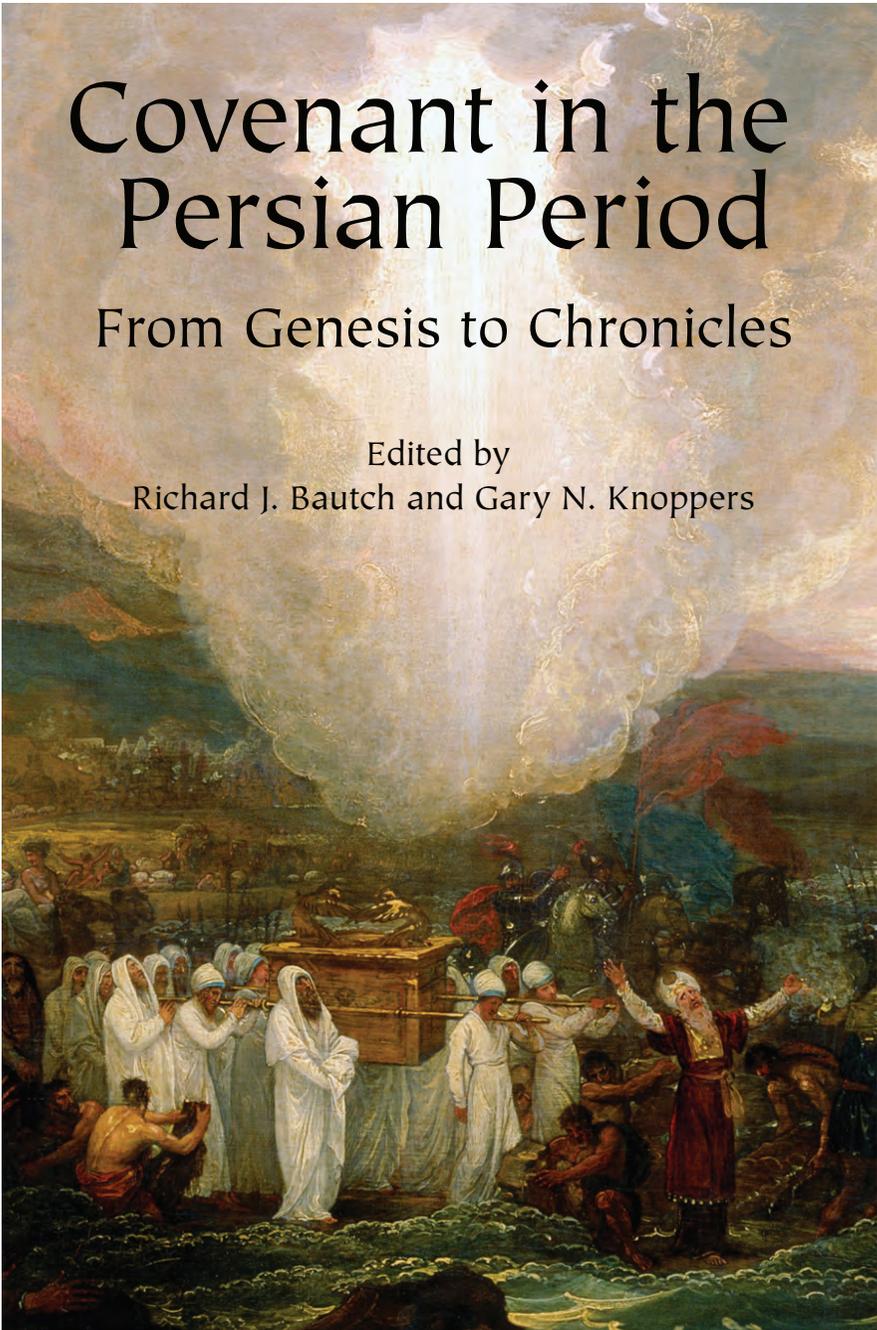


Covenant in the Persian Period

From Genesis to Chronicles

Edited by
Richard J. Bauckham and Gary N. Knoppers



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From Genesis to Chronicles

Edited by

RICHARD J. BAUTCH and GARY N. KNOPPERS

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A Balancing Act

Settling and Unsettling Issues Concerning Past Divine Promises in Historiographical Texts Shaping Social Memory in the Late Persian Period

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Introduction

Central to the construction of social memory in the late Persian period, at least among the literati of the period, were memories of some core divine promises. Many of these core divine promises were understood and remembered in terms of ברית ‘covenant’, even in cases in which central texts encoding these memories do not explicitly contain the term ברית. For instance, whether the original writers of 2 Samuel 7 (whenever they lived) intended the divine promise to David to be understood as a ברית or not,¹ it is clear that the late Persian- or early Hellenistic-period literati construed the divine promise to David reported and evoked by 2 Samuel 7 as a ברית (see 2 Sam 23:5; 1 Kgs 8:23–24 [implicitly]; Jer 33:17–21;² Ps 89:29; 2 Chr 13:5; 21:7).³ Because no text was (or is ever) read by itself

Author’s note: My thanks are due to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for supporting the research leading to this essay and to the many colleagues with whom I discussed these matters.

1. See, for instance, McKenzie 2001; those who advance this position tend to maintain that for the original (redactionally reconstructed) “Deuteronomist” there was only one Mosaic covenant, the Horeb covenant renewed in Moab (see Deut 28:69; cf. 4:13 and 5:2–19, which is the same that was to be renewed at Mt. Gerizim/Ebal [see Deuteronomy 27]).

2. Jer 33:14–26, and thus Jer 33:17–21, is not present in the LXX Jeremiah, which here may well reflect an earlier version of the text, as it is often proposed—note also the “Chronistic flavor” of the text. See, e.g., Gosse 2011: 52–54; Leuchter, 2008: 72–81; McKane, 1996: clxii–clxiii, 861–65 and bibliography cited there. In any event, there is no question that questions about “eternal promises” were enduring questions within the discourse of the communities discussed here and, for that matter, within the discourses of many later communities that identified with “Israel.”

3. As stated in its title, this essay focuses on “historiographical texts.” These texts have, obviously, certain genre characteristics that distinguish them from other texts

but within a cultural context and as an integral part of a general discourse, not only did these texts construe the promise to David as a ברית, but they informed the literati's readings of 2 Samuel 7 accordingly.

Crucial promises were considered a ברית, and promises raise the issue of obligation, because to make a promise is tantamount to set an obligation on oneself.⁴ But the relation between the two is not unproblematic,

(such as psalms, proverbs or prophetic texts) that existed within the repertoire of the community, or its literati, and thus it makes sense studying them separately. This said, references will be made, from time to time, in this essay to texts that are not historiographical. These references are more than justified. For one, concepts may be encoded and activated by texts, reflected and explored through them, continuously negotiated and renegotiated through (social) readings of texts within a community and the like, but concepts (and ideas and memories for that matter) are held by a community not by a written text. Moreover, no concept exists alone, by itself; instead, they exist and have meaning in relation to other concepts and as an integral component of the social mindscape and intellectual discourse of a community. It is extremely unlikely, and I would say unreasonable, to expect that core communal concepts such as ברית be encoded, explored, activated, shaped and reshaped by the community only within the boundaries of a single literary genre to the exclusion of all others (cf. other core concepts such as Torah). It is appropriate then to use, when relevant, references to ברית in texts other than "historiographical" to illuminate our historical reconstructions of the ways in which the community, or its literati, at least, constructed the meaning of ברית as they read and read their "historiographical" texts. Moreover, reading is always contextual and historically contingent. Actual readings (and, for that matter, acts of writing/editing, which are to some extent a way of expressing, shaping and communicating particular "readings" and "rereadings") of texts are never carried out in a "vacuum." When the community read and reread the relevant historiographical texts, they did so informed by their world of knowledge, ideological viewpoints and social attitudes, even if, or likely even more so because, the process was dynamic and the reading of texts contributed to the shaping of the latter. Thus, even if our goal were only to understand how a particular text was read in the late Persian period, still we would have to deal with the world of knowledge of the community and be aware of other (nonhistoriographical) texts within the discourse of the community that informed, in ways known and unbeknownst to the community, its readings of the historiographical texts. Further, most of the nonhistoriographical texts mentioned here shaped images of the past and evoked and construed (social) memory just as the historiographical texts themselves. The comprehensive social memory of the community about particular events, characters, and the like is influenced by all the relevant texts that it considers "authoritative."

4. Not surprisingly, ברית appears at times in association with other terms within the large semantic/conceptual realm of "obligation." See, for instance, the parallelism between דבר and ברית in 1 Chr 16:15//Ps 105:8; the association between ברית and דבר clearly communicated in 1 Kgs 8:23–24; and similar conceptual developments such as the association between שבועה and [implied] ברית in 1 Chr 16:16//Ps 105:9. It is worth noting that the sense of obligation exists when two parties enter into a ברית, but also in the case of obligations taken by characters on themselves (e.g., 2 Chr 34:31; note that the ברית there is construed as "before YHWH," לפני יהוה). It is even more interesting when the term ברית stands for, evokes or even *embodies* a single particular

because a promise seems to create a reason (that is, the obligation) for doing something just by stating the intent to fulfill what was promised.⁵ Not only is this conceptually problematic, but rarely would a society consider the value of the act of promising in itself as absolute so as to override completely all socially accepted moral rules. Jephthah is not praised for offering his daughter (see also, for instance, 1 Sam 14:45). Moreover, although YHWH was characterized and remembered both as (a) fulfilling all his promises and not changing his mind, particularly when YHWH is contrasted with human beings (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; see also Mal 3:6), and as (b) changing his mind and not following through with his promises, particularly *but not exclusively* when he is portrayed as merciful.⁶

Promises, like any performative utterance, are nothing more but nothing less than a socially accepted practice, namely, promising, and as such they receive their meaning from society and generally agreed-on societal norms, which, of course, vary from time to time and are rarely absolute. In any case, this means that promising is to be understood within the social norms and the pragmatic understanding/s of “promise” and “promising” that exist in the relevant society.⁷ To illustrate, one may claim that the reason for fulfilling promises may be grounded not in the very act of stating

group or entity (see Mal 3:1; Isa 42:6; and Prov 2:17—note especially the parallelisms in the latter two; cf. also Dan 11:22, 28, 30; 1QM 14:4; 1QS 5:11, 18). Even in this case, ברית stands within the general semantic realm of obligation, because the group was essentially construed around such an obligation. In the cases relevant to this essay, obligations were understood and remembered as established by divine promises (see, for instance, Deut 7:9; 1 Kgs 8:23–24//2 Chr 6:14), whether they involve a “contract” or not. To be sure, the idea of a “contract” involving YHWH is somewhat problematic because a “contract” is basically an obligation whose enforcement is implicitly assigned to an external agent and made dependent on some set of “objective” rules to be evaluated by that enforcer. On ברית and obligation, see Kutsch 1997.

5. On general issues regarding promises, see Sheinman 2011.

6. E.g., Hos 11:8–9; contrast the language used here with that of Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29. To improve readability, masculine pronouns have been used here in relation to YHWH. Although this deity was construed as beyond the male/female dichotomies that characterized humans and other animals and thus was superior to them (see Genesis 1), it was also cast in roles which in human societies were clearly gendered (e.g., warrior, king, husband, father).

7. The crucial promises for the present study are divine promises. But socially shared norms regarding human promises were most likely involved with the construction of divine promises and their meanings. After all, gods were imagined, by necessity, on the basis of attributes, roles and norms that were known to the imagining society because they occurred in society itself (e.g., the god as shepherd, husband, king, mighty warrior, teacher; the god’s anger, compassion; the god’s council and messengers; and so on—all human roles and characteristics). In fact, the deity was, at least in part, construed as a superhuman and thus based on humans.

them but in the need not to lose socially granted trust and “honor” in general, and thus the need not to hinder one’s own future social transactions due to a loss of “status.”⁸ One may claim that people may be socialized to keep promises in a society, because this facilitates social cooperation and that *mutatis mutandis* this applies to their constructions of the deity; for one who keeps promises is one with whom social cooperation can be easily imagined and remembered. A well-socialized (and one may say well-tamed) “deity” is one with whom a reliable partnership can be struck, and therefore, society may have a stake in constructing and remembering such a deity. These images, though, were balanced by others as we shall see.

In any event, given that promising is above all a social practice, then the pragmatic, not the “semantic” aspects of the remembered promises should be at the forefront of studies of their meanings and significances. “Remembered promises” indicates particular promises within the mnemonic and ideological landscape of the community. One of the best ways to construct a reasonable reconstruction of the pragmatic value of these promises in an ancient society is to examine the memories of these promises this sort of society holds, specifically in our case memories of core divine promises at the center of the social discourse of the literati of the period. This approach also opens the gates for a better understanding of the general discourse of the community. Clearly, the memories of the literati raised both settling and very unsettling issues about core divine promises.

Observations on Some Core Promises within the Community’s Mnemonic Landscape

There is no doubt that there were a number of prominent core divine promises within the discourse and mnemonic world of the literati of the time, including the promise not to sweep away the entire world (the promise to Noah, Gen 8:21–22; 9:9–17), the promises of progeny and land for Israel (the promise to the patriarchs⁹), and, among others, promises of the royal and priestly lines. All these promises involved YHWH’s obligations. For obvious reasons, the works included in the Deuteronomistic His-

8. This line of thinking about “promises” generated and was activated by some memories encoded within the literati’s authoritative repertoire of texts in the late Persian/Early Hellenistic periods, e.g., Exod 32:11–13; Jer 14:21.

9. The promise of the land was associated with the patriarchs also in Deuteronomy and the DHC (e.g., Deut 6:10, 23; 8:1; 10:1; 31:7; 34:4; Josh 5:6; 21:41–43). Whether or not אבותם originally referred to the patriarchs or the fathers of the generations who actually entered the land, it is clear that by the late Persian/early Hellenistic period, it was understood to be the patriarchs.

tory—or as I prefer to call it, the Deuteronomistic Historical Collection (DHC)—and Chronicles evoked in the remembering community more memories directly associated with the promises of land and of royal and priestly lines than those of progeny as numerous as the sand of the sea or of not undoing creation.

The land is certainly a central issue in Joshua and plays an important role in Judges as well. The conquest of the entire land was explicitly and saliently presented in the book of Joshua as a fulfillment of a divine promise (e.g., Josh 11:23; 23:14). But the late Persian/early Hellenistic, Jerusalem-centered literati who read the book of Joshua were also asked to construe and vicariously experience a past in which the entire land was conquered and simultaneously not conquered by Joshua (and YHWH; compare Josh 11:23 with Josh 13:1–6; also Josh 23:14 with Josh 23:1–5; and see Judg 1:1–2:5). Significantly, this tension did not lead to less social mindshare (or narrative space, for that matter) for the story. One should stress also that this tension was not hidden but explicit and for all to see. In fact, in the case of the conquest and nonconquest of the entire land, the relevant texts were even set in close literary proximity, so readers could not miss the point.¹⁰

Tensions such as these served here and elsewhere as attention getters and drew particular attention to the heart of the matter. Thus, they served significant didactic purposes (cf. Jonah).¹¹ But if so, what was the effect

10. Examples of these and similar “logical” tensions appear in various texts and across genre boundaries. They are particularly common in prophetic literature and within the historiographical books; they appear not only in the DHC but certainly in Chronicles as well. To illustrate, the literati knew about YHWH’s promise to Noah not to sweep away the world again (Gen 8:21–22; cf. Gen 9:9–17), but they also remembered a number of divine promises of future sweepings away of the created world, involving the massive killing of humans and animals (e.g., Zeph 1:2–3). Thus, YHWH was remembered as a deity who obligated itself both never to sweep the world away and to sweep it away. Similar cases appear, as it shall be discussed here, in the historiographical works. The existence of a variety of texts encoding and evoking memories that reflected, communicated, and negotiated “divine obligations” in similar ways is *only to be expected* given that (a) the community shared a social mindscape that underlies and makes sense of shared social practices including promises, and (b) systemic preferences and dispreferences in the construction of social memories—including those dealing with promises—are not a function of a particular literary genre or of some rhetorical requirements or preferences in a single or set of related texts.

11. In its construal of the divine promises, the metaphoric book of Jonah reminded the readers that the promises were carried out in more than one way, more than once, and at the same time not carried out at all. Accordingly, YHWH was construed in the book as a character who may fulfill its (self-)obligations, may not fulfill them at all, or may fulfill them in what, from the perspective of those receiving the promise, could

of remembering together both the presence and the absence of such a total conquest on the community, particularly in the ways it negotiated and thus constructed the meaning of promising as a social and pragmatic practice? Further, what could have been the effect of remembering that the promise of the land was given with full knowledge that its outcome would not last (e.g., Deut 30:20; 31:20–21; Josh 23:15)? Is this a “good faith” promise? And if not, what does it say about promising as a social practice? I will come back to these questions.

The promise of the land was not exclusively, or one may say even mainly, associated with memories of the (construed) period of Joshua within the text/memory-centered community in late Persian/early Hellenistic Judah. It is not by chance that their usual mnemonic cipher was “the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” or variants of it,¹² not “the land which I swore to Moses” or to “Joshua” or to their generation. To be sure, the remembered patriarchs never held or could have held possession of the “promised” land. The emphasis was thus on remembering the promise and its future fulfillment rather than remembering its fulfillment in a past that exists no more.

There is a second principle at work here as well. The remembering community could see themselves closer to the (for the most part) powerless patriarchs than to a mighty warrior and military leader such as Joshua and his militarily powerful Israel. In fact, the common principle of enhancing “contemporary” identification in shaping social memories was at work even in the characterization of Joshua. The latter was, of course, remembered within this context as the successful leader of a military conquest.¹³ But at the same time, this sort of image is balanced in the book of Joshua by a tendency to lessen the weight of his mighty warrior image and attach to him other attributes (for example, a secondary Moses, a prophetic figure, a torah/text-centered literati), thus creating a site of memory with which the literati could more readily identify.¹⁴ Do these tendencies indi-

be described as either a less-than-straightforward manner or even an intentionally deceptive manner—whether for good moral purposes or not. YHWH was construed as a deity doing all the above. See Ben Zvi 2003.

12. E.g., Gen 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 24:7; 26:3; 28:13; 50:24; Exod 3:8; 6:8; 13:5, 11; 32:13; 33:1; Lev 26:42; Num 14:23; 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 30:20; 34:4; Jer 11:5; cf. Ps 105:9–11; 1 Chr 16:15–18.

13. E.g., Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:7, 23; Josh 11: 7, 10–13, 16, 18, 21, 23, 12:7; and cf. Exod 17:9–13.

14. One may note that mnemonic vignettes that emphasize the warrior-like character of the individual “hero” (e.g., 1 Sam 14:13–15; 18:7; 2 Sam 21:18–22) were not associated with Joshua. Moreover, it is YHWH who defeats the enemy in all memorable

cate that, within the mnemonic landscape of the community, memories of promises that can be attached to characters with whom the community may more easily identify are more prominent than others?¹⁵ And, in the case of positive promises, because of the principle of hope that is necessary for social reproduction, is it those promises that the society will tend to consider more “fulfillable,” even if in the distant future?¹⁶

Whereas the “promised” land figures prominently in the book of Joshua, and to some extent in Judges as well, the promised king and his line figures prominently in the closely associated books of Samuel and Kings. This being so, it is particularly worth noting that this collection does not begin with David or a failed kingly foil to David such as Saul. Instead, it begins with and shapes a communal memory in which a lengthy apologia for the substitution of priestly with monarchic rule occupied a substantial section of memory-scape.¹⁷ In any event, Samuel–Kings reminded the reading

reports. The walls of Jericho fell because of a ritual performance, not Joshua’s military heroism. In the case of Ai, the successful ambush is devised by YHWH, not Joshua (Josh 8:2). Cf. Josh 10:10–14. Significantly, the process of downgrading/lessening the relative weight of military/warrior features of great figures of the past was at work in the construction of Moses and Abraham and even in that of David. See especially Chronicles and Psalms, and note the famous citation from Wellhausen (1957: 182), “See what Chronicles has made out of David! The founder of the kingdom has become the founder of the temple and public worship, the king and hero at the head of his companions in arms has become a singer and master of ceremonies at the head of a swarm of priests and Levites.” Of course, ancient Near Eastern warrior kings (for example, neo-Assyrian kings) were also described as pious, praying, and building temples. The issue is the relative weight of certain attributes in the overall construction of the memory of the king, rather than any either/or logic. Chronicles did not innovate as much as it shifted the balance of memory, and because it is also a historiographic work, the matter cannot be explained away as just an issue of genre (cf. Psalms). See von Rad 2001: 350.

15. Of course, as in all cases of identifications with (construed) characters of the past, there are gaps that cannot be easily bridged. Take, for instance, the identification of the community with the patriarchs. The ancestors of the patriarchs never held—or in the case of Abraham never were in—the land, but the literati in Yehud construed themselves as descendants from those who (at least partially) held it. Their memory of former possessions of the land brought to the forefront a different perspective on the land and its promise. The literati remembered the fall of Jerusalem and its temple, exile, and even an empty land. For them, promises about possession of the land were not only something incongruent with their present situation or a pointer to a distant future but also a reminder of a lost past, whose loss was also promised.

16. Rather than the precise language of a text encoding memories of these promises.

17. It is worth noting that the traditional mnemonic narrative of a new ruler (that is, the “usurper”) who brings down an impious regime and brings back order had to be extensively modified in this case. The ideological, generative grammar underlying Samuel–Kings could not allocate to David the traditional role of the “usurper” bringing down Samuel, the last priestly ruler; instead, it had to construe him as a kind of restorer

community in late Persian/early Hellenistic Judah that monarchy was not a “natural” situation for Israel,¹⁸ and this reminder could not but have an effect on constructions of monarchic promises.¹⁹

Moreover, although Samuel–Kings contained clear references to the promise to David and evoked it (e.g., 2 Samuel 7), the readers were introduced to the general matter of divine promises and their pragmatic meanings as social practices in 1 Sam 2:30. The text is presented as direct divine speech and is associated with a true prophet; in fact, it is the first divine speech in Samuel–Kings and involves the first instance of a prophetic speaker. The text here is blunt and explicit:

נאם־יהוה אלהי ישראל אמור וביתך ובית אביך יתהלכו לפני עד־עולם ועתה
נאם־יהוה חלילה לי כי־מכבדי אכבד ובזי יקלו

YHWH the God of Israel declares: “I promised that your [Eli’s] family and the family of your ancestor should go in and out before me *עַד עוֹלָם*”; but now YHWH declares: “Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt” (NRSV, with slight changes).

The text certainly communicates an interpretative key for negotiating the meaning of divine promises and whether YHWH was construed as necessarily obligated to keep and fulfill them. A few observations sharpen matters further. First, the YHWH of the text does not present the original divine promise as conditional (see vv. 27–28). To be sure, given the reason for annulling it in vv. 29–30, one may claim that the promise was implicitly construed as conditional. But, within this logic, any memory of a past or future “cancellation” of a divine promise that can be explained on account of impious behavior—in other words, almost any memory of a cancellation—would render any promise implicitly conditional. If this is the case here, then it is potentially the case everywhere. The lack of explicit refer-

of order supported by Samuel. In other words, it needed a transitional Saul figure to gloss over the fact that David’s “restoration” of order is not a return to Samuel’s days but a new beginning, by constructing Samuel himself as an active agent supporting David’s kingship. Below, I discuss Samuel as a priest and successor of Eli. I expanded elsewhere on the multiple implications of constructions of Samuel as priest within the discourse of late Persian/early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah. See Ben Zvi 2014a.

18. It is worth noting that poignant sites of memory activated memories of explicit, interpretive divine communications (e.g., 1 Sam 8:7) that associated priestly rule over Israel with YHWH’s rule over it.

19. The presence of this sort of apologia is not a given or something necessary just because there was no Davidic king in the remembering community, a point demonstrated beyond doubt by the absence of this apologia in Chronicles.

ence to conditionality in vv. 28–29 turns this text into a very substantial interpretive key and a central place for analyzing the ways in which the community negotiated the meaning of divine promises, including core promises.

Second and directly related to the first observation, Eli's response to YHWH's decision to break his promise to him and his house was יהוה הוא הטוב בעיני יעשה ('YHWH, he will do what is good to him' or 'YHWH, let him do what seems good to him' or 'He is YHWH; he will/let him do what is/seems good to him'; 1 Sam 3:18). Although by all means this does not represent a strange position,²⁰ its implication is that, ultimately, YHWH can overturn promises as YHWH pleases.

Third, the explicit use of the expression עד-עולם shows that YHWH was remembered as a deity for whom yesterday's "perpetual" was not *necessarily* today's or tomorrow's "perpetual." This construction of YHWH has direct impact on constructions of the social practice of promising and vice-versa, and is at work elsewhere in the discourse of the community.²¹ Further, the expression עד-עולם in connection with a divine promise of leadership within the context of the book of Samuel links this verse to divine promises to David (e.g., 2 Sam 7:13, 16; 22:51; cf. 2 Sam 7:25²² and 1 Kgs 2:45) and comments on what, from the perspective of the remembering community in the late Persian/early Hellenistic period, were considered to be problematic aspects of such a promise; after all, there was no Davidic king over them.

Fourth, the explicit use of the language 'I רבחר אתו מכל-שבטי ישראל [YHWH] chose him out of all the tribes of Israel' activates not only a reference to David (cf. 1 Kgs 8:16; 2 Chr 6:5; Ps 78:70; see also in relation to Solomon 1 Chr 29:1) but also, and perhaps more importantly, an expression that was mainly used in the historiographical books held by the community in reference to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:15–16; 11:32; 14:21;

20. Cf. 2 Sam 10:12; 1 Chr 19:13; Isa 45:9; Job 9:12; see also 1 Chr 21:23, which refers not to a divine king but to King David, as perceived from the perspective of Ornan. Note also the idea that no one can tell the king, divine or human, what to do (e.g., Qoh 8:4).

21. Similar considerations apply to the pentateuchal expression ברית עולם (see Mason 2008, with bibliography). None of this is surprising in view of the previous observation about promises as social practices within a shared social mindscape. It is also not surprising given that עד-עולם does not necessarily mean "eternal" (see, for instance, 1 Sam 1:22; 2 Sam 12:10; 1 Kgs 2:33) and thus its meaning is malleable according to the communicative circumstances in which it is used.

22. Note the different verbal forms used in vv. 24 and 25 and the rhetorical effect to which this difference is used.

2 Kgs 21:7; 2 Chr 6:5–6 and 33:7; 1 Kgs 8:15–16//2 Chr 6:5–6 share with 1 Sam 2:27–28 also an association between the promise and the Exodus). This web of texts hinted at yet another possible way of negotiating the meaning of the broken promise to Eli, not instead but in addition to the one mentioned above, linking Eli and David. The promise to Eli may be approached as creating a mnemonic path and, one may say, an implied narrative linking the broken promise to Eli to the discursively and ideologically far more crucial divine promise regarding Jerusalem. I will return to Jerusalem and the promise to keep it as the city of YHWH's temple, YHWH's capital city and as such as the cosmic center of the world, from the perspective of the mentioned community.²³

Fifth, breaking the promise to Eli was conceptualized in terms of breaking the promise to his biological progeny. But the promise of priesthood was not conceptualized in these terms. After all, the text reported and the community remembered that an “adopted son” who was an Ephraimite, namely, Samuel, succeeded Eli.²⁴ Even if the community at one level was aware that the House of Eli continued serving as priests before the ark well after the events reported in 1 Sam 2–4 (see esp. 1 Sam 22:20 and 1 Kgs 2:27)—a matter that in itself calls for negotiating the pragmatic meaning of YHWH's words in 1 Sam 2:2—and even if, contrary to the seeming logic of the narrative in this section of the book of Samuel, the *בית נאמן* and *כהן נאמן* of 1 Sam 2:30 were understood as references to Zadok and his house (see 1 Kgs 2:27), still the fact remains that Samuel was remembered as an important priest.²⁵ After all, he takes the place of the biological sons of Eli.

The implications of remembering Samuel as priest (not only as prophet or judge) were significant in terms of negotiating the meaning of the remembered divine promises of priesthood to a particular line. It certainly raised the issue of whether individuals who were not originally from Levi, or Zadok for that matter, may serve as priest. This issue was, of course, known to the literati and reflected and communicated in other authorita-

23. To be sure, Jerusalem was remembered as all these things, but at the same time not necessarily as a city that cannot be conquered or temporarily razed.

24. Cf. Polzin 1993: 42–43. The logic of the narrative, which contrasts Eli's (biological) sons with Samuel, makes that point unmistakable. To be sure, the community knows that Samuel later on loses his leadership position, but this sort of event was not associated with breaking the promise to Eli (see 1 Sam 2:31–36; 1 Samuel 4).

25. It is true that Samuel is not explicitly called “priest” in the narrative, but 1 Sam 2:11, 18–19; 3:1, and the salient contrast between Samuel and the sons of Eli, who are priests, between the old, corrupt order and the new order about to emerge, serve to characterize Samuel as a priest. The fact that 1 Chr 6:12–13 (most English translations, 6:27–28) turns him into a Levite is proof positive that Samuel was remembered as a priest by the late Persian/early Hellenistic period.

tive works within the repertoire of the community (cf. Isa 56:6–7; 66:21, which raise the issue of originally non-Israelites priests). The issue is, of course, taken up also by Chronicles, which attempts to balance the memory of Samuel evoked by the book of Samuel by turning Samuel (and Elkanah, of course) into (genealogical/biological) Levites (1 Chr 6:12–13; most English translations 6:27–28) and thus trying to inform the community’s reading of Samuel. The presence of various and conflicting voices attests to the fact that the reading was well inside the boundaries shaped by the social mindscape of the community.

Moreover, this is just one aspect of a more general issue that directly affects the community’s understanding of a central, hereditary divine promise within the discourse of the community, namely, the promise/s regarding Israel. Are those who were not genealogically Israel allowed to become Israel? The answer seems not always, but for the most part positive (e.g., Isa 14:1), and given the tendency to “priestize” Israel,²⁶ this answer was not irrelevant to the pragmatic understanding of the hereditary promise to Levi.²⁷

On the surface, at least, to the literati of the late Persian/early Hellenistic period, memories of divine promises to Levi or *some* of his descendants did not seem in need of negotiation in the same way as memories of the promise to David were. After all, there were legitimate priests in Jerusalem at that time, as the literati knew very well,²⁸ but there was no Davidic king in Jerusalem or hope for one to emerge in the normal course of worldly events.

There is no question that the promise to David figured quite prominently in the memory-scape of the community. Multiple texts, across various literary genres, evoked that site of memory many times, directly and indirectly.²⁹ The question is, however, how this promise was negotiated by

26. This tendency is encoded in and communicated by texts across genre boundaries, because it played important (and generative roles) within the discourse of the community and thus was bound to emerge in various places. See, for instance, Exod 19:6 and Ps 114:2; cf. Lev 19:2.

27. Cf. Ben Zvi 2014a.

28. The Jerusalem-centered literati of the late Persian/early Hellenistic period were not only obviously aware of the existence of the temple in Jerusalem, which by itself requires priests to function, but were probably supported by the temple and its priests. On priests and literati at that time see Ben Zvi 2004.

(The distribution of roles among the “sons of Levi” and especially that of the “Levites” when this term is used in contradistinction to “priests” was very much a debated issue, but the matter cannot be discussed here.)

29. See 2 Sam 7:1–17; Ps 89:29; 132:1–18; also 2 Sam 23:5; 1 Kgs 8:23–24; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19; Isa 55:3; Jer 33:14–26; 2 Chr 13:5; 21:7.

the community in response to their circumstances and their core memory of the fall of Jerusalem and the monarchic polity. The previous survey shows that the memory of the fate of the divine promise to the House of Eli shaped one possible response: namely, the community could construe the divine promise to David as cancelled. This sort of approach was consistent with other memories of divine promises, with conceptual approaches to promises as social practice, even if projected to the realm of deity, and with some characterizations of and memories of YHWH.³⁰

Moreover, because the promise to David was generally understood as a promise to reign over all Israel, not Judah alone,³¹ remembering that Jeroboam could have had an enduring house (בֵּית נְאֻמָּן)³² involved already a renegotiation over the meaning of the divine promise to David. In this case, the renegotiation strongly narrowed its scope and, despite explicit rhetoric to the contrary, carried by itself the possibility of further narrowing and renegotiation.³³ To be sure, Chronicles did not shape a mnemonic narrative in which Jeroboam could have had a divinely appointed enduring house.³⁴ Instead, significantly, Chronicles reshaped causality. Whereas in Kings it is because of sins that the promise is renegotiated, in Chronicles it is quite the opposite; YHWH decides to divide the kingdom during a pious period. Whereas Kings evoked in the mnemonic community typical images of punishment for sin (and the conditionality of all divine promises), Chronicles evoked a sense that YHWH does as YHWH wishes, and at times YHWH's

30. Of course, it is also consistent with the generally agreed position, by now, that the covenant of David—and other covenants as well—was conditional. See, for instance, McKenzie 2001 and Avioz 2012 and literature cited there. McKenzie encapsulated the point, stating, “The Davidic promise was always subject to Yahweh, not the other way around” (2001: 177). I will return to this quotation. For the general conditionality of covenants/promises, see recently Mason 2008 (and cited literature). Mal 2:4–9 assumes that the covenant is conditional. In fact, readers were asked to imagine and remember YHWH trying to help the offending party (the priests) to hold the covenant (see esp. Mal 2:4). But one has to keep in mind that within the world that the literati construed covenants—like all types of divine promises—could at least potentially be cancelled by the deity without a humanly understandable reason.

31. The point that David is promised to rule over “(all) Israel” (i.e., not just Judah) is clear from 2 Samuel 7 (and its context) and the same position is implied in texts such as Jer 33:14–16; Ezek 37:22–25; Hos 3:5.

32. See 1 Kgs 11:38.

33. In fact, one may claim that the forceful rhetoric to the contrary (see 1 Kgs 11:32, 34, 36) emerged as a response to the implications for the “eternal” value of YHWH's promise to David and reflected some uneasiness about them. One is reminded of the famous expression “The lady doth protest too much, methinks,” *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, 230.

34. The same holds true for LXX Kings. See Schenker 2000.

decisions cannot be explained by humans, including the implied author of Chronicles.³⁵ But this being so, and because YHWH's path was construed as not always explainable or predictable and YHWH was construed as sovereign, then just as YHWH can promise, YHWH can revoke his promises, without any understandable reason. Paraphrasing S. L. McKenzie, one may say that, within the discourse of the community, divine promises were always subject to YHWH, not the other way around.³⁶

But the fact that the community could potentially imagine the promise to David as cancelled does not mean that they always had to imagine it as such. Other ways of negotiating the meaning of the promise to David existed in the community. The promise could be and was at times construed as relevant to the future and yet to be fulfilled. This approach is explicitly manifested in and communicated by some texts in the prophetic books that shaped images and memories of a utopian future in which a highly elevated Davidide plays a central role.³⁷

The fact that these images are attested in and evoked by prophetic but not historiographical books is not grounded on discursive or ideological differences within the community but on genre constructions. Prophetic books could and did construe memories of the past and the future; historiographical books were meant to shape memories of the past. The main narrative of the "national" histories was organized around kings and kings' regnal periods. These "national" histories had to conclude, in the main, with the last king of Judah.³⁸ Prophetic books certainly did not have such a

35. See Ben Zvi 2006: 117–43. The underlying ideological stance was common in the general discourse of the period and played an important balancing role in terms of allowing the community to make sense of the world. Its centrality in the social mind-scape of the community is attested by the fact that such a stance is reflected in and communicated by, directly and indirectly, various texts held by the community, across boundaries of genre and topic. See, for instance, 1 Sam 3:18; Isa 45:9; Job 9:12; Prov 19:21; 20:24.

36. See n. 30.

37. See, for instance, Isa 9:5–6; 11:1–9; Jer 23:5–6; 30:8–11; 33:14–26; Ezek 34: 23–30; 37:15–28; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11–15; Mic 5:1. This Davidide of the utopian future was remembered by the community as a highly elevated human being (see Isa 9:5–7; 11:1–9; Hos 3:5), very different from the community's memories of monarchic David or Solomon as evoked in the "historical" books.

38. The reason is simple: books such as Kings and Chronicles could not have continued their periodization of history and their organization of time around local kings, as required by their basic character as "national," polity-centered histories. Adopting a strongly ideological, framing structure based on the regnal periods of Achaemenid kings was, for obvious reasons, not a good option and was certainly not taken up. This means that this sort of construction and periodization of "national" history can reach only to the end of the monarchy, and indeed both Kings and Chronicles end their

limitation. The only thing historiographical books could (and did) do was to allow the community to hold the hope for a future, utopian Davidic renewal by leaving open the door for the continuation of the line of David.³⁹

But other ways of negotiating the promise existed. For instance, the re-builder of the temple within social memory at the time, namely Cyrus, had to be both a foreign king and also partially Davidized, because as re-builder of the temple he is a kind of “second David.”⁴⁰ This trend is attested by and communicated by books as diverse as Chronicles and Isaiah; it shaped and evoked a basic mnemonic narrative that moved from David to Cyrus, from temple to temple.⁴¹

It is easy to understand that, within the discourse of the period, the meaning of the promise to David was renegotiated also to mean the promise to Israel. This is due to the related processes of (a) ideological “royalization” of Israel; (b) remembering David, particularly the sinful and heavily punished David, as embodying and symbolically representing Israel, and thus contributing to shaping a shared conceptual realm that includes both David and Israel; (c) numerous memories of a utopian future in which Davidides play no role,⁴² but Israel does; and (d) explicit memories of a utopian future that do not mention David but in which the *ברית* is with the people (Jer 50:4–5). The “classical” text expressing this approach is taken to be Isa 55:3–11, but a similar, underlying trend can be detected also in Chronicles. There was a tendency in Chronicles to renegotiate the fulfillment of the promise to David in communal and above all temple-centered terms. Chronicles suggested to its readers that they

main narratives at that point, even if both include an “afterword” notice, and the one in Chronicles is particularly significant. To be sure, books within the repertoire of the community may still contain references to the regnal years of Achaemenid kings (e.g., Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah), but obviously these are not comprehensive “national,” polity-centered histories as Kings and Chronicles are.

39. See Knoppers 2003: 332–36, and literature cited there. As for the end of Kings, see Wilson 2014 and literature cited there.

40. The same applies to Zerubbabel, the Israelite/Yehudite associated with the building of the temple who ended up being construed as a Davidide in 1 Chr 3:19 and is elevated in Hag 2:21–22. Of course, through the centuries other figures were associated with Davidic lineage (e.g., Jesus, Hillel, R. Judah HaNasi). Processes of Davidization did not completely stop. For a recent example, see the case of David Koresh and his founding of a “Davidic kingdom.” (One may note that Ben Gurion mused, though very briefly, about a “Third Kingdom of Israel.”)

41. The highly elevated character of the construed and remembered Cyrus of the literati contributed to this characterization (and vice versa). On the elevated character of Cyrus, see, for instance, Isa 44: 24–28; 45:1–8, 11–13. Goldingay (2005: 253–300) describes all of Isa 44:24–45:25 as “the triumph of Cyrus.” See also Isa 48:12–15.

42. See, for instance, those evoked by Isa 40–66; Jer 50:4–5, 19–20; Ezek 16:60; Hos 2:18–22; 14:6–9; Obadiah; Zephaniah 3.

could construct the fulfillment of the promise to David through the prism of the existence of the (present or future utopian) temple and (present or future utopian) temple-centered Israel.⁴³ Above all, from a conceptual perspective, Chronicles reminded the community that the typical association between Davidic kings and the temple in Jerusalem and the divine legitimization of monarchic rule associated with temple building/establishing activities were now transferred to the community in Yehud.⁴⁴ Some

43. Commonly mentioned texts in this regard are 1 Chr 16:22, 28:20, and the lack of reference to Davidides within the community of 1 Chronicles 9; the common exchange from David's house/kingdom to YHWH's house/kingdom (e.g., 1 Chr 17:14; 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chr 13:5, 8); and the quasi-royal characterization of Jehoiada the priest in 2 Chronicles 23–24, which goes as far as possible given the constraints of imagining a priest in the monarchic period but includes even a note about his burial among the kings of Judah (see in particular 2 Chr 23:16, 18–19; 24:3, 12, 14–16). This construction of Jehoiada was likely a projection of a utopian priestly, Jerusalemite ruler like the one the community wanted to have, made to fit within a narrative and mnemonic world of a past, monarchic/Davidic Judah. (For an alternative, but also non-Davidic, non-monarchic Israel and its leadership, see 2 Chr 28:8–15; see Ben Zvi 2006: 223–31.) There is considerable debate as to whether Chronicles shows a royalist, messianic tendency or a nonroyalist, nonmessianic, communal and temple-centered tendency, and to what extent these agendas are future and possibly utopian and present focused—the latter in particular, but not exclusively, for the nonroyalist, communal/temple-centered agenda. For a recent survey of many of the important positions taken in research on the matter and substantial bibliography, see Boda 2014. I would argue that all these “voices” are present in Chronicles and that they complement and balance each other, but certainly do not “cancel” each other out. I would further argue that it is the intertwining of these multiple voices that represents both the discourse of the period and the “voice” of the implied author of Chronicles as construed by the literati in the late Persian/early Hellenistic period.

44. This holds true even if the command to “build” the temple is associated with Cyrus (and through Cyrus with YHWH) and even as I argued elsewhere, even if the temple was *partially* (and only *partially*) construed as an Achaemenid enterprise. This is not the place for a substantial discussion of these matters; it suffices to notice that to “build/establish” the temple, proper knowledge is necessary—including knowledge of the place where it should be erected, of its basic pattern, and above all of its proper service. It is not by chance that according to Chronicles, the main “builder” of the temple was David, not Solomon, the king who actually built it. In the Persian period, it is the community that is responsible; Cyrus was not imagined as knowing Moses' and David's instructions for a proper Jerusalemite temple, as construed by the community. Moreover, the act of “building/establishing” the proper temple/cult was not imagined as complete once for all. In monarchic times, Davidic kings were construed as responsible for ensuring that the temple was established/run properly, that is, according to Moses and David's instructions on their own times—which involved, from time to time and as necessary activities such as cleansing the temple, ensuring proper cult, proper cultic community and (re)building as necessary, or lack thereof when kings failed in their tasks. Within the discourse of the community, all these roles were now construed as Israel's, as was Torah.

version of this point was made also in Kings, through the subordination of the temple to torah (see the story of Josiah's scroll),⁴⁵ because the torah is Israel's and not (only) the Davidic king's.

Tendencies to negotiate the promise to David in communal terms were at work elsewhere in the prophetic books, prominently in the construction of YHWH's servant, which clearly contains elements of royal and even "imperial" imagery, but also likely in the image of the future king in Zech 9:9.⁴⁶

One may mention also that when a group was engaged in a political project that failed catastrophically (its fall was accompanied with extreme calamity) and that had no chance to succeed under any foreseen circumstances, the group may reconstrue itself and its identity in cultural/religious terms and thus may construe itself as engaged in a cultural/religious project.⁴⁷ This shift from political to cultural/religious project is consistent with the identification/transformation of King David with/to a temple centered community.

This draws attention to a variety of ways in which the community could and did renegotiate the divine promise to David. It could be understood as broken, as yet to be fulfilled, as referring to a highly elevated Davidide or to the people or to Cyrus, and any combination of these. Each of these understandings manifested itself across various literary genres and with subvariations. Each emerged out of a socially shared, implied generative grammar, and each manifestation informed the others. These understandings together provide a representation of the general discourse of the community.

But where do these considerations leave us in terms of better understanding the pragmatic meanings of divine promises? Certainly, remembering the past evoked by the DHC, the Primary History (Genesis–2 Kings), Chronicles, other past-construing texts, as well as remembering the future vicariously experienced by reading prophetic books, raised both "settling" and very "unsettling" issues regarding core divine promises for the community. At the conceptual level, all promises were breakable, but they were also "promises," that is, "obligations."

45. E.g., Römer 2000.

46. The king may be read as a personification of Israel/the community. See Petersen 1995: 58–59; Leske 2000.

47. Cf. the construction of Judaism and Christianity after 70 B.C.E., and of Judaism in the light of the failure of Bar Kochba's rebellion. From a completely different period and circumstances, compare the recreation of (white) Southern identity after the American civil war. See, for instance, Wilson 2009, Schivelbusch 2001: 37–101; and notice the contrast between the case of the American South with that of other national projects discussed in this volume, which despite national trauma and military defeat, and unlike the case of the American South, continued to be advanced.

How could the community approach and negotiate these matters within its discourse? As is well-known, conceptual tensions are often addressed in societies through shared narratives and metaphors that provide them with a “language” to deal with these issues. In our case, the most promising option was to rely on the shared conceptual fields of two constructions that held much mindshare and generated multiple sites of memory in the community: (a) the ברית between YHWH and Israel and (b) the marriage between YHWH and Israel, and particularly so because the concepts of ברית and marriage were clearly associated with one another within the social mindscape of the community (Mal 2:14; Prov 2:17). If the concept and social practice of ברית informed those of marriage, then, from the perspective of the community, the latter was likely to, at least partially and implicitly, inform the former.

The community knew well that, in social practice, marriages could be dissolved and promises broken. They “knew” that marriages could be dissolved because of the fault of the bride(/Israel) or just because the husband(/YHWH) desired so. But they tended to imagine marriage as enduring and hoped that the one between YHWH and Israel would last or at least would be renewed. Just as they remembered YHWH as knowing well ahead of time that Israel (/Jerusalem) could not but fail as YHWH’s bride and was thus involved in a social practice that would normally be associated with lack of “good faith” in the performance of promises, they also remembered a YHWH who will in the future change Israel so it would be able to succeed as YHWH’s bride.

But this metaphorical conceptual frame had its limits too. To illustrate, the community remembered that some divine promises were only partially fulfilled and others were from the outset for a limited time only (such as royal promises for a certain number of generations). None of these work well with the marriage metaphor. Even more importantly, this approach provided no discursive/imaginative tools to address crucial questions such as which divine promises were more or less likely to be broken.

All in all the community construed and remembered promises as breakable, enduring, of short term value, fulfilled, partially fulfilled, not fulfilled, made in good faith and in bad faith. But if so, what can we learn about promises and particularly divine promises and their pragmatic value within the discourse of the community?

Can we discern within this sort of discourse systemic patterns of preference and dispreference that may help us toward a reconstruction of which promises were more easily understood as breakable, which had to be seriously renegotiated and which, although conceptually were considered potentially breakable, were for all practical purposes imagined to be

unbreakable or close to unbreakable? Was there a socially shared implied logic governing these matters and thus their pragmatic construction of promises and memories of promises? What does this logic, if it existed, tell us about the community?

*Pragmatic Differentiation among Promises in
Late Persian / Early Hellenistic Judah*

Because potentially all promises could be construed, negotiated, renegotiated and the like in the ways mentioned above, the governing logic is most likely not to be found in variances in the social practice of promising, or in the actual words of the remembered promises. After all, the wording was always influenced by rhetorical needs, and in any case, the same promise could have been reflected in and communicated by various texts, each with its own wording, or for that matter in a semantic attitude toward the meaning of obligation.

The governing logic was more likely grounded in the question of the social cost for the community involved in the various constructions of remembered, core divine promises. For instance, the transtemporal Israel that the literati construed within their discourse and with which they identified could exist and was remembered as existing in the land and outside the land, with a Davidic king on the throne and without him, with a built Jerusalem and functioning temple and without it. The social memory that bonded the group together proved that to be the case. But this Israel could not exist without being imagined as YHWH's people/wife/son/flock/etc. without divine instruction, without Jerusalem's being construed as YHWH's wife/selected city/city at the center of the world. The latter required the existence of a divinely approved temple and worship, whether these existed as a shared mental image or as a built space in the "real" world, or both. Thus, promises associated with YHWH's choice of Israel, Jerusalem and divine instruction, irrelevant of the metaphor or the words involved, strongly tended to be pragmatically remembered as enduring and permanent. The cost of seriously and genuinely doubting whether these promises were or will be in effect in the future carried social and ideological costs too high for processes of shaping self-identity and social reproduction. Doubts of this sort would have raised a strong sense of existential anxiety about the future or identity of the community.⁴⁸

To be sure, a temple required legitimate priests and legitimate teachers (be they priests, prophets, both or none). These were construed as neces-

48. Of course, the promise of progeny belongs to this category as well.

sary to communicate the divine instruction to the people. Thus, genuinely doubting the continuous existence of priests and teachers carried a very high cost. Surely, negotiating who was or will (or could) be a priest or legitimate teacher is another matter. Accordingly, the pragmatic meaning of the relevant remembered promises could be open for multiple interpretations, within limits: the very existence of priests and teachers could not be at risk.

Unlike promises associated with YHWH's choice of Israel, Jerusalem and divine instruction, the promise of David was much negotiated.⁴⁹ On the one hand, this is consistent with the lower cost for the community of a genuine consideration of the possibility that the promise has been revoked. On the other hand, the fact that it was so saliently negotiated shows that the divine promise to David was a central site of memory and as such attracted to itself multiple interpretations, each encapsulating and communicating main "voices" interacting and complementing each other within the general discourse of the period. In fact, the divine promise to David became a site of memory/tool that facilitated communal thought and imagination about possible futures, the very character of Israel and the ways in which past, present, and future utopian Israel were continuous and discontinuous with each other. Perhaps this is why it was so much negotiated.

49. To be sure, the community in the late Persian period remembered that monarchic Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed in the past and the people went into exile, a point hammered down time and again, directly and indirectly in the core repertoire of texts of the community. But this was not the point. The point was that the community neither construed nor remembered YHWH's choice of Jerusalem, Israel, and Torah as alterable or contingent on human behavior. In other words, the community did not seriously entertain, explore, or consider alternatives such as a resignifying Israel to mean non-Israelites, Jerusalem to mean a city other than Jerusalem, or a divinely ordained "Torah" different from the one they held to be YHWH's Torah. But it could explore whether the promise to David was rescinded or not; whether the promise may have been "democratized" or even partially "Persianized."

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