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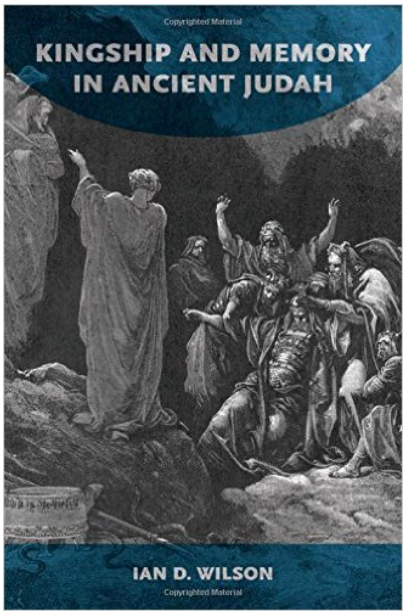

Ian D. Wilson

Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah

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Kingship and Memory addresses the question how Judeans remembered their past and how that past impacted their visions of their (Persian) present and future, centered on the topic of kingship. The study does this by providing readings of traditions concerning (Davidic) kingship in light of memory studies and narratology. It comprises six chapters and three indices and is a revision of Wilson's doctoral dissertation under Ehud Ben Zvi.

Chapter 1 (1–42) delimits the goals of the study: to understand how Judeans conceptualized and remembered kingship; Wilson's hypothesis is that the meanings were "thoroughly multivocal" (4). The chapter sets the stage by explaining Wilson's view of the relevant sociocultural setting, a sparsely populated Persian Yehud, one with a collection of literature approximating the Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic History, the Prophets, and Chronicles. Though he does not deny the growth of the corpus, Wilson argues that it should be read as a "discourse" of this era (9–10), among a handful of "literati" who may have been priestly but too few in number to constitute separate schools (15). He proposes that the topic of kingship is a good exemplar of how these literati constructed their culture. To provide tools for analyzing this discourse, Wilson appeals to the field of memory studies (22–33), arguing that it is helpful to think of "mnemonic practices and social remembering" rather than a "mystical group mind" (24). He finds Nora's concept of "sites of memory" to be useful for historical analysis, topics that reveal the contested

way the collective past was appealed to. Since Wilson sees Yehud's discourse as primarily historiographical, he finds it helpful to focus on how historical events were remembered. Wilson contrasts his use of memory with that of Jan Assmann, which he sees as too much like "classical historical-critical" readings; that is, Wilson wishes to focus on remembering rather than writing per se. To use this method for the Hebrew Bible, the chapter connects the workings of memory with narrative and its emplotment—"Meaning within mnemonic discourse is first and foremost a function of narrative emplotment" (36)—and emphasizes the effect of the overall story's role in society on memory. The remainder of the study more or less follows the narrative order of the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 2 (43–76) explores the textual prelude to monarchy: Deuteronomy and Joshua, beginning with the so-called law of the king. Wilson argues that this law, combined with the figures of Moses and Joshua, are the "primary frames within which the Judean literati remembered kingship" (45). He understands "torah" to reflect simultaneously the specific instructions in Deuteronomy, all of Yhwh's instructions, and the narrative of Israel's origins in the Pentateuch (47). Wilson emphasizes the conditional framing of kingship in the law (only once the land is fully conquered and settled, 51). In the posited Persian context, he sees the stipulation against foreigners as preserving Judean identity in the empire but also stretching those same boundaries. Wilson argues specifically that Cyrus was remembered as David (56–9), thus altering the meaning of "foreigner" (57). He also sees a pro-Persian, anti-Egyptian slant in the injunction against acquiring Egyptian horses (60). He then notes the tension between the injunction against foreign wives and the depiction of Solomon. He sees the last segment of the law to create the king in the image of the torah-reading and -writing Persian scribes. The chapter then moves to argue the impact of the kingly nonkings Moses and Joshua, which is seen as enabling acceptance of the Persian Empire and of keeping the role of the torah central. The chapter concludes by reiterating the implications of the law of the king as a mnemonic frame for the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 3 (77–130) analyzes Judges and the beginning of 1 Samuel as exemplifying the interplay between conflicted views concerning monarchy displayed throughout the Hebrew Bible, which Wilson calls "doublethink" (or ambivalence). The core idea developed is that future ideas concerning kingship are inspired by the diversity within the discourse of kingship in its incipient stages (78). Wilson notes a series of tensions, such as those between an antimonarchical Samuel creating a monarchy and a chaotic period of judges with a series of admirable leaders. He proposes reading Judges as a prologue to Samuel and Joshua as a prologue to Judges, which results in a narratological mirror of Moses-Joshua-Judges paralleling David-Solomon-divided monarchy (88), with Samuel and Saul as an oddly ambiguous middle. Wilson reads both Gideon and Abimelech as "testing discursive possibilities" for kingship (90). Similarly, the success of Samuel but failure of

his sons usher in both the request for a king and its provision in Deuteronomy (95), the discourse consistently expecting yet troubling dynastic succession. He sees the link with Deuteronomy as profoundly ambivalent, simultaneously approving and rejecting the request (102–3). The arrival of Saul continues the pattern of multivocality, paralleling Samuel, acting both kingly and unkinglike, and role reversals between the two characters. Noting the chronological and geographical disjunctions in 1 Sam 8–12, Wilson emphasizes that the literati preserved the text and read it as such, despite their familiarity with real-world geography (118). He emphasizes how Saul's story strongly complicated kingship at its very inception, representing consensus on neither how kingship should be nor should be remembered.

Chapter 4 (131–81) turns to David and Solomon in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles. Noting the polyvalence in these traditions as well, Wilson appeals to the cognitive limits of polyvalence in the forms of "forgetting" and "bracketing" (133). He also notes that, while David is "double thought" in memory, he was also a site for diverse future visions. Wilson emphasizes that he wishes to discuss how the text emplots David rather than his characterization per se (135–36), resulting in the two main aspects of David's story (his ruthlessness and piety) constructing a tragic narrative arc (138). Wilson argues that the seemingly unconditional promise to David raises the question whether Davidic kingship was to be considered a blessing or a curse (145). Noting that Chronicles smooths over these difficulties, he sees the relevant issue to be how to understand the workings of memory in the light of the two preserved contrasting visions (Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles). He argues that starting from the assumption that Chronicles was intentionally altering the Deuteronomistic History is starting from an unproductive angle. One should rather start from the idea that the Yehudian scribes were reading both (151). To understand the divergences, Wilson appeals to cognitive psychology and the effect of bracketing on recall—the likelihood of a detail being recalled is dependent on how much context is also bracketed—although he notes this works less well for the continual rereading of literature. He also notes that both versions have a similar broad narrative arc, with the dynasty falling in both and with both leaving unclear futures for it (154).

Moving to Solomon's reign, Wilson argues that the most "significant site of memory" is his gift of wisdom (158) and that this combined with the location in Gibeon and transfer to Jerusalem links worship at Jerusalem with wisdom. Yet Solomon's story also quickly sours (166). Wilson argues that both the story of Solomon and the law of the king would mutually influence each other's memory. The chapter concludes the discussion of Davidic memory by considering the end of the dynasty, since the outcomes of stories affect their memory. Like the narrative as a whole, the ends are ambivalent: the dynasty is fallen but alive in 2 Kings, and Chronicles has a David-like Cyrus.

Chapter 5 (182–222) moves to the memories of the monarchy in prophetic literature, which Wilson argues provide a future-looking complement to the Former Prophets, giving "a sense of potential endings" instead of a distinct end (184). Wilson sees them as "metahistoriographical," dialoguing with historiographical literature. Taking the lead of approaches focusing on the prophetic book rather than the historical prophets, he sees a sense of timelessness as a major "communicative feature." Wilson emphasizes the multivocality in the prophetic texts, with diverse visions for future rule. One note of connection with the historiographical books is the kingship of Yhwh, though in the prophets it is much more strongly contrasted with hubristic human kings. Wilson also notes the common trope of the return of David, though it frequently occurs with "hedging." He examines one example of what he deems future superhuman Davids (Isa 10–12 [199–203]) but notes that other depictions are more mundane. He plays up the variance in different depictions of Zerubbabel. The overall vision in Ezekiel is also unclear, ranging from a prominent place for David (Ezek 34, 37) to almost none (Ezek 44–48). Moreover, a number of visions have no David at all. The chapter concludes with images of the kingship of Israel itself, either as priestly or Davidic. Wilson argues that the collective visions hearken back to the premonarchic days and thus circumvent the issue of kingship altogether (219). Thus, for Wilson, even though the prophetic literature is aware of Israel's history, this does not create uniformity, deciding neither on kingship past nor future.

Chapter 6 (220–235) brings the above analyses together. Wilson sees a broad emplotment of no king—king—no king—various kingly futures (225). He argues that the scribes saw themselves as parallel to the time of judges, thus in a similarly liminal period (227). While they resisted certain aspects of kingship, they found it difficult to think outside the "kingship box" (228). Wilson reiterates that he sees the prophetic literature as "speculative fiction" or "metahistoriography," with a "thoroughgoing ambiguity." He finds this hedging remarkable (232) but believes it makes sense when read with the historiographical literature, as the literati did themselves. The book closes with bibliography and source, author, and subject indices.

Wilson's approach in this book is not wholly new, and it will be familiar to scholars from his Doktorvater's work. As Wilson admits in his introduction, this is a perspective that cannot be proven, but he believes it can provide some heuristic insight even for those not wholly subscribing to the starting premise. Though he recognizes that the collection of the Hebrew Bible has grown over time, he is skeptical of our ability to discern the stages of this process with any precision. While I am deeply sympathetic to the problems that spur Wilson and others before him to take the Masoretic Text as it has survived as the point of analysis, I still find the move to a synchronic reading in an arbitrarily selected time to also be unsatisfactory. I personally would like more external evidence for the ways

things were remembered in a particular period and am also less confident in a synchronic reading of the collection until later periods. Nevertheless, granted the starting point, the study follows logically and clearly from there. Wilson's careful and considered exposition and deployment of memory studies will please those who are sympathetic to his (and similar) approaches and is still illuminating for providing ways of considering texts and their interrelations. Even scholars who are more redactionally minded will find helpful and nuanced readings of the extant text that may challenge some of their reasons for positing seams here and there.

Where I think the study clearly succeeds—regardless of whether one agrees with its starting premises—is in demonstrating its thesis of thoroughgoing multivocality concerning kingship in the Hebrew Bible, both in terms of its past and its future (e.g., 78, 188, 222). Moreover, Wilson successfully demonstrates the corpus's overall skepticism concerning the suitability of any type of human rulership (e.g., 99, 105, 145). These are quite remarkable features of the corpus and raise a number of intriguing questions, even if one is not as confident as Wilson that all of the texts were being read through and together in the Persian Empire as he believes (e.g., 153). Future scholarship will need to take up Wilson's observation that the Yehudian scribes were transmitting and living with a text with no clear decisions on a key social concept (kingship) and what that means for the way we reconstruct their world.

Overall, the book is exceedingly well written and admirably clear, and thus it is a pleasure to read. A wealth of discursive footnotes clarify Wilson's meanings and positions for unclear and controversial terms and issues, making it very easy to follow the flow of the argumentation. The book will be an important and sophisticated addition to the growing literature on memory in the Second Temple Period, as well as the ways ideas around kingship and David developed in the period.