



Of All the Years the Hopes: Or Fears? Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-30)

Author(s): Donald F. Murray

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 120, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 245-265

Published by: The Society of Biblical Literature

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3268294>

Accessed: 21/05/2009 00:02

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=sbl>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Society of Biblical Literature is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

OF ALL THE YEARS THE HOPES—OR FEARS? JEHOIACHIN IN BABYLON (2 KINGS 25:27–30)

DONALD F. MURRAY

d.f.murray@ex.ac.uk

Department of Theology, The University, Exeter EX4 4QH, UK

I. The Question

The tantalizingly brief account, right at the end of Kings, narrating Evil-merodach's release of Jehoiachin of Judah from close imprisonment in Babylon has become a scholarly crux, at least since Martin Noth famously refused to see it as ameliorating in any significant degree what in his view is the book's pessimistic appraisal of the future of Israel as God's people.¹ Gerhard von Rad's prompt and vigorous rebuttal of Noth's negative reading of Kings is equally well known.² Not the least element in that rebuttal was von Rad's conviction that, following hard on the dispiriting account of decline and destruction of the people of YHWH, the ending of Kings intentionally, if very obliquely, invoked the hope of a future for dynasty and people still active in the divine promise of an eternal dynasty to David.³ Subsequently, independent efforts were made by Dennis J. McCarthy, Frank Moore Cross, and Timo Veijola to set the dynastic

* This article reworks in more detail ideas presented in the first part of a paper delivered at the SBL annual meeting in Boston, November 1999.

¹ Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die Sammeln und Bearbeiteten Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (1943; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1957), 107–8; idem, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 97–99.

² Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (FRLANT n.s. 40; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1947), 52–64; idem, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (SBT 9; London: SCM, 1953), 74–91.

³ In commenting on 2 Kgs 25:27–30 von Rad remarks: "Obviously nothing is said here in strict theological terms, but a carefully measured indication is given: an occurrence is referred to which has immense significance for the deuteronomist, since it provides a basis upon which Yahweh could build further if he so willed. At all events the reader must understand this passage to be

promise to David at the heart of Noth's Deuteronomistic History (at any rate in one of its putative redactions).⁴ Concomitantly, the view that the account of Jehoiachin's release was a portent of hope for Davidic restoration has been expounded with assurance by a steady stream of authors, most recently, with notable enthusiasm, by Iain Provan.⁵ On the other side there has also recently been a growing number of dissenting voices.⁶

an indication of the fact that the line of David has not come to an irrevocable end" ("The Deuteronomistic Theology of History in *I and II Kings*," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* [Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966], 220).

⁴ Dennis J. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," *JBL* 84 (1965): 131–38; Frank Moore Cross, Jr., *Caananite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–89; Timo Veijola, *Die Ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung Seiner Dynastie Nach der Deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae 193; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1975). Although the basic principle of Noth's theory of a Deuteronomistic History has been widely embraced by scholarship, it has been subject to almost endless modification, principally by scholars detecting redactional layers within the work. While McCarthy's cited article made no claims about redaction, Cross's work argued for two redactions, with the dynastic oracle being central to the Josian original, and main, redaction. Veijola worked with three main redactions, all exilic in date, with the dynastic promise operative in the first (DtrG) and third (DtrN). This is not the place to enter into the details of the debate, even had I the desire to do so. Although I acknowledge evidence of some unevenness of outlook within the various books said to comprise this history, I have not been persuaded by any redactional theory I have read that a redactional approach is a particularly fruitful way to read them. Indeed, the more I read these books, the more both their integrity as books and the differences between them suggests to me (as it did differently to von Rad: see *Old Testament Theology* [Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962], 1:346–47) that some of them at least (notably Judges and Samuel) must have had a history as books independent of their grouping together in a putative "Deuteronomistic History." Hence, in what follows I am principally concerned with 2 Kgs 25:27–30 as the ending of the Kings account of monarchy, but I do occasionally remind readers who embrace a version of the Nothian construct that it is also the ending of the whole Deuteronomistic History. To attempt to explore what differences arise from these two views of context (as suggested by one publisher's reader) is beyond the scope of this article.

⁵ Among many others note the following, who are referred to in subsequent discussion: Erich Zenger, "Die Deuteronomistische Interpretation der Rehabilitierung Jojachins," *BZ* n.s. 12 (1968): 16–30; Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought in the Sixth Century BC* (London: SCM, 1968), 79–81; Joachim Becker, "Das Historische Bild der Messianischen Erwartung im Alten Testament," *Testimonium Veritatis* 8 (1971): 132–33; idem, *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 56–57; Jon D. Levenson, "The Last Four Verses in Kings," *JBL* 103 (1984): 353–61; Thomas R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 368–69; Iain W. Provan, "The Messiah in the Book of Kings," *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and Richard S. Hess; Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 71–76; idem, *1 & 2 Kings* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 87–93.

⁶ The following dissent from the von Radian line, in different degrees and for varying reasons: Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1987),

The context within which most of the above-cited accounts have arrived at their reading of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 is the book of Kings as the concluding section of Noth's Deuteronomistic History. Since the passage in question brings Kings and thus Noth's Deuteronomistic History to an end, this is a perfectly legitimate context within which to read it. In being so much engaged with this wider context, however, most of these accounts have given little attention either to how the passage relates to its immediate context in 2 Kgs 25 or to the detailed texture of its own internal rhetoric.⁷ In order to redress this balance, what follows will first set 2 Kgs 25:27–30 within the overall structure of this final chapter in Kings. Next it will delineate the episode's own internal structure and examine its language in some detail, noting in particular significant resonances from its immediate context in 2 Kgs 25, as well as from other biblical texts. This perspective discloses the brief vignette on Jehoiachin's experiences in Babylon not as a separate afterword to the doom and gloom of 2 Kgs 25:1–26 but as the final summative episode of this chapter. Finally, after reflecting on the significant silences of the text, the discussion arrives at a view on what this closing word adumbrates about the future of the Davidic monarchy and of vanquished Judah that is more akin to Hans Walter Wolff than to either Noth or von Rad.⁸

265–59; J. Gordon McConville, "Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings," *Bib* 70 (1989): 47; Bob Becking, "Jehoiachin's Amnesty, Salvation for Israel?" in *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies: Papers Read at the XIIIth IOSOT Congress Leuven 1989* (ed. C. Brekelmans and J. Lust; BETL 94; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1990), 283–93; Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (VTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 137; Yair Hoffmann, "The Deuteronomist and the Exile," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies . . . in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 659–75.

⁷ Among the works cited above, Nelson's commentary does something of this within the limits of his format, but Zenger's account is exceptional in the amount of detailed discussion given to the language of 2 Kgs 25:27–30, with some attempt also to situate it within the chapter as a whole. These similarities in our treatment of the text, on the one hand, but notable differences, both in detail and in overall reading, on the other, explain the number of references to Zenger's discussion in what follows.

⁸ Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work," in *The Vitality of the Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 81–100. Wolff only twice brings 2 Kgs 25:27–30 into his discussion, neither time in any detail: once in repudiating both Noth's and von Rad's accounts of this text (pp. 85–86), and once in passing at the end of his discussion (pp. 99–100). The attenuated hope I find implicated in the account of Jehoiachin's release is not entirely dissimilar to that Wolff finds in other texts in Noth's Deuteronomistic History, but differs crucially in that 2 Kgs 25:27–30 says nothing of repentance by Jehoiachin: see section IV below. Among other scholars who have read 2 Kgs 25:27–30 in a Wolffian way, Christopher T. Begg ("The Significance of Jehoiachin's Release: A New Proposal," *JSOT* 36 [1986]: 51) observed this difference; Levenson ("Last Four Verses of Kings," 359–60) did not.

II. Analysis of 2 Kings 25:27–30

2 Kings 25:27–30 within 25:1–30

Several features integrate the short episode about the release of Jehoiachin into a narrative structure with the preceding material, a structure that properly begins at 2 Kgs 25:1.⁹ This overall narrative is articulated into episodes by four introductory dating expressions (25:1, 8, 25, 27) that exhibit both parallels and differences in structure and function. Whereas the parallels, it will be argued in this subsection, present 2 Kgs 25:27–30 as the culminating episode in a series depicting the lamentable fate of Judah, the differences also mark it out as something of a new departure.

The most obvious parallel between the episode openings is in their syntactical-narrative structure: each dating expression heads a *qāṭal* verb clause whose named grammatical subject specifies a new actant in the narrative and continues with a *wayyiqṭōl* verb clause with pronominal anaphora to the same subject. Thus these four actants, respectively Nebuchadnezzar (25:1), Nebuzaradan (25:8), Ishmael (25:25), and Evil-merodach (25:27), are clearly presented as the effective agents of all the action that is narrated in 2 Kgs 25.¹⁰

The second feature parallel in all four episodes is not so immediately apparent: the opening focus on the respective actant in each soon gives way to a focus on the patient/recipient. This consistent change of focus within the episodes, achieved by varying means, is sustained in the main through the rest of each episode. In 25:2–4 there are several different grammatical subjects, but all concentrate attention onto how the Judeans suffer from Nebuchadnezzar's siege.¹¹ Although, in 25:11–15, Nebuzaradan and/or his forces remain the grammatical subject of verbs throughout, sustained object-verb inversion similarly effects concentration on the devastation suffered by the Judeans. In episodes 3 and 4, the grammatical subject of the verbs changes to the respective patient/s (25:26,¹² 29). Thus, what 2 Kgs 25 is really about is not Nebu-

⁹ The narrative begun in 2 Kgs 25:1 is itself prefaced by the introductory rubric for Zedekiah's reign, 2 Kgs 24:17, 18–20, and in particular by the appended assertion "Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon" (וימרד צדקיהו במלך בבל, 24:20b). But 25:1ff. is about the wider ramifications of Zedekiah's rebellion, within which that king's fate is just one, almost incidental, feature (25:5–6).

¹⁰ Divine agency is absent not just from 2 Kgs 25:27–30 but from all four episodes in the chapter. Moreover, the very last action directly attributed to YHWH in Kings is ער השלכו אתם מעל, פניו, "until he expelled them from his presence" (24:20a).

¹¹ Although in episode 1 there is a subsequent switch of focus back to the Babylonian actants (25:5–6, 7bβ), two significant instances of object-verb inversion (ואת בני צדקיהו שחטו לעיני ואת, צדקיהו עור, 25:11–15).

¹² ויכו in 25:25aβ is supplemental to the main verb, ויכו.

chadnezzar or any of the other actants as such, but what their actions bring upon the Judeans as patients/recipients.

But within this overall paralleling of the episodes, and in particular their openings, there are points that differentiate them. First, three of the four open with וַיְהִי, “it happened, came to pass,” prefacing the dating expression. The odd one out here is 25:8, where the conjunction ו alone precedes the dating expression. Thus the openings in 25:1, 25:25, and 25:27 are more disjunctive than that in 25:8. This accords with the fact that in those three episodes the action attributed to Nebuchadnezzar, Ishmael, and Evil-merodach respectively is more discontinuous with the preceding than is that attributed to Nebuzaradan in the second episode.

Second, only in the first and last of the four, 25:1 and 25:27, is וַיְהִי followed by a full year-month-day dating expression. In fact, the second and third dating expressions (25:8, 25) are dependently linked to the first (25:1), in that their month(-day) dates presuppose the year references given by the first full year-month-day expression (25:1) and its follow-on year dating (25:2b), both dated to the reign of Zedekiah (in 25:1 by anaphora of לַמֶּלֶךְ, 24:30b).¹³ In contrast, the fourth (25:27) gives another full year-month-day expression, but one now defined in terms of the years of Jehoiachin’s exile.¹⁴ This sets the final episode in 2 Kgs 25 in closer parallel with the first, as a significantly similar departure within the action here narrated. But, unlike the coming of Nebuchadnezzar against Zedekiah (25:1ff.), whose narrative consequences are rather fully spelled out in further dependent episodes (25:8ff. and 25:25f.), those of Evil-merodach’s release of Jehoiachin remain latent within this one brief episode (25:27–30). This reticence of the concluding episode of 2 Kgs 25 has been an inducement to scholars who want a clear final indication of an overall message from Kings to supply elements that the text itself does not warrant. But of this more below.

Third, and consonant with the second point, the opening of the fourth episode is differentiated from those of the preceding three in that their dating expressions each head a clause deploying the same *qāṭal* verb (בָּא) used in a

¹³ Thus the four episode-initial dating expressions are distinct from two other, subsidiary, dating expressions: the year-date in 25:2b that is a postpositional followup to 25:1, and the dependent pre-positional month date in 25:3a that prefates a *wayyiqṭōl* verb clause with a new grammatical subject (וַיִּחֶזֶק הָרֶעֶב בְּעִיר), but not one that specifies a new actant.

¹⁴ While this change in dating era, from Zedekiah’s reign to Jehoiachin’s exile, is noteworthy, it is just one element in an episode that tells about the fate of Jehoiachin, not that of Zedekiah. According to 25:7b, Zedekiah was taken captive to Babylon, but the text of Kings gives no further indication of his fate. In the parallel account in Jer 52, an extra clause (וַיִּהְיוּ בְּבֵית הַפְּקִידָה עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ, 52:11bβ) notes Zedekiah’s lifelong incarceration in Babylon, which resonates with Jehoiachin’s pensioned detention in Babylon, similarly lifelong (עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ, Jer 52:34a).

hostile sense.¹⁵ Moreover, the ensuing *wayyiqṭōl* verbs in each, though different ([עליה], 25:1; וישרף, 25:9; ויכו, 25:25), are all verbs of hostile action. But in the opening of the fourth episode both the corresponding *qāṭal* [נשא] and the ensuing *wayyiqṭōl* [אחרו טבות] וידבר are verbs of ostensibly friendly action.

Let us summarize here the conclusions germane to our discussion that may be drawn from the preceding observations. The overall structure of 2 Kgs 25 can be seen to present Evil-merodach's release of Jehoiachin as the culminating act in a series that began with his Babylonian predecessor's attack on a rebellious Zedekiah, a series that details the fate of Judah and its monarchy at the hands of the Babylonians. Yet the finer detail of the structure indicates that, as a fresh departure after the lapse of a considerable period of time, this last in the series is more comparable to the first (the stronger parallel made by the full dating formula), than to the intervening two episodes, which develop much more closely out of the first (the dependent dating expressions; the parallel use of בא). Then further, precisely within a strikingly similar syntactical-narrative form in the opening of each episode, there is a significant semantic contrast between the *qāṭal* and *wayyiqṭōl* verbs used in the opening of the fourth (verbs of ostensibly friendly action) and those used in the preceding three (verbs of hostile action). Thus 2 Kgs 25:27–30 is presented on the one hand as the last in a series of devastating events for Judah, all initiated and effected by human agents, but on the other hand as also something of a new departure within that series.

Structure, Language, and Meaning in 2 Kings 25:27–30

From the detailed reading of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 in this section will emerge a view that both in structure and in language this episode sets Evil-merodach's acts toward Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 25:27–28), with their apparent high promise for the future, against Jehoiachin's actual experience of release from prison (2 Kgs 25:29–30), with its dispiriting limitation of that future. I say "apparent high promise" advisedly, since the discussion below of Evil-merodach as actant will reveal some ambiguity in several of the expressions used in 2 Kgs 25:27–28.

Discourse Structure in 2 Kings 25:27–30

The focus on Evil-merodach as actant and Jehoiachin as recipient, begun with the *qāṭal* (נשא) in 25:27, continues through two *wayyiqṭōl* verbs (. . . וידבר) in 25:28. Thereafter, however, the verbal syntax changes, in 25:29 to two

¹⁵ This threefold parallel occurrence of בא in 2 Kgs 25 is noteworthy, in that the verb is not otherwise frequent in this sense in Kings. For 25:1 compare 2 Kgs 24:11 (בא על); for 25:8 compare 2 Kgs 14:13 (בא ירושלים); in addition 2 Kgs 6:23b, 15:19, 29.

w^eqāṭal forms (שָׁנָא and וָאָכַל), and finally, in 25:30, to a passive *qāṭal* (נִתְּנָה). Discourse logic makes clear that the grammatical subject of the second *w^eqāṭal* verb (וָאָכַל) must be Jehoiachin, and the תָּמִיד (“continually”) that is adverbial to it indicates construction of the *w^eqāṭal* form as frequentative: “he used to eat.”¹⁶ The intended construction of the first *w^eqāṭal* (שָׁנָא) is, however, not immediately evident. Although normal consistency of subject anaphora with the preceding verbs favors Evil-merodach as continuing subject, other discourse indicators point rather to a change to Jehoiachin as subject.

First, not only is Jehoiachin the otherwise unsigned anaphoric subject of the next verb (וָאָכַל, 25:29b); he is also clearly the referent of the pronominal suffix in כָּלָאֵו (25:29a). But, second, more decisive indicators are two related difficulties in processing 25:29a as an utterance referring to Evil-merodach as subject: (1) dischronologization, and (2) change of verb form. If presented as an action of Evil-merodach, 25:29a could have taken its expected place, immediately before 25:28b, as another *wayyiqṭōl* verb clause in a temporally consecutive series (וַיִּשְׁנָא . . . וַיִּדְבֵּר). As it stands, however, the assertion in 25:29a is made more salient in the discourse than that in 25:28b, both in being dischronologized and in being marked by a change of verb form. But if one takes Evil-merodach as the grammatical subject in 25:29a, it is difficult to see why the assertion that he changed Jehoiachin’s prison clothes (25:29a) merits greater discourse salience than the preceding assertion that he exalted Jehoiachin over the other captive kings (25:28b).

If, however, with שָׁנָא there is a change of subject to Jehoiachin, these problems for discourse logic disappear. What the dischronologization and syntactical change make salient in the discourse is precisely this change of narrative focus from actant to patient. The dischronologized action is both consistent with and contributory to this shift in point of view, and the change of verb form is necessitated by the dischronologization: “so he changed out of his prison-clothes, and used to eat . . .” Hence, this first *w^eqāṭal* form (שָׁנָא) is to be taken as a preterite disjunctively coordinated with the previous *wayyiqṭōl* preterites: coordinated, in that there is no major change in scenic locale or participants, but disjunctive in that, by changing grammatical subject and backtracking temporally, it effects a shift in perspective on the scene.¹⁷ Moreover, the passive *qāṭal* (נִתְּנָה) in 25:30 maintains the shift in point of view, precisely by its avoid-

¹⁶ Contra Zenger, who, in order to take וָאָכַל as a simple preterite, arbitrarily deletes both תָּמִיד and כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו from 25:29 (“Rehabilitierung Jojachins,” 26–27): see further n. 34 below. Note that the LXX both here and in Jer 52:33b renders וָאָכַל with the imperfect ἔσθιεν, not the aorist ἔφαγεν.

¹⁷ Thus this use of a *w^eqāṭal* preterite needs to be added to the usages documented by Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *IBHS*, 519–42; see also Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (JSOTSup 86; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 183–85.

ance of a change back to Evil-merodach as directly acting subject. It also allows the foregrounding of another element as subject of the passive verb, a point whose significance we shall come to below.

The foregoing observations indicate that the discourse structure of 25:27–30 falls into two main parts: 25:27–28, with verbal focus on Evil-merodach as actant, and 25:29–30, with verbal focus on Jehoiachin as recipient. But another structural feature should also be observed. In the episode's opening, the ponderous chronological synchronism (Jehoiachin's thirty-seventh year of exile = Evil-merodach's sole regnal year) and the repetitively formal specifications (twice "Jehoiachin king of Judah," 25:27a, b; once "Evil-merodach king of Babylon," 25:27b) break up the narrated action (נָשָׂא . . . אֶת רֹאשׁ . . . מִבֵּית כְּלָא) in order to specify this chronological relation between the two kings.¹⁸ Then through 25:28–29a a much more succinct and direct narrative style prevails, where active verbs are juxtaposed with their direct objects and circumstantial detail is spare. But starting in 25:29b and increasing in the final verse, the narrated action is once again heavily interlarded with chronological expressions that connect the two kings: the knell-like repetition in 25:30 of חַיִּי וְחַיִּיד from 25:29, and the tautologous דְּבַר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ alongside חַיִּיד in 25:30. This insistent return of temporal parameters sets into final relief what this fateful conjunction of Jehoiachin's thirty-seventh year of exile with Evil-merodach's sole year of reign entailed for Jehoiachin's future.

The Focus on Evil-merodach as Actant in 2 Kings 25:27–28

Evil-merodach is here reported as taking three actions concerning King Jehoiachin: (1) "to raise his head from prison" (נָשָׂא אֹוִיל מִרְדֵּךְ . . . אֶת רֹאשׁ) (וְהוֹיָכִין, 25:27b);¹⁹ (2) "to speak good things to him" (וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו) (טָבוֹת, 25:28a); and (3) "to give him a seat/throne above the kings with him in Babylon" (וַיִּתֵּן אֵת כִּסְאוֹ מֵעַל כִּסֵּי הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּבֶּל) (25:28b). On the face of it these appear to be three very positive actions that manifest a great deal of good will by Evil-merodach toward Jehoiachin. By looking more closely, however, at the semantic and pragmatic implications of each expression as evidenced in

¹⁸ A similar synchronism is given for the fateful arrival of Nebuzaradan in 25:8, the beginning of the episode narrating the final destruction of Jerusalem and exile of Judah (25:8–21).

¹⁹ The parallel text in Jer 52:31 (MT and LXX) reads נָשָׂא אֹוִיל מִרְדֵּךְ . . . אֶת רֹאשׁ יְהוֹיָכִין . . . וַיִּצָּא וְהוּא מִבֵּית הַכְּלָא, "Evil-merodach graciously raised Jehoiachin . . . and released him from prison." This suggests the possibility of accidental omission of the emphasized words from 2 Kgs 25:27, but on the other hand the zeugma of נָשָׂא in 2 Kgs 25:27, with both רֹאשׁ and כְּלָא, does not seem impossible.

similar contexts elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, we shall see that the first two of these expressions are at least susceptible to negative connotations.²⁰

The first, the combination נָשָׂא רֹאשׁ, occurs some eighteen times in the Hebrew Bible outside this text and its parallel Jer 52:31.²¹ Most relevant to the present usage are the three figurative instances in Gen 40, since their context most closely resembles our present text, in that there, as here, the expression is used in connection with the release of prisoners by a sovereign.²² But whereas in the case of one of the prisoners, the pharaoh's cupbearer, the expression speaks of his gracious restoration to service (Gen 40:13, 20), in the case of the other, the pharaoh's baker, the expression (נָשָׂא פֶרַעַה רֹאשׁךָ מֵעֵלֶיךָ, Gen 40:19aα) makes a macabre wordplay between this positive figurative sense already acti-

²⁰ In response to a question of method raised by one of the anonymous *JBL* readers, let me explain that the ensuing discussion presupposes the following: (1) the fact that each of the three expressions singled out for discussion here has close analogues elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is *prima facie* evidence that they are conventional; (2) accordingly, besides their present context of usage, the contexts in which the analogues occur provide additional evidence about how the expressions may be read; (3) contexts that share significant features in common with 2 Kgs 25:27–30 provide evidence of particular relevance to assessing how to read them in the latter context; (4) but as relevant, if not more so, is the immediately given context of 2 Kgs 25:1–26. So while, on the one hand, my discussion does not assert or assume that any of the non-Kings biblical passages were being played upon by the author of 2 Kgs 25:27–30, nor even that they were necessarily known to him, it does not ignore, on the other, the fact that such intertextual resonances are an ineluctable element in a modern biblical scholar's reading of the passage.

²¹ Genesis 40:13, 19, 20; Exod 30:12; Num 1:2, 49; 4:2, 22; 26:2; 31:26, 49; Judg 8:28; Zech 2:4 [Eng. 1:21]; Pss 24:7, 9; 83:3; Job 10:15; 1 Chr 10:9. Of these only the last instance is fully literal, referring to the Philistines' removing the head of the dead Saul (וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ רֹאשׁוֹ, 1 Chr 10:9a). The metaphorical basis of the expression would appear to lie in associating a bowed head with humility/humiliation and dejection and a raised head with confident hope and triumph (see Job 10:15). Accordingly, I take the basic social location of "to raise another's head" to be that of a great man raising the bowed head of a humble suppliant as a sign of favor. The reflexive form "to raise one's own head" as a metaphor for exultant triumph probably has its basic social location in situations of conflict, especially warfare and litigation: see Pss 24:7, 9; 83:3; negatively Judg 8:28; Zech 2:4 [1:21]; Job 10:13–17. I take the eight instances in Exodus and Numbers, all of which refer to counting heads in censuses, to be based on another military use of the expression, where counting warriors is facilitated by their bowed heads being raised as each is numbered. Zenger, deprecating the usual rendering, "begnadigen" ("grant amnesty to"), in 2 Kgs 25:27, argues instead for "vorladen, zitieren" ("summon") on analogy with Akkadian *našû rēša* ("Rehabilitierung Jojachins," 22–23; note also 18 n. 11), but, if the above analysis is along the right lines, "grant favor to" is to be preferred.

²² Zenger draws on the same parallel to argue that, just as the officials' cases came up for review on the pharaoh's "birthday" (Gen 40:20: i.e., the anniversary of his accession [?]), so the fate of Jehoiachin and other captive kings came up for review on Evil-merodach's initial accession to power ("Rehabilitierung Jojachins," 22–23). However plausible this piece of historical argumentation may be, my discussion is premised on thematic and discourse parallels between the two contexts, not historical ones.

vated in the context (Gen 40:13) and a negative literal sense that points to the actual destiny of the baker: execution by hanging (וְחָלָה וְחָךְ עַל עֵץ, Gen 40:19aβ). Thus the expression נָשָׂא רָשָׁע, though mostly positive in connotation, is by no means univocally so in biblical texts: two instances refer to the death of the referent in question, and one of these plays knowingly on a positive/negative ambiguity in the expression.

The next expression, “he spoke with him good things” (וַיְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ טוֹבוֹת), 2 Kgs 25:28a), occurs but this once in the Hebrew Bible in this precise form, though there are examples of related expressions.²³ One close parallel, found in David’s prayer of response to YHWH’s enunciation of the dynastic promise, “you have spoken to your subject this promise of good” (וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵל עַבְדְּךָ אֵת הַטּוֹבָה) הַזֶּה, 2 Sam 7:28b), is as unarguably positive as one can expect to meet. David has just specified that this “good” is the future dynastic house promised by YHWH (7:27a) and has also affirmed the total reliability of YHWH’s words (7:28a). Thus the context fully warrants the pragmatic inference that, in using the expression here, David intends to evince certainty about YHWH’s gracious intention.²⁴

But there is another parallel that, in its use of the plural טוֹבוֹת, is in fact linguistically closer to the expression in our text: “do not trust them when they speak to you good things” (אַל תִּאֱמָן בָּם כִּי יְדַבְּרוּ אֵלֶיךָ טוֹבוֹת), Jer 12:6b).²⁵ The pragmatic inference YHWH intends Jeremiah to draw from the expression here, however, is diametrically opposite to that intended by David in 2 Sam 7:28b. For precisely in warning Jeremiah not to trust himself to those (his closest kin!) who are speaking to him words of gracious intent, he deconstructs their overt intention by implicating a covert one. Hence, in our present context, merely to

²³ Again Zenger takes the historical turn, alleging that the Hebrew here is equivalent to an Akkadian expression found in the Amarna Letters, *tābūta dabābu itti*, “to establish friendly relations with,” and thus concluding that Evil-merodach offered Jehoiachin “a form of rehabilitation” through “official recognition as a royal vassal” (“Rehabilitierung Jojachins,” 24–25); similarly Levenson, with reference to other discussion (“Last Four Verses in Kings,” 357–58). Zenger refers to the Hebrew Bible passages I expound here only in passing in a note (“Rehabilitierung Jojachins,” 24 n. 62); Levenson not at all. Zenger’s list includes לְדַבֵּר עִלְיָהֶם טוֹבָה (Jer 18:20), but this text is not really parallel since it refers not to promises of good made to/with someone but to good representations made on behalf of someone. Even if one allows that דַּבֵּר טוֹב/הוֹרָה אֱחָזֵל in the Hebrew Bible may sometimes refer to the establishment of formal relations, what is clear is that this technical sense is a pragmatically defined specialization of the more general sense of “speak kindly/graciously with” someone.

²⁴ On the strategy of 2 Sam 7:28 as part of David’s prayer, see Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Polemics, and Poetics in a Narrative Sequence About David* (2 Sam 5:17–7:29) (JSOTSup 264; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 210, 225; for arguments against reading 2 Sam 7 in treaty terms, see pp. 274–76.

²⁵ Begg refers to this text in arguing against the claim that 2 Kgs 25:28a refers to a vassal treaty (“Jehoiachin’s Release,” 53).

report that Evil-merodach spoke graciously with Jehoiachin is not necessarily to guarantee either that the intention behind the words is as gracious as their ostensible import, or that, even if it is, their promise will in the event be realized. After all, it is not YHWH who is uttering here!

Moreover, in the close context of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 there are two other expressions that, because they resonate strongly with *וידבר אִתּוֹ טֹבוֹת* (25:28a), bear on the reading of that expression here. The first is the clause “they pronounced sentence upon him” (*וידברו אִתּוֹ מִשְׁפֵּט*, lit., “they spoke with him justice,” 25:6b).²⁶ This clause closely resembles our expression not only in its syntactical shape and verbal content but also because it summarizes the treatment of Jehoiachin’s replacement, Zedekiah, at the hands of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Rhetorically, this interlocking of verbal and motival similarities between the two expressions sets *טֹבוֹת* in 25:28 in opposition to *מִשְׁפֵּט* in 25:6. The sentence carried out on Zedekiah was to blind him immediately after he had witnessed the execution of his sons, and then to exile him to Babylon (25:7). By contrast with this *מִשְׁפֵּט*, “spoken with” Zedekiah, then, Evil-merodach’s *טֹבוֹת*, “spoken with” Jehoiachin would seem to promise much better things, to be detailed in what follows.²⁷ On the one hand, then, the expression appears to carry the same assurance of good evinced by David in 2 Sam 7:28.

On the other hand, however, the second expression contextually resonant with 2 Kgs 25:28a belies this surface assurance. For in its context the relevant phrase (*וַיֵּטֶב לָכֶם*, 25:24b) sets the reliability of an assurance of good at issue, if in a way different from YHWH’s words to Jeremiah (Jer 12:6b). The Judean governor Gedaliah has given a sworn undertaking to those who remain in Judah, motivating his directive to stay put and serve the Babylonian king with the promise that *it will bring you good* (*שָׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ וְעַבְדוּ אֶת מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל וַיֵּטֶב לָכֶם*, 25:24b).²⁸ This promise is, however, hardly uttered before it is rendered void when Ishmael assassinates Gedaliah, forcing “all the people” to flee to Egypt in mortal fear of the Babylonians (25:25–26). Though verbally less parallel to 25:28a than 25:6b, being closer to hand this utterance is more immediately in the reader’s mind. Moreover, motivally it is strikingly anticipatory of 25:28a.

²⁶ Beside the close parallels Jer 39:5; 52:9 (both *מִשְׁפֵּט*), cf. also Jer 1:16; 4:12.

²⁷ Zenger, who does not adduce my second parallel, argues that through this contrast the Deuteronomist indicates that the threatened punishment instigated against Zedekiah is now to be overtaken by a counterhistory of salvation (“Rehabilitierung Jojachins,” 25). But, given that the only agent here is the pagan monarch, not YHWH, to present what happens here in such grand terms seems unwarranted.

²⁸ As pointed, *וַיֵּטֶב לָכֶם* is in the impersonal form, “so that it may go well with you” (so also Jer 40:9b), a common enough idiom (BDB, s.v. Qal 3, cites sixteen instances, all with *לָךְ*). The verb could equally well, however, be vocalized *וַיִּטֵּב* (similarly Jer 40:9b), yielding “so that [the king of Babylon] may treat you well,” also a common construction (BDB, s.v. Hiph. 2, cites nine instances with *לָךְ*). The latter reading would somewhat increase the parallel with 25:28a.

Thus, the last thing narrated before our episode concerning Evil-merodach's release of Jehoiachin is how the sworn promise of a vice-gerent of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, for all that it is genuinely intended and apparently underwritten by his position of authority, falls to the ground with its human utterer. Now, at the start of our episode, 25:27b has mentioned a single, unnumbered regnal year for Evil-merodach, the successor to Nebuchadnezzar. This form of expression (בשנת מלכו) implies that this is his sole year of reign.²⁹ Given the uncertainty for the future that that suggests, the juxtaposition of Evil-merodach's promises to Jehoiachin with the abortive promise of Gedaliah poses to the reader the ominous question: Will those promises, assuming they are genuinely meant, prove to be any more certain than that of Gedaliah? After all, it is not YHWH who is uttering here either!

If both ambiguity of expression in 25:27–28a and contextual resonances of 25:28a raise doubt about just how promising Jehoiachin's future is, Evil-merodach's third recorded action (25:28b) tends to exclude uncertainty: "he set his seat above the seat of the kings who were with him in Babylon" (ייתן את כסאו מעל כסא המלכים אשר אחרו בבבל, 25:28b).³⁰ For, unlike Jeremiah's relatives (Jer 12:6), Evil-merodach authenticates the good intention of his fine words with an appropriate deed. So Evil-merodach "raises Jehoiachin's head" in a literal sense, that is, above those of the other kings, and thus gives substance to its figurative meaning in 25:27. Indeed, in terms of the similar story in Gen 40–41, the rise of Jehoiachin here bids fair to outstrip that of the cupbearer there, perhaps even promising to emulate that of Joseph himself, raised above all others in the Egyptian kingdom except the pharaoh (Gen 41:40–44)!

The Focus on Jehoiachin as Patient/Recipient in 2 Kings 25:29–30

In the event, however, as narrated in 25:29–30 Jehoiachin's experience as patient/recipient of Evil-merodach's actions does not fulfill this high promise. First the narrative, after the buildup of expectation by the actions of Evil-merodach in 25:27–28, backtracks in 25:29a to a comparatively nugatory ele-

²⁹ Similarly also Zenger ("Rehabilitierung Jojachins," 19–20). The lack of a numeral appears to be significant in this regard. I have found no biblical parallel to this instance of *שנה מלכי* [ב] without numeral, but there are several instances of the use of a numeral to designate the first regnal year of kings with longer reigns. Daniel 9:2 (בשנת אחת למלכי) in particular is otherwise a close parallel to 2 Kgs 25:27b, and also 2 Chr 29:3 (הראשונה למלכי), but cf. also Dan 9:1; 11:1; Ezra 1:1, all of which have *בשנת אחת* followed by ל + PN, and Dan 1:21, *עד שנה אחת*, followed by ל + PN.

³⁰ The referent of *אחרו* is ambiguous, but the clear anaphora to Jehoiachin of the preceding third singular masculine suffix in *כסאו* makes Jehoiachin the most likely referent for *אחרו* also. In that case one may infer that the kings in question are fellow captives of the Babylonians. On the less likely, but still possible, pronominal anaphora of *אחרו* to Evil-merodach, the kings in question would presumably be loyal vassals of the Babylonians.

ment in the process of his purported exaltation, as comparison with Gen 40–41 shows.³¹ At the very moment of focusing onto Jehoiachin's actual experience, merely to report that Jehoiachin changed out of his prison rags (אֶת בְּגָדֵי כְלָאוֹ, 25:29a) is both bald and anticlimactic. Even taking full cognizance of the spareness of the narrative style here, it must be conceded that but few words more could have depicted Jehoiachin donning splendid throne array in place of his drab prisoner's garb.³² That they are not said is thus itself a rhetoric to deflate high expectations.

Next we are apparently told that "[Jehoiachin] used always to eat in [Evil-merodach's] presence" (וַאֲכַל לֶחֶם טָמִיד לִפְנֵי, 25:29b).³³ At first sight this translates Jehoiachin to a position of continual high honor, although the past aspect of the verb already betrays that this bright new beginning has reached a known end. We will return to this point at the end of this subsection. Material for further readerly reflection on Evil-merodach's provision for Jehoiachin is provided by the more detailed explication given in 25:30,³⁴ where it is succinctly characterized by a technical term, אִרְחָקָה. Moreover, the term is given quite notable discourse salience: (1) noun-verb inversion puts it into the stressed first position in its utterance; (2) it is given further emphasis by immediate repetition

³¹ In the Genesis narrative the reader is told that Joseph changed out of his prison clothes (Gen 41:14) long before his exaltation by the pharaoh (Gen 41:40). Granted, that story is related with vastly more circumstantiality than is Jehoiachin's release here, but note also that Joseph's exaltation merited not merely this first change of clothes, but a subsequent exchange of that first change for far more splendid garments in keeping with his new position of high honor (Gen 41:42).

³² See the remarks in the previous note regarding Gen 40–41, and contrast also the famous liberation from prison passage Isa 61:1–3, where a series of three brief oppositions dramatize the difference between before and after: פָּאָר חַתָּה אַפֵּר שָׁמֶן שְׁשׁוֹן תַּחַת אֲבֵל בְּעֵטָה תְּחַלֵּה תַחַת רִיחַ כְּהָה (61:3a); cf. further 61:10. Zenger's exposition supplies precisely what our text does not say: "[w]enn Dtr hier so in der Änderung der Kleidung insistiert, wäre es möglich, daß Jojachin wieder königliche Tracht zurückerhalten hat" ("Rehabilitierung Jojachins," 26).

³³ As the text appears at first sight to be saying, but on the sense of לִפְנֵי in 25:29b, see the penultimate paragraph in this subsection. The expression אֲכַל לֶחֶם טָמִיד is used twice by David to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:7, 10; cf. also v. 13), where the locative specification "at my table" (עַל) corresponds to לִפְנֵי here. Although not in prison as such, for his own safety Mephibosheth has previously secreted himself from David in a self-imposed exile. David insistently represents his invitation to Mephibosheth to dine continually at his table as an act of gracious kindness "for Jonathan's sake" (2 Sam 9:1, 3, 7). There, however, David's protestations and explications fuel doubt about how genuine this show of kindness to Mephibosheth is, and about what "to always eat at my table" really means.

³⁴ Zenger takes וַאֲכַל in 25:29b as a preterite, reads לִפְנֵי literally as "in his presence," and, arguing that historically Jehoiachin could not constantly have dined with Evil-merodach, claims that 25:29b refers to a one-off meal following Jehoiachin's release ("Rehabilitierung Jojachins," 26–27). He thus denies any parallel between 25:29b and 25:30, an assertion he can sustain only by gratuitously excising both רָמִיד and כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּי from 25:29b, as having been imported from 25:30 on a false construction of 25:29b!

(וארחתו ארחה תמיד);³⁵ (3) through passivization of the verb it is made the grammatical subject of this final sentence in the episode.³⁶ This last grammatical subject in the text of Kings thus encapsulates the final point toward which the whole history of monarchy in the book has led.

Outside of this text and its parallel, Jer 52:34, the term ארחה occurs in the Hebrew Bible only in Jer 40:5 and Prov 15:17.³⁷ The former text has some interesting analogues with our present passage. In Jer 40:1-6 the Babylonian general Nebuzaradan first releases Jeremiah from captivity at Ramah (40:1). Then, when Jeremiah elects to join Gedaliah at Mizpah, Nebuzaradan gives him, at the last moment before Jeremiah's departure and apparently as an afterthought, an ארחה to take with him on his journey (40:5). Accordingly, the context indicates that this ארחה comprised provisions such as were to hand and that Jeremiah could manage to take with him, presumably on foot.³⁸ Jeremiah's ארחה, then, was perforce a relatively modest, one-off, provision of food.

The other occurrence of the term, in Prov 15:17 (ירק ואהבה), טוב ארחת ירק ואהבה, "שם משר אבוס ושנאה בו", "better a ration of greens accompanied by love than a fatted calf full of hatred"), also has a particular pertinence to 2 Kgs 25:30, in that here ארחה is used in reference to food being provided at table. In this palpable opposition of modest to sumptuous fare, ירק is contrasted with שור and ארחה with אבוס. Hence ארחה is being used here to characterize the ירק as mea-

³⁵ The first three words of 25:30 (וארחתו ארחה תמיד) may be taken as a nominal clause, with the following clause then being asyndetic, thus: "now his food ration was a standing ration; it was granted to him from the king, day in and day out, all the days of his life." Alternatively, וארחתו may be treated as a *casus pendens* within a single verbal clause, thus: "as for his food ration, a standing ration was granted to him from the king, day in and day out, all the days of his life." I prefer the first construction.

³⁶ The passivization avoids reverting to Evil-merodach as the grammatical subject and thereby diluting the narrative concentration here on Jehoiachin as recipient. But since the latter could have been avoided in other ways, for example, by saying באת המלך ארחה, the fact that ארחה is made the grammatical subject in itself has rhetorical impact.

³⁷ LXX ^{A,B} Jer 47:5 (= MT Jer 40:5) has no equivalent to ארחה. In 4 Kgdms 25:30 ארחה is translated by ἐσθιατορ(ε)ία, a term apparently unique to this context, in Jer 52:34 by σὺνταξις, and in Prov 15:17 by ἐξουσία.

³⁸ At any rate there is no mention of his being provided with any other means of transport. Nor is there any clear contextual indication of what the ארחה was for: Was it simply to sustain him on his journey, or was it also to provide for him when he reached Mizpah? If the term is related to ארה ("to journey"), then a basic sense of "something pertaining to a journey, journey provisions" would tend to indicate the former rather than the latter here. Cf. Zenger's suggested comparison of ארחה with Akkadian *akal ḥarrāni* ("Wegzehr") ("Rehabilitierung Jojachins," 18 n. 11). Derivation from the Hebrew root ארח seems more likely than the suggested connection with any of the Akkadian terms, *iarahṭu* ("portion of corn?"), (*w*)*arḥītu* ("monthly installment"), *iarahḥu* ("fine quality barley") (J. Gray, *I & II Kings* [OTL; London: SCM, 1970], 774 ad loc; M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* [AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988], 329 ad loc). The Akkadian terms are all of rare occurrence, and in any case the vocalization אֶרְחָה indicates a straightforward Hebrew *qetullā* formation.

ger fare and in the context is most likely to indicate a small serving, or ration. Thus, despite this restriction of our term to just two other contexts, their evidence converges persuasively to indicate that *אֶרְחָה* denotes limited rations.

Returning, then, to 2 Kgs 25:30, we can now see how this text, in giving particular salience in the discourse to *אֶרְחָה*, very pointedly characterizes the food allowance granted to Jehoiachin as far from sumptuous. Moreover, “a standing ration, granted to him daily *from the king*” (*אֶרְחָה חֲמִיד נְתָנָה לוֹ מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ דְּבַר יוֹם*) (ביומו),³⁹ does not necessarily imply that Jehoiachin was honored as the king’s constant table companion, merely that he was made his dependent pensioner.⁴⁰ Accordingly, this explication makes it clear retrospectively that *לפניו* in 25:29b, as the parallel term to *מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ* in 25:30a, does not signify “in his presence,” but has the looser sense of “under his superintendence, at his direction.”⁴¹ Hence this highly repetitive account of exactly what Evil-merodach’s disposition for Jehoiachin amounted to, in terms of the latter’s experience day in and day out, serves to underline just how utterly dependent on a pagan monarch (*tout court*, 25:30a) Jehoiachin was for the very wherewithal of life.⁴² If Jehoiachin had become a client favored above others (25:28b), yet he remained completely beholden to a foreign patron, who kept him with a measured generosity (25:30) as a detainee in Babylon (*בבבל*, 25:28bβ).⁴³

Finally, the last and most emphatic point our text makes about Jehoiachin’s experience of release at the hands of Evil-merodach is that this modestly pensioned detention would endure for the rest of his life span. The phrase *כל ימי*, “all the days of his life,”⁴⁴ is repeated in successive sentences, and more-

³⁹ The expression *דְּבַר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ*, lit. “the matter of a day on its day,” is used in connection with the daily provision of manna (Exod 16:4), the requirement of daily sacrifices (Lev 23:37; Ezra 3:4), and the daily distribution of tithed food (Neh 12:47). It is also used, in a context more closely resembling our own, of the daily ration of food from the king’s table assigned by Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel and his friends (Dan 1:5), a ration Daniel refused (Dan 1:8). Thus the expression clearly connotes a regulation of quantity, and in our present context the expression reinforces the idea of “ration” inherent in *אֶרְחָה*.

⁴⁰ In the case of Mephibosheth, David’s instruction to Ziba makes it clear that David’s “generosity” does not even extend as far as this, since Mephibosheth is to be maintained “at my table”—from the produce of his family estate (2 Sam 9:10 MT)!

⁴¹ This is a meaning *לפניו* also has in 1 Sam 3:1; Gen 17:18; and Hos 6:2.

⁴² Zenger’s failure to appreciate this rhetoric of repetition leads to his misconceived surgery in 2 Kgs 25:29 (see “Rehabilitierung Jojachins,” 26 n. 75); see n. 34 above.

⁴³ Note that some stress accrues to *בבבל* from its final position in its sentence. Hence, in addition to its referential function in 25:28b of defining the kings above whom Jehoiachin is exalted, *בבבל* serves rhetorically to remind the reader where Jehoiachin is in this his thirty-seventh year, and where he will be detained “all the days of his life” (25:29b, 30b). Similarly, under the cover of the invitation to dine at the king’s table, David detained Mephibosheth in Jerusalem.

⁴⁴ In texts such as Deut 17:19; 1 Sam 1:11; 1 Kgs 11:34; and Ps 27:4 the same phrase indicates a desire and/or intention that a particular state of affairs continue throughout the lifetime of the person(s) in question.

over both times it occurs in the stressed final slot of each sentence (25:29b, 30b). Further, precisely this stressed phrase forms the concluding words not only of our episode but also of the whole book, and thus of Noth's Deuteronomistic History. Most tellingly of all, within the temporal perspective of the accompanying verbs this repeated phrase encompasses all that there was of Jehoiachin's life following his release from prison.⁴⁵ The past frequentative *וַיֵּאָכֵל* ("he used to eat," 25:29b) and the preterite *נָתַן* ("was given him," 25:30a) betray that from the writer's point of view this durative event was one that was already past and gone.⁴⁶ Simple everyday pragmatics therefore lead the reader to infer that "all the days of his [Jehoiachin's] life" had filled their full tale within the still melancholy circumstances prevailing at the conclusion of the book.⁴⁷

III. What the Text Does Not Say

Since 2 Kgs 25:29–30 clearly implies Jehoiachin's death while detained at the pleasure of his Babylonian masters, in order justifiably to read the text as

⁴⁵ For other examples of *כל ימי חייו* referring to an already closed span of time in the past, compare Josh 4:14 (contrast 1:5); 1 Sam 7:15 (contrast 1:11); 1 Kgs 5:1 [English 4:21]; 15:5, 6.

⁴⁶ The LXX rendering of *עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ* in Jer 52:34 (*ἕως ἡμέρας ἧς ἀπέθανεν*, "until the day he died") by past actual, not by future potential (*ἕως ὃν ἡμέρας ἧς ἀποθανῇ*, "until the day he dies"), shows that the translator drew the same inference from the temporal aspect of the same verbs in Jer 52:34 as I do here in 2 Kgs 25:29–30. Jeremiah 52:34 MT reads *עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ* before *כל ימי חייו*, whereas LXX^{A,B} reads *ἕως ἡμέρας ἧς ἀπέθανεν* in place of *כל ימי חייו*. Ackroyd notes that, of the main textual readings in 2 Kgs 25:30 and Jer 52:34, only the MT and *Targum* Jer 52:34 read both phrases; hence he considers, with Talmon, the one phrase to be a "duplicate reading" of the other (*Exile and Restoration*, 80 n. 79). So far as the textual issue is concerned, the graphic similarity of the two phrases *עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ* and *דַּבָּר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ* raises the possibility that the former could have fallen out of the text of 2 Kgs 25:30 by a form of phrasal haplography with the latter. But in any case, to define the issue only in terms of textual reading ignores the fact that rhetorically the two phrases *עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ* and *כל ימי חייו* are not simply equivalent: while each entails both duration and termination, the former headlines the durative, the latter the terminal, aspect.

⁴⁷ Thus I can agree neither with Levinson ("[t]he last four verses of Kings announce . . . that a scion of David, king of Israel, is yet alive and well," in "Last Four Verses in Kings," 361) nor with Hobbs ("[i]t is fair to conclude that Jehoiachin was still alive when 2 Kgs 25 was written," in *2 Kings*, 368). Although, with Begg, I do see "a positive development" of a limited kind in 2 Kgs 25:27–30 (see section IV below), I cannot concur with him that it ends "on a cheery note" ("Jehoiachin's Release," 49). To take a historical turn for the moment, and assume that Jehoiachin's release was a historical event, on the information supplied in 2 Kgs 24:8 and 25:27 it is in any case relatively unlikely that Jehoiachin could have lived for very many years after his release, since he was already in the fifty-fifth year of his life in his thirty-seventh year of exile, the highest indication for him that we have. But my argument here does not rest on such historical projections from our text, but rather on establishing the discourse implicatures of the text, a task that is in any case a prerequisite to an adequate attempt at historical projection.

offering its original readers hope for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, some indication within the text that this ray of hope is not extinguished in Jehoiachin's death is surely necessary.⁴⁸ Any such ray discernible in the apparent auspiciousness with which Evil-merodach first released Jehoiachin from close confinement (25:27–28) shines at best fitfully in the harsher light of Jehoiachin's actual experience of release (25:29–30). But even that fitful ray dies away in the deep shade that falls with the final extinction of its source (25:29b, 30). Only if our text has given some palpable indication that what it has narrated need not end with Jehoiachin's death could this ray of hope keep on shining. Hence, taking cognizance of the wider context of the story of Israel's kings narrated in the book as a whole—the story that precisely our present episode concludes—the reader would at least need evidence that the royal line will not cease with Jehoiachin, coupled with some optimistic invocation of YHWH's promise to David of an enduring dynasty.⁴⁹

But of neither of these requisites is there commensurate evidence. With regard first of all to the promise to David, such elements in 2 Kgs 25:27–30 as distantly reflect its language do not engender hope of its fulfillment.⁵⁰ Thus in 25:28b (וַיִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ כְּסֹא מַעַל כְּסֵא הַמְּלָכִים) one may see a last dying gleam from the *lō' yikārēt* form of the promise (לֹא יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מֵעַל כְּסֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל, 1 Kgs 2:4b; 9:5bβ; see also 8:25aβ), which shows how far from fulfillment that promise is here. For the throne now given Jehoiachin is granted not by the gracious favor of YHWH, but by that of a Babylonian king beholden to the Babylonian god Marduk (Hebrew מַרְדֻּךְ = Akkadian *Awil/Amēl-Mardūk*, i.e. “man of Mar-

⁴⁸ This is, in my view, the Achilles' heel in the reading of this text offered by von Rad and his scholarly heirs. Indeed, the following quotation from von Rad, which immediately precedes his account of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 as “a carefully measured indication . . . of the fact that the line of David has not come to an irrevocable end” (“Deuteronomic Theology of History,” 220), betrays the absence of real evidence for this claim: “[o]n the one hand, none was less in a position than [the Deuteronomist] to minimise the terrible severity of the judgement; on the other hand *he could not, indeed must not, believe* that the promise of Yahweh might fail, and that the lamp of David would be finally extinguished, for no word of Yahweh pronounced over history can ever fall to the ground” (“Deuteronomic Theology of History,” 219, my emphasis). Note that “the hope” I am discounting in this section of my discussion is specifically that of future restoration of the Davidic monarchy. On a more general, but far more modest, element of hope, see the final section of this article.

⁴⁹ Wolff had long ago pointed to the absence of explicit reference to the Davidic promise as counting against the von Radian view (“Deuteronomic Kerygma,” 86), and, more recently, both Begg (“Jehoiachin's Release,” 52) and Hoffmann (“Deuteronomist and the Exile,” 668) note that the nonmention of Jehoiachin's offspring is against interpreting the text as nourishing eschatological hope.

⁵⁰ Whereas von Rad did not claim any specific allusion to the promise in our text, asserting only that the writer presumed the efficacy of the promise in a general way (“Deuteronomic Theology of History,” 219–20), Zenger suggested that כְּסֵא in 2 Kgs 25:28 deliberately alluded to a key term of the promise (“Rehabilitierung Jojachins,” 26). But on this, see the ensuing remarks.

duk"). Nor is it a throne of power and authority, the throne of Israel, that he is given, but merely a seat higher than other client kings, themselves detained in Babylon at the Babylonian monarch's pleasure. More faint still, but also more grotesquely parodying, are shadows of the *nîr* form of the dynastic promise (למען היות ניר לדוד עבדי כל הימים לפני בירושלים, 1 Kgs 11:36b_a; cf. 15:4a) cast by בבבל (2 Kgs 25:29b) and כל ימי חייו (25:29b, 30b) in conjunction with לפניו (25:28b_β). For לפניו here projects the beholdenness of the Davidic scion, not to YHWH, as does לפני there, but to the Babylonian monarch and his god; כל ימי חייו here projects, not, as כל הימים there, the perpetuity of a Davidic dynasty under YHWH's faithful protection, but the temporality of a lone Davidide under fickle human patronage; and בבבל here projects, not, as בירושלים there, the security of that kingship in "the city where YHWH chose to set his name" (1 Kgs 11:36b_β), but the precariousness of clientship in an alien city—and that the seat of Jerusalem's destroyer.

How feeble, then, in 2 Kgs 25:27–30 are these dying glimmers of the dynastic promise, whose flickering light projects through the deep gloom of 2 Kgs 25:1–26 a mocking phantasm of YHWH's solemn undertaking to David. Still, these dying embers of the promise might yet have had life in them, if only our text had provided more fuel, in the form of reference to a son for Jehoiachin who, living on, might have reignited the promise's sputtering flame. But there is, *pace* Provan and others, not the faintest trace in our text of such a son and potential successor.⁵¹ That we are told elsewhere that Jehoiachin did indeed have such sons,⁵² and that they, or some of them, were in exile with

⁵¹ Provan, in maintaining that Kings intentionally contrasts the fate of Jehoiachin's family with that of his "successor," Zedekiah, gratuitously introduces descendants for Jehoiachin never mentioned anywhere in Kings ("Messiah in Kings," 72 = 1 & 2 Kings, 90). Granted, 2 Kgs 24:15 has related that besides the queen mother (אם המלך) the king's wives were taken into exile with Jehoiachin, but there was no mention of any sons. Still, on this basis a reader might be led to conjecture about sons being born in exile. But in that case, given that Jehoiachin, according to 2 Kgs 25:27, was held in prison until released by Evil-merodach, our text excludes the possibility *de facto* for those thirty-six years, and is therefore more likely to give explicit mention here to any believed to have been born after Jehoiachin's release. Moreover, to be cogent, the analogy Provan elaborates ("Messiah in Kings," 75–76 = 1 & 2 Kings, 92–93) between the situation in our episode and that in the account of the restoration of Joash in 2 Kgs 11 demands explicit mention here of such progeny. For just as in 2 Kgs 11 the restoration of the Davidic line was possible only because Joash was shown, conspicuously to the reader, to have survived Athaliah's purge, so here an analogous hope of Davidic restoration would be possible only if a potential successor had been shown to survive Jehoiachin's death in Babylon. To be fair, Provan is by no means alone in smuggling progeny for Jehoiachin into his account of 2 Kgs 25:27–30; see, e.g., Zenger, "Rehabilitierung Joachims," 27; Becker, *Messianic Expectation*, 56–57; Levenson, "Last Four Verses of Kings," 358.

⁵² 1 Chronicles 3:17–18 in fact lists eight sons for Jehoiachin, but this is the only explicit reference to sons of Jehoiachin in the Hebrew Bible. Further, that Jehoiachin had (male!) offspring is a pragmatic presupposition of זרעו in Jer 22:28–30. But the intent of this passage is precisely to deny any future to both father and offspring.

him,⁵³ simply sets the absence of any such reference in our text into starker relief.⁵⁴ But irrespective of that intertextual comparison, the textual context of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 offers its own pointed comparison, in that a descendant of the royal line has just figured prominently in the immediately preceding episode. The Ishmael who, we were explicitly informed, was “of the royal progeny” (מִזֶּרַע הַמַּלְכוּתָה, 25:25aα),⁵⁵ assassinated both Gedaliah, the Judean governor appointed by Babylon, and his Judean-Babylonian entourage (25:25aβ). In so doing, however, he exacerbated the plight of Judah, portentously forcing the very remnant who might have revived her fortunes to flee to Egypt (25:26; cf. Deut 17:16). With the only royal progeny explicitly mentioned in the context thus acting so inimically to Judah’s future, the absence from our episode of any royal progeny for Jehoiachin who might yet live to undo the mischief wreaked by Ishmael is the bleaker. This silence of 25:27–30 should not recklessly be filled with talk of sons for Jehoiachin imported from other contexts.

IV. Summary Conclusions and Consequences

Manifestly, my reading of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 within the foregoing perspective has not led me to a von Radian view of it. Babylonian favor toward Jehoiachin, albeit that it exalts him above other captive kings, has its limit, namely, that of his remaining a modestly pensioned client in perpetual detention in Babylon. Crucially, this is a limit that in our text the Davidic monarchic line never promises to transcend, either in the person of Jehoiachin, who dies while still in this state, or in the person of a son and heir, who might have lived to see restoration. For of such a son and heir to Jehoiachin our text knows nothing. It is therefore difficult, *pace* von Rad and his successors, to see how this text could have been intended to foster hope of the restoration of the Davidic monarchy.⁵⁶

⁵³ It is a reasonable inference from Babylonian administrative documents published by Weidner, which record provisions assigned to dependents of Nebuchadnezzar, that they refer to five such sons of Jehoiachin: for an English translation of relevant excerpts, see *ANET*, 308b.

⁵⁴ Begg’s discussion is not sufficiently strong on this, to my mind crucial, point, since merely to say that the text does not mention any provision by Evil-merodach for Jehoiachin’s sons is open to the inference that such sons are mentioned or implied in the text of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 (“Jehoiachin’s Release,” 52–53).

⁵⁵ Besides the “parallel” passage Jer 41:1, the expression is used as an oblique referent to Zedekiah, otherwise unnamed, in Ezek 17:13, and in Dan 1:3 to characterize some of the group of exiled Judeans selected for grooming by Nebuchadnezzar. The parallel form זֶרַע הַמַּלְכוּתָה is used in 2 Kgs 11:1 of Davidides who had survived the massacre of Jehu (2 Kgs 10:13–14) only to be assassinated at Athaliah’s instigation. Thus both expressions probably can encompass a kin set wider than the direct line of descent, but a set that is still distinctly royal.

⁵⁶ It is worth pondering the degree to which this hopeful reading of the text is interdepen-

Does that then vindicate a pessimistic reading of 2 Kgs 25:27–30? In answer to that question let me rehearse salient points from the preceding discussion. The place of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 within the structure of 2 Kgs 25, as the last episode in a series of acts that determine the fate of the Davidic monarchy and Judean people, is ambivalent. For it is at once coordinated with the destructive acts that precede this final episode, yet also distinguished from them as a fresh departure of some kind. Moreover, that new departure is also portrayed in ambivalent terms. Focused on the actions of Evil-merodach (25:27–28), the new departure seems to promise much. Focused on the experience of Jehoiachin (25:29–30), however, it delivers considerably less: at best a very attenuated form of rehabilitation for Jehoiachin that endures for the rest of his life.⁵⁷

But, that said on the one side, on the other side it must also nonetheless be recognized that Jehoiachin's experience of Babylonian captivity was significantly ameliorated. To express it in terms drawn from 1 Kgs 8:50, his captors have (eventually!) treated Jehoiachin with compassion (ונתחם לרחמים לפני, שביהם ורחמם, 1 Kgs 8:50b). But, since 2 Kgs 25:27–30 says nothing about Jehoiachin praying in heartfelt repentance toward the site of the temple in the way 1 Kgs 8:47–48 elaborately details, nor is there the slightest hint that what has happened to him is due to YHWH's intervention as 1 Kgs 8:49–50 petition, clearly 2 Kgs 25:27–30 can hardly be proffering Jehoiachin's release as an explicit fulfillment of 1 Kgs 8:46–50.

All the same, in portraying an instance of the victor's mercifully alleviating the suffering of the vanquished, this final episode of Kings exemplifies the substance of Solomon's petition in 1 Kgs 8:50b. Latent within the dispiriting limitations of events in this final episode is some positive movement that is

dent with a (prevailing) assumption of a date of composition for the text in close proximity to this last recorded episode, indeed a date often presumed to be before Jehoiachin's death (see, e.g., the comments of Levinson and Hobbs quoted in n. 47 above). It is unlikely that an author writing even soon after Jehoiachin's death would have said no more than is in our text, if his intention was to foster hope in the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. For on this reading the knowledge of Jehoiachin's death changes everything and makes reference to living royal progeny a *sine qua non* (see also n. 51 above). Moreover, to see just how precarious is this assumption about the dating of Kings, consider how, by a similar argument, the Gospel of Mark in its "shorter ending" form would have to be dated to immediately following the day of Jesus' resurrection, before his subsequent resurrection appearances! On the dating of Kings, see further James Linville, "Rethinking the 'Exilic' Book of Kings," *JSOT* 75 (1997): 21–42.

⁵⁷ In historical terms (but not in textual; see n. 23 above), and if historical, Evil-merodach's actions in 25:27–28 may have presaged his intention to reinstall Jehoiachin as vassal ruler in Jerusalem, as a number of scholars conjecture, an intention perhaps balked of fulfillment by Evil-merodach's assassination so soon after these initial steps. But, however that may have been, the point is that so far as our text is concerned neither this nor anything further of political-religious significance materialized for Jehoiachin, and knowledge of that failure shapes 25:29–30.

incompatible with a totally pessimistic reading of the text. If there is here an attenuated allusion to 1 Kgs 8:50b, it serves as a token presaging not a hopeful future for an heir to the Davidic promise but a more tolerable future for all vanquished Judeans.⁵⁸ In contrast to the relentless devastation depicted in the preceding episodes in 2 Kgs 25, that is a hope not to be despised. But, since at the end of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 all power continues in the hands of their conqueror, and any promise of amelioration latent in Jehoiachin's release is not attributed to the agency of YHWH, it is also a hope not to be exaggerated.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ It is their future, not that of the Davidic monarch, that is the concern of Solomon's petition in 1 Kgs 8:50b. Becking, also noting both the absence of acceptance of judgment and repentance in 2 Kgs 25:27–30, and that YHWH is not the instigator of Jehoiachin's release, argues that the release is presented as a false dawn ("Jehojachin's Amnesty," 292–93). But to stigmatize something as a false dawn implies a view about what will be the real dawn. If the intended message was as defined as this, a Deuteronomistic writer would not have been so coy about expressing it.

⁵⁹ The difference between this ending and that of Chronicles points up just how measured is the element of hope implied here. Kings closes with no end to Babylonian sovereignty or to Judean captivity in sight. Chronicles closes with a determinate end to captivity set for seventy years, coinciding with a change of sovereignty to the Persians (2 Chr 36:20–21). Moreover, with its implication of Jehoiachin's death in Babylonian captivity and no mention of issue to sustain the Davidic line, Kings ends on a rather melancholy note. Chronicles, however, ends on a more optimistic note, in that, ignoring the ultimate fate of the Judean monarch, whether Zedekiah or Jehoiachin, it concentrates on that of the people in general, set to change for the better at the end of the seventy years. But most of all, both the devastation of Judah and its future end in 2 Chr 36 are, unlike 2 Kgs 25, attributed to the agency of YHWH. In a nutshell, in 2 Chr 36 there is an express divine "until" (עד) מלך מלכות פרס, 36:20b; לְמִלְאוֹת שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה, 36:21b) that is missing from 2 Kgs 25.