

The Prophetic Speeches in Chronicles Speculation, Revelation, and Ancient Historiography

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Scholars have for some time recognized that the Chronicler's prophetic speeches are his own compositions rather than materials that he has culled from source materials. The fictive nature of these speeches raises important questions regarding both the nature of Hebrew historiography and also the nature of the Chronicler's work as scripture. When the Chronicler's use of speeches is compared to a similar use of speeches in Greek historiography, it becomes clear that his fictive contributions to the history are a legitimate means to bring his theological Tendenz to bear on the narrative. A close reading of the speeches also shows that their theology has been exegetically derived from the Chronicler's canonical texts.

Key words: Chronicles, Chronicler, Hebrew historiography, Greek historiography, Herodotus, Thucydides

Ancient Hebrew historiography has been an important topic for some time, and the recent work of J. Van Seters generated a good bit of discussion when he suggested the likelihood, now followed by an increasing number of scholars, that the work of the Deuteronomistic Historian not only reflects a *Tendenz* but is more properly viewed, in many respects, as fictional.¹ The debate along these lines has been exacerbated by the contention from literary criticism that all historiography is tendentious, not because all authors are unscrupulous, but because human perceptions necessarily give rise to fictive narratives.²

1. J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997). See also the polemical response of B. Halpern, *The First Historians* (rev. ed.; University Park, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

2. For useful summaries and discussions of the issue, see A. P. Norman, "Telling It like It Was: Historical Narratives on Their Own Terms," *History and Theory* 30 (1991) 119-35; H. V. White, "Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination," *Essays on*

This has prompted not only a number of responses from scholarship in general but also, and happily, from those of the evangelical confessional community.³ Among these, the one that I have appreciated the most is the work of V. P. Long, and it is his work that serves as the suitable point of departure for my discussion.⁴

V. PHILIPS LONG, *THE ART OF BIBLICAL HISTORY*

Long begins his work with an illustration: two brothers find a painting among their deceased grandmother's things and so set about to interpret it. The painting is of "a young girl sitting before a piano, atop which was an embroidered cloth. On the cloth lay cut roses, garden gloves, shears. Leaning against the piano stool was a field hockey stick and at its base a basketball." Curiously, the girl also appeared to have, believe it or not, a second thumb on her right hand. This last feature the boys considered symbolic in some way because, after all, human beings have only one thumb per hand. They surmised that the painting was of their grandmother and that the things cast about her reflected her breadth of interest as a youngster. A conversation with their mother confirmed most of their suspicions. Yes, it was their grandmother. Yes, the gardening tools on the piano represented her interests and not the place where such tools were usually kept. Yes, she was athletic. On the other hand, their mother set the boys straight with regard to their symbolic notion of the extra thumb. The thumb was no fiction, for their grandmother had been the recipient of an extra digit from the day of her birth. Only later was the thumb surgically removed, long before the boys had come on the scene.

The remainder of the volume is a kind of extended metaphor in which Long argues that the artistry found in such a portrait is in many respects like the artistry and creativity reflected in biblical

Historicism (History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History 14; Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Press, 1975) 48-67; J. Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994)

3. See especially the collection of essays in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

4. V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994). This work is now available along with other contributions to the *Foundations* series in a single volume, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (ed. M. Silva; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996). See also idem (ed.), *Israel's Past in Recent Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

historiography.⁵ Its primary features are referential, but they are enshrouded with the creative liberties that we come to expect from art, such as the sports equipment in the piano room. The extra thumb represents those unexpected features of historiography which we might at first find historically improbable (or even impossible) but which are nonetheless an integral part, not of the artistry, but of the history itself. We needn't go any further to see that the creative liberties found in a painting might by analogy suggest this: that the features in biblical historiography most frequently viewed by scholars as tendentious may be profitably viewed as either artistic license or, like the extra thumb, the miraculous intervention of God in history.

At first one gets the impression that Long is saying something that, it turns out, he is not (at least not very strongly). If we take his portrait analogy far enough, then it may be pointed out that portions of the biblical narrative may be no more true, referentially speaking, than the notion that the boy's grandmother kept garden tools upon her piano. To this implication Long offers two objections. First, historiographic literature, more so than a portrait, is necessarily constrained by the referential history which it seeks to narrate. And second, from a theological perspective, the fundamental basis of evangelical faith is a historical one, so that when one removes the referential character of the biblical narratives one also tends to threaten the vitality of the faith and the unique authority of the Scriptures.⁶ While I have some sympathy with this conclusion, I am not sure that it is always true in the same way for all biblical narratives. Long seems at points to be aware that it cannot be the case for all narratives, but his volume does not provide serious examples of fictive composition within biblical historiography. In fact, once he has established that fiction might have a legitimate place even within historiography, he then nuances the discussion by replacing the word "fiction" with "artistry," primarily as an effort to carefully separate historiography from fictive genres that he believes are not referentially restricted (novels, folktales, etc.). But such a distinction is difficult to make because all literature derives its meaning via referential

5. In doing so Long reflects influence from the very useful observations of Sternberg, Berlin, and others, who have come to recognize and appreciate the literary character of the Hebrew narratives. Although there is no end to the debate about the definition of *literature*, it is clear that this literary emphasis sets Israelite historiography generically apart from modern historical treatises. See especially M. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). On the problem of defining literature, see T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 1-14.

6. On these two points, see chaps. 2 and 3 of Long's volume, *Art of Biblical History*.

connections. Can we imagine an allegory whose typological elements have no referential antitypes? The difference is one of degree rather than kind. It is more correct to say, I think (and it is likely that Long would agree with me here), that historiography tends to be much more referentially restricted than, say, novella. And I would imagine that some histories could well be more fictive than others without prompting the charge against them that they are tendentious. In fact, here I will echo the sentiment of many scholars that most of the speeches found in the history of the Hebrew Chronicler should be understood as fictional compositions. I also view them as legitimate contributions to Holy Scripture.

DIRECT DISCOURSE IN ANCIENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

I have chosen as comparative exemplars the Greek histories of Herodotus and Thucydides.⁷ This choice is necessitated by several contingencies, the most crucial being that only in ancient Greece and ancient Israel did true history writing emerge in antiquity. And because my focus below will be on the Hebrew Chronicler, the comparative value of Herodotus and Thucydides is greater still, for all of these works stem from the same general chronological era. Another important point of comparative value is that both the Greek writers and the Chronicler use *oratio recta* (direct discourse) in their work, and it is precisely the speeches and sermons of the Chronicler that interest me here. This discussion should not be misconstrued as an attempt to argue that we are necessarily dealing with an issue of generic diffusion, in which the Hebrew Chronicler has been influenced by the Greek authors (or vice versa). No, I would say that the similarities among them should be explained primarily as phenomenological (arising out of common human tendencies) rather than as historical (arising out of common influences). On the other hand, such intercultural influence would be of no surprise, since the material and cultural exchange between Greece and the Levant was reestablished following the collapse of Mycenaean culture no later than the eighth century BCE, and this process of exchange seems to have grown steadily from that point onward.⁸

7. My citations are taken from the Loeb series: A. D. Godley (trans.), *Herodotus* (4 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); C. F. Smith (trans.), *Thucydides* (4 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

8. W Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur* (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 1; Heidelberg: Winter, 1984).

We will begin with Herodotus.⁹ Although he utilized direct discourse frequently, perhaps the most celebrated instance is in book 7.5-18, where he provides a lengthy account of dialogues in the Persian court about a potential war with the Greeks. As Lateiner has pointed out, Herodotus cannot have been privy to sound sources for such intimate and personal discussions between the king and his advisors.¹⁰ Whether he had access to more general kinds of sources is a matter of debate, but classical scholars agree that here Herodotus has freely composed the dialogues.¹¹ Herodotus did this on the basis of what he believed the characters probably would have said, and he presents their thoughts and musings with great detail. So, for instance, he introduces a quote of Mardonius, a certain advisor to the king, with the words "Mardonius reasoned thus in his discourse," and then he has the advisor present an argument that Greek atrocities against Persia ought to be avenged. Interspersed with the discourse are Herodotus's own thoughts (or shall we say, speculations) on the subject. The method is best illustrated with a brief excerpt from 7.5:

"Sire [said Mardonius to king Xerxes], it is not seemly that the Athenians should be unpunished for their deeds, after all the evil they have done to the Persians. Nay, my counsel is that for the nonce you do what you have in hand; then, when you have tamed the insolence of Egypt, lead your armies against Athens, that you may have fair fame among men, and that all may in time to come beware how they invade your realm." This argument of his was for vengeance' sake; but he would

9. I am aware of the so-called "liar school" that paints Herodotus as a tendentious forger. While I have elsewhere taken the position that Herodotus cannot always be trusted in his use of oral source citations (see chap. 2 of my *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998]), I think that his speech compositions are a separate issue. For a favorable view of Herodotus as a historian, see J. M. Balcer, *Herodotus and Bisitun* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987); A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus, Book II: Commentary 99-182* (3 vols.; Etudes preliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain 43; Leiden: Brill, 1975-88) 3.21-25, 185-95; W. K. Pritchett, *The Liar School of Herodotus* (Amsterdam: Bieben, 1993). For the more skeptical perspective, see D. Fehling, *Herodotus and His Sources* (ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers, and Monographs 21; Leeds: Cairns, 1989); R. Rollinger, *Herodots babylonischer Logos: Eine kritische Untersuchung der Glaubwürdigkeitsdiskussion an Hand ausgewählter Beispiele* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft 84; Innsbruck: Verlag des Instituts für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1993).

10. D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Phoenix Supplementary Volume 23; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 20.

11. Ch. Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) 25; Fr. Solmsen, "Two Crucial Decisions in Herodotus," *Mededelingen der koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie* 37/6 (1974) 14, 23 [139-70]; L. I. C. Pearson, "Credulity and Skepticism in Herodotus," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 349 [335-55].

ever slip a plea into it, that Europe was an exceeding fair land, one that bore all kinds of orchard trees, a land of high excellence, worthy of no mortal master but the king. This he said, because he desired adventures and would himself be viceroy of Hellas.

In pursuing this method, Herodotus is not a wanton and rebel historiographer but an active interpreter and literary composer of historical tradition. True, his work might not pass for modern historiography—but this kind of fictive activity certainly would pass for, and is very similar in certain respects to, the genre that we call historical novel. The simple fact is this: our distinction between historiography and novel cannot be too readily applied to works from antiquity, for the ancient historians possessed a legitimate freedom that we do not usually extend to ourselves. In distinction from us, in the *Histories* direct discourse signaled, not the *ipsisima verba* of the character, but rather, the author's intervention in the narrative.

It is appropriate to ask about the origins of this use of direct discourse. Of course, generally speaking, we rarely get to the bottom of things in historical analysis. Nevertheless, we can take a few steps back in time and find that Homer's epics frequently used direct discourse to explain political policies, justify behaviors, and evaluate events through the mouths of his characters. This suggests that the Greek historical tradition has probably picked up its use of direct discourse, along with other habits, from the earlier epic tradition.¹²

Thucydides is a historian of a different stripe and by all accounts, both ancient and modern, devoted himself to getting the facts straight. His historical interest was more focused than the work of Herodotus and so he was not prone to make extensive digressions into ethnography, geography, genealogy, and so on.¹³ Although his attempt to narrate a referentially grounded history was a serious one, it did not prevent him from utilizing fictive literary methods to accomplish this effort. This is especially visible in his transparent comments about his use of direct discourse:

As to the speeches that were made by different men . . . it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches

12. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus*, 21.

13. In this comparison I am departing from Lateiner's emphasis that the ethnography constituted for Herodotus an important access into history (*ibid.*, 145-62). In my view the digressions and anecdotal materials in Herodotus instead reflect his storytelling profession and his antiquarian tendency to preserve a record of just about anything he saw or heard. For this second view of Herodotus, see P. Levi, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York: Viking, 1985) 270; S. Flory, *The Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 153.

are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion. . . . (1.22)

Here we have a methodology quite different from that of Herodotus. While in Herodotus both the discourse and its content were fictive, in Thucydides (if we are to believe him) the fiction lies mainly in the content of the discourse, and even more narrowly, it lies especially in the speeches which he culled from oral sources rather than from his own memory of them. To what extent were they fictive? Two observations. First, it is clear to most scholars that the speeches were composed in Thucydides' own idiosyncratic style and, while it is debated whether this means that he has invented the speeches entirely, this means at least that he has played an active role in the content. Second, Thucydides presents the speeches dramatically and with the purpose of revealing the thoughts and motives of the speaker. These two facts, coupled with Thucydides' confession that the discourse provides us with what he thought the characters would have said, indicates that fiction played an important role in the direct discourse of his history.¹⁴

A comparison of Herodotus and Thucydides reveals both similarities and important differences. Both of them employed fictive tools in their composition of direct discourse, and both found the use of direct discourse a helpful rhetorical device for conveying their interpretation of the events in the narrative. On the other hand, the fictive element of the speeches varied from author to author, depending on their generic habits and upon the sources at their disposal. Herodotus invented the speech events themselves, as well as their contents, while Thucydides seems to have invented only their contents, and this especially when his sources were few or difficult to recall. These differences aside, I think that all of this leads to the conclusion that fictive speech composition was a legitimate aspect of historiographic composition in ancient Greece.

If we are to make a comparison of the Chronicler with these Greek historians, three differences among them must be highlighted from the outset. First, Hebrew historians were not rationalistic in the same way that Greek historians like Herodotus, and especially Thucydides, were rationalistic. On the other hand, it could certainly be argued that in the basic narrative of both the Deuteronomistic History and the Chronicler, divine activity is primarily visible in God's sovereignty over the events rather than in his direct and visible intervention, such as occurs frequently in the Pentateuch and in the prophetic stories of

14. H. T. Wade-Gery, "Thucydides," *OCD* 1517-18; S. Hornblower, "Historiography, Greek," *OCD* 714-15.

Elijah and Elisha. Whether one is willing to see here a certain rationalizing tendency is another question, but it is a conclusion one might draw from the texts. A second difference is that the Greek historians entered into their historiographic efforts with a unique spirit of inquiry. Herodotus and Thucydides were trying to understand the causes of past events and, as a result, one can perceive in their histories an inductive process of discovery, as well as an array of causative models that they used to explore these *aitia*.¹⁵ By comparison the Chronicler seems to have entered into his history with already determined principles of historical causation, especially "immediate retribution."¹⁶ This is not to say that the Greeks lacked preconceptions of historical cause and only discovered them through research; it is only to argue that their notions of causation were more varied and more open to a process of discovery than was the case for the Chronicler. For this reason, while Herodotus and Thucydides searched for the "how" and the "why," the Chronicler already knew the answers to these questions. The third difference between the Greeks and the Chronicler is perhaps the most important one of all. Historians have four basic tools that help them convey their unique view of the past. They can select sources that reflect their perspective. They can nuance the narrative derived from their sources through rhetoric and carefully selected language. They can make creative additions to the narrative. And they can interrupt the narrative with commentary of their own. While Greek historians utilized all of these tools, it is clear that Israelite historians chose to remain anonymous and that their generic tradition generally pre-empted the fourth option, what narratologists sometimes call "extranarrative" intervention.¹⁷ Because the Chronicler chose not to intervene in such a direct way, and because there is only so much that can be accomplished with source selection and nuanced rhetoric (both of which the Chronicler used very successfully), the primary vehicle that was available to him was to compose materials of his own and add them to the narrative. I believe that this method was not only available to him but that he has also availed himself of it by composing many of the sermons and speeches interspersed throughout his story.

15. On causation in these authors, see Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus*, 189-210; P. Derow, "Historical Explanation: Polybius and His Predecessors," *Greek Historiography* (ed. S. Hornblower; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 73-90.

16. On immediate retribution in Chronicles, see R. B. Dillard, "Reward and Punishment in Chronicles: The Theology of Immediate Retribution," *WTJ* 46 (1984) 164-72; idem, "The Reign of Asa (2 Chr 14-16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *JETS* 23 (1980) 207-18.

17. G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) 255-59; idem, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 130-31.

THE SERMONS AND SPEECHES IN CHRONICLES

That the Chronicler's speeches were his own compositions rather than culled from sources has been presumed for some time,¹⁸ but it was only with the classic discussion of G. von Rad that their form and character was more completely appreciated.¹⁹ Von Rad recognized that speeches appeared to follow a similar form and theological *Tendenz*. Because of the levitical emphasis in Chronicles, and also because the prophetic speeches were often presented by levitical prophets, von Rad concluded that the basic form used by the Chronicler was the "levitical sermon." He tried to demonstrate this by showing that the Chronicler's speeches were not based on undirected theological speculation but were instead grounded in his canonical texts: the law, the former prophets (i.e., the Deuteronomistic History), and the rest of the prophetic corpus. This can be illustrated by citing an example from 2 Chr 16:7-9. King Asa of Judah had concluded a treaty with Ben-hadad of Syria in return for the Aramean king's military assistance. While there is no prophetic intercession in the parallel narrative of 1 Kings 15, in Chronicles the prophet Hanani steps forward with these words:

Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand. *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him.* You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars.

The italicized words are important. They reflect clear allusions to two texts, first to Zech 4:10, "These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth," and second to 1 Sam 13:13, "'You have acted foolishly.' This demonstrates, according to von Rad, that the speeches are exegetical efforts to bring the import of these older canonical texts into the Chronicler's interpretation of history.

I am not sure that Von Rad's thesis is entirely sound.²⁰ In the first place, some of the speeches were done by kings and non-Levites rather

18. E. L. Curtis and A. A. Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910) 13; S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1897) 531.

19. Von Rad's article first appeared in 1934 and is available in English as "The Levitical Sermon in I and II Chronicles," *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 267-80.

20. Noth accepted von Rad's view without modification, as have most others. I think that this is in large part because nothing really essential hinges on the form-character of the speeches. See M. Noth, *The Chronicler's History* (JSOTSup 50; Eng. trans. of 1943 German ed.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) 80.

than by levitical prophets, and this makes one wonder why the form used here should be identified the "levitical sermon" when it could as easily be labeled "prophetic oracle."²¹ And in the second place, it is not always easy to identify the scriptural allusions that von Rad says should be in the speeches. He has found them in the six examples that he treats, but the intertextual connections are not as clear in some of the speeches that he does not treat.²² Nevertheless, all of these speeches reflect a rather narrow thematic *Tendenz* that is clearly based on the Chronicler's view of older texts: (1) Israel must rely only on Yahweh, and (2) Israel must avoid idolatry. So, whether one agrees with von Rad or not, it seems rather clear that the Chronicler has composed these speeches in order to bring the normative message of his canonical *Vorlage* to bear on the history.²³ In this way, he insures that his readers will draw the proper lessons from the events of the past.

I suppose that some might want to argue that the Chronicler had sources for these speeches. An examination of the comparative sources from the ancient Near East does not suggest that such documentation would have existed.²⁴ On the other hand, the fact that Israelite historiography is so unique in antiquity weakens such a comparative claim. But the Chronicler's speeches so clearly reflect his own *Tendenz* that one cannot easily avoid the conclusion that he has composed them himself. There is also evidence that, generally speaking, the biblical writers were limited by the sources at their disposal. A comparison of the Deuteronomistic Historian's narrative of the early monarchy (Samuel, Saul, David traditions) with his narrative of the late monarchy shows that he utilized different kinds of sources for them. He does not refer to a "book of the Chronicles of David/Saul," nor does he provide the kind of chronographic data early in the monarchy that appears later in the history. From this we should draw the conclusion that revelation did not usually provide the Israelite historian with data outside of his source materials but was instead concerned with guiding his theological interpretation and rhetorical arrangement of the sources.

All of this raises a question. How can we legitimately identify as "revelation" that which is largely a product of human speculation? One part of the answer, which we have little time for here, is the some-

21. Cf. 1 Chr 28:2-10 (King David); 2 Chr 19:6-11 (King Jehoshaphat); 2 Chr 32:7-8a (King Hezekiah).

22. Cf. 2 Chr 12:5; 20:14; 20:37; 24:20. The texts in 2 Chr 12:5 and 24:20 might reflect the influence of Deut 31:16-17, and 2 Chr 20:14 could perhaps have a connection with Deut 20:4. But 2 Chr 20:37 seems to reflect influence from no particular text but from a more general theological perspective.

23. On the canonical viewpoint of the Chronicler, see B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 647—48.

24. The best survey of this issue is still that of Van Seters, *In Search of History*.

what careless way in which we sometimes use the word "inspiration." Yes, it does mean "god-breathed," but a careful examination of the phenomena of inspiration shows that it cannot be explained through the rubric of a single process. There are various modes of inspiration; here, it is a vision (see Revelation), there, a dream (Daniel), here, some research (Luke), there, a prophetic *logos* (Jeremiah). Is there also room at the inn for philosophical and theological "speculation" as a mode of divine inspiration?²⁵

SPECULATION IN ECCLESIASTES

I think that it is perhaps difficult in some circles to entertain the idea that "speculation" might also be understood as "revelation." However, it is clearly the case that such an idea has for some time been entertained already with respect to Ecclesiastes. Even the old Scofield Bible suggested that Qohelet's "reasonings were, after all, man's."²⁶ Of course, the key interpretive question of the book is the relationship between the "frame" in chaps. 1 and 12 and the rest of the corpus, for without the introduction and conclusion in these framing chapters one is hard-pressed to find sound orthodoxy in the book. T. Longman's recent commentary admirably attacks the problem by positing that the philosophically optimistic frame was composed to provide an orthodox theological interpretation of the otherwise mistaken introspective efforts of Qohelet.²⁷ He may well be right, but to support this view Longman must argue that the apparent compliment paid to Qohelet in 12:11 (that Qohelet's words are like goads, like nails firmly fixed) is actually a criticism of Qohelet. I am still thinking on the matter, but even if Longman is right, it must be recognized that, through inclusion, this product of human speculation has been placed within the pages of Holy Scripture.

Part of the reason for our willingness to handle Ecclesiastes in this way is the decidedly minor role its philosophical genre plays in the scope of biblical literature, as well as the obvious tension that

25. The word *philosophical* is added here because I am about to suggest that Ecclesiastes is an appropriate example of such speculation, and many scholars continue to view Ecclesiastes as a philosophical rather than theological work. See R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965) 196.

26. See the discussion of Scofield's views in J. S. Wright, "The Interpretation of Ecclesiastes," *EvQ* 18 (1946) 18-34.

27. T. Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 32-39, 274-84. This use of frame-narrative is a technique used in other ancient texts, as Fox has pointed out. But he concludes from this that the frame-narrative was composed by the same author, which is of course a perspective at variance with Longman's. See M. V. Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," *HUCA* 48 (1977) 83-106.

exists theologically between a phrase like "all is vanity" and the more comfortable theologies of Scripture. But to entertain such a question with a larger corpus of the Scriptures, such as Old Testament historiography, tends to open a Pandora's box that many would prefer to leave closed. But slippery slope or not, the problem is this: the box has been open for some time, and it is incumbent upon us to answer the questions that have been raised. It is my view that the space given in Ecclesiastes to human speculation (of questionable orthodoxy!) provides us with ample room to allow the Chronicler to work as I have suggested he did. For the Chronicler's speech compositions are so obviously based on the theological orthodoxy of his canonical *Vorlage* that the validity of his speculations can hardly be questioned. There is certainly *Tendenz* here and also fiction, but there is nothing that should be labeled "tendentious."

SUMMARY

With respect to the Chronicler's speeches, the question "Did it happen?" is at certain points not the proper one.²⁸ Rather, the appropriate question is this: does the speech that he has created reflect theological orthodoxy and does it provide an appropriate interpretation of the past? Like Long's hypothetical painting, we should not always focus on whether gardening tools were kept upon the piano. We should instead ask whether the point made by the gardening tools upon the piano is a valid one. Just as the creativity of the painter was not entirely bound by referential history, so too for the ancient historian, referential history was not a rigid boundary but a general framework within which his creative work was done. The Chronicler's effort was necessitated by a key problem: his sources did not adequately reflect and address the theological perspectives that he knew to be valid, valid because they were insights that he had received from God himself. This dearth of source material dictated that his narrative would ultimately include both information from his sources and his own fictive contributions to them. In doing so, he followed a natural historiographic convention that was also used legitimately in ancient Greece, and he utilized a speculative process of composition that was guided by what he viewed as canonical truth. As E. Bickermann has pointed out, "the Chronicler, like Hecataeus of Miletus or Herodotus, gives such information concerning the past as

28. As M. Z. Brettler recently noted, "The Chronicler was not intending to write a depiction of the actual past, but was writing a type of fiction with a historical substratum to illustrate certain values." See his *Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995) 47.

appears to him most probable."²⁹ In my view, we have demonstrated that fiction plays an important role in the Chronicler's historical work. And this raises another question that there is no time for here: does fiction also play a prominent role in our other exemplars of ancient Hebrew historiography?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING, TEACHING, AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The implications for preaching and scholarship are, in my view, straightforward. The theological legitimacy of the Chronicler's speeches makes them fair game for teaching and preaching, and we can treat them as we would any other historical narrative in our efforts to exhort, reprove, and correct. On the other hand, scholars would be ill advised to make use of the speeches as grist for their *modern* historiographic mills. There are serious reasons to question whether the speeches actually took place, and to the extent that one uses them to reconstruct Israelite history according to the canons of modern historiography, then one runs the risk of being misled. A second implication for scholars is that careful attention must be given to the possible presence of fiction in otherwise historically referential narratives. There are no hard and fast rules that can be adduced for easily distinguishing fiction from history in the narratives. But the referential character of the historiographic genre dictates that the narrative's basic shape is referential rather than fictional.

29. E. Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees: Foundations of Post-Biblical Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1962) 22.