Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 6, Historical Implications of Treaty Form, Sitz im Leben Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 6, Historical Implications of Treaty Form, Sitz im Leben, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt discusses the origins and historical implications of the covenant form in Deuteronomy. The lecture contrasts Gerard von Rad's cultic origin hypothesis with J.A. Thompson's argument for a historical origin rooted in the Sinai event, emphasizing the importance of the historical prologue in Hittite treaties. The lecture further examines the evolution of treaty forms, comparing Hittite treaties with those of the Assyrians and Sefire, arguing that differences in structure and spirit suggest Deuteronomy aligns with the earlier, classic Hittite form, supporting a Mosaic timeframe. The differing viewpoints on the relationship between the Old Testament covenant and ancient Near Eastern treaties are debated, with the lecture ultimately favoring a historical interpretation of the covenant's origins.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Deuteronomy).

Vannoy_Deut_Session06.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 6, Historical Implications of Treaty Form, Sitz im Leben

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts, including relevant quotes.

Briefing Document: Analysis of Covenant Forms in Deuteronomy & Ancient Near Eastern Treaties

Main Theme: The lecture explores the origin and historical implications of the covenant form found in Deuteronomy by examining its relationship to ancient Near Eastern (ANE) treaty structures, specifically Hittite and Assyrian treaties. It critically assesses the hypothesis of a cultic origin for this form and argues for a historical basis rooted in the Sinai event.

I. Introduction and the Question of Origin

- **The Core Question:** Vannoy frames the central question as: Is the covenant form in Deuteronomy cultic or historical in origin? What are the implications of the answer for dating the book?

- **Sitz im Leben:** The concept of "Sitz im Leben" (setting in life) is crucial. The lecture is concerned with the historical and social context out of which the form of the covenant emerged.

- As Vannoy notes, "The origin of the covenant form… is to be considered as cultic or historical, as far as the origin of the form. That has come to be a rather debated matter…"

II. Von Rad's Cultic Origin Hypothesis

- **Von Rad's Position:** Gerhard von Rad initially proposed (1938) that the structure of Deuteronomy was derived from a periodic cultic celebration. He later recognized the parallels between the structure of Deuteronomy and Hittite treaties, but maintained that the form, though ultimately derived from the cult, had been "freely adapted."

- **Key Quotes from Von Rad:**"Comparison of Ancient Near Eastern treaties, especially those made by the Hittites... with passages in the Old Testament, has revealed so many things in common between the two... that there must be some connection between these Suzerainty treaties and the exposition of the details of Yahweh's covenant with Israel"

- "At the time of Deuteronomy this pattern had long been used freely for literary and homiletic purposes."

- "If we now ask what sitz im leben demanded by the pattern in accordance with which Deuteronomy is arranged, it could have been taken only from cultic celebration, perhaps from a piece of renewal of the covenant."

- **Vannoy's Interpretation:** Vannoy notes that even with the recognition of the treaty parallel, von Rad remains committed to a cultic origin, viewing the covenant form in Deuteronomy as an adaptation of a liturgical practice, not as evidence of an original historical covenant event. He sees the material in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua as having been codified later.

- Vannoy says von Rad thinks "Israel became acquainted with form and material was put in that form at a later time but it's not original."

III. Criticism of the Cultic Origin and the Historical Prologue

- **Inadequacy of Cultic Origin:** Vannoy argues (citing J.A. Thompson) that the cultic origin hypothesis does not provide a complete explanation for the origin of the covenant form and crucially, fails to answer when Israel adopted the form.

- **The Historical Prologue:** Thompson and Vannoy assert that the historical prologue in treaties, a recitation of the great king's past actions, is essential.

- Vannoy quotes Thompson: "There seems little reason to doubt that the Historical Prologue in the secular treaties was a basic aspect of any treaty."

- He expands on this: "the historical material in that prologue is very important. It appears in all the treaties; it's an essential element."

- **Historical Basis:** Vannoy notes that the historical prologue provides the basis for the vassal's obligations. The king's past acts of kindness establish a context for the demand of loyalty. The historical prologue was, in reality, a "correct outline of the preceding historical events which were paraded as a strong argument for the acceptance of the treaty by the vassal."

- **Von Rad's Dismissal:** Von Rad views the historical narrative in the OT as a "cultic legend of doubtful historicity", a view that Vannoy criticizes. Thompson says a question "should be asked...whether a cultic legend could serve the purpose demanded in this context."

- **The Sinai Event:** Vannoy argues that the Sinai event described in Exodus 19-24 represents the most likely setting for the adoption of the covenant form, and that the historical prologue in the biblical narrative is a recounting of real history (the Exodus).

- Vannoy posits "it presupposes a specific historical occasion on which it was originally and formally established."

- He says, "the Sinai event described in Exodus 19 to 24 provides the most likely setting for the entrance of the covenant form and points to the experience of ancient Israel in which the historical prologue is functioning as it does in the treaties."

- **The Lord's Words** Vannoy notes the pattern in Exodus 19-24 that the Lord says: "I am the Lord your God," identifying himself as the one who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. "So that's what I've done for you. Now, therefore, you have certain obligations to me."

IV. The Evolution of Treaty Forms and Implications for Dating Deuteronomy

- **Kline's Argument:** Meredith Kline argues that Deuteronomy's structure matches the classic legal form of Suzerainty treaties of the Mosaic age (14th-13th century BC). He posits a discernable evolution in treaty forms, arguing that Deuteronomy's form aligns with the earlier Hittite treaties and not later Assyrian forms.

- **Evolution of Forms:** The lecture highlights a perceived evolution in the form of ANE treaties. The key question raised: "Do the Hittite treaties of the 14th and 13th centuries exhibit a classic form that does not survive in treaties of a later time?"

- **Key Difference: Historical Prologue:** The most significant difference between the Hittite and later Assyrian (and Sefire) treaties is the absence of the historical prologue in the later treaties.

- Vannoy emphasizes, "The most striking and important contrast between the Assyrian and Hittite treaties is that the second section of the schema of the Hittite treaty is the historical prologue that is not found in the Assyrian treaties."

- **Tone of Treaties:** The absence of a historical prologue leads to a different tone in the Assyrian treaties, which are characterized as harsh, with a focus on fear and threats rather than a relationship based on benevolence. Vannoy says, "the absence of a historical prologue in the Esarhaddon treaties contributes to the cold harsh tone that you find in Esarhaddon treaties."

- **Other Differences:** The Assyrian treaties also lack the element of a basic obligation (loyalty) that immediately follows the historical prologue and lack blessings for keeping the treaty stipulations.

V. Examination of Assyrian and Sefire Treaties

- **Assyrian Treaties (Esarhaddon):** Vannoy reiterates that the Assyrian treaties lack the historical prologue, loyalty obligation following the prologue, and blessings.

- **Sefire Treaties (Aramaic):Similarities to Assyrian:** The Sefire treaties, though earlier than the Assyrian, also lack the historical prologue and a basic loyalty obligation after the prologue. Vannoy notes that in these ways "the treaties from Sefire are closer to the Esarhaddon treaties than they are to the Hittite treaties." The stipulations in Sefire treaties are one-sided.

- **Similarities to Hittite:** However, in some regards, such as the inclusion of gods from both the vassal and the suzerain as witnesses to the treaty, the Sefire treaties seem closer to the Hittite structure.

- **Rejection of the Wiseman Position:** Vannoy and others reject the position of D. J. Wiseman that the form of the treaties was standardized in the Hittite period and remained unchanged through the Neo-Assyrian times. He notes, "it seems the weight of evidence is with Kline, Mendenhall, Albright, and Bright that there's this difference [between the treaty types]."

- Mendenhall notes that the Assyrian treaty structure is "entirely different" from Hittite treaties. Albright notes that the structure of Assyrian and Aramean treaties from the 8th century BC is "quite different."

VI. Conclusion

- **Historical Origin:** Vannoy concludes that the evidence strongly points toward a historical origin for the covenant form, especially given the importance of the historical prologue. The analogy with treaty forms suggests a historical foundation rather than a solely cultic origin.

- He summarizes by noting, "you have strong evidence pointing towards a historical origin for the covenant form, particularly as it's connected with the nature of the historical prologue."

- **Significance of Sinai:** The Sinai event is presented as the historical moment of the establishment of the covenant form, a significant point for dating the text.

Key Takeaways:

- The covenant form in Deuteronomy shows strong parallels with ANE treaty structures, particularly Hittite treaties.

- The presence of a historical prologue is essential in determining the quality of the relationship and the historical validity of the narrative.

- Later Assyrian treaties differ significantly, lacking key elements like the historical prologue, and demonstrating a different spirit.

- The structure and tone of the book of Deuteronomy are thus more closely related to the structure of the older Hittite treaties.

- The lecture ultimately argues for a historical basis for the covenant form, grounded in the Sinai event, and pushes back on the idea of a solely cultic origin.

This briefing document captures the main points and lines of argument within the provided text. Further study into the references mentioned, and further reading about the various treaties discussed, would allow for an even deeper understanding of the complex discussion of the origin and dating of Deuteronomy.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 6, Historical Implications on Treaty Form, Sitz im Leben

Deuteronomy: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is Von Rad's main argument regarding the origin of the covenant form found in Deuteronomy, and when did he initially propose this idea?

2. According to Vannoy, what is the key difference in the way Von Rad and Thompson view the historical prologue within the treaty form?

3. What is the significance of the historical prologue within a treaty, according to Thompson?

4. What is meant by the term *sitz im leben*, and how does it relate to the discussion of covenant form?

5. How does the presence or absence of the historical prologue differentiate the structure and tone of Hittite and Assyrian treaties?

6. According to the lecture, how did Kline use the evolution of treaty form to support the Mosaic date of Deuteronomy?

7. Besides the absence of the historical prologue, what are two other key differences between Hittite and Assyrian treaties?

8. How do the Sefire treaties compare to both the Hittite and Assyrian treaties in terms of the historical prologue and the basic obligation?

9. How does the presence of a protection clause differentiate the Hittite treaties from both the Assyrian and Sefire treaties?

10. According to the lecture, what is a major problem when drawing conclusions from the archaeological record of these ancient treaties?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Von Rad argues that the covenant form in Deuteronomy originated in cultic practices and celebrations, not in historical events. He initially proposed this theory in 1938, before he was aware of the Hittite treaties.

2. Von Rad views the historical prologue as a "cultic legend of doubtful historicity," while Thompson argues it represents a real historical outline that provides the basis for the covenant relationship. Thompson believes this history is the reason for the vassal's loyalty.

3. The historical prologue within a treaty is essential because it provides a historical background of the relationship between the suzerain and vassal. This recounting of past acts of beneficence serves as the basis for the vassal to accept the treaty obligations.

4. *Sitz im leben* refers to the social, historical, or cultural context in which something (like the covenant form) originated and functioned. Understanding the *sitz im leben* helps determine if a form is cultic or historical in origin.

5. The Hittite treaties consistently include a historical prologue, which establishes a tone of benevolence. In contrast, the Assyrian treaties lack this prologue, resulting in a harsher tone that is typical of ruthless imposition of power.

6. Kline argued that Deuteronomy reflects the classic form of the Hittite suzerainty treaty characteristic of the Mosaic era, noting an evolution in treaty forms that shows later treaties lacked elements present in Deuteronomy.

7. Besides the absence of the historical prologue, the Hittite treaties include a basic loyalty obligation immediately after the prologue and offer blessings for obedience, both of which are absent in the Assyrian treaties.

8. The Sefire treaties lack a historical prologue and a statement of basic obligation, which aligns them more closely with the Assyrian treaties. However, some elements in Sefire treaties are similar to those of the Hittite treaties.

9. Hittite treaties include a protection clause from the suzerain to the vassal, stating that the suzerain will protect the vassal from enemies when they are loyal. Neither the Assyrian or Sefire treaties include such a protection clause.

10. Drawing conclusions from the archaeological record is problematic because the evidence is fragmentary, and further discoveries may alter existing interpretations. This makes forming definitive conclusions difficult.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the arguments for a cultic versus historical origin of the covenant form found in Deuteronomy, providing a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.

2. Analyze the significance of the historical prologue within the structure of ancient Near Eastern treaties, discussing its function and its implications for understanding the relationship between suzerains and vassals.

3. Evaluate the evidence for and against the claim that the treaty forms evolved over time, and discuss the impact of this evolution on the debate over the dating of Deuteronomy.

4. Examine the similarities and differences between Hittite, Assyrian, and Sefire treaties, with particular attention to the impact of these variations on the way in which covenants are understood and enacted within the biblical tradition.

5. Discuss the ways in which the political and cultural context of the ancient Near East illuminates the understanding of covenant theology and law in the Old Testament, focusing on how these comparisons help in interpreting biblical texts.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Sitz im Leben:** A German phrase that translates to "setting in life." In biblical studies, it refers to the historical, social, and cultural context in which a particular text or tradition originated and functioned.

- **Historical Prologue:** A section within ancient Near Eastern treaties that recounts the past relationship and beneficent acts of the suzerain (great king) toward the vassal. It served to justify the obligations imposed by the treaty.

- **Cultic Origin Hypothesis:** The theory that the covenant form found in Deuteronomy and other Old Testament texts is derived from cultic practices and celebrations rather than from historical events.

- **Suzerainty Treaty:** A type of political treaty from the ancient Near East where a stronger power (suzerain) establishes a binding agreement with a weaker party (vassal), obligating the vassal to loyalty and tribute.

- **Hittite Treaties:** A collection of treaties from the Hittite empire (14th-13th century BCE), which are used as comparative material for understanding the structure and form of covenants in the Old Testament.

- **Assyrian Treaties:** Treaties from the Assyrian empire (8th-7th century BCE), which lack several key features, such as the historical prologue, found in earlier Hittite treaties.

- **Sefire Treaties:** A collection of Aramaic treaties from Sefire, a city-state in Syria, dated to the 8th century BCE. They have elements similar to both Hittite and Assyrian treaties.

- **Vassal:** The weaker party in a suzerainty treaty, obligated to the more powerful suzerain through oaths of allegiance, loyalty and tribute.

- **Suzerain:** The superior power in a suzerainty treaty, which imposes obligations on the vassal.

- **Covenant:** A solemn agreement between two parties, involving obligations, promises, and often ratified by ceremonies. In the Old Testament, it often refers to the agreement between God and the people of Israel.

- **Treaty Form:** The structural elements and patterns used in ancient Near Eastern treaties, which include the preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, blessings and curses, and witnesses.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 6, Historical Implications on Treaty Form, Sitz im Leben, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Covenant Treaties and Deuteronomy

1. **What is the central debate regarding the form of the covenant in Deuteronomy?** The central debate revolves around the origin of the covenant form found in Deuteronomy. Is it cultic, originating from religious practices and rituals, or is it historical, derived from ancient Near Eastern treaty patterns, particularly Hittite Suzerainty treaties? The implications of this origin directly impact how we understand the date and context of Deuteronomy.

2. **What is Von Rad's hypothesis regarding the cultic origin of Deuteronomy's structure?** Gerhard von Rad proposed that the structure of Deuteronomy is derived from cultic practices and periodic celebrations. He observed a specific structure in Deuteronomy that he believes reflects a pattern of these cultic rituals. Though aware of the parallel between the structure of the book of Deuteronomy and Hittite treaties, he maintained that the Deuteronomic form is derived from the cult, and was only later utilized for homiletic instruction.

3. **How do Hittite treaties relate to the covenant form in Deuteronomy?** Hittite treaties, particularly Suzerainty treaties from the 14th and 13th centuries BC, share remarkable structural similarities with covenant passages in the Old Testament, especially Deuteronomy. These similarities are so numerous that they suggest a connection between the two forms. Common elements include a preamble, a historical prologue, stipulations, curses, and sometimes blessings.

4. **What is the significance of the "historical prologue" in the covenant form?** The historical prologue, present in Hittite treaties, is a recital of the great king's past benevolent actions toward the vassal. This historical account establishes the basis for the vassal's obligation and loyalty. In the context of the biblical covenant, this translates to God recounting His deliverance of Israel from Egypt as the basis for their covenantal obligations.

5. **How does Thompson critique von Rad's view regarding the historical prologue?**
   Thompson criticizes von Rad for viewing the historical recitals in Deuteronomy and Exodus as mere "cultic legend of doubtful historicity," and for suggesting that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is not based on past acts of God. Thompson argues that a cultic legend cannot serve the same purpose that a historical prologue does, emphasizing that the real, historical events between God and Israel are the basis for the covenantal relationship and demands a response of loyalty from the vassal.

6. **What are some key differences between the Hittite and later Assyrian treaties?**
   The most significant difference is that Assyrian treaties lack the historical prologue found in Hittite treaties. Additionally, Assyrian treaties tend to be harsh and focused on the vassal's obligations secured through threats and curses, with no real expectation of loyalty. In contrast, the Hittite treaties, following the historical prologue, call for an oath of allegiance in a context of gratitude and trust. Lastly, Assyrian treaties lack any blessings that would be given for keeping the treaty stipulations.

7. **What does the evolution of treaty form suggest about the dating of Deuteronomy?** The fact that Deuteronomy aligns more closely with the classic form of Hittite Suzerainty treaties of the Mosaic era, rather than later Assyrian or Sefire treaties, is argued to suggest that it likely dates from this earlier period. This is because the classic Hittite form is seen to have evolved over time, with later treaties differing significantly in structure, and that the form in Deuteronomy resembles earlier treaty structures.

8. **How do the Sefire Aramaic treaties compare to Hittite and Assyrian treaties?**
   The Sefire treaties, dating from the 8th century BC, are a kind of "in-between" form. They lack the historical prologue and basic loyalty obligations immediately following it, putting them closer in structure to the Assyrian treaties. However, they include the gods of both suzerain and vassal as witnesses, which has more similarity to Hittite treaties. They are, however, decidedly one-sided, with little in the way of obligation of the greater power towards the vassal, and with no protection clauses.