

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 8, Present State of Covenant Form in OT Studies Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 8, Present State of Covenant Form in OT Studies, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Robert Vannoy's Deuteronomy class discusses the scholarly debate surrounding the covenant form in the Old Testament. **The main focus is on comparing the structure of the Old Testament covenant with ancient Near Eastern treaties, particularly Hittite suzerain treaties and Assyrian vassal treaties.** Scholars disagree on the origin of this form—whether it's primarily cultic or historical—and its implications for dating the Book of Deuteronomy. **Dr. Vannoy critiques von Rad's cultic origin hypothesis and argues for a historical basis rooted in the Sinai covenant.** The lecture also examines the differences between Hittite and Assyrian treaties, focusing on the absence of a historical prologue in the latter and its significance for understanding the nature of the covenant relationship.

2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 8 – 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).



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3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 8, Present State of Covenant Form in OT Studies

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript:

Briefing Document: Dr. Vannoy on Deuteronomy and Covenant Form

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Vannoy focuses on the covenant form found in the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy, and examines the debate surrounding its origins and historical implications. He reviews previous scholarship, particularly the work of Von Rad and Meredith Kline, before exploring the argument that the form's evolution can help date the text of Deuteronomy.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Covenant Form:

- **Recognized Structure:** There is a wide agreement that a discernible "covenant form" exists within the Old Testament. This form is characterized by specific elements and a particular structural pattern.
- **Key Locations:** This form can be identified in:
 - Exodus 19-24 (the Sinai covenant establishment)
 - Deuteronomy
 - Joshua 24 (covenant renewal at Shechem)
 - 1 Samuel 12 (covenant renewal at Gilgal)
- **Transition of Leadership:** The presence of the covenant form in Joshua 24 and 1 Samuel 12 signifies the idea that these passages address transitions in leadership in order to preserve covenant continuity at those times. Deuteronomy has a similar function in the transition from Moses to Joshua.
- **Form vs. Historical Implications:** While there's broad agreement about the form's existence, there is significant disagreement about its origin and the historical conclusions that can be drawn from it.

1. The Deuteronomy Debate:

- **Structural Integrity:** Traditional views of Deuteronomy often see it as having an original core with later additions. However, some scholars have seen Deuteronomy as displaying "structural unity."
- **Von Rad's Contribution:** In 1938, Von Rad identified a coherent structure to Deuteronomy, which he argued was of cultic origin.
- **Meredith Kline's Contribution:** Kline used form-critical methodology to highlight the integrity of the book's structure. His analysis emphasized the treaty-covenant analogy.
- **Form-Critical Methodology:** The form critical methodology sees a connection between a certain literary form, and the historical setting that produced the form, which is known as Sitz im Leben.

1. Cultic vs. Historical Origins:

- **The Question:** The lecture poses the question: is the origin of the covenant form "cultic" or "historical"? The lecturer asserts that the form can be both.
- **Von Rad's Position:** Von Rad, while acknowledging parallels between the covenant form and Hittite treaties, believed the form originated from cultic practices and was preserved by the Levites through preaching and homiletic instruction. Von Rad believed that the form found in Deuteronomy "can have been taken only from a cultic celebration, perhaps from a feast of renewal of the covenant"
- **Vannoy's Critique of Von Rad:** Vannoy argues that von Rad's hypothesis of a cultic origin doesn't adequately explain the initial utilization of the form and its historical basis. He argues that von Rad considers the historical material within the Biblical texts to be "cultic legend of very doubtful historicity." Vannoy counters that the underlying historical events cannot be divorced from the cultic.
- **Sinai as Origin:** Vannoy sides with Kline, who argues that God employed the existing legal instrument of the Hittite treaty form at Sinai to present the covenant to Israel. The presentation of the covenant at Sinai was a "specific historical occasion" that formed the basis for the covenant relationship.

1. Evolution of the Treaty Form:

- **Kline's Argument:** Kline contends that the treaty form underwent an evolutionary development. The classic Hittite pattern was not duplicated in later treaties (like the Esarhaddon treaties), supporting the view that the form of Deuteronomy is earlier.
- **Esarhaddon Treaties:** These treaties were discovered in 1955 and provide a later example of the treaty form (672 B.C.). These treaties contain a preamble, gods as witnesses, stipulations, curses, oath of allegiance, and curses in the form of similes. They are also notable for their focus on the succession of Ashurbanipal.
- **Similarities and Differences:** While the Esarhaddon treaties show some similarity to the earlier Hittite treaties, they are distinguished by key differences, such as the lack of the historical prologue.
- **The Historical Prologue:Hittite Treaties:** The historical prologue was an essential part of Hittite treaties, providing a background for the relationship between the suzerain and vassal, and setting a tone of benevolence that is the basis for the stipulations that follow.
- **Esarhaddon Treaties:** The historical prologue is notably absent from the Esarhaddon treaties. Instead of this historical prologue, Esarhaddon treats his vassals with the "imposition of raw power" and with long sections of curses for any failure to obey.
- **Significance:** The absence of a historical prologue in the later treaties is viewed as a significant shift in the conceptualization of the treaty relationship, moving from persuasion to an emphasis on power.
- **Debate on Prologue:** Some scholars, such as D.J. McCarthy, argue that a historical prologue was not an essential element, even in Hittite treaties. However, Vannoy argues that McCarthy is not correct and cites Herbert Huffman as evidence for the persistent nature of the historical prologue.

Key Quotes:

- "I think there is widespread agreement today that there is a discernable covenant form to be found in the Old Testament, and that form can be found in the structure of the book of Deuteronomy."

- "What Baltzer is doing is hesitating to draw historical conclusions on the presence of the form. He says it's methodologically dangerous to bring both sets of questions together prematurely."
- "See, the whole thing about the form critical methodology is if you have a certain literary form, it presupposes a certain historical setting that gave rise to the form."
- "It seems to me that a judicious attempt to delineate the historical setting of a particular form can be a useful interpretive tool."
- "The question is still open: How and when did Israel come to understand it's relationship to God in the form of these early Near Eastern treaties with vassals."
- "The Bible presents the initial utilization of the treaty-covenant as being in the presentation of the covenantal materials given by God to Moses at Sinai. That is the origin of it."
- "The Historical Prologue in the treaties gives us real history, tells us of previous relationship between the great king and the vassal which provides the basis of obligation on the part of the vassal toward the great king."
- "It ought not be assumed that a cultic liturgy should be divorced from the underlying historical events."
- "Power replaces persuasion such that although the treaty form continues to be the same in many respects, it is misleading to state that the treaty remains basically unchanged"

Implications:

- **Dating of Deuteronomy:** The debate on the evolution of the treaty form directly impacts the dating of Deuteronomy. The absence of a historical prologue in the later Assyrian treaties, if taken to be a significant deviation from the standard form, lends weight to the idea that Deuteronomy is older than the 7th century B.C. and closer to the time of the Hittite treaties.
- **Understanding the Covenant:** The lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context of the covenant form to truly understand the nature of the relationship between God and Israel.

Conclusion: Dr. Vannoy's lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the covenant form debate, highlighting the different perspectives and their implications for the study of Deuteronomy. He ultimately argues that the form's origin is both cultic *and* historical and that the evolutionary development of the treaty form provides important evidence for the early dating of the Book of Deuteronomy. The lecture stresses the importance of a judicious approach to form criticism that includes historical analysis and cautions against excluding historical conclusions in the interpretation of biblical texts.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 8, Present State of Covenant Form in OT Studies

Deuteronomy Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the significance of Von Rad's 1938 work on Deuteronomy?
2. What is the treaty-covenant analogy, and who is credited with developing it?
3. According to the lecture, in what Old Testament books can the covenant form be found?
4. What is Baltzer's view on the historical implications of the covenant form?
5. What is meant by the term *Sitz im Leben*, and how does it relate to form criticism?
6. What is Von Rad's view of the origin of the covenant form, particularly as it appears in Deuteronomy?
7. How does Vannoy critique the cultic origins hypothesis for the covenant form?
8. What are the key differences in the structure of the Hittite treaties and Esarhaddon treaties?
9. What is the purpose of the historical prologue in the Hittite treaties?
10. How does the absence of the historical prologue in the Esarhaddon treaties affect the relationship between the treaty partners?

Quiz Answer Key

1. In 1938, Von Rad identified a coherent structure within the book of Deuteronomy, suggesting it was not just a collection of disparate pieces but a unified work. This was a crucial step in understanding the literary form of the book, but he attributed that structure to cultic origins.
2. The treaty-covenant analogy refers to the structural similarities between ancient Near Eastern treaties, particularly Hittite treaties, and the covenant structure found in the Old Testament. Meredith Kline is credited with developing and emphasizing this analogy.

3. The covenant form is found in Exodus 19-24 (Sinai covenant), Joshua 24 (covenant renewal at Shechem), Deuteronomy, and 1 Samuel 12 (covenant renewal at Gilgal). These texts share elements similar to ancient Near Eastern treaties.
4. Baltzer is hesitant to draw historical conclusions from the presence of the covenant form, arguing it is methodologically dangerous to combine form-critical study with historical questions prematurely. He prefers to focus on the literary form itself.
5. *Sitz im Leben* is a German phrase meaning "setting in life," referring to the specific historical and social context in which a literary form originated. Form critics use this idea to make speculative reconstructions of the historical setting from the identified form.
6. Von Rad believes the covenant form originated in cultic settings within Israel, preserved and passed down by the Levites. He posits the structure found in Deuteronomy comes from this cultic tradition, even while acknowledging parallels with Hittite treaties.
7. Vannoy critiques the cultic origins hypothesis for not adequately addressing the initial use of the covenant form or the occasion for its origin, noting that the Bible presents the original covenant as being given by God to Moses at Sinai, using the treaty form known in the ancient Near East.
8. The Hittite treaties have a consistent form, including a historical prologue that outlines the benevolent acts of the suzerain. Esarhaddon treaties lack this historical prologue, and they include more elaborate and vivid curse sections.
9. The historical prologue in Hittite treaties sets the tone by outlining the benevolent acts of the great king, establishing a sense of obligation and responsibility on the part of the vassal. This highlights a more reciprocal and trusting relationship.
10. The absence of a historical prologue in the Esarhaddon treaties signals a shift toward power and imposition rather than a relationship based on mutual obligation. The relationship becomes one of raw power, with a focus on the vassal's fear of curses rather than loyalty from acts of benevolence.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the implications of the treaty-covenant analogy for understanding the literary structure and dating of the book of Deuteronomy. How does it challenge or support traditional views of its authorship and context?
2. Compare and contrast Von Rad's and Kline's interpretations of the covenant form in Deuteronomy. How do their differing perspectives on the origin of the form impact their conclusions about the date and significance of the book?
3. Analyze the significance of the historical prologue in the Hittite treaties. How does the inclusion or exclusion of this element affect the nature of the covenant relationship as seen in both the Hittite and Esarhaddon treaties, and how does that connect to the Sinai covenant?
4. Evaluate the argument made by McCarthy and the counter argument by Huffman regarding the importance of the historical prologue in the Hittite treaties. How does the debate over the historical prologue inform our understanding of the evolution of treaty forms in the ancient Near East?
5. Explore the potential methodological challenges and benefits of using form criticism to understand the Old Testament, including the dangers of speculative reconstruction. How can form criticism be applied effectively, and what are its limits?

Glossary of Key Terms

Covenant Form: A literary structure found in the Old Testament (and also in the ancient Near East), that mirrors the structure of ancient treaties, typically involving a preamble, stipulations, curses, and blessings.

Form Criticism: A method of biblical criticism that analyzes the literary forms or genres of biblical texts in order to determine the historical and social contexts that shaped their development.

Historical Prologue: A section of an ancient treaty (particularly Hittite treaties) that outlines the history of the relationship between the suzerain (king) and vassal, focusing on the benevolent acts of the suzerain that justify the vassal's obligation to the treaty.

Hittite Treaties: Ancient treaties from the Hittite empire (c. 14th-13th centuries BCE) known for a consistent structure that includes a historical prologue, stipulations, and curses.

Levites: A priestly tribe in Israelite society, sometimes attributed with maintaining and transmitting religious traditions, especially in the cultic setting.

Sitz im Leben: A German phrase meaning "setting in life," referring to the specific historical and social context in which a literary form or genre originated.

Stipulations: The detailed terms, laws, or conditions of a treaty or covenant that the vassal is obligated to follow; commandments, if you will.

Suzerain: A superior ruler, king, or sovereign who imposes a treaty or covenant on a subordinate vassal.

Treaty-Covenant Analogy: The comparison between the structure and content of ancient Near Eastern treaties and the Old Testament covenants, particularly the covenant at Sinai.

Vassal: A subordinate ruler or party who is bound by a treaty or covenant to the suzerain.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 8, Present State of Covenant Form in OT Studies, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Covenant Forms in the Old Testament

- What is the covenant form in the Old Testament, and where is it found?** The covenant form, also known as the treaty form, is a recognizable literary structure found in several Old Testament texts. This structure includes elements like a preamble, historical prologue, stipulations or laws, blessings and curses, and witnesses. Key texts exhibiting this form are Exodus 19-24 (the Sinai covenant), Deuteronomy (especially its overall structure), Joshua 24 (renewal at Shechem), and 1 Samuel 12 (renewal at Gilgal). These texts suggest that the form was used at significant moments of covenant establishment or renewal.
- What are the two primary views on the origin of the covenant form in the Old Testament, and how do they differ?** The two primary views are the *cultic* and the *historical* origin theories. The *cultic* view, championed by scholars like von Rad, proposes that the form originated from the cultic practices of Israel, especially as preserved and propagated by the Levites in their preaching. They believe it came to be used in Deuteronomy through cultic memory and adaptation. The *historical* view argues that the form was derived from a known legal instrument of the time, specifically the Hittite treaties, and that it was used to structure the presentation of the covenant from the beginning at Sinai. This view suggests the form was adopted by God as a way to communicate to Israel. While these need not be completely opposite (something can be cultic and historical), the primary disagreement is whether the form's origins lie in cultic practice or in an actual historical moment of covenant formation.
- How does the structure of the Hittite treaties relate to the covenant form in the Old Testament?** The Hittite treaties, particularly those from the 14th and 13th centuries BC, exhibit a structure that closely parallels the covenant form in the Old Testament. This includes a preamble, a historical prologue detailing the past relationship between the great king and the vassal, stipulations (laws/obligations), blessings and curses, and the invocation of witnesses. The strong structural similarities suggest a connection, indicating that the biblical writers were likely drawing on a common literary and legal practice of their time. This similarity is the basis for the treaty-covenant analogy.

- **What is a historical prologue, and why is it significant in understanding the Hittite treaty form?** A historical prologue is a section in the Hittite treaties (and in some other ancient near eastern treaties) that recounts the past relationship between the great king and his vassal, emphasizing the king's benevolent acts toward the vassal. This section creates a sense of obligation on the part of the vassal to be obedient to the king's stipulations. The historical prologue provides the foundation for the stipulations by appealing to past actions rather than just raw power. Without it the relationship is not one of reciprocal responsibility, but rather just obedience because of the suzerain's might.
- **How do the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon compare to the Hittite Suzerain Treaties, especially regarding the historical prologue?** While the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (7th Century BC) share some structural similarities with the earlier Hittite treaties (such as preamble, stipulations, and curses), a key difference is the *absence of the historical prologue* in the Esarhaddon treaties. This absence is significant, suggesting a change in the very concept of the treaty relationship. In the Esarhaddon treaties, the emphasis shifts from a relationship founded on past benevolence to one based on raw power and the imposition of stipulations backed by severe curses. This alteration fundamentally changes the character of the relationship between the suzerain and the vassal.
- **What is the scholarly debate surrounding the presence of a historical prologue in Hittite treaties and how does this affect the understanding of the covenant form?** There is some scholarly debate regarding whether or not *every* Hittite treaty contains a historical prologue. Some scholars argue that a few exceptions exist, leading to the conclusion that the historical prologue is not an essential element. However, other scholars dispute this, suggesting that in instances where a historical prologue is apparently absent or seems out of place, a close analysis shows there *is* a historical prologue, perhaps very brief or in an unexpected location in the treaty. The resolution of this debate is significant. If the historical prologue is indeed essential, then it further highlights the shift in treaty structure as seen in the Esarhaddon treaties.

- **How does the evolutionary view of the treaty form impact our understanding of the date of the Book of Deuteronomy?** The evolutionary view of the treaty form suggests that the form went through a development over time. The classic Hittite form (with a historical prologue) represents an earlier stage and the Esarhaddon treaties (without a historical prologue) a later stage. This evolution has implications for the date of Deuteronomy. If the book exhibits the full Hittite treaty form with its historical prologue, as argued by some, it would suggest a date closer to the time when those treaties were in use rather than a much later time. This would lend weight to the view that Deuteronomy has a Mosaic origin or an origin much earlier than the 7th Century. On the other hand, if it has adopted a form without it or is only loosely following it, that would lend credence to later authorship.
- **What conclusions does the lecture suggest about the origin of the covenant form and its significance for understanding the Old Testament?** The lecture concludes that the *historical* origin is more persuasive than the *cultic* origin in understanding the nature and purpose of the form. The covenant form did not arise from cultic practice but from a specific historical moment of covenantal establishment at Sinai. God adopted the legal instrument of the Hittite treaty to structure the giving of the covenant to Israel. The historical prologue is crucial because it creates a reciprocal relationship between the two parties. The structure of a treaty and understanding of its context will therefore impact how the content of the covenant is interpreted.