

REVIEW

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About the dissertation work of **Assist. Zoran Tsvetkov Kalev**

" 'Evil in the sight of the Lord' in the Book of Judges"

For awarding the educational and scientific degree PhD in professional field 2.4 Religion and Theology (Holy Scripture of the Old Testament).

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Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ivaylo Naydenov, PhD.

1. Information about the doctoral program and the doctoral student

Zoran Kalev obtained a bachelor's and master's degree in theology at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in 2018 and 2019. He was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Biblical Studies at the Faculty of Theology on 1.02.2020 with a dissertation topic "'evil in the sight of the Lord' in the Book of Judges". After a competition, he was appointed as an Assistant in the same department (from October 2020), and the doctoral studies were transformed into part-time.

By order of the Rector RD-38-657/2.12.2024, the composition of the Scientific jury under the present procedure was determined. The review submitted by me was prepared on the basis of the Rector's order and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific jury, held on 10.12.2024. I note that there are no violations. The doctoral student has successfully completed his individual curriculum and meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the requirements of the Regulations for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". No plagiarism has been established in the dissertation.

2. Data about the dissertation, the author's summary of dissertation and publications

The topic is definitely dissertable and the way it is formulated sets not only the specificity of the subject of study, but also the possibility of using methods that reveal different aspects of the problem under study: literary, historical and chronological, social and political.

The dissertation consists of 317 standard pages. It is structured in a Preface, Introduction, five chapters, two excursuses, Conclusion, Appendix and References. The exposition in each of the chapters is structured through subtopics and ends with a summary (there is no summary in the first one) of the results of the analysis.

In the introduction we find all the elements necessary for the dissertation genre: object of the study, methods, goals and objectives – everything is clearly presented. Chapter one examines the isagogical issues characteristic of a biblical study: authorship, chronology, structure, genre, with an emphasis on the traces of later editorial interventions. Chapter two analyzes the textual structure in Judges 2-3 in order to identify stable expressions that, according to the author, point us to conclusions regarding chronology and genre, in the light of which he presents the content of the expression “evil in the sight of the Lord”. Chapter three examines the time of Deborah and Gideon (Judges 4 to 8). “evil in the sight of the Lord”, which is discussed in this section, testifies, according to Kalev, to “the course of later religious reforms, which prompted the composition of the genre of deuteronomistic theological works”. Chapter four analyzes the story of Abimelech (Judg. 9), the language of Judges. 10:6-16 and the “Song of Moses” (Deut. 32) through a critique of the sources. This analysis provides the dissertationist with a basis to argue for the Deuteronomistic origin of the final version of the book of Judges. The task that the doctoral student solves in Chapter five is to “clarify the scale of the problem of the Deuteronomistic redaction of materials in the Old Testament”. To answer this question, Kalev examines some exegetical problems in the story of the ministry of the priest Phinehas (from chapters 20 to 21 of the book of Judges), as well as identifying and analyzing the content of the expression “evil in the sight of the Lord” in “canonical, non-canonical literature and the apocrypha”.

The two excursuses illuminate the researched problem in later Jewish writings (Book of Jubilees, Damascus Document, Book of Zohar).

The doctoral student's argument is based on the relevant research methodology, which he has described in the introduction and appropriately applies in his research. The literary criticism, which Kalev actively uses, identifies sources, editions, literary interactions. Through historical-critical methods, the influences of social and political processes on the final form of the book's text have been identified.

In the Conclusion, Kalev notes: "In the event that the Book of Judges is perceived as part of the Deuteronomistic corpus, the researched topic of "evil in the sight of the Lord" appears to be subordinate to such concepts in Judaism that developed after the historical processes immediately after the Babylonian captivity, which in turn necessitated the composition of Deuteronomistic texts. The period in which the term "evil in the sight of the Lord" began to be used cannot be dated earlier than the time of the great prophetic movement that emerged as a criticism of the syncretic worship in the Northern Kingdom (9th century BC). The anti-Samaritan polemic present in the Book of Judges points to its dating to the later context after

the fall of the Northern Kingdom at the end of the 8th century BC". The doctoral student sees a perspective for the development of his research: "The Deuteronomic definition of "evil in the sight of the Lord" as worship of pagan deities with common names, respectively "baals", "ashtars" and "asher", should point to future discussions on the problem of what the ancient religion of Israel actually was in the pre-monarchical era".

The author's summary of dissertation presents the structure and content of the dissertation well, although it contains semantic ambiguities and too much fragmentation in places. The five articles of the doctoral student are on the topic of the dissertation and have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals.

3. Scientific contributions and critical notes

The primary source for the book of Judges is apparently a collection of loosely connected stories of tribal heroes who saved the people in battle with hostile tribes. It is possible that this source was "the book of the wars of the Lord" (Judg. 21:14). The consensus view is that the first part of the prologue (chapters 1:1-2:5) and the two parts of the epilogue (17-21) are collections of fragments added to the main text, while the second part of the prologue (2:6-3:6) is an introduction composed specifically for the final version of the book. A statement repeated in the epilogue, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (cf. 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25) suggests a dating of the redaction compilation of earlier sources to the monarchical period. The leadership role of the house of Judah leads us to the assumption that the redaction took place in these circles.

Since the second half of the 20th century, most scholars have agreed with Martin Nott's thesis that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, the two books of Samuel, and the two books of Kings form parts of a single source. Nott argues that this source was compiled in the early Exodus period (6th century BC) to demonstrate how the narrative of Israel's history was constructed in accordance with the theology expressed in the book of Deuteronomy. Nott believes that this story is the work of a single author living in the mid-6th century BCE, who selected and edited from his sources to create a coherent historical narrative. Frank Moore Cross later proposed the thesis that an early version of the story was composed in Jerusalem during the time of Josiah (late 7th century BCE); this first version was then revised and expanded to produce the second edition that Nott refers to (Cross calls it Dtr2).

The consensus today is that the hand of a redactor, called a "deuteronomist", can be seen in the book of Judges through the cyclical structure of the book: the Israelites fall into idolatry, God punishes them for their sins with oppression by foreign nations, the Israelites cry out to God for help, and God sends a judge to deliver them from foreign oppression. After a period of

peace, the cycle repeats itself. The same redactor also includes humorous (and sometimes dismissive) comments found in the book, such as the story of the people of Ephraim who cannot pronounce the word “shibboleth” correctly (12:5-6).

In the context of this research paradigm (which the author could summarize in the introduction or in Chapter One within 3-4 pages), Kalev explores the use of the linguistic marker “evil in the sight of the Lord” as part of a genre that Fr. Prof. Shivarov conditionally calls “theological composition”, whose main theme is the violation of the covenant with God. The emergence of this literary form in the 9th century BC in the context of the struggle of the prophets against syncretism testifies, according to Kalev, to the influence of the Deuteronomic tradition on the book of Judges by introducing prophetic rhetoric into the book. By expanding the research perimeter of working with texts, the dissertationist seeks parallels between the book of Judges and extra-biblical Jewish sources from a later time, which, in his opinion, should shed light on the development of Judaism and in this respect has significance, albeit secondary, for the topic he is researching.

In this context outlined by me, I also see the contributions of the work of Assist. Zoran Kalev. I think that they are not well formulated and do not fully present the scientific value of his study. Contributions are usually formulated in such a way as to state in general terms certain results of the research. *In this case, the dissertation has a contributing character in a number of important details: an analysis of text units, which shows that they were subjected to later editorial intervention; tables in which texts are compared in the context of the development of traditions; the identification of various sources and of linguistic markers attesting to later redactions and anachronisms (mentioning events and people from a later time) in texts that tell of an earlier time and/or claim an earlier origin.* This analysis outlines the main points in the Deuteronomic historical discourse that Zoran Kalev successfully identifies in the book of Judges: (1) obedience to Yahweh brings peace and prosperity; (2) the period of prosperity often involves a weakening of the resolve to keep Yahweh's commandments or outright disobedience; (3) disobedience leads to a weakening of the faith that bound the community together and thus leaves the community open to attack by external enemies; (4) the external threat forces the community to reassess its position and inquire into the cause of the calamities, thus leading to repentance and the strength to resist all enemies. Kalev has outlined a “paradigm of Deuteronomic narratives: sin – punishment – repentance. “The established cyclicity in the Book of Judges of Israel is tied to the overall Deuteronomic plot of Israel’s sins that led to the Babylonian captivity.... The description of cyclicity in Judges 2:11–19 is in the following order: I) doing “evil”; II) flaming of divine wrath and punishment; III) cry for mercy; IV)

salvation by raising up a judge.” (p. 85). According to Judges 2:11–19, there are seven repetitions of “evil” and corresponding elevations of a savior.

Also important is the doctoral student's conclusion that “authors of biblical sources can supplement and correct their predecessors, subordinating older religious ideas to their own time. In order to determine the content of Judg. 3:6 as an example of a late prohibition against mixed marriages, it is necessary to make a comparison with the language of apocryphal writings, the origin of which is among sectarian branches that adopted the radical opinion about pure and impure marriages” (p. 96). The cases of “evil” in the Book of Judges also include the practice of forbidden marriages with Canaanite and Midianite women: “Clearly the old tradition about Moses’ family relations with the non-Israelite Zipporah (Ex. 2:21; 18:1–2) contradicts the idea of the Deuteronomic redaction” (p. 113). This is also illustrated on p. 160: “Another behavior of Gideon, contrary to Deuteronomic themes, is revealed in the mention of his concubine. The woman has the status of a pagan (“who was in Shechem,” Judg. 8:31). Gideon is the first judge to violate the prohibition of Deut. 7, and since Judg. 3:6 summarizes the entire era, this remark to Gideon characterizes him as a sinner”.

The doctoral candidate argued that “the term ‘evil in the sight of the Lord’ can be considered the means by which older texts are edited and transformed into parts of the new Deuteronomic framework. It is permissible to assume when analyzing Judg. 4–5 that inculturation may have been a hermeneutical phenomenon that motivated the process of composition of the respective text” (p. 115). As an illustration of this thesis, we find the interesting analysis on p. 158: “Judg. 8:22–35 is the crossroads of political ideology and religious reformation (a change in the paradigmatic sin in the Pentateuch). In order to present the religious definitions of ‘evil’ in the book, it is necessary to consider the ironic end of Gideon’s election. The hero has delivered the people, but the implication is that the ‘raising up’ of judges is not idyllic. Progress is followed by national failure, when “there was no king in those days,” and was the judge supposed to reign or not? The prohibition of polygamy is the law of Deut. 17:17, which Gideon does not observe, but a more reliable hypothesis for dating is the repetition of the warning of Deut. 4:23 about an idol of metal. The ephod (אפוד) is also of gold and remains in Gideon’s hometown (vv. 24–29) . In this “Ephod” Caleb sees an intriguing parallel: “The gathering of gold earrings (Judg. 8:24–26) resembles the moment with Aaron in Exod. 32:1–6: both the judge and the priest sin in their relations with the society around them. The expression for “jewelry” (הזהב נומי) is repeated, and it is understandable that the making of the decorated ephod is a response to Gideon’s request to the people; As for Aaron, the instigator of sin in his time was the people. With such an interpretation, the plot puzzle can be rearranged

so that Judg. 8:24–27 is perceived as a story that does not recreate the era of Gideon, but is inserted into it. The book of the prophet Hosea allows Gideon's golden ephod to be interpreted as an indicator of the diachronic development of the legislation of faith in Yahweh - in it the main message is the prohibition of veneration of the "molten calf" (מסכה עגל).

In my opinion, the statement on p. 163 is also significant: “The establishment of Deuteronomic ideas through the term “evil in the sight of the Lord” must have taken place first among elite groups who disagreed with the worship of Yahweh through the calf images of King Jeroboam. Perhaps these groups of people escaped deportation by the Assyrians.” The attached table on p. 170 illustrates another important detail of the study: “Why in 2 Kings 17 is an Assyrian who does not worship Yahweh like a divinely inspired prophetic speaker? The expressiveness in the cases of Judg. 9 and 2 Kings 17 reflects textual sources about worship in Samaria and they are edited in relation to the Deuteronomic polemic related to the term “evil in the sight of the Lord”.

The similarity “between the theological basis of the term “evil in the sight of the Lord” and the views of the compiler of the Pentateuchal source in Deuteronomy 32” is another important and contributing aspect of the study, realized in the fourth chapter. The existence of such a connection, according to Kalev, “implies the assumption that certain texts in the Mosaic Law developed diachronically and in dependence on the Deuteronomic corpus. The Song of Moses (Deut. 32) is dedicated to the responsibilities of the people and the Lord, and its arrangement coincides with what was called a “prophetic judgment” in the analysis of Judg. 10:11. The first part of the Song of Moses contains a reminder of the good deeds towards Israel, followed by an accusation (Deut. 32:1–15). The speech from Judg. 10:11–15 is similar to that of Moses, but divine words in the first person are not reported in the Song until almost the very end (Deut. 32:20). Deuteronomic terminology, built around the idea of the cyclicity of “evil in the sight of the Lord”, is found when the Song of Moses begins to predict calamities (Deut. 32:20–25), but in the synchronic method the sentence “I will hide My face from them” would also describe the formula of Judg. 2:14, 20”; “In Judg. 10:13–14 the speech is constructed so as to reflect the prophetic idea to which the cycles of raising up judges are subordinate. The harsh condemnations of “evil in the sight of the Lord” suggest that the source of Deut. 32 is heuristic; it enlightens us so as to understand in what setting and with what thought rituals of rebuke such as Judges appear. 10:10–16 and similar passages that are not from the Book of Judges. Not vindictiveness, but the goodness of God is the ideological matter in the Early Prophets. The order of evil–punishment–restoration, which is set forth in the Song of Moses, reinforces the creed of the eternal covenant with the Israelites” (p. 192).

Significant and contributing are the two Deuteronomic themes that Kalev deduces from the “missing information about undefiled high priests in Shiloh after the ministry of Phinehas,” related to the explanation of the reasons why the people sinned and how the punishments are carried out during the lives of subsequent generations: 1. “Theme about the Amorites as the root cause of “evil.” In the biblical canon, the identity of the Israelites is formulated through the equivalent terms “evil in the sight of the Lord” and the “lawlessness” (עון) of the Amorites (Gen. 15:16)”; 2. “Theme about the superiority of the Sadducees. Eleazar’s reply in Num. 31:21–24, through which the war is interpreted according to a “command” (צו), presents him as an overseer for the prevention of mixed marriages. The scheme of military actions from Judges. 20–21 is the source material from which this “priestly theology” is drawn (not only because of the need to consult Phinehas in Judg. 20:18, 27) (p. 256).

These details are of a contributing nature; they can be further developed in another study by the dissertation student, not so much as evidence of a deuteronomic redaction (this is still a directly recognizable consequence of this research paradigm), but *as a historical marker in an obvious editorial intervention, which testifies not to the time of the editor, but to the time of the events that actually occurred.*

My critical remarks are in two directions:

1. The language and style of the dissertation text. First of all, I would point out the lack of clarity in the expression throughout the dissertation text (“one must guess what the author wanted to say”, as noted in one of the opinions of the internal discussion), which makes it difficult for the reader to follow the argumentation and the connection between the individual text units from the book of Judges that are being studied. These inappropriate words (in some places clearly a bad translation from the literature used) are only a touch of the clumsy and too vague style, e.g.: “the Bulgarian scholar narrates/Protoyer. Al. Men narrates” (p. 8, 32); sectarian (p. 96, 265); leviratic (p. 74); “God’s assistance in war” (p. 134); “peak of Heaven” (p. 245); midrashic (p. 271). There are also numerous technical problems – omitted letters, etc. (I do not point them out, because they are noticeable throughout the text), which must be eliminated. *The dissertation should not be published without stylistic and linguistic editing!* In this regard, when it comes to clarity in the presentation of the research, it would not be superfluous, in my opinion, to have a summary after the first chapter, which contains isagogical data and in this case the reader has difficulty orienting himself in the theses that the dissertationist shares (or disputes) and puts at the basis of his analyses; it would be good if the doctoral student's thesis that the expression "evil in the sight of the Lord" in the book of Judges testifies to the influence of the Deuteronomic edition on the biblical book under study were

stated in advance in the introduction (I saw it openly stated only on p. 115 – see the passage cited above with a reference to this page);

2. *Literary criticism and historical relevance.* According to Wellhausen, the Pentateuch is constructed from various sources – oral and literary – concerning the legislation; the historian’s task is to discover their chronological order. These sources and their editorial compilation pose questions for us about places of worship, sacrifices, feasts, priests and Levites and their support (see, for example, p. 233 of the dissertation). It is now widely accepted among biblical scholars that Josiah's reform (1 Kings 22–23) declared the exclusivity of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. This suggests that Deuteronomy was written in the 7th century as a theological introduction (with strong prophetic rhetoric) to the historical books of Israel, rather than as a summary of the first four books of the Law. Sources J and E, when compared with D, reveal religious attitudes and cultic questions that were current before the prophetic activity of the mid-8th century. Comparing the content of P (Ex. 25–31; 35–40; Lev. 1; Num. 1:1–10:10) with D, Wellhausen and Graf argue that P is later than D and should be considered the framework that gave the Pentateuch its final form at the time of the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. J and E were combined during the time of King Josiah and later added to D, while P provided the final framework into which J, E, and D were integrated in the 5th century. Each of these sources reveals the specific theological interpretation and life situation of the respective author and can therefore be used as *a source for the history of the time of its compilation*. I assume that the dissertationist did not want to repeat this well-known data, but it would be useful to see these premises outlined in order to bring more clarity regarding his contribution to the problem he studies; clarity also regarding the distinction *between the history of the period that the source claims to describe and the respective author/editor's idea of that history*. This question is important. Wellhausen also points out that in some cases the origin of the sources that we can identify is not necessarily identical to the origin of their content (e.g. some parts of J are earlier). This means that we have information about the time when the traditions of historical events were recorded, and not about the time of their actual occurrence. Therefore, any existing coherence between the relevant sources is the result of literary dependence only. If the final editing of the book of Judges took place during the monarchy, then the historical relevance of the stories that the doctoral candidate analyzes remains an unclear and mythical horizon. I raise these questions because the doctoral candidate has decided to explore “evil in the sight of the Lord” through literary criticism of the sources, respectively. the layers of the different traditions in the Pentateuch. I would recommend to my colleague a clearer and more prominent delineation of these layers of literary traditions from the point of view of *their chronological*

arrangement and their interaction in the theological discourse of prophetic rhetoric in the editorial compilation. Another simple fact should not be overlooked: the final version of the text is no less significant as a subject for study than its deconstruction, which should show heterogeneous traditions.

Conclusion

I define the dissertation work of Assist. Zoran Kalev as a contributing biblical study, which corresponds to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the terms and conditions for obtaining scientific degrees and holding academic positions in Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. This finding gives me reason to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award the scientific degree "PhD" to Assist. Zoran Tsvetkov Kalev.

On the current procedure my vote is positive.

7.02.2025

Assoc. Prof. Pavlin Sabev, PhD