**Thomas W. Mann. *The Book of the Former Prophets*. Cascade, 2011.**

**From the inside: understanding the text**

1. The ending of the Former Prophets can be read in diametrically opposite ways. On the one hand, a Davidic king survives and seems to be treated with respect by his captors--a sign of hope. On the other hand, there is no indication here that the Davidic dynasty will survive after Jehoichin is gone--a sign of resignation, if not despair. The editor has given us a report without commentary. p. 382
2. The Former Prophets is a theodicy in that it attempts to show how God is good despite all the evil that has consumed Israel. p. 383
3. The Former Prophets is Israel's memory of at least seven hundred years of its history interpreted through the lens of the Torah. Precisely because it ends with an enormous national failure, it illustrates more eloquently than anything in the Torah why the "Great Commandment" of loving Yahweh alone is the center of lsrael's identity. All other centers of value have collapsed--national sovereignty, territorial occupation, political power, and religious institutions. p. 412
4. Together, the Torah and the Former Prophets presented a magnificent "history" of Israel, from the creation of the cosmos to the Exile, but with the hints of a future that lay ahead. . . those who participated in the composition were witnesses for generations to come. They remembered, and in recording their memories they bequeathed a gift to all those who would hear their story. They taught the world how to "sing the Lord's song" in the poignant, bittersweet harmony of failure and endurance, mourning and rejoicing, despair and hope. Thus the charge to Joshua at the beginning could still be the charge to the Jews everywhere after the Exile, and to those who would identify with their story:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left ... Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. p. 414

**From the outside: challenging the theology/ideology of the text**

1. The Deuteronomic editors may insist on the truth of the system, especially in the book of Deuteronomy, but they have included within the narrative numerous instances in which the system not only fails, but seems to be reversed where good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. For example, Azariah of Judah does everything right (except for preserving the high places) but God strikes him with leprosy (2 Kgs 15:1-5). Jeroboam II did everything wrong (like his namesake, Jeroboam I), but he enjoyed a long reign of prosperity for forty years. Not to be outdone, Manasseh, who excelled everyone in depravity, enjoyed the longest reign of any king! Josiah, the darling of the Deuteronomists, dies in a way completely at odds with orthodox Deuteronomic theology, an apparent victim of curse rather than the recipient of blessing. p. 399
2. Any simplistic equation of national disaster with divine punishment is theologically perilous. Contemporary history adds innumerable examples of why the rewards/punishment system either does not make sense or becomes obscene, an unspeakable blaming of the victims--above all, the Holocaust. p. 393
3. [In the DtrH] people seem to act out of their own free will, but at the same time people are blamed for doing things that God seems to have made them do. These texts raise enormous questions about human freedom vs. fate and the relationship between the human will and God's will. When the editors of the Former Prophets insist that God is in control of history, they are emphasizing the sovereignty of God at the risk of questioning the morality of God. p. 389