Criticising Political Power: The Challenge of Deuteronomy 17:14-20

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ABSTRACT
In this article Deuteronomy 17:14-20 is approached from a synchronic (a structural analysis within the literary context of the larger narrative) and a diachronic perspective (embedding the text into its exilic context). It is concluded that both approaches contribute to an understanding of the text. Some hermeneutical remarks (pertaining, amongst others, to the interrelationship between political, sexual, and economic power and their abuse) are also made to address the challenges that are presented by the text.

INTRODUCTION
Historical criticism is often criticised for confronting the text to the extent that it no longer has a positive message for the present-day world. This ‘attack’ is then construed as, on the one hand, dissecting the text (the quest for sources in classical literary criticism) and, on the other hand, as contextualising the text by ‘pushing’ it into its ‘original’ historical context or Sitz im Leben, and thereby disconnecting it from the needs of the (post)modern world we live in (see Scheffler 2006:11-17).

By addressing a methodological as well as a hermeneutical question, the intention of this contribution is therefore twofold. In what follows it hopes to illustrate, by reading Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the complementarity of the so-called synchronic and diachronic approaches. How these two approaches were applied in South Africa (with much rivalry) in the latter half of the previous century was aptly recorded by Le Roux (1993; see also Groenewald 2005). It should nevertheless be stated that historical criticism has never denied the need for a synchronic look at the text, as is clear from Formgeschichte. The latter represents the phase or ‘step’ in the historical-critical approach that deals with the form of the text before situating it in its developmental context. One needs only be reminded of the formal aspects of Gunkel’s (1975:33-58, 94-99, 344-346; see also Koch 1974; Barth & Steck 1980:57-76; Richter 1971; Fohrer et al. 1973:81-98) distinction of the different Gattungen or genres of the psalms. What historical criticism does deny is that a synchronic approach alone is sufficient for understanding the text, a claim often made by exponents of the so-called structural, literary or narratological approaches.
Deuteronomy 17:14-20 serves as an excellent example to illustrate that the text can only be comprehensively understood after historical questions have been asked and (provisionally) answered, despite or apart from the fact that the text also lends itself to a synchronic reading. Moreover, contents-wise the selected text deals with an issue (the possibility, limitations and criticism of government) the present-day relevancy of which very few people will deny. In the process of pursuing therefore a hermeneutical question as well, it will become clear that other approaches that cut across synchrony and diachrony (relating amongst others to political liberation, gender, society and ecology) should also be accounted for.¹

**B A SYNCHRONIC READING OF DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20**

As far as Deuteronomy 17:14-20 is concerned, structural and narratological aspects are important when the text is read synchronically. From a narratological view our text forms part of Moses’ extended farewell speech north of the Dead Sea and east of the River Jordan as part of the larger narrative that relates Israel’s wandering through the desert and the Israelites being on the verge of settling in(to) Canaan – the narrated world of the text. Israel’s recent history is judged as one of disobedience and the people are informed about what will be expected of them upon entry into the land. The laws of God which should be observed are, apart from the ten commandments (Deut 5-11), given in the law code of Deuteronomy 12-26. Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22 deals with offices, like those of the priests and judges and 17:14-20 specifically with rules regarding the king. The speech of Moses therefore provides a blueprint for living in the promised land and forms the introduction to the larger narrative (Joshua to 2 Kings), which relates the history after the occupation up to the exile (Rogerson 2003:153-173). The plot of the narrative (at least in the introductory part as constituted by the book of Deuteronomy) is not very complicated and a detailed narratological analysis, apart for some cursory remarks, will not be done here.²

In order to highlight the stipulations meant to regulate the behaviour of the future king, an investigation into the structure of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 has the advantage that it accounts for the detail of the text, and the interrelations between units of meaning (thereby revealing new meaning). In what follows a translation of the text is provided as well as an outline of the text’s structure. To facilitate discussion, the translation is numbered corresponding the numbering used in the outline of the structure. This is followed by a discussion of the structure as an illustration of a synchronic reading of the text.

¹ Because of constraints of space these will not be pursued in detail but limited to cursory remarks.
² For a classic example of a narratological reading of an Old Testament text (2 Sam 9-1 Kgs 2), see Gunn (1978).
1 Translation of Deut 17:14-20: The conditions for kingship in Israel

The occasion or circumstance (14)

(14a) When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’

Nine conditions for successful kingship (15-19)

I 1 (15a) you may indeed set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose.
2 (15b) One of your own brothers you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not a brother of yours.

II 3 (16a) He must not acquire many horses for himself
4 (16b) or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You must never return that way again.’

B III 5 (17a) And he must not get many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away;
6 (17b) also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself.

IV 7 (18) When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him that is kept by the Levitical priests.
   (19a) It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life,
8 (19b) so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, and to observe all the words of this law and to act according to these statutes,
9 (20a) neither exalting himself above his brothers nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left,

Outcome: Prolonged dynasty

C I so that he may reign long over his kingdom
II he and his descendants in Israel.
2 Structural analysis of Deuteronomy 17:14-20

THE CONDITIONS FOR KINGSHIP IN ISRAEL: ITS OCCASION AND OUTCOME

A THE OCCASION OR CIRCUMSTANCE (14)
I WHEN SETTLED IN THE LAND (14a)
II WHEN THE NEED FOR A KING ARISES (14b)

B NINE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL KINGSHIP (15-19)
I ELIGIBILITY FOR KINGSHIP (15)
1 The one chosen by the LORD (15a)
2 A (male\(^3\)) compatriot (15b)
II SOCIAL LIMITATIONS TO THE KING’S POWER (16)
3 Not many horses (vs excessive military power - 16a)
4 No exploitation of the people (vs oppressive power -16b)
III PERSONAL LIMITATIONS TO THE KING’S POWER (17)
5 Not many wives (vs distractive sexuality - 17a)
6 Not much gold and silver (vs excessive wealth - 17b)
IV SUBMISSION TO DIVINE (DEUTERONOMIC) LAW (18-20a)
7 Keeping and reading a copy of the law (18-19b)
8 Observe the law in order to fear God (19b)
9 Observe the law in order to respect fellow citizens (brothers! - 20a)

C OUTCOME: PROLONGED KINGSHIP AND DYNASTY (DEUT 17:20bc)
I LONG INDIVIDUAL REIGN (20b)
II LONG REIGN FOR SONS (! -20c)

3 This and the following exclamation marks have the function to highlight the exclusively male bias of the text.

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In section B the nine conditions for kingship are contained in four subsections which characterise these conditions. The first three subsections contain two conditions each whereas the fourth subsection contains three. The nine conditions can be viewed as those dealing with the eligibility for kingship (subsection I, verse 15), social limitations to the king’s power (subsection II, verse 16), personal limitations to the king’s power (subsection III, verse 17) and the king’s observance and submission to the divine law (subsection IV).

Two rules apply to the eligibility for kingship (subsection I, verse 15). Firstly, the people have a choice as to whether they want a king or not, but their choice is limited by the fact that they cannot elect the king themselves. The LORD must choose the king, according to the (subsequent) conditions which rule kingship. The terms פָּטַח (elect, choose) and מַפְתִּיר (set, recognise) typify the major role of the LORD and minor role of the people in the election process. Secondly, the king should be a male compatriot (v.15b). The emphasis in this condition is that the king should not be a foreigner, but a member of the nation. That this member ought to be male (‘brother’), does not constitute a separate condition, but is accepted as self-evident in the patriarchal society presupposed in the narrated world of the text.

Social limitations are set to the king’s power (subsection II, v.16). These relate to the political and public conduct of the king towards his subjects. He should not acquire too many horses, which means that he should not build up excessive military power (condition 3). In the process of acquiring horses, the people should not be exploited. ‘Returning to Egypt’ must in all probability not be understood in a literal sense, but (recalling the slavery in Egypt before the Exodus) as a metaphor for oppression (condition 4).4

Subsection III (v.17) states the personal limitations to the king’s power. The king should not have too many wives, for excessive polygamy can distract his attention from his task (or from the LORD, condition 5). He should also not gather excessive wealth (‘gold and silver’, condition 6). It is important to note that polygamy and wealth as such are not condemned, but the excess thereof (cf. the words ‘many wives’, ‘great quantity’).

Apart from complying with the stipulations contained in the six conditions or rules above, the last three conditions relate specifically to the king’s submission to the divine law (subsection 4). This motif is not only the most extensive, but also the most important. The king should have a copy of this (deuteronomic5) law preserved for him and he should read it constantly.

4 According to Driver (1978) ‘returning to Egypt’ refers to sending merchants or ambassadors to Egypt in the quest for cavalry (1 Kgs 10:28; Isa 30:1-5).
5 It is interesting to note that the name ‘Deuteronomy’ derives from the Greek translation (τὸ δευτερονόμιον τούτο = this repetition of the law) of the Hebrew words
(condition 7). However, the reading should have practical consequences pertaining to God and humanity. The LORD should be feared. This does not occur instantly at the wish of the king, but is gradually acquired by studying and reflecting on the law (condition 8). The reading should also lead to concrete actions pertaining to fellow citizens. These actions should express the king’s respect for his fellow citizens. Not exalting himself (דְּחַלֶּה) implies that he ought to regard them as his equals and refrain from using his power and position as king to oppress them (condition 9). The seriousness of the last two conditions are emphasised by the phrases ‘to observe all the words of the law’, ‘according to these statutes’ and ‘nor … turning aside either to the right or to the left’ (19b-20).

Section C states the purpose or outcomes if the conditions for kingship are complied with. The kingship will last long. This applies to the individual reign of the king (I, v.20b) as well as to that of his sons (the dynasty, see II, v.20c).

4 Deuteronomy 7:14-20 within the larger narrative (Deut -2 Kgs)

As illuminated above, one can discern a well-structured argument in which the narrated author clearly spells out what is expected of the future king. From a narratological point of view, and if the scope of the narrative is taken up to 2 Kings 25 (the traditional Deuteronomist⁶), the reader will keep these conditions in mind when he or she reads the story of the Israelite kings in the books of Samuel and Kings. Inter-textual relationships relating to issues like a foreigner as king, polygamy, military build-up, oppression of citizens and acquiring of wealth will presently come under scrutiny. In as much as the narrative also relates Israel’s real history, these inter-textual relations also impose historical questions. These come into play when the author’s (or authors’) knowledge about the behaviour of the kings is questioned, and when the point in history or the context of the narrative’s composition (the so-called ‘time or world of narration’) needs to be clarified. Our synchronic reading as such does not make a diachronic or historical reading redundant, but actually calls for it. Nor does a historical reading make a synchronic reading superfluous, but the latter becomes a point of departure for posing historical questions.

⁵ אֲדַרְמָשִׁים חַזְרָהָה פָּתָה (= copy of this law). The Hebrew therefore does not subscribe to the idea of a second version of the law in the book Deuteronomy, often made in reference to the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5. The king should merely have his own copy of the law for personal study.

⁶ Otto (2000:12-17) questioned the existence of a Deuteronomistic History as formulated by Noth (1983). To my mind this is by no means proven and does not effect our argument here which relates our text to its larger narrative context (up to 2 Kgs 25).
C HISTORICAL (CRITICAL) REMARKS ON DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20

To allege that a text has a narrated world as well as a world of narration – the real world or the context in which and for which it communicates, the world of the real author and addressees – boils down to saying that the dating and contextualisation of the text co-determine its meaning. Anyone who has read Deuteronomy 17:14-20 even superficially, and continued to read the report on Solomon’s reign in 1 Kings 2-11 or 2 Chronicles 1-9, cannot miss the conspicuous relationship between Deuteronomy 17:16-17 and the behaviour of Solomon. The question arises: How should the text be contextualised in view of the obvious connection? There are four possibilities for contextualising or dating Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

1 Was Deuteronomy 17:14-20 written before the entry into Canaan?

According to this (fundamentalist) point of view, the text was written (or spoken and/or shortly afterwards recorded) by Moses before the entry into Canaan. If biblical chronology is taken as a point of departure, it occurred in the fifteenth century BCE, but if the evidence of the Israel Stele is taken into account and the Pharaoh of the Exodus is identified with Ramses II, (cf. Scheffler 2000:82-85), Moses allegedly spoke these words towards the end of the thirteenth or early twelfth century.

Dating the text to the time of Moses is based on the narrated world of the text and would be naively accepted by readers not familiar with the rest of the text (Deuteronomy at large) or Israelite (especially Solomon’s) history. Moses predicts the future and talks in terms of possible scenarios of what could happen after the (future) occupation of the land. Moses depicts what would be an ideal king, and provides the conditions and criteria for kingship. If the reader is familiar with kingship in the contemporary ancient Near Eastern world, he or she will probably note significant differences between the ‘Mosaic’ ideal and common practice in the surrounding world. That the reader is prompted to look for such differences is suggested by the phrase, ‘like the nations that are around me’ in verse 14b.

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8 Reference here to the ‘narrated world’ by no means implies that a scholarly narratological reading of the text will be guilty of this fundamentalist fallacy.
9 For a brief overview of kingship in the ancient Near East see Von Soden 1994: 63-69. See also Pss 2; 20; 45; 72; 110.
According to this view the narrative of the biblical text is taken on face value. On the historicity of a figure like Moses is not even reflected. It is also accepted that the text originated close to the period it reports on. The narrated world of the text is regarded to overlap with the real world or actual history, the world of narration.

2 Deuteronomy 17:14-20 as contemporary criticism of Solomon’s government.

According to this view the narrator or author is a contemporary of king Solomon who ruled in the tenth century. He (or she – the latter unlikely) is aware of Solomon’s conduct and criticises it. The text functions as a contemporary protest against Solomon’s unworthy behaviour, especially his policy of oppressing people, his military build-up, his excessive polygamy and extravagant accumulation of wealth.

This view presents a possibility in that it at least accounts for the conspicuous similarities between the text’s warnings and Solomon’s conduct, but fails in view of further references in the text (e.g. the foreigner as king which could refer to Omri, cf. 1 Kgs 16:17, or Tabel, cf. Isa 7:6; 8:6) and the widely accepted dating of the book of Deuteronomy (at least after the fall of the northern Kingdom).

3 Deuteronomy 17:14-20: During the exile on the eve of re-entry into Canaan?

This option views the text as a Transparanz (transparency or mirror) of the period when it is written. According to Rogerson (2003:154), ‘the analogy is easy to see. The reality of a people about to return to the promised land is addressed by a narrative about a people initially entering the promised land.’ The author construed analogies in his mind between bygone events in history and the situation of his contemporary world. He draws parallels and writes about the past to inform the present. His writing about the past is consciously or unconsciously ideologically driven, pretending to write history in order to derive ‘a lesson’ from it.

If the text was composed towards the end of the exile in the sixth century (ca 540 BCE), the author at this point in time is unaware of the fact that there would not be kings after the exile. He therefore reckons with the possibility of kings in view of the mistakes of the past (especially those of Solomon). By setting conditions and criteria according to which the king should rule (after the exile), the author attempted to prevent the repetition of past mistakes in the future. According to his view the existence of the monarchy before the exile was a failure, but since it did exist, it was sanctioned by God.
Whereas the exilic author could not prevent kings to take the throne, his strategy is to redefine kingship to be an improvement on the ancient Near Eastern practice followed by the past kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Instead of subjecting the people to the absolute will of the king, the king must be subjected to the law of God. He must possess a copy (מִשְׁתַּחֵת, LXX ‘Deuteronomium’!, cf. 17:18), read it and obey it, which ultimately will have the consequence that he would not exploit the nation, but serve it.

Also situating the text in the exile, Otto (2000:123-125) asserts that the function of the text is to show that the identity of Israel is not constituted by the king and his divine legitimation, and as such also not by the contemporary Babylonian king, but by the ethical statutes that are based on Yahweh’s law. This is indeed a viable option if the text is read as a polemic vis-à-vis the political power the exiles had to contend with. However, to read the text only from this perspective, neglects important notions in the text, namely the resemblances with Solomon’s reign and the portrayal of the people as being free to choose a king. I therefore concur with Otto’s earlier reading (1994:195-196) of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 where the reference to Solomon’s reign and pre-exilic times is acknowledged and the rules for kingship are regarded as a critical alternative for present and past mistakes with the intention of serving as a critical mirror in the service of a better (post-exilic) future.

4 Deuteronomy 17:14-20 as post-exilic fiction

A fourth possibility would be the so-called ‘minimalist’ approach according to which all the texts of the Old Testament are dated in the post-exilic period (see Scheffler 1998). Lemche (1985; 1996; see also Thompson 1992; 1999; Davies 1992; 1994; Garbini 1988) for example, regards the Old Testament at large as a response to Hellenism, with Hebrew narratives having their parallels in Greek literature (for example, Saul and Hector, David and Alexander the Great, Solomon and Croesus). The Deuteronomistic narrative of Deuteronomy to 2 Kings would then mainly be based on fiction composed by Hellenistic Jews to provide counterparts for Hellenistic sagas and legends.

5 Towards contextualising Deuteronomy 17:14-20 in the exile

For various inter-textual and archaeological reasons, options 1, 2 and 4 seem unlikely to fully explain the complexities of the text. I therefore choose for the third possibility which holds that the text reflects on Israel’s past from an exilic perspective in view of avoiding future mistakes. Within this framework, some remarks on Solomon’s reign and its representation in the tradition can serve as an illustration of a historical interpretation of Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

Solomon was known for possessing large numbers of horses and chariots. Although archaeological evidence disproved the existence of horse stables at
Megiddo (Scheffler 2000:15-18), the report in 1 Kings 10:28-29 that Solomon traded in horses and chariots imported from Egypt and sold to Arabia and Syria, is highly probable. Whereas the texts of 1 Kings 10:28-29 (the traditional Deuteronomist) and the Chronicler (2 Chr 9:25-28) seemingly boast about Solomon’s ‘achievements’, the warning against horse trading in Deuteronomy 17:16, (with Egypt as trading partner in particular, cf. 1 Kgs 1:28) is significant.

The same holds true for Solomon’s excessive polygamy and his accumulation of wealth. After Solomon the perception grew in ancient Israel’s history that Solomon was successful and wise. That his wealth and wisdom (probably even the many wives) were expressions of this success is clearly communicated in the story relating his vision when he requested wisdom from God (1 Kgs 3:6-9). The same goes for the legend about the two prostitutes who brought the disputed child before him (1 Kgs 3:2; 2 Chr 1:10–13). Because of his humble seeking for wisdom and his wise decision in determining the child’s real mother, Yahweh blessed him with wealth and power. This wealth and power is, however, viewed in exactly the opposite light in Deuteronomy 17. Because there is such a close correspondence between the stipulations of Deuteronomy and Solomon’s behaviour (whereby Solomon actually emerges as a transgressor of these laws), the conditions for kingship as expressed in Deuteronomy 17 (especially where military build-up, countless wives and wealth accumulation are concerned), should best be understood as *ex eventu* political criticism aimed at Solomon’s reign. The stipulation that the king should not ‘return the people to Egypt’ (v.16), nor ‘exult himself above his brothers’ (v.20) should probably also be understood as criticism of Solomon’s oppression of especially citizens of the Northern Kingdom by means of taxes and forced labour (1 Kgs 12). This criticism served as warning for the exilic Jews who stood on the verge of returning to Palestine to reoccupy the land, not to repeat the mistakes of the past. At the time of writing it is foreseen that there would again be kings (which in reality only occurred in Maccabean times). To the (Deuteronomistic) author, who viewed the exile as punishment for the wrong-doings of the kings, the law with its stipulations for kingship, was now central. The future kings should therefore be subservient to the law which they must read and carefully observe (vv.19-20).

The realisation that Solomon’s life can also be evaluated from another perspective, implying the crumbling of the traditional view of him as a heroic king in both Judaism and Christianity (corroborated by recent insights from archaeology), is therefore not primarily a modern(istic) one of hyper-critical historical criticism, but one supported by a neglected voice from the Bible, namely Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (cf. Scheffler 2004:769-789). This state of

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10 Von Rad (1968:85) reckons on the basis of 1 Kgs 10:28 with ‘einem Tauschgeschäft, nämlich der Lieferung hebräischer Soldaten gegen ägyptische Pferde’.
affairs can be regarded as highly fortunate in a (post)modern world still haunted by oppressive politics and war, oppressive sexuality and poverty. Some hermeneutical remarks indicating the relevance of the text for today,¹¹ are therefore called for.

D    DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20: HERMENEUTICAL REMARKS

1    The interconnection between synchrony and diachrony

Since the human mind functions as a unity, all exegetical approaches are expressions of the one collective human mind. If an exegete would only employ a synchronic method, this does not mean that the diachronic dimension is absent, but merely that it is suppressed to the subconscious mind. It would therefore surface in naive presuppositions about the text’s historical nature (for example that Deut 17 was composed by and communicated to the Israelites by a historical Moses figure before their entry into Canaan). Similarly, an exclusive historical approach operating with a cursory reading of the text without attending to its grammatical, structural and literary features, may (ironically) overlook important historical information.

2    The Bible’s inner dialogue versus fundamentalist ‘authority’

In view of the way in which the Bible communicated in ancient times, and for the sake of its meaningful communication in today’s (post)modern world, an uninformed, literal, naive and fundamentalist view of scriptural authority should not only be avoided, but exposed. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 as well as 1 Kings 1-11 (cf. also the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21 and the rich man in Luke 16) clearly oppose the popular and traditionally accepted view of Solomon as a wise and wealthy heroic king.¹²

The Bible as a whole can be regarded as containing an inner dialogue between various views on matters that were religiously and socially relevant in antiquity. Many of these matters are not relevant in today’s world with its own unique questions. It must, however, be said that some issues, especially involving oppression, war, wealth and sexuality, are just as relevant today. A holistic (synchronic and diachronic) perspective on the complexities of this dialogue constitutes a participation in the dialogue, which, when paired with conscious and profound hermeneutical reflection and contemplation, can contribute to a meaningful and authentic functioning of scripture(s) in today’s world. This implies that with regard to matters experienced as ‘relevant’, the various

¹¹  Constraints of space merely allow for the indication of relevant issues which all deserve in-depth discussion and debate.
¹²  This ‘popular’ view is reflected in (amongst others) the 2nd book of Chronicles, the titles of the books of Proverbs and Wisdom of Solomon, also the New Testament, e.g. Matt 12:42; Luke 11:31.
and contradictory views in the Bible, should first be appropriated and accounted for by the reader. Only then can present-day Bible readers formulate their own viewpoints as ‘free agents’ (for which full responsibility should be taken).**13**

2 The Bible’s inner dialogue versus compartmentalisation of political, sexual and economic power

The author(s) of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 clearly detected a connection between disproportionate political, sexual and economic power. In modern thinking these powers are usually compartmentalised, with the result that the dynamic of the interface between them is not always transparent. The interconnected functioning of politics, sexuality and wealth needs much more consideration today, in order to limit corruption before it occurs, and in view of optimising political functioning. This includes the emancipation of women (often construed by patriarchal societies merely in bodily terms, even if harems are not involved) in order to facilitate their participation in society (politically and economically). Notice should be taken in biblical hermeneutics of the work of the famous psychologist Sigmund Freud’s (1961) well-known distinction between *eros* (the sexual instinct) and *thanatos* (the death instinct), and the interconnection between them. Extremely important for the reflection on the interconnectedness of sexuality, politics and the economy is also the work of Marcuse (1972), who indicated that the growth of western civilisation is closely related to the way in which human sexuality has been coped with.

3 Approaches beyond synchrony and diachrony

Contemporary theologies of disadvantaged groups in society (such as liberation theology, feminism and ecology) can contribute much to detect features of the text ignored by the traditional exegete (that is, the ‘male professor’ employing so-called ‘objective’ and disinterested ‘methods of exegesis’) because of his social stance. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20 this pertains to issues like sexual exploitation of women, suffering of humans (and animals) in war, forced labour, trade with humans, gender exclusivity and poverty.

4 No power above justice

The American war effort in Iraq is now almost universally viewed as being unjust. Ironically, there are some lessons to be learned from this ‘unjust’ war in view of Deuteronomy 17:14-20. They are two-fold:

*Firstly*, ordinary citizens increasingly come to the realisation that political leaders (unless otherwise proved) cannot be trusted and followed blindly. If Deuteronomy 17:14-20 was internalised in western thinking, this lesson could

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**13** The view taken here is extensively argued in Barr (1973).
have been learned earlier. It is noteworthy that the text (cf. vv. 14-15) is not addressed to the king itself nor the people as a group, but to the *individual* who should see to it that the king complies with the conditions for kingship. The challenge of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 to the ordinary individual is that one should not understand patriotism as a blind obedience to the demands of political leaders. Especially in the Apartheid era such blind loyalty was expected from the white South Africans. Political power should be regarded and criticised in terms of religious values (as contained in Deuteronomy 17:14-20) and further expressed in the rest of the Torah.

  *Secondly*, (and related to the first), the former allies of the Second World War (America and Britain) forfeited their moral high ground. They now share the status of perpetrators with Germans. The advantage of Germany is not only that they have gained some moral ground (by not partaking in the Iraqi war), but also that they have learned from their past mistakes. Something which America and Britain, whose leaders still seem to think that military power constitutes justice, still have to do.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY


