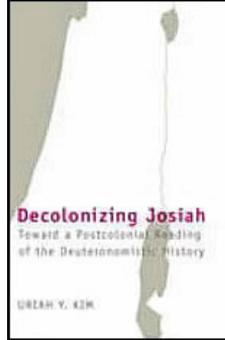


○ REVIEW OF URIAH Y. KIM, *DECOLONIZING JOSIAH: TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY*

(SHEFFIELD: SHEFFIELD PHEONIX, 2005)

Mark Sneed, Lubbock Christian University



This book is a revision of Uriah Y. Kim's dissertation written at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Robert Coote being on the committee. Kim's book is a fascinating, postmodern and postcolonial reading of 2 Kgs 22-23 (Josiah account) as part of the DH.

In a nutshell, Kim's argument is twofold: the biblical historian's social and political identity is directly connected to his/her historiography, and scholars need to provide interpretations that liberate rather than oppress; biblical readings need to be committed ones. In other words, all historiography is ideological, but one can find ways to mitigate it. Kim shows how Martin Noth, the author of the DH theory, casts the Dtr in his own image. Noth, the historian, strikingly resembles Dtr, the historian. Noth anachronistically believed that the Dtr was an objective historian who carefully used sources to compose a history for the Israelite nation. He also advocated that the DH was the very first history ever written. These notions reflect Noth's identity as German biblical scholar and Western modernist. The Cross school (Harvard) takes a similar position. Kim argues that Josiah's kingdom was not a nation in the modern sense, whose citizens automatically become homogenized into a single entity.

Kim also believes that the Dtr's account of the reign of Josiah was just as ideological. Josiah is cast in the role of a new David, who expands Israelite territory to its furthest. Josiah intends to reunite both Judah and Israel as the new Israel. Judah occupies what can be called a liminal space. They are subjugated by the Assyrians, yet they have their own identity in opposition to them. The DH is meant to provide a 'history of their own' for Josiah and the Judeans in resistance to the hegemony of Assyria.

But what about the North Israelites? Are they a mixed-breed? Are they foreigners? Is their land empty? Who will write for them 'a history of their own'?

Kim believes that his status as a liminal Asian-American especially qualifies him to write such a history for the North Israelites. His methodology essentially is the use of postmodern and

postcolonial criticism to interpret the Josiah account. He thereby hopes to transcend the predominant, Western interpretation. Kim first sides with the Judeans against the Assyrians and then with the North Israelites against Judah.

After a brief forward and list of abbreviations, in chapter one, 'Introduction: The Politics of Interpretation and Identity,' Kim first surveys the history of the DH theory and shows how Western and modern, biblical historians have been. Kim then proposes liminality as an important concept for creating a non-Western, postmodern, and postcolonial interpretation of Josiah's reign and also an important social position for biblical historians to hold for better understanding the similar positions of Judah and North Israel.

In chapter two, 'Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Studies,' Kim first discusses Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and its racism, which has heavily influenced the modern historian. He then discusses the work of R. S. Sugirtharajah, who has done the most to promote the use of postcolonial criticism in biblical studies. Other biblical scholars discussed are Fernando Segovia and Kwok Pui-lan. Finally, Kim discusses his own position of liminality in America and raises the possibility for an Asian-American hermeneutics.

In chapter three, 'Whose History is it Anyway?' Kim first discusses the DH as modern historiography and the postmodern challenge to it. Postmodernists discussed include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and the historian Hayden White. Next he discusses the reaction by biblical historians to postmodern historiography, which evolved into the debate between the 'maximalists' versus the 'minimalists.' Then follows a postcolonial critique of Western history, and the possibility of an Asian-American historiography is broached. Then, finally, biblical historians' response to the postcolonial critique is discussed. The work of Keith Whitelam is highlighted.

In chapter four, 'Whose Space is it Anyway,' drawing on Foucault, Kim begins with a discussion of the importance of space in postmodern historiography. He then questions whether the province of Samarina was ever empty. Next he discusses several spatial theorists, who emphasize how Western imperialism has shaped our thinking about space. Next he shows how biblical historians have interpreted the expansions of David's kingdom and its parallel, Josiah's. Kim argues that the land was not empty and that the people of Samarina (North Israel) were a politically organized people and that Josiah's reform intended to keep North Israelites in Judah from moving back north.

In chapter five, 'The *Realpolitik* of Liminality in Josiah's Kingdom,' Kim addresses the social location of liminality that Judah held in its subjugation by the Assyrians. First, he discusses his own liminal status as an Asian-American, then he treats Judah. He argues that Josianic editors did not refer to Assyria and Egypt during his reign so that they could conceive of themselves as agents in history and not just subjugated people. The Josianic reform and the DH emphasized ethnic identifiers like circumcision and the Passover in order to help solidify the Judean peoples and separate them from their enemies, like the Philistines or the Egyptians. Kim concludes by warning that he has not made the story of Josiah safe for Asian-Americans. It was unsafe for the people of Samarina. He warns that Asian-Americans need to write a 'history of their own' that does not homogenize various peoples into a unity as Josiah's reform attempted to do. He finishes with a brief 'Reflections'. The bibliography and two indices follow, one for biblical and extra-biblical references and one for authors cited.

Kim's book is one of the most interesting books I have ever read. It is both refreshing and original. All biblical scholars who are interested in the 'maximalist'/'minimalist' debate need to

read it. The book can also serve as an excellent and readable introduction to postcolonial criticism. I have only mild criticism. I think the book is too long. Kim does not finish with theorists and begin his own arguments until page 126. I think the discussion of postmodernists and postcolonialists could have been tightened up and made more concise. Also, as he was making his arguments, my interest was piqued concerning the North Israelites' 'history of their own'? which never materializes. He describes them as an organized people, and I wanted to know more about them, especially from an archaeological perspective: shrines, cities like capitals or fortresses, evidence of Assyrian occupation, etc. He provides a history for the Judeans, but not for the people of Samaria. But having said that, this is a great book, and I highly recommend it.