

Notes on the Preface of *The Structure of Biblical Authority* by MG Kline.
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There is an important question "what is the Bible?" which seems trivial at the face but becomes interesting when considering that different traditions disagree on the number of books. To each tradition its own canon. That an authoritative *canon* is how the Bible is modeled (as opposed to say an *anthology*, e.g. an open library) is itself not trivial and raises the question of how we know it should be so modeled. Additional pressure is placed on this question by the fact that we accept post resurrection theological writings but only up to the writings of John and not without centuries of mainstream councils disputing the limit. So the question is nontrivial because it cannot neatly be answered by saying that only documents produced during Jesus's human lifetime would carry the necessary authoritative quality. This is simply not how any version of the modern Christian Bible is arranged regardless of tradition. Therefore in support of scripture as *canon* we are logically required to search for other authoritative standards of that ontological status. Kline writes in the direction of this search with expertise in the Old Testament.

Kline argues for the rediscovery of the 'ancient treaty form' as a means to understand canon as the right biblical ontology. He makes this argument in his previous work *Treaty of the Great King*. The exact thesis is that Deuteronomy is structured as an ancient Near-Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty, a suzerain (*sus* "above" + *sovereign* "supreme" in Old French) being a king, and a vassal (vassal state) being his subordinate nation that receives his protection. Their interaction is codified as a treaty, and not something representing total coercion, because while the suzerain determined the vassal state's foreign diplomatic and economic policy, the vassal state typically had autonomy in legal and social terms. The treaty model was the prototypical engine for the decentralized Hittite empire, where subordinate vassal states, e.g. the Kussara and Kanesh kingdoms, retained their cultural identity while having interdependent trade relations defined and closely monitored by Hittite administrative authority.

The structure of a Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty, an example of which being that issued by Mursili II to Duppi-Tessub of Amurru (<https://www.julianspriggs.co.uk/pages/HittiteTreaty>), has five parts.

1. Preamble: identification of the suzerain as author

These are the words of the Sun Mursilis, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favourite of the storm-god, the son of Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant.

2. Historical Prologue: summary of the past kindness of the suzerain and his ancestry towards vassal state leadership

`Aziras was the grandfather of you, Duppi-Tessub. He rebelled against my father, but submitted again to my father...

...300 (shekels of) refined and first- class gold, the tribute which my father had imposed upon your father, he brought year for year; he never refused it...

When your father died, in accordance with your father's word I did not drop you...To be sure, you were sick and ailing, but although you were ailing, I, the Sun, put you in the place of your father and took your brothers (and) sisters and the Amurru land in oath for you.

3. Ethical Stipulations: laws and demands required of the vassal

You, Duppi-Tessub, remain loyal toward the king of the Hatti land, the Hatti land, my sons (and) my grandsons forever!

With my friend you shall be friend, and with my enemy you shall be enemy...As I, the Sun, am loyal toward you, do you extend military help to the Sun and the Hatti land. If an evil rumour originates in the Hatti land that someone is to rise in revolt against the Sun and you hear it, leave with your foot soldiers and your charioteers and go immediately to the aid of the king of the Hatti land!

If anyone of the deportees from the Nuhassi land or of the deportees from the country of Kinza whom my father removed and myself removed escapes and comes to you, (if) you do not seize him and turn him back to the king of the Hatti land, and even tell him as follows: "Go! Where you are going to, I do not want to know," you act in disregard of your oath.

4. Sanctions: blessings promised for good action and curses promised for rebelliousness

The Sun-god of Heaven, the Sun-goddess of Arinna, the Storm-god of Heaven, the Hattian Storm-god, Seris (and) Hurris Mount Nanni (and) Mount Hazzi, the Storm-god of [. . .], the mountains, the rivers, the springs, the great Sea, heaven and earth, the winds (and) the clouds-let these be witnesses to this treaty and to the oath.

`The words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet - should Duppi-Tessub not honour these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land and together with everything that he owns.

But if Duppi-Tessub honours these words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet, may these gods of the oath protect him together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house (and) his country.

5. Succession:

When you take a wife, and when you beget an heir, he shall be king in the Amurru land likewise. And just as I shall be loyal toward you, even so shall I be loyal toward your son.

Klines urges the reader to notice the structural overlap to the entire Book of Deuteronomy:

1. Preamble (Deut 1:1-5)

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel... Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment to them (1:1, 1:3).

2. Historical Prologue (1:6-4:49)

The Lord our God said to us in Horeb... 'The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes (1:6, 1:30).

3. Ethical Stipulations (5:1-26:19)

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me (5:6-7).

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (6:5).

4. Sanctions (27:1-30:20)

And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments... all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you (28:1-2).

But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments... then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you (28:15).

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse (30:19).

5. Succession (31:1-34:12)

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them (31:7).'

In Kline's mapping of the progression of Deuteronomy to the suzerain-vassal treaty form-- especially emphasizing the 'curse formularies' (ethical stipulations with a negative valence) and 'concern, of all things, with the dynastic succession of Joshua', both of which are unlikely except through external inspiration-- he is essentially arguing that scripture, inasmuch as it is

an eternal covenant, is fixed and unalterable, in the way that a suzerain-vassal treaty was unalterable by law.

The rest of the preface of this book deals with contemporary reactions by scholars whose work is undermined by this insight. In particular if it is true that Deuteronomy was in fact inspired by the treaty form originating in the second millennium BC, then scholars who date Deuteronomy to the seventh century are likely wrong since there would be no reason as to why Moses would have been influenced by these writings. Kline, whose background is best characterized as conservative and reformed, singles out one such scholar, the theological liberal Gerhard von Rad. He credits Von Rad as having mapped the Deuteronomic covenant to the ancient treaty form 25-35 years prior to the present work, but says that von Rad (due to 'philosophical predilections') stopped short at saying this was due to the former being contemporary to the latter. So whereas von Rad's initial observations went on to become increasingly validated under further historical scrutiny, he was ironically unwilling to embrace the full historical implications, instead casting Deuteronomy as imitating "the liturgy of a cultic pattern" allegedly due to a precommitment to a position asserting the ahistoricity of Mosaic authorship. But as the historical evidence stacks against von Rad, we're led to reject his model of the broader scriptural corpus as phenomenological cult and embrace the Klinean model of scripture as immutable canon.