

**REASONS FOR THE INSERTION
OF THE INCOMPARABILITY OF GOD
IN SOLOMON'S PRAYER**



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Minithesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Magister Theologiae in the Department of Religion and Theology,
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ABSTRACT

REASONS FOR THE INSERTION OF THE INCOMPARABILITY OF GOD IN SOLOMON'S PRAYER

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In this minithesis, I argue that the prime reason of the Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr) for inserting the incomparability of God in Solomon's prayer is to convey his (Dtr's) theological interpretation of the history of Israel as history controlled by her sovereign God, Yahweh. Other reasons are also considered. In order to argue the main reason and others, the socio-historical aspects of the Davidic-Solomonic era are briefly highlighted as well as the Deuteronomistic Historian, his time and theology. A closer look at the Babylonian exile shows the significance of this event in terms of the theological thought of Dtr conveyed in the passage 1 Ki. 8:23-26 and the rest of Solomon's prayer.

A brief exploration of the theme "The Incomparability of Yahweh" as seen in the Deuteronomistic History is then undertaken to acquire a full comprehension of the incomparability formula within the Deuteronomistic writings. This also helps to place the formula within its immediate context, i.e. the passage and the prayer itself, and within its broader context, viz., the Deuteronomistic writings.

An exegesis of 1 Ki. 8:23-26 is undertaken giving further rise to lexical data leading to major themes. This critical exegesis, the lexical data and major themes lead to the postulation of the assumed reasons for the insertion of the incomparability formula by Dtr. Arguments for each reason are then put forth culminating in my argument that Dtr wants to convey his theological interpretation of the history of Israel as history controlled by her sovereign God, Yahweh.

The minithesis is concluded with an overview, reflections and theological perspectives of Dtr gleaned especially from the postulated reasons. Finally, this research shows the actuality of Dtr's theological thoughts for his time as well as for today's readers, especially in terms of the sovereignty of God, his *hesed* for his people and the motif of conditionality expressed in the Deuteronomistic theology permeating Solomon's prayer.

November 2007

DECLARATION

I declare that *Reasons for the insertion of the incomparability of God in Solomon's prayer* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or assessment in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Peter C. E. Loots

November 2007

Signed:



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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM, METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

1.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA OF CONCERN

A characteristic of Ancient Israel's worship is the positive incomparability formula, viz.

"O Lord God of Israel, there is no god like you" which asserts that Yahweh, the Hebrew God, is incomparable when compared with all other gods, past or present. The incomparability of Israel's God can be traced throughout Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, i.e. Joshua through to 2 Kings (e.g. Deut. 3:24; 33:26; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 7:22, 23; 1 Ki. 8:23; 18:5; 23:25). The Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr) presents King Solomon as rendering a deep and sophisticated prayer unto the incomparable God of Israel at the occasion of the dedication of the temple he has built for Yahweh (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-53).

It is indeed awesome to listen to the prayer and choice of words (the intentional diction of Dtr) to stir up national pride and obedience to Yahweh. Yet, we may ask simultaneously, is this the same Solomon of 1 Kings 1 - 2 (describing the manner in which his "throne was established") and the king of chapter 4 (where he makes use of forced labour – something now foreign to the people of the exodus)? What then is the reason or emphasis of Dtr for inserting this incomparability formula here?

This research intends to show that the main reason for the insertion of the incomparability of God into Solomon's prayer by Dtr was to promote the sovereignty of Israel's God as opposed to other deities, thereby also conveying his (Dtr's) theological interpretation of Israel's history. Other reasons will be considered, for example it will be argued that Dtr wants to show that Israel's God is the God who keeps covenant and mercy (*hesed*) with his servants who walk before him with all their heart (1 Kings 8:23).

Dtr presents the history and worship of Israel and Judah from the perspectives of his Deuteronomistic theology with its matrix in the Mosaic (Sinaitic) and Davidic covenants.

This study hopes to contribute, in its own way, to the theological debate of Old Testament scholars on the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of Yahweh's temple and the work of Dtr in the Book of Kings. The researcher hopes that it may also have relevance even for the church, especially in terms of the sovereignty of God, his *hesed* towards his people and the motif of conditionality expressed in the Deuteronomistic theology permeating this dedicatory prayer.

1.2 DELIMITATION AND STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The problem I wish to investigate in this thesis is: "What does the Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr) want to communicate by inserting the incomparability of Yahweh into the prayer of Solomon in 1 Ki. 8:23-53?"

This study will not pursue the incomparability formula throughout the Deuteronomistic writings, but will confine itself to the prayer of Solomon and more specifically to the use of the incomparability formula – "Lord God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven above or on earth below" – and its significance in 1 Ki. 8:23-26. A brief survey of the use and functioning of the formula as uttered by Dtr's Solomon will be given. We see here that right at the outset of the prayer, Solomon declares the incomparability of Yahweh. As far as the historical context is concerned, the study will not confine itself to the reign of King Solomon, but will take into account the time of Dtr as well.

The researcher is of the opinion that there must be a main reason, possibly among others, why Dtr inserted this incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer. There is a widely accepted view of this prayer of dedication that it could be perceived as an opportunity for Dtr to propagate certain of his own theological-political views. The prayers of David and Solomon are widely regarded as largely deuteronomistic compositions (Knoppers 1992: 421). Does Dtr here as elsewhere wish to stress that the cults of the high places during the period of the monarchy, as well as foreign cults, are considered a violation of the First Commandment (Deut. 5: 6-7; 4:39)? It may also be asked whether Dtr wants to convey his theological interpretation of the history of Israel (Yahweh's covenant people) as directed by their incomparable God.

The problem will be investigated through an exegetical method, inter alia through translation of the original Hebrew text, the study of certain key words and phrases, and a literary analysis. A

conceptual analysis of a number of concepts relevant to this study will be done, for example, the exclusive worship of Yahweh, the motif of incomparability, God's steadfast and loyal love (*hesed*), and the functioning of certain key verbs.

1.3 STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

The main reason for the insertion of the incomparability of God in King Solomon's prayer by the Deuteronomistic historian was to convince the people of the sovereignty of Israel's God as opposed to other deities.

1.4 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

This study intends to examine, in a scholarly and responsible manner, the main reason(s) for the insertion of the statement of the incomparability of God in king Solomon's prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-26) by the Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr). This section will discuss the methodology to be used to effect my intended research.

Since the intended research is in the field of Biblical studies, the nature of this study would be by way of *an exegetical and theological analysis*. I take the final text as normative and take due cognisance of the canonical approach. Should links be found with other Old Testament passages, e.g. in the Book of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles and Jeremiah, with reference to the incomparability formula and certain relevant deuteronomistic theological thoughts as expressed in 1 Ki. 8:23-26, then such links will be indicated in terms of such a canonical approach.

Seeing a fairly large section of the intended research would be exegetical, various secondary sources supportive of exegesis will be used, such as translations, commentaries, so-called introductions, journal articles, theologies, dictionaries of the Hebrew language, theological dictionaries, Bible concordances and sources on exegetical methods.

In Chapter 2 the prayer of Solomon will be placed into one of its historical contexts, by providing a brief overview of socio-historical aspects of Davidic-Solomonic period (with a focus on the reign of Solomon). This will be based on the assumption that knowledge of the political,

economic, social and religious situations that prevailed just prior to and during Solomon's time is necessary in order to understand the theological thinking of Dtr when he writes about that period.

Chapter 3 will show that it would be essential to this study to undertake an investigation into the pertinent underlying theology by the writer of Kings, viz. *the Deuteronomistic theology*. This chapter will discuss the Deuteronomistic historian, his time and theology. An understanding of the historic period of Dtr is necessary in order to understand his thoughts expressed in our text under scrutiny as well as through the rest of Solomon's prayer.

Dtr wrote in the aftermath of the devastating event of the exile (586 BC). Therefore, section 3.2 will briefly discuss the Babylonian exile with reference to the traumatic fall of Jerusalem, the situation within the exile, and possible theological concerns raised by the exilic community in Babylon. An in-depth research of the Babylonian exile, however, falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Section 3.3 will show how the incomparability formula, as inserted by Dtr, is steeped in the matrix of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. This will be argued by referring to relevant texts, though outside Dtr's writings (cf. Exod. 19:4-6, 8; 24:13), showing how the Sinaitic or Mosaic covenant was the instrument by which the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people was carried out. To posit the argument that the incomparability formula is also steeped in the Davidic covenant, a very brief overview will be given outlining the gist of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:11-16) culminating in Solomon sitting on the throne of David and having built a "house" for the Lord.

Section 3.4 intends to show, by referring to the passage and other relevant scriptural texts, how Dtr is inextricable from his theology, i.e. what he believed about the relationship between God and Israel. Therefore, a brief note about Dtr and his status within the historical and theological context of the Books of Kings will be given.

Chapter 4 will place Solomon's prayer in its literary context. An overview of the composition of the Books of 1 and 2 Kings and a brief synopsis of the contents of 1 Kings 1-11 (in which the dedicatory prayer features) will be presented in order to show the socio-historical and theological

matrix of this prayer, and per se, of the “incomparability formula” as inserted by Dtr. In this way the reader is enabled to see the context of this incomparability formula (1 Ki. 8:23) within the prayer itself, its relationship to the prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53), to Dtr’s view of Solomon (1 Ki. 1-11) and to Dtr’s overall theology expressed in Joshua through to 2 Kings. A very brief structural analysis of the prayer-text will be given in order to indicate the possible theological thinking of Dtr. However, it is not within the scope of this research to do an in-depth study of the structural composition of Solomon’s full prayer-text.

To end chapter 4, the theme “The incomparability of Yahweh” as seen in the Deuteronomistic writings will be briefly explored in Section 4.5 in order to show how Dtr uses the formula elsewhere.

Chapter 5 will form a major section of the thesis because the researcher intends to give a detailed exegesis of the passage in which the incomparability formula occurs, viz. 1 Ki. 8:23-26. A brief outline of the prayer will be followed by the specific passage, in three forms, namely, the Hebrew text, a transcription thereof and an English translation. Other translations of the Bible will be consulted in order to acquire a thorough perception of the text on hand. Both the Hebrew text and transcription is expected to show by way of its structure and diction, the assumed pattern of thought of Dtr. A very brief structural analysis of the passage will be done in order to understand the overall thought-structure as well as the semantic and theological function of the individual structural elements. By means of this structural analysis the central aspects and the totality of the message contained in the text will be grasped (cf. Els 1998: 35). The passage will be investigated with respect to its outline, possible patterns (e.g. repetitions and progression of thought), whether it is a self-contained unit and how it fits into the broader context of its placement (Solomon’s prayer); but also with respect to its historical context by researching the historical background and the social setting. An examination will be done of the literary context of the passage thereby revealing its literary function, the placement of the passage and also its form analysis. In order to achieve this, the researcher will first locate the passage within the broad, general categories of literary types contained in the Old Testament and then identify the specific literary type (genre). The detailed exegesis will be done, by procedures already mentioned, in order to explore Dtr’s assumed pattern of thought, his underlying theology and possible reasons for the insertion of the prominent incomparability formula.

A large section of chapter 5, namely 5.5, will focus on “Lexical Data Leading to Major Themes”. In this section the researcher will investigate and analyse various key words and phrases or expressions and their function within the passage, taking into account their significance in the broader context of Solomon’s prayer. In order to achieve this, major Hebrew lexicons and theological dictionaries of the Old Testament will be consulted. On the basis of said analysis, various relevant themes emanating from 1 Ki. 8:23-26 will then be discussed. The investigation into the various aspects mentioned above will provide the reader with perspectives on the text (1 Ki. 8:23-26) and the prayer of Solomon as a whole.

Chapter 5 will be concluded by a brief section on “Revisiting the passage in relation to its literary context”, showing how this passage relates to the rest of the prayer and the Deuteronomistic history. With this summary, the researcher shall draw together tentatively the essential discoveries from the previous sections of chapter 5, especially the lexical data, for the purpose of focusing on the specific theological “message” of the passage (1 Ki. 8:23-26), as it relates to the message of both its immediate and its wider context.

Chapter 6 will postulate the researcher’s assumptions of Dtr’s reasons for inserting the incomparability of Yahweh into Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple. The researcher will then argue in support of each reason postulated, referring to appropriate texts within Dtr’s writings. Each postulated reason will be dealt with in a separate sub-section.

In Chapter 7 the researcher will provide an overview of the previous chapters, followed by reflections on the reasons postulated for the insertion of the incomparability formula. Such reflections will only be on the most important sections relevant to the researcher’s hypothesis and especially, the arguments provided. The reflections on the arguments will give rise to certain theological perspectives of Dtr, derived from the completed exegesis of the passage, lexical data and some major themes emanating from such data.

As the final chapter, Chapter 8 will give an evaluation of the researcher’s treatise of his hypothesis and subsequent reflections, followed by a very brief conclusion. I hope that my understanding and exegesis of the passage have the theological significance I propose to attach to it. Up till this stage I would have tried to show that my approach to the text under scrutiny does, to some extent, agree with that of other scholars in this field of study.

The thesis will be finally concluded with a complete bibliography.



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CHAPTER 2

SOCIO-HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE DAVIDIC-SOLOMONIC ERA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The period of the Book of Kings deals with two chronological units as seen by the Deuteronomistic historian (Dtr), viz. the period of the united monarchy (1 Sam. 8 – 1 Kings 11) and the period of the divided monarchy (1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 25). These two periods of Israel's history are preceded by the period of the judges (Judg. 2 – 1 Sam. 7) (Otwell 1967: 57). The united monarchy lasted through the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. We view the history of Israel (in the Book of Kings) through Dtr's perception. The Deuteronomistic historians wrote in the ashes of the destruction of the monarchy and knew at first hand the bitterness of the woe God had brought upon them (Otwell 1967: 71). It was out of this period, reflecting in part the life of Israel in the exile, that the prayer of 1 Kings 8 was placed in the record of the dedication of Solomon's Temple.

This section confines itself to the reigns of David and Solomon. The latter will receive main emphasis, seeing he is the character who utters the prayer in 1 Kings 8.

2.2 FROM THE TRIBAL SYSTEM TO THE MONARCHY OF DAVID

It is important to note that Israel's tribal system did not disappear overnight after the monarchy had been established. The tribal groups, in the course of time, came together in a more centralized association especially during Solomon's reign. Thus in the Hebrew tradition we see the division of Israel into districts, which were allegedly introduced by Solomon to improve administration and the collection of taxes in his kingdom (1 Ki. 4:7-19). Fragments of tribal territories can be seen in the administrative districts of the time of the monarchy (Gerstenberger 2002: 117). In general, the tribal alliances of this period had to submit to the royal authority wherever the welfare of the state as a whole was at stake. However, some Israelite tribal leaders opposed the development of a monarchy because their territories were not so threatened by the Philistine and Ammonite power and also feared that their privileges and freedom would be drastically limited by this new authority (Roberts 1987: 386, 396).

The tribal system performed different functions in the Old Testament traditions after the formation of the state. It did not disappear overnight. Gerstenberger (2002: 117-118) says that it served as the background to the monarchy; as part of the basis of the division by the kings into districts and as a partial model for the organization of the army. The tribal system provided a religious symbol (the ark) and it was the source of Yahweh faith, etc. In the post-exilic period the tribal system had the function of entering every Israelite “in the list of generations” (1 Chr. 5:1, 17; 9:1).

The monarchy of Israel developed only late in their social history. The biblical tradition mentions clearly the motivation for the establishment of the central authority – a bureaucratic centralized system. This form of government was already in vogue in Israel’s neighbouring areas and seemed to be more effective than Israel’s loose tribal structure. The establishment of Israel’s monarchy can be seen as a counter-reaction to their small but strong neighbours. This centralization of power was also an important factor in the formation of Israel’s religion, the possible growth of the population, as well as the defence of the country. The result of this centralization of power and authority, through the monarchy, was the establishment of a central administration, economy and army, centralization of communication, resources and methods of weapon and even copper production (Gerstenberger (2002: 23). A central cult for the kingdom was established in order to legitimize power and give divine support for the ruling dynasty. This would safeguard the entire new organization of Israelite society (Gerstenberger: 2002: 22-23, 117). Thus with the establishment of the monarchy, a new religious ideology was developed to legitimate the earthly king as the chosen agent of the divine king, and under David this royal theology was elaborated to provide justification for his imperial conquests (Roberts 1987: 386). The researcher will show at a later stage whether the essence of the prayer bears relation to the above-mentioned opinions expressed respectively by Gerstenberger and Roberts.

King Saul was both the last of the judges and the first of the kings. He displays characteristics of both judge and king because he stands at the point in history where Israel changed from rule by judge to rule by king. Saul’s career ended in disaster. Thus, up till this point in Israel’s history, the period of the judges (including Saul) was an era of repeated faithlessness, an age in which Israel responded to each new act of God’s compassion and mercy by renewed faithlessness. King

Saul's effectiveness as king is the more difficult to evaluate because he was unfortunate to be succeeded by the charismatic David who captured the hearts and minds of the people.

The institution of the monarchy had sprung from the tribal federation and under Saul it was still in embryonic form. A new and decisive stage in the history of Israel was to open with the reign of David (De Vaux 1973: 94-95).

King David ruled Israel from about 1000 – 961 BC. He was regarded by Dtr as the ideal king of Israel, not only worthy to be emulated but also the one whose example God commanded David's descendants to follow. David was the greatest of Israel's kings, and the only one to establish a long-lived dynasty that lasted for over 400 years until the break-up of the state in 587 B.C. When Saul died, Israel was left at the mercy of the Philistines. David meanwhile became king over Judah in Hebron (2 Sam. 2:1-4) with the consent of the Philistines because he was their vassal. The people of Judah welcomed David. He was acclaimed king, a military hero elected king, by popular consent and anointed at the shrine of Hebron. David, after defeating his rival, Eshbaal, delivered the rest of the country from the hold of the Philistines. He subsequently secured and consolidated the state of Israel, making Jerusalem the new capital, "the City of David". David's conquests had transformed Israel into the foremost power of Palestine and Syria and convinced the people that Yahweh had indeed designated him (Bright 1972: 190-201). God emphasized his sovereign choice of David by the fact he was chosen over his apparently more qualified brothers. Yahweh promised David that he would be with him. The place of David in God's programme for Israel is seen as set forth in the Davidic Covenant (Heater 1991: 118-120). Dtr comments, "David became greater and greater, for Yahweh, the God of hosts, was with him" (2 Sam. 5:10). The present writer has omitted any discussion of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) as this event falls outside the scope of this study.

David's policy in religious matters was dictated by the desire to give the state legitimacy in the eyes of the people as the true successor of Israel's ancient order (Bright 1972: 202). David declared his own succession to the throne as an "everlasting covenant" (*bērît 'ōlām*) (2 Sam. 23:5). He therefore established the new shrine in Jerusalem where the Ark was housed as an official institution of the state. The introduction of the ark to Jerusalem, a politically neutral enclave near the border separating Judah and the northern tribes, was important to establishing the extent of the kingdom over all Israel (Anderson 1975: 181-182; Kaiser 1978: 157). Thus, as

mentioned earlier, under David this new religious ideology was elaborated to provide justification for his imperial conquests. Israel's covenant faith found new expressions in the different conditions of the monarchy. Now, instead of being bound together on the basis of covenant allegiance to Yahweh at the central sanctuary, Israel was bound together politically on the basis of a contract between king and people (Anderson 1975: 188).

The reader has to bear in mind that in spite of Israel's covenant faith finding new expressions in the different conditions of the monarchy, many groupings of the people of both the northern and southern kingdoms over whom David and Solomon reigned, successively, worshipped other deities and "brands of Yahwism" on the 'high places' where they had their religious shrines (Roberts 1987: 388). Hence, we see David and Solomon's respective initiatives of centralizing the Yahweh worship and, of course, Dtr's purposeful insertion of "Lord God of Israel, there is no god like you ..." (1 Ki. 8:23)

David's reign continued till he was an old man. His latter years, however, was marred by much intrigue, violence and even outright armed rebellion (1 Ki. 1-2). At the heart of all these troubles was the question of the throne succession (Anderson 1975: 184-186; Bright 1972: 202-203). Despite the fact that David, the anointed one, became ensnared in and humiliated by his own lusts and embarrassed by revolts from his own family, God's promise still held. It was not so much how David maintained legitimate control over the kingdoms of Judah and Israel but how Yahweh controlled human destiny for his own purpose (Kaiser 1978: 163). Thus in the midst of human tragedy and failure, God's purpose and promise still went onward (Kaiser 1978: 163-164). The reign of king David, however, would pave the way for a central palace and central temple. This would then bring us to the reign of David's son, Solomon, who built and dedicated the temple for Yahweh's abode and worship.

2.3 SOLOMON: HIS REIGN AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Solomon was king David's tenth son but the second son of him and Bathsheba, the former wife of Uriah the Hittite. When he was born the Lord loved him, so that the child was also called Jedidiah "beloved of the Lord" by Nathan, the court prophet (2 Sam.12: 24-25). This name implied David's restoration to divine favour (2 Sam. 12:25). Solomon did not enter into the history of Israel until in David's advanced old age, when a conspiracy attempted to make

Adonijah, the eldest son of David and Haggith, king (Bryant 1982: 587-588). Solomon was only nineteen years old when he was crowned as king. It could be said that Solomon became king due to the trickery of his mother and Nathan. Little is known of the early life of Solomon.

Israel's monarchy ran its further course from the splendour of Solomon to the pitiful days of Jehoiachin, who ended in disgrace and exile, and those of Zedekiah. It can be inferred that Solomon's claim to kingship was based only on his birth and the influence of his political supporters (cf. 1 Ki. 1:11- 2:46).

Dtr gives the reader a picture of a wise and just king of peace. However, right at the start this picture is disturbed by the conclusion of the succession narrative, which at the same time marks the beginning of the history of Solomon. 1 Kings 2 records how Solomon eliminated his political opponents cruelly and on unconvincing pretexts, beginning with his older brother Adonijah (1 Ki. 2:13, 25). 1 Ki. 2:46 has indeed a macabre ring to it (Rendtorff 1985: 34). Anderson (1975: 189) states that this was the royal road to power that the kings of the ancient world often travelled, and in this respect Israel had indeed become like the neighbouring nations. Nevertheless, Solomon's kingship was clear. The entire city acclaimed with great shouts, "Solomon sits on the throne of the kingdom" or "Solomon is now the king" (1 Ki. 1:46). Solomon's counsel and charge from his father was full of promise (1 Ki. 2:1-9).

Solomon, David's successor, inherited an almost undisputed possession of David's throne and immense stores of wealth from his father. According to historical tradition, David came to the throne the hard way while Solomon, on the other hand, was "born to the purple", and never knew anything else but the protected, extravagant life of the king's palace. The name of Solomon came to be the symbol of wealth, worldly splendour and the glory of empire. His kingdom of 60,000 square miles was ten times as large as that which his father had started with. The wealth and glory of Solomon's reign fairly took away the breath of the queen of Sheba (1 Ki. 10: 5), (cf. the words of David's officials in 1 Ki. 1:47).

David's successor was not a man of war and committed him to peace-time projects such as building programmes, trade and industry, though without neglecting the defence of his empire. His reign can be seen as the culmination of Israel's material history and his cabinet was greater than any king of Israel ever had (1 Ki. 4). He showed successful governmental administration

and a policy of foreign cooperation. Solomon's remarkable wisdom and patronage of the arts made him a wonder to all surrounding peoples (1 Ki. 4: 34).

King Solomon's request in 1 Ki. 3:9 for an "understanding mind" was for wisdom and understanding to rule and to judge Israel in true justice. He desired gifts that would qualify him for his work and calling in life. One of the chief functions of the oriental king has always been to hear and judge cases or disputes. Solomon wanted to do this by divine inspiration and God granted this request (1 Ki. 3:28). A commendable feature of Solomon's royal rule is to be seen here in that even the ordinary citizens had access to the king (cf. 1 Ki. 3:16-28).

Acknowledgment has to be given to king Solomon for his great achievements. A treatise on the great achievements of Solomon in terms of his governmental machinery, establishing himself as the special representative of Yahweh and, in turn, his descendants as well; his economic enterprises partly enslaving his own people; the building of the temple itself, and his cultural and social changes brought about within the nation, falls outside this present study. A brief note would later be included to say something of the effect of Solomon on the religious life of the Hebrews by virtue of the temple he built "for Yahweh".

As the builder of the temple Solomon deserves recognition, but sadly though, the temple reflects the syncretistic elements he introduced. He borrowed all that Canaan (Phoenicia) had to offer, especially in the structure of the edifice and use of equipment in the temple. It was a process of assimilation with its culminating point in Solomon (Christie 1952: 191). Although the architectural structure and the implements used in the temple were, at that time, the culturally accepted norm of religious expression, I believe that it violated Yahweh's injunction to David's descendants in terms of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. This religious syncretism – that is, the assimilation of foreign elements with Israel's national cult, together with his economic policies contributed to the downfall of Solomon's kingship (cf. 1 Ki.11) and eventually of the Hebrew nation. Christie (1952: 192-193) infers that Solomon, indirectly at least, is partially responsible for the messages of the eighth century prophets. Meyers (1987: 364) posits that the erection of temple buildings served to convince subjugated or allied peoples of the supremacy of a particular god and of the regime associated with that god.

On a more positive note though, the temple stood as a token of the fulfillment of God's covenant with David. Solomon is now the manifest possessor of the divine blessing. Thus, Solomon's effect on Hebrew religion cannot be ignored because the temple came to mean the centralizing force in Hebrew religion.

The temple was not essentially a religious center; it was the house of Yahweh, the palace of the Great King (Israel's sovereign and incomparable God) who could and must be visited there by his elected people. The temple then served as the focal point of Israel's faith. Solomon, in his dedication prayer reiterates the necessity of his people (and foreigners) to look and pray toward this temple in order to be heard, forgiven and restored by Yahweh. Merrill (1991b: 176) sees the temple as the visible expression of the invisible God and that with all its forms and functions, the temple becomes a sublime revelatory vehicle of the character and purposes of Yahweh, the incomparable God. Yahweh had indeed set himself apart there and nowhere else.

King Solomon, despite his great reputation and wonderful achievements, proved himself to be a tragic hero i.e. a person of high nobility and magnitude of character but with a fatal flaw within his/ her make-up causing the downfall of such a character. He was selfish, showing a pretentious display of wealth and glory, extravagant, a "lover of women" (though this was motivated by political policies), and a tyrannical despot as reflected during his economic and building projects (cf. 1 Ki. 4 - 5). The wise Solomon willfully forgot the conditional promise made to him by his father in 1 Chron. 22:13; 28:7 and then the serious word, "If you forsake [the Lord], he will reject you forever" (1 Chron. 28:9). The narrative found in 1 Ki.10 - 11) shows the tolerance of Dtr towards Solomon. He even tries to defend the king in 1 Ki.11: 4. Dtr, being favourably disposed towards Solomon, even presented the idea that Solomon had more direct access to Yahweh than either David his father or any of his successors (Heater 1991: 132). In the end, even Dtr has to confess that, "Yahweh was angry with Solomon" (1 Ki. 11: 9; cf. 1 Ki. 9:1-9). The reign of Solomon caused Israel's political, cultural and economic status to soar but the crash came suddenly and even permanently after his death. Anderson (1975: 196) remarks that the aftermath of Solomon's reign could be interpreted to show that the God of Israel made himself known even in political events that shook the foundations of the kingdom that men sought to build. Therefore the rule of Solomon according to Dtr stood under divine judgment (1 Ki. 11:11-13, 23).

Many tribal leaders and followers less loyal to the Davidic house, as mentioned earlier, never forgot that the king ruled by the sufferance of Israel's covenant God and was subject to criticism in the light of an older tradition. Thus, many of them spoke out against the tyranny of Solomon, whom they regarded as the portrayal of what a king should not be (Deut. 17:14-20) and regarded his rule as intolerable. There was thus always tension within the monarchical state. Bright (1972: 224) says that neither David nor Solomon could solve this fundamental problem of bridging the gap between tribal independence and the claims of the new order. Solomon's oppressive social and economic policies widened that gap irreparably.

In conclusion, it is generally believed that the history of Samuel and Kings was assessed from the viewpoint of the moral standard of Deuteronomy and some of its chief connecting points can be seen with 1 Samuel 12; 2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 8 and 2 Kings 17 (Kaiser 1978: 45; See also Childs 1979: 291).

2.4 THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE PASSAGE

The historical setting of the passage is the time of the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem by King Solomon. This dedication did not take place till twenty years after the building of the temple had begun, or thirteen years after its completion, and when Solomon had also completed the building of the palace (Keil and Delitzsch 1973: 118). The dedication of the temple coincided with the Festival of Sukkoth in the 7th month, the month of Ethanim – a royal festival of Zion. It was a festival both of the foundation of the sanctuary and foundations of the dynasty. Zion was also the place of the throne of Yahweh's anointed. This passage, in the form of a prayer, is part of a historical narrative by Dtr. The latter's theological insight implied by this pericope and the rest of the prayer is to be seen in the socio-historical situation of the Book of Kings.

The above-mentioned historical developments give us some insight to the intended meaning of Dtr with Solomon's prayer. Knoppers (1992: 421) asserts that Solomon's formal, royal prayer, like those of king David (2 Sam. 7:18-29) and king Hezekiah (2 Ki. 19:15-19 and 20:2-3), appears at a critical moment for the Davidic throne and national cult in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORIAN, HIS TIME AND THEOLOGY

3.1 THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORIAN AND HIS TIME

The later anonymous revisers and editors of the books of Samuel and Kings are called “Deuteronomists”, from the Deuteronomic school of thought, and were active during the exile which took place in the sixth century BCE (Gerstenberger 2002: 163). Eybers (1977: 95) asserts that many sources and traditions were used in the writing of the book of Kings, but it is found that only “the history (book) of Solomon”, the “Chronicler books” of Israel and Judah and most probably the “court history” of David can definitely be pointed out as written sources while certain prophetic reports were probably used as oral sources by Dtr.¹

This present study does not focus on a detailed study of all the sources used by Dtr nor on his entire theology expressed in the deuteronomistic writings. Relevant to our present study is, that for the Solomonic period, the chief source is clearly the “Book of the Acts of Solomon”(1 Ki. 11:31) that would have provided the deuteronomist with official information on Solomon’s building and commercial operations. Mayes (1983: 109) notes that for the monarchic period following the death of Solomon, Dtr had three major sources, viz. the “Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel” (1 Ki. 14:19 and about sixteen times elsewhere), the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah” (1 Ki. 14:29 and about fourteen times elsewhere) and a collection of stories of prophets and of prophetic interventions in the succession of Israelite kings in 1 Kings 11, 12, 14, 20, 22 and 2 Kings 9-10 (cf. also Soggin 1989: 228-230).

Gray (1970: 213) thinks that there is evidence of at least two hands of Deuteronomistic editorship in Kings. One of the writers did not visualize the collapse of the Davidic dynasty and the destruction of the Temple while the other redactor experienced the exile. The text to be studied would presumably be the work of two historians, namely, the Deuteronomistic compiler

¹ The terms “the Deuteronomic Historian”, “Dtr”, “the Deuteronomistic writer”, “the Deuteronomic writer” are all indications of the same individual (or the same group). In the literature these terms are used interchangeably. The researcher will use the terms “Deuteronomic” and “Deuteronomistic” according to the German demarcation, i.e. “Deuteronomic law” would refer to the law as expressed in the Book of Deuteronomy while “Deuteronomistic theology” refers to the theological views expressed by the Deuteronomistic Historian.

and a second redactor. In this study the postulated two hands will not be distinguished and the two together will be referred to as Dtr.

Von Rad (1975: 335) says that Dtr who wrote and passed judgments in the time of the exile was not only confronted with much remembered material but the issue that weighed most heavily was the burden of certain historical experiences which had long ago solidified, and the authority of certain theological ideas or traditions² upon which Dtr depended in his time or in the circle to which he belonged.

Given the permeating theology expressed in the book of Kings, it can be inferred that Dtr was influenced by the theology expressed in Deuteronomy. This stance can be seen in the manner (the formula) in which the kings of Israel (the North) and Judah (the South) are respectively described in terms of their succession to the throne and their end (cf. 1 Ki. 1; 14:21-24 and 29-31; 15:1-3, 25-26; 16:23-28). It can, however, be said that Dtr presents the history of Israel and Judah from the perspective of a Deuteronomistic theology. Childs (1979: 291) says that Dtr identifies himself, not just with a book, but with that religious community constituted by the Torah of Moses, as interpreted by Deuteronomy.

Niehaus (1997: 541) calls Dtr of Joshua – Kings the putative Deuteronomist and says that Dtr was an exilic writer/editor who subscribed to the Deuteronomistic theology and redacted the historical books from a deuteronomistic point of view. Because of Dtr's work, Israel's disastrous end can be understood theologically as an outworking of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy (Deut. 28 and 2 Ki. 17:7-20).

Dtr has contributed to the historical narratives mainly by way of combining given source materials to present a total picture. He, however, inserted his own compositions designed to show the reader that the introduction of the monarchy had divine consent. The Nathan oracle on Solomon as builder of the temple has also been expanded by Dtr to include a promise that David, the servant of Yahweh, is the founder of an eternal dynasty. This prophetic oracle is modified further (cf. 2 Sam. 7:10-11, 22-24) so that now it is Israel as a whole is once again the object of comforting assurance of restoration (Mayes 1983: 106-107).

² Von Rad (1975: 338) is of the opinion that it is only in the Deuteronomistic History that the two traditions of election – the Israel-Covenant and the David-Covenant traditions – are finally fused. This is then also the last great fusion of traditions in Israel's history.

Dtr postulates that each leader of Israel was “raised up” specifically for the act of salvation done through him (e.g. 1 Ki. 15:9-15). King Solomon who prays and petitions God on behalf of his subjects is deemed great by Dtr because the Lord has endowed him, like his father, David, with an unusual measure of Yahweh’s spirit and “good” (Otwell 1967: 59-60). The king then, according to Dtr, became the channel of God’s blessings and judgments (Kaiser 1978: 162).

Dtr assumes that the Davidic dynasty, by way of the Davidic covenant, is under divine protection by the sovereign God of Israel (Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:16). He holds that the designated and anointed monarch or one nominated by Yahweh through the prophetic word, also receives permanent divine legitimation all his life (Gerstenberger 2002: 168-169).

Another idea expressed by Dtr is the incomparability and sovereignty of Yahweh, as recorded in Solomon’s prayer. Thus, this acknowledgment of Yahweh’s having proved to be the true and only God in heaven and on the earth, produces the confidence in Dtr’s Solomon, for offering the dedication prayer that will be sure of an answer (Keil and Delitzsch 1973: 126).

Dtr also articulates the theme of conditionality (the “if” and “then” of Deuteronomy) to his readers, viz., that Israel (including its kings), as people of the covenant, are obliged to love, obey, execute justice, worship and serve Yahweh exclusively. Israel will then experience *shalom* (Hebrew *šālôm*). Thus a strong unifying element, devised by Dtr, throughout Kings is the constant use of a single criterion of judgment on the kings of Israel and Judah, viz. whether or not they removed the high places. Especially from the time that the temple was built in Jerusalem by Solomon it was, for Dtr, the worship of Israel at that temple alone which was legitimate (cf. 1 Ki. 14:21) (Mayes 1983: 108).

The diction used by Dtr in Solomon’s prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53) is indicative of his (Dtr’s) thought of Yahweh controlling human destiny for his purpose and the prophetic inferences of his plan for the throne and Davidic kingdom (Kaiser 1978: 163-164). Dtr takes advantage in this prayer as an opportunity to make Solomon the mouthpiece of his theology and his philosophy of Israel’s history (De Vries 1985: 121).

It can be said that although Dtr undertook his work under difficult circumstances (during the exile), it would be wrong to consider his presentation of history as if without hope, for at the heart of it all was the lasting continuity of the promise made to David concerning the eternity of his dynasty; as long as the lamp of David lasts (1 Ki. 11:32, 36) nothing is irretrievably lost and the exile does not erase this promise (Jacob 1958: 196).

Childs (1979: 294) sees a “messianic hope” in the writings of Dtr. There appears to be a pattern of repentance and forgiveness in this Deuteronomistic history serving as a model to be followed (cf. 1 Ki. 8:46-49). Childs (1979) says that because Dtr does not restrict the presence of God to either the temple or the land, the possibility of renewed blessing is left open to the hope of future generations.

In conclusion, Dtr wrote in the ashes of the destruction of the monarchy and thus knew at first hand the woe of judgment God had brought upon them, but the faithlessness of Israel did not bring an end to Israel. Part of Solomon’s prayer (1 Ki. 8:46-50) reflects the life of Israel in the exile. Even at the end of the book of Kings (2 Ki. 25:27-30) the Deuteronomistic historians implied that Yahweh, whose just anger had destroyed the Israelite monarchy, had again heard the prayers of his people and would again pour out upon them the blessing of his compassion because theirs was “a great God who ruled them in justice and love” (Otwell 1967: 72). Israel’s God is indeed the incomparable God. There is a glimmer of hope for the restoration of Israel found in the closing verses of 2 Kings 25. It expresses the will of Yahweh for his people (Mayes 1983: 132). The reader is also referred to Psalm 89:20-37 in this regard. Therefore, despite the fundamental pessimism of its considerations, the Deuteronomistic History, and with it the Book of Kings, ends on an optimistic note (Soggin 1989: 231).

In order to understand more of Dtr’s theology and his possible reasons for inserting the incomparability formula in Solomon’s prayer, we have to look briefly at a decisive event during the time of Dtr’s writing – the Babylonian exile.

3.2 THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

A brief look at the historical event of the exile and its implications for Israel, God’s covenant people, would throw more light on 1 Ki. 8:23-26 within the context of Solomon’s prayer.

There were earlier deportations (Gray 1970: 223; Anderson 1975: 395) but the Babylonian exile was regarded as the main exile of Israel. Scholars date the Babylonian exile to 586/587-538 B.C.E. (Otwell 1967: 132; Anderson 1975: 401; Von Rad 1975: 346). Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the Babylonian Empire, destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. and took many of the people of Judah, especially the influential citizens, as prisoners to Babylon (Van Zyl et al 1977: 184). The poorer elements of the population were left behind to harvest the crops (2 Ki. 25:12; Jer. 52:16). According to 2 Ki. 24:14, there were 10,000 people, women and children included, taken into exile. Most scholars believe that there were not many more than 10,000 and that a large group remained in Jerusalem and Judah (Le Roux 1987: 127; Van Zyl et al 1977: 185, 192). Many had died in the destruction of Jerusalem. A vivid description of this destruction of Jerusalem is given in Lam. 1:1-10, 14-16; 5: 2-4, 18; 2: 6-11 and Ezek. 5:1-17. There seems to have been death, confusion, isolation and finally banishment.

What was the situation like during the Babylonian exile? The fall of Jerusalem resulted in major loss and massive disorientation among the Jews. Any threat of national revival was removed by Nebuchadnezzar's actions. Anderson (1975: 399, 418) says that many Jews found the economic and political conditions intolerable and migrated steadily to Egypt to start a new life. Those left in Palestine were destitute and lacked direction because of having lost their leaders and, most importantly, their national and religious symbols which defined them as Yahweh's covenant people. The same sentiment was shared by those exiles in Babylon. These national and religious symbols of the people of Israel were their independence, the kingship, the land and the temple.

The exiles, away from their homeland, now had to face and adjust to the situation of the Babylonian environment. Their faith had been rooted in their promised land, the inheritance Yahweh had given them, and in the temple of Jerusalem, the place where Yahweh caused his name to dwell. Given the splendour and superiority of the Babylonian culture and its seeming superior religion over Israel's traditional faith, there was a real danger of the Jews abandoning their faith.

The kingdom of Judah lost its independence and became a province of the Babylonian empire. The normative view was that God had, up till the destruction of Jerusalem, channeled national (covenantal) blessings through the house of David, but now the Davidic king, Jehoiachin, was also a prisoner in Babylon (Van Zyl et al 1977: 185). Otwell (1967: 71) says that though the

sovereignty of God is pictured as displaying itself in the establishing of the Davidic kingship in a new outburst of blessing, the kings and people proved faithless and God acted in judgment – the destruction of the monarchy (cf. also Mayes 2002: 71).

Land with its concomitant rights and privileges, was of great historical and theological significance for the life and faith of Israel. The promised land had been the evidence of Yahweh's favour upon Israel and now it was no longer in their possession. Land provided the basis for individual, family and national prosperity; was imbued with a theological significance; was part of God's purposive action in history, and became a sign of the abiding relationship between Yahweh and his people. Israel's privilege of dwelling in the land is counterbalanced by the fact that their disobedience to Yahweh would cause them to lose possession of it. Thus there was a continued demand for Israel's obedience and emphasis on the obligation they owed to Yahweh. They should not attribute possession of the land to their own power and ability but that it had been freely granted to them by the will and *hesed* of God and as his gracious gift to them (cf. Deut. 4: 37f; 6:10-12; 7:8) (Brueggemann 1977: 239). Dtr knew that the promise of the land also served to remind Israel that they are not of Canaan-land. The people were sitting in exile now due to their disobedience to the commandments of God. They had been driven from the land promised and given to their fathers.

Another devastating event, in fact the most ignominious blow, with the exile was the destruction of the temple. Now in exile, the most serious adjustment that the Jews in Babylonia had to make was a religious one. The temple of Jerusalem had been the focus of Israel's religious life – the seat of the divine presence, and also a sign of election. It recalled and signified Yahweh's choice of Jerusalem and of David's dynasty, and then the subsequent protection afforded to Jerusalem and this dynasty (De Vaux 1973: 325-329). Now not only the entire city of Jerusalem was lying in ruins but the temple as well. The Ark of the Covenant was most probably also destroyed in the process. Such was the end of the temple that had been the pride of Israel. Due to the destruction of the temple the religious life in Jerusalem itself was at a low.

The exiles refused to transplant their cult to foreign soil. No temple was built in Babylon because foreign land was considered impure. The fact that the temple service could not be performed in Babylon gave rise to regular meetings on the Sabbath for worship and the study of the Torah as religious activities. It is believed that priestly activities such as the teaching of Israel's faith also

continued during the time of the exile. Knoppers (1999: 234) says that it seems unlikely that either the community left in Judah or in exile stood still but there was development in both. Many scholars believe that a number of prayers found in the book of Psalms were composed during the exile, e.g. Ps. 89:38-39, 46: 130:1; 137:1-7. This could be true because Israel, despite various historical events, was seen as a worshipping community who regarded Yahweh as their sovereign Lord and King. Given the religious activities being pursued by the worshipping community, it is believed that, according to Jeremiah's prophecy, the future of the covenant people did not lie with the remnant left in Jerusalem, and definitely not with the exiles in Egypt but with those faithful exiles in Babylonia. In fact, the momentum of Judean societal life, after the fall of Jerusalem, shifted from Judah to Babylonia (Van Zyl et al 1977: 192).

Anderson (1975: 403, 407, 418) says that the Babylonian exiles were always kept informed what was happening in Jerusalem either by means of verbal messages or in writing, e.g. Jeremiah's letter in Jer. 29. They also lived more comfortably than those in Egypt (Van Zyl et al 1977: 197), even though many of them longed to return to Judah. In fact, some of the Babylonian exiles adjusted so well that they held controlling business interests in the city of Nippur in Babylonia (Anderson 1975: 404, 418). However, the most serious adjustment that the Jews of Babylonia had to make was a religious one.

In spite of the exile being an exceptional national crisis for Israel, for many of them the faith in Yahweh survived. The faith of Israel was preserved with great zeal in the Babylonian exile in contrast to the Egyptian exile where the religious heritage gave way to foreign ideas and practices (Anderson 1975: 420; cf. also Van Zyl et al 1977: 198). However, a number of the exiles did succumb to the social and religious culture of the mighty Babylonia. Van Zyl et al (1977: 197) say that the "maelstrom" of the foreign Babylonian culture threatened continuously to suck them in and carry them with.

The exile is regarded as a very dark and tragic period in the religious and historical life of Israel. They were filled with rage, sadness and grief, and experienced a deep sense of loss that permeated their exilic life. Exilic Israel had lost everything they valued and everything that gave life coherence (Birch et al 1999: 347). The nation was shaken to its foundations, especially its religious foundations. This tragic event also marked the beginning of a completely new chapter in the history of Israel's faith.

It was then in the light of this historical period and as part of its theological activity that Dtr penned the prayer of Solomon. A section of Solomon's prayer (1 Ki. 8:33-34, 46-50) reflects the life of Israel in the exile.

In contemplating the *theological concerns*³ of the exilic period, we must bear in mind that up till the time of the exile, Israel's faith in Yahweh, her covenant God, had a historical base, viz., the era of the patriarchs, the exodus events and the Davidic dynasty. Israel's past served as a basis of her thinking about God and proclamation concerning this God. The advent of the exile now called into question this view of Israel's faith. The reason for this was that they found themselves deprived of their promised land and in a foreign country, under a foreign yoke (Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 77-78; Mayes 2002: 72; Van Zyl et al 1977: 196).

Dtr addresses concerns that plagued the community of exiles in Babylonia. These concerns were about Israel's identity and worship, God's faithfulness, his judgment, sovereignty and power, his presence, about beginning again (hope), continuity and change and about leadership (Fretheim 1983: 46-47; Birch et al 1999: 346).

Pertinent questions of identity on Israel's mind were whether they were still the people of Yahweh or "Has Yahweh forsaken his people?" Israel had previously believed that as a result of the facts of the exodus from Egypt, Yahweh's election and covenant, God would never abandon them. According to Israel's national religion, Yahweh was the God of Israel who was presumed to be the sovereign God of heaven and earth and therefore their eternal protector (cf. Deut. 4:31, 39; 10:17 and 1 Ki. 8:23). They found themselves now in exile as if abandoned forever, and the other remnant leaderless and in a state of seemingly hopelessness in the shattered land of Judah. Mayes (2002: 72) says that the exiles, the emerging remnant, being politically and socially dependent on the Babylonians, were compelled to establish their religious identity without recourse to political organs (a Davidic king and capital city) through which it could be implemented. Anderson (1975: 411) also adds that the question of the destiny of the individual Israelite had to be faced more seriously than ever before.

³ This thesis will deal with theological concerns or questions of the exiles relevant to 1 Ki. 8:23-26 only.

According to Dtr, sin was the main cause of the demise of Judah (Deist 1987: 101). The ultimate sin of Israel was the sin of idolatry that resulted in the rejection of the Torah and the covenant of Yahweh. From it flowed all the evil and abuses practiced by the Israelites against one another (Heater 1991: 154). The people themselves had made a choice: they did not repent and return to Yahweh, and thus subsequent punishment was inevitable.

Fretheim (1983: 46) states that the exiles were faced with questions of guilt, such as “What went wrong?” “Are we to be blamed?” “If so, can we be forgiven?” “Are we being punished for the sins of others?” Dtr infers that their punishment was due to nothing else but the sin of disobedience and subsequent idolatry.

The exilic community grappled with questions of hope such as “Is there any basis for hope?” or “Are we condemned to despair?” (Fretheim 1983: 46). The exiles should not succumb to the fatalistic notion that they are condemned to despair. They might have assumed that God had abandoned them completely but there was a basis of hope because Yahweh was still the God of Israel who was ready to show his steadfast and loyal love to the obedient descendants of David. Dtr’s passage indicates the promise of grace and hope to David and his dynasty.

In their crisis of faith the Babylonian exiles were facing a concern about the divine power of Yahweh. Heater (1991: 154) believes that the great question of the exile was, “How could Yahweh desert his people and allow them to suffer the reproach of domination by a people worshipping pagan gods?” Fretheim (1983: 46-47) states that Israel may have questioned themselves: “Given Israel’s defeat at the hands of enemies who served other gods, what does that say about the power of Yahweh?” They questioned the ability of their God to execute deliverance for them.

The seemingly insecure state of the exiles in Babylonia caused them to reflect on questions of idolatry and syncretism such as “Has it paid us to worship only one God?” and “Would it not serve our future better if we were more syncretistic?” (Fretheim 1983: 47). Their desperation and wavering in faith may have caused them to forget Yahweh’s commandment of exclusive worship of him and allegiance to him alone. The community of exiles in Babylonia had a deep longing after the city of Zion and simply could not forget Jerusalem. But just as Jerusalem could not be forgotten, likewise Yahweh could not be worshipped cultically in this defiled Babylon. Israel,

being prisoners in foreign Babylonia with its many deities, should not succumb further to the sin of idolatry and of syncretism.

The exilic community knows from the Torah that they are the people of Yahweh. They also know the stipulation of the Deuteronomistic code that, as a people of God, they should not mix with the foreign nations nor adhere to the customs and beliefs of such nations. But now, surrounded and seemingly overpowered by the inhabitants of Babylonia, questions of purity bothered them. Questions such as “What should be our relationship to other peoples, given the troubles such mixing has occasioned for us in the past?” and “Should we be separatistic?” existed among them (Fretheim 1983: 47). There was the real possibility that some of Yahweh’s people may be absorbed into the superior culture of Babylonia.

Fretheim (1983: 46) postulates that other possible questions of divine faithfulness lingering on the minds of the exiles were, “Will God remain true to the ancient promises?” They knew the old promises of prosperity given to Abraham, the promise of mighty deliverance and inheritance given to Moses with the exodus event and then the Davidic covenant promises. The exilic community found themselves deprived of their land, their city destroyed, people killed and others deported, and in a general state of being destitute. Thus the burning question troubling their minds was “Do promises of land, prosperity, etc., still hold or were such promises forgotten?” Bright (1972: 351) notes that the ruins of Jerusalem, the Holy City and temple, pressed upon their hearts; confessing their sins, they prayed for the restoration thereof through Yahweh’s divine intervention as in the days of the exodus.

The destruction of the temple gave rise to serious questions relating to divine presence, “With the destruction of the temple, is God present with the people anymore?” “Is God available where we now are?” The heavens were deemed as God’s holy dwelling and his abode but so was his holy temple too (1 Ki. 8:30; Ps. 11:4). The ark and the temple, the place where Israel’s God was thought to be present in the land, having been destroyed, the question of faith and worship in a foreign land arose (Fretheim 1983: 47, 49). Where and how could they offer sacrifices, temple service and worship unto their God in a strange and foreign land, in a land where other deities seemed to be in control? (cf. Ps. 137:1-6) (Anderson 1975: 419). Psalm 137 is explicitly located in the exile and is congruent with the larger liturgical pattern of protest and complaint but which reflect the particular crisis of the exile (Birch et al 1999: 347-348). The concerns relating to

Yahweh's presence, in turn, gave rise to other questions of continuity and change such as "To what extent, if at all, can we count on the old truths?" "Will long standing symbols of the faith, such as the temple, remain a part of what it means to be the people of God?" (Fretheim 1983: 47). Even the supreme central role claimed by the temple had not justified itself in history (Mayes 2002: 72).

Fretheim (1983: 47) infers that there could have existed questions of leadership among the exilic community. They grappled with this concern of leadership because their present king, Jehoiachin, was also a prisoner of Babylonia and so were a number of their influential leaders. The supreme central role that had been claimed by the king had not justified itself in history (Mayes 2002: 72). What and where is Israel's centre now? The exilic community may have asked themselves who would lead them, like a Moses of old, out of this bondage back to their promised land?

The sense of devastation, tremendous loss and exile did not lead to despair and a loss of faith. Birch et al (1999: 346) are of the opinion that the exile rather became a significant moment in the life of the Jewish community for inventive and generative faith, which experimented with new expressions of that faith and which produced much of the eloquent and more determined literature of the Old Testament.

The exile was a period of religious activity and a time of concentrated attention to Israel's religious heritage by the Deuteronomistic writers, the interpreters of the exilic period (Anderson 1975: 421). Otwell (1967: 129) says by looking at the exile, the mind of the past (historical period) is reconstructed to understand and look into that particular world and listen.

A cursory glance at the passage intended for exegesis already shows Dtr's theological concerns in themes such as Lord God of Israel, the sovereignty and incomparability of Yahweh, his constant loyal love, the Davidic promise, the temple and obedience to Yahweh. These themes find their significance within the prayer as formulated by Dtr against the backdrop of the Babylonian exile. Many scholars (e.g. Fretheim 1983: 44) postulate that the final edition of the Deuteronomistic History was written with a specific audience in view, namely, the community of exiles in Babylon.

3.3 COVENANT THEOLOGY – THE MOSAIC AND DAVIDIC COVENANTS

A major theological thought concerning the exiles reflected by Dtr is that Israel, despite its disobedience, is still Yahweh's covenant people and he its incomparable covenant God. We will have a brief look at the Davidic and Mosaic covenants, seeing that Solomon refers to these covenants in the beginning of his prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-26).

The Sinai or Mosaic covenant was the instrument by which the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people (Israel) was carried out. Yahweh offered the covenant (Ex. 19:4-6) and the people accepted it (Ex. 19:8). There are conditional elements in this covenant (see Ex. 19:5). Israel (as God's chosen people) now had a free choice how they would respond to Yahweh. If Israel submits, it would be above all nations the "treasured possession" of God. They would be his personal property (*səgullâ*), his choice possession (Merrill 1991a: 32-33).

Yahweh, the God of Israel, is preeminently the God who manifests his saving presence in history. Israel believed that Yahweh, the sovereign God, the incomparable One, was manifested in the crucial historical-political event of the Exodus. They also believed that God had taken the initiative to establish a close relationship with them, God's chosen people. This covenant relationship was the basis of the Israelite community. Gratitude for Yahweh's hand of deliverance and promise became then the chief motive for Israel's response of faith. Proof of this (Yahweh's hand of deliverance and promise) is seen in Solomon's opening words of his prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-24) as well as later in the prayer (1 Ki. 8:51-53). In terms of the Mosaic Covenant there was to be for Israel only one God – Yahweh. Other gods paled into insignificance before the glory, power and assured covenant promises of Yahweh. Note the language of the opening words of the prayer as put on record by Dtr, "Lord God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven above or on earth below! ..." (1 Ki. 8:23; cf. Ex. 20:4).

Deuteronomistic theology articulates further that Israel, as covenant people, are obliged to love, obey, worship and serve Yahweh exclusively, and act justly. This stipulation was for the king as well. Israel would then experience *shalom*.

The Sinai covenant was akin to the concept of rights and obligations (terms of agreement) as contained in (Hittite) sovereign-vassal treaties known at that time. The covenant between

Yahweh and his people had to be sealed by a treaty of vassalage. Unlike the Hittite and Assyrian treaties invoking their gods as guarantors, Yahweh was not merely a guarantor of the covenant but was a party to it as well (De Vaux 1973: 147-148). Yahweh's promise of Israel's election and redemption was unconditional but her function and capacity as a holy nation and priestly kingdom depended on her faithful obedience to the covenant made through Moses (Merrill 1991a: 35).

What were the obligations contained in the covenant made through Moses? God, who is identified by name, promised to accept the Israelite nation as his people and to take care of them as long as they accept Yahweh as their God and promise to be faithful and obedient to him (cf. Exod. 24:1-11; Josh. 24:1-27). Only God, the initiator, could repeal or cancel the covenant (Otwell 1967: 32,70,124). All accounts of covenant-making (which would include the Mosaic or Sinai covenant) between God and the people show three aspects, viz., (a) the covenant is a gift that Yahweh makes to his people; (b) through the covenant, God comes into a relationship and creates with his people a bond of communion; (c) the covenant creates obligations which take concrete shape in the form of law. The Sinai covenant also implies an election, a bond and an obedience (Jacob 1958: 211-212).

In his dedication prayer (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-26), Solomon, like Moses in Ex. 24:13, reminds Yahweh of the unconditional nature of the covenant promises to the patriarchs. Yahweh would keep his word for he is the only true God. Now with the dedication of the temple, Yahweh also reveals his presence in theophany in the form of the cloud "shining in the dazzling light of the Lord's presence" (1 Ki. 8:11).

The Davidic Covenant underlies all of God's dealings with the monarchy under David and after him. Yahweh has made a new beginning by having raised David and selecting Mount Zion as his sanctuary (Anderson 1975: 520). The contents of the covenant are given in 2 Sam. 7. This chapter is very important in terms of the reference to it in Solomon's prayer of dedication. Yahweh emphasized his choice of David above his other brothers (cf. also 1 Sam. 16:6-13) and placed him as ruler over his covenant people (2 Sam. 5:2). The "anointed one" is commissioned to rule God's people with justice. David will also experience God's continued presence and this presence will assure victories over his enemies. God also promises a resting "place" for his people in this covenant (Heater 1991: 118-119).

The passage of Scripture (2 Sam. 7:11-16) contains the gist of the Davidic promise, viz., David was not to build a house for Yahweh, but Yahweh would build a “house” (a dynasty) for David. The special relationship between Yahweh and David was extended to the whole dynasty of David. God promised David an eternal seed and an eternal throne, “You will always have descendants, and I will make your kingdom last for ever. Your dynasty will never end” (v.16). This was realized with David’s son, Solomon, who would also build the temple David wanted to build for Yahweh. The Davidic Covenant also promises that Solomon can be assured of God’s constant love though discipline will be meted out when disobedience takes place (Anderson 1975: 185, 520; Heater 1991: 118-120).

Dtr shows that Israel’s faithlessness did not bring an end to Israel. The sovereignty of God displays itself in the establishing of the Davidic monarchy in a new outburst of blessing. Such blessing, however, is always accompanied by God’s commandments and judgments (Otwell 1967: 71).

The Davidic Covenant has its promissory reference to Solomon, David’s son, as king – “God’s anointed one”. This study intends to show how this incomparability formula, as inserted by Dtr, is also steeped in the Davidic covenant.

A study of the prayer (1 Ki. 8:23–53) would show how its contents are steeped in the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, each having its matrix in the Abrahamic blessing.

3.4 THE DEUTERONOMISTIC THEOLOGY OF 1 KINGS

It can be clearly deduced, given the language used in the chapter under discussion, that the writer of the Book of Kings (Dtr) used prevalent themes, such as, the obligation of Yahweh’s people to remember his salvific acts, his warnings and encouragement in view of the future, the promise of the land given by Yahweh and its occupation, the importance of Israel as God’s chosen people and the relationship between God and his covenant people, the exclusive worship of Yahweh, Yahweh’s covenants, commandments and their concomitant blessings and curses. These aforementioned themes then served as a theological norm for Dtr’s history and theology. The use of such themes (e.g. Deut. 4:40; 11:18-21; 28:1-2) explains the “if – then” stance (theme of

conditionality, cf. 1 Ki. 8:37-43, 46-49) of Dtr, the proclamation of Yahweh as the only true God (Deut. 6:4 as repeated in 1 Ki. 8:23) and the continual references to the Davidic and Mosaic covenants.

The motifs of the exodus, the promised land and the people of Israel, including their kings as well, are all central to the Deuteronomistic theology as reflected so vividly in 1 Ki. 8:14- 61. Dtr wishes to evoke an immediate response to the First Commandment of Yahweh (as given to Moses) from the generation who enters the land, those from the exile and all future generations. According to Robinson (1972: 101-102) Dtr inserts, “There is no covenant God like Thee ...” because of Yahweh’s incomparability and that he demands Israel’s exclusive loyalty and worship. God also demands their undefiled spiritual response.

One tradition found in Israel was the exclusive worship of Yahweh, the God who made himself known to Israel in many saving events centred in the exodus from Egypt (cf. 1 Ki. 8:51-53). This tradition laid upon Israel an obedience to a divine law that preserved and strengthened the people of God. The other tradition was the worship of other deities which the prophets attacked so vehemently (Otwell 1967: 70-71).

Another important observation is how Dtr judges the kings of Israel on theological grounds and not on their military, political or economical achievements. For example, king David was also guilty of allowing religious syncretism but is not condemned by Dtr because in his view David’s tremendous achievements were regarded as blessings and proof of God’s approval. Also despite David’s being a man of war, he walked humbly before Yahweh. The theological picture changes with the rule of Solomon though Dtr still narrates the achievements, glory and splendour, and even his sophisticated prayer in 1 Ki. 8:23-53. Reports by Dtr of Solomon’s glory and achievements actually conceal what really is being conveyed to us. The underlying Deuteronomistic theological thought is that the worship of the “only true God” should be seen in a correct relationship and attitude towards God. It must also be pointed out to the reader that a study of the narratives throughout the Book of Kings will show that the Deuteronomistic beliefs were not the beliefs of all Israelites.

One of the most important theological aspects in the Book of Kings is the judgment that each king receives. Dtr gives a literary picture of a king’s reign at the beginning and end with the

well-known framework of, “In the year of such and such a king of Israel so and so became king of Judah; he was so many years old when he became king, he reigned so many years in Jerusalem; his mother was so and so the daughter of such and such, and he did what was pleasing (evil) in the sight of Yahweh.” At the end it runs: “The history of so and so is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. Then so and so slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David, and so and so else became king in his stead” (Von Rad 1975: 335).

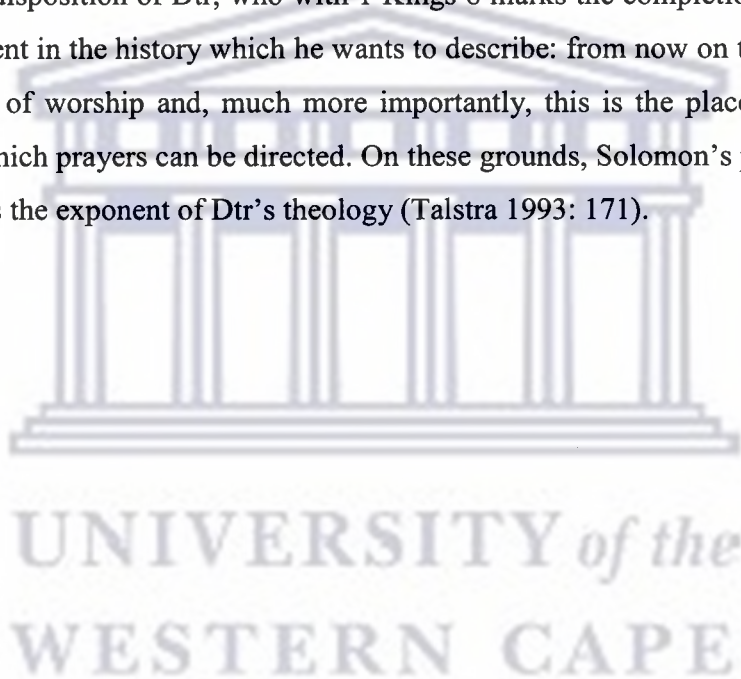
The deuteronomistic theology of history held the standpoint that Yahweh should be worshipped only at the one legitimate sanctuary at which he had put his name and not at the high places. The judgments passed on the kings are arrived at solely in the light of this decision. From this standpoint the kings of Israel are condemned because they walked in the “sin of Jeroboam”. Only Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah are given unqualified praise, six are approved conditionally while the rest are reproached with “having done what was evil in the sight of Yahweh” and that “their heart was not perfect with God” (Von Rad 1975: 336).

Dtr actually pictures for us the deterioration of the covenant relationship between God’s chosen king and Yahweh. King Solomon, despite his “wisdom”, allowed religious syncretism to reach a high point during his reign. Solomon, who was regarded as the adopted son of Yahweh, “beloved of the Lord”, the anointed one to rule over God’s people, now asserted ownership of the people he ruled. Hence, towards the end of Solomon’s reign, the shadows of impending judgment drew nearer (cf. 1 Ki. 10-11) (Eybers 1977: 100-101; Otwell 1967: 64-65). Thus, in typical deuteronomistic thought, the end of the united monarchy came at the time of Solomon’s death. But then, everything is not all that bleak because Yahweh, in spite of Israel’s continued faithlessness and his chastisement of them, always shows his mercy and steadfast love towards his chosen people (1 Ki. 8:23-26). Yahweh’s promise is that because of David and for the sake of his (Yahweh’s) honour, his people will not be cut off, nor will the house of David (1 Ki. 8:12-13). Dtr presents this assurance against the background of the Davidic covenant and the Mosaic covenant, to both of which the character Solomon refers in his dedication prayer.

Dtr sees Yahweh as the Lord of the covenant, Israel’s sovereign Lord, King and Judge; the warrior who undertook mighty saving acts for his people but simultaneously demanded their obedience to him, the God of history able to intervene in Israel’s history right there in Canaan as well (De Vaux 1973: 258- 261).

The researcher of this study wants the reader to see the context of this incomparability formula (1 Ki. 8:23) within the prayer (steeped in deuteronomistic theology) itself, its relationship to the prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53), to Dtr's view of Solomon (1 Ki.1 – 11) and to Dtr's overall theology expressed in Joshua through to 2 Kings.

The reader's attention is drawn now to Solomon's prayer in 1 Ki. 8:23-53 in which the Deuteronomistic writer, as in other texts, reaffirms his emphasis on covenant people, throne, temple and city (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-26, 29, 33, 36, 43 and 47). Noth's view is that Solomon's prayer fits in with the disposition of Dtr, who with 1 Kings 8 marks the completion of the temple as an important moment in the history which he wants to describe: from now on this temple is the only permitted place of worship and, much more importantly, this is the place where God's Name dwells and to which prayers can be directed. On these grounds, Solomon's prayer, more than any other passage, is the exponent of Dtr's theology (Talstra 1993: 171).



CHAPTER 4

SOLOMON'S PRAYER IN ITS LITERARY CONTEXT

4.1 SECTIONS OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings first formed a unity and was counted as part of the "Prophets" in the Hebrew canon. Greek and Latin translators then divided this unity in the fifteenth century (Childs 1979: 287; Eybers 1977: 89, 101; Mears 1980: 129). 1 and 2 Kings record the events of the reign of Solomon and then the succeeding kings of Judah and Israel. They cover a period of approximately five hundred years and tell the story of the growth and then the decay of the kingdom. The kingdom is divided and then both Israel and later Judah are led into captivity.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings were composed from various sources. The opening chapters are a completion of the succession narrative, showing that God has chosen Solomon to succeed his father David. It is generally believed that the section on Solomon (1 Ki. 3- 11) is probably derived from the book of the annals of Solomon (1 Ki. 11:41) and that the court records of the southern and northern kingdoms provide much of the information for the books. Heater (1991: 147) points out that the *terminus ante quem* for the final composition of 1 and 2 Kings is 560 B.C., the last dated event in the book, which refers to the elevation of Jehoiachin in captivity by Evil-Merodach. Many scholars, LaSor among them, argue that the composition probably took place just after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and that the last event is a later appendage (Heater 1991: 147).

The material in the Books of Kings falls into three sections:

1. 1 Kings 1-11: The history of Solomon.
2. 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17: History of the Kings of Israel and Judah until the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.
3. 2 Kings 18-25: Further history of the Kings of Judah (Childs 1979: 288; Eybers 1977: 99).

Given the divisions above, it seems that there is a connection between the books of Samuel and 1 Kings 1-2. Eybers (1977) and some scholars are of the opinion that 1 Kings 1-2 should belong to 2 Samuel (as part of the court-history of David) rather than being part of 1 Kings. It is assumed that the writer of Kings could be another author than that of Samuel. Van Selms refers to the first two chapters of 1 Kings as “linking compositions” (“skakelkomposisies”) of the author concerned (Eybers 1977: 80-81).

Napier (1981) renders the composition as, 1 Kings 1-11: Solomon; 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 18:12: The two kingdoms, North and South up to the North’s fall in 722-721; 2 Kings 18:13 – 25: 26: The South up to its own destruction in 587. 2 Kings 25:27-30 appears to be in the nature of a postscript from some years later (Napier 1981: 143).

4.2 FURTHER DIVISIONS OF 1 KINGS 1 – 11

The first section of 1 Kings (chapters 1-11) details the history of Solomon. Chapters 1-2: David’s final years, 3-5 and 10: Solomon’s wisdom, power and wealth; 6-9: Solomon’s building projects which include the temple and its dedication; 11: the dark side of Solomon’s life and tragic condemnation.

Brettler (1991: 87-97) states that it is possible to divide the Solomon pericope into three structures, viz. 1 Ki. 1-2, Solomon’s accession; 3:3 – 9:23, Solomon serves Yahweh and is blessed; 9:26 – 11:49, Solomon violates Deut. 17:14-17 and is punished. Brettler also suggests that Dtr recast the pro-Solomonic material in the last section with conscious reference to the law of the king in Deuteronomy.

Deist (1981a: 85) renders the division of 1 Ki. 1-11 in a Solomon-cycle as follows:

- A. Solomon becomes king (2:12-47)
- B. Yahweh appears unto Solomon (3:1-15)
- C. Solomon’s riches and wisdom (3:16 – 4: 34)
 - The building programme begins (5:1-18)
 - The temple is built (6:1-38)
 - The palace is built (7:1-14)**
 - The temple is furnished (7:15-51)
 - The temple is dedicated (8:1-68)
- b. God appears unto Solomon (9:1-9)
- c. Solomon’s success and reputation (9:10 – 10:29)
- a. Solomon’s demise and death (11:1-13)

Deist opines that the schematic representation above wants to show that Solomon is the builder of the palace and thereby brings the fulfillment of the political expectations. He also points out that when the Chronicler narrates the story then the emphasis will shift to the temple (Deist 1981a: 85; Deist 1981b: 111, 117-118).

A close examination of 1 Ki.1-11 will render the following detail in which the prayer of Solomon features prominently:

- Chapter 1 – The last days of David in which he makes Solomon king as well.
- Chapter 2 – David's charge to Solomon and the execution of Adonijah and other rivals.
- Chapter 3 – Solomon's marriage and his alliance with Egypt, his prayer for wisdom, the request granted plus riches and honour.
- Chapter 4 – Solomon's officers, dominions, knowledge and world fame.
- Chapter 5 – Solomon's religious policies, the preparations for building the temple.
- Chapter 6 – The building of the temple taking seven years to complete.
- Chapter 7 – The building of Solomon's house taking thirteen years to complete.
- Chapter 8 – Dedication of the temple, the ark brought in and the glory of Yahweh appears and then Solomon's dedication prayer (of which 1 Ki. 8: 23-26 would form the matrix of the present study) followed by him blessing the people.
- Chapter 9 – The second appearance of God to Solomon. The Davidic covenant confirmed again. This chapter also deals with Solomon's further building programme and levies.
- Chapter 10 – Solomon's fame, wisdom and riches admired by the queen of Sheba. This chapter ends with the first two steps of Solomon's downfall.
- Chapter 11 – The third, fourth and final step in Solomon's demise, Yahweh's chastening of Solomon (fulfillment of the prophecy of judgment as in 2 Sam. 7:12-15). This chapter ends with Solomon's adversaries descending upon him and his eventual death with Rehoboam's accession to the throne.

4.3 A BRIEF OUTLINE OF SOLOMON'S PRAYER AT THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

The prayer of Solomon in 1 Kings 8:23-53 is one of the royal prayers in the Deuteronomistic History and is widely regarded as a deuteronomistic composition. It is recorded at a critical moment for the throne and national cult in Israel (Knoppers 1992: 421).

The reader is immediately arrested by the sensitivity, depth and sophistication of the theology apparent in this prayer placed on record by Dtr (Napier 1981: 136). The theology expressed in this prayer, in fact in the entire chapter, impregnated with the idea of sin and its inevitable retribution, stamps it as Deuteronomistic (Gray 1970: 213). Solomon prays for the future of his people. Yahweh, the incomparable God, would hear and forgive, renew and restore the life of his covenant people. Solomon, the possessor of the divine blessing, stands now in front of his people, as representative of them ready to render his dedicatory prayer. King Solomon stands here in a priestly role as well which is an indication of the priestly status of the king in pre-exilic times, when the latter served as the link between God and the people.

An in-depth analysis of Solomon's prayer and its structure falls outside the scope of this present study. Suffice it to mention that Dtr presents the speech of Solomon in three structured sections. Firstly, Solomon's address – an ascription of praise to Yahweh which turns into a statement of his divine designation as the temple builder (1 Ki. 8:14-21). Secondly, Solomon's prayer where he faces the altar with his palms toward heaven and prays for his succeeding generations, the temple and God's divine attentiveness, and special cases inviting God's attention (1 Ki. 8:23-53). In the third section of Solomon's speech, vv. 54-61, he rises from his knees to bless the people. His blessing turns out to be an appeal to God and the people (De Vries 1985: 123; Gray 1970: 215).

This particular part of the study focuses on the second part of the character Solomon's speech, viz., Solomon's dedicatory prayer put on record by Dtr (1 Ki. 8:23-53). It is in this section where Solomon prays first for a blessing on his generations to follow and for Yahweh's attentiveness toward the temple and those who worship in or from afar "toward" it. This formal, royal prayer shows explicit communication and is worded effectively by Dtr. Balentine (1993: 21) distinguishes certain form-critical elements in Solomon's prayer, viz., a *description of the*

situation that causes the prayer; an *introduction* which precedes the actual prayer, calling the reader's attention (even God's attention too) to the actual words of the communication; an *invocation* followed by a *declaration*, which serves either to praise God or justify the pleas (petitions) that follow such declaration; the *various petitions* follow and, finally, *the recognition*, that is, God's response to the prayer. Balentine posits that the *petition* is the key to the function of prayer in Deuteronomistic literature.

Solomon's dedication prayer is structured as follows:

1 Ki. 8:23-26. Dtr's Solomon commences this dedication prayer with a confessional statement, in an ascription of praise, about the incomparable nature of God and his covenant faithfulness having secured two of the Davidic promises, viz., the security of Israel and the construction of the temple (by one of David's descendants).

1 Ki. 8:27-30. This section is Solomon's plea to Yahweh for his divine attentiveness by way of extolling, in characteristic deuteronomistic sentiment, God's residence in heaven but simultaneously asking God's attention to the temple as a place of prayer "... and when you hear, forgive".

1 Ki. 8:31-51. These verses, constituting the third section of Solomon's dedication prayer, are subdivided into seven special petitions inviting God's attention in the different cases in which, in future, prayers may be offered to God in this temple. The seven special petitions are as follow:

- (i) 1 Ki. 8:31-32 a plea for just judgment in case of offences;
- (ii) 1 Ki. 8:33-34 a plea for forgiveness and restoration for Israel from captivity (exile);
- (iii) 1 Ki. 8:35-36 a plea for forgiveness and rain from heaven to repentant Israel;
- (iv) 1 Ki. 8:37-40 a plea (cry) for forgiveness, deliverance from famine, enemies and sickness;
- (v) 1 Ki. 8:41-43 a plea for God's blessing upon foreigners seeking Israel's God and praying in this temple;
- (vi) 1 Ki. 8:44-45 a plea for Yahweh's defence and support for Israel in foreign warfare;
- (vii) 1 Ki. 8:46-51 a final plea for God's compassion, forgiveness and restoration of Israel from captivity.

1 Ki. 8: 52-53. These verses conclude the dedication prayer with the petitioning for God's continued attention to the temple and to Israel.

1 Ki. 8:54-61 form a benediction following the prayer. This fourth address is introduced as a final blessing and as such provides a rhetorical frame for the series of petitions that constitute the core of Solomon's third address (1 Ki. 8:31-51, 52-53).

4.4 THE INCOMPARABILITY OF YAHWEH AS SEEN IN THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY: A BRIEF EXPLORATION

The purpose of this section is to let the reader see the context of this incomparability formula within the prayer (so steeped in Deuteronomistic theology) itself, its relationship to the prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53), to Dtr's view of Solomon (1 Ki. 1 – 11) and to Dtr's overall theology expressed in Deuteronomy through to 2 Kings.

The incomparability formula as expressed by Dtr through Solomon, is also reflected in Exod. 15:11, Deut. 4:39, 2 Sam. 7:22, 32 and Ps. 86:8; 113:4-6. "How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is none like you: we have always known that you alone are God" (2 Sam. 7:22). The first commandment stipulates that Yahweh alone should be served and that he is a jealous God who wants to be honoured exclusively. He shares his glory with no other deity. Israel's Yahwism is to be a monotheistic religion, i.e. where only one God is acknowledged. The second commandment stipulates that no graven image is to be made of Israel's God. A further injunction to this is that Yahweh cannot be compared to or associated with anything in nature, although he reveals himself through the powers of nature (as at Sinai/Horeb). He is the One who establishes and creates things in nature (Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 24-25). Thus we see that Dtr wishes to evoke an obedient response to the first commandment of Yahweh from the generation of the exile and all future generations. Because of his incomparability, expressed by Dtr, Yahweh demands from the Israelites (including their kings) their exclusive loyalty, i.e. loyalty and worship to the exclusion of all other gods. He demands their undivided and uncontaminated spiritual response (Robinson 1972: 102).

Dtr held the view that the conquests of David and subsequent fulfillment of Yahweh's promises, played essential roles in the development of the theological claim that Yahweh's rule was universal and that he was the great king over all the earth, the incomparable suzerain. Yet the great Yahweh is Israel's suzerain, Yahweh alone (Levenson 1987: 72; Roberts 1987: 378). According to Dtr, given his references to the Mosaic and Davidic covenants in 1 Ki. 8:23-26 and elsewhere in Solomon's prayer, Israel's God is the One who establishes thrones (dynasties) and secures them, gives land and is in total control of and responsible for history. In other words, Yahweh controls human destiny (Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 26; Kaiser 1978: 163-164). An

undoubted proof of this is that Solomon, through divine bequest of wealth and wisdom by Yahweh, has secured two of the Davidic promises: the security of Israel and the construction of the temple (Knoppers 1992: 417). King Solomon, who has been nominated by God through the prophetic word, receives now permanent divine legitimation (Gerstenberger 2002: 169). It is, therefore, not surprising that Dtr inserts this incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer.

Israel took the existence of other gods seriously, hence they compared their God with other gods. An example of this thought can be seen in Elijah's confrontation with the Ba'al prophets and the choice given to the people whom they want to serve by comparing Israel's Yahweh and Ba'al. They will thereby be able to recognize and acknowledge Yahweh as the only true God (1 Ki. 18:20-40). In the light of this story of Elijah, we note that the enemies of Israel who "know that their own gods are weak, not mighty like Israel's God" (Deut. 32:31), Hannah's prayer that there "is no one like the Lord ... no protector like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2), David's prayer of thanksgiving in which he exclaims, "How great you are, Sovereign Lord! ... we have always known that you alone are God" (2 Sam. 7:22) and Solomon's superlative judgment in (1 Ki. 8:23), it becomes evident that there is a connection between Yahweh's uniqueness and his incomparability. To Israel incomparability implied being both different and unique. This monotheistic confessional formula can then be considered as a confession of Yahweh's uniqueness (Labuschagne 1966: 145-146).

Further to the concept of the incomparability of Yahweh is the notion that not only Israel, but also the heathen had to recognize and acknowledge Yahweh as God. This idea is recorded in Solomon's prayer as well (1 Ki. 8:41-43,60). Dtr implies that this confession transcends national boundaries, which shows a universalistic trend (cf. 1 Sam. 17:46; 1 Ki. 5:15; 2 Ki. 19:19; Ps. 59:14) (Labuschagne 1966: 146-147).

Dtr also wants to express in Solomon's prayer (1 Ki. 8: 31-49) that other deities, unlike Israel's Yahweh, cannot execute justice, or rescue or help; they cannot supply needs in natural disasters nor hear when there is a call for help; these deities cannot forgive sins and restore the fallen and cannot listen to or help foreigners; they do not know the thoughts of the people. Therefore, the other gods are insignificant and thus cannot be compared to Israel's God.

Solomon's invocation and declaration (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-26), what he says to God and about God in prayer and subsequent petitioning, provide an insight to the identity of God. Yahweh is indeed the incomparable God of Israel.



CHAPTER 5

EXEGESIS OF 1 KINGS 8:23-26

5.1 PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The purpose of this particular section is to give an exegesis of the passage 1 Ki. 8:23-26 in which a theological portrayal of Yahweh, Israel's incomparable God is recorded by Dtr. In order to do this the historical background of the text, the composition of the text, its literary type (genre) and form (general and specific), the literary context, text analysis (structure of the text), dating and theological relevance will be investigated. The researcher will further elaborate on the key concepts contained in the text, such as the incomparability formula of verse 23, the covenants implied and the keeping of these covenants by Yahweh, his elected people, his steadfast love and mercy (Hebrew *hesed*), and the motif of conditionality. In other words, inner-biblical tradition-historical motives and references will be identified and analyzed to provide a better understanding. The researcher will also look at the negative answer strategy of Dtr, what the thrust of the text is and, finally, how the various elements contribute to the thrust, i.e. considering all the aspects in relation to one another to make full sense of 1 Ki. 8:23-26 (cf. Cloete 2004: 2; Human 2004: 41; Stuart 1982: 19-21).

The researcher will explore how Yahweh's incomparability, sovereignty and uniqueness in comparison with other deities in Israel and the Ancient Near East is implied through Dtr's strategy of using the negation, "O Lord God of Israel, there is *none like thee* ...". Israel's God seems to be simultaneously transcendent and sovereign because his throne is in "heaven above" while his "Name" (presence) dwells in the temple. This transcendent God also conveys his immanent character in the realm of history and human activity (Labuschagne 1966: 22). An exegesis of the passage will endeavour to reveal whether the deuteronomistic writer is correct in asserting that Yahweh is the covenant-keeping God of Israel because he has fulfilled "even this day" the promise of the building of the temple by David's seed (v.24) and the security of Israel's throne (2 Sam. 7:11-16).

5.2 THE COMPOSITION OF 1 KINGS 8:23-26

5.2.1 A UNIT OF THOUGHT

Els (1998: 34) defines a “thought-unit” as the smallest meaningful unit which has a certain semantic completeness in itself. The pericope is part of Solomon’s dedicatory prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53). The reader is referred to section 4.3 above in which a brief outline of Solomon’s prayer is given. 1 Ki. 8:23-26 can be regarded as a complete unit of thought, the themes being specifically that of Israel’s God, his “keeping covenant and loyal love” (*hesed*), with an emphasis on the Davidic covenant, in the form of a prayer. Verse 22 serves as a transition from 1 Ki. 8:14-21 (De Vries 1985: 120) while verse 27 contains an intermediate thought with which Solomon meets certain ideas of the presence of God in the temple (Keil and Delitzsch 1973: 127). Gray (1970: 221) expresses the opinion that verse 27 is parenthetical and perhaps a later theologizing interpolation, while De Vries (1985: 125) says that the “wondering question” is a characteristic deuteronomic sentiment.

The reader should also note, for a better understanding, how this passage relates and functions within the broader context of the entire prayer-text (1 Ki. 8:23-53).

5.2.2 THE HEBREW TEXT, TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

1 Kings 8:23-26

23 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין־כְּמוֹד אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל
וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת שָׁמַר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד לְעַבְדֶּיךָ הַהֹלְכִים לְפָנֶיךָ
בְּכָל־לְבָבָם: 24 אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַרְתָּ לְעַבְדֶּיךָ דָּוִד אָבִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתָּ
לִּי וְתִדְבַר בְּפִיךָ וּבִידֶיךָ מִלֵּאֵת כִּי־וָיָה: 25 וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁמַר לְעַבְדֶּיךָ דָּוִד אָבִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לִּי לֵאמֹר לֹא־
יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מִלְּפָנַי יָשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל רַק אִם־יִשְׁמְרוּ בְנֵיךָ
אֶת־דִּרְכָם לִלְכַת לְפָנַי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִלַּכְתָּ לְפָנָי: 26 וְעַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
יֵאָמֶן נָא דְבַרְיֶךָ [דְּבַרְיֶךָ] אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לְעַבְדֶּיךָ דָּוִד אָבִי:

23 wayyō' mar yhw' ḥ' ḥlōhē yiśrā' ḥl ' ḥn kāmōkā ' ḥlōhīm baššāmayim mimma' al
wē' al-hā' āreṣ mittāhat šōmēr habbērīt wēhaḥesed la' ḥvādēkā hahōlēkīm lēfānēkā
bēkol-libbām.

- 24 'āšer šāmartā lē'avdēkā dāwid 'āvī 'ēt 'āšer dibbartā lō wattēdabbēr bēfikā
ūvēyādēkā millē'tā kayyôm hazzê.
- 25 wē'attā yhwē 'ēlōhē yiśrā' ēl šēmor lē'avdēkā dāwid 'āvī 'ēt 'āšer dibbartā llō lē'mōr
lō'-yikkārēt lēkā 'iš millēfānay yōšēv 'al-kissē' yiśrā' ēl raq 'im-yišmērū vānēkā
'et-darkām lāleket lēfānay ka' āšer hālaqtā lēfānāy.
- 26 wē'attā 'ēlōhē yiśrā' ēl yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā (dēvārēkā) 'āšer dibbartā
lē'avdēkā dāwid 'āvī.

- 23 And he said, "O Yahweh, God of Israel, there is no God like unto thee in the heavens above or on the earth beneath, who keep covenant and loyal love to thy servants who walk before thee with their whole heart,
- 24 who has kept unto thy servant David my father all that thou hast spoken to him, yea thou didst speak with thy mouth and thou hast fulfilled it with thy hand even as this day,
- 25 And now, O Yahweh, God of Israel, keep unto thy servant David my father that which thou didst promise him saying, There shall no man of you be cut off from before me who may sit upon the throne of Israel, if only your sons keep their way to walk before me as you have walked before me,
- 26 And now, O God of Israel, let thy word be confirmed which thou didst speak to thy servant David my father.⁴

5.3 LITERARY CONTEXT

This passage, in the form of a prayer, is part of a historical narrative by Dtr. The latter's theological insight inferred by this pericope and the rest of the prayer is to be seen in the socio-historical situation of the Book of Kings. Many scholars are agreed that the historical time of composition of Solomon's prayer is that of Israel's exilic period. Some reasons for this possible dating are, amongst others, the expression of Yahweh's incomparability (v.23) and the "servant" motif (v.23, 24 and 26). To these reasons one could add the presence of the exilic / post-exilic deuteronomic "Shem-theology" (v.20, 27) (Human 2004: 57).

⁴ The translation is that used by Gray (1970: 216).

This introductory part of the prayer is followed by seven pleas of Solomon in which he petitions God on various issues and their answers on which, in future, prayers may be offered to God in the temple. Solomon's first three petitions engage specific situations - the oaths sworn in the temple, the sanctity God is asked to protect (vv.31-32), defeat in war (vv.33-34), drought (vv.35-36). The fourth and central petition (vv.37-40) begins with specific situations but becomes more general in this that it mentions specific agrarian disasters and enemy raids and proceeds to beseeching God to consider "any plague or any disease" and to answer "any person's prayer or supplication" (8:37b-38). The last three petitions once again engage specific situations - the plight of foreigners (vv.41-43), military operations (vv.44-45), and exile (vv.46-51) (Knoppers 1995: 235).

Solomon's prayer, having commenced in verse 23-26, ends with verse 53, in which Solomon reiterates the theme of Israel's election as "an inheritance apart from all peoples of the earth" and the Exodus motif again.

The introductory prayer-text is set in the larger context of 1 Kings 8. Solomon assembles the people in Jerusalem for the ceremony of the dedication of the temple. The ark is brought into the sanctuary and sacrifices are offered, after which the glory of Yahweh fills the temple (1 Ki. 8:1-11). Solomon now addresses the people with a number of speeches. Solomon's first address is contained in verses 12-13 where the emphasis is placed on the temple as a dwelling place for Yahweh. The temple is first described as a "royal house" then as "a place for your dwelling". Balentine (1993: 80) is of the opinion that the image of the temple as a dwelling place for God stands at odds with the remainder of Solomon's address. In verses 14-21 Solomon blesses the congregation and praises God for the fulfillment of the covenant promises given to his father, David (2 Sam. 7:8-16). As mentioned earlier, verses 23-53 constitutes the prayer-text in full (i.e. Solomon's third address) while verses 54-61 are words of final blessing in which Solomon stresses God's faithfulness to the promises given through Moses, particularly the promise of "rest". According to Balentine (1993: 81-82) the blessings of verses 14-21 and 54-61 are constructed with Deuteronomistic language and reflect the ideological concerns of the exilic period, viz., the repeated stress on the temple as a place for the "name" of God and not so much as a place for God's dwelling. This marks a change in the theological conception of the sanctuary. Dtr wants to stress the view that only God's name is placed on the temple.

The closing of the prayer is then followed by the benediction (1 Ki. 8:54-61) with an allusion to “rest” or a “place of rest” (v.56). This reference may be to the foundation of the temple and the peace and security of Solomon’s reign after the wars of David (Gray 1970: 231). The people now bless the king and depart, thankful for what God has done for David and for Israel.

5.3.1 LITERARY FUNCTION AND PLACEMENT OF THE TEXT

1 Ki. 8:23-26 forms part of Dtr’s narrative of king Solomon’s life. In this case it is the introductory part of a dedication prayer rendered by Solomon just outside the temple on a raised platform. The placement of the text is essential to its present context, viz., Dtr’s primary concern with the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty. To the deuteronomistic writer it is important that the security of the Davidic succession remains the prerequisite for the establishment of the temple. That is the reason for his repetitive reference to the Davidic dynasty and God’s faithfulness (in this pericope), and to the temple and city in the rest of the prayer.

The placement of this introductory part of Solomon’s prayer, and specifically the opening confessional ascription of praise to Yahweh through the negation strategy of “...there is none like thee ...” (v.23), serves also to convey Dtr’s theological view of Israel’s covenant-keeping God who is incomparable and unique in character. This incomparability formula (v.23) is to be found in various deuteronomistic writings and other Old Testament texts (cf. Ex. 15:11; Dt. 3:24; 33:26; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 7:22; 22:32; 1 Ki. 18:20-40; Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:7; Mi. 7:18; Ps.18:32; 35:10; 71:19; 77:14; 86:8; 89:7-9). Each of these texts has its own context in which the incomparability formula is expressed and it may be that each of these texts expresses a feature of Yahweh’s character and uniqueness.

As mentioned earlier, it could be said that Solomon’s prayer is uttered from Dtr’s theological perspective. With regards to the authorship of this passage (and the rest of the prayer), the reader is referred to Section 3.1 of this study. Suffice it to say that this prayer with its introduction is the work of a deuteronomistic writer (Dtr) who wrote from the perspective of experiencing the exile. This knowledge will help the reader in understanding and connecting this passage, with its Exodus and Deuteronomistic motifs, style and typical deuteronomistic diction, with other texts from Dtr. The passage under discussion together with the rest of Solomon’s prayer represents deliberate authorial strategy (Knoppers 1992: 421).

5.3.2 FORM ANALYSIS

5.3.2.1 GENERAL AND SPECIFIC LITERARY TYPE

This passage, serving as an introduction to the larger prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53), is part of a formal, royal prayer set in a typical deuteronomistic, historical narrative prose. Balentine (1993: 80-81) says that Solomon's prayer is one of the longest recorded prayers in the Hebrew Bible (1 Ki. 8:23-53). The most unusual aspect about this prayer is that it does not focus so much on Solomon himself, but on the temple as the important place of prayer. Balentine (1993: 85-86) says that although the larger context of 1 Kings 8 clearly affirms sacrifice in the temple (cf. vv. 5, 62-64), Solomon's address puts the emphasis elsewhere, namely, on prayer. We notice here that the prayer serves here as a defining characteristic of a place (the temple) rather than the person (Solomon). The temple was usually seen as the centre for sacrifice but here it turns out to be a centre for prayer. King Solomon, in a priestly role, does not offer a sacrifice before the altar of the Lord (v.22), but rather "prayer and supplication".

Its specific literary type (form) is that of a prayer-text because of its recognizable features by virtue of both outline and categories of content.

5.3.2.2 FORM-CRITICAL FEATURES

The form-critical elements (features) in Solomon's prayer are: i) *description of the situation* that causes the prayer; ii) *introduction* which precedes the prayer, calling the reader's attention to the actual words of the communication; iii) *an invocation*; iv) *declaration* which serves to praise God and to justify the petitions that follow; v) *petitions*; vi) *recognition*, that is, God's response to the prayer (Balentine 1993: 21).

The passage for exegesis (1 Ki. 8:23-26), being part of the larger prayer-text (1 Ki. 8:23-53), does not contain all the afore-mentioned form-critical elements. However, it does contain an introduction, the invocation and declaration. It even alludes to recognition, i.e. God's response to Solomon's prayer. This introductory part of the prayer does play a significant role in the greater prayer-text form in that the invocation of "O Lord God of Israel ..." and the declaration of

Yahweh's incomparability serve to praise God and even to justify the various petitions that follow. Dtr depicts Solomon in an act of faith, of being sure of God's favourable response.

A survey or analysis of the various petitions found in this prayer-text falls outside the scope of this particular section of the study. It could be said that the seven petitions (pleas) in this prayer-text provide the stylistic and theological key to the function of prayer in Deuteronomistic literature (Balentine 1993: 21).

1 Ki. 8:23-26 appears in the prayer-text as "literary programmatic creation" put into Solomon's mouth for the purpose of conveying the ideological and theological concerns (i.e. the specific redactional interests) of the Deuteronomistic editors (Balentine 1993: 89-90; Knoppers 1995: 230-249).

5.4 STRUCTURE AND LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

5.4.1 STRUCTURE OR LAY-OUT OF 1 KINGS 8:23-26

Here follows a suggested "mechanical lay-out" of 1 Ki. 8:23-26 to help trace the assumed flow of the Deuteronomistic writer's thought.

23 A and he said:

B "Yhwh, God of Israel,

C There is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath,

D keeping covenant and faith with your servants,

E who walk before you with all their heart,

24 A you, who kept with your servant, my father David,

B what you had spoken to him.

C You spoke to him with your mouth

D and with your hand you fulfilled, as is the case today.

25 A Now therefore, Yhwh, God of Israel,

B keep with your servant, my father David,

C what you spoke to him,

- D namely:
- E You shall not lack someone before me,
- F sitting on the throne of Israel,
- G if only your sons heed their way of life
- H to walk before me
- I as you have walked before me.”

- 26** A Now therefore, God of Israel,
B let your word be confirmed,
C which you have spoken to your servant, my father David (cf. Talstra 1993: 90).

A mechanical layout denotes a simplified kind of diagram of the text. The reader would notice that the words in a mechanical layout are left in the same order in which they occur in a translation of the Hebrew text. Therefore, this particular mechanical layout is based on a reading of a translation. McQuilkin (1992: 145) says that this kind of layout emphasizes relationships between clauses and phrases more than the grammatical function of individual words.

The principles guiding the development of this mechanical layout are its purposes and advantages. There is a two-fold purpose in developing a mechanical layout, viz., the finished product allows the reader to see at a glance the primary elements of a passage and their relationship to each other and that the process of developing the layout forces the interpreter to ask questions and make observations about the structure of the passage. For example, if there is ambiguity in thought flow, the exegete must then decide where a thought fits in the layout. Judgments have to be made concerning each part of the sentence lest the exegete assume that he/she understands the flow of thought before he/she has actually studied each part of the sentence and paragraph. Details, a vital element of Bible study, become prominent now (McQuilkin 1992: 145).

The second principle guiding this kind of mechanical layout is its practical advantages. McQuilkin (1992: 145) notes two practical advantages: (1) it becomes an ideal worksheet for recording notes and observations from the application of all hermeneutical guidelines to the text; and (2) it is a good intermediate step between studying the text and composing a teaching outline

from the passage. Each main clause and its modifiers, linked by all of the connectives, help one to think about the major and minor points or themes of the author.

It must be noted that although the mechanics of the layout are fairly simple, they demand a degree of grammatical awareness, especially with regards to independent clauses (complete thoughts), dependent clauses (incomplete thoughts) and possible connectives (coordinating conjunctions) (McQuilkin 1992: 145-146).

I wish to draw the reader's attention to certain important elements present in 1 Ki. 8:23-26 with reference to the awareness of independent clauses, dependent clauses and possible connectives, semantic relations between certain structural elements, their functions and possible theological significance (cf. Els 1998: 32-40).

(a) Verse 23 functions as a basic foundational statement which represents the focus of the whole prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53). Verse 23C presents the basic statement, the incomparability of Yahweh (God). Verse 23DE stands in an expansive-descriptive relation to 23C. Dtr's emphasis here is on universality ("in the heavens above and the earth beneath") adding to the concept of the exclusive existence and nature of God (Yahweh). The incomparability formula is a pronouncement of Yahweh's sovereignty presupposing creation. Verse 23DE stands in a motivating-specifying relation to 23C. It is introduced by the participle *šōmēr* and the relative clause ("Yahweh who keeps the covenant and the *hesed*"). Verse 23E, in a specifying relation to 23D, describes the beneficiaries of Yahweh's attitude and acts, as well as the conditions on their part in terms of which he will act as described in 23D. The condition is whole-hearted devotion – "with their whole heart".

(b) Verse 24AB is a relative clause in an expansive specifying relation to 23C, which now refers to the Davidic covenant. The term *'eved* is a covenantal term and describes a covenant partner who is a vassal of the higher royal covenantal (treaty) partner. The phrase in verse 24CD, "you have spoken with your mouth and you fulfilled with your hand" expresses the comprehensive nature of the promise and act of God and its complete realization. The final phrase *kayyôm hazzê* "as it is today", expresses the lasting significance of the Davidic covenantal promise.

(c) Verse 25A: The phrase *wě'attâ yhw'ēlōhē yisrā'ēl* is in an expanding consequential (resultant) relation to what was stated in verse 23 and 24. The phrase “And now, O Yahweh, God of Israel” contains the following significant meaning-elements:

(i) The word *wě'attâ* can serve as focus particle in that, as an adverb “now”, it places the focus on the clause in verse 25A that follows it. The referent for this adverb is a qualification or limitation of another referent, as in verse 26 “And now, O God of Israel, *let thy word be confirmed which thou spoke to thy servant David my father*” (Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze 1999: 58).

(ii) The word *wě'attâ* is also an subordinating conjunction, serving as an “outflow” of Solomon’s words in verses 23 and 24 and introducing what would follow in verses 25 and 26 respectively.

(iii) The word *wě'attâ* can serve as a discourse marker. This discourse marker precedes the sentence(s), verse 25 and 26 to which it refers. It also draws attention to the contents of the succeeding sentences (verse 25 and 26), affording the said verses greater prominence within the passage and in its larger context (cf. Els 1998: 33; Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze 1999: 59).

(iv) *wě'attâ* introduces all the elements of the prayer requests (petitions, appeals) that follow in verse 25 and the subsequent verses – based on Yahweh’s covenant with David and Yahweh’s attitude. The introductory phrase *wě'attâ* defines the prayer requests as being “outflows” or consequences based on Yahweh’s covenant.

(v) *wě'attâ* is also an introductory temporal phrase which emphasizes that the effect of Yahweh’s covenantal promise should also be realized in the future, from the time of Solomon and onwards, to secure the continued well-being of the Davidic dynasty and (as tied up with the dynasty) also of the nation as a whole.

(d) Verse 26, linked by the *wě'attâ* of 25A and 26A, continues Solomon’s requests on the basis of God’s Davidic covenantal promise. This particular request by Solomon is that there should be forever a member (descendant) of David’s family on the throne.

A further analysis of the literary and stylistic features of the prayer-text in question will show how the above-mentioned principles and grammatical structures function within the text. The literary genre (in this case, a formal, royal prayer-text) determines also the manner in which the words are to be understood (Smit 1987: 22). In order to have a clear and full understanding of this introductory part, as well as the rest, of Solomon's prayer, the reader should take cognizance of the socio-historical and cultural context in which the words of this prayer-text are constructed by Dtr and now uttered by the character Solomon. Words and sentences actually acquire their meaning and significance first within the context or within the whole as such. McQuilkin (1992: 151) corroborates this idea by saying that context is needed to understand word meaning, and word meaning is needed to understand thought flow.

5.4.2 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

A few literary and stylistic features characterize this introductory part of the larger prayer-text. The repetition of certain key words, concepts and conjunctions plays an important role in this passage. In fact, the entire prayer-text (1 Ki. 8:23-53) is permeated with repetitions of "loaded" key words, especially the verbs, such as, "pray", "listen", "hear", "forgive", "heal", etc., and of course, "O Yahweh, God of Israel", "prayer and supplication", "temple", and "place". Repetition of certain themes and concepts occur as well, such as, the Exodus motif, the temple as a place of prayer where the Name of God dwells and God's grace and faithfulness as Israel's covenant God.

In the passage of our study, the repetition of the divine name, "O Yahweh, God of Israel" (v.23, 25, 26), "thy servant David my father" (v.24, 25, 26), "thou hast spoken to him" and "thou didst speak" (v.24, 26), "walk before (thee) me" (v.23, 25), and "And now..." (v.25, 26) are intentionally used by Dtr with literary (cf. the repetitive invocation of "O Yahweh, God of Israel") and theological functional effects (cf. the references to the Davidic covenant). The repetitive invocation "O Yahweh, God of Israel" (v.23, 25, 26) is also a liturgical formula used in the Deuteronomistic literature. This liturgical formula enhances the sophisticated, Deuteronomistic diction and theology in this prayer-text. Meaningful theological thought patterns and insight emerge from the usage of repetitions and progressive patterns in Solomon's address to God. Stuart (1980: 36) says that the keys to identifying patterns are most often repetition and progression.

The appearance of the incomparability formula through the deuteronomistic writer's strategy of negation, "... there is no God like unto thee ..." expresses Yahweh's incomparability and uniqueness of character – the God of Israel who keeps covenant and shows loyal love to his servants. This intentional declaration sets the base for Solomon's calling God's attention to the promises spoken to his father David, for his requesting of God's confirmation of his word (v.26) and for the seven petitions after verse 27.

The connective particle or arresting link, *wě'attâ* "And now, ...", serving as a kind of linguistic, arresting-attention strategy in public speaking or address (v.25a), draws the reader's attention to Solomon's serious concern about the fulfillment of Yahweh's blessing through his father David as given to him (cf. 1 Ki. 2:4 and 1 Ki. 8:20, 25, 26). Yahweh also confirmed this blessing to Solomon directly (1 Ki. 9:5). See section 5.4.1 (c) i-v, for a discussion on the use and function of *wě'attâ* the passage.

Another observation should be made here concerning the structure of the text. The ending of v.24 "... thou hast fulfilled it with thy hand even this day" (referring to the building of the temple) and the commencement of verse 25 with the connective particle "And now, ..." ending with "... the throne of Israel ..." (reference to the Davidic dynasty) (v.25) stand in a mutual relationship. This structure or structural relationship alludes also to Dtr's theological view of the Southern Kingdom (Solomon, a southern king) as opposed to the Northern Kingdom. Deist and Du Plessis (1981: 62-63, 73) state that the theological and historical point of view of the South was an appeal on the legitimization of the Davidic empire to whom Yahweh had given his infallible and irrevocable word (promise), whereas the North's appeal on history was an appeal on the deeds or exploits of Yahweh whereby he had revealed himself. Deist and Du Plessis (1981: 63-64, 73) state that the Southern Kingdom's theological view was a politicized theology by virtue of the fact that the promised king and dynasty, the temple and city were seen as proof of God's approval and presence.

Another literary device used by the deuteronomistic writer is the merismus as part of the incomparability formula "... in the heavens above or on the earth beneath, ..." (v.23b). The merismus not only stresses the character of Yahweh but also alludes to his universality, transcendent nature and sovereignty, and that no other deities known in the ancient Near East at the time, whether solar or terrestrial (cf. Human 2004: 54), could compare with Israel's One and

only true God. Yahweh, as God and king of Israel is eulogized in the cult and thus this prepositional phrase “in heaven above and the earth beneath” acquires a universal and cosmic meaning (Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 60). It is also indirectly implied that no physical structure can contain the God of heaven and earth (cf. vv. 23, 27, 30, 39, 43, 49). Even the wording of the “wondering” rhetorical question in verse 27, indicating God’s dual abode (cf. also vv. 29, 30) corroborates the thought expressed through the merismus in v.23b. The latter verse can be read in conjunction with verse 27 and Isa. 66:1 as indicating the exilic concerns and tying this prayer to Dtr (Balentine 1993: 85). The merismus, various repetitions and even “And now ...” (v.25, 26), which makes the transition to the petitions after the introduction (Gray 1970: 220), enhances the sophistication and theological content of this prayer-text.

Based on other recognizable deuteronomistic passages in the Deuteronomistic History, it can be said that this introductory part as well as the rest of the prayer-text is strongly deuteronomistic in language, style and thought. However, it is only when a word study of the most crucial (key) words is undertaken, that the reader will be able to note the strong deuteronomistic language, style and intended thought of Dtr.

Kaiser (1978: 64) aptly says that this prayer-text is one of the “well placed speeches by leading actors of the Deuteronomistic history”.

5.5 LEXICAL DATA LEADING TO MAJOR THEMES

In this section the researcher will investigate various key words and phrases or expressions to determine their significance and function within the passage. The significance and function of these key words within the broader context of Solomon’s prayer (cf. 1 Ki. 8:22-61) will also be taken into account. The various ranges of meaning of these crucial words will be considered in order to determine their specific theological meaning(s) suitable to this context. These word studies will be followed by brief discussions of the various themes emanating from them.

Here follows the transcribed text of 1 Ki. 8:23-26 with the key words and phrases in bold:

23 *wayyō mar yhw̄h ’ēlohē yīsrā’ēl ’ēn kāmōkā ’ēlohīm baššāmayim mimma’al
wē’al-hā’āreš mittāhat šōmēr habbērit wēhahesed la’āvādēkā hahōlēkīm lēfānēkā
bēkol-libbām.*

- 24 'āšer šāmartā lē'avdēkā dāwid' āvî 'ēt 'āšer dibbartā lô wattēdabbēr bēfikā
ūvēyādēkā millē'tā karryôm hazzē.
- 25 wē'attā yhw̄h 'ēlōhē yisrā'ēl šēmor lē'avdēkā dāwid' avî 'ēt 'āšer dibbartā llô lē'mōr
lō'-yikkārēt lēkā 'iš millēfānay yōšēv 'al-kissē' yisrā'ēl raq 'im-yišmērū vānēkā
'et-darkām lāleket lēfānay ka'āšer hālaqtā lēfānāy.
- 26 wē'attā 'ēlōhē yisrā'ēl yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā 'āšer dibbartā lē'avdēkā dāwid' āvî.

The following key words, phrases and expressions, as highlighted above, will now be studied in order to determine their significance or function within the passage and to explore Dtr's purpose and emphasis in using them:

1. wayyō' mar – “and he said ...” (v.23) – prayer
2. yhw̄h 'ēlōhē yisrā'ēl – “Yahweh, God of Israel” (v.23) – the exclusive worship of Yahweh
3. 'ēn kāmōkā 'ēlōhīm – “there is none like you God “ (v.23) – the incomparability of Yahweh
4. šōmēr habbērīt wēhaḥēsed – “who keeps the covenant and the loyal love” (v.23)
5. la'āvādēkā – “for your servants” (v.23)
lē'avdēkā dāwid – “to (for) your servant David” (v.24, 25, 26)
6. millē'tā karryôm hazzē – “you have fulfilled even this day” (v.24) – the temple (inferred)
7. wē'attā – “and now ...” (v.25, 26)
8. hlk lifnē – “walk before” – obedience (v.23, 25)
9. yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā 'āšer dibbartā – “your word that you have promised” (v.26)

5.5.1 wayyō'mar – “and he said ...” (v.23) – prayer

It can be safely deduced that Solomon is praying to Yahweh, given the previous verse, “*Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven*” (1 Ki. 8:22). Verse 23 continues the thought by commencing with “*and he said: ...*” which would imply that he now starts to pray to the God of Israel.

The reader is referred to section 5.3.2 “Form Analysis” (5.3.2.1 – General and Specific Literary Type and 5.3.2.2 Form-Critical Elements (Features) in Solomon's Prayer) and 5.4 dealing with

“Structure and Literary Characteristics” in which a brief note is given on “formal, royal prayer-text” as a literary genre.

This royal prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53) is on the lips of the king. It is not royal speech as such because a human addressee requires royal speech while God requires a royal prayer (Throntveit 1987: 75). Solomon is addressing the God of Israel. Therefore, the prayer is reported in direct discourse (Throntveit: 1987: 51). This long royal prayer at the dedication of the first temple is unique to the Book of Kings because of Dtr’s distinctive theological views that are embedded within the prayer.

1 Ki. 8:22 falls outside the passage of our research, but for a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of this prayer-text, the reader has to briefly look at this particular verse. A brief interpretive comment will suffice. The introductory comment, “And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven” (1 Ki. 8:22), presents the historical, national and theological contexts in terms of which this entire prayer and its historical-theological functioning and significance should be understood.

The stance taken by Solomon (1 Ki. 8:22, 38-39, 54) is one of a variety of symbolic gestures relating to the emotional sphere of prayer presented in the Old Testament. The spreading out of the hands is a posture of prayer and supplication. Solomon is sure of an answer because he can legitimately approach God in heaven through prayer and by lifting his hands, an act of total submission and commitment, to “heaven, his (God’s) holy dwelling place” (2 Chron. 30:27) (Kruger 1997: 1227; Tsumura 1997: 165; Verhoef 1997: 1065).

Solomon, as king and representative of the whole assembly of Israel (*qəḥal yiśrā’ēl*), entered into the very presence of Yahweh, i.e. at the altar. The altar is the place where God is met and worshipped but is also, in terms of the worship rituals of Israel, the place and instrument through which atonement and forgiveness is obtained by sinful people. Hands are the instruments through which one acts and brings about the fruits of one’s labours. Thus the symbolic act (spreading out of hands) expresses something of the intention of the content of the prayer.

King Solomon's prayer is not only a royal prayer but is a prayer of intercession for the people as well. In other words, the king also stands in a priestly role (a cultic function). The king even intercedes for foreigners. Solomon's functionary role here is an indication of the priestly status of the kings in pre-exilic times, when they served as a link between God and people. He indirectly encourages people to pray towards this temple while urgently pleading with (entreating) Yahweh to "listen to", "forgive", "help" and "restore" those who repent and direct their prayers toward the temple.

There appears now to be an added dimension in the function of the temple as such. Balentine (1973: 85-86) points out that prayer here serves as a defining characteristic of a place (the temple) rather than the person (Solomon). Dtr implies that this edifice built for Yahweh is not to be a place for sacrifice only but a centre for prayer as well. Knoppers (1995: 231) contends that the deuteronomistic presentation of Solomon's dedication of the temple depicts both royal sacrifice (1 Ki. 8:5, 62-64) and royal prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-51). God's answers to Solomon's royal-priestly prayer reaffirm the deuteronomistic emphasis on covenant, people, throne, temple and city (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-26, 29, 33, 36, 43 and 47). Knoppers (1995: 233) says that among other major movements in 1 Kings 8, the Solomonic discourse on the Davidic promises, the Torah of Moses and the celebration of the festival serve to integrate the temple and Solomon's prayer itself into Israel's corporate life. In the deuteronomistic view the Name of Israel's God now dwells in this temple.

The entire prayer of Solomon promotes the temple as a place of prayer, not so much as a place of sacrifice. According to Dtr, Solomon wants this temple to function as a place of popular prayer. Solomon's introductory address to Yahweh also indicates his concern about the role and perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty and the desired effect of his prayers (1 Ki. 8:23-26, 28-30, 52-53). It is to be borne in mind that Solomon's communication here with Yahweh is done within the two covenant relationships, viz., he is addressing the God who entered into a covenant with Israel and into a covenant with the Davidic dynasty.

In 2 Chron. 6:14-42, Solomon's long prayer at the dedication of the temple is adapted to some extent to the Chronicler's own conceptions. A brief note on the Chronicler's conception is given in section 5.5.6 and 5.5.8 respectively.

Cloete (1993: 40) is in agreement with Greenberg that prayers (in our case, Solomon's) are tailored to their circumstances and serve to give us an idea about the characters concerned. Dtr deliberately chose to present Solomon's prayer in full. As in the case of Hezekiah's prayer (cf. Cloete 1993), what the author makes Solomon say in his prayer reveals to us the character of Solomon whom Dtr wants us to experience in his text. It is also important to note how Dtr gives form to Solomon's prayer. At this stage the character of Solomon is still favourably portrayed by Dtr as can be deduced from Solomon's sophisticated and moving prayer and his allegiance to Yahweh, the temple and Jerusalem.

Apart from the prayer of Solomon, the prayer of king David (2 Sam. 7:18-29) and those of Hezekiah (2 Ki. 19:3-4; 20:2-3) are the only other royal prayers in the Deuteronomistic History (Knoppers 1992: 421).

5.5.2 *yhwh 'ēlohē yisrā'el* – “Yahweh, God of Israel” (v.23) – the exclusive worship of Yahweh

Solomon commences his long prayer with a touching and meaningful adoration through the invocation of “O Yahweh, God of Israel”. This invocation is also a liturgical formula used in the deuteronomistic literature. Solomon, in addition to standing in a priestly role, stands here in an act of total worship with this address.

Solomon, as king and representative of both Yahweh and Israel, knows that it is unacceptable to worship other gods alongside or instead of the Lord, God of Israel. This aspect is one of the main convictions of Dtr. The story of Solomon and other stories within the deuteronomistic literature are narrated against the background of the deuteronomic laws. Thus we see Dtr's theological concern with the exclusive worship of Yahweh, Israel's God (Provan 1997: 851).

Dtr is adamant in his expression here that God (Yahweh) is indeed God of Israel. He is not to be confused with the various gods worshipped within Israel and outside, for they are simply powerless, human creations. Israel's God, by contrast, is the only true God, and the incomparable Creator of heaven and earth. Solomon's address or invocation alludes to the motif of the exclusive worship of Yahweh. Yahweh is Israel's deity (God) and Israel is Yahweh's elected people, his chosen ones and “treasured possession” (cf. Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; Ps. 135:4). Israel

is commanded to worship Yahweh alone to the exclusion of all other gods. In adhering to the exclusive worship of or undivided allegiance to Yahweh, Israel can be sure of his election-love and covenantal faithfulness. These perceptions are inherent in Solomon's introductory invocation in his royal prayer.

The addressing of Yahweh as "O Lord God of Israel" expresses the monolatric attitude of the loyal Israelite. Yahweh is called a "jealous God" (Robinson 1972: 101). Van Gelderen (1951: 168) stresses the significance of the Hebrew name Adonai Yahweh, saying "De openbaringsnaam van den God des Verbonds is het begin en het einde". It is expressed in Ex. 3:14, finds its echo in Rev. 1:4; 8:4; 11:17, and is "by uitnemendheid in Salomo's gebed de Alpha en Omega".

The invocation of Solomon, "O Yahweh, God of Israel" (v.23), also alludes to the motif of divine election. Yahweh's special covenant relationship with Israel implies election and exclusive worship. Dtr recalls the divine election of God's people (*'ām*) and indirectly of David ("the Lord's chosen one") with this address of king Solomon. The election or choice of the city as well as the temple is inherent in Dtr's use of "Yahweh, God of Israel" (cf. the expression "the place the Lord your God will choose ... to put his Name there for his dwelling" (Deut. 12:5) and Deut. 15:20; 16:7, 16). Solomon is now standing in the "place" (dwelling) chosen and approved by God (cf. vv.27-29).

The opening address or liturgical formula "O Yahweh, God of Israel" (v.23) and its subsequent repetition (v.25, 26, 28 and 53) emphasize Dtr's preoccupation with the comforting and encouraging thought that there is still hope because Yahweh is still Israel's covenant God who will not abrogate his word. He, and no other god, has elected them to be his covenant people. Dtr refers here to the old tradition about the election of Israel, Moses and the exodus from Egypt (Von Rad 1975: 338). This election motif is continued later in the prayer (v.48) where king Solomon is mindful of Yahweh's election of Jerusalem, "this city", his dwelling place "this temple" and of his people "our ancestors".

Jacob (1958: 111) notes that the deuteronomistic writers want us to bear in mind that Israel's election was driven by Yahweh's love for his people. Yahweh has chosen them, therefore he is to be acknowledged as "Yahweh, God of Israel". The idea of divine election is embedded in the

story of Israel from the patriarchs onwards, and the idea is conveyed by various words and expressions (cf. Nicole 1997: 638 and Jacob 1958: 202).

Solomon, like David, is also called God's chosen or anointed one. There is thus a close relation between choice and anointing. Dtr recalls the divine election of David at the occasion of the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Ki. 8:16, 24-26). Knoppers (1995: 243) says that Dtr actually champions the novelty of Yahweh's choice of ruler and city. Brensinger (1997: 282) holds the opinion that one aspect of Dtr's theology concerning election and covenant is the indirect inference of Yahweh establishing and maintaining a personal royal-theocratic covenantal relationship with Solomon and an attitude of personal affection (love) for Solomon due to his father David.

The significance of divine election was for Israel, since the time of the exodus, a most powerful stimulant. No wonder Solomon, the Israelite king, commences his prayer by also alluding to the idea of divine election through the invocation of, "O Lord, God of Israel".

5.5.3 'ēn kāmōkā 'ēlōhīm – "there is no God like you" (v.23) – the incomparability of Yahweh

The incomparability and uniqueness of Yahweh is highlighted in 1 Ki. 8:23. Solomon commences his prayer at the dedication of the temple by affirming that Yahweh is the God of Israel and that there is no God like him in the entire universe ("...in heaven above or the earth beneath ..."). This also implies that no other ancient Near Eastern deities can be compared with him in terms of characteristics and nature (cf. the discussion by Van Dam 1997: 601 albeit focused on *l'vad* which is not used in our text). This theme of incomparability is echoed throughout Kings in the battle between the prophets and the syncretistic people.

The reader's attention is drawn to Solomon's repetition of the title by which the incomparable God is addressed, "Lord God of Israel" (v.23, 25), "O God of Israel" (v.26), "O Lord my God" (v.28) and "O Lord God" (v.53). This kind of addressing the incomparable God also expresses the monolatric attitude of the loyal Israelite. This feature of Israelite worship is what is meant when Yahweh is called a "jealous God" (Ex. 20:3-4) (Robinson 1972: 101). Dtr re-iterates the incomparability, sovereignty and uniqueness of Yahweh through Solomon's prayer because to

Dtr there is no other deity like the God of Israel. The deuteronomistic writer assumes that the Davidic dynasty (“house”), by way of the Davidic covenant, is under divine protection by the sovereign God of Israel. The passage, in typical deuteronomistic language, implies that the Lord has proved himself to be the true and only God in heaven and on earth because He, Yahweh, has granted the blessings promised to his chosen people.

Spina (1997: 1125) remarks that the language “God in heaven above” and “on the earth below” is uttered only by the most prominent of Israelites (Deut. 4:39; 1 Ki. 8:23; 2 Chron. 20:6). Apart from being an ascription of praise, this acclamation serves as a confession of faith as well.

The purpose of this section is to present a brief list of occurrences of the incomparability formula in Joshua – 2 Kings, and then a brief discussion of some of these, with a specific focus on the question what Dtr wants to achieve by placing this formula in that specific context. Reference will also be made to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah because the deuteronomistic theology permeates these books. The writer hopes that such a brief discussion may be able to throw more light on Solomon’s invocation and Dtr’s intent.

As mentioned in section 3.4 the reader will also be able to see the context of this incomparability formula within the prayer (so steeped in Deuteronomistic theology) itself, its relationship to the prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53), to Dtr’s view of Solomon (1 Ki. 1-11) and to Dtr’s overall theology in Joshua through to 2 Kings.

According to Dtr, Israel’s God was different from all other gods and therefore her religion would be different from other religions as well (cf. Labuschagne 1966: 1-3). The uniqueness of Israel’s religion shows itself in the uniqueness of Yahweh. Labuschagne (1966: 4) says that Israel spoke in a most explicit way about the distinctiveness of her religion whenever she proclaimed that her God, Yahweh, is incomparable. As reflected in the Old Testament Israel believed that Yahweh’s characteristics and qualities distinguished and differentiated him from other deities. It seems evident that there is a connection between Yahweh’s uniqueness and his incomparability. To Israel incomparability implied being both different and unique. Therefore, this confessional formula can be considered as a confession of Yahweh’s uniqueness (Labuschagne 1966: 145-146).

It must be noted that Israel was not the only people to call its God incomparable. Many Ancient Near Eastern polytheistic religions used a formula like this. There was, however, a distinct difference in perception by Israel of the incomparability of her God.⁵ This perception will be spelt out in the following paragraphs. Yahweh's uniqueness is indisputable for there is none that can be placed on the same level with him (cf. Ps. 40:5-6).

The way in which Yahweh's incomparability is expressed in 1 Ki. 8:23 is by means of a comparative negation, "there is none like thee...". This manner of expression is also seen in "There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2), as well as in, "There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord..." (Ps. 89:7). The opening words of Asa's prayer would serve as another example of this comparative negation, "Yahweh, there is none like thee to help between the mighty and the weak" (2 Chron. 14:10). Another way of expressing Yahweh's incomparability is through a rhetorical question, for example, "Who is like Yahweh our God ...in heaven or on earth" (Ps. 113:5-6) and in "What god is there in heaven or on earth, who can do such works and mighty acts as thine?" (Deut. 3:24).

According to Old Testament tradition, the newly elected king is called incomparable because he alone, to the exclusion of all other rivals, has a claim to the throne (Labuschagne 1966: 10). The incomparability formulae are one means by which an exilic Deuteronomist highlights the exceptional accomplishments of very important persons, be they judges or kings, within his history. A look at the various reasons for describing the kings as incomparable can be expected to help us to understand why the incomparability formula is put there. For example, Solomon is lauded for unparalleled (incomparable) wisdom and wealth, Hezekiah for unparalleled trust (2 Ki. 18:4-6), and Josiah for unparalleled reforms (2 Ki. 23:25) (Knoppers 1992: 413, 414). According to Dtr, God was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom and told him that God would give him, Solomon, "more wisdom and understanding than anyone has ever had before or will ever have again ... and you will have wealth and honour, more than that of any other king" (1 Ki. 3:12-13). The queen of Sheba lauded king Solomon in the same way as expressed by Nehemiah, the scribe, "He was a man who was greater than any of the kings of other nations"

⁵ Gottwald (1980: 693) makes a thought-provoking comment in answer to the question, "What was the uniqueness of Israel's God?" He asserts that the uniqueness of Yahweh does not lie in the fact that Yahweh was personal, merciful, powerful, sovereign or even acted in history but that Yahweh "transcended" Israel as the symbol of Israel's "transcendence" over Ancient Near Eastern society. Yahweh was so different from other gods because Yahweh was the god of such a different people.

(Neh. 13:26). Dtr sees Solomon's wealth and wisdom as a divine bequest through which the latter secures two of the Davidic promises: the security of Israel and the construction of the temple (Knoppers 1992: 417). The narratives found in 1 Ki. 3-10 demonstrate the importance of wisdom and wealth in the deuteronomistic presentation of Solomon because the first part of Solomon's reign brings unmatched glory to God and Israel. The Chronicler also notes Solomon's glory and greatness in 2 Chron. 35:18 but unlike Dtr in 1 Kings 3-10, he avoids glorification of Solomon's person and eulogizes the latter's riches and honour only (Labuschagne 1966: 14).

The comparative negation is used many times in the Old Testament in respect of Yahweh. Two instances of this comparative negation are found in Exod. 9:14 and Exod. 8:6. Other examples are to be found in hymns and prayers, some by way of an opening confession (cf. Deut. 33:26; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Ki. 8:23; 2 Chron. 14:10; 2 Chron. 20:6; Ps. 86:8 and Jer. 10:6,7). Labuschagne (1966: 12-14) warns that all these expressions call for a careful consideration of the primary meaning and possible connotations of the comparative particle – "as", "like" – and to adhere to the primary sense of these expressions denoting Yahweh's incomparability.

Some of the passages relating to the incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament are Exod. 9:14; 8:6; 15:11; Deut. 3:24; 33:26; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 7:22,23; 22:32; 1 Ki. 8:23; 18:5; 23:25; 2 Chron. 14:10; 20:6; Ps. 18:32; 35:10; 71:19; 77: 14; 86:8; 89:7-9; 113:4-6; Jer. 10:6,7,16; 50:44; Isa. 40:18,25; 44:7; 46:5; Mic. 7:18). This list is by no means exhaustive but we will focus only on those relevant passages, where Dtr has placed them and what he wants to achieve by placing them in their specific contexts. By virtue of the nature of the topic under discussion, a few exilic and post-exilic texts outside the Deuteronomistic History will also be explored.

The comparative material or things and the aspect or quality by virtue of which Yahweh is considered incomparable is mentioned in many of the above-mentioned texts. For example, in Exod. 15:11 and Ps. 86:8 (the gods), Deut. 32:31 (other "rocks"), Ps 89:7 (the heavenly beings), Jer. 10:7,16 (the wise ones, i.e. craftsmen and diviners, of the nations), 1 Sam. 2:2 (His holiness), Ps. 77:14 (greatness), Ps. 113:4-6 (Yahweh's glory is above the heavens and he sits enthroned on high, yet simultaneously raises the poor from the dust and helps the needy), 2 Chron. 14:11 (helping the weak in battle) and in 2 Chron. 20:6 (the sovereign and all-powerful God who cannot be opposed). We would now find Solomon's exclamation of Yahweh's incomparability in terms of keeping his (Yahweh's) covenant of love, and the honouring of his promises to his

servants (1 Ki. 8:23-26) appropriately in terms of Yahweh's character and sovereignty as deduced from the afore-mentioned texts.

Labuschagne (1966: 94-96) notes that the expressions in the hymns are frequently followed by participles denoting the qualities that characterize Yahweh as incomparable. He says that those passages mentioned above, except the Psalms, which are loaded with ideas and conceptions associated with these expressions, shed light on their meaning or purpose and content. The statements of Yahweh's incomparability cannot be detached from their context. They cannot be seen as mere ascriptions of praise to God, because these expressions constitute the main idea, the substance of the passage to which epithets of praise are complementary.

I wish to argue in this study that the diction used by Dtr in 1 Ki. 8:23 serves to expound and throw light on Yahweh's incomparability with reference to his covenant keeping and showing of *hesed* to his servants, including the exiles in Babylon.

In some ways the idea expressed by Dtr through the incomparability formula in Solomon's ascription of praise (1 Ki. 8:23) is unlike the idea of incomparability in the Assyro-Babylonian religion. Knoppers (1995: 251) says that the knowledge people in surrounding states gain about Yahweh and his incomparable status is linked to Yahweh's treatment of his own king and people. Solomon knows God for he has experienced God's loyal love in the fulfillment of the Davidic promises. Dtr also records "How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is none like you; we have always known that you alone are God" (2 Sam. 7:22). The first commandment stipulates that Yahweh alone should be served and that he is a jealous God who wants to be honoured exclusively. He shares his glory with no other deity. The second commandment stipulates that no graven image is to be made of Israel's incomparable God. The implication in Ex. 20:4-6 is that Yahweh cannot be compared to or associated with anything in nature, although he reveals himself through the powers of nature (as at Sinai/ Horeb). He is the One who establishes and creates things in nature (Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 24-25). Thus we see that Dtr wishes to evoke an obedient response to the first commandment of Yahweh from the generation of exile and all future generations. Because of his incomparability, expressed by Dtr, Yahweh demands from the Israelites (including their kings) their exclusive loyalty, i.e. loyalty and worship to the exclusion of all other gods. Robinson (1972: 102) says that it is a call for their undivided and uncontaminated spiritual response.

Dtr, with his reference to the Mosaic and Davidic covenants in 1 Ki. 8:23-26 and elsewhere in Solomon's prayer, believes that there is but one God only because Israel's incomparable God is the One who establishes thrones (dynasties) and secures them, gives land and is in total control of and responsible for history (Brueggemann 1977: 45-70). In other words, Yahweh controls human destiny (Brueggemann 1977: 15-27; Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 26; Kaiser 1978: 163-164). An undoubted proof of this is that Solomon, through divine bequest of wealth and wisdom by Yahweh, has secured two of the Davidic promises: the security of Israel and the building of the temple (Knoppers 1992: 417). King Solomon, who has been nominated by God through the prophetic word, receives permanent divine legitimation (Gerstenberger 2002: 169). For Dtr, the dedication of the central temple validates Nathan's dynastic oracle (2 Sam. 7:5-16) as well as David's prayer (2 Sam. 7:18-29) (Knoppers 1995: 243). It is, therefore, not surprising that Dtr inserts this incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer.

Dtr took the existence and worshipping of other gods or deities seriously, hence the persistent comparison of Israel's true God with other ("false") gods. An example of this thought can be seen in Elijah's confrontation with the Ba'al prophets and the choice given to the people whom they want to serve by comparing Israel's Yahweh and Ba'al (cf. 1 Ki. 18:20-40).

Jer. 10:2-16 (consisting of a prayer and a confession in hymnic style makes an explicit comparison between Yahweh of Israel and the gods of the nations. The specific aim of the redactor of the Book of Jeremiah, under the influence of deuteronomic theology here, is to show that they are nothing compared with Yahweh. Israel's faith in him is unlike the heathen's and the way of Yahweh's people is not like the way of the nations. This passage of Jer. 10:1-16 is set during the time of Josiah's religious reform.

In the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43) a comparison is made between the gods of the enemies (the idols) and Yahweh. Deut. 32: 31 states explicitly, "Truly their rock is not as our Rock! What is more, your enemies themselves are judges." The term "their rock" implies any of the heathen gods in whom the non-Israelites and unbelieving Israelites put their trust (Labuschagne 1966: 70). The text also implies that the enemies will judge for themselves and come to the definite conclusion that their rock is not as Israel's Rock. King Solomon, in his prayer, now affirms the God of Israel who has proved himself to be, unlike the other gods, a sure foundation that will not

waver in his promises and covenant love because “with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it, even this day” (1 Ki. 8:24).

Labuschagne (1966: 71) concedes that in the Song of Moses, as in Jer.10:2-16 and elsewhere, the expression of Yahweh’s incomparability was born in the heat of the struggle against idolatry, as a confession of true faith in Yahweh the only true God. Israel’s wayward conduct stirred God to jealousy and angered him.

In the discussion of the afore-mentioned texts, the pronouncements of Yahweh’s incomparability occur in a context describing a situation where other gods were put on a level with Yahweh as a result of idolatry or as in Exod. 8:6 and 9:14 where Yahweh’s position and his rights were challenged. Ps. 89:7 shows two significant aspects of Yahweh’s incomparability. First, because of the unusual mode of expression and secondly, because of the explicit comparison made between Yahweh and the heavenly beings. The idea expressed here is that the heavenly beings cannot regard themselves to be on the same level as Yahweh, enjoying the praises given to him, but should actually join in the act of worshipping Yahweh. The reason is that Yahweh, the One who is “feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all around him” (v.8), is exalted above them as well (Labuschagne 1966: 80-81).

The prayers of Asa (2 Chron. 14:11) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:6-12) contain references to Yahweh’s incomparability. Asa commences his prayer with the assertion, “Yahweh, there is none like thee to help between mighty and the weak.” (2 Chron. 14:11) while the prayer of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:6-12) starts with a creedal confession expressed by means of rhetorical questions, “O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, ...” (v.6). Both Jehoshaphat and Asa conclude their prayers by expressing their confidence in Yahweh after having confessed that Yahweh is God and incomparable in holding out against any enemy. It supplies the motive for their call on Yahweh to act. The primary idea in these prayers is that there is no one like Israel’s Yahweh in whom humans in trouble can put their trust, for there is none like him able to help or to intervene in a struggle. Solomon shows throughout his prayer his trust and faith in the incomparable God of Israel.

Given all the passages discussed in this section, it becomes evident that there is a connection between Yahweh's uniqueness and his incomparability. Therefore, Dtr makes it an important and permeating theme in Solomon's prayer, commencing right away with 1 Ki. 8:23.

5.5.4 *šōmēr habbērît wēhaḥesed* – “who keeps the covenant and the loyal love” (v.23)

Solomon stands before the altar of the Lord and with praise and adoration to Yahweh tells his incomparable God that there is no one who can keep covenant like the God of Israel. Dtr sees in the covenant contracted with David and his dynasty (“house”) that Yahweh does concern himself with his people and “listens” (cf. 1 Ki. 8:30).

1 Ki. 8:24-26 stress the deuteronomistic perception of Israel's covenant keeping God. Otwell (1967: 70-71) says that the Deuteronomistic historians shared with the rest of the Deuteronomistic school the belief that the covenant between king and his subjects was like the covenant between God and his people. Israel's God is identified by the name, Yahweh, whose deeds are described by the covenant community accepting him as “Lord God of Israel” and who promises to be faithful. This thought is scattered throughout both the Deuteronomic Code and the Deuteronomistic History. The latter is now the description of the working out of the blessings or curses, as contained in the Deuteronomic Code, in the history of Israel. King Solomon, who utters this prayer, is now also a recipient of the promised covenant blessings.

In the covenant that Yahweh made with his people, he shows his grace and steadfast, loyal love (*ḥesed*) in reaching down from heaven to the earth below. Gray (1970: 220) notes an association of *ḥesed* with *bērît* (“covenant”). God has promised to accept the nation of Israel as his people and to take care of them as long as they obey him. Solomon acknowledges here that when Yahweh gives his covenant, he keeps it (*šōmēr habbērît*). Solomon can attest to this because he has been favoured by God to have built the temple and is also sitting now on David's throne. That which God had promised in the Davidic covenant, he has now fulfilled.

The word *bērît* in the Old Testament context means a binding agreement, essentially conceived of as a relationship containing assurance, promise and command. The covenant also expresses the bond that unites the people of Israel to their God (Jacob 1958: 209; McConville 1997a: 747).

A close study of certain Old Testament texts would show that there were covenants between human parties and covenants between God and his people, and that the idea of covenant occurs in the writings of some prophets.

Covenants between human parties include a covenant of friendship, with an implication of obligation and sanction (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8); treaties or agreements of parity between rulers or powerful individuals (1 Ki. 5:12, 26; 15:19; 2 Ki. 11:4); treaties or agreements in which the more powerful party stipulates the terms (Deut. 7:2; 1 Sam. 11:1) or where the weaker party seeks terms (1 Ki. 20:34). It is owing to Israel's religion that Yahweh, the parent-god, holds such an important place in covenant-making between any Israelites. Every covenant is concluded before Yahweh (cf. 1 Sam. 23:18; 2 Sam. 5:3; 2 Ki. 23:3 and Jacob 1958: 210-211).

The covenant in the Old Testament has been compared to Ancient Near Eastern state treaties (Anderson 1975: 89; Mayes 1983: 34-35; McConville 1997a: 747). Similarities between Yahweh's covenant and the vassal treaties may imply that Yahweh is Israel's suzerain and that the covenantal relationship demands a certain commitment or allegiance from the people for its preservation.

Election as a dynamic reality is exercised within the framework of a covenant with its character of a relationship of commitment between two contracting parties. It is to be borne in mind that when God is one of the two parties of the covenant, there can be no question of a contract between equals because such a covenant is due only to the initiative of God and is in no way a reward for Israel's merits. The covenant is valid only if the people respond to it by obedience and faithfulness (cf. Deut. 7:7-10). Israel's experiences of the blessings of the covenant would bring them to be obedient to the commands of the covenant. Solomon, in his prayer of dedication, also refers to this aspect of obedience by his father David (1 Ki. 8:24-26).

Solomon alludes to the Mosaic or Sinai covenant a few times in his prayer (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23 – referring to the “God of Israel”, and his “servants”; v.40, 51-53, 56). The gist of this covenant is unfolded in Ex. 19–24. It is undergirded by God's deliverance of his people from Egyptian slavery, a connection that theologically links it to the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17). The Priestly writer embraces the Sinai covenant within the “everlasting covenant” that Yahweh (El Shaddai) had made with Abraham and his descendants. Yahweh's deliverance of the Israelites

from Egyptian slavery is based on his remembrance of the Abrahamic covenant (Exod. 2:24; 6:2-8; cf. Deut. 4:31); and the establishment of the cult at Sinai (Exod. 25 –31) is the fulfillment of his pledge to be God to his people (Gen. 17:7) and then to “tabernacle” in their midst (Anderson 1975: 84; McConville 1997a: 749).

The outstanding feature of the Mosaic or Sinai covenant is its stipulation of God’s laws regulating Israel’s life within the framework of the election of Israel by grace. Two pivotal passages here are Ex. 19:5-6 at the beginning of the Sinai event,

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

and the prologue to the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:2,

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

It is significant that the unconditional obligations of the Ten Commandments are prefaced with this brief historical prologue.

The Mosaic covenant was in no way a contract between two equals or where the parties were mutually dependent. It was, indeed, a relationship between unequals, God and Israel. The theophany experienced at Sinai, affirms the thought of God’s holiness and majesty. This covenant was given and the relationship conferred upon the people by their sovereign. Yahweh was legally bound to Israel but his sovereignty was not limited by the covenant. Israel’s pledge of obedience to Yahweh, expressed in the covenant ceremony, was based on gratitude for Yahweh’s mighty deeds of deliverance (cf. Ex. 1–15) and on the realization that her entire life was dependent upon God’s sovereign grace and promise.

Solomon makes a reference to the Davidic covenant through “you who keep your covenantal love with your servants” (1 Ki. 8:23). David is deemed as one of Yahweh’s “servants”. Another reference is seen in “Now Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father the promise you made to him ... you shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel ...” (v.25) and a final one in “your word that you promised your servant David my father ...” (v.26). It can be gathered from the passage on hand that there is a distinct difference between God’s

covenant made with David and his promise to David concerning the building and completion of the temple (cf. 1 Ki. 8:15-21; 8:24).

The covenant made with David permeates the rest of Old Testament theology (Heater 1991: 149). David himself became a model, according to Dtr, for all other successive kings. Solomon's words used in Ki. 8:23-26 allude to the prophetic oracle of Nathan, the court's prophet, that David's son and successor would build a temple in Yahweh's honour and that God would "establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:13-16). The content of the text in 2 Sam. 7 is to be seen as an everlasting covenant with David – a total commitment on God's part but with the concomitant provision that any disobedience to Yahweh's laws would result in harsh discipline though not in the ending of the covenant relationship now established. However, keeping faith with Yahweh (cf. 1 Ki. 9:6-9) becomes a prerequisite for the continuation of the covenant (Gordon 1997: 507-508).

There are two schools of thought holding diametrically opposed views concerning the aspect of conditionality regarding the continuation of the Davidic covenant. The one school of thought holds that God's covenantal promises are unconditional while another (especially the deuteronomistic writers and scholars) holds that keeping faith with Yahweh becomes a prerequisite for the continuation of the covenant.

The text itself speaks of the continuation of the Davidic covenant but reflects a strong conditional aspect to the Davidic covenant whereas other Deuteronomistic passages (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:13-16) give the impression that the Davidic covenant is not conditional. This ambiguity in the texts has resulted in differences of opinion amongst scholars. McConville (1997b: 535) says that a balance is always kept in deuteronomistic theology between the elements of promise and command.

In the introductory part of his prayer (1 Ki. 8:24-26), Solomon urged Yahweh to keep his promises relating to David's descendants. If they were obedient, they would be allowed to sit on the throne (v.25). As mentioned earlier, God responded favourably to Solomon's request but, as Solomon's reign progressed, his heart "was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been" (1 Ki. 11:4). Solomon came under the negative aspect of the Davidic covenant in 1 Kings 11. Dtr states that Solomon failed to meet the norms stipulated by God. In

spite of Yahweh's displeasure with Solomon due to the latter's syncretistic activity, there was no immediate retribution. God said, "... I will not tear the whole kingdom from him ... for the sake of David my servant ..." (1 Ki. 11:12-13; cf. 2 Chron. 21:7). The text in Chronicles emphasizes the Davidic covenant, "because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord ... had promised to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever". Gordon (1997: 511) says it seems that hope for a restored Davidic monarchy was cherished by the Chronicler and others who held the same sentiment even late in the fourth century.

Gordon (1997: 508) postulates that this praising of David by Dtr as the standard of comparison for all David's successors is possible because of a cultic loyalty to Yahweh that Dtr prizes, and in that respect the David of tradition was more exemplary than was even Solomon.

The essence of the Davidic covenant can be seen as God's promise to David that his progeny will sit on the throne of Israel forever. In addition, David received a promise that his offspring will build the temple, now realized with Solomon (1 Ki. 8:24-26). The Davidic covenant concerns the continuation of the dynasty. The promise of building the temple is not part of the covenant. However, there is an association of the temple with the dynasty.

In verses 24-25 Dtr implies that Yahweh's covenant with Israel is recalled, though the idea moves on to a new covenant, that of Yahweh with David and his house that will never fail for lack of an heir (Robinson 1972:101-102; Gray 1970: 220). Dtr assumes that the Davidic dynasty is under divine protection by the sovereign God of Israel. Dtr declares that the promise was made to David and to his line forever (2 Sam. 7:12) and now repeats the assurance in verse 25 that the Davidic dynasty will never be cut off (*lō' -yikkārēt lēkā 'îš*). This then is manifested in Solomon, the son of David, sitting on the throne now (Peckham 1987: 81).

1 Ki. 8:24-26 has to be read and understood in conjunction with 2 Sam. 7:11-16 because both passages contain the core of the Davidic promise. God promised David an eternal seed and an eternal throne. One of David's offspring would succeed him to the throne, and the son's throne, like David's, would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16). This offspring was to build the temple David wanted to build and would also not be outside the covenant love of Yahweh. God's sovereign choice cannot be cancelled or revoked, though various forms of discipline will be invoked when disobedience takes place. Solomon is now the beneficiary of this Davidic

covenant. Heater (1991: 127) says that David created the setting for the message from Yahweh about David's eternal house. Solomon completed the temple, and with a permanent structure, the priesthood at Jerusalem under Zadok took even greater significance. At the same time, Yahweh had graciously conceded to place his Name in the temple (1 Ki. 8:27) and people will now be able to pray toward the temple and expect a response from Yahweh who had identified himself with the temple. Suffice it to say, God fulfilled his promises to David, Solomon's father. King Solomon now acclaims Yahweh as the incomparable covenant keeping God of Israel.

The dominant theme of "breaking" the covenant or conditionality conveyed in 1 Ki. 8:25 can only refer to personal and individual invalidation of the covenant, but it cannot affect the transmission of the promise to David's descendants (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-15; 1 Ki. 2:4; 9:4-5; Ps. 89:30-33; 132:12). God would indeed affirm his promise and faithfulness in spite of any "erring" descendants of David. Yahweh would find fault with them and deal with them accordingly but not with his Abrahamic-Davidic-new covenant (Kaiser 1978: 157).

According to Dtr, it is in obedience to the commands of Yahweh, and only in such obedience, that Israel and her king can stand in covenant relationship with Yahweh and be recipients of Yahweh's covenantal promises or blessings. Thus the destruction of Israel and Judah followed by the exile signified that a breach of the covenant had taken place, albeit from Israel's side, through the evil done by her kings. Mayes (1983: 125) points out that towards the end of the books of Kings (2 Ki. 25), Dtr sees Israel's destruction, her subsequent repentance and especially God's *hesed* bringing about future restoration.

The dedication of Solomon's temple confirms both David and Moses, the two most dominant figures in the deuteronomistic history (Knoppers 1995: 243).

Based on the above, the reader will notice the inextricable relatedness of the concept of covenant with the motifs of the divine election of Israel, the exclusive worship of Yahweh (Israel's God), the covenant-keeping God, the Davidic dynasty, and God's *hesed*. Indeed, God's covenant with David and his descendants, though having an element of conditionality, is characterized by God's loyal love and faithfulness.

Solomon stands in front of the altar of the Lord and publicly declares in his prayer the incomparability of Yahweh, lauding the God of Israel who alone is capable of showing and keeping true *ḥesed*, i.e. covenant loyalty and steadfast love, to his servants – *šōmēr habbērît wəḥaḥesed la'āvādêkā*. In our passage for exegesis, *ḥesed* does not only denote God's initial grace in the covenant but also his loyalty to the Davidic promises made. From the text on hand, we can infer that Dtr's view is that the Davidic dynasty would be preserved through God's covenantal loyalty. Baer and Gordon (1997: 217) says that there is a particular focus on God's establishing *ḥesed* towards David who is promised an eternal "house" and kingdom in contrast to his predecessor. This permanence is predicated on God's promise never to strip David of his *ḥesed* (cf. Sam. 7:15-16; 1 Ki. 8:23). Divine *ḥesed* characterizes God's rule and establishes his king and servants.

According to Glueck (1967: 2, 37) *ḥesed* exists between people who are in some close relationship to one another. For example, the *ḥesed*-relationship exists between relatives by blood or marriage, related clans and related tribes; host and guest; allies and their relatives; friends; ruler and subject, and there is also the principle of *ḥesed* as merited obligation (Glueck 1967: 35-37). Thus *ḥesed* is received or shown only by those amongst whom a definite relationship exists. David, God's servant, his "chosen" and "anointed one", was in a close and definite relationship with Yahweh. Solomon is now in the same relationship with God in terms of the Davidic covenant but also in terms of God's love for Solomon himself. The tone and diction of the words recorded by Dtr conveys a sense of close relationship between the praying Solomon and his God.

The word *ḥesed* with its various shades of implied meanings, such as constant love, steadfast love, grace and mercy, faithfulness, and loyalty, describes the relationship established between God and his people. Further to our exegesis of 1 Ki. 8:23, *ḥesed* may also imply the loyal fulfillment of the obligations of a relationship that has been freely accepted. In other words, it implies the keeping of covenant. The essence of what Dtr stresses here may be that Yahweh showed *ḥesed* because he was loyal to the covenant relationship he had initiated with Israel. God had deemed Israel worthy of his consideration in the covenant.

According to the prayer-text, it is not only Solomon who will benefit from this covenant relationship but the people as well. On the other hand, Israel showed *ḥesed* as they responded to

God with a loyal and willing obedience to all the requirements stipulated in the covenant (Robinson 1972: 101; Gray 1970: 220). Solomon's prayer in verse 25 ("keep") and verse 26 ("let thy word be confirmed") is actually in a way of reminding God to confirm his promises made to David. From this assumed pattern of relationship of people and God, there is also the implication of sympathy with a man's needs (God has confirmed and will further confirm his word in a sure answer to Solomon and the people). Embedded in this thought is also the faithful adherence to the principles of the covenant guaranteeing order in relationships. Dtr notes this obedience in "servants who walk before thee with their whole heart." (v.23), and "your sons keep their way to walk before me as you (David) walked before me." (v.25).

Jacob (1958: 104) discerns another dimension in this *hesed* referred to by Solomon in 1 Ki. 8:23. He says that this *hesed* can be defined as the power guaranteeing a covenant and making it strong and durable because Solomon thanks the incomparable God for keeping his covenant love. God is now revealed in and through the Davidic covenant and God's showing of *hesed* is a proof of God's intention to give that which God has promised (cf. v.25).

Thus *hesed*, as conveyed in the text, can be seen as characterizing the reciprocal relationship of God to David and his dynasty. In 1 Ki. 8:23-26 Solomon refers to Yahweh's promises made to his father, David (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-16; 1 Chron. 17:13-14). Yahweh promises David to show *hesed* to his descendants but with an inherent conditionality. God's relationship with David's descendants is to be like that between father and son. This implies a mutual relationship of rights and duties necessitating the reciprocal practice of *hesed*. It also entails strong ethical demands and obligations. The descendants of David had to conduct themselves with *hesed* to Yahweh otherwise they would risk punishment. This is a typical deuteronomistic thought.

The covenantal relationship between Yahweh and David is further stressed by calling David God's servant. It can also be deduced from 1 Ki. 8:23-26 that only those who serve God in faithfulness participate in communion with him and will receive *hesed* from him.

It is in this introductory part of the prayer-text (1 Ki. 8:23-25; cf. 2 Chron. 6:14-16), where Solomon, in his plea for God's affirmation, alludes to the promise concerning David and the accompanying *hesed* which Yahweh keeps for those of his servants who walk wholeheartedly before him. Solomon refers to the promise earlier:

“You have shown great *hesed* to your servant David, my father, because he dealt with you in loyalty, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart; and you have kept for him this great *hesed*, and have given him a son who sits on his throne this day” (1 Ki. 3:6).

Now, as a result of this promise, Yahweh had acted toward David in accordance with the covenant just as David had fulfilled the obligations resulting from this *hesed* relationship with Yahweh by walking before him in loyalty, righteousness and uprightness. Solomon also prays that the promise will remain unbroken (Glueck 1967: 78).

Based on the various forms of relationships noted above, it can be inferred that *hesed* is human conduct corresponding to a mutual obligatory relationship of rights and duties. God has shown divine *hesed* to King Solomon therefore the king is now also obligated to show *hesed* to his subjects who are God’s people as well. They should respond likewise.⁶

There is *hesed* between God and the righteous man tied to him by ethical and religious conduct. Dtr, in his favourable portrayal of Solomon, sees the latter as a righteous person hence Yahweh’s communion (in the form of visions and dreams) with Solomon. Dtr sees a reason for the showing of *hesed* between God and Solomon because of the latter’s religious conduct in having built a “dwelling” where Yahweh’s name will dwell forever and now dedicating this huge and beautiful edifice to Yahweh’s glory. Such conduct is indeed commendable.

Solomon is the recipient of God’s *hesed* because of his father David’s loyalty, honesty and obedience to the commands of God. Solomon is thanking God now for his *hesed* shown to him, “even this day” (v.24). The question arises in the mind of the reader: will Solomon be able to fulfill these obligations related to *hesed* throughout his reign?

Solomon now stands in a covenant relationship with God. Dtr shows that God will answer Solomon’s prayer and affirm his *hesed* and covenant, and “listen to”, “help” and “heal” his people. God’s *hesed* is the result of his covenant, or promise or oath (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-16 and 1 Ki. 8:23-26).

⁶ The elements of the general concept of *hesed* as corresponding to a mutually obligatory relationship are in essence: reciprocity, mutual assistance, sincerity, friendliness, brotherliness, duty, loyalty and love (Glueck 1967: 54).

Glueck (1967: 70) states that the *hesed* of God, while not to be identified with his grace, is still based upon the latter, especially in terms of the nature of the relationship between God and Israel. It is by the grace of God that Solomon can be the beneficiary of God's *hesed* and the Davidic promises.

The benefits of *hesed* for both king Solomon and his people can only be realized and secured in a life of faith and obedience, in other words, loyalty and fidelity to God are required (cf. v.24-25, 26) (Kaiser 1978: 65-66).

5.5.5 *la'āvādēkā* – “for your servants ” (v.23) and *lě'avdēkā dawid* – “to (for) your servant David” (v.24, 25, 26)

Solomon repeats the term “servant” in 1 Ki. 8:23-26 in addressing the incomparable God of Israel. He praises Yahweh by stating, “you who keep your covenant of love *with your servants* (v.23), “You ... kept your promise *to your servant David* my father (v.24), “keep *for your servant David* my father the promise” (v.25) and “let your word that you promised *your servant David* my father come true” (v.26). Each phrase, as italicized, has its own specific nuance of thought. It is significant that this term *'eved* “servant” is connected to David, Solomon's father, and a promise made to him by Yahweh. This term is also coupled with the idea of obedience to the initiator of the promise. Throughout the text on hand Dtr confirms the honourable status of David as the servant of Yahweh. David is Yahweh's *'eved* but not his slave. The reader can see, from the context and tone used by Dtr in this passage, the favourable aspect of the term “servant” in relation to Yahweh as opposed to its everyday pejorative connotation of a relationship between two persons of unequal status. Solomon can now also be regarded as a servant of Yahweh, providing he “walks before” God as David did.

As the theme of “servant” develops, each occurrence of it, as reflected in verses 23-26, adds a new nuance to the term. 1 Ki. 8:23 relates to Yahweh's keeping the covenant of love with his loyal and obedient servants (*la'āvādēkā* “with your servants”). This plural implies that the same choice and the same commitment of Yahweh are available to the readers/hearers/audience of Dtr in the exile and after.

In verse 24, there is a shift in nuance because the term, *lě'avdĕkā dāwid*, now has a more personal and direct relational ring articulated by the pronominal suffix “your”, “You have kept your promise to your servant David my father ... you have fulfilled it, even this day.” These words, apart from their allusion to the Davidic covenant, relate also to the prophetic fulfillment of the building and completion of the temple as promised explicitly by God to David himself (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-16; 1 Chron. 17:11-14).

With verse 25, there is again a shift of emphasis in the use of the term “servant”. The phrase, *lě'avdĕkā dāwid* “for your servant David”, is now associated with the main aspect of the Davidic promise, as introduced arrestingly by the connective link of “And now” viz., the promise of a dynasty that will last forever, “You shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel”. This promise was made to David only.

Verse 26 says that Yahweh’s promised word to his servant David must now be affirmed. Solomon states that the “word” of Yahweh was promised to nobody else’s servant but Yahweh’s (*lě'avdĕkā dāwid*). Yahweh’s word must now be affirmed to the new Davidic king, Solomon. Note the importance and significance of the possessive pronoun serving as a demonstrative adjective (“your”) denoting relationship, viz., Yahweh’s servant. Dtr uses the adjectival phrase “your servant” here as a designation indicating the relationship between God and David. Certain aspects of the thrust of Dtr’s theology can be discerned in the exploration of the servant theme within the text on hand, in this case the thrust of the Davidic covenant and its implications.

Schultz (1997a: 193, 197) notes that the assessment of a theologically significant term, in this case “servant”, as part of the exegetical process must take into consideration possible constraints on usage (this includes the specific emphasis a word is given) and discourse meaning. A sudden shift in its discourse meaning may underline the major point the author is making. Thus one must not allow any negative connotation associated with the term servant, involving oppressive servitude, to affect one’s perception of the biblical image. To be a “servant of God” has no negative connotation for the servant him/herself.

The text on hand intimates that Yahweh favoured David and Solomon by the giving and the fulfillment of the Davidic promises. Solomon has built a magnificent temple for Yahweh. A further reading of 1 Kings 8 about the dedication of the temple, the prelude to the prayer, the

prayer-text itself, the final blessings and subsequent sacrifices and feasting, will show how God has indeed conferred majesty and splendour on the (Davidic) king, his “chosen servant” (cf. Collins 1997b: 1014).

A particular theological usage of this term can be seen in our text where Solomon designates David, his father, as God’s servant in addressing God. There is, however, also the other usage where God, another speaker, or the narrator describes someone as God’s servant when God is not being addressed (Schultz 1997b: 1189).

The usage of God’s servant as a self-designation takes place when, while addressing God in prayer, the individual or representative of the people evokes the master/slave terminology to acknowledge dependence on God to grant a request, even referring to the relationship as the basis for expecting the request to be granted. This is exactly what Dtr’s Solomon is doing in his prayer on the occasion of the temple dedication. He uses the word *‘eved* 12 times; 5 times as a self-designation, 3 times to refer to David, once to refer to Moses, and 3 times to refer to his people (Schultz 1997b: 1189). Solomon uses this self-designation of servant by virtue of his being the recipient or bearer of the Davidic covenant promises. The achievement of having completed the temple and the promise of sitting on the throne of Israel now prompt Solomon to evoke David’s and his servant relationship to Yahweh. The divine promises to David associated with his servant status are both acknowledged as being fulfilled (1 Ki. 8:24; cf. also v.66) and now invoked with reference to Solomon’s and his descendants’ continuation on the Davidic throne (1 Ki. 8:25-26). According to Dtr, Solomon is sure of an answer from Yahweh.

The term servant (*‘eved*) is applied frequently to David (38 times), who is a dominant figure in Israel’s history. The usage and emphasis of the term by Dtr is remarkable and significant. God is the one who calls David “my servant”, by virtue of the Davidic covenant: “He chose David his servant” (2 Sam. 7:5, 8). David has been given the honour of serving the divine master, Yahweh, being intimately related to him, inter alia in having designed the temple, and has been particularly exemplary in his obedience to Yahweh and in his sense of dependence on Yahweh. Solomon, as God’s chosen one as well, is to emulate his exemplary father.

Given the language used by Dtr, the reader can deduce that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not distant and aloof from his people, the king and subjects alike, but is a God who has entered into a

genuine relationship with his chosen ones, in this case, with David his chosen servant (cf. Fretheim 1997: 1300).

5.5.6 *millē'tā kayyôm hazzê* – “you have fulfilled even this day” (v.24) – the temple implied

The expression *millē'tā kayyôm hazzê* refers to the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant as far as Solomon's “sitting on the throne of Israel” is concerned but simultaneously to timely fulfillment of the accompanying promise of the building of the temple (“house of Yahweh”) by David's son, Solomon.

Yahweh promised David that one of his descendants would build a “house” or “dwelling place” for him. This “house of Yahweh” (*bêt yhwh*, cf. 2 Sam. 7:5; Zech. 1:16) refers to the temple of God, now completed and dedicated by Solomon. King Solomon opens his long royal prayer in an ascription of praise to the incomparable God of Israel who has kept his “word” faithfully concerning the Davidic promises. One of these promises was that Yahweh would see to it that one of David's sons would complete the building of the temple, where Yahweh's name would dwell perpetually. Solomon is now the beneficiary of this promise for he was granted the privilege of having built a “house” for Yahweh, “a place for your dwelling forever” (1 Ki. 8:13, 24). He addresses God in gratitude but also with a sense of achievement. His achievement is the completion of a new sanctuary to Israelite traditional religious and political life. It was deemed as both Yahweh's palace and Israel's cultic center (Wilson 1997a: 655).

Van Pelt and Kaiser (1997: 940) state that the verb *millē'tā* has both a spatial and temporal aspects in its range of meanings. The temporal aspect depicts the completion of a particular period of time. The prophetic oracle of Nathan pertaining to David's dynasty and his offspring that would build a temple for Yahweh has been fulfilled, implied by “even this day”. Yahweh's obligation has now been fulfilled and he will fulfill all his promises, “You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it even this day” (1 Ki. 8:24). The emphasis is placed on the fact that Yahweh is proven faithful by doing exactly as he has spoken. This final phrase *kayyôm hazzê* “as it is today” expresses the lasting significance of the Davidic covenantal promise.

Verhoef (1997: 422) says that the term *kayyôm* may function to qualify and epitomize, in the sense of summarizing, the central and theological significance of a particular event or prophecy and of the day in which it occurs. 1 Ki. 8:24 refers to such an event and past prophetic utterance (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-16). In the use of the term, the immediate past, the present, and the immediate future merge into one (Verhoef (1997: 422)). In the passage under discussion, we notice that the prophecy of Nathan concerning the Davidic covenant and its accompanying promise that one of David's offspring would build the temple has happened, to give "this day" its central and theological significance. "Even this day" has a decisive effect for Solomon's period of reign. He is now sitting on the throne of his father "as the first and prototypical heir to the Davidic covenant" (Wilson 1997b: 1233).

The Chronicler is making Solomon's prayer more relevant to the situation of his community. He omits the word "today" in his rendering (cf. 2 Chron. 6:19 with 1 Ki. 8:28b). Throntveit (1987: 58) points out that by deleting the time reference, the Chronicler ensures the timeless nature of the paradigmatic royal prayer and the prayer becomes applicable to any period in history especially the Chronicler's own day. The Chronicler also uses the prayer to recall the fulfillment of God's promise to David through Nathan in the building of the temple. The prayer with its alterations and omissions is thus recast "as a timeless paradigm" by the Chronicler. And as with Dtr's version, the prayer promises God's continual hearing of Israel's prayer as long as it is offered at or toward the temple (Throntveit 1987: 60-61). The thought of the prayer as a "timeless paradigm" is also corroborated by Van Selms (1958: 711-712) who says that the prayer does not only work while it is being uttered but remains as an intercession whenever the praying person stands before the face of God.

The most important of all Solomon's building operations was the building and completion of the temple that was built by a Tyrian architect (cf. 1 Ki. 7:13f.) after a design then current in Palestine and Syria (Anderson 1975: 192-193). It must be borne in mind that according to the narratives in both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the project is said to have been conceived by David and carried out by Solomon.

Van Seters (1997: 57) says that the description of the temple in 1 Kings 6-7 is not a historical witness to the temple in Solomon's time but is rather an attempt to establish an ideological continuity between the beginning of the monarchy under David and Solomon and its end, and to

suggest the possibility of restoration and a new beginning, perhaps under a restored Davidic ruler.

Dtr's mentioning of the gathering of the assembly, the elders, priests as well as the many sacrifices by people and king seems to commend Solomon's temple and simultaneously approve a change in Israelite worship. For Dtr the dedication of Solomon's temple, a central sanctuary, marks the high point of and a new departure in Israel's history since the exodus (Knoppers (1995: 240). The temple, as a truly national shrine, is now the central, unifying cultic institution in Israelite life. It encompasses and supplants the previous cultic symbol, the ark.

According to Dtr, the dedication of the central shrine validates the dynastic prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7:15-16; 1 Ki. 8:19-21) as well as David's prayer (2 Sam. 7:18-29; cf. also 1 Ki. 8:15, 24, 66); while confirming David and Moses (cf. Knoppers 1995: 242-243).

Solomon's prayer promotes the temple as a place of prayer and intercession. Israelites, in various critical circumstances, are encouraged to travel to Jerusalem and to pray at "this house". Their attention, even while in exile, is directed to Solomon's royal shrine. Knoppers (1995: 246) states that Dtr also promotes an international role for the temple through Solomon interceding for those foreigners who, having heard of Yahweh's great name and mighty hand, journey to Jerusalem to pray at the temple. Yahweh will answer so that all peoples of the earth will come to know that he is the incomparable God and recognize that his name is invoked at this house (1 Ki. 8:41-43). The figure of speech used by Dtr for the temple as a place for prayer promotes the temple's value rather than devaluing it (Knoppers (1995: 247-248, 250). The temple could be a channel of blessing to people in various critical situations and for the procuring of forgiveness and justice to them in the land through prayer (cf. also Gray 1970: 222-227).

Dtr, influenced by Deuteronomic theology, is of the opinion that the God of Israel has identified himself with Solomon's temple, has become directly associated with it and that his presence among the people is now symbolized by this temple (Heater 1991: 127-128). The temple is called the dwelling place of the name of Yahweh.

Jacob (1958: 83- 84) says that Dtr's theology holds that this particular association of Yahweh with the temple is not so much in the sense of the deity's dwelling place but rather in that of his

particular property. It can thus be inferred that Solomon has built the temple and Yahweh has chosen it to be the place where he can reveal himself with reality and where his people can meet with him.

The Old Testament is acquainted with the Canaanite concept of the gods dwelling at the top of a high mountain. In deuteronomistic thinking, the temple now has become God's mountain *par excellence*, making the presence of God among his people a possibility open to all (Jacob 1958: 198, 255).

According to Knoppers (1995: 249, 251), the popularization of the temple serves a few related ends for the Deuteronomist. The status of the Davidic lineage is strengthened by Solomon's example and participation in public worship. The promotion of the temple as a place of prayer as well as a place where all Israelites have a stake in their future, in turn, enhances the position of the central shrine and its priesthood. Solomon's recourse to Israel's election in the exodus as grounds for Yahweh's attention to Israel's petitions strengthens the stature of the temple. The arrangement of royal prayers with popular prayers strengthens the bond between God, king, temple, and people.

Finally, the enthusiastic and widespread participation in the feast at the end of the prayer and blessings, confirms the success of the temple. Knoppers (1995: 250, 252, 254) asserts that Dtr makes a literary effort to convince his audience of the temple's intrinsic value and its centrality to his people's fate. Dtr also underscores the need for such enthusiastic support by all sectors of the people in his day because this national shrine should not be neglected. The temple's status is that of a divine-human connection or link and functions as an inducement toward obedience.

We conclude that Dtr popularized Solomon's royal chapel, the temple, as a national site for prayer and that the prayer of Solomon would be adopted by the Israelites as their own in diverse circumstances. Solomon prays for the temple's beneficent function in the history of Israel (Knoppers 1992: 422).

Certain questions arise from the discussion on Solomon's temple. Does Dtr, with his emphasis of the Davidic promise and fulfillment regarding the temple (1 Ki. 8:24-26), wish to stress that the cults of the high places during the period of the monarchy, as well as foreign cults, are

considered a violation of the first commandment (Deut. 5:6-7; 4:39)? It may also be asked whether Dtr wants to enforce his theological interpretation of the history of Israel concerning the worship at and prayers toward the central shrine, as directed by their incomparable God.

Jacob (1958: 259-262) reflects that the temple theme has a wider theological importance than the mere cultic observances. He states that the temple will be more than ever the centre of Jewish godliness and that the Chronicler presents a new synthesis of the history of Israel turning on the two pillars, viz., the temple and the Davidic monarchy.

Together with other initiatives, now with the completion of the temple building and its dedication, Solomon and his father David had indeed succeeded in uniting the secular and the religious community under the crown (Bright 1972: 219).

5.5.7 *wě'attâ* – “and now ...” (v.25, 26)

The phrase *wě'attâ yhw̄h 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl* bears relation to what the character Solomon states in verse 23, viz. that Israel's God is the sovereign One who alone can keep covenant and *ḥesed* with his obedient servants. It also relates to verse 24 in which Solomon explicitly states Yahweh's keeping and fulfilling of the Davidic promise and referring to the completion of the temple as well.

“And now” serves as an “outflow” of Solomon's words in verse 24 and introducing what would follow in verses 25 and 26 respectively, viz. a reference to the security of Israel and the construction of the temple by one of David's descendants. It thus introduces the prayer for the further fulfillment of the Davidic promise.

The phrase “and now, Yahweh, God of Israel” contains significant elements of meaning. Firstly, the phrase *wě'attâ* places the focus on Solomon's request that Yahweh must keep his word pertaining to the promise made to David, Solomon's father, concerning the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty (v.25). Secondly, the arresting introductory discourse marker *wě'attâ* focuses on the sureness of Yahweh's word, “And now, O God of Israel, *let thy word be confirmed which thou spoke to thy servant David my father* ” (v.26). Thirdly, the phrase *wě'attâ* not only introduces elements of the prayer requests by the character Solomon but also draws attention to

the contents of his petitions or appeals (verse 25 and 26). It thus affords the said verses greater prominence within its larger context (cf. Van der Merwe, Naude & Kroeze 1999: 59). It marks the transition to the petition after the introduction.

“And now” (*wě’attâ*) is also an introductory temporal phrase which emphasizes that the effect of Yahweh’s covenantal promise to David should also be realized in the future, from the time of Solomon and onwards, to secure the continued well-being of the Davidic dynasty.

This connective particle *wě’attâ* thus draws the reader’s attention to the character Solomon’s serious concern about the fulfillment of Yahweh’s blessing through his father David as given to him (cf. 1 Ki. 2:4 and 1 Ki.8:20, 25, 26). Yahweh then directly confirms this blessing (1 Ki. 9:5).

As mentioned earlier, there is an inextricable link between *šēmōr* (v.25), *wě’attâ* (v.25a, 26a) and the final expression of *yē’āmen* in verse 26. This link will be briefly spelled out in 5.5.9.

5.5.8 *hlk lifnê* – “walk before” (v.23, 25) – obedience

The repetitive use of the expression “walk before” is significant and arrests the attention of the reader in terms of the flow of thought of Dtr. It occurs as *hahōlēkīm lēfānêkā* “who walk before you” (v.23), *lāleket lēfānāy* “by walking before me” (v.25) and *hālaqtā lēfānāy* “you have walked before me” (v.25). The continuation of the verse “with their whole heart” (v.23) and “if only your sons keep their way” (v.25) is inextricably connected with the command to “walk before me”.

The expression *hlk lifnê* unmistakably refers to the idea of obedience to Yahweh by his servants. In other words, the theme of conditionality is introduced and briefly explored in our passage. David was a servant of God in the sense of being exemplary in his obedience to Yahweh and in the sense of being dependent on him (Schultz 1997b: 1191). Dtr’s Solomon rests his case by saying to God that his father did “walk before” Yahweh and therefore he, Solomon, is eligible for the fulfillment of the Davidic promise in terms of his father’s obedience.

Verse 23 renders an ascription of praise to Israel’s incomparable God for keeping covenant and *hesed* with his servants who are obedient to the commandments of Yahweh. In other words,

Yahweh shows loyal love constantly to those servants “who walk before” him “with their whole heart”. In fact, verse 23, together with verses 32 and 36, emphasize the obedience expected from Israel and the divine compassion and active kindness expected by Israel by virtue of its servant status. Verse 25 becomes more personal in this that Solomon is now requesting Yahweh to honour that which he has promised to David (“for your servant”) providing the latter’s progeny would adhere to Yahweh’s commandments – “if your sons keep their way to walk before me” – as David did. Solomon’s obedience to the commands and ordinances of Yahweh is now crucial. Dtr’s Solomon, having up till now fulfilled his contractual obligations by having kept his “way” in walking “before” Yahweh as his father David did, expects that God can now confirm his spoken promise.

Thompson and Martens (1997: 583) state that the expression “the mouth of the Lord has spoken” gives an authoritative tone to what precedes. Therefore, Dtr’s Solomon should take special note of who uttered these commands of “walking before me” and “your sons keep their way by walking before me”. The adherence or obedience to these words or the violation thereof would affect Yahweh’s covenant promise to David and the promise of the temple to Solomon and the rest of the Davidic descendants. Therefore, although Solomon would be the beneficiary of the Davidic promises, he would have to be ever mindful of the nature and commands of God concerning the Davidic dynasty and the temple.

The underlying Deuteronomistic thought in verse 23 and 25 is that obedience to Yahweh results in participating in God’s guaranteed *hesed* and being the recipient of God’s promised covenant blessings.

The expression “to walk before me” in 1 Ki. 8:25 can also be compared with “to walk in my law” in 2 Chron. 6:16. Throntveit (1987: 58) points out that the explanation for this alteration is that it deals with the post-exilic emphasis on the law as a way of life.

5.5.9 *yē’āmen nā’ dēvārēkā ’āšer dibbartā* – “confirm your word that you have spoken” (v.26)

Verse 24 already refers to the Davidic promises made by Yahweh (“with your mouth you have promised”). There the focus was on the promises already fulfilled. In verse 25 the reference to

the Davidic promise is again expressed by “you said”, but this time it is part of the request of Solomon that Yahweh fulfill the promise of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty. Finally, in verse 26, Solomon says to God “let your word that you promised” come true. Dtr wants to show, through the diction used, that the promise made was a prophetic message from God. This thought is conveyed emphatically by the use of the possessive pronominal suffix “your” now functioning as a demonstrative adjective “your word”. It means Yahweh’s word only and not anybody else’s.

Keil and Delitzsch (1973: 126) state that Solomon’s prayer of *yē’āmen nā’ dēvārēkā ’āšer dibbartā* forms the introduction to the prayer that follows and for the hearing of all the prayers presented before the Lord in the temple. They are of the opinion that these words contain more than a prayer for the continual preservation of the descendants of David upon the throne of Israel (cf. v.25); the words refer to the whole of the promise in 2 Sam. 7:12-16.

The reader’s attention is drawn to the development of thought expressed by the repeated use of *dbr* in our text. Verse 24 states “with your mouth you have spoken (*dibbartā*)”. Verse 25 takes “spoken” further with the word “said” which does imply that Yahweh spoke the promise of the continuance of the Davidic dynasty. The development of *dbr* is climaxed by “let your word (*dēvārēkā*) which you spoke (*dibbartā*) ... be confirmed”. One translation of verse 26 reads “that you promised ...” instead of “which you spoke” (Kohlenberger 1980: 362). A closer reading from the translation just mentioned would show a kind of emphasis on the word “promise”. For example, v.24 reads “and-you-promised”, v.25 “you promised” and v.26 says “let the word-of-you which you promised ... come true”. By means of the interrelatedness of the terms “word”, “spoke”, “keep” and “promise”, and their significance and functioning within the context of the passage, Dtr stresses the point that it is Yahweh who made (spoke) these promises.

Dtr’s Solomon renders his request to Yahweh by uttering a very significant clause, “let your word”. The term “word” (*dāvār*) in the text is a loaded word. In fact, Ziener (1970: 991) says that to the Hebrew mind the “word” is more than the expression of an idea spoken aloud. It is dynamic in that it presses on towards a further realization. He states that such a word cannot be withdrawn or cancelled and its effectiveness extends into the far future (e.g. 1 Ki. 16:34). Solomon is appealing to Yahweh’s word (which was a prophetic utterance) promised to David. Yahweh will not repeal or cancel his “word” that was spoken in terms of keeping and showing *ḥesed* (v.23). Neither will he fail on his promises (v.24 and 25). Here in v.26 Dtr’s Solomon

appeals to the word of Yahweh as a creative utterance in *yē'āmen nā'* “let it be confirmed”, “let it be so” (cf. Gen. 1:3-24, the repetition of “and it was done”).

The text shows clearly that it is Yahweh’s word above all that is powerful in its effects (cf. also Isa. 55:10f.). Solomon now stands as the recipient of the prophetically proclaimed word of God (cf. 2 Sam. 7:4, 5). This spoken word of Yahweh will be carried out irresistibly. “Word”, therefore, stands for the revealed will of Yahweh, who intervenes time and again in the history of Israel, but also lays upon them a firm order (cf. v.23c and v.25c) – the condition of obedience to the way of Yahweh (Ziener 1970: 991).

Ames (1997: 913) says that the word of Yahweh has power only because it is an expression and extension of Yahweh’s knowledge, character and ability. No wonder, therefore, that Dtr extols the incomparability of Israel’s God in terms of his character and ability. Ps 119:89 corroborates the thought (of Yahweh’s word) by stating that God’s word (*dāvār*) is eternal and stands firm in the heavens.

Dtr lays a strong emphasis on the divine “word” of Yahweh as a way of articulating the assurance of the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty and its accompanying blessings.

Closely connected to the theme expressed in *yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā' āšer dibbartā* is the conspicuous repetition of the verb “keep” *šmr* (v.23, 24, 25). Dtr’s Solomon addresses Yahweh in v.23 as “you who keep” using the participial form of the verb “keep” intimating God’s habitual action. It is Yahweh who is keeping and will always keep his *hesed* with his servants. Verse 24 renders an expression of thanks to God for “you have kept your promise to your servant David”. In verse 25, Solomon now actually says that because you are the God who keeps your covenant of love (v.23) and has indeed kept your promise (v.24) therefore, now keep (imperative) the promises you made to your servant David, my father “...if only your sons keep their way”. We notice how the idea of *šmr* is picked up in v.26 with *yē'āmen*. This specific request in v.26 is aptly introduced by *wē'attā* - “and now” (“now make it real”). The reader will now be able to see how the words *wē'attā* and *yē'āmen* tie up with Solomon’s expression of *šōmēr* (v.23), *šāmartā* (v. 24) and *šēmōr* (v. 25). This would then link up with the “word of Yahweh”. The use and function of the word *šmr* has a significant effect on the content and meaning of the passage, as well as give the readers Dtr’s reason for such diction. Yahweh will

not alter that which his mouth has spoken (cf. Jer. 1:12). With these words Solomon also has in mind another important point in the promise, viz. that God would not withdraw his mercy from the seed of David, even when it sinned (Keil and Delitzsch 1973: 126). The verb *yē'āmen* affirms the security of his covenant relationship with his people even after entering into judgment with them.

The expression *yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā 'āšer dibbartā* offers clear evidence of an established theological conviction that Israel's God is a God who speaks. Throughout the Old Testament the "word of the Lord" is characterized as trustworthy and powerful.

5.5.10 Concluding remarks

The lexical data explored in this section intended to show, as mentioned earlier, the flow of Dtr's thoughts regarding Yahweh's unfailing *hesed* to his servants (David, Solomon, and the people of Israel) who have a concomitant responsibility to God, the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty and Solomon being the recipient of the promissory blessings. Dtr expresses the thought explicitly that Yahweh's "word" is steadfast, powerful and sure. The concept of "obedience" – *hkk lifnē* is stressed emphatically throughout the passage. It is echoed indirectly in the greater prayer as well by words such as, "turn again to thee", "confess" (v.33, 35, 48), "the good way wherein they should walk" (v.36), "fear thee" (v.40, 43). The words, phrases and themes explored in this section do not function within the passage only but have significance within the whole prayer of Solomon as well, because this royal prayer is offered by Dtr's Solomon at a time when the majority of the Jewish exiles in Babylon felt abandoned.

5.6 REVISITING THE PASSAGE IN RELATION TO ITS LITERARY CONTEXT

This passage (1 Ki. 8:23-26) forms part of Solomon's royal prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-53) and is at the heart of the narrative of the dedication ceremony. Dtr's Solomon conveys deep deuteronomistic theological thoughts by way of typical deuteronomistic language. The introductory part of the royal prayer (1 Ki. 8:23-26) stresses the covenant idea and particularly the Davidic covenant. Yahweh, God of Israel, is publicly confessed and declared as the incomparable God of both heaven and earth. Dtr does this by means of a positive comparison in the incomparability formula "there is none like thee" (v.23). The God of Israel is the One who keeps covenant love

(*hesed*) and promises; the One who will see that it will be fulfilled but simultaneously expects his “servants” to be careful in all they do “by walking before me”, in other words, to conduct themselves properly as Yahweh’s elect. Verses 25 and 26 particularly underscore the need for Davidic or Israelite fidelity. Solomon is the immediate beneficiary of Davidic covenant and its accompanying promise of the completion of the temple, Israel’s national sanctuary.

The passage in question serves as introduction to the rest of the prayer consisting of an invocation (1 Ki. 8:27-30), seven petitions or pleas by Solomon to Yahweh pertaining to various situations in which Israel might find itself – in famine, drought, war, pestilence, injustice, defeat, and exile (1 Ki. 8:31-51) – followed by another invocation (1 Ki. 8:52-53) and his final blessings (1 Ki. 8:55-61).

The passage shows another aspect of David’s successor. Solomon’s exemplary participation in public worship (cf. 1 Ki. 8:22) strengthens the status of the Davidic dynasty within Israel’s national life (Knoppers 1995: 249).

The significance and functioning of the key words, phrases and expressions in the passage give rise to certain possible reasons why Dtr inserted the incomparability formula.



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CHAPTER 6

REASONS FOR INSERTING THE INCOMPARABILITY OF YAHWEH

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher wishes to postulate and argue in support of certain reasons of Dtr for inserting the incomparability formula in the prayer of Solomon. It should always be borne in mind that the Deuteronomistic History was written with a specific audience in view, namely the community of exiles in Babylon. This exilic community in Babylonia and the remnant in Judah were now experiencing a crisis of faith. The historical narratives found in Judges through to 2 Kings show what issues or concerns, especially religious ones, Dtr's audience might have faced (cf. Fretheim 1983: 44-46).

6.2 EXPLORING POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE INSERTION OF THE INCOMPARABILITY FORMULA

In the light of the socio-historic milieu of Dtr and his theology, it can be argued that his reasons are:

6.2.1 to portray Yahweh as the One who keeps *hesed*

Dtr knows that the history of Israel, Yahweh's covenant people, is directed by their incomparable God – the One who keeps *hesed*, i.e. steadfast and loyal covenant love. Possible questions of identity facing the community of faith in exile were, “Are we still the people of Yahweh?” “Has God abandoned us?” or “Will God remain faithful to the ancient promises?” (Fretheim 1983: 46-47; Le Roux 1987: 125). The exiles may have thought that their God does not concern himself with his people anymore. One of the primary questions of the exile was, “How could Yahweh desert his people and allow them to suffer the reproach of domination by a people worshipping pagan gods?” (Heater 1991: 154). It seemed a kind of cold justice meted out to them by Yahweh. Hence their serious question concerning their national and religious identity.

Dtr wishes to emphasize that in spite of Israel being in exile in Babylon, their holy city of Jerusalem and its temple being destroyed and only the poorest of the poor being left in the land now, their national and covenant God, Yahweh, is still in control and will deliver them as he did in the days of the exodus.

Dtr's theological interpretation of this fateful event in the history of Israel is that it is God's judgment on Israel's disobedience, but at the same time proof of God's continued commitment, his *hesed* that would still be extended to his covenant people. No other deity is able to do this except Israel's incomparable God who is able to keep covenant and show mercy (1 Ki. 8:23).

1 Ki. 8:23-26 stress the deuteronomistic perception of Israel's covenant keeping God. The deuteronomistic Solomon acknowledges him as "Lord God of Israel" who promises to be faithful in keeping loyal love. Dtr holds that Israel's election as Yahweh's covenant people and his covenant with David and his descendants are driven and characterized by Yahweh's *hesed* and faithfulness to his people. That which God had promised in the Davidic covenant, he has now fulfilled (v.25; cf. also 1 Ki. 3:6). Dtr sees that Yahweh does concern himself with the plight of his people and "listens" (cf. 1 Ki. 8:30). According to Dtr it is the incomparable God of Israel who will "listen" (v.29, 30, 52), "hear" (v. 30, 34, 36, 39, 49), "help" (implied in v. 42 and 45), "heal" (cf. 37-39), "forgive" (v. 30, 34, 36, 39, 50) and restore his people who are there in the exile (v.34, cf. 49-52).

From our passage we can infer that Dtr's perception is that the Davidic dynasty would be preserved through God's covenantal loyalty. Dtr stresses that the dynasty will be preserved if Israel and her king adhere to the loyal fulfillment of the obligations in the covenantal relationship contracted between Israel and her God. The deuteronomistic theology expressed here is that *hesed* characterizes the reciprocal relationship between Yahweh and his servants. Yahweh keeps his promise and will show *hesed* to those "who walk before him with their whole heart" (v. 23) but if they do not comply with Yahweh's command of absolute allegiance, they will risk punishment. Israel, as a nation, is also the corporate servant of Yahweh. This is then what happened to Israel – taken into exile, but graciously not abandoned by God.

Dtr shows that Solomon is now, by the grace of the incomparable God, the recipient of God's *hesed* because of his father David's loyalty and obedience to the commands of God. Thus, according to Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history with her God, Yahweh is still the One who keeps *hesed*, and thus the basis for the relationship between God and Israel is still in

place. However, curses will be experienced in a life of faithlessness and disobedience. This is to be seen in the history of Israel. Even Solomon, God's beloved, experienced the curse resulting from disobedience to Yahweh. Dtr held the strong opinion that sin was the reason for the demise of the state of Judah.

Pertaining to the *hesed* shown by God towards the exilic community, Van Zyl et al (1977: 195) render metaphorically that the tree of Jesse had been hewn down (Isa. 11:1) but that little stem gradually grew upright again because the balm of the covenant grace of God had dripped over its wounds.

The reason for this is that Yahweh is still Israel's God and they are still his covenant people. In spite of their present situation in exile, their identity as God's people is still intact because of his *hesed*. Their incomparable God will never abandon his elect provided they "walk before him with their whole heart".

6.2.2 to teach the exilic community Yahweh's control over history

Another reason for Dtr's inserting the incomparability of Yahweh is that it is aimed at the exilic community to teach them that Yahweh is in control of history. The incomparable God's control of history includes any historical event in the life of Israel and of other nations as well. Such control of history covers God's covenants with Abraham and Israel, his promises to David and beyond. It also includes God's dealing with any foreign power countering or wanting to destroy the nation of Israel.

The event of the exile was theologically interpreted as an act of God through which God spoke to the Israelites. As is characteristic of deuteronomistic writings elsewhere, here, at a critical point in Israel's history, the prayer of Solomon (1 Ki. 8:22-61) is penned to review the history and draw consequences from it (Mayes 2002: 69). It can be argued that Yahweh does not just allow history to happen but that he sees to it that there is somebody who would realize God's concern with his people and be able to interpret it. Israel's past was reinterpreted by Dtr in the light of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Deist 1987: 102; Mayes 2002: 67-68). We can agree with Mayes (2002: 71) that Dtr turned the history of Israel as a whole into an explanation of the catastrophic event of the Babylonian exile.

There were certain concerns facing the exilic community now; cf. 3.2. These included concerns such as “Are we still the people of God?” and “Has our covenant God abandoned us, perhaps forever?” (Fretheim 1983: 46). Covenant theology implied Yahweh’s control over history and the prophets explicitly taught that Yahweh controlled history (cf. Amos 2:9-11; 3:6; 9:7; Hos. 13:4; 5:6; Mic. 6:4-5 and Isa. 1:19-20; 10:12-16; 14:32; 28:21-22). The historical situation of the exile most probably gave rise to a concern about whether their God was still in control of their destiny. Certain deuteronomistic passages would indicate that Dtr was influenced by the pre-exilic prophets. Dtr now wants to reassure and teach the exilic community that their God is indeed still in control of history. This is his understanding of history and his interpretation of the exile in terms of Israel’s covenant thinking.

The deuteronomistic passage of 1 Ki. 8:23-26 shows Dtr’s reassurance to the exiles, by way of Solomon’s ascription of praise and acknowledgement, that Yahweh is still their covenant God who keeps his covenant and shows covenant love to Israel, Yahweh’s corporate servant. He has also kept his promise to his servant David by blessing his offspring to sit on the throne of Israel and that his (David’s) throne shall be established forever. Even the completion of the temple now shows Yahweh’s power and control over history. These historic events are assured and confirmed by Yahweh’s powerful word and hand, “spoken with your mouth” and “thou has fulfilled it with thy hand even as this day” (v.24). However, Dtr also points out that God’s powerful control over history has its concomitant command, viz. “to walk before me”.

Solomon’s prayer alludes to Yahweh’s sovereignty and control over history through his covenant with Moses by virtue of the great historical deliverance of the Israelites by the “strong hand” of Yahweh himself (1 Ki. 8:51, 53, 56). And now Yahweh has shown his control over history with his Davidic promises as well.

Dtr’s intention is to show through his Deuteronomistic History how Yahweh brings upon Israel the blessings or the curses of the covenant. They entered the promised land through obedience but lost it again through disobedience to the covenant. The historical result is exile to Babylonia. Dtr addresses the afore-mentioned concern of the exiles by describing how Israel’s incomparable God responded in their history and will still respond to his people’s concerns. It is Yahweh who will “hear”, “listen”, “answer”, “forgive” and “restore” as uttered by Dtr’s Solomon in his prayer

because he is in control of history (cf. 1 Ki. 8:33-34 with its focus on forgiveness and restoration from captivity).

A study of Dtr's theology concerning the Babylonian exile reveals a belief that Yahweh, the God of Israel, had not been defeated but that the fall of Judah had been according to his will in history. Dtr also wants to teach the readers of his day that the reason for the exile is not Yahweh's abandonment or lack of power and control over Israel's destiny but rather the lack of obedience and justice of the people themselves. He also shows that Israel's God is the sovereign and incomparable God who was not limited to a particular place and time in history. Dtr's theology stresses the belief that the exile was a temporary historical phenomenon; the covenant still existed and Yahweh would restore his people to their land and temple.

Dtr is favourably disposed towards the monarchy and has a positive view of David as the servant of Yahweh. He accepts the history of the Davidic dynasty, using it to state his own understanding of Israel's history in terms of the relationship of God, king, and nation (Otwell 1967: 62-63). Dtr asserts that God had chosen David and his descendants to rule Israel forever (2 Sam. 7:11-16 – the Nathan prophecy; cf. also 2 Sam. 22:51; 23:5). The high point in Israel's history is when God accepts the Davidic dynasty and “moves” into the temple. But this historical climax becomes a turning point leading to the rejection of the house of David and God's departure from the temple – what was given in the exodus was taken with the exile (Deist 1981a: 86; Deist 1981b: 104) (cf. also 2 Ki. 23:26-27).

Dtr's intention is to show, in terms of Israel's history, that Israel's incomparable God is the One who establishes dynasties and secures them, gives land and is in total control of history and responsible for history as such. It is he who controls human destiny (Brueggemann 1977: 15-27; Deist & Du Plessis 1981: 26; Kaiser 1978: 163-164). Dtr wants to convey to his readers that throughout Israel's history Yahweh was busy revealing himself as a gracious and merciful God. He is still the God of the historic exodus.

1 Ki. 8:23-26 confirms Dtr's thought of Yahweh's revelation in the history of Israel in terms of his sovereignty, faithfulness and steadfast love. No other deity can be compared to Israel's God in terms of character and ability to design and control history.

In closing, Dtr intends to show that what happened to Israel in their history was not by chance but it was Yahweh at work in history. Even with the fateful dissolution of the Davidic kingdom, it was Yahweh at work. In the final analysis, the history of Israel is the description of the working out of the blessings or curses that were to follow obedience and disobedience respectively.

The Israelites had to realize that Yahweh's action and purpose in history do not concern their present historical situation of despair and bondage only. They have to look beyond their current plight to a new future in Yahweh's presence.

6.2.3 to show the exilic community the importance of looking to their covenant God for deliverance

Historical developments – the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, plundering and killings executed by a foreign political power, and finally banishment into exile – caused possible doubt in the minds of the exiles concerning the divine power of Yahweh. This serious question concerning their own God's ability to rescue and deliver them gnawed at the roots of their faith.

Dtr addresses the serious concern about Yahweh's divine power prevailing among the exiles after their defeat at the hands of the Babylonians. The concern of the exiles was "Even if there is a will, has the deity (Yahweh) ability to enact deliverance?" (Fretheim 1983: 47). My opinion is that Dtr now mentions the incomparability of Yahweh in order to show the exiles the importance of looking to their covenant God for national deliverance and to nobody else in history, not even a king. Even the role of the king is now like that of an exemplary Israelite ("who walk before Yahweh with their whole heart" (v.23).

Dtr wants to convey the idea to his readers that Israel's deliverance will be executed by Yahweh's covenant love for his elected people in spite of their having been disobedient to him. Yahweh's incomparable character and ability to deliver will be shown to them in their history once again. According to Dtr, the exiles should not doubt or question the divine power and love of their God because they shall be delivered from foreign bondage, redeemed, restored and there will be a new age and a new history initiated by their incomparable God (cf. Jer. 33:10-12).

Anderson (1975: 291) says that God's wrath is not destructive but rather the expression of a holy love that wants to break the chains of Israel's bondage and to set her free for a new life, a new covenant.

Even in terms of national deliverance, the exiles may have seen God's hand of deliverance when king Jehoiachin, though an Israelite king, was favoured first by Nebuchadnezzar for a period and then given palace favours by Evil-Merodach (cf. 2 Ki. 25:27-29). It seems that Jehoiachin was a symbol for repressed nationalism among the exiles (Lockyer 1958: 177; Anderson 1975: 405, 407).

According to Solomon's prayer, Yahweh has the will and ability to enact a miraculous and complete deliverance for his people because of his explicit revelation in the history of Israel. Dtr now affirms the assurance of Israel's deliverance by their incomparable God through the diction in Solomon's prayer, "You have spoken with your mouth ... this day" (v.24) and "Thy word be confirmed which you spoke" (v. 26). In his view Yahweh's word stands firm (*yē 'āmen* v.26).

6.2.4 to convey to the exilic community that they can still rely on the covenant promises of Yahweh

Given their historical situation, the exiles were concerned about whether the covenant promises could be relied on still. It is assumed that the exilic community may have voiced concern about Yahweh's faithfulness "Will God remain true to the ancient promises?" "Do promises of land, prosperity, etc., still hold, or have they 'gone by the boards'?" (Fretheim 1983: 46; Birch et al 1999: 346). The king was deposed and the temple destroyed and the promises concerning them had not justified themselves in Israel's history. Dtr addresses God's faithfulness to the exiles with the insertion of "God of Israel, there is no god like thee, in heaven above or the earth below".

In terms of covenant thinking of history, Dtr wants to assure the exiles that Yahweh is still absolutely in control of human destiny. Israel's incomparable God will remain true to his promises. No other deity of the Ancient Near East can keep his/her promises like Israel's God. The promises of land, prosperity and restoration by their covenant God still hold true.

1 Ki. 8:24-26, within the context of the entire prayer, conveys Dtr's assurance to the exilic community that Yahweh, the incomparable God, has never backed down and will never abrogate any promises he had given to any of his servants throughout history. The Davidic covenant promises had been realized. It is Yahweh who will "listen" to the cries of the exiles and will restore them to their land given graciously by him, their covenant God.

Dtr points out that Israel's history has shown that God's promises, whether judgment, restoration or prosperity, hold true because his word is indeed "yea and amen". The exilic community, therefore, should take courage and be comforted in Yahweh's confirmed word. He promised that they shall return. The remnant's historic return from exile would imply a new hope, new beginning, and a new history (Deist 1981b: 109-110), a new history rooted, not in themselves, but in the incomparable Yahweh's character and presence (Brueggemann 1977: 132).

Dtr wants to encourage his readers with reference to the history of Israel that the end of the state of Judah is not necessarily the end of the covenant people of God. Because God is inextricably tied up with Israel's history, they are still the *'am Yahweh*. The plural in "your servants" (1 Ki. 8:23) implies that the same choice and the same commitment of Yahweh is available to the readers/ hearers/ audience of Dtr in the exile and after. Israel will be delivered from exile, redeemed, restored and there will be a beginning of a new age and a new history initiated by their incomparable God. The theme of a new age is developed further in Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 33:10-12) and Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Chs. 41 – 44; 43:19). Yahweh's glory is above the heavens and He, Israel's incomparable God, sits enthroned on high, yet simultaneously raises the poor from the dust and helps the needy (Ps. 113:4-6). Such are the things that Israel's sovereign God can do to the exiles because he has control over history.

6.2.5 to promote the sovereignty of Yahweh

The researcher holds the view that the intended reason for the insertion of the incomparability formula into Solomon's prayer by Dtr was to promote the sovereignty of Israel's God as opposed to other Ancient Near Eastern deities, particularly those of Babylon. By sovereignty is meant "supreme and unrestricted power"⁷. The sovereignty of Yahweh can be seen when compared to

⁷ *New Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (1984). The concept "sovereign" is defined as "supreme and very good" and "sovereignty" also refers to the "supreme power of a ruler or monarch, or the Lord" (*The Concise Dictionary of Current English*, 1984).

other deities in terms of his character and ability. He is the sovereign God who is still in supreme control of the historical destiny of Israel.

Dtr extolls the incomparability of Yahweh by his opening ascription of praise in “O Lord God of Israel, there is none like thee” and conveys the thought that the Lord is the incomparable Creator of heaven and earth (1 Ki. 8:23; 2 Ki. 19:15; cf. Deut. 4:39 and Deut. 5:6-7). The exiles may be wondering what has become of the so-called sovereignty and divine power of Yahweh. This concern could have been raised now that they had been defeated at the hands of their enemies who served other deities. Does Israel’s God still have the supreme power to deliver them from exile (Fretheim 1983: 46-47; Heater 1991: 154) ?

Dtr wants the exilic community of faith not to think that the Babylonian deities are stronger than their God, Yahweh. Their present plight of exile is not an indication that Yahweh is powerless but in Dtr’s view actually shows them that he is active in the history of his people and in control thereof. Dtr wants the people to view the event of the exile as a temporary phenomenon, and to believe that the covenant of Yahweh with the house of David still holds true. Yahweh’s glory is above the heavens and He, Israel’s incomparable, sovereign and covenant keeping God who sits enthroned on high, will raise and deliver the exiles again. Their God is still able to do what he has said in his word. They just have to acknowledge him as the only true God, the incomparable One.

Dtr sees the exiles in Babylonia as an emerging people without a royal statehood and dependent on a foreign power. The emerging remnant is compelled to establish its religious identity without turning to any political organ of the state (Mayes 2002: 72). They need to be reassured of Yahweh’s sovereignty and that his relationship is directly with them there in the foreign land. Dtr now narrates Solomon’s prayer to show the sovereignty of Israel’s covenant God who exacts obedience from them in order to realize the promised blessings.

Dtr’s wants his audience, in spite of their feeling of abandonment and sense of loss resulting from the destruction of the city and temple, and of the Davidic dynasty and the death of family and friends, still to acknowledge Yahweh as their sovereign God because he is the One who establishes thrones and secures them, gives land, creates things in nature and is in total control of

human (and Israel's) destiny (Deist 1981 & Du Plessis: 24-26; Kaiser 1978: 163-164). Their sovereign God now still demands loyalty and worship to the exclusion of all other gods.

Dtr holds the view that Yahweh's sovereignty over Israel's history is evident from Solomon's having secured two of the Davidic promises: the security of Israel and the construction of the temple. Gerstenberger (2002: 169) corroborates this point by saying that Solomon has been divinely nominated and has now received divine legitimation. It is only Israel's incomparable and sovereign God who is the divine protector of the Davidic dynasty and who can fulfill such promised blessings. Hence we see Dtr's insertion of this incomparability formula in the text.

Dtr's intention is to show that the confession of the incomparable God (1 Ki. 8:23) does not only show Yahweh's uniqueness and character but his sovereignty and control over history as well, in that it transcends national boundaries and shows a universalistic trend (cf. 1 Sam. 17:46; 2 Ki. 5:15; 1 Ki. 8:41-43, 60; 2 Ki. 19:19 and Ps. 59:14) (Labuschagne 1966: 146-147). The exiles in far-off Babylon can also call upon the Name of Yahweh because his sovereignty is not limited to a particular place. Inherent to this idea of transcendence is also the anticipated shift in thinking that Yahweh is not Israel's national God only but there is a consciousness about the universality of his reign and sovereignty as reflected in 1 Ki. 8:23.

Dtr wants to express that other deities are not sovereign and in control of history, cannot keep promises, execute love or justice, neither rescue nor help, cannot forgive and restore the fallen and neither listen nor help the foreigners like Israel's sovereign God (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-26, 28-53). The conviction is that neither the fall of Jerusalem nor the destruction of the temple and even the exile of the people by any power or deity would not eclipse Yahweh's promise to David (cf. 11 Kings 25:27-30 in relation to 1 Ki. 8:25). In sum, the other gods are insignificant and cannot be compared to Israel's sovereign God. The exilic community can draw their God into their troubles, even protest against God's seeming neglect of his people or appeal to him for help because he is their incomparable and sovereign God (Birch et al 1999: 347). A study of Dtr's theology concerning the Babylonian Exile reveals a belief that Yahweh, the sovereign God of Israel, had not been defeated and that he was still in control of history. Judah's demise had been according to his will.

Dtr inserted the incomparability formula in the light of Yahweh having kept his covenant love and honoured his promises to his servants by virtue of his character and sovereignty. The intention with Dtr's insertion of this formula is to show that the expression is not just an ascription of praise to God, like the pagans' praise to their gods, but it constitutes the main idea, the substance of Solomon's prayer. King Solomon now affirms the sovereign God of Israel who has proved himself to be a sure foundation for the exiles and future generations, who will never waver in his promises and covenant love because "with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it, even this day" (1 Ki. 8:24).

Dtr thus shows that Yahweh, Israel's God, who has revealed himself through his activity in and sovereign control over history, is the only God, the incomparable One. Dtr wants the exiles to take their eyes off their trying circumstances, their fearful captors, the values and splendour of Babylon to their own unique and sovereign God. The theme of the incomparability and sovereignty of Yahweh finds its significance within the prayer as formulated by Dtr against the backdrop of the Babylonian exile.

6.2.6 to portray the high places as illegitimate sanctuaries

The choice of the place of worship plays an important part in Deuteronomy as well as in deuteronomistic theology. Nicole (1997: 639) says that this thought is in no way unusual. What is unusual is the fact that the choice will be limited to only one place of worship for all Israel. Worshipping and sacrificing at "high places" was a strongly entrenched practice and the priests executing such practices were very powerful (Heater 1991: 154; also cf. De Vaux 1973: 284-288; 331-332).

The deuteronomic conviction of Dtr concerning the "high places" is clear. He adhered to the perception that the true worship of Yahweh must be centralized in the temple of Jerusalem, not in the outlying "high places" where sacrifices were made and incense burned to other deities (Anderson 1975: 190). Sacrificing at these "high places" was regarded as a violation of deuteronomic laws (cf. Deut. 12:5-6; 14:23-25; 16:2-16; 26:2).

Dtr, although being strongly critical about the "high places" (Thompson 1976: 38), does not condemn them outright because Yahweh was also worshipped at certain popular "high places"

right to the end of the monarchic period (cf. 1 Sam. 9:12-19; 1 Ki. 3:3f; 11:7; 2 Ki. 18:4; 21:3; 23:4ff). De Vaux (1973: 331) states that Gibeon seemed to have been a popular “high place” and was also regarded as “the greatest high place”. It is significant that at the commencement of his reign Solomon first went to Gibeon to offer sacrifice and that he was there favoured with a divine message from Yahweh (1 Ki. 3:4-15).

Dtr gives the readers a favourable picture of Solomon at first and does not condemn the wise king, Yahweh’s beloved, for sacrificing and burning incense at the “high places” and for allowing idol worship at some “high places” for the sake of political and military expediency as a result of his marriages to foreign wives. These acts would have been a violation of the deuteronomic laws. Some kings of Judah did offer sacrifices at certain “high places”. But unlike their counterparts in Israel who worshipped pagan gods and made sacrifice to idols at these “high places”, the Judean kings made sacrifices to Yahweh and worshipped him there (cf. 1 Ki. 3:4-15).

Dtr judges all the kings in terms of their attitude toward worshipping or sacrificing on the “high places” or the “bullock sacrifices or cultic practices” at Bethel and Dan. The kings of Judah are mentioned in terms of their attitude to these “high places” whereas those of Israel are described in terms of whether they are guilty of “the sins of Jerobeam, the son of Nebath” (Eybers 1977: 91). King Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah are judged favourably (2 Ki. 18:3-6; 22:2; 23:8). Gordon (1997: 508) asserts that Dtr prizes a cultic loyalty to Yahweh, and in this respect the David tradition was more exemplary than was even Solomon. The kings are thus judged along deuteronomistic theological lines on their attitude toward and practices at these “high places” and not so much on their political ability. Even Solomon is judged along these lines.

There is an inextricable relation between this reason of Dtr for inserting the incomparability formula and that of the exclusive worship of Yahweh (cf. 6.1). Dtr hails the incomparability, uniqueness and sovereignty of Israel’s God (cf. Deut. 4:25, 39; 32:39 and 1 Ki. 8:23) and encourages the worship of God, irrespective of the place (e.g. there in exile or elsewhere), with the whole heart, mind and soul, implying obedience as well (cf. Deut. 6:4-5 and 1 Ki. 8:25-26).

The condemnation of the “high places” is inextricably related to the questions of idolatry and syncretism that permeated the minds of the community of faith in exile, viz., “Has it paid us to

worship only one God? Would it not serve our future better if we were more syncretistic?" (Fretheim 1983: 47).

Dtr's propagation and encouragement of the centralized place of worship and the praying towards the temple serve as an admonition to the exiles not to engage themselves in any idolatrous cultic worship while they are lamenting their sense of loss. They should not switch allegiance to foreign gods.

The "high places", once used to worship Yahweh alone, were corrupted into syncretistic cultic practices of Yahweh/Baal or some other deity, continued during the time of the monarchy (Heater 1991: 154). The advocacy of centralized worship led to the condemnation of all "high places" without discrimination. De Vaux (1973: 288) asserts that Dtr takes the word for "high places" (*bāmôt*) in the sense of "illegitimate sanctuaries" and condemns the guilty kings of Israel and Judah accordingly.

Israel became disobedient and rejected her God and his covenant, an inconceivable deed because even the gentiles do not reject their gods. The primary sin referred to by Dtr in his writing is the sin of the worshipping of gods other than Yahweh (cf. Heater 1991: 154). This indictment against Israel by Yahweh is to be seen in the light of the first and second commandments, viz., "Thou shall have no other gods before me. Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ..." (Ex. 20:3-5). Consequently, Yahweh's judgment was inevitable. The exiles cannot blame God for what has happened to them in history because God's judgment on their apostasy and unfaithfulness was a just one. The comforting thought is that their God, Yahweh, is merciful and gracious but simultaneously mightier than the gods of Babylon. They should now serve God diligently, "walk before him with their whole heart" like David did (1 Ki. 8:24, 25) and acknowledge Yahweh as the only true and incomparable God who should not be worshipped at the "high places" but at the "place where his Name is called." (1 Ki. 8:27), "the place the Lord your God will choose" (Deut. 12:5).

6.2.7 to show the importance of the temple – Israel’s national sanctuary

As builder of the temple, the historic Solomon deserves some recognition. This is so in spite of the fact that the temple gave concrete expression to the result of a process of syncretistic assimilation (Christie 1952: 191; Anderson 1975: 191). The temple came to mean the centralizing force in Hebrew religion; indeed a rallying point for centralized worship. The choice of a place of worship plays an important part in deuteronomistic theology.

Dtr reaffirms in Solomon’s prayer, as in other deuteronomistic texts, his emphasis on throne, temple, and city (cf. 1 Ki. 8:23-26, 29, 33, 36, 43 and 47). God’s promise to “build a house” (*bayit*) for David is clearly attached to the development of the Davidic dynasty (*bayit*; 2 Sam. 7:11-16) and now realized with Solomon (1 Ki. 8:24-26). Knoppers (1995: 243) says that for Dtr, the dedication of the central temple validates Nathan’s dynastic oracle (2 Sam. 7:5-16) as well as David’s prayer (2 Sam. 7:18-29). The temple stands as the token of the fulfillment of God’s covenant with David.

The exilic community of faith grappled with the question of divine presence because their symbol of Yahweh’s abode, the place where his Name and presence dwelt had been totally destroyed. This concern presented itself in questions such as, “With the destruction of the temple, is God present with the people anymore?” and “Is God available where we are now?” (Fretheim 1983: 46). Dtr addresses this concern of divine presence as well.

Dtr wants to show that the temple is to be Israel’s national sanctuary, a place of prayer and a comforting thought for the exiles that God’s eyes and ears would be open and attentive towards this sanctuary. The exiles may even find compassion in the sight of their captors if they would pray in the direction of their temple (cf. 1 Ki. 8:46-51). This temple (*hēkāl*) is deemed as a holy place (dwelling place – *bayit*) where Yahweh’s holy Name dwells and from where he answers. It serves as a meeting place of humans and God by virtue of his divine Name (1 Ki. 8:27-30). The effective answer to prayer when his Name is pronounced is a token of the actual presence of Yahweh in the temple. Dtr sees that the temple will have a benevolent function in the history of Israel.

The geographical situation of the temple has an interesting spiritual positive and negative aspect to it. The temple stood on high ground so that it attracted everybody's attention and was well known. Likewise God also promised to make Israel high among the nations (cf. Deut. 26:19; 28:1). However, the rejection of it and all that it stands for will likewise be a lofty example for all that pass by. The ruins of the temple shall continue to be high but will now serve as an example of the rejection of Israel from the presence of God (Keil and Delitzsch 1973: 139).

One of the related ends achieved for Dtr by the popularization of the temple is that the promotion of the temple as a place where all Israelites, the exiles and future generations, have a stake in their future, in turn enhances the position of the central shrine and its priesthood (Knoppers 1995: 249). I agree with Knoppers (1995: 252) that Dtr makes a literary effort to convince his audience of the temple's intrinsic value and its centrality to his people's fate. He says the temple's status is that of a divine-human connection.

Dtr also promotes an international role for the temple. Knoppers (1995: 246-247) notes that in the Near East palace-temple complexes communicated the power of a king to his people, his vassals, and foreign emissaries. Such a complex would advance royal propaganda (cf. 1 Ki. 8:41-43; 59-61). However, Knoppers also says that the concern for the plight of foreigners found in 1 Ki. 8:41-43 is unusual in the deuteronomistic history. It is rather consistent with the imperialistic ways of Solomon's reign.

A question may arise in the mind of the reader, "Why would Dtr elaborate on the function of a temple that has been destroyed by the Babylonians?" We would agree with Knoppers (1995: 247-248) that Dtr's portrayal of the temple as a site for prayer actually promotes the temple's value rather than devaluing it. Dtr enhances the temple's prestige in Jerusalem, Judah and beyond by presenting the temple as crucial to the livelihood of present and future generations, and that Solomon's sanctuary is central to Israel's well-being.

Dtr wrote a *plaidoyer* to the exiles on behalf of the Davidic king and his sanctuary. The temple is not only a royal chapel or the legitimate place of sacrifice but also the divinely approved channel of blessing and forgiveness secured through prayer (Knoppers 1995: 248). He implicitly emphasizes the inextricable relationship between the incomparable God of Israel, the temple and prayer. By directing their prayers, in the form of laments, towards the temple where Yahweh's

name dwells, the Israelites in exile and others who are in despair will experience once again the sovereignty of Israel's national God, Yahweh.

6.2.8 to show the incomparable God's covenantal blessings

1 Ki. 8:24-26 has to be read and understood in conjunction with 2 Sam. 7:11-16 because both passages contain the core of the Davidic promise. Ps. 89: 3-4, 19-37 lends a further commentary to this ever-expanding promise and plan of God. God's sovereign line of choice cannot be revoked or cancelled, though any form of discipline will be invoked when disobedience takes place. According to Dtr, Israel's sovereign and incomparable God is prepared to execute his covenantal blessings on his covenant people.

Heater (1991: 149) says that the covenant made with David permeates the rest of Old Testament theology and Deist & Du Plessis (1981: 57-58) state that David is the second Abraham, the second person to receive an unconditional promise from God. "There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel" (1 Ki. 8:25b) relating to 2 Sam. 7:16 could only mean that David's "dynasty" would rule "forever". Kaiser (1978: 150-151) says that this was the new addition to the promise plan: all that had been offered to the patriarchs and Moses was now being offered to David's dynasty and it was to last into the future. It can be assumed that Dtr uses the occasion of the dedication of the temple as a befitting opportunity to emphasize the theme of the Davidic covenant with reference to the foundation of the Davidic dynasty with the succession of Solomon. The latter is the beneficiary of this divine, covenantal blessing and promise established by God himself. The temple stands as a token of fulfillment of Yahweh's covenant promise with and blessing to his servant David. Keil and Delitzsch (1973: 139) point out that 1 Ki. 9:4-5 contains the special answer to the prayer in ch. 8: 25 and 26. The very presence of Yahweh will be part of the covenantal blessings (1 Ki. 9:3).

Gray (1970: 220) notes an association of *hesed* with *bērît* (covenant). Solomon acknowledges here that when Yahweh gives his covenant, he keeps it (*šōmēr habbērît*) as well as its concomitant blessings. The reader can infer from the passage that Dtr wants to convey the thought that there is a covenantal relationship between Israel's sovereign God and the Davidic dynasty (and other servants of God) containing assurance, promise, command and blessings.

Dtr alludes to the Mosaic or Sinai covenant through Solomon's prayer (1 Ki. 8:23B,D) referring to the "God of Israel" and his "servants"; v.40, 51-53, 56). By this allusion, Dtr's intention is to remind his exilic audience of Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Exod. 20:2) and God's subsequent covenantal promise and blessing that he will then "tabernacle" in the midst of his people. According to Dtr, Yahweh will "tabernacle" again with them there in exile because of his covenant with Israel. This time, however, their deliverance from exile and their restoration will be more powerful and miraculous because he is still Israel's sovereign God. He will bestow all covenantal blessings on them providing they adhere to what he said in Exod. 19:5.

As mentioned earlier the Deuteronomistic writers held that keeping faith with Yahweh becomes a prerequisite for the continuation of the covenant and its resultant blessings. God responded favourably to Solomon's request but, as Solomon's reign progressed, his heart "was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been" (1 Ki. 11:4). Solomon came under the conditional curses of the Davidic covenant in 1 Kings 11 because he failed to meet the norms stipulated by God. However, there was mercifully, no immediate retribution meted out to the erring Solomon (1 Ki. 11:12-13; cf. 2 Chron. 21:7).

The sovereignty and incomparability of God is pictured as displaying itself in the creation of the Davidic monarchy in a new outburst of blessing (Otwell 1967: 71). The most fundamental aspect of God's covenantal blessings with reference to David and Solomon is that David receives the promise that his dynasty will be "eternal" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:29; 1 Ki. 8:24) and that Solomon would complete the building of the temple (1 Ki. 8:25). Dtr shows proof of God's covenantal blessings by mentioning Solomon's wealth, his abundance and prosperity coupled with the *shalom* of God. Yahweh's covenantal blessings are also expressed in Ps. 132:11-18 (God's oath to David, God's choice of Zion and God's blessing on Zion).

Dtr's Solomon also mentions that God's covenant people, the exiles, will experience God's *hesed*. There is an aspect of hope conveyed to the exiles by God's covenantal faithfulness (v.25) and his continued presence with them.

The introductory temporal phrase, *wě'attâ* (v.24), emphasizes that the effect of Yahweh's covenantal promise and blessings should also be realized in the future, from the time of Solomon

and onwards, to secure the continued well-being of the Davidic dynasty and also that of the nation as a whole.

According to Dtr, it is in obedience to the commands of Yahweh, and in only such obedience that Israel and her king can stand in covenant with Yahweh and be recipients of Yahweh's covenantal blessings. Dtr sees the destruction of Israel and Judah followed by the exile as signifying a breach of that covenant from Israel's side because of the evil done by her kings (Eybers 1977: 100-101 and 2 Ki. 25). According to the prayer, Dtr believes that the same God whose just anger had allowed the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple will again hear the prayers of his people and he will again pour out upon them the covenantal blessings of his compassion.

Dtr's readers should realize that Israel's entire life is dependent upon God's sovereign grace and promise. It is noted that the promise of Israel's covenant God continued to survive in David's house regardless of a number of unfaithful rulers who followed. It is only He, the incomparable God, who can keep his promise of covenantal blessings on his covenant people.

6.2.9 to emphasize the possible working out of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy

Dtr intends to show how that Yahweh's covenant people who do not adhere to the stipulated commandments and true worship of Israel's one and only true God cause the working out of the resultant curses of Deuteronomy. Dtr's Solomon knows the Deuteronomistic stipulations because he refers to them in his prayer, "servants who walk before thee with their whole heart" (v.23) and "sons keep their way to walk before (Yahweh)" (v.25). The entire prayer (cf. vv. 23-52) is permeated with the deuteronomistic thought of conditionality – "if" and "then". The reader is also referred to Deut. 10:12-13 and Deut. 28:1-68 which spell out the blessings of obedience and then the curses of disobedience to God.

Yahweh's covenant people had experienced the curses resulting from their disobedience to him. They lost their land, independence, king, national sanctuary (the temple), their beloved city of Jerusalem was destroyed and finally they were exiled to Babylon. Apart from many other concerns, the exiles were even experiencing the resultant emotional trauma of their disobedience as spelt out in Deut. 28:65-67, viz., the trauma of "no ease", no "rest", "a trembling heart",

“sorrow of mind” and “fear of heart”. Fretheim (1983: 46) states that due to their traumatic situation, they expressed a concern of hope, “Are we condemned to despair?” and the foremost question of abandonment, “Has God abandoned us?”

The researcher’s opinion is that Dtr wants to summon an obedient response to the first commandment of Yahweh from the generations of exiles and all future generations including their kings so that the resultant curses will not overtake and destroy them again (cf. Deut. 28:45). Robinson (1972: 102) says that it is a call for their undivided and uncontaminated spiritual response.

King Solomon, favourably portrayed at this stage by Dtr, is the recipient of God’s stipulated deuteronomistic blessings by way of the Davidic covenant. The same Dtr is later compelled to show the darker side of Solomon’s life. Dtr’s intent is to show that keeping faith with Yahweh becomes a prerequisite for the continuation of the covenant (cf. 1 Ki. 9:6-9). If David’s progeny were obedient they would be allowed to sit on the throne forever (1 Ki. 8:25). Now Dtr intends to show that as Solomon’s reign progressed, in spite of being favoured by God, his heart “was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (1 Ki. 11:4). Like the exiles, Solomon failed to meet the norms stipulated by God and had to suffer the curses of disobedience, albeit not immediately though (1 Ki. 11:12-13 and cf. 2 Chron. 21:7).

Therefore, according to Dtr, it is in obedience to the commands of Yahweh, and only in such obedience that Israel and her king can stand in covenant with Yahweh and be recipients of Yahweh’s covenantal blessings or promises. If not, then the resultant stipulated curses will overtake the king and people. According to McConville (1997b: 535) a balance is always kept in deuteronomistic theology between the elements of promise and command. Thus the destruction of Israel and Judah, including Jerusalem and the temple, followed by the exile signified that a breach of the covenant had taken place, from Israel’s side, through the evil done by her kings (2 Ki. 25). It is noticed that the theme of obedience and disobedience, with its concomitant blessings and curses, is explicitly and strongly conveyed by Dtr to his audience in the exile and after. This fact can be observed by the intentional repetition of *hkk lifnê* (v. 23, 25) by Dtr’s Solomon.

6.2.10 to instill hope into Yahweh's covenant people in exile

The passage and parts of the prayer show that Dtr wants to instill hope for the future into the hearts and thinking of the exiles despite their present social situation "in a strange land". This hope also holds true for future generations. Dtr conveys the aspect of hope for the future and restoration of the exiles to their land by mentioning the incomparability of Yahweh, that he is the One that will not forget them because of his covenant and loyal love. His grace is sufficient to every person in exile and "because of David" both king and people are tolerated (1 Ki. 8:25).

Through the diction Dtr points out to his audience that the steadfast love of God never ceases and that his mercies endure forever. Dtr wants each member of the exilic community to have or exercise a language of faith in spite of their present intolerable situation. Dtr's Solomon expresses such a language of faith and hope in the introduction and other parts of his prayer.

In order to instill hope into the exilic community, Dtr stresses the fact of the authority of Yahweh's word and that it is this word, above all that is powerful in its effect. Israel's covenant God will not renege on his word that he has spoken. According to his word, the Lord will not cast them off forever but will have compassion on his repentant and obedient people. Apart from Dtr's main concerns, his purpose is to instill hope within the hearts of those in exile that Israel's God will "hear", "listen", "forgive", "heal" and "restore" because their covenant God will not deny or abandon his promises to David and also to his covenant people. Dtr does not restrict the presence of Yahweh to either the temple or the land (3:27) and thus the possibility of renewed blessing is left open to the hope of future generations Childs (1979: 294).

Dtr's encouragement of hope and deliverance is rendered in typical deuteronomistic language of "if" and "then" in Solomon's prayer. Childs (1979: 294) notes that a pattern of repentance and forgiveness which is recognized in the history of exiled Israel, serves as a model to be followed by future generations. In the deuteronomistic prayer the assurance is sought that repentance would result in divine forgiveness (1 Ki. 8:46). Sin or disobedience brings suffering, whilst a return to God brings deliverance and happiness. A prime element concomitant to this thought is that the people themselves must make a choice.

Dtr instills further hope and possibility of renewed blessing to the exilic community and future generations by intimating that the hope of the people is not only due to Yahweh, being the “transcendent” God and Israel his elect, but also due to the lasting continuity of the promise made to David concerning the continuation of his dynasty. As long as the lamp of David lasts (1 Ki. 11:32, 36) nothing is irretrievably lost. The event of the exile does not erase this promise (Jacob 1958: 198).

The reader may wonder whether a resurgence of hope of national restoration was indeed aroused among the exiles with the favouring or promotion of King Jehoiachin right there in Babylon (2 Ki. 25:37-39). Anderson (1975: 406-407) believes that the exilic community regarded Jehoiachin as the legitimate Davidic king and held onto the hope for revival of the Jewish nation as long as the exiled king was still alive. It seems that Jehoiachin thus served as a symbol for repressed nationalism among the Babylonian exiles.

There is strong hope for definite deliverance of the exiles through prayer. Jeremiah wrote to the exiles that even in a faraway land where there was no temple of Yahweh, the people could have access to God through prayer (Jer. 29:12-14; cf. also Deut. 4:27, 29). Dtr expresses the same thought in Solomon’s prayer (1 Ki. 8:23, 30, 33, 47-52). Yahweh would then be their sanctuary in the foreign land.

The exilic community is looking forward to the possibility of a return. The promise gives them hope despite the uncertainty of their prevailing situation. This hope for a new beginning and a new history in Yahweh’s presence now precedes the expectation of a return (Deist 1981b: 109-110).

6.2.11 to show the exilic community that the word of Yahweh is “yea and amen”

Dtr wants to convey to the exiles that the hope they cling to in their traumatic situation should be anchored in the surety and confirmation of Yahweh’s word. This is indelibly conveyed through the words in Solomon’s prayer *yē’āmen nā’ dēvārēkā’ āšer dibbartā* “confirm your word that you have spoken” (v.26). Dtr wants to show, through the diction used, specifically in verses 24 and 25, that the promise made was a prophetic message from God. This thought is conveyed

emphatically by the use of the possessive pronoun “your” now functioning as a demonstrative adjective “your word”. It means the God of Israel’s word only and not of any other deity.

Keil and Delitzsch (1973: 126) state that Solomon’s praying of *yē’āmen nā’ dēvārēkā ’āšer dibbartā* forms the introduction to the prayer that follows and for the hearing of all the prayers presented before the Lord in the temple. They are of the opinion that these words contain more than a prayer for the continual preservation of the descendants of David upon the throne of Israel (v.25); the words refer to the whole of the promise in 2 Sam. 7:12-16 (cf. also Talstra 1993: 228).

Dtr draws the attention of the exiles to the development of thought expressed by the repeated use of *dbr* in Solomon’s prayer-text. Verse 24 states “with your mouth you have spoken (*dibbartā*)”. Verse 25 takes “spoken” further with the word “said” which does imply that Yahweh “spoke” the promise of the continuance of the Davidic dynasty. The development of *dbr* is climaxed by “let your word (*dēvārēkā*) which you spoke (*dibbartā*) ... be confirmed.” One translation of verse 26 reads “that you promised ...” instead of “which you spoke” (Kohlenberger 1980: 362). A closer reading from the translation just mentioned would show a kind of emphasis on the word “promise”. For example, v.24 reads “and you promised”, v.25 “you promised’ and v.26 “let your word which you promised ... come true”. Dtr stresses the point that it is Yahweh who made (spoke) these promises and it is He, Israel’s covenant God, who will keep these promises and bring them to pass. The interrelatedness of the terms “words”, “spoke”, “keep” and “promise” and their significance within the context of the passage are crucial in this regard.

Dtr’s Solomon renders his request to Yahweh by uttering a very significant clause, “let *your word*”. The term “word” (*dāvār*) in the text is a loaded word. In fact, Ziener (1970: 991) says that to the Hebrew mind the “word” is more than the expression of an idea spoken aloud. It is dynamic in that it presses on towards a further realization. Such a word cannot be withdrawn or cancelled and its effectiveness extends into the far future (e.g. 1 Ki. 16:34). Solomon is appealing to Yahweh’s word (the prophetic utterance) which he promised to David. Yahweh will not repeal or cancel his “word” that was spoken in terms of keeping and showing *hesed* (v.23). Neither will he fail on his promises (v.24 and 25). Here in v.26 Dtr’s Solomon appeals to the word of Yahweh as a creative utterance in *yē’āmen nā’* “let it be confirmed”, “let it be so” (cf. Gen. 1:3-24, the repetition of “and it was done”). It shall be so for the exiles.

Dtr's text shows clearly that it is Yahweh's word above all that is powerful in its effects (cf. also Isa. 55:10f.). Solomon now stands as the recipient of the prophetically proclaimed word of God (cf. 2 Sam. 7:4, 5). This spoken word of Yahweh will be carried out irresistibly. "Word", therefore, stands for the revealed will of Yahweh, who intervenes time and again in the history of Israel, but also lays upon them a firm order (cf. v.23c and v.25c) – the condition of obedience to the way of Yahweh (Ziener 1970: 991).

Ames (1997: 913) says that the word of Yahweh has power only because it is an expression and extension of Yahweh's knowledge, character and ability. No wonder, therefore, that Dtr extols the incomparability of Israel's God in terms of his character and ability.

Another thought deduced from "with *your mouth you have spoken*" (v.24 – my italics) and "promise you made ...when you said" (v.25) with reference to obedience ("walk before me") is that Yahweh's spoken "word" by his "mouth" has authority and should not be disobeyed. The words "mouth", "spoke" and "you said" refer to communication from God himself (cf. Deut. 8:3; Jer. 9:12). By contrast, Israel's other deities have mouths but do not speak (cf. Ps.115:5; Ps. 135:16). Thompson and Martens (1997: 583) state that the expression "the mouth of the Lord has spoken" gives an authoritative tone to what precedes. Therefore, both Dtr's Solomon and the exilic community should take special note of who uttered these commands of "walking before me" and "your sons keep their way by walking before me". The adherence or obedience to these words or the violation thereof would affect Yahweh's Davidic covenant promise and the promise of the temple to Solomon and the rest of the Davidic descendants. Dtr, therefore, lays a strong emphasis on the divine "word" of Yahweh as a way of articulating the assurance of the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty and its accompanying blessings to both Solomon and the exiles.

As argued above we would see that closely connected to the theme expressed in *yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā 'āšer dibbartā* is the conspicuous repetition of the verb "keep" *šmr* (v.23, 24, 25). It is Yahweh who is keeping and will always keep his *hesed* and promises with his servants.

The expression *yē'āmen nā' dēvārēkā 'āšer dibbartā* offers clear evidence of an established theological conviction by Dtr that Israel's God is a God who speaks in history. His word is

spoken and confirmed not in the historical life of Israel only but universally as well. Throughout the Old Testament the “word of the Lord” is characterized as trustworthy and powerful.

6.2.12 to convey Dtr’s theological interpretation of Israel’s history

The researcher postulates that one of the most important and over-arching reasons of Dtr’s for inserting the incomparability formula in Solomon’s prayer, is to convey to the exiles his theological interpretation of Israel’s history. Yahweh, the incomparable God of Israel, is in control of his people’s history.

There were two theological views to the tragic event of the exile. One reaction or view was that Israel’s national theology that had sustained them and given them hope was now in tatters. The emphasis was on suffering and desolation (cf. Lam. 1:1-2, 4, 12, 18, 20; 5:4, 9, 15, 17). The worst suffering was caused by their broken relationship with Yahweh and the exiles and those in Jerusalem and Judah must experience that Yahweh is no more their helper and comforter. Their theology could neither explain their crisis nor help them to survive this catastrophe because they were not sure what the nature of their iniquities was. They even expressed their uncertainty by saying, “... there may still be hope” (Lam. 3:29b) (Le Roux 1987: 124 (Afr. Version)).

The other theological perspective, conveyed by Dtr, was so different from the above-mentioned view. Dtr was certain about the cause of Israel’s exile due to his adherence to the deuteronomic tradition that taught the conditional aspect of salvation or deliverance. This deliverance would not happen without obedience to the law. Dtr’s theological perspective was that sin was the cause of their exile and suffering. There is a causal relation between sin and punishment and it is from this perspective that Dtr judged the past (Le Roux 1987: 124-125).

1 Ki. 8:23-26 should be viewed in the light of Dtr’s theological insight in the socio-historical situation of the Book of Kings. It is in these verses, within the milieu of the Babylonian exile, that Dtr sustains the theme of the Davidic covenant in the prayer, with reference to the foundation of the Davidic dynasty and with reference to the succession of Solomon to the throne. Israel’s incomparable “God of the covenant” had promised and covenanted the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty. Dtr emphasizes that what Yahweh had promised will be fulfilled because his word is trustworthy, powerful and stands firm (v. 26). Yahweh’s sovereignty over Israel’s

history and incomparability with other deities are shown by the evidence of Solomon having secured two of the Davidic promises now: the security of Israel and the construction of the temple. Dtr wants to express that other deities, all insignificant in comparison with Yahweh, cannot keep promises, nor show covenant love neither rescue nor help, cannot forgive nor deliver like Israel's God. In fact, his word is the only word that stands firm.

According to Dtr, Yahweh is not Israel's national God only but there is a consciousness about the universality of his reign, power and sovereignty. He is indeed the incomparable God of heaven and earth. The passage (1 Ki. 8:23-26), as well as a large section of Solomon's prayer, stresses Dtr's concern that the exiles should adhere to the word of Yahweh and his revelation to them in history.

Dtr presents the history of Israel and Judah from the perspective of a deuteronomistic theology. Childs (1979: 291) says that Dtr identifies himself, not just with a book, but with that religious community constituted by the Torah of Moses, as interpreted by Deuteronomy. Niehaus (1997: 541) infers that Dtr wants to convey the thought that Israel's disastrous end can be understood theologically as an outworking of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy (Deut. 28 and 2 Ki. 17:7-20).

Heater (1991: 151) says that the major thrust of Dtr's theology in the book of Kings is that the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple are to be explained in light of the conduct of the kings and people. He says that David was the norm by which the subsequent kings were measured, and David was the reason for God's *hesed* to his people in spite of their sin. Willful departure from such a standard could not go forever unpunished, and so Israel went into exile (cf. also Wessels 1987: 138, 146-148).

Studies of Dtr's theology concerning the Babylonian exile reveal a belief that Yahweh, the God of Israel, had not been defeated but that the fall of Judah had been according to his will. Dtr also wants to teach the exilic community that the reason for the exile is not because of Yahweh's disloyalty but due to the lack of obedience and justice of the people themselves. He also shows that Israel's God is the sovereign and incomparable God who was not limited to a particular place or people. He is still in total control of Israel's history. Dtr's theology stresses the belief

that the exile was a temporary phenomenon, the covenant still existed and that Yahweh would restore his people back to their land and temple because he is the incomparable God.

According to Dtr despite Israel's sin, Yahweh's grace is sufficient for them and because of David both people and king are tolerated (1 Ki. 8:25) and blessed (1 Ki. 19:6-8, 18) but they have to worship and honour him. For his own honour, Yahweh will never abandon his people and for the sake of David, nor the house of David (Eybers 1977: 101) because he is the One "who keeps the covenant and the loyal love" – *šōmēr habbērît wəhaḥsed* (1 Ki. 8:23).

Dtr wants to show that the name Yahweh, with reference to king David, his servant, ties God to a certain history. God's own history is thus integrated with the history of the Israelites. Our text indicates that God has made a commitment to be part of the history of Israel and because he is addressed by Solomon as "O Yahweh, God of Israel" indicates a close, genuine relationship with Israel's ruler and people as well (Fretheim 1997: 1297, 1300). Dtr's theological thrust shows how he turned the history of Israel as a whole into an explanation of the catastrophic event of the Babylonian exile. According to Dtr's view covenant theology implied Yahweh's control over history and the prophets explicitly taught that Yahweh controlled history despite the possible concerns raised by the exiles. This is Dtr's understanding of history and his theological interpretation of the exile in terms of Israel's covenant thinking. Dtr intimates that Yahweh has shown his control over history with his Davidic promises as well. He wants the exilic community to realize that Yahweh's action and purpose in history do not concern their plight only. They have to look beyond their present situation to a new future in Yahweh's presence. Their incomparable God who is both universal and sovereign, does not only control history but is also responsible for history as such. Therefore, it is he who will deliver the exiles from bondage.

Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history infers that Yahweh's covenant with Israel is recalled, though the idea moves on to a new covenant, that of Yahweh with David and his dynasty that "will never be cut off" – verses 24-25 (Robinson 1972: 101-102; Gray 1970: 220). Our passage contains the core of the Davidic promise and Solomon is now the beneficiary of this Davidic covenant. King Solomon now acclaims Yahweh as the incomparable covenant keeping God.

Mayes (2002: 72-73) says that in Dtr's view Yahweh's relationship is directly with his people and the role of the king, Yahweh's servant, is little more than that of an exemplary Israelite. An ethical demand of obedience is introduced as a way of effecting a change from the king to Israel as a whole. The responsibility for Israel's welfare now rests on the people and the divine foundation of their welfare is none else than the incomparable God of Israel. Dtr prizes a cultic exclusive loyalty to Yahweh (Gordon 1997: 508) so that the David tradition was more exemplary than was even Solomon. Hence Dtr's insertion of the incomparability formula, "O God of Israel, there is none like thee".

In his theological interpretation of Israel's history, political or religious, Dtr's condemnation of the "high places" is related to the concerns of idolatry and syncretism that permeated the minds of the community of faith in exile, viz., "Has it paid us to worship only one God? Would it not serve our future better if we were more syncretistic?" (Fretheim 1983: 47). Dtr stresses and encourages the worship of Yahweh, irrespective of the place (e.g. there in exile or elsewhere), with the whole heart, mind and soul, implying obedience as well (cf. 1 Ki. 8:25-26). Simultaneously though, Dtr encourages and propagates the centralized place of worship and the praying towards the temple by the exiles who should not engage themselves in any idolatrous cultic worship of foreign gods. Dtr's admonition to Israel is to be seen in the light of the first and second commandments stated in the Torah. Therefore, Dtr explicitly inserted the incomparability formula in the prayer of Solomon.

Dtr strengthens the status of the Davidic lineage through Solomon's prayer that sets an example of the latter's participation in public worship. This form of public worship promotes the temple as a place of prayer as well as a place where the exiles have a stake in their future. Dtr wants to encourage the exiles that Yahweh, the incomparable God, will attend to and listen to their prayers in bondage because prayer strengthens the bond between God, king, temple, and people. The temple is to be Israel's national sanctuary and serves now as a divine-human connection. It will also have a benevolent function in the history of Israel because it is the divinely approved channel of blessing and forgiveness secured through prayer (Knoppers 1995: 248-249, 251-252). Dtr, therefore, addresses simultaneously a concern of the exiles relating to the divine presence of their God.

Dtr's further theological interpretation of Israel's history is to be seen in his emphasis on throne, temple, and city as reaffirmed in Solomon's prayer. The choice of a place of worship plays an important part in deuteronomistic theology. As mentioned quite a few times in this thesis God's promise to "build a house" for David is clearly attached to the development of the Davidic dynasty and now realized with Solomon. The temple stands as the token of the fulfillment of God's covenant with David.

One aspect of Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history is the covenantal blessings executed by the incomparable God. Kaiser (1978: 150-151) says that it can be assumed that Dtr uses the occasion of the dedication of the temple as an opportunity to emphasize the theme of the Davidic covenant with reference to the foundation of the Davidic dynasty and the succession of Solomon. The latter is the beneficiary of Yahweh's stipulated covenantal blessing and promise established by God himself. Related to the afore-mentioned aspect is the principle that the covenant is valid only if the people respond to it by obedience and faithfulness. Now Dtr's Solomon in his prayer also refers to this principle of obedience by his father David (1 Ki. 8:24-26). Dtr held that keeping faith with Yahweh becomes a prerequisite for the condition of the covenant and its resultant blessings. Thus in his theological interpretation of Israel's history, Dtr shows how that Yahweh's covenant people who do not adhere to the stipulated commandments and true worship of Israel's one and only true God cause the working out of the conditional curses of Deuteronomy. In typical post-exilic thought, God's law has become the stipulated way of life for his covenant people.

Dtr seems to hold the view that the judgment of the Babylonian exile did not mean the end of the people of God. Nothing but the refusal to "turn" would be the end. The turning (repentance) is to be spiritual – in the heart – and this can be realized through prayer (Von Rad 1975: 346). The exilic community's turning to their incomparable God through prayer will then be met by his forgiveness. Dtr expresses his theological view of the understanding of divine forgiveness through this prayer. The Hebrew verb *slh* "forgive" occurs five times in Solomon's prayer (1 Ki. 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50). The prayer conveys the granting of forgiveness to the individual, the people of Israel, and the foreigner. It describes the different deuteronomistic dimensions of forgiveness such as the relationship between repentance and forgiveness (O'Kennedy 2001: 72-88). God's promise to the forefathers, and to David as well, lies in the background of Solomon's prayer as he looks forward to the possibility of forgiveness after judgment (Provan 1997: 854).

Dtr also wants to convey to the exilic community that apart from forgiveness from their gracious and merciful God, there is hope and possibility of renewed blessing for them and future generations. This hope is due, not only because of Israel being God's elect, but also due to the perpetuation of the promise made to David concerning the continuation of his dynasty. The event of the exile does not erase this unwavering promise and nothing is irretrievably lost as yet. This promise is supposed to give them hope despite their traumatic situation. Dtr stresses the idea that their hope should be anchored in the surety and confirmation of Yahweh's word which is *yea and amen*. The exiles have to believe that Yahweh, Israel's incomparable God in terms of his knowledge, character and ability, is still in control of their history as well as the history of the universe.

As Dtr's theological interpretation unfolds, there seems to be an inextricable relatedness of the concept of covenant (with its concomitant blessings and curses) with the motifs of the divine election of Israel, the exclusive worship of Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, obedience and faithfulness, the Davidic dynasty, and God's *hesed*. Divine *hesed* characterizes God's rule in history and establishes his king and servants, including the exiles.

According to Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history, the latter's disastrous end can be understood theologically as an outworking of the conditional curses of Deuteronomy: Yahweh was obligated by faithfulness to his covenant to apply those curses as Israel turned aside to idolatry. Even though Yahweh had sent his prophets to call Israel and Judah to covenant obedience, they had continued to merit punishment – exile (McConville 1997b: 541, 543).

Dtr also wants to point out, theologically and very strongly, that the destruction of Israel and Judah including the temple and Jerusalem, followed by the exile signified that a breach of covenant had taken place from Israel's side (Wessels 1987: 147; Eybers 1977: 100; McConville 1997b: 541, 543). The wrath executed by Yahweh seen in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and subsequent exile of his people, serve simultaneously to show God's claim on exclusive worship of him, his honour, sovereignty and incomparability. God's revelation and wrath in history is indeed an affirmation of his sovereignty and incomparability (Jacob 1958: 114-115; Eybers 1977: 134).

6.3 CONCLUSION

In the light of the discussion of possible reasons above (6.2.1 – 6.2.12), it is my conviction that the most prominent reason for the insertion of the incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer is that Dtr wishes to convey his theological interpretation of Israel's history as history controlled by her sovereign, incomparable and covenant-keeping God, Yahweh.



CHAPTER 7

OVERVIEW, REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study on the reasons for Dtr's insertion of the incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, set out to discover the possible intention of Dtr at the time of writing. Responsible, Biblical and scholarly interpretation was necessary in order to deduce certain theological perspectives from the passage.

This chapter will now concentrate on giving the reader an overview of the study up till this point, critical reflections on the study by the researcher and certain theological perspectives gained through the exegesis of the passage within the larger prayer-text. Certain theological perspectives will also be gleaned from the arguments advanced for the possible reasons or intentions of Dtr's inserting the incomparability formula within the prayer of Solomon.

7.2 OVERVIEW

A carefully planned, methodological approach to this study, as described by chapter 1, showed in what way reasons for Dtr's insertion of the incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer could be postulated. This chapter showed how the research problem, methodology and area of concern are interrelated and simultaneously that an investigative and exegetical methodology would be needed to spell out my hypothesis and arguments to reach the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 2 put the prayer of Solomon into its historical contexts, viz., the period of 1 and 2 Kings (970 BCE – 562/561 BCE) and the period of the Babylonian exile, i.e. the time and circumstances under which Dtr wrote. This historical overview was necessary in order to evaluate the actuality of Dtr's theological thoughts expressed in the text under scrutiny as well as through the rest of Solomon's prayer. In addition to outlining the historical contexts, chapter 2 also outlined Dtr's theological matrix of this prayer, thereby letting the reader see the context of the incomparability formula (1 Ki. 8:23) within the prayer itself, its relationship to the prayer (1

Ki. 8:23-53), to Dtr's view of Solomon (1 Kings 1-11) and to Dtr's overall theology expressed in Judges through to 2 Kings.

Chapter 3 gave a brief note about the Deuteronomistic Historian and his status within the historical and theological context of the Books of Kings as well as his specific theology, viz., a deuteronomistic theology. Chapter 3 also indicated how the significant incomparability formula is steeped in the matrix of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. From chapter 3 onwards, the study showed how Dtr is inextricable from the theology by which he conveys his theological interpretation of Israel's history with reference to the relationship between God and Israel. Chapter 3 also indicated the events leading up to the exile, the situation of the exiles in Babylon and possible pressing theological concerns of the exilic community.

Chapter 4 focused on Solomon's prayer in its literary context. It briefly described the sections of the Books of Kings and specifically, the further divisions of 1 Kings 1-11. A brief outline of the dedicatory prayer was given as well as a brief structural analysis of the royal prayer-text in order to indicate Dtr's theological thinking in terms of Yahweh's covenant and loyal love towards Israel, the Davidic covenant, Solomon, Israel as a nation and the temple itself. The Hebrew text and transcription of the passage in which the incomparability formula occurs, showed the reader by way of its very structure and diction Dtr's assumed pattern of thought. The last section of chapter 4 explored very briefly the theme of the incomparability of Yahweh in terms of his uniqueness of character and ability, as seen in the Deuteronomistic History. This exploration intended to show how the researcher would then eventually argue for the possible reasons for Dtr's insertion of this formula into the prayer of Solomon.

Chapter 5 formed a large section of the thesis as it investigated the composition of 1 Ki. 8:23-26, by way of exegesis, i.e. exploring the outline of the passage, its possible structural, linguistic and theological patterns. The exegesis, as well as the form analysis, showed further how this passage fits into the broader context of its placement, the historical context of the text and the literary context elucidating the literary function of the text.

The main purpose of the detailed exegesis of the text was to lay bare its theological thrust through rendering lexical data leading to major themes. This was done through identifying, investigating and analyzing the key words, phrases or expressions, motifs, images and their

respective significance or function within the passage together with structural elements that would reveal aspects of Yahweh's will concerning David and his dynasty in the theological understanding of Dtr. In the presentation of the lexical data and major themes such as the *hesed* of Yahweh, his incomparability, election and covenant, the importance of the temple, etc. emanating from such investigation, a conscious effort was made to relate the data and themes to the assumed pivotal deuteronomistic theological thinking of Dtr.

Chapter 6 contains the main thrust of this research. In this lengthy chapter the researcher postulated the possible reasons or intentions of Dtr for inserting the incomparability formula in the prayer of Solomon. Each reason given revolved around Dtr's theological thinking. The chapter culminated in a climactic, over-arching reason, viz., that Dtr wishes to convey his theological interpretation of Israel's history.

7.3 REFLECTIONS ON CHAPTER 6

7.3.1 Chapter 6 discussed comprehensively the researcher's postulated reasons for Dtr's inserting the incomparability formula in the prayer of Solomon and arguments in support of these reasons. The list of reasons is not necessarily comprehensive but should be understood within the context of this study.

7.3.2 Each argument raised in support of an assumed reason dealt with Dtr's Solomon firstly with reference to the Davidic blessings. Secondly, the reasons were argued in the light of the socio-historical milieu of Dtr and his theology. It makes us aware that the Deuteronomistic History was written with a specific audience in view, namely the community of exiles in Babylon who were experiencing a crisis of faith.

7.3.3 Each reason argued had its own specific theological thrust but all the reasons given were inextricably related to the main thrust of the study – the incomparability of God mentioned by Dtr's Solomon.

7.3.4 The chapter concluded with a detailed analysis of a very important reason, namely, that Dtr wanted to convey his theological interpretation of Israel's political and religious history. The study also showed that Dtr and his deuteronomistic theological thinking are inseparable, in the passage itself, as well as in the broader prayer-text.

- 7.3.5 A critical reflection on the final reason given (6.2.12) reveals that all the other postulated reasons (6.2.1 – 6.2.11) are outflows of the overall theological interpretation of Dtr as dealt with in 6.2.12. His prime theological point of departure is that Yahweh, Israel's incomparable God, is in control of his people's history and that he wants to teach them lessons through history.
- 7.3.6 A critical study of the passage placed within the broader royal prayer-text of Solomon shows that it is, to a large extent, still relevant as an historical example of God's relationship with humankind today. The prayer-text itself can serve as an ongoing paradigm in which the sovereign God can be approached (cf. 5.3.2 and 5.5.1). A critical reflection on the passage also revealed an indication of God's norms, his constant loyal love and transcendence in sovereignty, character and ability. That is why he can be addressed as the incomparable God (cf. 4.5 and 5.5.3).
- 7.3.7 The researcher has postulated some assumed reasons of Dtr for his insertion of the incomparability formula in the prayer-text of Solomon. There might be other possible questions (reasons) that could also be researched in this context, such as, "Did Dtr use this prayer-text as a vehicle for his royal, national propaganda?" or "With reference to the prayer of Solomon, how relevant was Dtr's incomparable God for the exilic community?" These possible questions surfaced during the research but fell outside the scope of this study and could consequently not be dealt with.

7.4 THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF DTR

Reflecting on the arguments provided for the various reasons for Dtr's insertion of the incomparability formula in Solomon's prayer, some theological perspectives were gained. These perspectives of Dtr can be summarized as follows:

- 7.4.1 Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the One and only true God who keeps covenant and shows *hesed*. For his own honour, Yahweh will never abandon his people and for the sake of David, he will never abandon the house of David (Eybers 1977: 101) because he is the One "who keeps the covenant and the loyal love" (1 Ki. 8:23).

- 7.4.2 Yahweh's *hesed* as well as his judgments are not confined to Israel only because he is sovereign, his character and ability are unique and incomparable, transcending cultural boundaries.
- 7.4.3 God is indeed incomparable in terms of his sovereignty and uniqueness of character and ability. He is in control of human destiny, and therefore his people should look to him for deliverance.
- 7.4.4 Yahweh's revelation and deeds shown in Israel's history serve as proof of his concern with his people. God's salvific involvement with Israel, his covenant through Moses and then with David and his dynasty, as well as the election, entail specific requirements, conditions or responsibilities to be adhered to by every generation of his people. God's covenant people are judged on the basis of obedience or disobedience to his commandments.
- 7.4.5 Yahweh's involvement in Israel's history by means of his covenant love showed that they could rely on the covenant promises and blessings of their covenant God. Simultaneously, they are also made aware of the possible working out of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy because of disobedience to the precepts of Yahweh.
- 7.4.6 Yahweh's word stands confirmed because he himself has promised the covenantal blessings – the continuance of the Davidic dynasty and its concomitant blessings. As mentioned before, Dtr's Solomon now stands as the recipient of the prophetically proclaimed word (cf. 2 Sam. 7:4, 5 and 1 Ki. 8:26). The articulation of the assurance of the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty should also instill hope into the exiles. It should be realized that Yahweh's trustworthy and powerful word is spoken and confirmed not in the historical life of Israel only but universally as well.
- 7.4.7 Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history stresses the belief that the exile was a temporary phenomenon, that the covenant still existed and that Yahweh would restore his people to their land and to his temple because he was the incomparable God.

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In this final chapter the study is evaluated as follows:

- 8.1 The exploration of the research problem showed that, from the perspective Dtr, no other Near Ancient Eastern deity could be compared with Israel's covenant God in terms of sovereignty, uniqueness of character and ability. The study revealed this aspect repeatedly.
- 8.2 To render a scholarly and responsible Biblical exegesis of a text or passage, it is of paramount importance to take cognizance of the socio-historical context of such a text as the frame of reference of the intended audience. In this study, the exilic community in Babylon is the audience who is faced with concerns of faith – faith in Yahweh, their national and covenant God.
- 8.3 The exegetical study of 1 Ki. 8:23-26 rendered the idea that Dtr strengthens the status of the Davidic dynasty. Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history is to be seen in his emphasis on the prophecy (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-16) that God had promised to "build a house" for David which clearly refers to the development of the Davidic dynasty and which was now realized with Solomon. The temple stands as the token of the fulfillment of God's covenant with David. Thus the final phrase "as it is today" expresses the lasting significance of the Davidic covenantal promise and has a decisive effect for Solomon's period of reign. He was now sitting on the throne of his father "as the first and prototypical heir to the Davidic covenant" (Wilson 1997b: 1233). Apart from the validation of the Davidic dynasty there is also an emphasis on throne, temple and city as reaffirmed in the prayer.
- 8.4 The brief but comprehensive discussion of the Babylonian exile (cf. 3.2) with reference to the events leading up to the exile, the situation in Babylon and the theological concerns faced by the exilic community, facilitated comprehension of the passage.

- 8.5 Through Solomon's prayer, Dtr wants his audience to come to a critical self-examination of their plight – its causes, the theological concerns they may be grappling with while in exile, but also possible hope and deliverance from their exilic situation. In other words, Dtr's interpretation is intended to cause the exiles to critically examine their own faith. Such self-examination should lead to responsible faith-decisions, e.g. that Yahweh, their covenant God, is the One who would keep *hesed*. They would experience God's loyal love and covenantal blessings if they would walk in obedience "before him" especially in the light of the first and second commandments of the Decalogue.
- 8.6 The text and the larger prayer are formulated in such a way by Dtr that, apart from being an ascription of praise to the incomparable God, Yahweh, it also functions as an appeal to Dtr's audience, the exilic community, to "look" to God, repent and walk in obedience. Israel has to acknowledge Yahweh, not only as their covenant God, but also as the One and only true God.
- 8.7 Dtr renders his theological interpretation of Israel's history through his narratives and thereby teaches the exilic community Yahweh's sovereign control over history. This important aspect has theological relevance to the twenty-first century believers of the Bible as well. With reference to the afore-mentioned aspect, the study assumes the relevance for the classical conception of God – a universal, sovereign and incomparable God in terms of his transcendent character and ability. Similarly, believers assume that humanity is dependent on God for its present and future deliverance in whatever traumatic situations people may experience if they only "look" to God in prayer.
- 8.8 Dtr's theological interpretation of Israel's history by virtue of the insertion of the incomparability formula intimates that there is hope for the exilic community, not only because of them being regarded as God's elect, but also due to the perpetuation of the promise made to David concerning the continuation of his dynasty.
- 8.9 The event of the exile does not erase the unwavering promise and nothing is irretrievably lost because Yahweh has not abandoned them. His trustworthy and powerful word stands confirmed and he is still in control of their history.

To conclude, the researcher wishes to make the following remarks:

- (i) The researcher holds the view that, in the light of the socio-historical context of the passage (1 Ki. 8:23-26), its literary placement within the broader prayer-text (1 Ki. 8:23-53) and Dtr's rendering of the narrative of the dedication of the temple, conclusive arguments were presented for each postulated reason. It was attempted to show the readers the role this passage plays within its larger literary and theological context, i.e. the Deuteronomistic History and Dtr's theology.
- (ii) The researcher also holds the modest view that the exegetical approach of the study was executed in a methodologically sound and scholarly responsible manner. On this depends the validity that any reader could attribute to the findings on the perspectives of Dtr and his theology.

I humbly hope that my understanding and exegesis of the passage have the theological significance that I have proposed to attach to it. I have shown that my approach to the text under scrutiny, to some extent, does agree with that of other scholars in this field of study. I hope that my investigation would in one way or another contribute to any theological studies done concerning the incomparability of Yahweh.

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