

Miszellen

Identity and community in the Book of Chronicles: The Role and Meaning of the verb *jāḥas'*

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In numerous publications on the Book of Chronicles, Joel Weinberg has offered a lot of sociological and statistical material dealing with the topic of *community* in post-exilic Judah and Jerusalem, especially in the Persian period.² The topic of *identity* in the Book of Chronicles has explicitly been brought to the front by Jonathan E. Dyck in an essay of which one should be aware of its full title: 'The Ideology of Identity in Chronicles'.³ In this fine essay Dyck describes how the concept of ethnicity that we find in Ezra-Nehemia was rooted in the experience of the Exile, and that its full expression and further development was determined by the nature of the relationship between the post-exilic community and its neighbours. "Whereas Ezra-Nehemia makes a clear distinction between the "Israelite" community and the other people living in the land of Israel, the Chronicler maintains an 'all Israel' perspective throughout the book".⁴

Preparing a commentary on the Book of Chronicles and investigating the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1-9, the present author came across a specific aspect of 'identity and community' in the Book of Chronicles, viz. the use and function of the

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² Joel P. Weinberg, 'Die soziale Gruppe im Weltbild des Chronisten', ZAW 98 (1986) 72-95; id., '„Wir“ und „sie“ im Weltbild des Chronisten', Klio 66 (1984) 19-34; id., *The Citizen-Temple Community* (JSOT.S 151), Sheffield 1992; Id., *Der Chronist in seiner Mitwelt* (BZAW 239), Berlin 1996.

³ Jonathan E. Dyck, 'The Ideology of Identity in Chronicles', in: M. Brett (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 19), Leiden 1996, 89-116. In this article Dyck also adduces further observations relating to the still ongoing scholarly debate with respect to the question whether Ezra-Nehemia and Chronicles were painted with the same brush, in other words whether these books share a common authorship. With regard of this problem, see S. Japhet, 'The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemia Investigated Anew', VT 18 (1968), 332-372; Id., 'The Relation between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemia', in: J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume Leuven 1989* (VT.S 43), Leiden 1991, 298-313; H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, Cambridge 1977, 37-70.

⁴ Dyck, 'Ideology of Identity', 105. See also his recently published monography: Jonathan E. Dyck, *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 33), Leiden 1998.

verb *jāḥas̄*.⁵ The root *jḥs̄* is unattested in other Semitic languages. The only connection might be the Arab. *whs̄* ('isolate') as has been suggested in 1910 by F. Schulthess.⁶

The verb *jāḥas̄*, always in *hitpa^cel*, is found twenty times in the Hebrew Bible, with no less than fifteen occurrences in the Book of Chronicles.⁷ It can hardly be an accident that the vast majority of these fifteen occurrences, namely ten, is found in the so-called „genealogical hall“ of the Book of Chronicles (1 Chron 1-9); the expression „genealogical hall“ has most probably been coined by Julius Wellhausen.⁸

It is of great interest to examine very carefully what entities within the „genealogical hall“ are involved with the verb *jāḥas̄* (*hitp.*). To start answering this question in a *negative* way: the verb *jāḥas̄* is not used relating to Judah (2:2-4:23), Levi (5:27-6:66)⁹ and Benjamin (8:1-40), which are precisely the tribes that in the post-exilic period, i.e. in the Chronicler's own days, the 4th Century BCE, constitute the people of Israel. These three 'sons of Israel' are presented to have remained loyal to the House of David and to the Temple. The positioning of Levi exactly in the *middle* of the „genealogical hall“ bespeakes the Chronicler's central interest in Temple and cult.

Between the genealogy of Judah (2:3-4:23) and that of Levi (5:27-6:66) we are told of the tribe of Simeon (4:24-43), the tribe of Reuben (5:1-10), the tribe of Gad (5:11-17) and Half-Manasseh (5:18-26). Between the genealogy of Levi (5:27-6:66) and that of Benjamin (8:1-40), the Chronicler pays attention to the tribe of Issachar (7:1-5), the tribe of Naphtali (7:13), the tribe of Manasseh (7:14-19), the tribe of Ephraim (7:20-29), and the tribe of Asher (7:30-40). In the Chronicler's own days, all those tribes mentioned between Judah and Levi, on the one hand, and between Levi and Benjamin on the other, had in fact disappeared from the historical and geographical scene.¹⁰

It is a major manoeuvre by the Chronicler to create and to establish an ideal community, which not by chance is called *kol jīsrā³el* for the first time in 1 Chron 9:1, serving as the summarising conclusion of 2:3-8:40.¹¹ From 1 Chron

⁵ In the Hebrew Bible, the noun *jāḥas̄* is only found in Neh 7:5. In Qumran literature it is attested in 4QD^a 5.2₁₄ (= Damascus Document [4Q 266]); 4QTohB^a 1₂ (= Purification Rules [4Q 275]) and 4QTohD 1₃ (= Purification Rules [4Q 279]).

⁶ F. Schulthess, 'Zwei etymologische Versuche: I. *jāḥas̄*', ZAW 30 (1910) 61-62.

⁷ 1 Chron 4:33; 5:1.7.17; 7:5.7.9.40; 9:1.22; 2 Chron 12:15; 31:16.17.18.19. Moreover in Ezra 2:62; 8:1.3; Neh 7:5.64.

⁸ M. Oeming, *Das wahre Israel: Die „genealogische Vorhalle“ 1 Chronik 1-9* (BWANT 128), Stuttgart 1990, 9. At the very end of his monograph, however, Oeming favours the notion 'proleptic summary' ('proleptisches Summarium').

⁹ Many Bible translations, e.g. RSV, NEB, REB, offer here a deviating numeration, viz. 6:1-81.

¹⁰ The tribes of Dan and Zebulon are not mentioned in the „genealogical hall“!

¹¹ H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCBC), Grand Rapids MI 1982, 86; S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (OTL), London 1993, 206.

11:1 onwards, the expression *kol jisrā'el* is used about forty-five times in the Book of Chronicles¹² and must therefore be considered one of its favourite characteristics.

Let us now have a closer look at the use and function as well as at the meaning of the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) which hints at a formative concept by the Chronicler. Within the „genealogical hall“, the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) is used in three clusters:

- (1) Framed by the genealogies of Judah (2:2-4:23) and Levi (5:27-6:66), the verb functions with respect of Simeon (4:33), Joseph (5:1)¹³, Reuben (5:7), and Gad (5:17).
- (2) Framed by the genealogies of Levi (5:27-6:66) and Benjamin (8:1-40), the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) occurs four times, each time in combination with the characteristic formulae *gibbôrê ḥ^ajālîm* (7:5 [Issachar]; 7:7; 7:40 [Asher])¹⁴ or *gibbôrê ḥājîl* (7:9); both expressions are only found in this chapter.¹⁵
- (3) Framed by the first (8:29-38) and second (9:35-44) genealogy of Saul, the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.), on the one hand, is connected to the first occurrence of the essential notion 'all Israel' (9:1) and, on the other hand, to the gatekeepers (9:22). The latter group is set out by the Chronicler in a section (9:17-26) which provides a 'disproportionate amount of detail'¹⁶ with respect of this specific group of Temple personnel. As compared to Ezra-Nehemia, where no levitical lineage is indicated for them (Ezra 2:42 / Neh 7:45; Neh 11:19; 12:25),¹⁷ the Chronicler does his very best to present the gatekeepers as being an inner-levitical group from old. No wonder that precisely 1 Chron 9:17b-33 is unparalleled in Biblical literature; it is a deliberate move from the Chronicler's own desk!¹⁸ It is not by chance, therefore, that in 9:22 'Samuel the seer' is explicitly mentioned in the same breath as David, having installed the gatekeepers in their office. For according to 1 Chron 6:12-13, Samuel is a Levite himself!

The Chronicler (or his source) created the section on the gatekeepers (9:17-26) in order to provide them with an unambiguous position as Levites, most probably reflecting the situation of his own days. It is presented as if this is a continuous tradition going back as early as to Phinehas and the wilderness tabernacle, and was re-established by David and Samuel. Within this theological rather than historical

¹² H.J. Zobel, *jisrā'el*, in: G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. VI, Grand Rapids MI 1990, 418. One should add 1 Chron 28:8 to his list.

¹³ In a fascinating midrashic way referring to Gen 49:4, the Chronicler in 5:1 brings Joseph to the fore. The tradition that the right of the firstborn Reuben is transferred to Joseph and/or his sons is found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, but is attested in the Targumim and Rabbinic literature (*Genesis Rabbah*).

¹⁴ Not 7:10, as given by William Johnstone, *I & II Chronicles, Vol. I: I Chronicles 1 - 2 Chronicles 9: Israel's Place Among the Nations* (JSOT.S 253), Sheffield 1997, 69.

¹⁵ Within the Book of Chronicles the expression *gibbôrê ḥ^ajālîm* is found only once more: 1 Chron 7:11 (cf. 1 Chron 11:26).

¹⁶ Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 90.

¹⁷ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 214 erroneously listed Neh 11:9 instead of Neh 11:19, and mentioned Ezra 10:45, a verse which, however, does not exist.

¹⁸ As to the setting of 1 Chron 9, see P.B. Dirksen, '1 Chronicles 9:26-33: Its Position in Chapter 9', *Bib.* 79 (1998), 91-96.

pattern, the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) is a crucial element too. It appears to function as the parallel or supplement of their installation by David and Samuel. So doing, the Chronicler in 9:19-22 runs ahead of 1 Chronicles 23-27 (entirely 'Sondergut') where all four classes of Levites, including the gatekeepers, are described in full.

Using the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.), the Chronicler does not so much refer to the *process* of registration as to the *result* of having been registered, viz. that one belongs to a family or group and that such a registration entitles to specific rights and privileges. The verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) does not express "the genealogical relationship of the individual members in a temporal sequence of generations; it expresses a relationship that is present and timeless ..."; "it assigns someone to a specific circle with reference to the present and therefore timelessly ...; the "enrollment" referred to is not meant diachronically but synchronically".¹⁹

That the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) indeed refers to membership of a group, i.e. explicitly deals with the question who are concretely reckoned among a specific circle is excellently demonstrated in 2 Chron 31:16-19 and Ezra 2:62 (cf. Neh 7:64). Though Bible translations render 2 Chron 31:16-19 in quite different ways, which, on the one hand, is caused by a probable textual corruption in verse 15 (*b^ecārē*)²⁰ and, on the other hand, by the question to what extent verse 16 is to be considered parenthetical, the purport of *jāḥas* (hitp.) in this pericope (vv. 16.17.18.19) is unequivocal. There is no doubt whatsoever that this passage deals with special privileges exclusively given to certain groups: priests and Levites who derive their rights to the fact that they have been registered.

Ezra 2:62 reports how priests belonging to the line of Hobaiah, the line of Hakkoz, and the line of Barzillai, after their return from Exile, unsuccessfully searched for their names among those enrolled in the genealogies. Since their names could not be traced, they were deemed disqualified and debarred from officiating; they actually lost their priestly rights.²¹

Harking back to the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) in the „genealogical hall“ of 1 Chronicles 1-9, it is not by chance that the Chronicler by using such a special concept of 'having

¹⁹ R. Mosis, *jāḥas*, in: G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (eds), TDOT, Vol. VI, Grand Rapids MI 1990, 55-59 (57).

²⁰ "The phrase 'in the cities of the priests' is impossible at this point in the text because (a) it creates a contradiction within the passage itself, ascribing to the priests 'in the cities' (v. 15) the office actually executed in the Temple ...; (b) it also creates an unnecessary doublet to v. 19, where the priests in their cities are explicitly referred to, with the full designation of these cities ...; (c) finally, with this rendering, the passage overlooks the most important constituent of the priesthood, the priests of Jerusalem. The original version is still preserved in the LXX, where 'in the cities' (*b^ecārē*) is represented by *διὰ χειρός* (literally 'at the hand'), which clearly reflects the Hebrew idiom *b^eyad* or *‘al yad* (1 Chron 26:28; 29:8; 2 Chron 23:18 etc.), rendered variously by the translations according to the various contexts: 'by', 'under', 'in the care of', etc. (cf. RSV of 1 Chron 24:19; 2 Chron 23:18; 1 Chron 26:28). When this slight error is restored, the contradiction and the doublet disappear, and the passage refers to the priests who actually officiate in the Temple"; Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 970.

²¹ The mere fact that the verb *jāḥas* (hitp.) is also found in Ezra-Nehemia does, from a methodological point of view, not imply that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemia must share a common authorship. It is more likely that this root is encountered in both literary complexes, since Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemia are more or less contemporary works.

been registered' breathes new life into all those tribes which actually had disappeared in his own days. "The genealogies describe Israel as it always was, its inner structure and hierarchy, and its geographical place. It treats of space, not time".²² Once the relation of people to territory is established, they are given an identity. Or to say it in William Johnstone's words: "By possession of land identity is established".²³ In the „genealogical hall“ of the Book of Chronicles, the verb *jāḥaś* (hitp.) is used as a literary and theological 'glue' in order to save all those 'forgotten tribes' from oblivion and to put them permanently on the literary map of the Book of Chronicles, so that all the 'invisible sons of Israel' should be reckoned among the ideal Israel, which is given the notion 'all Israel'.

Abstract:

The root *jāḥaś* which in the Hebrew Bible is only found in the Book of Ezra-Nehemia (5 times) and in the Book of Chronicles (15 times), is unattested in other Semitic languages. The accumulation in the Book of Chronicles appears to aim at a very special meaning, viz. that the verb does not so much refer to the *process* of registration as to the *result* of having been registered. An analysis of *jāḥaś* in 1 Chronicles 1-9 is adduced as conclusive evidence for such a special meaning.

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²² Dyck, *'Ideology of Identity'*, 110.

²³ Johnstone, *I & II Chronicles*, 69.