Covenant and Charisma as related to the Establishment and Dissolution of the United Monarchy of Israel

WILLIAM R. GRIFFITHS

ISRAEL dreamed a dream. Israel— that conglomerate collection of clans and tribes — dreamed a dream. It was not a dream that would pale in the harsh light of fact. It was a dream of history that drew upon separate histories to create a unified belief that became accepted as true and was the basis upon which Israel built a unified history accepted both by leaders and people. Thus a people were held together by the tie of common belief until a strong leader appeared who could bring together historical belief and political fact and build an institutional unity that radically changed the pattern of belief and so altered the political nature of the Israelite state that it was set on a course that ultimately ruptured the unity between Israel of the north and Judah of the south.

It is the writer's position that the leaders of Israel believed in and taught the people to accept as true a fabricated history. By "fabricated history" is meant the at least one-time conscious fashioning of individual histories of peoples, clans and tribes into a composite unity of history that, in time, was accepted as the history of the larger unit. Thus "fabricated history" is individual history transformed into composite history.

To this end examination is made of that segment of Israel's history which centers on the monarchies of Saul, David, Solomon and Rehoboam and to

WILLIAM R. GRIFFITHS is Associate Minister of the University Park Methodist Church, Denver, Colorado, and Instructor in Hebrew at The Iliff School of Theology. The present article summarizes his Th.D. dissertation, 1967, written under the supervision of Dr. Williams.

investigate the modification of two major concepts—covenant and charisma—that helped move Israel from a provincial tribal organization to a state that played a significant role in history.

Procedure

Examination will be made, first, of the basic tenets of Israel's believed and accepted history. These tenets include the experience at Mt. Sinai where it was believed that God had established a covenant with all the Hebrew people, the idea of the Hebrew tribes being formed and residing in the land of Egypt until the time of the unified exodus, and the entry into a land which they believed had been promised and given to them by their God.

Second, the key concepts of covenant and charisma will be examined for their special contributions to the support of the thesis.

Third, examination will be made of the kinds of judicial and religious institutions that could be formed by the twelve tribes on the basis of what they believed to be their history and their responsibility to that history.

Fourth, careful examination will be given to the events leading to the variations in philosophy of government and then to the event at Shechem that brought into confrontation the old ways with the new with the result that the kingdom was rent asunder because one man was incapable of operating effectively in the two worlds of believed history and hard reality combined with the need for political accommodation.[1]

---

[1] In the dissertation detailed examination is made of the positions of John Bright, Murray Lee Newman, Jr., Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth to determine their bias, if any, toward the developed history of Israel as that history relates to the period in question.

43

Resources

The following types of resources were considered for this study:

1. Primary sources. These are selected portions of the Old Testament concerned with the major area of investigation. The Massoretic text will be evaluated against the Septuagint text and, in the case of the Books of Samuel, against the Dead Sea Samuel scroll.

2. Extra-biblical sources. One source is the ancient texts which are relevant to the general period under investigation and which can be used to add to, confirm, support or deny material contained in the primary sources. A second source is archaeological data which, through inscriptional and non-inscriptional materials, add to, confirm, support or deny material now extant.

3. Secondary sources. These will include recent histories of Israel as they concern the covenant, its origin, development and history. These sources will also be used to study the relevant problems of the development, maintenance and dissolution of the united monarchy.[2]

BASIC TENETS OF ISRAEL'S BELIEVED AND ACCEPTED HISTORY

The Experience at Mt. Sinai

The orgin of the Mt. Sinai tradition appears to be lost in antiquity. What was credited to Mt. Sinai was of such importance and meaning to those who accepted the tradition that it became a well-remembered account. Those who

---

[2] The methodology used in the more detailed examination was as follows:
1. Analysis and evaluation of traditions as they are set forth in the primary, extra biblical and secondary sources;
2. Examination of linguistic evidence to seek to establish text and to determine sources and authorship;
3. Examination of archaeological evidence for its contribution;
4. Employment of comparative history and sociology to determine comparable situations in neighboring cultures;
5. An attempt to place internal and external evidence in balance, that effective and relevant conclusions may be drawn.

did accept it may well have made up the sub-stratum of peoples who were, in later years, made part and parcel of the Hebrew tribes as they were formed on Palestinian soil. It is very possible the Mt. Sinai portion of Israel's fabricated history may have come from shrine history and legend. The covenant idea would fit developed history of such a specialized institution.

Hebrew Tribes In The Land of Egypt

Dr. Murray Newman, Jr. takes the position that the Joseph tribes and possibly some Levites were in Egypt. He recognizes that it might be possible that ancestors of one or two other tribes could have been on hand. Dr. John Bright believes there is not much point in trying to discover whether or not any of the tribes of later Israel were ever in Egypt. He does see, as being in Egypt, a conglomeration of slaves from variegated backgrounds who could have become part of the later-developed tribal system in Palestine. Dr. Gerhard von Rad grants that some sections of later Israel's tribes may well have migrated to Egypt and suggests that a change in pastureland may have been the reason. This point of view is supported by Dr. Martin Noth. The writer does not believe the Hebrew tribes, as later constituted, were ever in the land of Egypt.

The Exodus

Concerning the recorded biblical account of the exodus, the validity of that account is less in the recounting than in the probable fact that some group remembered and retold the story of their escape from Egypt and in that escape something very special happened which they were willing to attribute to the power of their God.

The Role of Moses

If the Sinai tradition is to be separated from the exodus event or events, a question must be raised concerning the role of Moses. Dr. Martin Noth would see that this delegation of prime responsibility to Moses is based upon the concept of deuteronomistic writings

in which the role of law receiver and covenanter coupled with the theophany on the mountain is the most important event in that history of the people which preceded the settlement of the Hebrew people in the land of Canaan. Dr. Bright holds the position that to deny the role of Moses would require depicting another person of the same name. The writer believes that at this point Dr. Bright has become the victim of the fabricated history.

The Name "Israel"

Question can be raised concerning the name "Israel" since it appears on the stele of Pharaoh Merneptah. This stele was erected in the fifth year of Merneptah's reign (circa 1220 B.C.). The significance of this lies in the fact that it comes at a time that conflicts with generally accepted ideas concerning the slavery in Egypt, the wandering, and the entrance in Palestine. The writer holds the opinion that the word "Israel" on the Merneptah stele does not jeopardize his position since he believes the group mentioned thereon was not the Israel of the twelve tribes but more likely an otherwise unknown group which may well have made its contribution to the fabricated history of Israel by supplying the name. The word "Israel" likewise presents no serious problem since the biblical account introducing the word is an explanatory story with folk etymology and the biblical writer incorrectly interpreted the meaning of the word.

Entry Into the Land of Palestine

The writer supports the position that the tribes simply were not formed until after they were on Palestinian soil. Palestinian place names came to be used as some tribal names and particular circumstances experienced in Palestine by various tribes also had a part in the naming process. This could not have occurred prior to entry into the land of Palestine.

The many differing opinions as to what transpired prior to entry into the land of Palestine seem to offer unharmonious and dichotomous possibilities. Whether or not Sinai preceded the exodus, or the reverse; whether the tribes were in Egypt, or not at all; whether Yahwism was introduced at Kadesh, had been known earlier, or introduced later; whether the tribes entered the land of Palestine spasmodically, or on a tight chronological time schedule, or did not come in as tribes at all; whether the tribes were named prior to entry, or took their names from place locations and special circumstances, all this must pale before the recognition that howsoever these things happened, or even if they didn't happen at all, by the time the tribes were in the land of Palestine and ready to form their sacral relationship, they were willing to believe, either by fact, fancy, or absorption, that these things were a vital part of their history and were indeed the foundation for their being where they were. In truth, truth was less important than belief. What they were willing to believe became the foundation of their tribal relationships and these relationships became an important step in the movement toward the monarchy.

COVENANT AND CHARISMA

The Covenant

Since the covenant as presumed to be established at Mt. Sinai between God and the people of Israel is basic to the problem involved, it will be examined to determine whether or not the two differing concepts of how the people related to God in the establishment of the covenant can be determined. Literary criticism and the documentary hypothesis are becoming more widely known and yet the basis for establishing the two major documents which have been referred to by most biblical scholars as "J" and "E" is difficult to find. In the writer's dissertation much time is spent indicating how the source strands are determined. To this end a

literary analysis of chapters 19-24 and 32-34 of Exodus is undertaken. Since there is no universal agreement on how each verse is to be classified by sources, cases of disagreement provide the writer opportunity to make his own analysis and classification. For example, Exodus 19:16 is a verse in which Dr. Martin Noth has very finely honed his divisions for the two sources. Because understanding the problem of source assignment depends upon understanding the divisional accents of the Hebrew language, the writer has set forth in full detail the matter of how the accents mark the sentence and thus the reader is able to follow lucidly the source assignment problem. When the literary analysis was completed, the designated sources were compared to determine if indeed differing opinions existed as to the relationship of God with the people of Israel. Dr. Murray Lee Newman, Jr. and the writer are in basic agreement that differing opinions do exist. In addition, however, the writer believes there are many other contributing factors to the event at Shechem, notably the concept of charisma.

Charisma

While the matter of covenant only concerns the people as a whole in their relationship to deity, the event that concerns the individual specifically and involves the person in a special, demonstrative relationship is called "charisma." Charisma is defined on page 377 of **Webster's Third New International Dictionary** as follows:

> Supernatural power or virtue attributed especially to a person or office regarded as set apart from the ordinary by reason of a special relationship to that which is considered of ultimate value and as endowed with the capacity of eliciting enthusiastic popular support in the leadership, symbolic unification, or direction of human affairs."

Once the people accepted the belief that a specific person had been endowed with charisma, they apparently were willing to accept that individual's leadership without further question.

JUDICIAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The Amphictyony

The amphictyony, or sacral tribal relationship, was founded on faith. It was a faith founded on the historical experience of a group or groups which were included in the twelve-tribal pattern and whose special contribution of faith had become a part of accepted history.

It was believed Yahweh had elected these wandering, destitute desert peoples to be his chosen people. The initiative was with Yahweh. The election of Israel was considered simply to be the unexplained choice of the deity. By accepting this election and covenanting in agreement, Israel had accepted the lordship of Yahweh. This could be taken to mean that Yahweh was king over Israel and no other king was desirable. It would also mean that from the beginning of the relationship between Yahweh and the Hebrew tribes, certain stipulations and regulations were in force. Thus it can be seen that covenant law was invoked from the moment of the sealing of the covenant and was the dominant force in holding the amphictyony together.

It becomes apparent that with the background and memory of this historical religious experience, shared by some and apparently accepted by all, some very real measures of difficulty were to be experienced in any efforts to change the amphictyony. It would take a serious and sustained pressure to break the amphictyony. During the period of relative calm—generally thought of as the time from Joshua to Saul—incidents did arise which required special leaders. Attacks were made upon the people and defensive measures had to be taken. Since, under the amphictyony, the tribes were bound by covenant law and Yahweh was their supreme ruler, the only office for all Israel that could handle the threats was a judical one.

The Office of Judge

The Book of Judges presents the account of the individuals who filled the office of judge. Some of the judges are barely mentioned; other received full but specialized treatment. This inequality in presentation has led to categorizing these judges as major or minor on the basis of space allocation. Since these terms of major and minor are in common usage, they must be dealt with, but the reader should be aware that the distinction is an assigned one rather than a distinction in fact or in function. The individual who served as a judge and thus was the upholder and interpreter of God's laws could not in any way be considered a minor judge.

Charisma of the Judges

In times of stress upon the tribes, the judges demonstrated charismatic gifts that seemed clearly to indicate to their fellowmen that these individuals were touched by Yahweh and thus were in the crisis at hand, the leaders-designate to handle the matter.

A special problem in Hebrew exegesis occurs in the matter of whether or not a significant difference exists in durational charismatic responsibility. The writer feels two time periods were involved. A fine line of distinction is to be drawn between the seizure by the spirit of the Lord as it concerns the prophet and the charismatic individual. The same verb is used for both. But the prophet is caught up in an ecstasy that could bring him to a point of special insight and cause him to speak on behalf of God who caused his experience. With the prophet the seizure by the spirit was an intensely personal thing. The charismatic individual, however, was seized by the spirit of the Lord in such a way as to cause that individual to act in a mighty way and thus demonstrate a special quality of leadership that could stir men to battle to meet a particular crisis situation.

VARIATIONS IN PHILOSOPHY OF GOVERNMENT

Anointment

While Saul was first anointed in secret by Samuel with the charismatic experience following later, this was not the situation in the selection of David. David was not really anointed in secret because his family was present. Also it was recorded that the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day on. No longer is the divine charisma given for a single, limited, war-like encounter with Israel's enemies, but is now given to the anointed one without limitation. This makes it rather obvious the biblical writer was recapitulating a life rather than prophesying the course of one. But it does mark a significant shift in the thinking about the duration of charisma.

With the anointment of two men as king, a military clash was inevitable. David and his men are given a unique opportunity to attack Saul and kill him, but it is at this point that David most shrewdly ennunciates a policy that is both radical and protective. David says that he cannot put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed. Thus David lays the foundation for his treatment of Saul and, inevitably, for the conduct of others toward himself at whatever point he should become king in fact.

At Hebron the elders anoint David king over the house of Judah. The rite of anointment shifted from the hands of a prophet of the Lord into the hands of the men of Judah.

With the collapse of the house of Saul, the elders of Israel came to David at Hebron and made there a covenant with him to be king over Israel. David now held two kingships—that of Judah and that of Israel. It was not one country at last re-united, but two separate entities, bound now as one, and held together by the tie of common faith.

The Contract

The covenant which David concluded may also be considered a contract. It is so designated here to avoid confusion with the covenant which was believed to have been concluded at Mt. Sinai.

After the death of Saul and the conflict between Abner and Ishbosheth, Abner took the reins of government into his own hands and attempted to bring Israel into a formal relationship with David as the selected king. Abner offers to make a contract with David. It would seem to the writer that the subsequent events at Shechem with Rehoboam would support the position that Abner was acting in a manner accepted and possibly approved by the elders of the north when he offered to establish a contract with David.

When Soloman ascended the throne it was at David's express command. David indicated that Solomon would sit upon his throne and wold be ruler over Israel and Judah. At this point David breaks the pattern of the elders establishing their own contract with the king. The transfer of the monarchy from Solomon to Rehoboam, while accomplished without incident, involved neither contract nor anointment. Confirmation of Rehoboam's right to rule became the crisis event.

It is now clear that some kind of a contract was drawn up between the king and the people as a means of insuring that obligations agreed to would be met. But it must not be assumed that the contract always represented a favorable agreement and attitude on either side. When Samuel acceded to the wishes of the people in regard to a king, he wrote up the rights and duties of the king. This early type of contract apparently was placed in a sanctuary for safekeeping.

The fact that a contract could be negotiated between king and people is important. Such a contract could be subject to re-negotiation and it was one of the ties between king and people that could be severed. Of equal import-

ance is the nature of the contract. Since God is not involved in this kind of contract, it was considered secular. The right to dissolve the contract would rest both with the king and the people.

The willingness of Israel to dissolve an effective contract is in sharp distinction with Judah's long continuity of contract with David and his successors. In the light of a contract between king and people, the situation at Shechem with Rehoboam becomes clearer still. Rehoboam may have been willing to settle for a unilateral contract, but it appeared that a bilateral contract between equals probably was being sought.

In Judah, the continuity of Davidic kings relates interestingly to the concept of the contract. It is possible that Judah had contracted for David and his entire dynasty. Therefore a new contract would not be needed for every succession. Certainly this dynastic principle is evident in the manner in which the "J" document indicates the covenant was established with God at Mt. Sinai. It was believed Moses made the covenant for the people and through his descendants for ever.

When Nathan the prophet related to David the fact that there had been a divine legitimation for him and his heirs, the contract between king and people was raised significantly to a contract between king and God. That the people of Judah did not revolt against this kind of contract escalation indicates the people were loyal, steadfast, satisfied, or possibly apathetic. However, the concept of a king-contract with the people was a live issue in Israel. Later history indicates the people wanted to participate decisively in selecting their king.

A Shift in the Concept of Charisma

Together with the continuing success of David, a shift in charisma was made. Gone was the unsophisticated demon- Rather, the charisma became intellectu- stration of limited, single, war-like acts. ally respectable. Continued prosperity

played a part in this respectability. The fact of bestowing the charisma was less significant than belief in the proof of charisma. The proof was not a monentary exhibition; it was evidenced by continuing success.

Princely Revolts

In the later years of David's reign, he had to face two princely revolts. The writer believes that David, perhaps recognizing the problem of establishing a dynasty without popular support, let his sons revolt to determine if they could win and hold the popular support.

A significant difference between the revolts of these two most handsome men was in the fact that Absalom had only to face a king who was willing to be revolted against. Adonijah faced an even more apathetic king, but he had additionally to face the palace intrigue of an eager mother and a determined prophet.

The Reign of Solomon

As a result of this intrigue, Solomon was named and made king by David. As David approached death, his dynasty was supposedly legitimatized forever. The imposition of Solomon as king was accepted both by Israel and Judah as long as prosperity existed and the demands of the monarchy were tolerable. However, the lavish expenses of Solomon brought increasing burdens upon the people until they themselves were involved in the hated corvee, or slave labor.

The Event at Shechem

With the ascendancy of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the long-recognized differences in covenantal relationship, contractual right and responsibilities, and application of charisma came to the fore. Personal and group dissatisfactions also played an important role in the situation at Shechem where Rehoboam had gone to confirm his right to rule over Israel.

At Shechem, Rehoboam faced immediate and strong opposition. As the new king, he was heir to the troubles of Solomon his father. Rehoboam had to deal with the issues in one way or another. The elders of the kingdom of Israel presented a request of considerable import. Unable or unwilling to make an immediate reply, Rehoboam took counsel with his advisors. The decision Rehoboam announced was unacceptable to the elders and by their choice the kingdom was rent asunder.

CONCLUSION

By using the biblical material as the basis both to build a case and to criticize that case, the writer has been able to show that the attempt to develop a fabricated history as the basis for national belief and action was remarkably successful in its aim of unifying separate groups. However, in the pursuit of that goal the evidence remained both for the fabrication of that history and how that history was modified by strong leadership. In fact, so strong was the leadership of David and so completely was all of this accepted by the people that actually they lost some rights. Only in the crisis at Shechem were the people able to reassert the rights they had let fall into disuse during the years of David and Solomon.

The writer's position regarding the fact that critical examination of primary sources is vital to a proper understanding of this period of history is upheld by the textual examination of Exodus. The use of archaeology to pinpoint events and evidences of history is also to be noted for its significant contributions.

The position that truth is the reinforcement of an intelligent faith is upheld by this investigation. The fact that the biblical account of this portion of history is indeed a compilation of individual histories into a unified but fabricated history does not, in any way, destroy the faith of those who want to believe the truth that lies behind the presentation of the biblical account.

The writer believes that biblical scholars who come to this period of history

with prior acceptance of the biblical account as true, do considerable injustice to the field of scholarship when they attempt to uphold the prior-determined positions. This applies whether the scholar approaches the history of Israel from the position of complete or partial acceptance of the biblical account. The writer believes that the leaders of Israel believed in and taught the people to accept as true a fabricated history is supported and upheld by the development of Israel's history through the united monarchy.

Further, the writer believes that the differing concepts of covenant reflected a sustained and serious division of political philosophies between Israel of the north and Judah of the south. The presentation of the development and changes in charisma are to be recognized as of crucial importance in allowing the monarchy to develop its full power and to establish a dynasty.

All of these things: the actual histories, the fabricated history, the covenant, the contract, the charisma, the anointment, the settlement of the land, and the religious organization had much to do with bringing Israel of the north to the moment when it challenged Rehoboam. Many factors were involved in that crisis. But two concepts stand out above all the rest in their magnitude of being responsible for the events that led to the confrontation at Shechem: covenant and charisma. Thus covenant and charisma played a major role in the establishment and dissolution of the united monarchy.