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# Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer

Michael Widmer



10 NOV 2003

Thesis Submitted for PhD  
Department of Theology, University of Durham  
March 2003

## Abstract

### Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer

Michael Widmer

PhD Thesis

Submitted to the University of Durham, March 2003

The primary objective of this thesis is to reconsider the significance of the canonical portrayal of Moses the intercessor in the aftermath of “documentary” pentateuchal criticism. Not disregarding the diachronic dimension of the text, at the heart of this study is a close theological reading of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 in their final form with focus on the nature and theological function of Moses’ prayers. The intercessions evoke important theological questions, especially with regard to divine mutability, reputation, purpose, and covenant. It will become evident that Moses’ prayers embody a hermeneutical key to biblical theology.


The choice of the two key narratives is endorsed by their strong inner-biblical associations. Two are of particular importance: I) Moses’ intercession in Numbers 14:11–19 clearly wants to be understood in relation to Exodus 34:6–7, YHWH’s fullest revelation of His name, which in itself is the result of Moses’ engaging prayer activity (Ex. 32–33). By appealing to YHWH’s name (Nu. 14:18), Moses sets an important biblical paradigm of authentic prayer. II) We shall see that YHWH’s disclosure of His name remains a somewhat abstract reality in the context of the golden calf account. I shall advance the thesis, however, that YHWH’s fullest revelation of His name (Ex. 34:6–7) is enacted in Numbers 14 in a specific and concrete situation and stands thus as a kind of commentary on Exodus 34:6–7.

Another central aspect of this study is to bring Moses’ intercessory activity into canonical connection with his prophetic qualities. It has long been noticed that Moses is presented as Israel’s archetypal prophet. His prophetic role, however, has rarely been brought into constructive relation with his role as intercessor.

Our study of Moses’ intercessory prayers is preceded by some hermeneutical reflections and a survey of recent literature on Old Testament intercessory prayers.

Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is the author's own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree

 ..... (Michael Widmer) ..... (Date)



Statement of Copyright  
Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer

Michael Widmer

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Submitted as a thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Theology, University of Durham  
March 2003

## Acknowledgments

In the opening pages of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Karl Barth underlines the intrinsic connection between theological work and prayer. Thus it is no overly pious flourish when he joins the prayer with which Thomas Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologica*.

“Gewähre mir, barmherziger Gott, das, was dir wohlgefällig ist, brennend zu begehren, verständig zu erforschen, wahrhaftig zu erkennen und ihm vollkommen gerecht zu werden zum Lob deines Namens.”

It may seem presumptuous to start my acknowledgements in the words of these two undisputed giants of the Christian tradition, but their prayer brings fittingly to expression the attitude which underlies this work too. Thus I wish to acknowledge the God who has motivated and sustained me throughout the years, not least through the help of numerous people.

First of all I wish to express my deep gratitude to my *Doktorvater* Revd Dr. Walter Moberly, who, through his insightful and creative publications, lured me to the North of England to study under his supervision. He has been a constant source of inspiration, wise counsel, and encouragement. It is through his critical, but constructive thinking that I have become a better and more responsible student of the Old Testament. The other person who greatly contributed to the formation of my thinking is Professor B.S. Childs. Although I have never had the privilege of meeting him in person, I wish to acknowledge here my immense indebtedness to his liberating and discerning canonical approach. I have also greatly benefited from Professor Robert Hayward who read part of my work at an earlier stage and made several formative suggestions. As a member of the Old Testament seminar of Durham University, I am grateful for the opportunity to explore various aspects of this thesis under “friendly fire.” The seminar and its many participants have advanced and sharpened my thinking in many ways.

Special thanks are also due to my examiners Professor Chris Seitz and Dr. Stuart Weeks who read my work with great care and scrutiny. The oral defense of one’s dissertation is one of few events which one will never forget. I will keep my viva in good memory as an intensely stimulating time from which several new impulses emerged.

Studying and writing in a foreign language is not without its challenges. Thus a special tribute goes to Dr. Nathan MacDonald who undertook the demanding task of proof-reading the penultimate draft of this thesis. Thereby he saved me from many mistakes and made insightful suggestions. I am also grateful to another former fellow OT doctoral student and friend: Dr. Jin Min. With great pleasure I remember our Hebrew study group where many language and subject related issues were discussed. Special mentioning also deserves Mr. Terence Mournet (PhD cand.) for his friendship and technical assistance.

The origin of this thesis goes back to three former teachers of mine: Ms. Mary Evans, Dr. Deryck Sheriffs and Dr. Jean-Marc Heimerdinger. The former two

awakened my love for the Old Testament and encouraged me to search for hermeneutically responsible ways to read the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture. The latter competently instructed and introduced me to the fascinating world of biblical Hebrew.

I also wish to thank House to House, our Bible study group. The home fellowship, consisting largely of theological students, provided the ideal environment for probing the relevance and application of our academic pursuits. I am deeply grateful to the members for their friendship and support. Also a big thank you to all our friends here in Durham, particularly to the members of St. Nicholas Church, who enriched this stay in many ways and provided the kind of congenial fellowship which one can only hope for during an endeavor such as this.

This dissertation has not only materialized because of specialists of the Old Testament and good friends. Mrs. Margaret Parkinson, the departmental post-graduate secretary, and the library staff of Durham University, have always been very helpful and conscientious in their dealings with my requests.

As a Swiss national, there were times when I alternated between the libraries of Durham University and that of the *Evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät der Universität Bern*. Having had access to two major theological libraries has been a privilege for which I am grateful, it accounts, however, also for some inconsistencies in my dissertation because I did not always have access to the same books, editions, translations etc. Thus for example sometimes I use the *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (TWAT) and sometimes its English translation TDOT. I tried to be as consistent as was reasonably possible.

Devoting four years to doctoral studies cannot be done without financial support. Various people and bodies have carried this project. I am grateful to the department of education in Berne and to the department of theology at Durham. The former has provided the funding for my undergraduate and initial stages of my post-graduate studies, while the latter assisted my doctoral work with a substantial grant. I am also greatly indebted to my parents, Alfred & Renée Widmer-Villette, and my godmother, Mrs. Susanne Greber-Widmer, who have constantly assisted me with generous support and love. My gratitude is extended to my mother in law, Toshiko Kunioka and Mochigase Church for their support and ongoing prayer. Above all, I wish to express my sincere thanks to Haruhi, my wife, who worked full-time for two years, in spite of demanding working conditions, surprising pregnancy, and the heartfelt desire to be a full-time mummy. I can never hope to adequately express my appreciation. Together we experienced the existential reality of the wilderness narratives, being constantly torn between uncertainties and standing in awe of God's wonderful providence of which, among many other things, the amazing arrival of our daughter Ayuki Sarah is a living testimony. It is to her that this work is dedicated.

## Contents

## Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abbreviations .....	iii

### **Introduction: A Canonical Study of Moses' Intercessory Prayer**

a) The Enduring Witness of the Old Testament .....	3
i) The Theological Foundation for and the Task of Old Testament Interpretation .....	4
ii) Reading Moses' Intercessory Prayers .....	6
b) Objectives .....	7
i) Prayer as a Hermeneutical Key to Theology .....	7
ii) Moses the Prophetic Intercessor .....	8
iii) Canonical Relationship between Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 .....	8

### **1. Intercessory Prayer in the Old Testament**

1.1 Survey of Recent Approaches .....	10
1.1.1 A Theologian on Prayer (Barth, 1932–1953) .....	11
1.1.2 Intercession and God's Sovereignty (Eichrodt, 1933–1939, von Rad 1960) .....	12
1.1.3 Intercession in the Old Testament (Hesse, 1951) .....	15
1.1.4 Moses, Israel's Intercessor (Aurelius, 1988) .....	18
1.1.5 Prophetic Intercession (Muffs, 1992) .....	21
1.1.6 The Theological Function of Prose Prayers and Moses' Intercessions (Balentine, 1993) .....	23
1.1.7 Prayer, Theology, and the Nature of Intercessory Prayer (Miller, 1994, 1998) .....	26
1.1.8 The Dialectic Theology of Brueggemann (1997) .....	30
1.1.9 "One and the Many" (Seitz, 2001) .....	31

### **2. Hermeneutical Reflections**

2.1 Diachronic Dimensions of Moses' Prayers .....	35
2.2 A Canonical Reading .....	38
2.2.1 Prose Prayers, Context, and Theological Function .....	38
2.2.2 Concluding Summary .....	41

### **3. Prophetic Intercession**

3.1 Moses as the Archetypal Prophet .....	43
3.1.1 Called and Commissioned to Speak for God .....	46
3.1.2 Moses' First Intercession (Ex. 5:22–23) .....	47
3.1.3 The Logic of the Twofold Role of the Prophet .....	50
3.1.4 Concluding Summary .....	54

## 4. Moses' Intercessory Prayers at Sinai (Ex. 32–34)

4.1 Introduction .....	55
4.2 The Context .....	56
4.2.1 Israel's Great Sin .....	57
4.2.2 Leave Me Alone...! (32:7–10) .....	59
Excursus: Standing in the Breach (עֹמֵד בַּפֶּרֶץ) .....	66
a) The Metaphor .....	66
b) Mouth of God and Advocate of the People .....	67
4.3 First Prayer: "Faithful Disagreement" .....	69
4.3.1 Appeal to Israel's Status and the Logic of YHWH's Intention (32:11) .....	71
4.3.2 Appeal to Divine Reputation (32:12) .....	72
4.3.3 Appeal to the Patriarchs and the Divine Promise (32:13) .....	74
4.3.4 YHWH's Change of Mind (34:14) .....	80
4.4 The Twofold Role of Moses .....	82
4.5 Second Prayer: "Costly Solidarity" .....	85
4.5.1 Moses' Prayer Objective (32:30–31) .....	85
4.5.2 "If You will Bear their Sin–But if not, Blot me out of Your Book" (32:32) .....	87
4.5.3 Divine Mercy and Judgement (32:33–34) .....	91
4.6 Exodus 32:7–14 and 32:30–34: The Logic Between Moses' Two Prayers .....	92
4.6.1 Exodus 32 without Moses' First Prayer .....	93
4.6.2 Exodus 32 in its Final Form .....	94
4.7 The Third Prayer: "Engaging God Face to Face" .....	97
4.7.1 Moses' Prayer in Context .....	98
4.7.2 Need for Divine Assurance .....	99
4.7.3 Show me Your Ways! (33:13) .....	103
4.7.4 Divine Presence and Peace Assured (33:14–17) .....	104
4.7.5 Show me Your כְּבוֹד! (33:18) .....	109
4.7.6 God's Name (33:19) .....	111
4.7.7 The פָּנִים of God (33:20–23) .....	113
4.8 The Revelation of God's Name .....	119
4.8.1 Calling on the Name of YHWH (34:5) .....	119
4.8.2 God's Name Disclosed (34:6–7) .....	123
4.8.2.1 God's Steadfast Love (Spieckermann, 1990–2000) .....	125
4.8.2.2 Disjunction at the Core of YHWH's Name (Brueggemann, 1997) .....	127
4.8.2.3 Exodus 34:6–7 and Context .....	130
4.9 Fourth Prayer: The Covenant Mediator .....	142
4.9.1 Final Petition (34:8–9) .....	142
4.9.2 Divine Response: Covenant Renewal (34:10–28) .....	148
4.9.3 Divine Approval and Vindication (34:29–35) .....	156

## 5. Moses' Intercessory Prayer at Kadesh (Nu. 13–14)

5.1 Introduction .....	159
5.1.1 From the Golden Calf Incident to Kadesh .....	159

## Contents

5.1.2 Moses' Prayer and the Ambiguity of the Twofold Divine Response .....	163
5.2 A Historical Critical Reading .....	164
5.2.1 Doublets, Tensions, and the Documentary Hypothesis .....	165
5.2.2 Source Division According to M. Noth .....	166
5.2.3 The Yahwist .....	169
5.2.3.1 The Calebite Theory .....	170
5.2.3.2 The J-Account .....	172
5.2.3.3 Moses' Prayer: A later Addition? .....	173
5.2.3.4 The Literary Boundaries of Moses' Prayer (14:11–23/25) .....	175
5.2.4 The Priestly Writer .....	176
5.3 A Canonical Reading .....	178
5.3.1 Coherence and Logic of the Narrative .....	179
5.3.1.1 The Mission .....	181
5.3.1.2 Scouts' Report to the People .....	184
5.3.1.3 People's Reaction to the Report .....	186
5.3.1.3.1 i) The Reaction of the Faithful Leaders .....	188
5.3.1.4 YHWH's Dialogue with Moses .....	195
5.3.1.4.1 i) The Effect of Moses' Prayer .....	195
5.3.1.5 YHWH's Twofold Response .....	196
5.4 Moses' Intercessory Prayer and God's Response .....	199
5.4.1 The Context .....	199
5.4.1.1 Climax of the Murmuring Narratives .....	200
5.4.1.2 Israel's Sin and the Appearance of God .....	201
5.4.1.3 "Let Me Destroy Them!" .....	209
5.4.2 Prayer and Twofold Response .....	212
5.4.2.1 In the Light of Numbers 12:6–8 .....	213
5.4.2.2 Renewed Appeal to Divine Reputation (14:13–16) .....	214
5.4.2.3 Moses Prays God's Name Back to God (14:17–19) .....	219
5.4.2.4 Pardon Granted, but... (14:20–25) .....	224
5.4.2.5 The Objective and Logic of Moses' Prayer .....	227
5.4.2.6 Adults from Age Twenty Must Die, Except... (14:26–35) .....	229
5.4.3 The Logic of Visiting the Iniquities of the Parents to the Fourth Generation .....	231
 <b>6. Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer:</b>	
<b>Concluding Summary</b>	
6.1 Moses as Prophet .....	237
6.2 Moses' Intercessory Prayers at Sinai (Ex. 32–34) .....	238
6.2.1 First Prayer (32:10ff.) .....	238
6.2.2 Second Prayer (32:30–34) .....	240
6.2.3 Third Prayer (33:12–23) .....	241
6.2.4 The Revelation of God's Name (34:6–7) .....	243
6.2.5 Fourth Prayer (34:8ff.) .....	245
6.3 Numbers 13–14 .....	247
6.3.1 From a Diachronic to a Synchronic Reading .....	247
6.3.2 Moses' Paradigmatic Prayer .....	248

*Contents*

6.3.3 YHWH’s Name Enacted ..... 250

6.4 Prophetic Intercession and God’s Holy Mutability ..... 251

**Bibliography** ..... 255

## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday).
ABD	D.N. Freedman (ed.), <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
<i>AnBibl</i>	<i>Analecta Biblica</i> , Rome.
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969 <sup>2</sup> ).
AOS	<i>American Oriental Society</i> , New Haven.
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
BA	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i> , New Haven.
BBB	<i>Bonner biblische Beiträge</i> .
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver & C.A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the OT</i> (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979 <sup>2</sup> ).
<i>BEvTh</i>	<i>Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie</i> , Munich.
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , K. Elliger & W. Rudolph (eds.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990 <sup>4</sup> ).
BI	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i> , Leiden.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i> , Rome.
BJS	<i>Brown Judaic Studies</i> , Providence.
BK	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag).
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i> , Rome.
<i>BThSt</i>	<i>Biblich-Theologische Studien</i> , Neukirchen-Vluyn.
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer).
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i> , Paderborn.
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter).
CB	<i>Coniectanea Biblica</i> , OT Series (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell International).
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> , Washington.
Con	<i>Concilium</i> , Edinburgh.
Davidson	<i>Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar-Syntax</i> (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997 <sup>4</sup> ).
EA	<i>Ex Auditu</i> , San Jose.
EHS	Europäische Hochschulschriften (Frankfurt am Main, Bern: P. Lang).
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Zürich: Benziger Verlag & Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag).
ErFor	Erträge der Forschung (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).
<i>EvTh</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i> , Munich.
FAT	Forschung zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
Gesenius	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993).
GKC	W. Gesenius & E. Kautzsch, <i>Hebrew Grammar</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910 <sup>2</sup> ).
HAL	L. Köhler, W. Baumgartner, & J.J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000) = <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> (Leiden: Brill: 1967–1995).
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i> , Columbus.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg:



## Abbreviations

	Herder Verlag).
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i> , Pittsburgh.
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters).
HERM	Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i> , Cambridge, MA.
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> , Cincinnati.
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press).
ICC	The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark).
Int	<i>Interpretations: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i> , Richmond.
ITC	International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans & Edinburgh: Handsel Press).
JAOS	<i>Journal of American Oriental Society</i> , New Haven.
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> , Philadelphia.
JBR	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i> , Boston.
Joüon	P. Joüon, S.J. – T. Muraoka, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993/1996).
JPSTC	The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society).
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i> , Philadelphia.
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Sheffield.
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press).
KEHAT	Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Leipzig: Hirzel).
Lambdin	T.O. Lambdin, <i>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew</i> (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996 <sup>12</sup> ).
LD	<i>Lectio Divina</i> , Paris.
LXX	Septuaginta, A. Rahlfs (ed.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).
MT	Masoretic Text.
MThSt	<i>Marburger Theologische Studien</i> .
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
NEchB	Die Neue Echter Bibel: Altes Testament (Würzburg: Echter Verlag).
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series (Peabody: Hendrickson & Carlisle: Paternoster Press).
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
NIDOTTE	W.A. VanGemeren (ed.), <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House & Carlisle: Paternoster Press).
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i> , Cambridge.
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg & Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
ÖBS	Österreichische Biblische Studien (Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk).
OTG	Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press).
OTL	Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press).
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i> , Leiden.
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i> , Paris.
RSV	Revised Standard Version.
SBAB	Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände.

## Abbreviations

<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature.
<i>SFSHJ</i>	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press).
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i> , Cambridge.
<i>ThB</i>	<i>Theologische Bücherei</i> , Munich.
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel & G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), = <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer).
<i>TDOT</i>	G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, & H-J. Fabry (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977-), = <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970-1999).
<i>THAT</i>	E. Jenni & C. Westermann (eds.), <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995 <sup>5</sup> ).
<i>TOTC</i>	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester & Downers Gorge, IL: Inter-Varsity Press).
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i> , Bannockburn.
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i> , Tübingen.
<i>TT</i>	<i>Theology for Today</i> , Princeton.
<i>TVZ</i>	Theologischer Verlag Zürich.
<i>TWAT</i>	G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, & H-J. Fabry (eds.), <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970-1999).
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Leiden.
<i>VTS</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplement</i> .
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentaries (Waco, TX: Word Books & Nashville: Nelson Publishers).
<i>WBC</i>	Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press).
<i>WMANT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag).
<i>WThJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i> , Philadelphia.
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> , Giessen, Berlin.
<i>ZBKAT</i>	Zürcher Bibelkommentare Altes Testament (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich).
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i> , Tübingen.

## Introduction:

## A Canonical Study of Moses' Intercessory Prayer

Luther once commented that he would be prepared to spend a large amount of money (200 Goldgulden), if he could pray like the Jews. They learned it from the greatest man of prayer, their teacher Moses; Moses, however, learned it from God personally.<sup>1</sup> In the terms of Scripture, Moses can be called the father of biblical prayer.<sup>2</sup> Heiler in his classic treatment on prayer writes:

The ultimate roots of Christian prayer go back to the prophetic mediation of Moses between Jahve and Israel. He is the great man of prayer who intercedes for his people with Jahve; none of his contemporaries stand in such immediate relation to Jahve as he. He "sees Jahve's face"...He "speaks with Him mouth to mouth." The tremendous dramatic realism which is peculiar to the prayer of the great Christian personalities, is the creation of Moses. The prayerlife of the older leaders and prophets of Israel, of a Joshua, a Samuel, and Elijah, and an Amos, moves within the forms of the Mosaic intercessorship."<sup>3</sup>

Not only the intimate "I-Thou" dialogue which is peculiar to Jewish and Christian spirituality (which is often taken for granted<sup>4</sup>) goes back to the canonical Moses, but as we shall see, Moses' intercessions also raise ultimate issues about the nature of God and His dealing with His people. Scripture presents Moses as the archetype of Israel's prophets (Deut. 5:28ff., 34:10), YHWH did not speak to him in visions, dreams, or riddles, but clearly, face to face (cf. Nu. 12:6–8). It seems thus natural that the most comprehensive biblical account of the nature of God is given in the context of a prayer of Moses (cf. Ex. 34:6–7).

Moses' intense dialogues with God evoke questions about the divine nature and thereby raise the important and complex issue of how human participation in the divine decision-making process is envisaged. Clements suggests that the concept of

<sup>1</sup> Cited from Jacob (1997), 970. Unfortunately Jacob does not provide the source of Luther's statement.

<sup>2</sup> This is obviously not a "historical" statement. The canonical portrayal of Moses is most likely the result of a long and complex process of recording, compiling, and editing. We shall look at the depth dimension of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 at a later stage of this work.

From a canonical perspective the first extensive intercessory prayer is found on the lips of Abraham for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:23–33). Although Abraham is Israel's founding patriarch and his prayer is characterised by an audacious and persistent tone (not unlike those of Moses), content wise it does not bear any resemblances with the "prayer-tradition" initiated by Moses. Abraham' intercession is presented as a pre-Sinai, pre-covenant, pre-Israel prayer.

<sup>3</sup> Heiler (1932), 121–122. Cf. Wright (1998<sup>2</sup>), 138.

<sup>4</sup> See Miller (1994), 5–31, for a helpful overview of Israel's neighbours at prayer. There are many similarities and continuities, especially on the level of terminology and prayer postures. There are, however, also significant differences. For example, both in Mesopotamia and Egypt intercession commonly happens via a minor deity or personal god to the/a offended high god. Sometimes petitions are made directly to a high god to intercede to a personal god who was often believed more immediately involved with individuals.

intercession forces one to think through some of the most fundamental issues in theology:<sup>5</sup> the relationship between God and intercessor, the relationship between God and the party who is interceded for, and finally the relationship between the intercessor and those being prayed for. There is, of course, a mystery about prayer in general, and about intercessory prayer in particular, but bearing in mind the function and role of Moses in the Old Testament (from now OT), there is possibly no better place to commence an investigation into the biblical understanding of intercessory prayer than with Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14, two related key narratives which provide the context for Moses' most crucial intercessory activity.

A venture of this nature, however, rises considerable methodological problems. The subject of prayer is in itself is a very delicate matter. Ebeling is convinced, however, that if theology is based on the witness of the OT and NT, prayer is not a religious act among others, but in it is concentrated the entire divine–human relationship. Thus for Ebeling “Das Phänomen des Gebets wird somit zum hermeneutischen Schlüssel der Gotteslehre.”<sup>6</sup> Although the act of prayer has been rightly described as the most fundamental expression of religion in general and of biblical faith in particular,<sup>7</sup> it is also one of the most attacked areas by critics of religion and raises seemingly insurmountable challenges for the interpreter. This is partially due to what Ebeling calls the “intellectual vulnerability” of prayer.<sup>8</sup> By this he shows awareness that the phenomenon of prayer is frequently juxtaposed with a number of apparently contradicting divine attributes.<sup>9</sup> In classic Christian understanding God is omniscient. Thus the question is often posed why does God need to be told of human needs and why does He need to be reminded of His promises? Moreover, God is often confessed as impassible, and yet in prayer one apparently seeks to change Him or His plans. What is more, prayer by its very nature presupposes a personal God who adheres to human requests. This anthropomorphic picture of God, who is frequently addressed as “Father,” has been a major point of critique throughout Christian history.<sup>10</sup>

Given this background, it does not surprise that in OT studies the subject of prayer has until recently been neglected and was at best treated as a marginal subject in the area of Israel's liturgy or cult.<sup>11</sup> Under the long hegemony of historical–critical

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<sup>5</sup> Clements (1985), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ebeling (1979, 1), 193, 208.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 193, 208.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 209. Especially Kant (1998), 184–187, left a suspicious legacy. According to him, the idea of a personal God who engages meaningfully with the needs of individuals is nothing but wishful thinking. Cf. Reventlow (1986), 14–21.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cullmann (1997<sup>2</sup>), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Reventlow (1986), 2–80.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Eichrodt (1961), 172–176, von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 366–467. As shown elsewhere, Westermann (1978), 21, has initiated a shift by arguing that the divine–human dialogue is the primary theme of the OT. Since the work of Westermann several major treatments of OT prayer have emerged. E.g. Greenberg (1983), Clements (1985), Reventlow (1986), Balentine (1993), Miller (1994).

methods, it is understandable that prayer was not a promising field of research. This is all the more true for biblical prose prayers which are in some circles regarded as “mere literary artifacts” that do not provide direct or even indirect data of what actually happened.<sup>12</sup> An approach which is committed to historical reconstruction can attempt to describe Israel’s prayer-practice at various stages in Israel’s history, or, with regard to specific prayer texts, it can allocate them to specific life-settings, sources, and dates. Although historical-criticism asks important questions, when it comes to address the intrinsic logic of the narratives in their final form and context, or when it comes to a theological reading of scriptural prayers, the tools of the historian are not the most appropriate ones. By its own definition, a historical approach cannot address issues concerning the theology and spirituality of prayer, because these issues go clearly beyond historical verification. They involve theological issues such as faith, obedience, and discernment.<sup>13</sup>

Because a treatment of OT prayer raises a lot of hermeneutical challenges by itself, I first attempt to clarify some preliminary issues related to Christian interpretation of the OT.

### a) The Enduring Witness of the Old Testament

The term OT and the practise of Christian OT interpretation have increasingly come under critique from Jewish and Christian corners, because “Old” appears to connote inferiority and out-datedness in relation to the NT, while the discipline of OT interpretation is sometimes considered as anachronistic. Thus more neutral and politically correct terms for the OT have been suggested such as Hebrew Bible, First Testament, or *Bibel Israels*.<sup>14</sup>

Depending on the context the above designations for the OT might be useful, one should not forget, however, that OT interpretation is by its definition a confessional Christian discipline, as opposed to Jewish or religiously “uncommitted” approaches to Israel’s Bible.<sup>15</sup> The term “Old” carries theological force, it does not mean that it is replaced by the “New,” but rather refers to a different dispensation, a time when God had not yet revealed Himself in Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:5–6). Moreover, Old Testament refers to God’s first covenant with Israel which was only extended to the Gentiles through God’s new covenant in Christ (Matt. 26:28, Heb. 9:15–22). In other words, the Christian terminology “Old/New Testament” affirms that the same covenanting God is behind the two covenant relationships and thus underlines the close

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Greenberg (1983), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Lash (1986), 80–81, Balentine (1993), 249.

<sup>14</sup> See Moberly (1992b), 156–166, Zenger (1996<sup>2</sup>), 12–33, Seitz (1998), 69, Rendtorff (2001), 301–313, for discussions on the matter.

<sup>15</sup> Judaism prefers its own confessional terms such as Torah and Tanak over the neutral term Hebrew Bible.

continuity between the two. Thereby the “New” does not annul the first covenant, but affirms it and explains how the creator of heaven and earth through Christ extends His covenant to the nations.<sup>16</sup> From the inception of the Church, Christians acknowledged the previously (partially) fixed canon of Israel’s scriptures as authoritative for their faith and conduct.<sup>17</sup> The Early Church has not taken over Israel’s scriptures, but has lived with them since its very beginning.<sup>18</sup> They were convinced that the OT contains not only fundamental information regarding the Christ–event and their growing body of apostolic writings,<sup>19</sup> but also provides unique and authoritative witness to the nature of God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

*i) The Theological Foundation for and the Task of Old Testament Interpretation*

OT interpretation is theologically legitimised on the basis of the Church’s confession that the God who made Himself known to the patriarchs, who revealed Himself as YHWH to Moses, is the same as the One whom Jesus addresses as Father and initiated through His Spirit a mission to the gentiles.<sup>20</sup> Both testaments testify to one God, in different ways, at different times, to different peoples, and yet they both illuminate the living reality of God, who in Christian understanding is the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Moberly has argued that an analogous distinction is already at the heart of the Pentateuch itself. He insightfully shows that the relationship between the patriarchal narratives and Mosaic Yahwism corresponds in many ways to that between the Old and New Testament.<sup>22</sup> Although the patriarchs may have known God as *El Shaddai*, *El Olam*, and/or *Elohim*, the writers of the Pentateuch stipulate that God who introduced Himself first to Moses as YHWH (Ex. 6:2–3) is one and the same.<sup>23</sup> The

<sup>16</sup> Zenger (1996<sup>2</sup>), 15.

<sup>17</sup> For a helpful overview of the ongoing debate about the formation of the OT canon see Chapman (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Rendtorff (2001), 310. For practical reasons the Early Church used primarily the LXX rather than the Hebrew scriptures (Greek was the *lingua franca*). It is noteworthy, however, that in spite of the fact that the NT authors quoted from the LXX, the pervasive usage of the Greek translation was for cultural and not for theological reasons. Cf. Childs (1992b), 384.

<sup>19</sup> Probably the oldest literary Christian confession (1 Cor. 15:3–4) interprets the death and resurrection of Christ as God’s climactic salvific act *κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς*. Cf. Stuhlmacher (1995), 16. There are a number of other key passages in the NT, such as Lk. 24:44–47, Acts 10:36–43, Heb. 1:1 etc., which make it clear that the NT authors understand the mission and person of Jesus in the light of the OT.

<sup>20</sup> Seitz (1998), 16. Cf. Acts 7, Heb. 1:1–2, Nicene Creed.

<sup>21</sup> Childs (1995), 33.

<sup>22</sup> Moberly (1992b), 125–130.

<sup>23</sup> On the basis of a detailed study on Exodus 3 and 6, Moberly, in contrast to the traditional documentary hypothesis, argues that all “sources” are aware of a distinction between patriarchal religion and Mosaic Yahwism. Consequently Moberly suggests that God is often referred to as YHWH in the patriarchal period, not because of a particular historical perspective of the Yahwist (J), but because of the writer(s)’s theological conviction that the creator of the universe (Gen. 1–11) and the God of the patriarchs (Gen. 12–50) is the same as that of Mosaic Yahwism. (1992b), 70–78, cf.

analogy goes further through an argument that just as there are differences and continuities between the patriarchal religion and Mosaic Yahwism,<sup>24</sup> so are there continuities and discontinuities between the Mosaic Yahwism of the OT and NT faith. Just as the revelation at Sinai introduced a new theological dispensation of God's relation with His people, so God revealed a new aspect of His nature in the Christ event.

We can say that within the New Testament and the Pentateuch there is a remarkable parallelism in the concept of different dispensations and the attendant hermeneutical process. Indeed, so similar are the dynamics of the two interpretative processes that it seems not inappropriate to borrow Christian terminology for the theological concept of the pentateuchal writers and so to designate the patriarchal traditions of Genesis 12–50 as the Old Testament of the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup>

Moberly shows that neither Mosaic Yahwism, nor the NT, invalidates the former revelations, rather they both brought a new perspective to the nature and purposes of God.<sup>26</sup>

According to the NT, Israel's God opened up a way for the gentiles that is not through circumcision and the law, but through His Son and the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:4–6). By the same Spirit as God created the universe, spoke through Moses and the prophets, He initiated a mission to the gentiles. Although the OT (by the definition of the NT) comes to Christians with and from Jesus, this does not mean that Christian scholarship has to "Christianize the Old Testament by identifying it with the New Testament witness," for it remains a fact that the early Church accepted the integrity of the Hebrew scriptures as an independent witness to Jesus and God. Thus Childs describes the task of OT theology in the following way:

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Childs (1985), 38–39.

Seitz (1998), 229–247, in response to Moberly (1992), 36–78, has developed an insightful alternative reading to what is still widely understood as "P" saying that God had not been known as YHWH before His revelation to Moses (Ex. 6:3). Taking the wider narrative context of Exodus 1–20 into account, Seitz argues that Exodus 6:1–8 is not about a new knowledge of the name YHWH *per se* (neither is Ex. 3:14ff), but about a fuller and deeper revelation of YHWH's nature as he is going to be known in and through the salvific act of the Exodus. In other words, not until Exodus 14 and the victory at the sea has the enigmatic utterance אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי "found its proper content: 'I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt'" (Ex. 20:2). God, according to Seitz, has been already known by the name YHWH in primeval time. Not until the events at the sea, however, has God been known fully in His name YHWH. Despite the disagreement about when the actual name YHWH was known, Moberly and Seitz agree that there is a clear distinction between the time of the patriarchs and that of Mosaic Yahwism in terms of understanding the name YHWH.

<sup>24</sup> Moberly (1992b), 79–104, cf. von Rad (1993<sup>10</sup>), 342–343.

<sup>25</sup> Moberly (1992b), 146.

<sup>26</sup> Moberly (1992b), 125–146, 165, argues that both systems (i.e. Yahwism, patriarchal religion) have their strong points. The former emphasises commitment, morality, and holiness, while the latter is characterised by ritual simplicity and "ecumenical" openness.

Moberly is obviously aware that Genesis 12–50, in contrast to the OT/NT, never existed as an independent canonical text (for a "patriarchal religion" community), but served Mosaic Yahwism for its purposes. This difference is also reflected in the fact that Gen. 12–50 bears many marks of later redactions, whereas the NT writers did not edit the Hebrew scriptures in any way.

The task of Old Testament theology is...to hear its own theological testimony to the God of Israel whom the church confesses also to worship. Although Christians confess that God who revealed himself to Israel is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, it is still necessary to hear Israel's witness to understand who the Father of Jesus Christ is.<sup>27</sup>

This is exactly what this dissertation seeks to achieve, to read Moses' intercessory prayers as an important witness to the living reality of God.<sup>28</sup> By implication Moses' prayers (and prayers recorded in the OT in general) are not exclusively concerned with Israel, "but entail(s) a broader, yet more intensive look at a more privileged reality: the identity of God as he truly is."<sup>29</sup>

## *ii) Reading Moses' Intercessory Prayers*

Coming to Moses' prayers in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of the God whom the contemporary community of faith worships and confesses to be the Father of Jesus Christ is not a thoughtlessly anachronistic undertaking as it is sometimes perceived; rather it is an undertaking engendered by the Christian conviction that the OT continues to function as authoritative Scripture of the Church. Of course, in order to attain a full biblical portrayal of the nature of God, one needs to take the NT witness into account. This, however, does not invalidate serious reflection on God's nature under the old covenant. The OT provides an essential and unique contribution to the scriptural picture of God.<sup>30</sup>

Prayers by their very nature provide some of the deepest insights into the nature of God and thus in a sense point to a theological truth which transcends the Old-New Testament division.<sup>31</sup> Clements remarks that "it is in reality almost impossible to separate the questions of 'What is God like?' and 'How should I pray?'"<sup>32</sup> It is one of the leading themes of this dissertation that one's understanding of God and prayer go hand in hand. Prayers are nothing less than theology in action. This can be well illustrated with reference to Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:18. In Exodus 34:6–7 YHWH reveals Himself to Moses as a "God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..." while in Numbers 14:18, Moses makes a direct appeal to YHWH's new revelation of His attributes (i.e. Ex. 34:7–7). In other words, YHWH's deeper revelation, which is in itself the result of Moses' engaging prayer (cf. Ex. 33:12ff.), shaped Moses' later intercession as recorded in Numbers 14:18f. It will become evident that Moses' understanding of God and his prayer stand in a spiral relation to each other.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Childs (1985), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Dunn (1995), 186, with reference to Dahl's essay "The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology" (1975), 5–8, makes the significant observation that the authors of the NT never saw the need to develop fundamental aspects of their belief in God, precisely because they had the OT.

<sup>29</sup> Seitz (2001), 165.

<sup>30</sup> Childs (1985), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Seitz (2001), 164.

<sup>32</sup> Clements (1986), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Evagrius (1981), 153, commented: "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly, and if you pray



Just as there is a spiral relationship between prayer and understanding of God, we suggest, there is a spiral relationship between the text and the interpreter. We have argued that OT interpretation by its definition is strictly speaking a confessional Christian discipline. The exegete comes in faith to what he/she professes to be the first part of the Christian Scripture in order to seek knowledge and understanding of the living and transforming reality of God.<sup>34</sup> In other words, OT hermeneutics operate within a rule of faith, that is, it operates in the context of the community of faith, which in turn understands itself in the light of Scripture (OT and NT). There is good reason to argue that it is intrinsic to the canonical process and to the discipline of normative theology that it seeks to relate its traditions to the community of faith.<sup>35</sup>

## b) Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to reconsider the significance of the canonical portrayal of Moses the intercessor and God in the aftermath of characteristic modern pentateuchal criticism. As we shall see, the only recent substantial treatment on Moses the intercessor is by Aurelius, and he is almost exclusively concerned with reconstructing the development of the Mosaic portrait.<sup>36</sup> Lohfink, though highlighting the importance of Aurelius' monograph, indicates regret that the "synchronic Textstudium" is neglected and goes on to express the need for a fuller study of the reconstructed layers and the final form of the text.<sup>37</sup> We hope to contribute to this *desideratum* at least as far as Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 are concerned. We shall attempt closely to adhere to the final form of the two narratives in question without disregarding their diachronic dimensions, and carefully analyse the dynamics of Moses' prayers in their narrative contexts. Thereby the focus of attention will be on the prayers' rich theological contents and their theological functions in the immediate and wider narrative contexts.

### i) *Prayer as a Hermeneutical Key to Theology*

In both Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 the narrative setting of Moses' intercessions is that of rebellion and divine judgement. In fact these two accounts witness arguably to Israel's most severe offences against God in the Pentateuch.<sup>38</sup> In Exodus 32 the erection and worship of the golden calf endangers Israel's covenant

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truly, you are a theologian."

<sup>34</sup> Lash (1986), 81.

<sup>35</sup> Childs (1999), 210–211.

<sup>36</sup> Aurelius (1988).

<sup>37</sup> Lohfink (1990), 87.

<sup>38</sup> Blum (1990), 134–135.

relationship, while in Numbers 13–14 it is Israel's unbelief and rebellion against the divine purposes, which brought Israel's future as God's people into jeopardy. The consequences are the same: in wrath YHWH intends to annihilate sinful Israel and make a new start with Moses (Ex. 32:10, Nu. 14:12). In both accounts, Moses' intercession plays a crucial and central role in the outworking of the divine judgement. On both occasions Moses succeeds in preventing YHWH from totally destroying Israel. Exodus 32:14 explicitly speaks about a change of God's mind (נָחַם), while in Numbers it is clearly implied in the modified judgement (Nu. 14:20ff.). As a result of Moses' persistent prayers Israel is pardoned (סָלַח, Ex. 34:9ff., Nu. 14:20) and the battered covenant relationship is renewed.

This brief preview makes it evident that the nature of Moses' prayers evokes important theological questions, especially with regard to divine reputation and covenant commitment in the face of a rebellious and unbelieving people. Moreover, the puzzling notion of a God who "repents" (נָחַם) and changes His mind, as already mentioned, is not an unproblematic theological venture.<sup>39</sup> This underlines once more that prayer and theology are intrinsically related to each other.<sup>40</sup>

## *ii) Moses the Prophetic Intercessor*

Another central objective of this study is to bring Moses' intercessory activity into hopefully illuminating connection with his prophetic qualities. Although it has long been noticed that Moses is presented as Israel's archetypal prophet, the intrinsic relatedness between his prophetic role and his successful intercessory activity has received less attention. We shall not only argue that both Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 stand in canonical relationship to texts which ascribe unique prophetic qualities to Moses (e.g. Ex. 3–6, Nu. 12), but also that the logic of genuine intercessory prayer presupposes prophetic prerogatives.

## *iii) Canonical Relationship between Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14*

Apart from the fact that Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 provide the primary contexts for a study on Moses' intercessory prayers, the choice of the two narratives is endorsed by their often neglected and yet strong innerbiblical relations. The relationship, we shall argue, goes far beyond the numerous conceptual and linguistic parallels between Moses' intercessory prayers.<sup>41</sup> We shall see that Moses' intercessory prayer in Numbers 14:17–19 clearly intends to be understood in relation to Exodus 34:6–7, YHWH's fullest revelation of His name. In Numbers 14:18 Moses makes direct appeal to YHWH's name. In other words, he prays that YHWH will do justice to His nature as revealed to him on Sinai. It has been highlighted that Moses

<sup>39</sup> Jeremias (1997<sup>2</sup>), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Reventlow (1986), 9.

<sup>41</sup> See Blum (1990), 181–188.

sets here a biblical paradigm of authentic prayer.<sup>42</sup> Although Exodus 34:6–7 embodies the fullest disclosure of YHWH's name, it remains a somewhat abstract reality in the unfolding of the golden calf narrative. We shall argue, however, that YHWH's fullest revelation of His name is enacted in Numbers 14 in a specific and concrete situation. To be more precise, there is good reason to postulate that Numbers 14:11–35 stands as a kind of commentary on Exodus 34:6–7.

It will become evident that the following study has been informed in many ways by forerunners in the field. By providing a survey of recent literature on the subject of intercessory prayer, I wish not only to acknowledge my indebtedness, but also hope to provide a wider framework for dialogue for our reading of Moses' intercessory prayers.

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Brueggemann (1995), 43–49.

## Chapter One

## Intercessory Prayer in the Old Testament

The objective of this section is to provide an overview of the most relevant recent works on the subject of OT intercessory prayer. Intercession is a special form of prayer.<sup>43</sup> It differs from ordinary petitionary prayer in the sense that the needs of another party are brought before God. Intercessory prayer may be concerned with a blessing for a third person in the form of wisdom, prosperity, peace, protection (e.g. Pss. 61, 72), or on a more complex level, with the advocacy of a sinful party before God. There is good warrant to argue that the former form of intercession is ascribed to anybody who prays the psalms, whereas the latter, as we shall see, is particularly associated with figures of prophetic status.

## 1.1 Survey of Recent Approaches

Although the scholarly literature on Hebrew intercessory prayer is not unmanageable in quantity, this section does not attempt to be anywhere near an exhaustive history of research.<sup>44</sup> The subsequent selection of expositions of diverse approaches to the subject in question is guided by the degree of relevance for our later treatment of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14. In addition to the following accounts, there are several helpful essays on the topic or related exegetical works, which contribute to the understanding of intercessory prayer, but which for reasons of space and repetition are not mentioned at this point. They will, however, be taken up in our discussion of the texts.<sup>45</sup> The various approaches and ideas as advanced by the following advocates will hardly be assessed at this stage. A critical engagement with their views will follow in the context of the biblical texts in question (cf. § 3, 4, 5).

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Scharbert (1960), 321–338.

<sup>44</sup> For more general issues regarding prayer, I refer the reader to Reventlow (1986), 9–80, and Balentine (1993), 13–32, 225–259, who provide helpful and informative (though not exhaustive) discussions of most of the influential scholarly works on prayer since the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, I have provided an overview of most recent works on OT prayer elsewhere. There particular focus has been given to Eichrodt (1961, 1985<sup>5</sup>), von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), Westermann (1978), Greenberg (1983), Clements (1985), Reventlow (1986), Balentine (1993), Miller (1994, 1998), and Seitz (2001).

<sup>45</sup> Such as Scharbert (1960, 1984), Muileburg, (1968), Coats (1977), Jacob (1981), Greenberg (1983), Moberly (1983), Fretheim (1984), etc.

### 1.1.1 A Theologian on Prayer (Barth, 1932–1953)

The decision to include Barth in our survey of recent approaches is based on the following reasons. Firstly, his works have greatly influenced key figures in the field of OT theology such as Eichrodt, von Rad, and Childs. His influence is particularly felt in his emphasis on revelation and sovereignty of God, and his understanding and use of Scripture as an abiding witness. Secondly, Barth, in a unique way, wrote his monumental dogmatics in close and substantial interaction with the biblical text. He provides imaginative and detailed “theological exegesis” on a vast number of biblical texts, among which are Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14. Thirdly, he offers extensive reflections on biblical prayer and its interrelated portrayal of God.

Barth’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty is to some degree a reaction to the anthropocentrism of the 19th century. God, he asserts, can never be the object of human knowledge and description. He is the sovereign subject who takes the initiative of making Himself known. In other words, under “natural” circumstances God cannot be known, but He reveals Himself “supernaturally.” Divine revelation demands a human response engendered by a God-given faith and obedience.<sup>46</sup> God is not an abstract deity who is detached from humanity; on the contrary, He seeks to accomplish His plans and purposes with human participation.<sup>47</sup> In this divine-human co-operation prayer plays an important role.

Barth’s theology of prayer is in strong continuity with that of the Reformers. He develops four central aspects of prayer.<sup>48</sup> First he notes that prayer is an obedient response to God’s love. Because of God’s gracious election, humans ought to give thanks to God for His love.<sup>49</sup> It is not an option for the believer; it is rather the mark/criterion of the believer.<sup>50</sup> Barth characterises Joshua’s and Caleb’s response to the rebellious crowd (Nu. 14:6ff.) as an act of obedience to the divine promise and corresponding to the goodness and certainty of it. Their response, *a priori*, shares in the certainty that YHWH is with them. This takes us to the second aspect of prayer. Barth argues that the one praying ought to be certain of God’s answer (*Erhörung*). “Our prayers may be feeble and inadequate, but what matters is not the strength of our prayers but the fact that God hears them; that is why we pray.”<sup>51</sup> By this Barth does not only mean that human prayer is taken up and integrated in the divine plan and will, but also that God will respond in act and/or speech (cf. Matt. 7:7ff., 1 John 5:14f., Pss. 91:14–15, 145:19).<sup>52</sup> In the context of Barth’s treatment of Moses’

<sup>46</sup> Barth (1932), 238–241.

<sup>47</sup> Barth (1957), 9ff. Not least because God has elected humanity in Jesus Christ to be His covenant partners.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Barth (1951), 95–126, 121.

<sup>49</sup> Barth (1957), 410.

<sup>50</sup> Barth (1964), 19.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, cf. (1951), 117–118.

<sup>52</sup> Barth (1951), 117.

prayers in Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 14, we find the principle exemplified. There the distinction is made between those who know God and His promises and those who do not. Moses' prayers essentially insist on YHWH's previously revealed will and purposes and as such he is *a priori* certain of the divine promises and response. The authentic prayer, so Barth stresses on a number of occasions, is the one which is from the very heart of God.<sup>53</sup> Thirdly, Barth argues that prayer is fundamentally a petition.<sup>54</sup> Prayer moves from praise and adoration to petition and intercession.<sup>55</sup> By asking for help in prayer humans not only express their dependence on God, but also honour Him as God. It goes without saying that intercessory prayer is essentially a petition, though a selfless and noble one. Fourthly, Christian prayer is through Christ's mediatorship, in relation to him the one praying approaches God in humility and boldness.

God knows man, looks on him and judges him, but sees and judges him always in the person of Jesus Christ, his own Son, who was obedient and in whom he is well-pleased...we have one who represents us before God.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of Israel's wilderness time, it was Moses who represented Israel before God, and as we shall see, in its distinct and yet related way, YHWH judges Israel in the light of Moses' humble and obedient mediatorship. The Mosaic portrayal obviously provides a prime, if not the most important, typological category for understanding Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Although Barth ascribes an important role to humanity in the outworking of the divine plan, his emphasis is clearly on God's initiative and sovereignty, that is, on theology not on anthropology. Thus Balentine emphasises the importance of praise and thanksgiving in Barth's understanding of the divine-human relationship.<sup>58</sup> These tendencies are clearly reflected in the works of Eichrodt and von Rad, whose works have often been closely associated with the theology of Barth.<sup>59</sup>

### *1.1.2 Intercession and God's Sovereignty (Eichrodt, 1933–1939, von Rad 1960)*

Eichrodt, who was Barth's colleague at Basel, pursued in the field of OT theology the same goal as Barth in systematics, that is, the outworking of the abiding and normative nature of the OT. Eichrodt's attempt to organise his theology around the concept of covenant (or covenantal relatedness) has been both criticised as reductionistic and praised as capturing the very heart of Israel's faith, namely that it

<sup>53</sup> Barth (1953), 473.

<sup>54</sup> Barth (1951), 106, 117.

<sup>55</sup> The Lord's prayer functions as a model; from adoration to petition.

<sup>56</sup> Barth (1964), 17.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Allison (1993).

<sup>58</sup> Balentine (1993), 251–252.

<sup>59</sup> I have provided elsewhere fuller expositions of Eichrodt's and von Rad's work on prayer in general. Cf. Brueggemann (1997), 27, 36, 38.

is relational.<sup>60</sup> For our purposes it is important to see that Eichrodt understands the divine–human relationship, and hence also prayer, within the context of the covenant relationship.<sup>61</sup> By this he means that it is “a bilateral relationship.” Although it is an unequal relationship it “is still essentially two–sided.”<sup>62</sup> Eichrodt emphasises that God has entered freely into the covenant relation with Israel and thus could dissolve it on his side at any time.

(God) existed long before the nation, he is by nature independent of their existence and can abandon them whenever they refuse to be conformed to his will...for as a gift of God's grace it lays the stress on his right to dispose all things as he wills...There can be no doubt that in the setting up of the covenant the idea of sovereignty is dominant throughout.<sup>63</sup>

With such a stress on God's sovereignty, it comes as no surprise that in Eichrodt's understanding, prayer is primarily an obedient and willing submission to the lordship of the covenant God. This is manifested in the occasional confessional statements and gestures which accompany Israel's prayers.

The act of kneeling and raising the hands, followed by the bowing of the face to the ground, correspond to the behaviour of the vassal in the presence of his king, and symbolize the submission of the suppliant to a will higher than his own.<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the vassal–suzerain analogy, Eichrodt notes that Israel's prayers are free from any hollow pathos or “high–flown flattery, instead they are marked by ‘childlike’ simplicity, sincerity and confidence” towards their God.<sup>65</sup> He understands prayer as a generous divine gift, but even the prayers of the greatest men of God in the OT are subjected to the divine will. So in relation to Abraham's, Moses', and Samuel's intercessions, he notes that whether they are accepted or refused, they are subordinated to God's salvation–history.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless Eichrodt regards prayer as

*a real interaction of Man with God and God with Man* in which vital and forceful effect is given to the mystery of men's genuine fellowship with the majestic will by which all things are ordered and controlled. Here the man called and illuminated by God strives with the divine will which is not yet manifest, and on the basis of the revelation already received presses forward to a new revelation of the divine thought, confident that in so doing he is in accord with the profoundest intention of the God who calls, and that, whether his prayer is heard or refused, he will receive the gift of a new communion with the will of that God who, supreme though he be, yet does not work without Man. Moreover, both because and in so far as this will has made itself known as mercy and pardon, intercessory prayer may take it at its word even when it comes to men in the guise of judgment. Indeed, it is precisely in this that the distinctive power of the intercessory prayer lies, namely that as a result of his deeper understanding of the revealed will of God he dares to assert his prerogative with the confidence of one who is intimate with

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Levenson (1993), 16–21, Brueggemann (1997), 27–31, 38–42.

<sup>61</sup> According to Eichrodt, God is related in covenant with Israel in particular, but also with the world, and humanity in general.

<sup>62</sup> Eichrodt (1961), 37.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>64</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 175. It is noteworthy to point out that already Luther and Barth understood prayer as essentially an act of humble obedience.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

God, and with the vehemence of his own longing that God's salvation shall be fully realized.

Thus intercession is perceived as

a becoming one with the will of God to the point of self-sacrifice, and therefore as something to which God ascribes atoning value sufficient for the removal of guilt. On the other hand, such atonement is not a work with its own intrinsic value. It derives its meaning and its effective power from the fact that it is at bottom a reflection of God's will in a human soul...Hence God himself can summon men to intercession, and promise to hear it. But even where he rejects the actual request he does not leave any doubt that the end which it most deeply desires, the realization of God's plan of salvation despite human sin, will be achieved.<sup>67</sup>

One recognises clear parallels between Eichrodt and Barth's understanding of prayer. Both argue that although prayer is genuinely interactive/reciprocal, in its essence it seeks to discern the divine will in submissive obedience. Prayers are answered and come to fulfilment because they reflect God's plan and will. Although these are certainly important characteristics of Hebrew prayer, concerns have been voiced as to whether the pervasive lament tradition and Moses' audacious argumentative and possibly accusatory prayers have any genuine place in such an understanding.<sup>68</sup>

Similar concerns could be raised in relation to von Rad's overt stress on divine sovereignty over anthropology. This emphasis comes pertinently to expression in his understanding of the Mosaic narratives.

Not a single one of all these stories, in which Moses is the central figure, was really written about Moses. Great as was the veneration of the writers for this man to whom God had been pleased to reveal Himself, in all these stories it is not Moses himself, Moses the man, but God who is the central figure. *God's* words and *God's* deeds, these are the things that the writers intend to set forth...they are stories of God's great acts of salvation, of His enduring patience, and also of His judgments and His vengeance; in no single case is a man—be he the very greatest among the sons of men—the central figure. The aim of all these stories is to render honour to God, to glorify His deeds, His patience, and the faithfulness that He has been pleased to reveal. In other words, all the stories about Moses bear testimony to God.<sup>69</sup>

On the one hand, one must agree with von Rad for it remains a fact that Israel's existence and future is only possible because YHWH is a gracious, merciful and loving God (Ex. 34:6–7). Moreover, Moses' intercession, and indeed any prayer, is only possible because of these divine qualities. On the other hand, however, I am not convinced that von Rad's statement does full justice to the picture of Moses as presented in Exodus 32–34, Numbers 13–14, and other places. We shall see that according to these key narratives on the human–divine relation the divine plan is worked out in genuine co-operation with Moses and humanity.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 450.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. e.g. Brueggemann (1995), 98–111, Balentine (1993), 146–190.

<sup>69</sup> Von Rad (1960), 8–9.

<sup>70</sup> For Eichrodt, obedience to the divine will and covenant relationship is the normative response, for von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 381, it is praise for God's mighty acts. Interestingly they highlight the importance of trust and obedience and affirm God's providential guidance in history in times of apparent godforsakeness. We have noted elsewhere that particularly Westermann (1978) introduced a decisive shift from a stress on divine sovereignty towards genuine divine–human dialogue: "Gott handelt und



### 1.1.3 *Intercession in the Old Testament (Hesse, 1951)*

Hesse dedicated his doctoral research to the subject of OT intercessory prayer. His dissertation contains a historical (§ 1–2) and a systematic part (§ 4–5). The two major parts are divided by a brief chapter on the related Hebrew terminology (§ 3). Hesse's work is still of considerable importance for our study, not least because chapters 4 and 5 contain helpful and stimulating theological reflection on the nature of God and intercession. Because Hesse's systematic reflection bears direct relevance on our exegesis, it will be taken up at the appropriate places of my dissertation. Instead the focus of the following exposition falls on Hesse's understanding of the historical development of intercessory prayer.

In chapter 1, Hesse briefly looks into the practice and understanding of intercession among Israel's neighbours, particularly Babylon and Assyria.<sup>71</sup> In chapter 2, the phenomenon of intercession in the history of Israel's religion is examined. Following de Boer, Hesse agrees that intercession was initially a kind of "religiöse Magie" in the sense that only a power-endowed functionary could attempt to influence God.<sup>72</sup> This semi-magical understanding of intercessory prayer is still reflected in biblical texts from pre-prophetic times, such as the plague narratives in Exodus (cf. Ex. 8:5–8). The magical element, according to Hesse, is also found in Moses' absolute confidence that YHWH will act according to his prayer.<sup>73</sup>

Hesse believes he is able to detect signs of development in the understanding of intercessory prayer in important intercessory texts such as Exodus 32:11–14, 33:13, 34:9, Numbers 14:13–20, and Joshua 7:6–9.<sup>74</sup> He refers to the verbosity of these prayers, in contrast to e.g. Numbers 11:1–3, 12:13,<sup>75</sup> and infers from that, that the semi-magical power no longer applies and that the authority of the man of God is no longer considered as sufficient. Either the prayer is phrased in a cautious tone, as if the intercessor lacked the confidence to achieve the wanted forgiveness (cf. Ex. 32:30–32), or it bears the nature of an argument.

Die Bitte wird nicht mehr nur ausgesprochen, sondern auch begründet...Nun genügt also die Fürbitte als solche nicht mehr, Gottes Zorn sühnend zu begegnen. Rationale Erwägungen

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redet, damit er Antwort bekomme...Was im Alten Testament geschieht ist dialogisch" (p. 134). See Balentine (1993), 258–259, for a contextualisation of Westermann's dialectic approach.

<sup>71</sup> Hesse (1951), 8–9. In the case of an offence, only the priests were capable of intercession for the guilty party. In a semi-magical way they would implore a subordinated but related god for mediation between the sinner and the offended higher god. The act of atoning intercession would usually be accompanied by a sacrifice. Only in the case of prayers of blessing (e.g. for a king) could intercessory prayers be practised by non-priests.

<sup>72</sup> So also Muffs (1992), 11, 38–41.

<sup>73</sup> Another act of magic (*Zauberhandlung*), according to Hesse (1951), 15, 17, is detected in the narrative about Israel's victory over Amalek (Ex. 17:8–16), where Moses' particular gesture (and possibly the staff) appears to be essential for Israel's victory.

<sup>74</sup> Hesse (1951), 27.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

werden vorgetragen, um die Sinnlosigkeit des göttlichen Zornes offenbar und diesen damit unschädlich zu machen.<sup>76</sup>

Hesse concludes that the content of the prayer increased in importance, whereas the earlier “magisch–primitive” conception of it disappeared.<sup>77</sup> A further sign of the decline of the semi–magical perception of prayer is its inclusive nature. In Exodus 34:9 and Joshua 7:6–9 the intercessor detaches himself no longer from the sinful people but speaks about “our guilt.”<sup>78</sup> The confession of sin and turning from it, however, is still barely mentioned at this stage. In fact, the sinner’s attitude towards his/her offence hardly mattered. Hesse explains this on the basis of the authority and power of the intercessor.<sup>79</sup>

When one reaches 1 Samuel 12:19ff, however, the response of the guilty part plays a decisive role in the efficacy of the prayer. Only if the sin is recognised and one is committed to do so no more, the mediator’s prayer has the potential to become successful.<sup>80</sup> Hesse sees in the accompanying sacrifice (or other cultic acts) a further step to ensure the greatest possibility for atonement (cf. 1 Sam. 7:7ff.).<sup>81</sup> Later he argues that intercessions were increasingly backed up with accompanying gestures such as fasting, prostration, and sacrifice because one did not ascribe anymore sufficient power (*Machtgeladenheit*) to intercession on its own.<sup>82</sup>

With regard to Amos’ intercessory activity, Hesse notes, since there is no mention of any atoning means, nor of any confession of sins on the part of the sinful people, one can assume that Amos still perceived his intercession to have atoning power on its own, and that he operated with full prophetic authority (cf. Am. 7:2, 5).<sup>83</sup> At the time of Jeremiah, the act of intercession was particularly associated with the prophet (Jer. 37:3).<sup>84</sup> While in earlier times the responsibility of intercession dominated the role of the prophet, in Ezekiel’s time, the prophet gradually assumed the role of the watchman. Thereby Hesse points to Ezekiel 14:12–20 as a proof-text that the prophet started to perceive intercession as increasingly problematic because no one can save the other from the punishment of his/her own sins. Thus Ezekiel came to see himself as one who draws attention to the breached wall and as one who summons the corrupt inhabitants to a moral and God–fearing life.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Hesse (1951), 35.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>78</sup> Scharbert (1984), 91–104, makes the same point and speaks of inclusive intercession.

<sup>79</sup> Hesse (1951), 19, 139.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. Although intercession and sacrifice, on a phenomenological level, have been put both under the label of “religious magic,” they underwent a different development and were practised by different functionaries (i.e. priests and prophets). Both the atoning sacrifice and the atoning intercession have the same objective; the appeasement of the enraged God.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–58. We shall see, however, that Ezekiel clearly believed in the importance of intercessory

A further definite shift in the perception of intercession, according to Hesse, is marked in Zechariah's fourth vision. Hesse is convinced that one is dealing here with a heavenly courtroom scene where the angel intercedes for Jeshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1ff.). Hesse argues that in the time when the prophetic office disappeared, intercession has increasingly been ascribed to angelic beings.<sup>86</sup> There was only one person left on earth who enjoyed direct access to YHWH; the high priest.<sup>87</sup> Hesse finds evidence for a shift from prophetic to priestly intercessor in the book of Joel, where the priests are summoned to intercede for the people between courtyard and the altar (Joel 2:17).<sup>88</sup> Intercession, however, became only a secondary means in the process of placating YHWH's anger. Increasingly more importance is attributed to the repentance of the people (Joel 2:12–13).<sup>89</sup> By the time of Nehemiah, intercession is no longer the sole prerogative of priests. Nehemiah is a political functionary and yet he feels compelled to pray for the vulnerable returnees (Ne. 1:6–11).

Hesse distinguishes between different categories of intercessory prayers in the OT. There is the prayer of blessings for a third party (same effect as normal petitionary prayer). This form of intercession is ascribed to several groups of people. According to Hesse, however, the two main categories of intercessory prayer are: i) Intercession as a means to remove obstacles in salvation-history. Thereby God is reminded of Israel's election and to live up to His responsibilities and to uphold His purposes (cf. Ex. 33). In this category, according to Hesse, the question of Israel's guilt is secondary.<sup>90</sup> ii) Intercession as "counterbalance" (Gegengewicht) to YHWH's wrath. Intercession in this role seeks to modify the divine judgment.<sup>91</sup> Since any form of atonement, according to Hesse, belongs to the sphere of the cult, the atonement bringing intercession also belongs to cultic circles.<sup>92</sup> The prophets, however, gradually challenged the efficacy of intercessory prayer. According to them, without change of heart, intercession is not only useless but also meaningless (cf. Hos. 5:15–6:4, Am. 5:4ff., Isa. 1:19f.). Since Jeremiah is not able to guarantee that Israel will repent and change their evil ways, YHWH repeatedly prohibits intercession for them. Thus Jeremiah reaches the sober understanding that Israel's election is no reason for YHWH to withhold His judgment (in contrast to the writer of Exodus

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prayer. Although there is an emphasis on the responsibility of the individual, one also finds some of the profoundest reflections on the logic of prophetic intercessory prayer in Ezekiel 13:5 and 22:30.

<sup>86</sup> Hesse (1951), 61, understands the angel as a "selbständige außer- und übermenschliche Hypostase des Ich des Propheten" and thus speaks still of a prophetic intercession. Yet the prophet has no longer the same influence on YHWH, he requires a heavenly mediator.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>88</sup> Psalm 99 ascribes intercessory roles to Moses, Aaron and Samuel in their priestly functions. *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 102–108.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

32:11ff.).<sup>93</sup> According to Jeremiah's perception, Israel must go through judgement towards a new beginning. YHWH does not protect His people from judgement but preserves them in judgement.<sup>94</sup> Ezekiel, according to Hesse, reaches the conclusion that no substitutionary act is possible anymore (cf. Ezek. 14:12ff.). The sinner has to return to God's ways by their own initiative (cf. Ezek. 33:10ff.). Only in the suffering and death of the Isaianic servant a substitutionary bearing of the punishment is found again (cf. Isa. 53:5–6).

In sum, Hesse attempts to reconstruct what he calls the "inner" history of intercessory prayer in the OT. The early short intercessory prayers reflect an understanding which had an almost coercing effect on YHWH to turn from His wrath. As this perception became increasingly problematic, the nature of intercessory prayers changed and long argumentative prayers, reinforced by all kinds of accompanying acts, emerged instead. With the decrease of the prophetic office, the responsibility to mediate for others shifted to the priests and above to the angels.<sup>95</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this study to assess Hesse's reconstruction of the history of Israel's intercession, the following exposition of Aurelius' historical-critical treatment of Moses' intercessory prayers will reveal fundamentally different findings with regard to the date and "historical and theological maturity" of Moses' prayers.

#### 1.1.4 Moses, Israel's Intercessor (Aurelius, 1988)

Aurelius' monograph is greatly welcomed by Lohfink since there has been no direct treatment on the subject since Dunlop's unpublished dissertation *The Intercession of Moses* in 1970.<sup>96</sup> The title of Aurelius' monograph *Der Fürbitter Israels: Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament* might give the impression that his work covers essentially the same ground as this dissertation. The following exposition of Aurelius' book will reveal, however, that this is hardly the case. Aurelius' work is a thorough traditio-historical treatment of all major narratives in the Pentateuch (and other relevant Old Testament material) which illuminate the OT portrayal of Moses

<sup>93</sup> Hesse (1951), 128.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 128: "Eine Theologie crucis leuchtet von ferne auf: Nur durch die Schmerzen und Nöte der Gerichtszeit geht es zum Heil."

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>96</sup> Lohfink (1990), 85. Because Dunlop's thesis is not lent out by the Pontifical Biblical Institute, I had to rely on Aurelius' quotes. Dunlop's approach to Moses' intercessory prayers is guided by the following concern: "to trace movements and developments which give some insight into the biblical understanding of intercession and related doctrines. We have seen developments in the conception of Moses, his office and activity." Dunlop argues that Exodus 32:7–11 is pre-deuteronomistic and Exodus 34:6–9 is post-deuteronomistic. He ascribes Numbers 14:13–19 roughly to the same date as Exodus 32:7–11. Although Dunlop attributes greater antiquity to the texts in question than Aurelius, their research objectives are comparable. Having said that, Dunlop is apparently more concerned with the phenomenon of intercession, whereas Aurelius focuses more on the intercessor. See Aurelius (1988), 4–5.

in his central role as Israel's intercessor. Thus his primary objective is to examine the *Ursprung und Geschichte* of this *Mosebild*.<sup>97</sup> Aurelius commences his diachronic investigation not with the biblical sequence nor with the traditio—historically speaking oldest text, but with Deuteronomy 9. He justifies this on the basis that Moses' role as intercessor comes clearest to expression in this chapter.<sup>98</sup>

In chapter 1, Aurelius argues that Deuteronomy 9–10 is composed of a wilderness account and a later Horeb addition, which is part of the third and last redaction of Deuteronomy 5–11.<sup>99</sup> On the reconstructed *Grundschrift*, Moses' intercessory prayer is not yet associated with Horeb. In chapter 2, Aurelius suggests that two subsequent redactions brought Deuteronomy 9 and Exodus 32 into concrete relationship and thereby shifted the context of Moses' intercessory prayers from the wilderness to Mount Horeb. In comparison to Exodus 32 which is not only about Sinai but also about the cult in Bethel and Jeroboam's bull images,<sup>100</sup> Deuteronomy 9 is not so much a polemic against the cult in Bethel anymore, but a theological teaching of a more general nature (influenced by Josiah's reform).<sup>101</sup> The redactional process is motivated by two main interests: namely the identification of the decalogue with YHWH's covenant and the expansion of Moses' intercession.<sup>102</sup> Moses' intercessory role had not only been expanded with regard to his function as the mediator of the tablets of the law, but had also been brought into connection with forty days of fasting (just as at the reception of the tablets, v. 9). Moreover, intercession is explicitly made for all Israel's sins (9:18). The overall intention of the redactor is the same as in Deuteronomy 5, namely a reconstituting of the people of God.<sup>103</sup> The differences between the *Grundschrift* of Exodus 32 and the deuteronomic *Nacherzählung* are best explained on the basis that one is composed before, the other after the fall of Jerusalem. After the destruction of state and temple, Israel lacked its own lawgiver, it is for this reason that the deuteronomic and priestly theologians ascribed this function to Moses.

In chapters 3–4, Aurelius analyses Moses' intercessory role in Exodus 32–34. He suggests that two deuteronomistic redactions, one in exilic and one in post-exilic times expanded his role.<sup>104</sup> The oldest reference to Moses' intercessory prayer (Ex. 32:30–34), however, is pre-exilic and depends in significant ways on Amos, Israel's arguably first recorded intercessor (Am. 7:1–6).<sup>105</sup> In both cases, the refused

<sup>97</sup> Aurelius (1988), 1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 33ff. The three layers according to him are: 6:4–9 (20–24), 7:1–6, and 7:17–10:11.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 48–49. Cf. reference to cult (Ex. 32:4ff., 8, 18f. cf. 1 Ki. 12:28).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 49–50.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 50–51.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 77, 126.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 203ff. This has recently been disputed by Becker (2001), 142–165, who argues on

intercession serves to underline YHWH's no to the Northern kingdom. Aurelius believes, however, that the *Grundschrift* of Exodus 32, in contrast to Amos, belongs to the time after the fall of Samaria (722 B.C) and thus served not only as a theological explanation for the destruction of the Northern kingdom, but also as a warning for Judah.<sup>106</sup> After the deportation of Judah the Sinai pericope was further developed. First, Exodus 32:30–34 was expanded with 33:12–17. The guiding concern in the aftermath of Judah's destruction circled around the problem of YHWH's presence and being recognition by Him. It was also in this context that Exodus 32:7f, 10–14 was inserted. Its motives were taken from the *Grundschrift* of Deuteronomy 9 in connection with the themes of divine repentance as found in Amos 7 and Jeremiah 26. Finally, Exodus 34 was added under the influence of the concept of the new covenant which is solely based on divine forgiveness as found in Deuteronomy 9, Isaiah 40–55, and Jeremiah 31. The composition Exodus 32–34, according to Aurelius, eventually became:

eine Erzählung über Jahwes Freiheit, anders zu werden und gerade darin seinem innersten Wesen gemäß zu handeln: als "ein barmherziger und gnädiger Gott...der Schuld und Auflehnung und Sünde vergibt" (34:6f). Gottes Nein am Ende von Ex 32 wird zum Vorläufer seines Ja, und das Gottesvolk zum Volk von 'gerechtfertigten' Sündern, nicht mehr und nicht weniger.<sup>107</sup>

In chapter 5, Aurelius relates Moses' intercessory role to the wilderness traditions. With regard to Numbers 14:11–25, he argues that it is a deuteronomistic addition to the spy story. In other words, in contrast to the earliest tradition of the golden calf account, there was no mention of intercession in the *Grundschrift* of the spy narrative (cf. Deut. 1:34–40). The prayer was given a specific historical context in order to show that Israel's pre-Canaan time was already a complex history of rebellion, intercession, and judgment (cf. 2 Ki. 17).<sup>108</sup> Aurelius suggests that Numbers 14:11–25 is post-exilic because it presupposes Exodus 34.

In sum, Aurelius argues that the Pentateuch preserves two early accounts of Moses' intercessory role in Exodus 32:30–34 and Deuteronomy 9. Based on this assumption, Aurelius, in Dozemann's words:

describes the process by which these two texts were interrelated and expanded through stages of deuteronomistic redaction, which in turn provides the background for interpreting the emerging role of Moses as intercessor presently interwoven throughout the exodus (Exod 5:22–6:14), wilderness (Exod 14:22–25a; 17:1–7; Num 11:1–3, 4–35; 14; 16; 21:4–9) and Sinai (Exodus 32–34) complexes, and the early chapters of Deuteronomy (Deut 1:26–40; 9:7–21).<sup>109</sup>

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literary-critical bases that Amos' four visions cannot be dated before post-exilic times. Thus he reverses the order of influence by suggesting that Amos 7–8 is a theological reflection on the none-repentant people and the almost inexhaustable forbearance of YHWH. This reflection draws on themes from the primeval history, the plague narratives, and Moses' intercessions. "Amos also als zweiter, 'strengerer' Mose!" (p. 164)

<sup>106</sup> Aurelius (1988), 75–77.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 138–140.

<sup>109</sup> Dozemann (1990), 106.

The Deuteronomist, to whom Aurelius ascribes all of Moses' intercessions,<sup>110</sup> sought to make sense of the complex reality of Israel's notorious stiffneckedness and the demanding, but also gracious and merciful nature of YHWH. The portrayal of the interceding Moses provided the deuteronomic theologians with a theological means to combine all these forces.<sup>111</sup> By projecting their findings back to Sinai and the wilderness, they suggest that all these forces had already been at work since the inception of Israel and thus provide a reason why Israel still exists in spite of all their shortcomings.

*Preliminary Reflections:* We have seen that Hesse's and Aurelius' approaches are guided by developmental interests. The former seeks to reconstruct or illuminate the historical development of OT intercessory prayer, while Aurelius attempts to document the tradition history of Moses the intercessor. Although it not our task to assess their historical findings, it is interesting to note they arrive at fundamentally different results. Hesse, on the basis of a religious phenomenological approach, ascribes to Moses' prayer greater antiquity (early prophetic circles), whereas Aurelius, on the basis of a traditio-historical approach, ascribes the same texts to deuteronomistic theologians and allocates them to an exilic and post-exilic setting. According to Hesse, the prayers of Moses reflect an early and overhauled concept of intercession. He believes that this is evident in Moses' power to influence the divine decision-making process and the absence of Israel's repentance of sin and their turning to YHWH in new commitment. Aurelius, by contrast, argues that Moses' prayers reflect consistently a mature deuteronomistic theology.

Although Aurelius' study covers to some degree the same texts as this dissertation and appears to have partially the same objective, namely the understanding of Moses' role as intercessor, the approach is fundamentally different from the one advocated here. He seeks primarily to illuminate the history behind the final form of the text and thereby attempts to document the various stages of the Mosaic intercessory role, whereas we will work predominantly with the final form of the text, and as such, seek to take the logic of the canonical form with utmost seriousness.<sup>112</sup> Due to these major differences in approaches, there is limited interaction with Aurelius' historical findings. Besides that, however, Aurelius raises plenty of interesting exegetical issues which will be taken up at the relevant places.

### 1.1.5 *Prophetic Intercession (Muffs, 1992)*

Muffs, in the words of Greenberg, offers an "unusually rich feast of ideas" in his

<sup>110</sup> With the possible exception of Exodus 32:30–34.

<sup>111</sup> Aurelius (1988), 207.

<sup>112</sup> This is not to deny the complex process behind the text, in fact we shall take into account the diachronic dimension of the text as we seek to read the narratives holistically (cf. § 2).

treatment of intercessory prayer.<sup>113</sup> His creative exploration of Israel's understanding of intercessory prayer is not only relevant for our purposes because Muffs reflects on Moses' prayers in Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 14, but also because he examines, as the title indicates, the phenomenon of intercessory prayer in the light of Israel's prophets. We shall argue, though with greater adherence to the text than Muffs, that prophecy provides an illuminating and to a certain degree intended "hermeneutical" context for understanding Moses' intercessory prayers. Another feature of Muffs' essay is his dynamic paraphrasing of biblical texts and his tendency to systematise theological concepts related to the subject.

Muffs sets out the twofold role of the prophet. On the one hand, the prophets were messengers of the divine court, instruments of YHWH's will; on the other hand, they are "independent advocates," agents of the defendant who attempt to mitigate the divine decree.<sup>114</sup> Muffs underlines the intimate relationship between the prophet and God. It is on the basis of this close relation that the prophet dares to oppose the very message he delivers. Muffs calls Moses the father of prophecy. He then sets out, as in this dissertation, to examine the life of prayer of Moses, as presented in the golden calf story and the story of the spies. In order to avoid repetition of material, we will interact with Muffs' insightful exposition of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 14 in our respective chapters (4 & 5).

According to Muffs, the objective of prophecy is twofold: to establish an ongoing dialogue between God and Israel and to balance "divine justice and divine love."

If there is no balance in the divine emotion, if justice gets the upper hand over mercy, the world is placed in great danger. Therefore, God allows the prophet to represent in his prayer His own attribute of mercy, the very element that enables a calming of God's feelings. In a more radical formulation: God originally sent prophets to Israel to demonstrate to them His great love. Even at the moment of His anger, He manifests His love by listening to the prayers of the prophets, prayers that control and calm His anger.<sup>115</sup>

Muffs sets out to illustrate four different ways God deals with His anger. Firstly, he uses Numbers 14 to illustrate that God does not destroy the rebellious generation on the spot as first intended. Instead "He exacts payment little by little, until the whole generation has died off. This act of kindness was called "bearing" (*nasa*) the sin (14:19)."<sup>116</sup> Secondly, sometimes sin is transferred to another human being. Muffs refers to the David–Bathsheba incident, where David repented after Nathan had confronted him with his sin. As a result Nathan said to David: "God has transferred (*he'evir*) your sin. You shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). Although David was pardoned, his sin was not requited but transferred onto his forthcoming son (cf. 2 Sam. 12:14–15). Muffs suggests to understand the suffering servant's bearing of sickness

<sup>113</sup> Greenberg (1978), 21. He refers to an earlier Hebrew version of the above essay.

<sup>114</sup> Muffs (1992), 9.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



and pain along these lines, that is, as vicarious atonement.<sup>117</sup> He, as a Jew, goes on to make the interesting statement:

The doctrine of punishment and its transference to another constitutes the basis of Christian faith. This doctrine is distinctively Jewish. For us, however, it is not the ultimate principle, but a secondary idea which is, nevertheless, a perfectly legitimate one, and there is no purpose in repudiating it.<sup>118</sup>

For Jews “the centre of their theology is repentance and good deeds and the divine forgiveness that comes in the wake of repentance.”<sup>119</sup> Thirdly, YHWH deals with His anger by controlling and restraining Himself and by absorbing some of it. Muffs finds this conveniently expressed in Psalm 78: “Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath (Ps. 78:38).” Finally, Muffs shows on the basis of a number of midrashim that “divine love triumphs over divine anger.” Without going into details, these midrashim seek to give expression to a tension in the mind of God. On the one hand, there is divine wrath and pain at the sight of human sinfulness, on the other hand, there is mercy, love, and joy where humanity grows and walks in the image it was created in. The possibility of the latter is worth risk of disappointment, pain, and suffering. “Love is an act of bravery and tolerance at the same time.”<sup>120</sup>

Apart from Muffs’ creative exposition of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 14, there are several guiding themes running through his essay which are of central importance for our dissertation. In due course we will interact with his perception of the relationship between the two narratives, with his understanding of the prophetic role, and the tension between divine love and justice.

#### *1.1.6 The Theological Function of Prose Prayers and Moses’ Intercession (Balentine, 1993)*

Balentine’s stimulating book on *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* understands itself as “a logical follow-up” of his doctoral thesis in which he looks at the question of how Israel relates to a God who at times is hidden.<sup>121</sup> Thereby he shows a keen interest in the prayers which challenge the hiddenness of God. This becomes not only evident in his two important chapters, “prayers for divine justice,” and “the lament tradition: holding to God against God,” but also in an earlier statement where Balentine writes: “I have come to understand that one of the principal function of Old Testament prayer is to address, clarify and sometimes resolve theodicean issues.”<sup>122</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Muffs (1992), 43.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 44–46.

<sup>121</sup> In his dissertation (1983), he suggests that prayer in the face of a silent God serves primarily as a means to “articulate the dilemma posed by God’s hiddenness.” It functions as a vehicle to voice doubt, protest, and anger.

<sup>122</sup> Balentine (1989), 598.

Balentine concentrates exclusively on prose prayers. In contrast to the psalms, the narrative context allows for a more accurate theological interpretation of the prayer.<sup>123</sup> Thus, as we shall see (§ 2.2), he rightly attributes great importance to the literary context of these prayers. In the footsteps of Westermann and Brueggemann, he strongly argues that these prayers embody an essential witness to both God and humanity. Disregarding its witness results in a defective OT theology.<sup>124</sup> It will become evident that this dissertation has greatly benefited from Balentine's study. As we shall see in section § 2.2.1, his discussion on the theological function of prose prayers has been particularly helpful for us. In our subsequent exposition of Balentine's chapter on prayer for divine justice, and with regard to his reassessment of the prophetic intercessory prayer (§ 3.1.3), we find ourselves less in agreement, nevertheless he helped to clarify and sharpen our arguments and understanding of Moses' intercessory prayers.

Balentine argues that Moses' intercessions as they are recorded in Exodus 32:7–14 and Numbers 14:11–23 (alongside other prayers such as Gen. 18:22–33, Nu. 11:4–34, Josh. 7:7–9) raise questions of divine justice.<sup>125</sup> Although he acknowledges differences in the details of these prayers, they all exhibit three essential features.

(1) some crisis in the relationship between pray-er and God; (2) a response to the crisis in the form of a prayer that raises questions about divine justice and divine intentions; and (3) some resolution or at least explanation of the crisis...I suggest that one of the principal functions of these prose prayers...is to address, to clarify, and sometimes to resolve the various concerns relating to theodicy.<sup>126</sup>

Balentine attempts to relate these prayers to the wider question of theodicy. Theodicies seek to explain "disorder while defending God's integrity and innocence at the expense of human integrity and innocence."<sup>127</sup> In other words, human sinfulness is often taken as the cause of pain and suffering. This is the dominant concept in deuteronomic literature. This concept, however widespread, does, according to him, not silence Moses' sense of divine justice.

Balentine attempts to roughly categorise "the major perspectives on pain and suffering and the justice of God in the Hebrew Bible." Hereby Moses' intercessory prayers (Ex. 32:7–14, Nu. 11:4–34, 14:11–23) alongside Abraham's intercession, Jeremiah's confessions, Job, and the psalms of lament fall into the category where suffering is "not justified, warranted/deserved, i.e. innocent suffering," and the response of the sufferer is lament and protest, while God is perceived as "unjust,

<sup>123</sup> Balentine (1993), 261.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 225–259, 260–271.

<sup>125</sup> Balentine (1993), 119, affirmatively notes the scholarly consensus which ascribes all of these texts to the deuteronomic editors and places them into the exilic or post-exilic period. In: § 2.1 we explore some of the underlying assumptions of such a dating.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

capricious, unresponsive.”<sup>128</sup> Balentine acknowledges that this is not the most prominent category. The dominant voice of the OT attributes suffering to sinful acts and envisages God’s judgement as just.<sup>129</sup> This view comes largely to expression in deuteronomistic literature, the prophets, and the wise. In these writings the justice of God is hardly questioned. There are, however, situations of unexpected and inexplicable punishment/suffering in the Bible which provoke dissenting voices such as encountered in the lament tradition. These prayers are characterised by their sharp why-questions and are essentially an “appeal to God *against* God.” In other words, the one who prays still presupposes that God is

committed to justice, but from the victim’s perspective God needs to correct or to adjust the way justice is meted out...Abraham, and Moses represent this...type of challenge. For them the lament is a means of appealing for a shift in the balance of power between God and God’s human partners.<sup>130</sup>

Balentine illustrates his point with reference to Jeremiah’s complaint: “You will be in the right, O LORD, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you (Jer.12:1, cf. Gen. 18:25).” Balentine notes:

Prayer as lament insists that two parties must be involved in the decision-making process... One can question the power of the greater party. God is available to the petitioner, and divine decisions can be reviewed.<sup>131</sup>

Following Brueggemann, Balentine raises the question: “What would be the loss if prayer were not possible or effective and if the concerns of theodicy could not be addressed in prayer?”<sup>132</sup> Based on Westermann’s work, Balentine remarks that the loss of these prayers would forfeit honest covenant interaction and would eventually lead to a “monopoly of divine power.”<sup>133</sup> Thus he understands these conversational prayers as an “important vehicle for addressing the concerns of the theodicy.”<sup>134</sup> In a “relationship of reciprocity”<sup>135</sup> God and humans negotiate the relationship between sin, suffering, and justice.

Balentine takes seriously the diachronic dimensions of Moses’ prayers, but he goes on from there to inquire after the theological function of these prayers in their final narrative contexts. He offers a stimulating discussion of the prayers of Moses, which he understands as models of protest which question divine justice. Although

<sup>128</sup> Balentine (1993), 191. Brueggemann (1992), 30–31, considers Moses’ prayers as radical and dangerous protests, assaults on the throne.

<sup>129</sup> Balentine echoes Brueggemann (1992), 33, who speaks in relation to the same texts about a *countertradition* which stands in major tension to the *common theology*.

<sup>130</sup> Balentine (1993), 195–196.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 197. Brueggemann (1995), 102, argues that the absence of lament denies “*genuine covenant interaction*,” because the second party is rendered voiceless or is only allowed to praise and worship. Hence “covenant minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover up, and pretence.”

<sup>134</sup> Balentine (1993), 122.

<sup>135</sup> Heschel (1999<sup>2</sup>, II), 67.

Balentine makes some suggestive observations on the effect of Moses' prayers on the wider context (cf. § 5.3.1.4), closer adherence to the entire narratives in their contexts will reveal that Balentine's categorisation of Moses' intercessions, as prayers where suffering/punishment is not justified and where God is perceived as "unjust, capricious, unresponsive," is not justified. This is not to deny that Moses' prayers are bold and in opposition to God's decision, but we shall argue that they are primarily characterised by loyalty to God's nature and larger purposes in salvation-history. Coats rightly characterised Moses' prayers as standing in "loyal opposition" to God. Balentine's conclusion regarding the nature of these prayers might perhaps have been different, if he had not allowed their hypothetically reconstructed *Sitz im Leben* to determine their character, but had taken their canonical setting more seriously.

#### 1.1.7 *Prayer, Theology, and the Nature of Intercessory Prayer (Miller, 1994, 1998)*

"No single practise more clearly defines a religion than the act of praying." This is Miller's opening sentence of a thorough treatment of Israel's poetic and prose prayers. Miller is primarily interested in the form and theology of Israel's prayers. Through the structure, content, and nature of these biblical prayers Miller seeks to discern their theology and beyond that, the character of God to whom these prayers are directed. He notes:

prayer and theology exist in relation to each other in a correcting circle, the one learning from the other and correcting the other. Religious faith seeks not to think one way and to pray another but to come before God in a manner that is consistent with what we believe and profess about God and God's way and to think about God in a way that is shaped by the experience of actual encounter in prayer. Learning to pray teaches about God.<sup>136</sup>

Miller highlights the essential dialogical character of biblical prayers and observes that these prayers are all in essence a "form of the cry for help."<sup>137</sup> He argues that not only is the cry out of trouble and suffering "one of the thematic threads of the Scriptures," but also its certainty that God will "hear and respond to that outcry."<sup>138</sup> The human outcry presupposes that God can help and is fundamentally concerned with the justice of the oppressed and suffering.

In our exposition of Miller's treatment of intercessory prayers, we shall see that divine justice stands often in tension with divine mercy. Particularly the penitential prayers and intercessions testify to a disobedient and sinful Israel who does not need justice but mercy. In the context of prayers for others, Miller notes that they arise out of "the assumption that God is bent toward mercy, grace, and deliverance, that judgment is subordinated to the merciful disposition of God."<sup>139</sup> Having said that,

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<sup>136</sup> Miller (1994), 1.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 45, 269.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 269.

Miller rightly cautions the interpreter by insisting that

Failure to take account of the interaction of mercy and judgment woven into the story of these prayers would be equal to ignore the same interaction in the crucifixion of Jesus, a strange but inescapable revelation of the mercy and judgment of God.<sup>140</sup>

In his chapter on intercessions Miller considers the occasions of the various intercessions and notes that the circumstances of these prayers are limited in character. Although there are a few references to prayers for somebody else's physical well-being (e.g. Gen. 25:21, 1 Ki. 17:20–22), the large majority of intercessions are made in the context when individuals, or more often Israel as a whole, sinned against God and became subject to divine judgement. Moses is obviously the prime example, he stands again and again before rebellious Israel “as a shield of prayer seeking to avert the divine wrath and the consequent destruction of the people.”<sup>141</sup> Miller rightly concludes that the context of most OT intercessions is the reality of divine judgement and hence the prime purpose of intercessory prayer is to avert YHWH's wrath and to remove judgement from the sinners.<sup>142</sup>

Miller notes that there is no common form for intercessory prayers. They can take the form of a short or long petition (cf. Nu. 12:13, 14:13–19), or take on the form of a prayer for help or lament (e.g. Ex. 32:11–13, Nu. 16:22). Unlike Hesse (1951) and Aurelius (1988), Miller does not attempt to explain this phenomenon on the basis of possible diachronic developments. Due to lack of uniformity of the intercessory prayers, Miller examines the intercessions of some representative figures in order to gain some understanding of the nature, actual outcome, and effect of these prayers.

*Abraham's Intercession (Gen. 18:23–32):* Although Abraham's negotiations with God are not explicitly called prayer, it clearly bears the mark of an intercession. There is a genuine dialogue going on with Abraham pleading for the few righteous and God listening and responding. Abraham's intercession is characterised by audacity and humility (18:25, 27).<sup>143</sup> Interestingly Abraham prays for the “forgiveness of the whole wicked city, for the sake of the innocent”<sup>144</sup> and not for the removal of the innocent few from the sphere of judgement. Sodom and Gomorrah, however, were destroyed. Abraham's intercession was only efficacious in the sense that Lot and family were saved (although the text does not say that they were righteous or innocent). No one else survived. The reader, however, is assured that God remembered Abraham's prayer (19:29).

*Moses' prayer:* Although Moses' intercessions do not resemble those of Abraham in terms of content, Miller notes that they both emerge out of the context of repeated

<sup>140</sup> Miller (1994), 279.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>143</sup> “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just...I who am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:25, 27)?”

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 268.

sin. Moreover, both are characterised by

persistence and a willingness to push and prod the deity, to do whatever is possible in the vehicle of prayer to turn away the divine wrath and evoke the mercy and compassion...of the Lord of Israel.<sup>145</sup>

We shall see, however, that the context from which Moses' prayers emerge is significantly different. The Sinai event marks a definite shift in the biblical perception of the human–divine relationship. Both Israel's election and covenant relationship play a central factor in the dynamics of Moses' intercessions. None of which obviously are part of Abraham's prayer. Moreover, Moses' important prayer in Kadesh is explicitly based on YHWH's "newly" revealed characteristics (cf. Nu. 14:18, Ex. 34:6–7). Although Miller does not sufficiently differentiate between the two, he is right in noting that Moses, in contrast to Abraham, does not appeal to justice and righteousness but among other important things to God's steadfast love (Nu. 14:19).

Miller goes on to list the various factors and arguments which characterise Moses' major intercessions. We shall engage with Miller's treatment of Moses' intercessory prayers once we actually exegete the texts in question. Overall, Miller argues that Moses' prayers assume that God's faithfulness and good purposes will overrule His anger and will to judge.<sup>146</sup> Although we agree to some good degree with Miller, a careful adhering to the scout narrative, which is in the background of Miller's argument, will reveal a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between God's steadfast love (or rather covenant loyalty), Israel's disobedience, Moses' prayer, and the divine resolution.

Having looked at some representative prayers, Miller poses the important question of the actual effect of these prayers. In a semi–systematic way, he attempts the difficult but significant step of synthesising the various witnesses into a biblical statement about the complex relationship between human freewill, prayer, and divine response. First he notes that, however audacious these prayers are, there is a "countering *expectation* on the part of God"<sup>147</sup> that His chosen servants will stand up on behalf of the people. Thereby Ezekiel 22:30–31 is evoked as a proof text. On the basis of which he says:

God expects a prophetic voice to stand forth and plead for the people. There is a divine openness to the intercession of 'his servants'...and an expectation that intercession...will help to shape the future.<sup>148</sup>

According to Miller, the question whether prayer changes things or not, is not quite the way the biblical accounts pose it. It is not "a matter of generally changing things

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<sup>145</sup> Miller (1994), 271.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 276

but of changing God's mind."<sup>149</sup> Miller, however, is quick to note that the notion of God changing His mind is only found in the context of intercessory prayers and more specifically in relation to intended judgement and punishment, not to divine acts in general. Divine change according to the Bible is not arbitrary but reliable. Miller finds this endorsed in the nature of the intercessory prayers which are consistent with who God is and what He stands for. The possibility of changing the mind is "rooted in the character of God" and is "fully consistent with who God has chosen to be."<sup>150</sup> In a subsequent paper Miller writes: "The will of God to judge is always open to a transcending appeal to the divine will to mercy and compassion."<sup>151</sup> He cautions, however, that the biblical intercessory prayers do not always lead to straightforward forgiveness. The narratives, as we shall see, present a complex understanding of divine mercy, love, and judgment. Miller concludes by saying that God's providence allows for some freedom and openness. There is a genuine responsiveness within the larger purposes of God.<sup>152</sup>

In a subsequent essay "Prayer and Divine Action," Miller has developed the interrelation of prayer and providence. There he takes issue with Kaufmann's postulation that the prayers of individuals are clearly subordinated and governed by God's overarching purposes. God, according to Kaufmann, does not (and cannot) actively engage with the prayers of individuals. In nine succinct claims Miller explores the various facets the OT offers on the relation of prayer and providence.<sup>153</sup>

- i) There is a pervasive theme that God is actively attuned to the cry of people in pain. God's response to particular incidents is integrated in the unfolding of the divine purposes.
- ii) Petitionary prayers are in essence seeking to persuade God to intervene. Frequently the one praying attempts to coax YHWH to respond to his/her plight. Underlying these prayers of persuasion, however, is the belief that God's intervention would fit in with the divine overarching purposes or would be in tune with God's nature.<sup>154</sup>
- iii) As seen above, intercessory prayers occur primarily in the context of sin and judgement and is made by a "prophetic" leader. Thereby he underlines that prophetic intercessory prayer is expected, even required by God to bring about a resolution. In other words, it is integrated in God's activity.<sup>155</sup>
- iv) Prayer consistently expects and receives a benign and transformative divine response of various kinds (e.g. mediated or direct oracle of salvation, healing, salvation, guidance, protection, etc.).<sup>156</sup>
- v) Trust in God and His transforming act is an essential

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<sup>149</sup> Miller (1994), 277.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>151</sup> Miller (1998), 221.

<sup>152</sup> Miller (1994), 280.

<sup>153</sup> Miller (1998), 211–233.

<sup>154</sup> Miller (1998), 216–217.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 217–221.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 222–224.

ingredient of prayer.<sup>157</sup> vi) According to the Bible, God is constantly upholding and maintaining nature and history. This providentiality is known as blessing and though veiled at times, encompasses human life as well. Miller finds this aspect well expressed in the Joseph story.<sup>158</sup> vii) Miller acknowledges that there are voices in the Bible which present God's work and ways as inscrutable, as it comes to expression in the dialogues between Job and God. Unlike Ecclesiastes, the prologue and epilogue of the book of Job align it with the rest of Scripture.<sup>159</sup> viii) The fundamental assumption of most prayers for help is that God and the universe are good and just. "The psalms...assert that the sovereignty of God is power in behalf of justice and compassion."<sup>160</sup> ix) Miller concludes with some reflections on the complex but epistemologically helpful image of the divine council. The metaphor is drawn from the sphere of politics which comes well to expression in the "phenomenon of prophecy, the agency of divine government in ancient Israel. The prophet functions as messenger of the divine decree from the divine council."<sup>161</sup> The image allows for considerable conceptual power when one attempts to understand the relationship between divine intention and divine act. Rather than conceiving the divine act as a single and momentary thing it is connected with decision making, decree, and agential action. Moreover, as Welker notes:

this image makes it possible simultaneously to think about God's singular and plural presence of power or about different manners of God's determinate and indeterminate presence.<sup>162</sup>

Although the image of the divine council is being probed in various directions, the implications of prophets having access to the panel for (intercessory) prayer has not been explored. We shall see in chapter 3.1.3 that the metaphor sheds considerable light on the logic of prophetic intercessory prayer.

#### 1.1.8 The Dialectic Theology of Brueggemann (1997)

Brueggemann has written a considerable amount on prayer, particularly on the psalms, but he has also shown a keen interest in Moses' intercessory prayers particularly as found in Numbers 13–14. For reasons of coherence and repetition, we will engage with Brueggemann's stimulating and provocative understanding of Moses' intercessory prayers in some detail at the appropriate places (cf. § 4.8.2.2, 5.4.2.3).

Here just a brief word about Brueggemann's dialectic approach which underlies his treatment of Israel's prayers. In his *magnum opus*, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann creatively developed his earlier programmatic writings on OT

<sup>157</sup> Miller (1998), 224–225.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 225–227.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 227–228.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>162</sup> Welker (1994), 375–376.



theology<sup>163</sup> by unfolding it around the metaphor of a courtroom trial, hence the subtitle *Testimony, Dispute, and Advocacy*. Thereby he outlines what he calls Israel's core testimony (its "characteristic" and "normative" testimony about God<sup>164</sup>) and puts it in dialectical dialogue with Israel's counter testimony (e.g. Israel's lament tradition witnesses to certain difficult and incomprehensible aspects of YHWH's nature, such as His hiddenness). The counter tradition is not secondary in status, rather, Brueggemann argues, that the two testimonies enrich each other. Thus theology ought to be conducted in an ongoing process of negotiations of conflicting biblical statements. It is in honest dialogue with claims asserted for YHWH and claims asserted against YHWH that Israel (and modern interpreters) arrives at the truth—claims of the OT. We shall see that Brueggemann imaginatively applies this dynamic to Exodus 34:6–7 (core testimony) and Moses' use of it in Numbers 14:17–19.<sup>165</sup>

#### 1.1.9 "One and the Many" (Seitz, 2001)

Seitz's approach to prayer in the OT can be described as canonical for several reasons. Firstly, he provides a broad overview of some of the principal Hebrew characters and their prayers and seeks thereby to give a comprehensive picture of prayer in the OT.<sup>166</sup> Secondly, Seitz's concern is not limited to historical and descriptive matters but lies primarily with "the abiding and constructive features of prayer as the Old Testament or Hebrew scriptures present them."<sup>167</sup> Thirdly, he engages in an interesting way with the fact that the OT presents both Israelites and non-Israelites in meaningful communication with YHWH. Seitz, on the one hand, notes that prayer is only possible because God discloses His personal name at Sinai, on the other hand, he recognises that prayer in the OT is not limited to those within the covenant. The article has two points of focus. Firstly, he reflects on prayer "within and outside the covenant" and seeks thereby to evaluate the "theological significance of this 'inside and outside' reality of prayer." Secondly, he looks at prayer within the covenant relationship, on the dynamics of the "one and the many," an important aspect of intercessory prayer.<sup>168</sup> Because of our focus, we shall concentrate in the following paragraphs on the latter.

Seitz points out that within the covenant exists a dialectic between the prayer of every-one and the prayer of the one man. Thereby he cautions not to underestimate the canonical witness of Moses' singular intercessory role as one looks at prayer

<sup>163</sup> See Fretheim (1998), 24–38, and Moberly (1999), 472–477, for a more detailed reflection on Brueggemann's theology and its development.

<sup>164</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 122.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 270f.

<sup>166</sup> Seitz (2001), 160.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

more generally.<sup>169</sup> Recognising that Moses is clearly portrayed as one, if not the principal figure of prayer in the OT, Seitz not only contrasts him with two other major intercessors, Jeremiah and the suffering servant; but he also highlights some of the characteristics of Moses' prayers. Thereby he notes that Moses' prayers (and Israel's prayer in general) are not so much characterised by special techniques,<sup>170</sup> as by simple truth-telling and by persistent insistence on YHWH's prior promises.<sup>171</sup>

As mentioned, Seitz emphasises the continuity between the intercessory activities of Moses, Jeremiah, and the "suffering servant." Although there is good reason to argue that those who shaped the book of Jeremiah understood Jeremiah to be the "prophet like Moses" (cf. Deut. 18:16, § 3.1.1<sup>172</sup>), Seitz, not disputing that, argues that Scripture in significant ways ascribes this role rather to the Isaianic servant.<sup>173</sup> Although both prophets suffered at the hands of their persecutors (cf. Isa. 50:4–11, Jer. 15:10–15), the latter does not lament as Jeremiah did (Jer. 11–20), nor does he withdraw from his office as intercessor (Isa. 53:12). Moreover, Seitz suggests that unlike Jeremiah, the prayers of the Isaianic servant were salvific "because God was doing a truly new thing through him. Intercession was not denied to the servant."<sup>174</sup> Seitz goes on to establish some conceptual parallels with the Mosaic portrait. Thereby he points particularly to Deuteronomy, where one finds the loosely developed theme that Moses also suffered innocently by being entrusted with a persistently sinful people whom he selflessly sought to preserve from YHWH's justified wrath (cf. Deut. 3:23–28, 4:21–27). Seitz concludes that the saving work of the servant as depicted in Isaiah 52:13–53:12

has been clearly modelled on Moses. He not Jeremiah is the awaited "prophet like Moses." Unlike the death of Moses, however, the death of the servant is seen as atoning and bearing the sins in the most explicit sense...His prayer is but the utterance of his life itself, which is given up in obedience—like Moses before him. But his intercession, even though very similar to that of Moses, costs him his life, brings life to a whole new generation, and removes their iniquity—something Moses did not do.<sup>175</sup>

We shall later affirm some of the parallels between the portraits of Moses, Jeremiah,

<sup>169</sup> Seitz (2001), 171.

<sup>170</sup> Looking at prayer within the covenant relationship, Seitz (2001), 170, is struck by "what one does not find. There is no handbook on prayer, as there is on sacrifice and offerings...Here, again, one is thrown up against the reality that prayer in the Old Testament is distinctly nonreligious."

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>172</sup> Seitz (1989), 3–27.

<sup>173</sup> The typological parallels have been particularly highlighted by von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 269–270, 286–288, who sees in the deuteronomistic portrayal of Moses part of the theological roots of Isaiah 53. With reference to Deuteronomy 3:23–28, 4:21–27, 9:19, von Rad comments:

Hier ist ja mehr als nur die Notiz einer geleisteten Fürbitte; das Deuteronomium will seine Leser rühren mit dem Bild eines Mannes, der in grosser Angst den Zorn aufgefangen hat und der stellvertretend den Tod ausserhalb des verheissenen Landes erleiden wird.

In conjunction with Deuteronomy 18:18, one comes close to the deutero-isaianic portrayal of the suffering servant (Isa. 53:12).

<sup>174</sup> Seitz (2001), 174.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 174–175.

and Isaiah, as Seitz has helpfully outlined. The linguistic and conceptual affinities between Moses and Jeremiah will be elaborated in a comparison of their call narratives and their intercessory ministries. Moreover, a brief comparison between the similarities and differences between Moses' intercessory activity and that of the Isaianic servant is provided in the context of Exodus 32:30–33, where Moses, as some argue, offers himself as a vicarious atonement for Israel's sin, if God will not bear Israel's sins (cf. § 4.5.2). Besides that, we would like to take up Seitz's contention that the OT, in contrast to the minute cultic instructions, does not provide any explicit instructions on how to pray (this he argues is also true for Moses' prayer). One does not need to go as far as Balentine who proposes that Moses' prayers (i.e. Ex. 32:11–13, Deut. 9:25–29, Nu. 14:13–19) alongside other deuteronomistic prayers such as Josh. 7:9 share a "fixed stock of legitimate reasons that could be called upon in prayers which sought to persuade God to modify or depart from plans for divine judgment,"<sup>176</sup> to question the position that Moses' prayer does not provide any instruction or detailed guidelines on how to pray. We shall argue in conjunction with Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:18 that the OT provides a paradigm (originating in YHWH's revelation of His name) of how to employ the divine name in prayer. This comes not only to expression in Numbers 14:13–19 where Moses prays back God's revealed name and appeals to YHWH's reputation and purposes, but also in several Psalms and other passages which arguably want to be read in direct association with the paradigm initiated by Moses.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Balentine (1989), 609.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. § 5.4.2.3.

## Chapter Two

### Hermeneutical Reflections

Having surveyed and learned from some of the major contributors on the subject, it is time to advance our own approach. We have already indicated that we seek to work primarily with the final form of the text, rather than attempting to reconstruct the history behind it, or the development of Israel's understanding of intercessory prayer. This is not to deny the multi-layeredness of the canonical text, nor that Israel's theology of prayer underwent development. Rather a canonical approach as envisaged in this thesis is engendered by three major factors: First, the final form of the text has served the majority of the Jewish and Christian communities of faith as foundation for authoritative teaching and for faithful living for about two millennia.<sup>178</sup> Second, the final form often transforms earlier traditions. This is either to extend its relevance from those who were originally addressed to subsequent generations who lived under different circumstances, or to give expression to a more mature theological understanding of matters in question.<sup>179</sup> Third, and related, a canonical reading seeks to give a fair hearing to the OT as it presents itself, rather than to reconstruct the stages which led to the canonical form.<sup>180</sup>

Having said that, we recognise that both Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 are most likely compositions of several traditions and sources which have been extended and complemented over time. There is virtually an unanimous agreement among scholarship that Moses' prayers in Exodus 32:7–14 and Numbers 14:11–19 are later additions to the first literary layer.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, there is a widespread consensus that the tradition historical process behind the canonical picture of Moses is so complex that it is difficult to come to any substantial judgements regarding the historical

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<sup>178</sup> Childs (1992), 8.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Moberly (2003b).

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Rendtorff (1999), 1–3, (2001), 280–301.

<sup>181</sup> The majority of commentators understand that the original source of chapter 32 consisted of vv. 1–6, 15–20, 35. Childs (1974), 559, argues that Moses' intercession in vv.30–34 are part of the original story. With regard to Exodus 32:7–14 the following proposals are made: i) it is pre-deuteronomistic, nevertheless secondary to J: Greenberg (1978), 21–36, Moberly (1983), 182–185, Jeremias (1997<sup>2</sup>) 59–66, Weinfeld (1991), 414, 427. ii) Deuteronomy 9–10 is the source of Ex. 32:7–14 and thus makes it deuteronomistic or even post-deuteronomistic. Noth (1959b), 200, Hyatt (1971), 301–303, Balentine (1989), 606–610, Renaud (1998), 137–144, Van Seters (1994), 291–318, esp. 308ff. Childs (1974), 559, agrees that vv. 7–14 is a secondary expansion, saturated with Deuteronomistic language, he considers it likely, however, that the redactor based his extension on an element within the original story. Aurelius (1988), 41ff., 92ff., by contrast, argues that Exodus 32:7ff. depends on an early form (Grundbestand) of Deuteronomy 9 (1–7a. 13f. 26, 27), but became the source of the first redaction of Deut. 9 (11–17, 21, 26–29). For an overview of the situation in Numbers 14 see § 5.2.3.3–4.

Moses.<sup>182</sup> In other words, the canonical form of Moses' prayers is most likely the result of a complex process of preserving, selecting, and appropriating of authoritative traditions. The following discussion seeks to address some of the hermeneutical issues involved.

## 2.1 Diachronic Dimensions of Moses' Prayers

We noted that an increasing number of scholars ascribe Moses' prayers (particularly Ex. 32:7–14) to a deuteronomistic pen.<sup>183</sup> This is not the place to recapitulate the ongoing discussion on the literary history of Moses' prayers.<sup>184</sup> We merely should briefly recall some of the possible diachronic dimensions of Moses' prayers in Exodus 32–34 (for Numbers 14:11–19 see § 5.2) and then highlight some of the underlying assumptions which give rise to the conjecture of (multiple) deuteronomistic redactions.

Aurelius probably offers the most substantial, though not undisputed, recent historical-critical analysis of Moses' prayers.<sup>185</sup> He suggests two deuteronomistic redactions, one in exilic and one in post exilic times. As seen (§ 1.1.4), Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:30–34 is understood as the oldest and possibly the only one which is pre-deuteronomic. He interprets it in association with Israel's first intercessor, Amos and the "stierbildverehrenden" northern kingdom (cf. Am. 5:5, 1 Ki. 12–14).<sup>186</sup> Just as in Amos 7, Moses' intercession has to be seen against the fall of the northern kingdom and serves primarily to underline YHWH's no to Israel's situation. The *Grundschrift* of Exodus 32 serves as a prefiguration of the history of the northern kingdom (1 Ki. 12–2 Ki. 17) and has been placed in the context of Sinai, the place of Israel's first authentic worship, because Jeroboam's sin is illegitimate worship.<sup>187</sup> It serves as a warning to Judah.<sup>188</sup> While Exodus 33:12–17 is a deuteronomistic extension, which after the fall of Judah pursues the most searching questions of

<sup>182</sup> Von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 304, 302–308. Rendtorff (1995), 13–14. There is some agreement among scholarship that the historical Moses is at least associated with the Exodus (in some form) and possibly also with the mountain of God and the revelation of YHWH's name. Cf. Gese (1990<sup>2</sup>), 49–62, Rendtorff (1975), 170. Cf. Schmid (1995<sup>3</sup>), 1–18, for a research overview.

There is some debate over how to handle (prayer-) accounts which do most likely not go back to Moses, but exhibit the understanding of a later mature Mosaic Yahwism and yet are presented as Moses' prayers. Cf. Greenberg (1983), 8, Clements (1986), 3. Until the beginning of the 17th. century the Pentateuch was ascribed to the pen of Moses. This understanding was largely based on the occasional reference to Moses' writing activity (cf. Ex. 24:4, 34:1, 27, Deut. 31). For an overview see Soggin (1993<sup>3</sup>), 92–95 and Zenger (1996), 64ff.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Perlitt (1969), 208–209, Blum (1990), 45ff., Boorer (1992), 209f.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Schmid (2001), 9–40, for a recent research overview of Exodus 32–34.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Lohfink (1990), 85–111, for a critical assessment of some aspects of Aurelius' diachronic reconstructions.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Perlitt (1969), 208.

<sup>187</sup> Aurelius (1988), 75.

<sup>188</sup> Perlitt (1969), 209.

YHWH's presence and recognition in exile. Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:7f, 10–14, according to Aurelius, comes as a development of Deuteronomy 9, taking up the theme of divine repentance from Amos 7 and Jeremiah 26. In its alleged historical context; "Moses bewirkt Gottes Reue, Selbstbeherrschung und zeitweilige Aufschiebung des Gerichts bis 587 v Chr – nicht mehr und nicht weniger."<sup>189</sup> The final prayer and its outcome in Exodus 34 are influenced by and reflect the idea of the new covenant as expressed in Jeremiah 31 and Isaiah 40–55.<sup>190</sup> In other words, Aurelius reconstructs a diachronic picture of Moses' prayers in Exodus 32–34 which reflects Israel's theological history from the warning to Judah, probably formulated in Josiah's time, via divine judgement in exile and its painful theological searching, to forgiveness and new covenant in post-exilic time.

A "mirror-reading" of Moses' prayers from exilic and post-exilic times is not only based on linguistic and conceptual parallels (cf. § 1.1.4), but also on various larger assumptions about the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of the Pentateuch. Ever since Wellhausen's influential work *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* an ongoing stream of scholars maintained and refined Wellhausen's thesis that the final composition of the Pentateuch (according to him Hexateuch) is the work of exilic and post-exilic writers (D and P).<sup>191</sup> This includes large parts of the law (e.g. Deut. 12ff. Lev. 11–16, 17–26) and, for our purposes more importantly, anything to do with the concept of covenant (ברית), in the sense of a conditional stipulation-based relationship. Thereby Wellhausen and his followers have frequently highlighted the following issues which challenge the traditional view that the law and covenant go back to the events at Sinai. There is little sign in the text that in the aftermath of Moses' death Israel knew of a complex law sealed with a covenant.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, Wellhausen and his school have drawn attention to the fact that there is hardly any linguistic reference to ברית in the eight-century prophets.<sup>193</sup> The term emerges only in the writings of the great prophets (e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah 40–66).<sup>194</sup> According to Wellhausen, the great prophets, under Deuteronomic influence (7th century) and guided by historical developments introduced a conditional human-divine relationship. Thus Wellhausen reaches the conclusion that the covenant was a late concept which is closely associated with the Deuteronomic reform.<sup>195</sup> Consequently, so goes the

<sup>189</sup> Aurelius (1988), 95.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Aurelius (1988), 203ff.

<sup>191</sup> This understanding was obviously not single-handedly established by Wellhausen, but as he acknowledges, goes back to the works of Graf, Vatke, and de Wette. Cf. Wellhausen (2001<sup>6</sup>), 3–4.

<sup>192</sup> For example the book of Judges portrays Israel as a loosely bound society who gathers only with the intention to wage war.

<sup>193</sup> According to Perlitt (1969), 129–155, the early prophets conceived of YHWH relationship with Israel in terms of natural kinship such as husband-wife, father-child.

<sup>194</sup> Wellhausen (2001<sup>6</sup>), 416.

<sup>195</sup> Perlitt (1969), 55–77, 190–203, revives Wellhausen's argument in significant ways. He argues in his influential work *Bundestheologie* that the concept of covenant originated in Israel only in the 7th century B.C. under Deuteronomic influence.

theory, everything to do with covenant in the Sinai account (Ex. 19–24, 32–34), is, either entirely or partially, attributed to the Deuteronomist.<sup>196</sup> Finally, as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation, so Wellhausen argues, the priestly writers introduced the law in order to explain the historical disaster as a consequence of breaching the law. Hence Wellhausen turned the traditional view upside down by arguing that the prophets preceded the law, which had been projected back into the Mosaic age.<sup>197</sup>

Van Seters applies Wellhausen's theory in a radical form by arguing that the Yahwist, whom he situates in the exilic period, modelled the mosaic portrait in the light of the Deuteronomic History and a corpus of prophetic tradition. Hence

(Moses') call narrative is not the beginning of the prophetic call tradition but the end of the process by which Moses becomes the greatest of all the prophets. He experiences a theophany like that of Isaiah and of Ezekiel, but in a way that epitomizes the divine presence forever afterward...He becomes the reluctant prophet who struggles with the people's unbelief, like Jeremiah. He is given the dual task of proclaiming both salvation to his people and judgment on the rulers, in this case the heathen.<sup>198</sup>

We shall elaborate on the parallels between Moses and the prophets in our next chapter; here we merely want to voice a cautionary note regarding Van Seters' understanding of the Yahwist's portrait of Moses. He describes it as "an extensive literary work" based on a radical expansion and modification of the Mosaic tradition in Deuteronomy.<sup>199</sup> In other words, according to van Seters, one is presented with largely fictitious portraits which mirror the beliefs and interests of exilic Israel. One of the major criticisms Van Seters has been confronted with, is his seeming lack of appreciation of the historical depths and complexity of the biblical texts.<sup>200</sup>

Although Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis, in more moderate forms, could retain the support of many scholars, it has also been seriously challenged by at least an equal number of scholars on various important grounds,<sup>201</sup> not least the dating of the idea of covenant.<sup>202</sup> This, however, is not the place to recapitulate the

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Perlitt (1969), 203–238 (esp. 232–238), Westermann (1984), 34–37, Blum (1990), 88–89.

<sup>197</sup> In a similar vein, the tent of meeting is also projected back as a fictitious forerunner of the temple.

<sup>198</sup> Van Seters (1994), 63. Gese (1990<sup>2</sup>), 59ff., in strong contrast argues that the fundamental encounter with God at Sinai was the cause of and the source for a traditio-historical development. Moses became the antitype of the revelatory mediator and the prophet. Israel applied and reviewed her new historical situation often through her encounter with God at Sinai. Thereby her traditions underwent a developmental process.

<sup>199</sup> Van Seters (1994), 462f.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Wenham (1999), 125. In contrast to van Seters, Perlitt (1969), 232ff., for example, argues that a complex process, which lasted nearly a thousand years, underlies the canonical shape of the Sinai pericope.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Rendtorff (1977), Whybray (1987), Blum (1992).

<sup>202</sup> Although the centrality of covenant in Deuteronomy and the associated literature is undisputed (cf. von Rad [1974<sup>2</sup>], 34ff.), there are numerous factors which seriously challenge the Wellhausen/Perlitt model. Under the influence of Gunkel and his form-critical and later traditio-historical approach, Alt, Noth, and von Rad, to mention a few influential contenders, believed to have established ancient covenant traditions which were rooted in concrete sociological settings (i.e. religious festivals) long

shortcomings of the Wellhausen model. Acknowledging the likelihood that a complex process of transmission, writing, compiling, and redacting underlie Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 (cf. § 5.2), a canonical reading as advocated in this dissertation focuses on the final literary composition which has its own integrity and intrinsic logic. Reading the final literary product is further endorsed by the fact that biblical writers and redactors chose to remain anonymous most of the time. To the frustration of modern historical-critical scholarship, neither the golden calf account, nor the scout narrative (or the Pentateuch in general), provides explicit indication as to historical context and purpose, other than the self-presentation of the texts themselves.<sup>203</sup> Childs describes the phenomenon as follows: “The tradents have consistently sought to hide their footprints in order to focus attention on the canonical text itself rather than the process.”<sup>204</sup>

## 2.2 A Canonical Reading

The canon, as Childs has consistently underlined, is the end result of a lengthy and careful historical process in ancient Israel of collecting, selecting, and appropriating material with the purpose of establishing an authoritative body of scriptures for the religious community.<sup>205</sup> Although there is paucity of historical evidence, the text and the logic of the canon strongly suggests that from an early period there had been an authoritative body of Mosaic writings which have been passed on and

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before the seventh century. Moreover, Mendenhall (1954), 50–76, in his influential work drew attention to striking parallels between Israel’s structure of covenant (as exemplified in both Deuteronomy and pre-deuteronomistic Sinai material in Exodus 19–24) and that of Hittite treaties of the 14th. and 13th. century B.C. Weinfeld [1977], 267–268, argues that the deuteronomistic covenant reflects with its elaborate curses the contemporary Neo-Assyrian treaties, while the short list of curses found in Exodus 23:20–33 is more characteristic of the older Hittite treaties. Cf. Levenson (1985), 30–32. Others such as Eichrodt (1961), 36–69, argue that the concept of covenant goes back to the earliest sources. Even, if the term ברית does not occur, the meaning is still there. Cf. Barr (1977), 23–38. Childs (1992), 133–137, 413–420, argues for a developmental trajectory of the concept covenant. In other words, deuteronomistic formulations would be built on earlier traditions (i.e. blood ritual and “covenant” meal in Ex. 24:3–8) which, though different, are in strong theological continuity.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Childs (1992), 419, Moberly (1995<sup>2</sup>), 59.

<sup>204</sup> (1979), 68.

<sup>205</sup> Barr (1980, 13, 1999, 378–438), has persistently pleaded for some clarification and nuancing of the term canon. Childs’ (1992), 70–71, understanding of canon has developed over the years and encompasses several distinct but related concepts. There are several levels of canon: i) it refers to the final form of a particular account or book ii) it refers to the entire body of the OT iii) canon for the Christian means the entire Bible, OT and NT iv) it refers to the historical and hermeneutical process of canonisation which led to these various forms of canon. Mays (1976), 524, insightfully describes Childs’ perception of canonical text as follows: “it holds a series of moments (in the history of the biblical text) in perspective, primarily the original situation, the final literary setting, and the context of the canon.”



complemented.<sup>206</sup> Consequently an important hermeneutical issue would be how to evaluate this process in a theological reading of the final form. Childs' approach provides helpful guidelines:

The critical method of a Wellhausen tends to disregard any non-historical shaping as fictional and to view the canonical form of the text with suspicion as self-serving ideology. Accordingly, a proper critical approach to the Old Testament is one which conforms to a reconstruction of Israel's religious growth within a genuine historical context. My alternative suggestion is one which seeks rather to interpret the canonical shape both critically and theologically, not as fictional self-serving, but as one which truly reflects the perspective from within the community of faith of how Israel understood its relationship with God. In short, a theology of the Old Testament is not to be confused with a description of Israel's religion but is Israel's own testimony, a perspective from within the faith (*emic*). Israel's 'history with God' reflects a different dimension of reality from a scientifically reconstructed history. Nevertheless, a canonical approach does not reject out-of-hand the use of the 'outside' (*etic*) perspective of a historical critical reconstruction. Indeed recognition of the subtlety of relationship is one factor which sets the canonical approach apart from fundamentalism on the right and liberalism on the left. Historical critical reconstructions can aid the interpreter in understanding Israel's own witness by seeing how its witness to the content of its experience with God over generations led to a reshaping of its faith in a manner often very different from the actual historical development, at times overriding, subordinating or recasting the noetic sequence in the light of a new and more profound ontic interpretation of the ways of God with Israel.<sup>207</sup>

We hope to illustrate in our reading of our two narratives (particularly Nu. 13–14), that a diachronic approach helps to appreciate the nature of Israel's testimony by showing its likely, or at least possible historical development. It will, however, also become evident that in a canonical reading as we seek to advocate it, a diachronic approach on its own cannot do justice to the larger theological objectives. We shall see with reference to the "Calebite theory" and the biblical scout narrative that the final form still bears marks of Israel's earlier traditions. Yet the canonical form transformed the underlying sources into a new, and we may say more mature theological witness.<sup>208</sup> With regard to Moses' intercessions, a purely historical-critical approach which is pre-occupied with reconstructing the history behind the text and thereby interpretes the possibly deuteronomic prayer accounts against its originating setting, is in danger of missing or distorting the logic and integrity of the biblical narratives as presented by the OT.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Gese (1992<sup>2</sup>), 49–62.

<sup>207</sup> Childs (1992), 415–416, cf. 98ff.

<sup>208</sup> Historical-criticism in its various forms is sometimes motivated by the questionable assumption that truth should be based on historical fact. This legacy goes probably via the Enlightenment back to the Renaissance and Reformation with its sense that antiquity is superior because of its untaintedness ("ad fontes"). Cf. Moberly (2003b). Truth, however, can be assessed by a number of criteria. Historicity is only one of them. There is ethical, moral, spiritual or theological truth which can often be better conveyed in a story, metaphor, or a parable. Often these means are the only legitimate way of communicating an unseen reality such as a transcendent God. Cf. Macquarrie (1996<sup>2</sup>), 647–650.

### 2.2.1 Prose Prayers, Narrative Context, and Theological Function

Prose prayers are often deliberately used by the writer as theological instruments. We shall see that Moses' intercessions are embedded at crucial and strategic places in the narratives (§ 4.3.6., 5.3.1). Balentine is right in observing that these prayers are usually found between a crisis in the human–divine relationship and the divine resolution of it. To be more specific, both in the golden calf account and in the scout narrative, Moses' prayer is couched between Israel's rebellion, which results in YHWH's intention to annihilate the entire people (Ex. 32:1ff., Nu. 14:1–12), and a divine response. In both instances YHWH changes His mind and refrains from destroying them (Ex. 32:14., Nu. 14:20ff.). The change of mind is clearly associated with Moses' brave and loyal mediatorship. In other words, Moses' prayers play a key role in the unfolding of the narratives. Stripping these prayers from their narrative context would result in a change of the intended meaning. A canonical approach, as advanced here, looks for coherence and meaning in the text, rather than wearing primarily "literary–critical glasses" which are tuned to spot any textual features which might provide some clue to the history behind the text.<sup>209</sup> When confronted with apparent tensions in the text, the exegete should be open to the possibility of deliberate literary effect and style.<sup>210</sup>

Alter identifies dialogues as one of the main vehicles of the biblical writers to signal important points in the narrative. This is obviously even more the case with prayers, which are essentially dialogues with God. According to Alter, a helpful principle to remember is "the tendency of the biblical writers to organise dialogue along contrasting principles—short versus long, simple versus elaborate, balanced versus asymmetrical...and so forth." Moreover, he draws attention to the interpretative significance of seeming discontinuities of biblical dialogues, and encourages the reader to ponder the possible dynamics of that. "When does the dialogue break off sharply, withholding from us the rejoinder we might have expected from one of the two speakers."<sup>211</sup> The significance of these literary techniques can obviously not be discussed in abstraction from specific texts, but as particularly Muilenburg, one of the pioneers of rhetorical criticism, has shown, Moses' prayers exhibit several of these literary features, such as *Leitwörter*, repetition, plot, foreshadowing, irony, contrast, tension, resolution, etc.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Schmidt (1991), 27ff., outlines the principles of *Literarkritik*: i) identification of "Brüchen, Unebenheiten oder Spannungen," ii) attempting to order the fragments to "sinnvollen Erzähl- und Handlungsabläufen" iii) allocating the reconstructed layers to larger related "Zusammenhängen."

<sup>210</sup> Moberly (1983), 44–109, and Brichto (1983), 1–44, convincingly show how Exodus 32–34, a text which is usually considered as a "hodgepodge" by source-critics, embodies in its final form an intelligible narrative with its own claim to theological truth.

<sup>211</sup> Alter (1981), 180.

<sup>212</sup> Muilenburg (1968), 168. Cf. Alter (1981), 179–189. Ironically some of these literary features are also taken as indication for the dept dimension of the text by historical-critics (i.e. *Literarkritiker*).

### 2.2.2 Concluding Summary

We have acknowledged the possibility of a complex *Entstehungsgeschichte* of the texts in question. Yet even if it were conclusively established that the biblical portrait of Moses as intercessor, covenant mediator, and law-giver are exilic and post-exilic constructs, the final form still deserves serious theological attention for the reasons outlined at the beginning of this chapter. As we have briefly attempted to illustrate, analysing and interpreting Moses' prayers against an exilic/post-exilic setting will obviously produce different results from an approach which seeks to understand these prayers as presented by the OT itself.

Since our emphasis is on the final form of the text, we have drawn attention to the importance of the narrative context for elucidating the logic and theological claims of Moses' prayers. Moreover, we have drawn attention to some important literary features and techniques which may enhance our reading of the narratives in question. Unlike purely literary approaches which argue that the meaning of the text is self-contained, we are cautious not to separate the final form from its rich diachronic witness to God's ways with Israel.<sup>213</sup> Keeping the synchronic and diachronic dimension of the text in their proper relation is key for an accurate understanding of the nature and function of Scripture. It is particularly in chapter 5 that we attempt to illustrate how this delicate relation could be handled. Having said that, unless the canonical portrait of Moses is taken with full imaginative seriousness "without being too quickly pressed into historical categories of one kind or other,"<sup>214</sup> one is unlikely truly to understand its claims. Since it is the final form of Israel's testimony which has provided the foundation for serious engagement of various kinds (theological, spiritual, ethical etc.) for the majority of Jews and Christians down the ages, we will also draw from the rich theological insights of pre-modern exegetes and engage with their interpretations of Moses' prayers. With a two thousand year long history of interpretation preceding, it is obvious that this can only be done on a limited and highly selective basis. Because of Rashi's and Calvin's influential commentaries and because of their systematic approaches to the scriptures, priority will be given to these two undoubted giants in the history of exegesis.<sup>215</sup> Other major premodern

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Talstra (1995), 187ff.

<sup>214</sup> Moberly (1992b), 16. See also Coats (1988), 9–43.

<sup>215</sup> Since Rashi, Jewish biblical interpretation moved more towards the plain sense of the text. Among other things it was the combination of Rabbinic tradition and the literal reading which made his commentary so influential. Cf. Sternberger (1996), 116–120. With regard to the plain sense, he did not seek strictly a rational or historical sense of the text, but he determined the plain sense with regard to grammar, parallel passages, and rational deduction. See Childs (1977), 83–84, for illustrations. Calvin's approach to the Scripture is also dominated by a focus on the literal sense of the text which he identified with the author's intention. What makes Calvin especially appealing for our purposes is his high view of the OT. In his *Institutes* (II, ch. x–xi) he examines in detail the relationship between OT and NT. He concludes that the two covenants are of the same substance and differ only in the mode of dispensation. They have their origin in the same divine reality, which can be seen by the fact that both are maintained only by God's grace and mercy (pp. 369–372) and thus Calvin ascribes to leading OT figures typological quality of the highest order (pp. 378–391).

Jewish and Christian commentators will also be occasionally consulted.

### Chapter Three

## Prophetic Intercession

In our previous chapter we have argued that unless Moses' intercessory prayers are interpreted in the light of the scriptural Moses, that is, taking seriously the status and role(s) ascribed to him by the canon, one is likely not to do justice to the witness of the OT. The Pentateuch in its canonical form is closely associated with Moses. He features dominantly from the outset of the book of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy (Ex. 2–Deut. 34). Not only is he presented as Israel's liberator, but most of the biblical high offices, such as judge, lawgiver, king, priest, and prophet are reflected in the extant portrayal of Moses. Given our interest in Moses' prayers, we shall particularly focus on the intrinsically related role of mediator and prophet.<sup>216</sup> In the following chapters we shall not only see that prophetic categories are clearly in the background of Moses' intercessory prayers in Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 14, but also argue that the logic of biblical intercessory prayer is inextricably related to prophetic qualities.

Moses' prophetic characteristics and the dynamics of his intercessions, I believe, could be significantly illuminated with relevant information from Moses' call narrative (Ex. 3–4), his first intercession (Ex. 5:22ff.), and the wider canonical witness.

### 3.1 Moses as the Archetypal Prophet

Ewald argued more than a century ago that among the many offices the canon (Ewald would say the traditions) ascribes to Moses, that of the prophet is the dominant one.

(Mose) ist zwar ferner volksführer, gesetzgeber, wunderthäter: aber alle diese seine weiteren eigenschaften verschwinden vor der einen, daß er Prophet ist; erst als Prophet ist er volksführer, gesetzgeber, wunderthäter, und alles große was er ist das ist er nur als Prophet.<sup>217</sup>

Ewald recognises that the OT depicts Moses not just as any prophet but as the prophet *par excellence*.<sup>218</sup> Von Rad argues that it is particularly the book of Deuteronomy which portrays Moses as the *Erzprophet*.<sup>219</sup> According to Exodus and Deuteronomy, Moses' prophetic mediatory role has its origin in the Sinai event (cf. Ex. 20:18–21, Deut. 5:22–31), where Israel was terrified at the awesome sight of

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Zimmerli (1977), 197–211.

<sup>217</sup> Ewald (1865), 68. Cf. Smend (1959), 55.

<sup>218</sup> Ewald (1865), 68. For similar views see Duhm (1916), III, 7, and Jeremias (1970), 142ff.

<sup>219</sup> According to von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 302–308, Moses' mediatory role was increasingly stressed and extended in later redactions and accounts because of the rise of the prophetic movement.

YHWH's appearance and asked Moses to mediate between God and them.<sup>220</sup> Von Rad comments: "Jahwe hat diese Bitte erfüllt, und so ist das prophetische Mittleramt entstanden."<sup>221</sup> Twice it is emphasised that Moses' role as YHWH's spokesmen and mediator is approved by both YHWH and the people (cf. Deut. 5:26–29). Moses is commissioned to bring God's word to the people and expound the divine will to them. In other words, Moses is also to function as a divine instructor and teacher (למד, Deut. 5:31). Thus he assumes a moral responsibility for Israel. Although there is no explicit mention of intercession in this context, the logical implication of Moses showing Israel the way, and making sure that they follow the will of God, anticipates a two-way mediation in the form of prophetic intercessory prayer (cf. Deut. 9:6–10:22).

In Deuteronomy 18 the Sinai-episode is closely echoed in order to prepare Israel for Moses' successor(s). YHWH will raise a prophet (נביא) like Moses, who is to bring God's word to Israel (Deut. 18:18). The singular of נביא has caused some confusion and led to the mistaken interpretation that Deuteronomy 18:15/18 anticipated one particular prophet who will come at a particular time in the future. Various later Jewish texts associate this prophet with the messianic hope,<sup>222</sup> while several passages in the NT identify Jesus as the promised prophet and the new Moses, as the one who embodies God's word and fulfils the law and the prophetic tradition.<sup>223</sup> The primary meaning of Deuteronomy 18:15/18 in its context, however, is about a line of prophets who will succeed Moses.<sup>224</sup> Hence the idea is that YHWH will occasionally or regularly raise up a prophet like Moses. Although Israel's forthcoming prophets will be like Moses in the sense that God will put His words into their mouths and that they will continue to proclaim God's will, the context makes it clear that they will not be on equal footing with him. Their message has to be seen and evaluated in the light of the Mosaic law (cf. Deut. 13:1–5, 18:20).<sup>225</sup> Moreover, the idiom "putting words into a prophet's mouth" (Deut. 18:18) does not specify the means of revelation which according to Numbers 12:6–8 distinguishes Moses from the prophets.

When there are prophets among you, I the LORD make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. 7 Not so with my servant Moses...With him I speak face to face-

<sup>220</sup> Exodus 20:18ff. is often understood as an aetiology of Moses' office. Cf. Childs (1992), 133.

<sup>221</sup> Von Rad (1983<sup>4</sup>), 89.

<sup>222</sup> 1QS 9:11 and 4Q175 (4QTest) 5–8 testify to an eschatological figure, a prophet like Moses. For bibliographical details see Allison (1993), 35, 53, 58, 61, 218, 222, 226.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Mk. 9:7, Jn. 1:21, 45, 6:14, 7:40, Acts 3:22ff., 7:37. Cf. Bruce (1990<sup>3</sup>), 145.

<sup>224</sup> It has been repeatedly argued that the term נביא should be taken collectively here. Just as Deuteronomy talks about one king (17:14ff.) when it means the institution of kingship. Cf. Keil (1864), 394, Wilson (1984), 162.

<sup>225</sup> Chapman (2000), 129, argues that the Torah (the living legacy of Moses) is depicted in Deuteronomy in conjunction with its concluding verses 34:10–12 as "both the authority and the criterion of the prophetic word, while at the same time the prophets are seen as the authoritative heirs and interpreters of the mosaic tradition."

(אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ פֶה אֶל-פֶּה) - clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the LORD.<sup>226</sup>

Phenomenologically, according to Levine, “Moses’ uniqueness lies in the fact that God speaks to him directly, ‘mouth to mouth’...There is nothing intervening between God and Moses in the transmission of God’s voice.”<sup>227</sup> The unparalleled stature of Moses’ prophetic grandeur, is of course confirmed and underlined by the conclusive statement in Deuteronomy 34:10.

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses (נִבִּיאַ...כְּמֹשֶׁה), whom the LORD knew face to face (אִשָּׁר יָדָעוּ יְהוָה פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים).<sup>228</sup>

Here Moses is distinguished from the other prophets by the unique prerogative that YHWH knew him face to face. Although the idiom “knowing face to face” is slightly awkward, it most likely seeks to underline Moses’ unsurpassed stature by combining and attributing two extremely rich Hebrew terms to him (cf. § 4.3.7.3).<sup>229</sup> Thus Deuteronomy 34:10 confirms that Moses’ supersedes all the prophets in his intimacy with, and understanding of, YHWH. Blenkinsopp describes the dynamics of the concluding statement of the Pentateuch as follows:

This final statement is meant to recall the promise of a “prophet like Moses” in Deut 18:15–18, probably as a warning against interpreting it in such a way as to put prophetic mediation on the same level as that of Moses.<sup>230</sup>

It has, however, been questioned whether the end of Deuteronomy seeks to drive a sharp wedge between what Blenkinsopp calls a (higher) “mode of revelation” and “the problematic and ambiguous phenomenon of prophecy.” This is not to downplay Moses’ pre-eminent stature, but to recognise that he is fully understood within Israel’s prophetic categories.<sup>231</sup>

In sum, we have seen that Numbers 12 and particularly Deuteronomy ascribes archetypal qualities to Moses’ prophetic status. Having said that, the following discussion seeks to highlight that Moses is already presented in prototypal prophetic categories at the inception of his ministry.

<sup>226</sup> Numbers 12:6–8 ought to be read in the light of Numbers 11:26–30. It primarily seeks to distinguish Moses’ prophetic prerogatives from those of the prophetically endowed leaders.

Biblical quotes are taken from the NRSV unless it is indicated otherwise.

<sup>227</sup> Levine (1993), 341. Cf. Ex. 33:11 (פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים), Nu. 14:14 (עֵין בְּעֵין).

<sup>228</sup> This is clearly a reflection from a later point in Israel’s history. It is written with hindsight and presupposes the knowledge of at least some of Israel’s prophets. It has been frequently pointed out that this climactic statement stands in some tension with chapter 18:15–22 which speaks of a successor (“a prophet like me”) who will also speak with divine authority (v. 18). E.g. Miller (1990), 155. We have seen, however, that chapter 18:15–18 already implies the uniqueness of Moses. This seems to resolve the tension between the two chapters.

<sup>229</sup> According to Perlitt (1971), 592, one can speak face to face (cf. Ex. 33:11) or one can see face to face (cf. Jud. 6:22), not, however, being known face to face. Granted that the deuteronomic writer does not take face to face literally, not least because chapter 4 insists that YHWH remained unseen, one must not press the language too much (cf. Ex. 3:2–6, 33:19–23).

<sup>230</sup> Blenkinsopp (1992), 232.

<sup>231</sup> Zimmerli (1977), 202–203. See Chapman (2000), 115ff. for an assessment of Blenkinsopp’s wider thesis.

### 3.1.1 Called and Commissioned to Speak for God

Much could be said about what came to be called the call narratives of Moses. Exodus 3–4 and 6 belong not only to the richest chapters of Scripture, but also share common themes with Exodus 32–34, such as divine presence, the revelation of YHWH's name and His purposes for Israel. In Exodus 3:1, 12 one finds also the first reference to the “mountain of God,” which prepares the setting for the Sinai narratives. Here, however, we merely intend to highlight some aspects of Moses' call and commission which we believe enhance our understanding of Moses' role and his intercessory prayers.

It has long been noticed that Moses' call and commission resemble in many ways that of the later prophets (cf. Isa. 6, Jer. 1, Ezek. 2).<sup>232</sup> Although the usual word for prophet (נביא) is not used in Exodus 3–6, there are numerous reasons which strongly suggest that Moses is being envisaged as Israel's paradigmatic prophet. For example, on the level of terminology, the word שְׁלַח which is usually employed to designate the prophetic commission (cf. Isa. 6:8, Jer. 1:7, Ezek. 2:3) is frequently used in Exodus 3, where Moses is not only elected as divine agent but also sent (Ex. 3:10–15) as divine spokesman (cf. Ex. 3:15, 4:17, 7:1, 20:16).<sup>233</sup> Moreover, it is here that we encounter for the first time in Scripture the prophetic formula; כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה (cf. Ex. 3:14–15, 32:27), which indicates that Israel is to be addressed with divine authority by Moses (Ex. 4:19).<sup>234</sup> Not only Israel, but also Pharaoh is confronted with the name of YHWH (Ex. 4:22, etc.). This is confirmed by Exodus 7:1–2 which provides a classic exposition of the prophetic office.

The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh (וְנִתְחַדָּךְ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרֹעַ), and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet (וְיִהְיֶה אָהֳרֹן נְבִיאֲךָ). You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh...”

We do not need to enter the discussion about the exact meaning and significance of Moses being made אֱלֹהִים to Pharaoh in order to appreciate the dynamics of Hebrew prophetic speech.<sup>235</sup> The point we would like to make here is that the prophet is envisaged as the divine representative and acts as the mouthpiece of God. He is to convey what has been revealed to him (cf. Ex. 3:13–15, 4:16).

That Moses is perceived as YHWH's archetypal prophet right from the inception of his calling can be further underlined on the basis of a brief comparison with the call

<sup>232</sup> E.g. Rendtorff (2001), 126–128.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Newman (1965), 40–42, 46–51, Moberly (1992), 21–26.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Ex. 19:3, 20:19. This is of course the standard formula found on the lips of the prophets. Cf. Westermann (1991), 111.

<sup>235</sup> Levine (1993), 331, suggests in conjunction with Psalm 82 (where God is said to preside over the council of El [בְּעֵדֶת-אֵל] and holds judgement among the אֱלֹהִים) that “Moses enjoyed a degree of access to God that was even more intimate than that normally associated with God's entourage or heavenly household.”



and mission of Jeremiah.<sup>236</sup> Long have the numerous verbal and conceptual parallels between Exodus 3–4 and Jeremiah 1:4–10 been detected.<sup>237</sup> Initially, both show themselves reluctant to the divine commission to speak on YHWH's behalf (Ex. 4:10, 7:2, Jer. 1:6f.). Yet both are assured of God's presence (Ex. 3:12, Jer. 1:8) and that YHWH will put His words into their mouths and that they "shall speak whatever YHWH commands them" (cf. Ex. 7:2, Deut. 18:18, Jer. 1:7–9). At times when the burden of their ministries grew unbearable, we hear similar words of despair on their lips. Jeremiah laments over the day of his birth (Jer. 15:10), while Moses pleads to be put to death (Nu. 11:15).<sup>238</sup> We shall see that Moses' first prayer for Israel arises partially out of uncertainty over his calling and YHWH's involvement in his mission (Ex. 5:22–23). Similarly Jeremiah, when confronted with the cruel and puzzling reality expresses on a number of occasions the need for divine reassurance regarding his calling and mission (Jer. 11:18–12:4, 14:19–15:1, 18, cf. Ex. 33:12ff.). Despite all the hardship and difficulties they encounter at the hands of an ignorant and stubborn people, they show a strong sense of trust in God and responsibility for their mission (Ex. 32–34, Nu. 13–14, Jer. 18:20). Apart from all the striking affinities between their call-narratives and their initial worries, it is really their ministries, in particular their role as intercessors, which is important for our purposes. Hesse argues that their responsibility to represent and defend Israel before God was the most important aspect of their ministries.<sup>239</sup> This would be endorsed by Jeremiah 27:18, according to which Jeremiah regarded intercession as a benchmark of the real prophet. It is through Baruch that we know that Jeremiah was appreciated as the most influential intercessor of his time (Jer. 37:3). This is further underlined and attested in 2 Maccabees 15:12–14 where Jeremiah is not only remembered as a great intercessor of Israel, but also as a kind of "heavenly advocate."<sup>240</sup>

### 3.1.2 Moses' First Intercession (Ex. 5:22–23)

Moses' intercessory activity started right at the outset of his mission. We briefly recall the context. After a lengthy discussion and constant affirmation of divine support, YHWH eventually succeeded in persuading Moses that he is the right man

<sup>236</sup> The links between the deuteronomic portrayal of Moses (and Deuteronomy as a whole) and the book of Jeremiah have long been recognised and explored. In the case of Exodus 3–4, though not undisputed, it seems that the writer of Jeremiah 1:4–10 assimilated the call of Jeremiah to that of Moses. Cf. Allison, 1993, 58. In any case, as our comparison shows, the two stand in close canonical association.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Holladay (1964), 152–164, Perlitt (1971), 606ff., For parallels beyond the call, see Seitz (1989), 3–27.

<sup>238</sup> According to Aurelius (1988), 206–207, the painful experiences of the *Gerichtsprpheten*, particularly those of Jeremiah are read back into Moses' time.

<sup>239</sup> So Hesse (1951), 47.

<sup>240</sup> Hesse (1951), 54, shows that the language of intercession and the more general terminology of prayer is found on the lips of Jeremiah more frequently than anywhere else. Cf. Balentine (1984), 163, 169.

for the enormous mission to deliver Israel from Egypt (cf. Ex. 3:10–4:17). Moses was commissioned to confront Pharaoh in the name of YHWH and to charge him to let Israel go, so that they can worship their God in the wilderness (Ex. 5:1). Pharaoh, not being impressed by the name of YHWH (Ex. 5:2) intensifies Israel's workload instead (Ex. 5:6ff.). As a result of the tougher working conditions, Israel's leaders accuse Moses and Aaron (Ex. 5:20). The whole enterprise seems to have gone badly wrong. Not only has Pharaoh ignored YHWH and his spokesman, but he has also doubled Israel's hardship.<sup>241</sup> As a result, the people have lost their trust in Moses and became hostile towards him (Ex. 5:20, 6:9). Overwhelmed by the apparent setback and under the illusion that his intervention has caused more problem than good, Moses turns to YHWH in prayer

and said "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people (לָמָּה תִּרְעָהָ לָעָם הַזֶּה)? Why did you ever send me (לָמָּה זֶה שָׁלַחְתָּנִי)? Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people (הִרְעָה לָעָם), and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people (Ex. 5:22–23).

This prayer is important for our purposes for a number of reasons: First, it is not only Moses' first prayer for Israel, but it is the first prayer for Israel in the Bible. Secondly, it is significant because it occurs in the context of Moses' prophetic commission (Ex. 3–6) and thus reflects, what is sometimes called, the prophetic two-way communication (§ 3.1.3). Third, we shall see that Moses' prayer for Israel bears remarkable conceptual and verbal parallels with his prayer on Mount Sinai in the immediate aftermath of the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:11–13). Both prayers contain a twofold לָמָּה-question and bear generally the characteristics of a lament (cf. Ex. 32:11–12). On both occasions Moses' complaint is directed towards YHWH's apparent (or intended) maltreatment of His people. Only in Exodus 5:22–23 and 32:11–14 do the words רָעָה/רָעָה and עָמַךְ occur together.<sup>242</sup> Of course there is also a significant difference between the prayers. The first prayer arises out of an apparent absence of God and the people's actual complaint, whereas Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:11–13 comes as a response to YHWH's intended judgement (Ex. 32:7–10).

In spite of the leaders' slander, not unlike the dynamics in Numbers 14:10ff. where the people are about to stone Moses, Moses is primarily concerned with the removal of Israel's hardship. In fact, the prayer is an implicit petition to deliver Israel. In other words, we are dealing here with an intercessory prayer rather than with a personal lament (cf. Nu. 11:11ff.). This is not to deny the frustrated tone of Moses' prayer. The prayer is dominated by two accusing לָמָּה-questions. Moses could not let the leaders' accusation rest on himself, after all he only followed the divine instructions. Thus in prayer, Moses passes on the blame to YHWH, who seemingly

<sup>241</sup> In the course of the plagues Pharaoh begs Moses to intercede for him before YHWH on several occasions (Ex. 8:4ff., 24ff., 9:27ff. 10:16, 12:32). Moses' intercessory prayers, however, have not so much the well-being of Pharaoh in mind, but seem primarily concerned to demonstrate YHWH's almighty power over the Egyptian king (cf. 8:6, 9:29–30).

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Aurelius (1988), 162.

was not involved in the course of events in spite of His promise to deliver them (Ex. 3:17).<sup>243</sup> This tension is characteristic of the lament tradition, where the psalmist is often coerced into praying against God to God. Although Moses' prayer bears clearly some resemblance with the lament psalms, the narrative context adds other important aspects to it. Moses appears to have forgotten YHWH's warning that the mission will not be a straightforward success (Ex. 3:19, 4:21). Thus by echoing his former doubts ("why have You sent me?" Ex. 4:10–13, 5:22), Moses seems to relapse into his former anxieties and feelings of inadequacy. Houtman notes that "in order for Moses' mission to succeed, YHWH will have to encourage and instruct Moses anew."<sup>244</sup> This pattern will repeat itself in Exodus 32–34, when Moses seeks divine approval and reassurance (Ex. 33:12–17, cf. § 4.3.7.2). Besides Moses' need of divine affirmation, the emphasis of the prayer is clearly on the people. Thus his question as to why he was sent should be understood in relation to the suffering which resulted from his mission. This is obviously confirmed by his final complaint in verse 23, which contains an implicit petition to deliver Israel ("...and still You have not delivered Your people"). Thus Moses' prayer could be called an accusatory intercession.<sup>245</sup>

Particularly traditional Jewish interpreters have been disturbed by Moses' audacious words. Some even ascribe to this "rash" prayer Moses' punishment of not being allowed to enter Canaan.<sup>246</sup> There is, however, no indication in the text that YHWH was disturbed in any sense by Moses' accusing tone (cf. Deut. 1:37, 3:26). Rather, it is interesting to note that YHWH not only patiently reaffirms His plans (cf. Ex. 3:19, 4:21), but also reveals them with greater clarity to His servant, not least with regard to His name (cf. Ex. 6:1–8).<sup>247</sup> Thus there is a sense that Moses' faith and trust needed to develop and YHWH seemed to respect that by giving Moses a fuller insight into His will and nature. In other words, according to the logic of the narrative the rich divine utterance found in Exodus 6:1–8 comes as a result of Moses' prayer (Ex. 5:22–23). This, as we shall see, is not unlike the fullest revelation of YHWH's name in Scripture (Ex. 34:6–7), which is also the result of a mixture of Moses' persistent engagement with God in intercessory prayer and the pressing need to have a fuller understanding of YHWH's ways (Ex. 33:13). On both occasions YHWH reveals His name in a new and fuller way to Moses and through that makes known His essential character and intentions (cf. § 4.3.8). Moreover, the nature of the divine response in Exodus 6:1–8 is also similar to that in Exodus 34:10. On neither occasion YHWH directly responds to Moses' prayer, rather YHWH proclaims His

<sup>243</sup> Davidson (1983), 68–69.

<sup>244</sup> Houtman (1993), 499.

<sup>245</sup> The prayer also raises the theodicy question, "why have you mistreated this people?" The question of YHWH's justice is obviously intensified when one argues like Brueggemann (1997), 284, or Clines (1995), 197, that the long and painful process leading up to the Exodus was primarily about establishing YHWH's name among the Egyptians.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Ginzberg (1954, II), 337ff.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Seitz (1998), 229–247.

nature and ultimate agenda. In other words, YHWH does not immediately change the hardship of Israel, but restates His plans in a fuller version, assuring Moses that He is אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרִי (Ex. 6:3) and appeals to trust in Him.

In sum, the canon not only associates Israel's later audacious and confrontative prayers (as expressed in the psalms of lament) particularly with Moses (§ 4.3.3), but also ascribes the beginnings of the two-way communication to him. Right from the beginning of Israel's history, Moses acts both as mouth of God and as advocate of the people. In the next section we hope to shed further light on the relation between Moses and the twofold prophetic role. Moreover, we attempt to explore the reason why intercession is particularly associated with the נְבִיאִים.

### 3.1.3 The Logic of the Twofold Role of the Prophet

According to von Rad, intercession was not only particularly associated with the נְבִיאִים, but historically also one of the earliest functions of the prophets.<sup>248</sup> Both Elijah and Elisha traditions seem to endorse that.<sup>249</sup> For example when Israel was faced with a severe national drought, Ahaz searched everywhere for Elijah, for he was the only one who was in a position to ask YHWH to bring the drought, which came about by his word, to an end (cf. 1 Ki. 17:1, 20ff., 2 Ki. 4:33). There are more examples where prophetic intercession proves to be the only channel of hope (cf. 2 Ki. 19:1–7).

Hertzberg, and more recently Balentine, however, challenge the perception that intercession was primarily the responsibility of the prophet.<sup>250</sup> After an analysis of the terminology of intercession<sup>251</sup> and its distribution in the OT Balentine reaches the conclusion that

it ought not to be overlooked that the vocabulary of intercession is not restricted to prophets or prophet-like figures...the prophet is perhaps more accurately described as simply one figure among several who from time to time exercises the privilege of "praying for" another person.<sup>252</sup>

Thereby Balentine points to other notable intercessors such as Abraham (Gen. 18–19, 20:7), Nehemiah (Neh.1:6), and Job (Job 42:8, 10). Moreover, David and Hezekiah pray occasionally on behalf of the people (2 Sam. 24:17, 25:2, 2 Chr. 30:18).<sup>253</sup> One could also add Solomon's prayer at the temple inauguration (1 Ki.

<sup>248</sup> Von Rad (1933), 114, argues that in early times the cultic function of the prophet was intercession. Cf. Reventlow (1986), 229ff., Becker (2001), 142, 162.

<sup>249</sup> Becker (2001), 161.

<sup>250</sup> Hertzberg (1963), 63–74, Balentine (1981), 331–344, and (1984), 161.

<sup>251</sup> Based on a survey of three major verbs used to depict the act of intercession (פָּלַל, עָתָר, פָּנֵעַ), Balentine (1984), 162–164, provides an overview of a large number of OT intercession passages. Balentine is aware that he restricts his examination to the "technical vocabulary of intercession" and thereby regrettably brackets out passages such as Genesis 18, which do not display the typical terminology of intercession. Cf. Hesse (1951), 89–94.

<sup>252</sup> Balentine (1984), 164, 172.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Balentine (1984), 163, for fuller references.

8:22–53).<sup>254</sup>

The fact that the OT attributes intercessory prayers not only to the prophets, as Balentine rightly notes, but also to patriarchs, kings, and other notable leaders, does not disprove that it was not predominately the responsibility of the prophets. Hesse in his monograph on OT intercessory prayers evaluates the entire relevant OT data, and yet concludes that intercession is particularly the responsibility of the prophets, or figures who were regarded as such by the canon.<sup>255</sup> This is supported by Genesis 20:7, where Abraham is called a נביא, and as such, he prays for Abimelech (החפּלל בעד). Because Abraham does not typically bear the marks of the biblical prophets, it seems particularly significant that the writer clearly associates intercession with prophethood.<sup>256</sup> Although kings, priests, and other (wo)men of God act also as mediators and as such occasionally prayed on behalf of the people, it is fair to say that intercessory activity by itself does not occupy an essential place in their role.<sup>257</sup> By contrast, we would like to argue that intercessory prayer is usually intrinsic to the prophetic vocation.

The following references will endorse this. Samuel, the man of God who is mentioned alongside Moses as the outstanding intercessor of the OT (Jer. 15:1),<sup>258</sup> assures Israel in his final address that “far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you (החפּלל בעד, 1 Sam. 12:23).” Recognising the fact that chapter 12 (and farewell speeches in general<sup>259</sup>) is of outstanding importance in its immediate and wider canonical context,<sup>260</sup> it is certainly telling, as Seitz notes, “that much of this passage involves the prophet Samuel in an intercessory role (vv. 19–25).”<sup>261</sup> In context, Samuel’s assurance to pray for Israel comes as a surprise because Israel, though they plead for his intercession (1 Sam. 12:19), do not deserve it, for they have rejected God as king by asking for a human monarch (1 Sam. 8:7, 12:12–18). In spite of Israel’s appointment of a king, Samuel was apparently not at liberty to refuse Israel’s request for his advocacy. To put it differently, not to

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Scharbert (1984), 97–99.

<sup>255</sup> Hesse (1951), 46.

<sup>256</sup> MacDonald (2002), helpfully draws attention to the canonical relationship between Gen. 18:16ff. and 20:7.

<sup>257</sup> Jacob (1981), 206–207. Moreover, it might be advisable to distinguish between prayer for blessing and prayer to avert punishment. The latter, as Miller (1994), 266, has noted, is only found on the lips of prophetic figures.

<sup>258</sup> Although Samuel, not unlike Moses, fulfils a number of the biblical offices, such as priest (1 Sam. 7:9ff.), judge (7:6), seer (9:9), and prophet (3:20), it is as the latter that he emerges as the second legendary intercessor (cf. Jer. 15:1). So Jacob (1981), 208.

<sup>259</sup> Klein (1984), 119, on the basis of Samuel’s ongoing prayer ministry, prefers to talk of a theological aetiology for prophetic intercession rather than Samuel’s farewell.

<sup>260</sup> Usually farewell speeches summarise the most important features of a departing figure’s ministry. Cf. Jacob (1981), 210. Noth (1981), 5, argues that 1 Sam. 12, alongside other speeches of seminal figures, is a key passage in the unfolding of the Deuteronomistic history. The chapter wrestles with the challenges of a fundamental shift in Israel’s history; from theocracy and covenant to monarchy. Cf. Brueggemann (1990), 89ff.

<sup>261</sup> Seitz (1989), 8.

intercede for the sinful people, in spite of being a prophet, would be a sin in itself (cf. Ezek. 3:17–21, 33:8). This key passage strongly suggests that intercession “is an inextricable part of the prophetic role.”<sup>262</sup>

That intercession belongs to the fundamental responsibilities of the prophet is also clearly alluded to in Jeremiah 27:18, where commitment to intercession is presented as a benchmark of the true prophet.<sup>263</sup> According to Jeremiah, authentic prophets would not neglect their duty to intercede (פָּנֵעַ). Based on this verse, Hesse goes even so far as to say that: “Viel wichtiger und charakteristischer als die Heilsweissagung ist für den echten Propheten die Fürbitte.”<sup>264</sup> Similarly, but more explicitly, Ezekiel refers to the authentic prophet (as opposed to the false ones), as those who stand in the breach on behalf of the people (עֹמֵד בַּרֶּץ) and defend them from the wrath of God (Ezek. 13, 22, cf. § Excursus).

In sum, these passages strongly suggest that intercession is intrinsically linked to the prophetic ministry. Although intercession is also attributed to non-prophetic figures, the large majority of people who prayed on behalf of others, are either prophets or are closely associated with the prophetic role. We have noted that Balentine’s approach to intercessory prayers in the OT is ruled by linguistic categories. However, by limiting himself to the standard Hebrew prayer terminology, he misses some of the crucial passages on intercessory prayer which do not employ the expected vocabulary for prayer. For example, apart from a brief footnote, there is no reference to the important passages in Jeremiah 27:18 and Ezekiel 13, 22. As we have seen, all of them explicitly and intrinsically relate intercession to the prophet. Balentine also ignores Amos’ repeated attempt to persuade YHWH to reconsider Israel’s future (Am. 7:1–8).<sup>265</sup> Neither is there any mention of the suffering servant’s costly intercession (פָּנֵעַ, Isa. 53:12).<sup>266</sup> Apart from disregarding these important passages, Balentine’s approach is flawed by a more substantial mistake. He does not seem fully to appreciate that an important requirement for intercessory prayer is exclusively associated with the prophets, that is having access to God’s plans and decision making.<sup>267</sup>

Intercession belongs to the prophet’s role for the same reason that prophecy belongs to it. Prophets belong to Yhwh’s cabinet (Jeremiah 23:18). They thus know the cabinet’s decisions and are in a position to prophesy, but are also in a position to take part in its actual deliberations, and in particular to question plans announced by Yhwh. Prophets urge God to take mercy seriously as they urge people to take wrath seriously.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>262</sup> Seitz (1989), 8.

<sup>263</sup> In context, Jeremiah warns the priests not to listen to the false prophets who spread false hopes that the deported sacred vessels will be brought back. Rather, so Jeremiah, if they had true insight into the situation, they would pray for the safety of the remaining vessels.

<sup>264</sup> Hesse (1951), 47.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Brueggemann (1969), 385–399, Jeremias (1995), 98, Becker (2001), 143–165.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Seitz (2001), 172–174.

<sup>267</sup> In a postscript, Balentine (1984), 172–173, acknowledges that his conclusion might have been different, if he had taken more seriously the mediatory role of the prophet.

<sup>268</sup> Goldingay (1998), 266.

Jacob reinforces the same point:

Il (prophet) est le seul à vraiment connaître Dieu, à avoir pénétré dans son entourage et dans ses intentions, car “Le Seigneur Dieu ne fait rien sans révéler son secret à ses serviteurs les prophètes” (Am 3,7).<sup>269</sup>

Amos could plead for divine mercy because he was made privy to Israel’s forthcoming judgement (Amos 7:1–5).<sup>270</sup> Abraham could only intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah, after God had revealed to him His intentions (Gen. 18:17). Moses’ prayer for pardon, on his way down from the mountain, was only possible because YHWH did not hide his destructive plans from His servant (Ex. 32:7–14). Still more important, as we shall see, is the fact that Moses is intimately familiar with YHWH’s ultimate purposes (Ex. 6:2–8), and His name (cf. Nu. 14:17–19), on the basis of which he could challenge YHWH’s circumstantial wrath and pray for mercy.

Participating in the divine council is probably a synonym for standing in the presence of God.<sup>271</sup> As mentioned, biblical prophecy finds its classic exposition in Deuteronomy 5:23–31, in which context YHWH emphatically asks Moses to stay with Him (וְאַתָּה פֶּה עִמּוֹר עִמּוֹרִי, Deut. 5:31). Standing in YHWH’s presence connotes not only spatial proximity, but, as we shall see, also spiritual and moral closeness (cf. § 4.3.7). In other words, only those who find divine favour are elected into the divine council and are entrusted with the responsibility of sharing in the divine decision-making (cf. Ex. 33:11ff., Nu. 12:3ff.). It is important to recognise that Moses does not stand in YHWH’s presence for his own sake, but primarily for Israel’s sake and for the fulfilment of YHWH’s ultimate plans. In the context of the deuteronomic golden calf account, the twofold role comes beautifully to expression. Moses, after having been informed of Israel’s sin by YHWH (Deut. 9:12–14), graphically condemns their act in prophetic fashion by shattering the covenant tablets before Israel’s eyes. A time of intensive intercession on behalf of the trespassers follows (Deut. 9:18–20, 25–29). Moses’ prayer is succeeded by a further public act of destruction. Following the eradication of the idolatrous object, Moses confronts the people with divine authority, challenging them to make up their minds and to fully recommit themselves to YHWH, so that they remain in divine favour (Deut. 9:17, 21, 10:12ff.). In a similar vein in the context of 1 Samuel 12, Samuel’s ministry to Israel does not only consist of intercessory commitment, but also of teaching them “the good and right way” (v. 23). McCarter notes that Samuel

is assigned to play two roles corresponding to the two parts of Samuel’s pledge, as the people’s intercessor with Yahweh on the one hand and as the moral conscience of the kingdom on the other. These are the irreducible aspects of the prophetic office.<sup>272</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Jacob (1981), 207–208.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Jeremias (1995), 96–100.

<sup>271</sup> See Miller (1998), 229–232, for some reflections on the complex imagery of the divine council and its relation to prayer.

<sup>272</sup> (1980), 219.

### 3.1.4 Concluding Summary

In conclusion, we have argued that prophetic authority is by nature twofold. It includes the proclamation of YHWH's will (usually in the form of divine ultimata and judgement) and the advocacy of the sinful people before the divine throne. As Jeremias notes:

Als Fürsprecher Israels oder eines einzelnen Israeliten machten sie die jeweilige individuelle oder kollektive Not zu der ihren und brachten sie vor Jahwe, um ihn zur Abwendung der Not zu bewegen; als Mund Jahwes verkündeten sie dem Volk oder dessen Gliedern den Willen Jahwes. Beide Seiten prophetischer Vollmacht gehören von Haus aus eng zusammen.<sup>273</sup>

Both aspects have ultimately the same twofold goal, the good of the people and the fulfilment of God's plans. Both effective intercession and authoritative prophetic speech presuppose intimate knowledge of YHWH's plans and nature. Only when the intercessor has insight into the divine council can he, on the one hand, participate and influence the divine decision-making process, and, on the other hand, instruct or rebuke the people with divine authority.

If these are the main criteria of the genuine prophet, then it does not come as a surprise that the OT, Deuteronomy in particular, portrays Moses as the נביא of נבאים.<sup>274</sup> Although none of the deuteronomic passages which speak of Moses' unique prophetic prerogatives link it explicitly to his intercessory role (cf. Deut. 5:16ff., 18:15ff., 34:10), we have noted that the two are implicitly, but intrinsically, yoked together in the deuteronomic golden calf account (Deut. 9–10). It has become evident that in the book of Exodus the twofold role of the prophet is already clearly present in Moses' call narrative and his first prayer for the well-being of the people (Ex. 5:22–23). Moreover, we shall see that Moses' paradigmatic intercessory prayer in Numbers 14 is almost immediately preceded by a divine statement regarding Moses' unique access to the divine mind (Nu. 12:6–8, cf. § 5.4.2).

Having situated Moses' intercessory role in the wider canonical picture of prophethood and having identified some key aspects of the logic of prophetic intercessions, we are now in a more informed position to unfold the dynamics of Moses' prayers in the context of Israel's two prime sin accounts: The golden calf apostasy and the rebellion at Kadesh.

<sup>273</sup> Jeremias (1971), 309.

<sup>274</sup> Perlitt (1971), 599.



## Chapter Four

## Moses' Intercessory Prayers at Sinai (Ex. 32–34)

## 4.1 Introduction

Exodus 32–34 starts with Israel's apostasy in making and worshipping the golden calf which results in a divine death sentence (32:10<sup>275</sup>) and ends with the renewal of the divine-human covenant relationship (34:10ff.). This dramatic shift from YHWH's determination to destroy Israel to His pardon and resolve to restore the covenant relationship is largely due to Moses' persistent and skilful intercessory activity. It is the objective of this chapter to explore and analyse Moses' intercessory prayers as they are presented in Exodus 32–34.

Aurelius implicitly argues that the deuteronomic parallel account of the golden calf (Deut. 9–10) provides a better context for understanding Moses' intercessions, because prayer is not just one theme among several, but comes as the main focus (*die Hauptsache*) of the narrative.<sup>276</sup> Moses' prayer is indeed at the very heart of Deuteronomy 9–10, whereas Exodus 32–34 is, in addition to Moses' intercessions, arguably equally concerned with the theme of covenant breach and renewal, and the revelation of God's name. Having said that, the canon attributes more weight to the account in Exodus 32–34. Not only is it a matter of primary canonical position, but more importantly, by the logic of the text, Moses in Deuteronomy looks back and recapitulates past events in order to teach and warn the children of the wilderness generation (and in a sense every new generation) at the border of the promised land (Deut. 1, 9:1).<sup>277</sup> The golden calf incident and Moses' prayers are retold from his own perspective and obviously, as any good preacher would do, with a specific agenda (cf. Deut. 9:4–6, 10:12ff.). Exodus 32–34, by contrast, witnesses to the "actual" events at the mountain of God. This is not a historical statement, not least because Moses' first prayer in Exodus 32:7–14 is usually also ascribed to Deuteronomists, but is based on the logic of the canonical witness. Just as all the pillars of Israel's faith are closely associated with the mountain of God (i.e. the torah, the covenant ratification, the revelation of God's name, and the sanctuary)<sup>278</sup> so is

<sup>275</sup> All biblical references without specification in this chapter refer to the book of Exodus.

<sup>276</sup> Aurelius (1988), 6, cf. von Rad (1983<sup>4</sup>), 55: "Das Ringen Moses mit Gott war im älteren Bericht, wenn man von der großen Interpolation 2 Moses 32:9–14 absieht, weil sie erst deuteronomisch ist, nur ein Ereignis unter vielen; hier (Deuteronomy 9–10) dagegen steht es in der Mitte des Geschehens." Von Rad makes no reference to Moses' ongoing prayer in Exodus 33–34.

<sup>277</sup> The merging of different generations is a typical feature of Moses' paraenetic speeches and serves most likely the purpose of actualising significant events of the past for every new generation (cf. Deut. 5:3, 26:5–10). Cf. Childs (1979), 222.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Crüsemann (1996), 27–57, Levenson (1985), 15–19.

also Israel's account about its archetypal breach of covenant and Moses' successful restoration of it. The fact that YHWH's fullest self-disclosure comes as a result of Moses' persistent prayer surely adds to the importance of the Exodus account (34:6–7). It is perhaps the acute seriousness of Israel's sin and the extensive dialogue between YHWH and Moses, which make Exodus 32–34 the most detailed and intense treatment of intercessory prayer in the entire OT. Moses is said to have interceded four times on behalf of the sinful people in order to save them from YHWH's destructive wrath and to reconcile them to their God (32:11–13, 32:30–32, 33:12–23, and 34:9). The theme of Moses' persistent intercessory activity pervades the entire narrative.

This is not to deny that there are several other important themes running throughout the account, but given our objective and focus, to analyse Moses' intercessions and the portrayal of God, we will allow ourselves to overlook some of the important, though not directly related, themes of Exodus 32–34. This means that interesting questions such as the relationship between the covenant accomplished in chapter 24 and the renewed one in chapter 34 will not concern us directly.<sup>279</sup> Moreover, issues related to the golden calf, such as its making and destruction, and its historical and theological connections with 1 Kings 12, will not greatly affect our examination of Moses' prayers either.<sup>280</sup> Furthermore, the controversial discussion about the election of Levites and the meaning of Exodus 32:25–29 will also be bypassed.<sup>281</sup> Although these issues are all important for understanding the history behind the composition and for comprehending the narrative as a whole, engaging with these complex matters would deviate from our focus.<sup>282</sup> Once all these issues have been laid aside, full attention can be given to the dialogue between YHWH and Moses.

## 4.2 The Context

Exodus 32 begins by depicting the people impatiently awaiting Moses' return from the mountain. Thereby Exodus 32:1–6 clearly presupposes chapter 24 where YHWH summoned Moses up on the mountain in order to receive the tablets of stone with the divine law and commandment (24:12–18). Although God explicitly asked Moses to stay on the mountain, where he remained for forty days and forty nights (24:18),

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Westermann (1985<sup>2</sup>), 35–46, Blenkinsopp (1997), 109–126.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Noth (1959), Hahn (1981), Dohmen (1987<sup>2</sup>), Janzen (1990).

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Brisman (1999).

<sup>282</sup> The reader is referred to some of the recent major monographs which comprehensively address most of the exegetical issues contained in these chapters. Cf. Zenger (1971), Moberly (1983), Aurelius (1988), Renaud (1998). See also Brichto (1983), Houtman's (2000), massive Exodus commentary and the compilation of essays on Exodus 32–34 and Deuteronomy 9–10 edited by Köckert and Blum (2001).

in the eyes of the people it was to Moses' shame to let them wait (בּוֹשׁ, Pol.).<sup>283</sup> Probably due to his long absence, the people feel disoriented and turn to Aaron for help. They urge Moses' deputy (24:13) to make אֱלֹהִים to lead them on.

#### 4.2.1 Israel's Great Sin

As a result of Israel's coercive request,<sup>284</sup> Aaron fashions a golden bull–calf,<sup>285</sup> which the people immediately declare as their אֱלֹהִים who delivered them from Egypt (32:4)! The text suggests that Aaron sought to dedicate the young bull to YHWH by proclaiming a feast to God (v.5). The people, however, never explicitly associate YHWH with the bull–calf, but seem to ascribe a separate entity to their object of worship. This is enforced when YHWH judges them for worshipping and sacrificing to the bull as if it were another deity (32:7), and Moses' confession that Israel has made for themselves אֱלֹהִי זָהָב (32:31). Regardless whether the bull–calf was intended to symbolise YHWH, replaced Moses, functioned as God's footstool, or even represented another deity,<sup>286</sup> the final form of the text clearly condemns it in the strongest possible way.<sup>287</sup> From YHWH's urgent words to Moses we learn that Israel has clearly violated the covenant (32:7–10). By worshipping the bull–calf they have acted perversely (שָׁחָת, Pi.) and have turned aside from the divinely prescribed way (דָּרַךְ). In this context, the word דָּרַךְ (32:8) refers most likely back to the decalogue, in particular to the first two commandments: No other gods but YHWH, and no material images to represent God (20:3–4). The first two commandments are often understood to embody the essence of YHWH's requirement (cf. 20:4, 20:23).<sup>288</sup> Since already the decalogue presents the second commandment as an expansion of the first, rather than as a separate commandment (20:3–6), we are possibly not meant to exactly determine the nature of Israel's sin in producing the

<sup>283</sup> Traditionally בּוֹשׁ (perf. Pol.) was traced back to the root בּוֹשׁ and rendered with “to be put to shame” (BDB). More recently בּוֹשׁ is related to a separate root with the sense “to delay, to tarry” (HAL, THAT). Because of the ongoing discussion a synthesis is suggested in the sense of “it was to Moses' shame to linger.” Cf. Houtman (2000), 631. LXX: ἡσυχάζω “to delay.”

<sup>284</sup> The Hebrew wording suggests a certain tone of aggression and shows affinities with the *Murrgeschichten*. The same terminology (קָהַל עַל) is used in contexts where people assemble for rebellion, conflict or war. Cf. Nu. 16:3, 17:7, 20:2.

<sup>285</sup> The translation of the word עֵגֶל is not straightforward. Most translations render it as calf. In the light of ANE parallels and Ps. 106:19–20, which put עֵגֶל in parallelism with שׁוֹר, however, it might be more accurate to translate it as young bull. In the ANE, the bull was a widespread symbol for power, leadership, vitality, and fertility. Cf. Weinfeld, (1991), 424–426.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. Hahn (1981), Janzen (1990), 597–607.

<sup>287</sup> According to the second commandment, there is no image (פֶּסֶל) and no creature in the entire creation that represents YHWH in a worthy manner. After all, YHWH has not revealed Himself in any concrete shape. So far YHWH revealed Himself through the burning bush, the pillar of cloud and fire, and at Sinai YHWH spoke to Israel out of the fire. The book of Deuteronomy develops the Sinai theophany into a rational polemic against any form of images. Israel does not depend on images of YHWH but on His Word and Name (Deut. 4:9–20). See von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 229–230.

<sup>288</sup> Zimmerli (1963), 234–248.

bull–calf.<sup>289</sup>

Regardless of the exact identity of the calf, the “law of the altar” (20:23–26) is introduced with a clear prohibition: *לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ זָבֵחַ וְאֱלֹהִי כֶסֶף וְאֱלֹהִי זָהָב לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם*. This commandment is placed at the beginning of the book of covenant, where it serves as a kind of introduction, while in Exodus 24:7–8 we read how Moses took the book of covenant and proclaimed it in the hearing of Israel.<sup>290</sup> In response, the people solemnly declare to do and to observe all commandments set before them (24:3ff.). On the basis of a mutual agreement the covenant relationship was ratified. According to the canonical witness, there were only forty days between the accomplishment of the covenant and Israel's apostasy. Thus in the light of Exodus 24:3–8 the golden calf incident is clearly presented as a direct violation of the covenant relationship.

The canonical form suggests that Israel's apostasy takes place at the very moment YHWH finalised the covenant with Moses on the mountain (31:18). Scholarship has rightly recognised the enormous theological force of placing the story of the golden calf immediately after the tablets of the covenant had been handed over (*לָחַח הַעֲדָתוֹ*, 31:18) and after Moses had received instruction regarding the sanctuary for God. Thus the story of the golden calf produces, as Childs formulates it, a “rupture of enormous proportions.”<sup>291</sup> Barth spells out the theological significance of the incident:

What has happened has brought everything into question—the election, the grace, the covenant of God, the separation and divine mission and therefore the existence of Israel...so profoundly did that which Israel willed and did—its sin—run counter to that which God willed and did, that it seemed as though God could only renounce Israel in His anger and break off the connection which He had made.<sup>292</sup>

From a canonical perspective, it is evident that “mature” Israel was deeply aware of its sin. The juxtaposition of YHWH's explicit command not to make any images (20:4, 23) with the account of the golden calf (32:1–6) reflects Israel's acknowledgement of guilt and can be read as a kind of confession of sin (cf. Ps. 106:20). In many ways the golden calf account in all its complexity provides a kind of commentary on the first two commandments.<sup>293</sup> Although Exodus 32:1–6 may

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Zimmerli (1994<sup>2</sup>), 115–120.

<sup>290</sup> According to Childs (1996), 134, the decalogue in its canonical context, functions as a comprehensive summary of the Torah to which the succeeding stipulations serve as expansion and commentary.

<sup>291</sup> (1974), 579. By juxtaposing the golden calf incident with the divine instruction of how to build the sanctuary, the canonical text contrasts effectively the human made *אֱלֹהִים* with the divinely appointed means of mediating YHWH's presence among the people (29:42–46). Moreover, the divinely appointed sanctuary is to be built by voluntary contribution from the people in form of gold, silver, copper, etc (25:1–5). These striking parallels suggest strongly that the text intentionally juxtaposes the divinely appointed vehicle of YHWH's presence with the one chosen by the people. In other words, this juxtaposition seems to elucidate the function and nature of the golden calf. Just as the sanctuary, the calf possibly meant to mediate God's immanence and probably also to represent the transcendent God among the people. Cf. Sarna (1991), 202.

<sup>292</sup> Barth (1961<sup>2</sup>), 425.

<sup>293</sup> Cf. Von Rad (1960), 39–42, Childs (1985), 67.

have had originally a different meaning, in its present shape and position it has come to represent Israel's archetypal rebellion and apostasy.<sup>294</sup> Just as Exodus 32:1–6 exemplifies Israel's sin and apostasy, so Exodus 32:7–14 typifies Israel's understanding of YHWH's judgement, gracious nature, and the importance of prophetic intercession.<sup>295</sup>

#### 4.2.2 "Leave Me Alone...!" (32:7–10)

There is a sudden shift in the narrative from Israel's idolatrous worship at the foot of YHWH's mountain to a deadly serious dialogue between YHWH and Moses on the mountain. Provoked to blazing wrath, YHWH not only condemns Israel's deed, but also immediately distances Himself from *His* people by informing Moses that "*Your* people have acted perversely." In a conclusive statement, Israel is branded as a stiff-necked people (32:9),<sup>296</sup> and Moses is urged to leave YHWH alone (הִנִּיחָה לִי), so that He can execute His intended judgement and consume the sinful people (אֲכַל). Instead YHWH offers Moses to become the channel of His promise by making him into a great people (v. 10).

וַעֲתָה הִנִּיחָה לִי יִתְחַר־אֲפִי בָהֶם וְאֲכַלֵּם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל (32:10)

Having been told in the clearest possible way not to interfere with YHWH's decision, Moses not only disobeys and challenges the divine intention, but also asks YHWH to turn from His burning anger and change His plans (32:12). This immediately raises the question on what grounds Moses dares to challenge YHWH's request and will? Is it because he feels compelled to protest against YHWH's justice in destroying His people?<sup>297</sup> Or is it rather because Moses does not want to become the new Patriarch of Israel? Does he think that YHWH's circumstantial wrath stands in tension with God's compassion and ultimate goals? Besides these possible underlying reasons, there is a long Jewish and Christian tradition which suggests that YHWH's command to be left alone paradoxically contains an invitation to intercede for the sinful people. So where do all these suggestions leave us in our quest for a better understanding of the dynamics of verses 10ff?

The divine imperative to be left alone and Moses' audacious response has puzzled interpreters throughout history. Part of the problem is due to the fact that there is no direct linguistic comparison in Scripture (with YHWH as subject), which could assist

<sup>294</sup> It is widely held that behind Exodus 32:1–6 lies the aetiology of the Bethel sanctuary where bull images and their worship had a legitimate place in YHWH religion. Buber (1994<sup>4</sup>c), 202: "die statt der Lade den tierischen Träger beglaubigte" (cf. 1 Ki. 12:25–32). Cf. Hahn (1981), 212f., 338ff., for an overview of traditio-critical suggestions.

<sup>295</sup> Moberly (1983), 52.

<sup>296</sup> The term עַם־קָשָׁה־עֵרֶךְ introduces here a key motif in Exodus 32–34 (cf. 33:3, 5, 34:9). Israel's stubbornness (i.e. failure to trust and obey God) is the very reason YHWH refuses to accompany them later on. We shall discuss the term more fully in the context of Moses' final prayer (34:9). Verse 9 is omitted by LXX.

<sup>297</sup> Balentine (1993), 136–137.

us in our interpretation of הִנִּיחָה לִי.<sup>298</sup> The perplexing expression is usually translated along the following lines: “let me rest, let me be,<sup>299</sup> let me alone!,<sup>300</sup> do not interfere with me.”<sup>301</sup> Perhaps the closest synonym is found in the deuteronomic parallel account which reads הִרְךָ מִמֶּנִּי (Deut. 9:14).<sup>302</sup> Translated as: “Desist from me (lit: relax, slacken [sc. thy hand] from me,”<sup>303</sup> “loosen [your grip] from me.”<sup>304</sup> Although two distinct Hebrew expressions are employed, the LXX employs the same verb ἐλάω.<sup>305</sup> Although a comparison of the various translations of the two Hebrew idioms suggests a similar semantic domain, Davidson is one of few who makes something of the difference between the two accounts. He argues that the Exodus wording is sharper and more offensive. He translates it with “leave me alone” while the deuteronomic command with “let me be.”<sup>306</sup>

Davidson's suggestion that YHWH's demand to be left alone in Exodus is sharper and more offensive has to be seen in the light of his larger comparison between the Exodus and Deuteronomy version of YHWH's dialogue with Moses. He notes that Moses' attempt to appease the enraged YHWH in Exodus (חלה, cf. 32:11), is replaced in Deuteronomy by a neutral term “I prayed to the Lord (פלל, Deut. 9:26).” Furthermore, he observes that the penetrating למה—questions in Moses' Exodus prayer (32:11–12) becomes a moderate plea “not to destroy the people...” (Deut. 9:26) and a “shy” “otherwise the Egyptians will say...(Deut. 9:28).” Finally, Davidson draws attention to Moses' decisive request to turn from the burning anger (שוב מחרון אפך) and to “repent” of the intended evil judgement (והנחם על־הרעה לעמך) (32:12).<sup>307</sup> The different tone of Moses' prayer prompts Davidson to question the widely held view that the Exodus tradition is deuteronomic. In fact, he suggests that the deuteronomic version reads like “an early attempt to make the Exodus tradition more theologically acceptable.”<sup>308</sup> He continues: “The disturbing urgency of the Exodus tradition has disappeared; protest has been transformed into respectful plea.”<sup>309</sup> These are obviously historical evaluations with a theological interest, and as such they are helpful. Davidson, however, does not seem to fully appreciate the logic and nature of the deuteronomic account. Although he notes that the setting of Moses' prayer in Deuteronomy is different, he contents himself with a juxtaposition of the

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Seybold (1983), 407. Same Hebrew form הִנִּיחָה לִי + ל (Hiph. Impv. + paragogic ה) occurs in 2 Sam. 16:11, 2 Ki. 23:18.

<sup>299</sup> Weinfeld (1991), 402.

<sup>300</sup> Childs (1974), 554.

<sup>301</sup> Durham (1991), 423

<sup>302</sup> הִרְךָ + מִן (Hiph. impv.) “release from.”

<sup>303</sup> Driver (1895), 114.

<sup>304</sup> Weinfeld (1991), 402, Rose (1994), 508: “Laß [deine Hände] niedersinken von mir.”

<sup>305</sup> 32:10: καὶ νῦν ἑάσόν με Deut. 9:14: ἑάσόν με: “allow me.”

<sup>306</sup> Davidson (1986), 71–72.

<sup>307</sup> One could add that Moses' immediate prayer opposition in Exodus (32:11–13) stands in tension with Moses' immediate silent descent from the mountain in Deuteronomy (9:15).

<sup>308</sup> Davidson (1986), 72.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 72–73.

two versions. If one takes seriously that Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11 by its own logic is a retrospective account of Israel's rebellion from Moses' own perspective, then it seems natural that Moses does not recount the event with the freshness and urgency of the original prayer (which by the logic of the canon is presented in Exodus). Just as there is a difference in rhetoric between being involved in an accident and reporting it with hindsight (not everybody people would re-enact the *oohs* and *aahs* of shock and pain), so the alarming and penetrating "why-questions" would not necessarily be part of a recapitulation of a previous event.

In sum, it makes good sense that the deuteronomic version has blunted the alarming edge from Moses' prayer and possibly from YHWH's original command. Regardless of the exact nuance of YHWH's controversial claim, both versions imply that Moses has somehow the potential to restrain God from executing His destructive intentions.<sup>310</sup>

The disturbing notion that Moses is capable of "physically" holding back God from executing His judgement has long been noticed by Jewish interpreters. Rabbi Awahu comments:

Wenn der Vers nicht geschrieben wäre, so wäre es unmöglich, ihn zu sagen. Dies lehrt, daß Mose den Heiligen, gelobt sei er, festhielt, wie ein Mensch seinen Freund am Gewand festhält, und vor ihm sagte: Herr der Welt, ich lasse dich nicht, bis du ihnen vergeben und verziehen hast.<sup>311</sup>

Probably disturbed by the anthropomorphism that YHWH has to be left alone, several Targumim paraphrase verse 10 along the following lines. Onqelos: "So now, let go of your prayer from before Me that My anger may become strong against them..." Neofiti: "...refrain yourself from beseeching mercy for them before me..."<sup>312</sup> Rashi correctly observes that the text does not mention any prayer prior to verse 11. He argues that "let Me alone" implies a refusal to Moses' entreaty. Thereby, so Rashi, YHWH "opened the door to him (offered him a suggestion intimating to him that if he prayed for them He would not destroy them)."<sup>313</sup> Jacob affirms the idea that *Let Me alone* means actually *don't let Me alone*, and is paradoxically a summon

<sup>310</sup> We shall see that Numbers 14:12 exhibits the same logic by saying that YHWH's judgement is intrinsically connected with the mediator's response.

<sup>311</sup> *Talmut* (1999), 142.

<sup>312</sup> See Bibliography for details of translations.

<sup>313</sup> Rashi (1946), 181. The perception that YHWH is actually implicitly intimating Moses to intercede for Israel comes well to expression in a midrash by Shemot Rabbah (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1959), 42:9, cited from Muffs (1992), 34.

God said to Moses..., "Let me at them, and my anger will rest on them and I will get rid of them." Is Moses holding back God's hand, so that God must say "Let go of me"? What is this like? A king became angry at his son, placed him in a small room, and was about to hit him. At the same time the king cried out from the room, and was about to hit him. The prince's teacher was standing outside, and said to himself, "The king and his son are in the room. Why does the king say 'stop me'? It must be that the king wants me to go into the room and effect a reconciliation between him and his son. That's why the king is crying, 'Stop me.'" In a similar way, God said to Moses, "Let Me at them." Moses said, "Because God wants me to defend Israel, He says, 'Let Me at them.'" And Moses immediately interceded for them.

to persuade YHWH not to destroy Israel. Jacob develops the idea of an implicit invitation to intercede by remarking that YHWH could have shut the door and said; “Enough, do not speak of the matter anymore,” as he did when Moses requested permission to enter the promised land (Deut. 3:26). Here, however, Jacob detects a subtle divine invitation and expectation that His servant-leader, Moses, will intercede.<sup>314</sup> According to Jacob, God not only encourages Moses to intercede for Israel by increasing his self-confidence (לְגֹי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), but even provides him with a persuasive argument to counter His anger by reminding him of the promise made to the patriarchs (cf. Gen. 12:2, Ex. 32:13).<sup>315</sup> Before we evaluate these Jewish interpretations, we look at some prominent Christian readings.

Calvin argues that YHWH's statement to be left alone, implies that the divine decision depends to some degree on Moses.

(YHWH) He asks of Moses to let Him alone. Now what does this mean? Is it not that, unless he should obtain a truce from a human being, He will not be able freely to execute His vengeance?...He declares his high estimation of His servant, to whose prayers He pays such deference as to say that they are a hindrance to him.<sup>316</sup>

Moreover, Calvin is in agreement with the Rabbis in understanding YHWH's denunciation as an implicit invitation to intercede for Israel. In addition, the reformer argues that YHWH's destructive intentions present the “sharpest and sorest trial of the faith of Moses” because God seemed to contradict Himself and to depart from His covenant. Calvin explores this apparent divine contradiction and seeks to establish some criteria of discernment when the “Word appears to be at issue with itself.” Thereby he refers to Genesis 22 as an example and suggests that Moses is confronted with a similar situation as was Abraham.

He (Abraham) heard from God's own mouth, “In Isaac shall they seed be called;” he is afterwards commanded to slay him...The same thing is here recorded of Moses, before whom God sets a kind of contradiction in His Word, when He declares that He has the intention of destroying that people, to which He had promised the land of Canaan.<sup>317</sup>

Although YHWH's intention seems to go, on one level, against His words and covenant, Moses, with the help of the Spirit, held fast to what YHWH had once revealed to him. According to Calvin, the covenant (which he understands as an eternal bond) constitutes the base line for Moses' faith and prayer.

It is not our intention to assess Calvin's rich theological exegesis in detail. We will indirectly interact with Calvin's underlying presupposition of God's eternal covenant in our discussion on Moses' appeal to Israel's special status and to the promise made to the patriarchs (32:11–13). Of particular interest remains Calvin's interpretation of YHWH's demand to be left alone. As noted, he senses in this request a divine testing of Moses' faith, while at the same time a means to provoke Moses to pray more

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Weinfeld (1991), 410.

<sup>315</sup> Jacob (1997), 931, cf. Childs (1974), 567–568.

<sup>316</sup> Calvin (1854), 341.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 340.



earnestly. The latter aspect is not only congruent with the Rabbinic interpretation above, but also raises the critical interrelation between Moses' prayer and YHWH's actual decision making. Calvin denies the possibility that God was not serious, or even deceitful when he announced His intention to destroy sinful Israel. According to him, there is a delicate line between YHWH's providence and Moses' prayer. God "quickens His mind to be more earnest in prayer, even as Moses himself was led in that direction by the secret influence of the Spirit."<sup>318</sup>

Some of Calvin's leading ideas and theological presupposition are taken up by Keil, such as the underlying theological assumption of God's providence, His omniscience, and unchanging promise. Moreover, Keil also understands YHWH's request to leave Him alone as a divine test. Although Keil upholds the unchangeability of God's promise to the patriarchs, he highlights the divine contingency plan to fulfil the promise through Moses:

When God says to Moses, "*Leave Me, allow Me, that My wrath may burn,*"...God puts the fate of the nation into the hand of Moses...This condescension on the part of God, which placed the preservation or destruction of Israel in the hands of Moses, coupled with a promise, which left the fullest freedom to his decision, viz., that after the destruction of the people he should himself be made a great nation, constituted a great test for Moses, whether he would be willing to give up his own people, laden as they were with guilt, at the price of his own exaltation. And Moses stood the test...But what if Moses had not stood the test, had not offered his soul for the preservation of his people, as he is said to have done in v. 32? Would God in that case have thought him fit to make into a great nation? Unquestionably, if this had occurred, he would not have proved himself fit or worthy of such a call; but as God does not call those who are fit and worthy in themselves, for the accomplishment of His purposes of salvation, but chooses rather the unworthy, and makes them fit for His purposes (2 Cor. 3:5, 6), He might have made even Moses into a great nation. The possibility of such a thing, however, is altogether an abstract thought: the case supposed could not possibly have occurred, since God knows the hearts of His servants, and foresees what they will do, though, notwithstanding His omniscience, He gives to human freedom room enough for self-determination, that He may test the fidelity of His servants. No human speculation, however, can fully explain the conflict between divine providence and human freedom.<sup>319</sup>

Houtman criticises Keil's perception of a divine test of which the outcome is already determined in God's providence. Houtman takes this to mean that YHWH in His anger and rebuke of Moses had already decided what to do regardless of Moses' choice.<sup>320</sup> The "much more obvious explanation," according to Houtman, is that YHWH "expressly forbids Moses to intervene on behalf of Israel, because he is fully determined to carry out his plan." Thus he interprets YHWH's "repentance" (נחם) in verse 14 at face value and reaches the conclusion that "a human being can change YHWH's mind." In other words, Houtman also rails against any interpretation which detects an implicit divine invitation to pray in verse 10. He concludes:

After reading 32:10 only one conclusion seems possible: the break with and the destruction of Israel are unavoidable. That YHWH might still change his mind appears out of the question.

<sup>318</sup> Calvin (1854), 340.

<sup>319</sup> Keil (1864), 223–224.

<sup>320</sup> Houtman (2000), 647.

After all, he emphatically forbids Moses to defend Israel. Furthermore, he removes whatever residual impulse Moses might still have to plead for his people, by holding out to him the promise that he is predestined to be the patriarch of the people that are going to take Israel's place as people of YHWH. Given that kind of prospect, who would still want to put in a good word for the so totally corrupt Israel?<sup>321</sup>

Davidson's reading of verse 10 is not unlike that of Houtman, he also understands YHWH's destructive intentions as determined. According to Davidson, it is Moses' audacious refusal of what has been presented to him which "calls forth the divine response."<sup>322</sup> In their understanding YHWH's intention to make a new start with Moses does not come as a subtle invitation or encouragement (by way of increasing Moses' confidence and status) to object to YHWH's destructive intention, but as a kind of divine assurance that the fulfilment of the promise is not endangered, but could come to its fulfilment through Moses.

After this wide-ranging overview, how is one best to evaluate verse 10? On one level, one can appreciate why Houtman and Davidson emphasise that the concept of change of mind only makes sense, if there is a genuine act of persuasion happening between verses 10–14. In other words, at face value it is not easy to reconcile the notion of verse 10 containing a subtle divine invitation to intercede and verse 14 speaking of a change of divine will. After all, how could something willed by YHWH (invitation) lead to His repentance or change of mind, if it was in tune with the divine mind in the first place? On a different level, however, one can agree with some certainty with all those interpreters who argue that YHWH, by asking Moses to leave him alone in His wrath, makes the judgement to some degree dependent on Moses' agreement, even if only in the form of silent consent.<sup>323</sup> As Jacob said, YHWH could have shut the door and gone ahead with His intentions without any consultation of Moses. To be more precise, by telling Moses to leave Him, He implicitly presents Him with the option *not* to leave Him and to oppose the divine intention. The same applies to YHWH's offer to make a new start with Moses. In other words, YHWH makes Himself vulnerable to Moses' decision. The fate of Israel is clearly entrusted to him (cf. Nu. 12:7). This unique freedom given to Moses could be further underlined with a brief comparison with Noah. Given the affinities between the flood narrative and Exodus 32–34,<sup>324</sup> it is important for our purposes to note that in contrast to Moses, Noah was not given any indication that the execution of the judgement was in any way within the reach of his influence. Although Noah was informed about the forthcoming flood (Gen. 6:13ff), he was simply chosen as the divinely favoured medium to make a new beginning with humanity (Gen. 6:8, 18, 7:1). Thus it is surely significant that YHWH makes His intentions vulnerable to the decision of Moses. If he objects to YHWH's intention and refuses to become the

<sup>321</sup> Houtman (2000), 647.

<sup>322</sup> Davidson (1986), 71–72.

<sup>323</sup> Balentine (1993), 136.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. Moberly (1983), 91–92.

channel of the divine promise, there is no immediate option available to YHWH to realise the outstanding promise.

Having followed the logic of the verse, one can appreciate why numerous interpreters believe that they hear a paradoxical invitation to intercede in verse 10.<sup>325</sup> Paradoxical because, on the one hand, YHWH urges Moses to leave Him alone so that He can judge His people and, on the other hand, He makes the consummation of the people dependent on whether Moses is in agreement with His intentions and whether he is willing to become the new patriarch or not. This leaves us with the apparent tension between an invitation by prohibition and YHWH's change of mind (32:10, 14).

It is well possible that the dynamics of Exodus 32:10–14 are somewhat analogous to the basic logic of Hebrew prophecy.<sup>326</sup> Just as YHWH's initial utterance to Moses is adversarial and provocative, so prophetic oracles are usually declared in confrontational language in order to provoke a response from the addressed party (cf. Ezek. 33:1–9). "This responsive dynamic of prophecy is set out as a basic axiom in key prophetic texts such as Jer. 18:1–12 (esp. 7–10)."<sup>327</sup>

At one moment I may declare concerning a nation...that I will...destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil (שוב מרעה), I will change my mind about the disaster (נחם על-הרעה) that I intended to bring on it (Jer. 18:7ff.).

With some qualification one could argue that the dynamics between God and Moses are similar to that of prophet and people. Not so much in the sense that YHWH expects Moses to repent (though he confesses Israel's sin and even identifies himself with their sin in subsequent prayers, 32:31, 34:9), but that He seeks to engage Moses with the fundamental tension between Israel's sinful ways and His exclusive and yet wholesome demands. If such an understanding is anywhere near the dynamics of Exodus 32:10–14, that would suggest that YHWH's initial reaction, though genuine, is exploratory in character and has not "reached an irretrievable point."<sup>328</sup> In fact, that would imply that just as a literal fulfilment of a prophetic warning is in some way against YHWH's will (cf. Ezek. 33:1ff., esp. v. 11), so is YHWH's warning about Israel's destruction to Moses in a fundamental way opposed to His salvific will for them.<sup>329</sup> The understanding that the devastation of Israel goes against YHWH's will

<sup>325</sup> Balentine (1993), 136, speaks here of a form of "invitation by prohibition."

<sup>326</sup> Although it is disputed whether all biblical prophetic pronouncements of judgement ideally intend to evoke repentance (the intention of prophecy influenced by the Deuteronomists) and lead to a change of heart, or whether some, particularly 8th century prophets, simply announced inexorable doom (even Isa. 6:9–10 presupposes the understanding of repentance), from a canonical perspective, prophetic utterances point beyond their original intention, and have the potential to effect some kind of response. In other words, a prophetic judgement, announced in the past may have had originally one purpose, in its canonical context it seeks to provoke repentance and obedience from later generations. Cf. Houston (1993), 167–188.

<sup>327</sup> Moberly (2003a), 8. Cf. Jonah 3:1–10.

<sup>328</sup> Fretheim (1991), 283.

<sup>329</sup> Fretheim (1988), 61, plays with words to make the point clear; "God's will is done, it would seem, when prophecies of judgment fail...In other words, God hopes to reverse himself."

and that He somehow expects, possibly even provokes, Moses to oppose Him is further endorsed by Psalm 106:23, an important and illuminating inner-biblical interpretation of the logic of Moses' intercession.

Therefore he said he would destroy them-had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach (עָמַד בַּפֶּרֶץ לְפָנָיו) before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them (Ps. 106:23).

Although the image of a breached city wall introduces strictly speaking anachronistic and foreign categories when it comes to describe Moses' intercessory activity in the wilderness, we shall argue that the metaphor of עָמַד בַּפֶּרֶץ not only accurately depicts the dynamics of Moses' prayer(s) as envisaged by Exodus 32:10ff. (and Nu. 14:12), but also that it sheds further light on the logic underlying the tense dialogues between Moses and YHWH. Psalm 106:23 stands in close conceptual and linguistic association with another important passage in Ezekiel (Ezek. 22:30, cf. 13:5) where one finds some of the most profound insights into the logic of prophetic intercession.<sup>330</sup> Ezekiel 22:30 explicitly states that YHWH expects and in some sense invites the prophetic mediator to make a case for Israel and thereby defend them from the justified divine wrath.

And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land (וְעָמַד בַּפֶּרֶץ לְפָנַי בְּעַד הָאָרֶץ), so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one (Ezek. 22:30).

Ezekiel 22:30 suggests that the justified destruction of Israel goes somehow against God's nature and plan, otherwise He would not look for a faithful mediator who would defend the people from the divine wrath.<sup>331</sup> Even at the peak of His anger YHWH hopes that His mediator would oppose Him and fend off the divine attack.<sup>332</sup> Needless to say there are important conceptual parallels with Exodus 32:10–14, not least because Moses is presented in archetypal prophetic categories himself. In the following excursus we shall see that the metaphor עָמַד בַּפֶּרֶץ sheds considerable light on the dynamics of Moses' intercessory prayer.

### Excursus: "Standing in the Breach" (עָמַד בַּפֶּרֶץ)

#### i) The Metaphor

According to von Rad, the essentials of the prophetic vocation are summarised in the imagery of standing in the breach.<sup>333</sup> The metaphor originates in war imagery.<sup>334</sup> Cities were fortified by a wall to ensure security and stability from any outside threat. Needless to say, once a wall was breached, the safety of the city would be

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Miller (1998), 218–219.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. von Rad (1933), 109–122.

<sup>332</sup> Cf. Muffs (1992), 31.

<sup>333</sup> von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 430.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 243.

significantly weakened and made vulnerable to intruders.<sup>335</sup> Henceforth during siege the breached area would require special attention in order to prevent invasion and destruction.

In the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction, Ezekiel applies the image of the fractured wall to an ethically corrupt Israel, whose "moral wall" is severely breached. He provides manifold reasons for the disaster and accuses the leaders of Israel for numerous moral offences (cf. Ezek. 13:4–5, 22:6, 23–29). To press the metaphor a little further, one could say that living in a right relationship with YHWH would provide Israel with an unconquerable wall (cf. Pss. 46:8, 12, 61:4, Pr. 14:26). Israel's sins, however, have not only breached the wall, but have also provoked the wrath of YHWH. Thus YHWH becomes Israel's "enemy," His wrath, metaphorically speaking, penetrates through the cracked wall and causes destruction (cf. Isa. 5:5 Lam. 2:2–8, Ezek. 13:10–15).<sup>336</sup>

#### *ii) Mouth of God and Advocate of the People*

According to Ezekiel 13:5, it is the prophet's role and duty to stand in the damaged wall and fence off YHWH's destructive anger.

You (false prophets) have not gone up into the breaches (לֹא עָלִיתֶם בַּפְּרָצוֹת), or repaired a wall for the house of Israel, so that it might stand in battle on the day of the LORD.

Hence the prophet is ideally perceived as a brave warrior, who wrestles with YHWH with the weapon of prayer (Ezek. 22:30). Thereby the prophetic mediator exposes himself somehow to the wrath of God and seeks to protect (with his life) the sinful people.<sup>337</sup> Standing in the breach at the time of onslaught, however, is only a temporary solution as it were. Ezekiel 13:5 suggests that the prophet is also responsible for the repairing of the wall and make it strong again. The "wall of being in right relationship with YHWH" can only be repaired by drawing attention to the cracks in it and by warning of the dangers of a weakened wall. By contrast the false prophets, Ezekiel says:

follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! 4 Your prophets have been like jackals (כְּשֵׁעָלִים) among ruins, O Israel. 5 You have not gone up into the breaches...(Ezek. 13:3–5).

Just as the jackals have no sense for the disaster, in fact they profit from it by making the ruined walls their habitat, so the prophets benefit from a ruined Israel and feel at

<sup>335</sup> Conrad (1989), 768–769, cf. Hesse (1951), 56ff.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Conrad (1989), 769.

<sup>337</sup> Schroer (1998), 16–23, suggests that the divine wrath would not be directed towards or absorbed by the "breach-stander." Thus he reckons that the prophet is not the substitutionary "object of divine wrath for the sake of Israel," rather he suggests, by acting bravely as a representative of the sinful people (through intercession), wrath would be turned away and the breach filled. Given the fact that intercession (standing in the breach) and call to change of heart (building the wall) come as one package, it seems safer to say that intercession freezes the situation (with appeal to YHWH's great patience), as it were, and provides for the condemned party a new chance to respond to the prophet's warning. Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 285–287, 429–431.

home in it. Why? Because, so argues Eichrodt, in a volatile political situation their status would be raised, people would readily listen to them and thereby they could make a good living.<sup>338</sup> The difference between the false and the genuine prophets is further pondered by Jeremiah who accuses the false prophets for remaining quiet in the face of corruption. As a result no one turns from wickedness (Jer. 23:14). Jeremiah reaches the conclusion that God never sent these prophets.

if they had stood in my council (עֲמָדִי בְּסוּדִי), then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings (Jer. 23:22).

The false prophets do not test the wall, they might not even realise that the wall is breached (cf. Ezek. 22:30). The genuine prophet by contrast knows the mind of God (member of the divine council) draws fervent attention to the danger of a broken wall and seeks to repair it. By implication, the prophet cannot save those who ignore his warning in the long term (cf. Ezek. 3:17–21, 33:5, 1 Sam. 12:23–25).<sup>339</sup> In other words, in the long run only genuine repentance of the sinful party and the practise of righteousness can fill the breaches and so keep YHWH's wrath at bay.<sup>340</sup> What is only implied in Ezekiel 13:1ff. and 22:1–31, is illuminatingly spelt out in Isaiah 58:12, which is one of the few passages in scripture, which take up the metaphor of the breached wall.

10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness...11 The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places...12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach (יִגְדֵר פְּרִיץ, Isa. 58:10–12).

According to Miller, “the work of justice and compassion in the human community is an activity that is comparable to intercession for the sinful community.” They are comparable because both activities reflect “the nature and activity of God.”<sup>341</sup> We shall see that Moses' prophetic intercessory prayers, although they appear to oppose YHWH on one level, on another they are profoundly in tune with YHWH's will and nature. With regard to the work of justice and compassion, it is interesting that in the deuteronomic parallel account, Moses after having achieved “temporary” pardon for the people through an intense time of intercession (Deut. 9:19), goes on to prophetically summon the people to fear YHWH and to love their neighbours. In other words, by emulating the divine attributes of mercy and compassion, Israel participates in YHWH's cause for His people (Deut. 10:12–22). Restoring a breached wall by doing righteous community work, however, is a committed long term process. When the hour of destruction is advanced, it is the prophets' duty to

<sup>338</sup> Eichrodt (1996<sup>5</sup>), 163–164.

<sup>339</sup> Von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 430. We shall see that the same dynamic applies to the children of the wilderness generation when they are given the choice to do better than their rebellious parents (Nu. 32:7ff., § 5.4.6).

<sup>340</sup> Cf. Isa. 5:1–7. Schroeder (1998), 19.

<sup>341</sup> Miller (1998), 220.

temporarily stand in the breach in prayer before the gradual process of restoration can be resumed.

In sum, the metaphor in its wider sense again gives expression to two major roles of the genuine prophet, that of intercession (standing in the breach) and that of warning (drawing attention to the cracks). Both aspects have peace and reconciliation in mind (the rebuilding of the wall).<sup>342</sup> We shall see and argue that Exodus 32–34 (and Deut. 9–10) gives expression to this dynamic.<sup>343</sup> First, Moses defends the breached wall from YHWH's destructive wrath (32:11–13, cf. Nu. 14:12, Deut. 9:19). Secondly, after having successfully fended off the initial attack (32:14, 32:30ff., Nu. 14:20, Deut. 10:10–11), Moses urges Israel (in the name of YHWH) to repair the wall by recommitting themselves to the terms of the covenant (34:11ff., cf. Deut. 10:12–22). Thus Ezekiel 22:30 becomes via Psalm 106:23 an important intertextual hermeneutical help to understanding Moses' intercessory prayers.

### 4.3 First Prayer: "Faithful Disagreement"

Moses steps into the "breach" and entreats (חלה) the enraged God. Although the general meaning of *חלה* is clear, the exact nuances of *חלה* in the Piel remains under discussion.<sup>344</sup> The Piel is possibly derived from the Qal (to be weak), hence "to make weak, to soften, to appease."<sup>345</sup> With the divine countenance as its object, according to Cassuto, it means "to endeavour to calm and soften the angry countenance."<sup>346</sup> The idiom *חלה פנים* in Piel occurs several times in the context of petitionary prayers (cf. 1 Ki. 13:6, 2 Ki. 13:4, Jer. 26:19 etc.). Although none of the references provide sufficient clues so as to reach an exact rendering of the idiom, it seems reasonable in this context to argue that it entails the sense of "entreating with view to pacify." How does Moses appease his God? The text does not explicitly tell us.<sup>347</sup> It seems likely, however, that Moses' subsequent prayer–dialogue had a pacifying effect on YHWH which eventually resulted in the withdrawal of His destructive intentions (v. 14). This would be endorsed by Deuteronomy 9:26 where instead of *חלה פנים* one finds the comment that Moses prayed to YHWH (*וַאֲתַפְּלֵל אֶל־יְהוָה*).<sup>348</sup>

<sup>342</sup> Von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 430.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Jeremias (1971), 320.

<sup>344</sup> See Seybold (1983), 407–408, for underlying reasons which make the exact notion of the formulaic usage difficult.

<sup>345</sup> Cf. HAL, 317, Ap-Thomas (1956), 239f, Hesse (1951), 90: "Gott zu besänftigen suchen, um Gnade anflehen," Scharbert (1960), 323: "Jahwes Antlitz glätten/streicheln."

<sup>346</sup> Cf. Cassuto (1967), 415, Jacob (1997), 932. Durham (1991), 425: "make sweet or pleasant the face of."

<sup>347</sup> In the deuteronomistic parallel account it is said that Moses prostrated himself before God for forty days and forty nights without any food and water (Deut. 9:9, 18, 25). The practice of fasting is often perceived as having an appeasing effect on God.

<sup>348</sup> This is endorsed by the only other passage where the idiom (*חלה פנים*) occurs in the context of an

The logic of Moses' argumentation, as we shall see, is very similar to his prayer in Numbers 14:13–19 (cf. Deut. 9:25–29). He questions YHWH's intention on three grounds: i) the status of Israel and the rationale of the divine will (v. 11), ii) divine reputation (v. 12), iii) the promise made to the patriarchs (v. 13). Two of the three questions are introduced by and phrased as a "למה-question." The penetrating למה is very dominant in the psalms of lament and often carries strong connotations of accusation (cf. § 5.4.1.2).<sup>349</sup> According to Balentine, the "למה-questions" in Moses' prayer raises, similar to the laments, the concern of divine justice, an appeal to God against God.<sup>350</sup> As we have noted (§ 1.2.5), he infers from Moses' audacious opposition that God's plan is unacceptable and probably to a degree incomprehensible to Moses.<sup>351</sup> Balentine argues that Moses' protest is underlined by the repetitive description of YHWH's intention as evil (רעה).<sup>352</sup> He allocates Moses' prayer(s), alongside Jeremiah's confessions, the Lament Psalms and others, to a category where divine justice is (often) perceived as "unjust, capricious, and unresponsive."<sup>353</sup>

Given the fact that Israel agreed to enter with YHWH a covenant relationship which strictly condemns the worship of any other gods and the fabrication of images (cf. 20:3–5, 21:23), it is questionable whether Balentine has allocated Moses' prayer in Exodus 32 to the right category. After all the people have breached the first two commandments and are thus guilty of the chief sin. To be more precise, according to the covenant Israel's judgement is well deserved. Moreover, Balentine's reading of רעה as evil poses a related problem. In the light of YHWH's justified judgement, it is unfortunate to render רעה in verse 12b and 14 with evil, a designation which has clear moral undertones. As the LXX already recognised, the term רעה in this context should rather be rendered with disaster or judgement than with moral evil.<sup>354</sup> This is further supported by the two verbs employed in verse 14 to describe YHWH's intention to do רעה (עשה, דבר).<sup>355</sup> Both verbs suggest a calculated and determined act of punishment, not a capricious and vicious onslaught.<sup>356</sup> Finally, nothing could be further from the truth than to label YHWH as unresponsive in Exodus 32–34. After

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intercessory prayer. In 1 Ki. 13:6 חלה stands in parallelism with חלל. Moreover, the Targumim interpret the Hebrew consistently with "prayed" (צלי/צלה). Cf. Grossfeld (1988), 89.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. Gerstenberger (1963), 393ff.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Renaud (1998), 148.

<sup>351</sup> Balentine (1989), 607, (1993), 136–137.

<sup>352</sup> Balentine (1989), 606.

<sup>353</sup> Balentine (1993), 191.

<sup>354</sup> The LXX translates the first רעה in verse 12 with μετὰ πονηρίας, while the second and third occurrence with κακά. Only the former connotes wickedness, the latter encompasses also the notion of trouble and disaster. This distinction is also made in the NRSV; "It was with evil intent...do not bring disaster on your people (32:12)." The confusion is due to the fact that Hebrew, unlike English, does not have distinguished terms for "disaster" and "evil." Hence the exact nuance of רעה has to be determined in context.

<sup>355</sup> Fretheim (1991), 286.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Stoebe (1994<sup>4</sup>), 799–800.



all, has He not just made Moses privy of His plans and enters into an extensive dialogue? Moreover, we have argued, that there is good reason to think that YHWH implicitly invited Moses to stand in the breach and to defend the cause of sinful Israel. All this poses the question whether there is not a more suggestive reading of Moses' prayer.

#### 4.3.1 Appeal to Israel's Status and the Logic of YHWH's Intention (32:11)

Moses' first appeal comes in response to YHWH's intention to let His consuming anger burn hot against Israel (וַיִּחַר-אַפִּי בָהֶם) and make him into a great nation instead (vv. 10–11). Without even mentioning the offer of becoming the new Patriarch, Moses questions the logic of the divine intention.

לָמָּה יִהְיֶה יַחֲרֶה אֶפְדֵּךְ בְּעַמִּי אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹחַ גְּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה

After all, YHWH has just, in view of fulfilling His promise, miraculously delivered Israel from Egypt with great strength (6:6–8, 32:11). Was it all a vain effort, a waste of divine power? Is YHWH to nullify His act of faithful redemption? There is good reason to argue that Moses' "לָמָּה-question" goes beyond uncertainty in YHWH's reasonableness. We have seen that at the outset of Moses' mission, while still in doubts about YHWH's commitment (5:22–23), God not only assures him in the strongest possible way of Israel's redemption, but also that He will take Israel as His people and that He will be their God (§ 3.1.2).

I am the LORD...I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD (6:6–8).

Thus at the outset of his mission YHWH assures Moses in His name that He will bring Israel (presumably the generation who endured slavery) in continuity with the oath made to the patriarchs into Canaan. Thereby the name of YHWH, as Childs writes, "functions as a guarantee that the reality of God stands behind the promise and will execute its fulfilment."<sup>357</sup>

There are several verbal and conceptual links between what came to be called the *Bundesformel* and Moses' prayer in chapter 32 which supports the possibility that Exodus 6:2–8 is in the background of Moses' appeal. For a start, YHWH promised to free Israel from Egypt's burden (יָצָא, Hi.) with a great show of strength (גְּדֹלִים), while in Exodus 32:11 Moses reminds YHWH that He has freed Israel (יָצָא, Hi.) from Egypt with great power (בְּכֹחַ גְּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה). Moreover, on both occasions Israel is designated as YHWH's people whose deliverance is intrinsically linked with God's covenant with the Patriarchs (cf. 6:3–8, 32:11–13).<sup>358</sup>

YHWH's initial assurance of His commitment to the people stands in stark

<sup>357</sup> Childs (1974), 115.

<sup>358</sup> Cf. Rendtorff (2001), 29–31.

contrast to His angry words in the immediate post-golden calf situation. In disappointment (or in irony) He refers to Israel as *Moses' people* whom he brought out of Egypt (32:7). Moses, not least on the grounds of Exodus 6:6–8, is quick to rectify the statement by insisting that Israel is by YHWH's very definition *His people* (32:11). After all, He has taken the initiative and chosen Israel to be His people, and adopted them to be His firstborn son (3:6–7, 4:22).<sup>359</sup> Although Israel's status as YHWH's treasured possession is made conditional on their obedience at Sinai (19:5–6), YHWH wanted to be Israel's God and on the basis of this divine decision He delivered His people from Egypt. Thus it seems that at least one important aspect of Moses' prayer was to remind YHWH that Israel is His chosen people and that He is their God. Thereby Moses does not attempt to justify or minimise Israel's sin (by the logic of the narrative, he has not even witnessed Israel's behaviour for himself), but bases his appeal on YHWH's earlier declaration, which was part of Moses' agreement to function as YHWH's mediator. Thus holding onto and based on a previous divine word, Moses "faithfully" questions YHWH's intentions.

#### 4.3.2 *Appeal to Divine Reputation (32:12)*

After having reminded YHWH that Israel's status and the Exodus are firmly rooted in divine election, and after having questioned the logic of YHWH's intention, Moses voices his second point of concern:

לְמַעַן יִאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם לְאֹמֶר בְּרָעָה הוֹצִיאָם לְהָרִג אֹתָם בְּהָרִים וּלְכַלֵּם מִעַל פְּנֵי הָאֱדֻמִּים

Basically Moses warns that the Egyptian might misread divine judgement as divine capriciousness or even viciousness and could therefore reach the conclusion that YHWH only delivers in order to destroy (כלה). In other words, Moses suggests that YHWH's reputation among the Egyptians is endangered. What exactly is at stake? In order to answer this question we briefly recall the motives behind the Exodus event.

So far we have touched on a twofold reason for the Exodus: i) YHWH's faithfulness to the promise made to the patriarchs which encompasses Israel (6:3–8), ii) YHWH's compassion and sense of justice when He noticed Israel's mourning at the hands of their Egyptian taskmasters (2:25, 3:7, 9, 6:5). There is a clear sense that Egypt has acted immorally in enslaving and oppressing Israel (cf. 2:23–24, 3:9, 5:23) and thus were in need of being judged by a just God. In addition to these factors, the Exodus with its display of signs and wonders served YHWH to establish His sovereignty over Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods (cf. 14:4, 17–18, 15:1–19).<sup>360</sup> A reading of Exodus 7–15 makes it evident that YHWH's reputation is a major factor in the outworking of divine judgement. Levenson correctly understands the enthronement of YHWH as one of the central themes and purposes of the Exodus.

<sup>359</sup> Renaud (1998), 148.

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Glatt-Gilad (2002), 63–74.

This comes supremely to expression in Moses' song at the Sea (15:1–19).<sup>361</sup>

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders (15:11)?

The underlying concern of the Exodus narrative comes poignantly to a climax in Jethro's remark at Sinai after Moses has informed him of all the happenings in Egypt:

Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them (18:11).

In fact the OT expresses at numerous places YHWH's objective to be known as superior and life-giving God beyond Israel (Josh. 2:9–11, 2 Ki. 5:15–17, Dan. 4:31–34, Jonah 1:14–16.). All these references give voice to pagans who acknowledge YHWH's superiority (even if only by reputation) in power and goodness over their gods.

Hence, what could easily be perceived as divine hatred and evil, would obviously be fundamentally opposed to YHWH's motivation and His goal to establish a Name as a sovereign, compassionate, and faithful liberator, as opposed to Pharaoh's alleged superiority and Egypt's rule of tyranny. By hypothesising that Egypt could misread divine judgement as divine viciousness, Moses is in effect saying that YHWH opens Himself up to the danger of being portrayed in even worse categories than Pharaoh and his cohorts. Thus Moses' second appeal obviously raises the concern that a judgement of the intended nature would convey the wrong signals regarding the true character and will of YHWH.<sup>362</sup> In other words, Israel's destruction, no matter how justified, would ultimately harm and degrade YHWH's reputation and purposes. Henceforth Israel's pardon is not only for the people's sake, but also in the best interest of YHWH. After all, has He not revealed Himself with an unshakeable determination to make His name great among the nations (14:9)? This overruling plan cannot possibly be hindered or even be abandoned because His people rebelled against him. On the one hand, Israel has sinned and deserves punishment, on the other hand, destruction would bring salvation history into jeopardy and therefore could lead to a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of YHWH's nature and purposes. This poses the following problem: "How is Yahweh to inflict that punishment on a rebellious people which His moral nature demands, and yet maintain the reputation of His power among the peoples of the world?"<sup>363</sup> Since the Exodus, YHWH's fame as a sovereign and faithful liberator is inseparably associated with the well-being of His people. They embody in some sense God's power and dependability, as Brueggemann notes:

How Yahweh treats Israel, and how Israel fares in the world, are taken as data for how powerful or reliable Yahweh is. This is the point on which Moses bases his daring appeal to Yahweh.<sup>364</sup>

<sup>361</sup> Levenson (1993), 127ff.

<sup>362</sup> Muffs (1992), 12.

<sup>363</sup> Gray (1912), 156.

<sup>364</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 297.

One could therefore say that divine wrath has to be restrained and controlled by divine purpose, patience, and loyalty. YHWH set out to reveal Himself as a compassionate and faithful liberator who freely entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. The succinct covenant formula says it all: “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (6:7). Thereby YHWH has definitively committed Himself to a relationship which Brueggemann has helpfully described as one of “costly solidarity.”<sup>365</sup> Costly, because the preservation of God’s holy name (and covenant) is ultimately only possible by way of self sacrificial commitment to His people and the covenant relationship.

Israel’s pardon would be a means to uphold YHWH’s name as a God of integrity and of true greatness (cf. Nu. 14:17). Because God’s name depends on the fulfilment of the promise (i.e. Israel’s existence), Moses’ prayer has a good chance to be effective and successful. Although Moses is primarily interested in preserving Israel’s existence (32:12), the prayer raises the wider issues which are at stake. That is, how is YHWH to be a God of justice and a God of grace and mercy? How is one to consolidate divine justice with divine grace and loving commitment? There is no way that one can or should fully resolve this tension because it belongs to the very essence of God’s being (cf. 34:6–7, Nu. 14:18). The fact that YHWH both allows, even invites, Moses at the height of His anger to participate in this dilemma, and that He is prepared to take Moses’ response into account speaks volumes for YHWH’s greatness and solidarity to His people. Having said this, in our exegesis of Numbers 14:20ff. we shall see how this tension is enacted in a specific situation. Grace and mercy need not preclude divine judgement (cf. § 5.4.2.4).

In the light of all these issues Moses launches an audacious appeal: שׁוּב מִחֲרוֹן אַפֶּךָ (turning from the back of your anger) taking up some of the words used by YHWH (32:10), Moses prays for nothing less than that YHWH would turn away from His burning wrath and would change His intention. By appealing to a change of mind, Moses does not so much put YHWH’s justice into question but attempts to persuade YHWH to be consistent with His nature and His initial plans. Miller insightfully captures the underlying dynamics of the prayer:

all his (Moses’) urging is grounded in an understanding of God’s way and what it is that God is doing in the world, the prayer is in fact a plea that God’s will be done...it seeks something that is wholly consistent with the divine nature. The modes of persuasion and urging seek to open the faithfulness of God.<sup>366</sup>

Because Moses’ prayer is fundamentally in tune with YHWH’s ways, it has a good chance to be successful.

#### 4.3.3 Appeal to the Patriarchs and the Divine Promise (32:13)

In contrast to the two preceding appeals, Moses’ final point is not put forward in

<sup>365</sup> Brueggemann (1995), 47.

<sup>366</sup> Miller (1998), 217.

question-form, but as a positive reminder of Israel's patriarchs and the divine oath made to them

זָכֹר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בְּךָ וַחֲדָבָר אֱלֹהִים אַרְבָּה אֶת-יִרְעָכֶם כְּכֹכְבֵי  
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֲתָן לְיִרְעָכֶם וְנָחֳלִי לְעַלְמִם

Verse 13 has occasioned considerable debate over the exact nature of Moses' appeal. The following suggestions have been proposed: Firstly, verse 13 is primarily an appeal to the merits of the patriarchs. Another prominent group of interpreters argues that verse 13 contains a twofold appeal, one to YHWH's parental emotion and one to His legal obligation. Thirdly, there is a significant party who argues that Moses appeals primarily to YHWH's irrevocable oath, the promise made to the patriarchs. While others assert that Israel has breached the covenant and thus argue that Moses lacks any firm ground to base his prayer on. Consequently his appeal would be of an argumentative nature, seeking to persuade YHWH to reconsider His intention. As I seek to evaluate these arguments, we shall advance what I believe to be the most likely interpretation of verse 13.

There is a long Jewish tradition which understands this verse to be an appeal to the merits of the patriarchs. According to Rashi לִזְכֹּר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק ought to be translated in the sense of "remember for Abraham, for Isaac..." In other words it would be an appeal to the patriarchs' outstanding and accumulated merits in order to achieve divine leniency for Israel.

If they (Israel) have transgressed the Ten Commandments, their father Abraham was tried ten trials and has not yet received his reward for them. Give it to him now...<sup>367</sup>

On the basis of an extensive discussion on the Hebrew idiom זָכֹר לְ Greenberg argues similarly that verse 13 means remembering Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *for* the benefit of their descendants.<sup>368</sup> He translates verse 13: "Have consideration for Abraham, Isaac, and Israel Your servants..."<sup>369</sup> The problem with this line of interpretation is, as has frequently been pointed out, that the qualifying clause in Exodus 32:13 informs of the content of the divine oath and not of the patriarchs' virtues and achievements.<sup>370</sup> Greenberg, in contrast to Rashi and Cassuto, acknowledges that the patriarchs' merits are not stated, but that their loyalty according to him is hinted at by the epithet "your servants." The scriptural portrayal of Isaac and Jacob/Israel, however, does not easily fit this honouree designation which is usually attributed to

<sup>367</sup> Rashi (1946), 182, cf. Cassuto (1967), 416, Brichto (1983), 9.

<sup>368</sup> Greenberg (1977-78), 26–29, argues that זָכֹר לְ entails a significant difference from אָחַז. On a basic level the former demands somebody as object and not something. On the basis of Psalm 132:1, 10 he substantiates his argument. In verse 1, the speaker (probably the ruling Davidic king) evokes YHWH to act for the sake of David (זָכֹר-יְהוָה לְדָוִד, Remember, O Lord, for David...). This is confirmed in verse 10 where it becomes apparent that the speaker (the anointed one) implores God, very likely from a later point in time, for a favour for the sake of David's loyalty.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>370</sup> Cf. Childs (1974), 568. This is not to discredit the notion that Exodus 32:13 resonates with the Jewish understanding of the "merits of the fathers," but to suggest that it needs some nuancing.

faithful men of God who live in obedient and intimate relation with YHWH.<sup>371</sup> This is generally true of Abraham, but not of Isaac or Jacob (cf. Gen. 26:24).<sup>372</sup> Of course one could argue that Abraham's descendants are blessed because of his obedience (cf. Gen. 22:15–18, 26:4–5).<sup>373</sup> Depending on how one interprets the much debated Niphal of בָּרַךְ in Genesis 12:3, Abraham functions as a channel of blessing for subsequent generations.<sup>374</sup> Granted the possibility that this is in the background of Moses' argument, it seems strange that he appeals to all three of them and not only to Abraham. Thus it appears more likely that Moses wants YHWH to remember the oath which strictly speaking was only made to Abraham as a result of his obedience not to withhold his beloved son Isaac from God (Gen. 22:15–18),<sup>375</sup> but was nevertheless extended to Isaac and Jacob (cf. Gen. 12:1–3, 26:2–5, 28:13–15). Since both Isaac and particularly Jacob lack moral integrity, this comes rather as a surprise.<sup>376</sup> This not only seems to indicate a difference between patriarchal religion and Mosaic Yahwism,<sup>377</sup> but more importantly underlines YHWH's mysterious love for the patriarchs which outshines their deviousness.

So far we have argued that Moses does not so much pray to show consideration of the patriarchs for their virtues or to be mindful of them because the oath has been made to them, but rather because YHWH made a solemn oath to Abraham which encompasses Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. According to Muffs and Tigay, there is good reason to believe that Moses' appeal to the patriarchs is twofold, that is it embodies both a legal and an emotional aspect.<sup>378</sup> First, with regard to the "legal" aspect of Moses' appeal Muffs and Tigay draw attention to what they consider the unconditional and irrevocable nature of the covenant made with the patriarchs. Muffs' attempt dynamically to paraphrase Moses' concern illustrates the point:

"You cannot behave in such arbitrary fashion...You are obligated to realise what You have promised, like it or not!...Your promise to our fathers was unconditional. Your obligation to the patriarchs is still binding. This specific act of Israel does not cancel Your obligation to the patriarchs."<sup>379</sup>

In a similar vein, a significant number of Christian interpreters argue that Moses is appealing here to the irrevocableness and everlasting dimension of YHWH's promise.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. Gen. 26:24, Nu. 12:7–8, Deut. 34:5, 1 Ki. 8:56. On the ambiguous characters of Isaac and Jacob see Moberly (1995<sup>2</sup>), 26–33.

<sup>372</sup> Perhaps it is for this reason that the designation "your servants" with reference to the three patriarchs occurs only here and in the deuteronomic parallel.

<sup>373</sup> Moberly (2001), 120.

<sup>374</sup> So von Rad (1979<sup>4</sup>), 160f., Wolff (1982), 41–67, Blumenthal (1998), 38–42. By contrast Grüneberg (2001) argues in a detailed study that the Niphal in question should be taken as reflexive. I.e. "all the families...will pronounce blessings on one another using your name." In other words, Abraham becomes a paradigm of divine blessing rather than a channel.

<sup>375</sup> Cf. Blumenthal (1998), 38f.

<sup>376</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 476.

<sup>377</sup> See Moberly (1992b), 79–104.

<sup>378</sup> Their argument is based on the deuteronomic parallel account.

<sup>379</sup> (1992), 13.

Thus, according to Renaud, a violation of His promise and initial aim would be contradictory to His nature,<sup>380</sup> and endanger trust in YHWH's character.<sup>381</sup> This comes also to expression in Houtman's understanding of verse 13:

Moses reminds YHWH of his obligation to the patriarchs, of the promises made to them under oath. Moses makes YHWH aware of what will be the consequences if he should carry out his purposes: YHWH will be guilty of breaking the oath!<sup>382</sup>

Two things can be said about this line of argument. Firstly, YHWH, by proposing Moses to become the channel of the divine promise does not intend to betray His oath. In fact, YHWH seems to be aware that He is bound by His oath to make the descendants of the patriarchs into a great nation and give the land to them. According to verse 10, this could be realised through a fresh start with Moses.<sup>383</sup> Moses, however, does not appear to be interested in YHWH's suggestion to fulfil His promise at the cost of Israel's destruction. He does not even mention it. But the fact that YHWH wanted to make Moses into a great nation implies that He had not forgotten His promise to Abraham.

Secondly, it is of some import that the only place where God commits Himself by an oath made by Himself to bless Israel's future is found in Genesis 22:16–17. Genesis 22:15–18 is not only of special interest and importance to us because of its unique reference to YHWH's oath, but also because of its many linguistic parallels with Exodus 32:13.<sup>384</sup> Although the land is not mentioned in Genesis 22, the terminology is strikingly similar to that of Exodus 32:13.<sup>385</sup> There is, however, a significant difference between Genesis 22:15–18 and Exodus 32:13. Genesis clearly links God's promise to Abraham's obedience "who did not withhold his only son," whereas the latter entirely lacks the association of obedience and promise. Although the promise of descendants, land, and blessing came initially without any conditions attached to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3), subsequent narratives somehow link the promise to Abraham's obedience.

and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice (עָקַב אֱשֶׁר-שָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹלִי, Gen. 22:18).

I...will give to your offspring all these lands...because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge (עָקַב אֱשֶׁר-שָׁמַע אֲבִרְהָם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי), my commandments, my statutes, and my laws (Gen. 26:3–5).

There is some warrant to argue that what became central to Mosaic Yahwism is already foreshadowed in God's dealing with Abraham. What is only in infancy stage

<sup>380</sup> (1998), 150.

<sup>381</sup> Balentine (1989), 609.

<sup>382</sup> (2000), 651.

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Fretheim (1991), 286. Gowan (1994), 225.

<sup>384</sup> Although Exodus 32:13 reflects linguistically and thematically a number of accounts in Genesis which contain God's promises to the fathers, the comparison with the stars of the skies and the promise to give the land to their descendants forever are limited to Genesis 13:15, 15:5, 22:17, 26:4.

<sup>385</sup> According to Aurelius (1988), 97, there is a sense that the essence of the promise to the patriarchs comes to expression in Exodus 32:13

is anticipated for future generations. YHWH has chosen Abraham:

that he may charge his children...after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice (לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יָצְוָה אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בִּיתוֹ אֲחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָדֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט); so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him (לְמַעַן הָבִיא יְהוָה עַל־אַבְרָהָם) אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו, Gen. 18:19).

Keeping the way of YHWH which is later paralleled with keeping the commandments (cf. 32:8, Deut. 9:16), is seemingly the prerequisite for, or somehow incorporated in, the fulfilment of the promise (cf. Gen. 22:15–18, 26:5).<sup>386</sup> Thus there is some scriptural evidence that the tension between unconditional promise and obedient response (analogous to election and covenant), goes right back to the patriarchs. This pattern of “promise–obedience–fulfilment of promise”<sup>387</sup> should come as a word of caution to those interpreters who believe that Moses is appealing here to an unconditionally binding covenant relationship.

As we have already noted, from a canonical perspective, Exodus 19:5 is of importance for our understanding of Israel's sin and Moses' appeal to the *Vätereid*.

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples (וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמְעוּ תִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי).<sup>388</sup>

Israel as a nation, in a sense, was only delivered from Egypt and offered a covenant-relationship with YHWH at Sinai because of Abraham's obedience in the first place. In Genesis 22:18, 26:5, and Exodus 19:5 the connection between promise and obedience seems to be clear. The connection between disobedience and destruction, however, is less clear. According to Aurelius, this ambiguity belongs to the essence of Exodus 32:7–14.<sup>389</sup> Moses, so he argues, explores here a grey area as it were. The question is raised whether Israel as rebellious children (nevertheless children) of Abraham can still appeal to YHWH in the name of their obedient father Abraham? If one reads Exodus 32 in the light of Genesis 22:15–18, there is a sense that Abraham succeeded where Israel failed.<sup>390</sup>

This brings us not only back to the idea of the merits of the patriarchs, but also to what Muffs and Tigay argue is the second aspect of Moses' prayer, that of YHWH's passionate love for the fathers.<sup>391</sup> Given our previous assessment of the merits of the

<sup>386</sup> Moberly (1992a), 71, reflects on this tension.

A promise which previously was grounded solely in the will and purpose of YHWH is transformed so that it is now grounded *both* in the will of YHWH *and* in the obedience of Abraham. It is not that the divine promise has become contingent upon Abraham's obedience, but that Abraham's obedience has been incorporated into the divine promise. Henceforth Israel owes its existence not just to YHWH but also to Abraham.

<sup>387</sup> Wenham (1994), 50.

<sup>388</sup> According to Aurelius (1988), 98, the terminology שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי יְהוָה sets out, in some sense, the quintessence of Israel's attitude towards YHWH (cf. Deut. 4:30, 8:20, 9:23). This is obviously true for Exodus 19:5 where Israel pledges herself to be YHWH's people.

<sup>389</sup> Aurelius (1988), 99.

<sup>390</sup> Blum (1984), 394f. argues that Israel came to understand Abraham's obedience (Gottesfurcht) in almost a substitutionary way. Cf. Jeremias (1997<sup>2</sup>), 64.

<sup>391</sup> Muffs (1992), 13, Tigay (1996), 103.



patriarchs, they might be closer to the logic of Moses' prayer in arguing that he seeks to stir YHWH's heart by reminding Him of His intimate involvement with the patriarchs. Levenson's reading of YHWH's involvement in the lives of the patriarchs insightfully elucidates the rhetoric of divine parental love.

This is not a man (i.e. Isaac) born of natural desire of his parent for offspring, but of God's solemn covenantal pledge to make Abraham "the father of a multitude of nations"...Abraham is his biological father, but it is God who sets aside the laws of biology that have prevented his conception for year upon painful year. And so it is with Jacob/Israel, born of Rebekah, who was barren until God answered her husband's entreaty and she conceived (Gen 25:21)...The ancestor of Israel—and thus also Israel itself—is the first-born son of two fathers, one human and one divine.<sup>392</sup>

By highlighting that the patriarchs, and through them Israel, are in some special sense children of God, Levenson helps us to see another important aspect of Israel's special status. Although we cannot be certain that Moses reminds YHWH of His intimate and inseparable bond with the beloved fathers, in the light of Exodus 2:25 the idea of Israel being the first-born son is re-enforced.<sup>393</sup> By implication, Israel's liberation from Egypt is primarily attributed to YHWH's special relationship with Israel, His first-born son (4:21–23). Levenson notes: "It is the special status of Israel, son of God, that explains why the Exodus is not a story of universal liberation at all but only of one nation's release, the release of the first-born son to rejoin and serve his divine father."<sup>394</sup>

In sum, we have seen that YHWH could have destroyed the people and still be faithful to His promise, provided that Moses consented to the divine offer to become the new patriarch. Moses, however, does not consider this as an option. This comes to expression even more clearly in his next prayer (32:32) where Moses selflessly refuses to be part of God's plan which does not include Israel as well.<sup>395</sup> Rather he insists that Israel is still YHWH's people, He had chosen them and at great expense delivered them from Egypt. Following from that, Moses attempts to show that sparing Israel is also in the best interest of YHWH, because Israel's annihilation would seriously endanger YHWH's reputation as a compassionate, loyal, and faithful God. Knowing that YHWH had, legally speaking, the right to severe punitive measures against Israel (23:21), he possibly does deliberately not mention the nexus between Abraham's obedience and the fulfilment of the divine promise,<sup>396</sup> but attempts to appeal in verse 13 to YHWH's "parental" involvement in the formation of Israel. To be more precise, Moses lacks any firm ground to plead for Israel's acquittal. The only grounds for appeal is provided by YHWH's offer to make him

<sup>392</sup> Levenson (1993b), 41–42.

<sup>393</sup> In the context of the deuteronomic parallel account, the theme of YHWH's love for the patriarch is made more explicit (cf. Deut. 7:7–9, 10:15).

<sup>394</sup> Levenson (1993b), 38. A word of caution regarding Levenson's emphasis on sonship. As seen, in Exodus (and Deuteronomy) YHWH's compassion for the enslaved people is also an important incentive for their liberation (cf. 2:23–25, Deut. 26:7).

<sup>395</sup> Moberly (1983), 57, Sarna (1991), 205.

<sup>396</sup> Renaud (1998), 150.

the new patriarch and the fact that YHWH made Israel's outcome vulnerable to Moses' agreement (32:10). As noted, however, Moses does not even respond to the divine offer and thus effectively turns down YHWH's only proposed option of fulfilling the divine promise. This leaves YHWH with little option but to reconsider His plans of destruction.

#### 4.3.4 YHWH's Change of Mind (32:14)

As a result of Moses' intercessory prayer God changes His mind (נחם) regarding the judgement (רעה) He intended to bring over Israel. Verse 14 stands in close correspondence to Moses' plea in verse 12.

שׁוּב מִחֲרוֹן אַפֶּיךָ וְהִנָּחֵם עַל־הָרָעָה לַעֲמֹד (32:12)  
וְהִנָּחֵם יְהוָה עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לַעֲמֹד (32:14)

According to our argument above, it is most likely that because Moses' prayer reflects in a profound sense the will and purposes of God, YHWH allows Himself to be persuaded to a change of mind. Before we move into the complexities attached to the word and concept of divine נחם, one may infer that Moses' succeeded in pacifying YHWH's wrath and achieved for Israel an exemption from annihilation. The personal suffix of the final word עם (i.e. YHWH's people) implicitly assures the reader that Moses' accomplished more than exemption from destruction, Israel is still (or again) considered to be God's people, even though YHWH initially denied His Lordship over them (cf. 32:7). Having said that, verse 14 does not report YHWH's actual spoken response as in previous verses, instead the narrator solely reports of God's reaction.

The RSV renders verse 14: "And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." In modern English "repentance" and "evil" have strong moral connotations. Such a translation could give rise to a picture of a moody, incalculable, and capricious God. With regard to הרעה we have already distinguished between moral wrong (e.g. evil) and disaster (e.g. military defeat, natural disaster, etc.) or judgement. The context makes is evident that it is not a moral evil God intended to bring on Israel, but a deserved judgement (32:7–9).<sup>397</sup> The fact that YHWH changed His mind about the planned judgement, brings us to the complex term נחם and the concept of divine mutability.

The general semantic domain of נחם in the Niphal is that of regretting or repenting of something.<sup>398</sup> If a person is the subject of the verb then the reason for repentance is usually human fickleness (13:17; 1 Sam 15:29b), or sinfulness (cf. Jer. 31:19; Job 42:6). If YHWH is the subject of נחם, the situation becomes more complicated, because the idea of "repentance" has, as noted, moral undertones (i.e. it presupposes

<sup>397</sup> NRSV puts it more nuancedly than its predecessor: "the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people."

<sup>398</sup> Cf. HAL, Simian–Yofre (1998), 342ff.

a wrongdoing of some kind).<sup>399</sup> Rather than detecting in the terminology the portrayal of a divine “culprit” (i.e. YHWH had evil destructive intentions), one should bear in mind that Scripture is consistent in saying that YHWH is fundamentally for His people (cf. 34:6–7, Pss. 103, 111) and does not commit any sin of which He needed to repent. (cf. Lev. 19:2, Nu. 23:19).

All of God's actions are considered appropriate and justifiable. Divine repentance thus has reference to an activity for which the word is not commonly used in contemporary English.<sup>400</sup>

This underlines the problem of an accurate English translation of the Hebrew term. Apart from rendering נחם with “repenting” in this context numerous other translations have been suggested; “being moved to pity concerning the injury,”<sup>401</sup> changing of mind,<sup>402</sup> renouncing the punishment,<sup>403</sup> going back on his decision,<sup>404</sup> bedenken wegen des Schlimmsten.”<sup>405</sup> Whatever the exact translation, they have in common the idea of a change of mind over the earlier decision to consume Israel.<sup>406</sup> In our judgement, a neutral translation such as YHWH changed His mind regarding the judgement is preferable for reasons stated above. Bearing this range of translations in mind, we still need to address the bigger and perhaps more puzzling problem of a God who changes His mind over something He intended to do (cf. § 6.3, for a fuller treatment of what is sometimes called the “immutability” of God). Jeremias gives voice to the conundrum:

Kaum eine andere alttestamentliche Aussage über Gott ist den Denkern aller Zeiten, Philosophen wie Theologen, derart anstößig erschienen wie der Satz, daß Gott über irgend etwas zuvor Geplantes oder sogar schon Vollbrachtes nachträglich Reue empfand und es zurücknahm.<sup>407</sup>

Childs remarks: “If this sentence (v. 14) is read by itself, it makes the God of Israel as arbitrary as Zeus. If it is read in its full context, it epitomises the essential paradox of the Hebrew faith: God is ‘merciful and gracious...but will not clear the guilty’ (34:7).”<sup>408</sup> In other words, rather than reading YHWH's response against the Hellenistic perception of an unchangeable divine being and through that against the

<sup>399</sup> The fact that there are two passages which programmatically state that YHWH does not repent like a human adds to the complexity (Nu. 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29a), cf. Moberly (1998), 93–111. Otherwise the idea of “divine repentance” is widely used in the OT. Fretheim (1988), 54f. notes: “Divine repentance is...found within a variety of traditions, northern and southern, early and late...eight-and seventh-century prophets; exilic and post-exilic prophecy; psalmody.” It also found its way into some of Israel's “creedal” forms (e.g. Ps. 106:44–45, Joel. 2:14, Jonah 4:2).

<sup>400</sup> Fretheim (1988), 51.

<sup>401</sup> Durham (1987), 424.

<sup>402</sup> Childs (1974), 568.

<sup>403</sup> New JPS.

<sup>404</sup> Houtman (2000), 650, cf. Simian–Yofre (1998).

<sup>405</sup> Jacob (1997), 930.

<sup>406</sup> In some instances the verb שׁוּב is used in a similar way. As for example in Exodus 32:12, where YHWH is asked to turn away from His wrath. Generally, however, שׁוּב is used for human's repentance, while נחם for “divine repentance.” In Jeremiah 18:8 and Jonah 3:10 the two verbs are clearly juxtaposed.

<sup>407</sup> Jeremias (1997<sup>2</sup>), 9, Fretheim (1988), 47, makes the same observation.

<sup>408</sup> Childs (1974), 568.

background of a long-lasting Christian tradition of an immutable God, we seek to take the canonical witness and its dynamics at face value and work with the Hebrew understanding of a God of mercy and judgement. It is within this divine portrait that Moses' dialogue with YHWH is presented as a genuine responsive relationship. God takes the relationship with His chosen leader absolutely seriously and is prepared to review His earlier announced intentions in the light of Moses' prayer. Thus the appeal to YHWH's initial plans, and the appeal to YHWH's reputation as a God of compassion and integrity allowed for an openness to change His earlier intention. We have submitted that this change of the divine mind came about because YHWH found Himself profoundly understood and affirmed in Moses' prayer. Moses, as Barth writes, "demanded from the very heart of God Himself."<sup>409</sup> There is good reason to argue that YHWH's change of mind reflects a "deeper consistency or, to use the biblical language, *faithfulness* to the way God is and does."<sup>410</sup> Although Moses' prayer presents a God who is genuinely open to change, it has to be qualified, that according to the OT, YHWH is said to change His mind only in the context of an intended judgement against sinful Israel who either show themselves genuinely repentant and/or are covered by prophetic intercession.<sup>411</sup>

In sum, Moses' first prayer is successful to the extent that YHWH turned away from His burning wrath and refrained from the intended judgement (32:12, 14). He managed to pacify YHWH's wrath and facilitated a divine change of mind regarding the initially announced judgement (32:7ff., 14). In other words, Israel is spared from total annihilation. As indicated, however, the wording of verse 14 does not exclude the possibility of punishment of a less radical kind. To be more precise, verse 14 is not so much about divine forgiveness of Israel's sin, but it is primarily about an assurance that the Sinai generation will not be eradicated and that they have a future as God's people. Even though the reader is told that Israel remains YHWH's people, the subsequent sequence of punishments make it evident that Israel's sinful conduct has serious consequences (32:19–29, 35, 33:5). It will become evident that further prayer is needed, not only for the well-being of Israel, but also to attain a greater degree of clarity about YHWH's relationship with His people and with Moses.

#### 4.4 The Twofold Role of Moses

Having secured Israel's continuing existence on the mountain, Moses descends to the people in the valley, carrying the two tablets of the testimony (לוחת העדות).<sup>412</sup> The

<sup>409</sup> Barth (1956), 426.

<sup>410</sup> Miller (1998), 221.

<sup>411</sup> This has been particularly underlined by Miller (§ 1.1.7).

<sup>412</sup> This terminology is usually ascribed to P who also talks of the "tabernacle and ark of testimony" (38:21, Nu. 9:15). The deuteronomistic parallel account talks at times of לוחת הברית (Deut. 9: 9, 11, 15) and thereby equals the decalogue with the covenant in chapters 9–10. In Exodus the tablets are only once used synonymously with decalogue and covenant (34:28).

account emphasises that the tablets and their inscribed content are the very work of God. This emphasis possibly implies that the covenant between YHWH and Israel is still extant (cf. 32:14).<sup>413</sup> Surprisingly, at the sight of the golden calf scene of which YHWH informed Moses on the mountain, Moses smashes the two tablets, possibly as a visual declaration that he regards the covenant as broken.<sup>414</sup> The man who had just faithfully pleaded on behalf of apostate Israel breaks forth in sudden anger at the sight of Israel's sin. Thereby his reaction appears to reflect YHWH's anger as displayed on the mountain (cf. 32:10, 19, חררה + אף). Not only do the tablets get crushed, the second decisive action of Moses is the total destruction of the bull-calf-image. Only after the object of worship is completely desacralised (only dust and excrement will remain of it<sup>415</sup>), Moses inquires of the exact circumstances which gave existence to it. In interrogating Aaron, his deputy, the difference between the two becomes apparent. Aaron under pressure from the people gave in to their demand and allowed for syncretistic worship of YHWH through a bull-image, whereas Moses acts in uncompromising loyalty to YHWH's command and utterly destroys the image. Childs underscores the contrast of the two leaders:

Aaron's whole behaviour, both in his original weakness and subsequent defence, serves merely to highlight by contrast the role of the true mediator. Aaron saw the people "bent on evil"; Moses defended them before God's hot anger (v. 11). Aaron exonerated himself from all active involvement; Moses put his own life on the line for Israel's sake. Aaron was too weak to restrain the people; Moses was strong enough to restrain even God.<sup>416</sup>

The contrast between the two comes to a climax in Moses' uncompromising command to punish the guilty people through a "sacred butchery." In prophet-like manner, Moses commands the horrific execution YHWH initially considered as a real possibility (cf. 32:10, 27).

So where does this sequence of perplexing and disturbing incidents leave the reader? Perplexing, because Moses destroys the tablets, the tangible witness that

<sup>413</sup> Houtman (2000), 613.

<sup>414</sup> Noth (1959), 205.

<sup>415</sup> Houtman (2000), 614.

<sup>416</sup> Childs (1974), 570. In contrast, Jacob (1993), 937–939, among other Jewish interpreters (e.g. Cassuto, Brichto) apologetically proposes:

Aaron never intended to make an idol which would be worshipped. Such a deadly sin would have been inconceivable for the head of the Levites (vv. 26ff.), the brother of Moses, the leader of Israel, and the future high priest!...It must have been Aaron's intent to form a *calf* as a mode of mockery.

Jacobs' suggestion seems to be far fetched for several reasons. The image of the bull was a widespread symbol for dominant deities in the ANE (Jeroboam's bull status clearly served a serious religious purpose, 1 Ki. 12). Thus it would be an extremely dangerous mockery to play if Aaron merely intended to expose Israel's foolishness. With regard to Aaron's innocence, the text in verses 1–6 remains fairly ambiguous, his guilt, however, becomes apparent in his apologetic response to Moses, where he "pathetically" tries to justify himself (32:21–24). Brichto (1983), 12–15, by contrast takes Aaron's statement: "I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" at face value and suggests that YHWH miraculously produced the bull image in order to test Israel's faith and obedience (cf. Deut. 13). This view not only seems to ignore Exodus 32:4 where the fabrication of the molten calf is clearly ascribed to Aaron, but also goes against the text which condemns Aaron's act (32:35, cf. Deut. 9:20).

YHWH has not forsaken Israel. Has he not just wrestled for the continuity of YHWH's bond with Israel? What about Moses' command to slay Israel? Has Moses not just successfully opposed the destruction of Israel in prayer (32:12)? Has the actual sight of the people's doing occasioned a change of loyalty in the mind of Moses? We shall seek to address these kind of questions in more details in § 4.3.6. where we attempt to explore the effect and logic of Moses' first prayer in its immediate narrative context. Here we merely intend to raise some of the apparent tensions.

As we shall see in a moment, the following prayer (32:30–33) assures the reader that Moses is still fully committed to the people. It seems thus that Moses' radical acts serve to underline the severity of Israel's sin. The dramatic destruction of the bull-image graphically underlines YHWH's commandment not to have any other gods beside Him and not to fashion any images of Him (20:3). In a similar vein one should probably understand the immediate destruction of three thousand Israelites. Although YHWH changed His mind regarding the intended judgement, of entire Israel, Moses' seems to, at least partially, enact it. The horrific judgement is executed in the name of YHWH (כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the reader knows that this is what God actually intended to do to all of Israel (32:10). Thus one could say that Moses' act of condemnation and judgement embodies in some sense the divine commandment and will. He speaks and acts as YHWH's representative. The juxtaposition of Moses' first prayer for Israel (32:11–13) and his subsequent acts of punishment (32:25–29) reflect the twofold role of the prophet. That is to loyally advocate the interest of the sinful people before YHWH and to proclaim, and here even to enact, the demanding divine will before the people.

It might be of some consolation to the modern reader that a historical-critical reading suggests that verses 25–29 reflect a much later struggle between the Levites and possibly the Aaronite priesthood. This would mean that these verses were not only later interpolated, but also that these verses do not reflect a historical event.<sup>417</sup> A canonical reading acknowledges this possibility, but seeks to draw out the logic of these verses in their context. It seems to me that verses 25–29 seek to underline in the strongest possible way that YHWH abhors anything within the range of physical representation, syncretism, and idol worship (cf. 20:3–7), and that this kind of sin

<sup>417</sup> As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, it is beyond the range of this study to investigate into the complex issues related to Aaron and the Levites. Here it must suffice to note that the canonical text carries strong anti-Aaronic connotations (esp. 32:24–25, 35), while the Levites are presented as the uncompromising faithful followers of YHWH. Childs (1974), 571, notes that it is remarkable that in the light of later historical development (Aaron's later reputable status), the story is retained in the tradition. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Jeroboam I employed non-levitical priests (1 Ki. 12:31). Does this endorse the hypothesis that Exodus 32 served as a polemic against the northern kingdom? Cf. Aurelius (1988), 77ff. In any case, it is very likely that the final shape of the text reflects a later struggle between the priesthood, of which Aaron is the archetype, and the Levites. From a canonical perspective, it remains unclear, how the loyal Levites could have allowed the manufacturing and worship of the calf in the first place. Have they come to realise their sin only in the light of Moses' rebuke?

evokes consequences of the most serious nature. It also underscores that the eventually received divine mercy and grace is costly and far from the notion of “cheap grace.” The logic seems to suggest that only when the idol and those who bowed down to it are destroyed, Israel has a future with YHWH for which it is worth living. Through his radical and consistent action, Moses creates a condition for a new beginning.<sup>418</sup> This is endorsed by verse 14, in the light of which the reader knows that neither the breaking of the covenant, nor the execution of the guilty ones is the end. There the reader is assured that YHWH still considers Israel to be His people.

On the next day, after having executed judgement on the sinners Moses decides to climb anew the mountain in order to atone for Israel's sin (32:30). This time Moses is not summoned by God, but takes the initiative himself (cf. 24:12–15). He may have felt justified to approach YHWH once again, after the radical sentence he executed (32:15–29). Although Moses succeeded in securing Israel's existence in his first prayer (32:10–14), the objective of his second prayer makes it evident that there is still reconciling work to be done.

#### 4.5 Second Prayer: “Costly Solidarity”

Before Moses sets out on his mission to reconcile Israel to YHWH, he underlines once again the severity of Israel's sin (הַטָּאָה הַזֹּאת גְּדֹלָהּ) and adds a word of caution as to whether he will be able to atone for their sins (אִילֵּי אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעֵד הַטָּאָהֶיכֶם). Although the verb כָּפַר occurs in prayers for forgiveness (e.g. Ps. 79:9, Deut. 21:8a, Jer. 18:23), the usage of כָּפַר in Exodus 32:30 is unique, because the verb does not have YHWH as its subject but Moses. Moreover, in other places the combination of כָּפַר בְּעֵד has only humans as its object and not sin as in our instance (e.g. Lev. 9:7, 16:6). This unusual usage has occasioned some debate over the nature of Moses' prayer objective.

##### 4.5.1 Moses' Prayer Objective (32:30–31)

A number of translations render verse 30 in the sense of: “perhaps I can make atonement for your sin” (e.g. RSV).<sup>419</sup> But what exactly is envisaged by making atonement for Israel's sins? Suggestions range from expiation of sin, restoration of the disturbed divine–human relationship through a substitutionary offering of a ransom (כֶּפֶר), to an attempt to persuade YHWH to endure Israel's sin by pacifying the divine wrath.

Usually the verb כָּפַר occurs in priestly texts and is used to describe the cultic act

<sup>418</sup> Houtman (2000), 615.

<sup>419</sup> Cf. Reventlow (1986), 236: “vielleicht kann ich für eure Sünden Sühne schaffen.” Cf. Renaud (1998), 158.

of atonement (cf. Lev. 9:7, 16:16).<sup>420</sup> The making of atonement is often believed to belong exclusively in the cultic sphere and consequently Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:30 is sometimes also ascribed to a cultic background.<sup>421</sup> The making of atonement is usually achieved through a sacrificial rite. In Moses' prayer, however, there is no mention of such, unless the writer envisioned the slaying of the guilty in Exodus 32:27–29 as a prerequisite to Moses' prayer of atonement.<sup>422</sup> Such an interpretation could be advocated in the light of Deuteronomy 21:1–9, where the ritual killing of a heifer is accompanied by a prayer of atonement (כפר) by the elders.<sup>423</sup> On a similar note, the atoning sacrifice of Job's friends only became effective after Job interceded for them (Job 42:8f.). Samuel at times also seems to enforce his prayer with a sacrifice (1 Sam. 7:9). This suggests that sacrifice and prayer, at least at times, formed a set in the plea for atonement.<sup>424</sup> It is, however, not necessary to press the text in Exodus in order to find sacrifice and prayer as interdependent, especially because the narrator does not connect Moses' intention to atone Israel's sin with the punishment of the sinful. Nor is it necessary to limit atonement to the sphere of the cult, as Gese in his important study on atonement has demonstrated.<sup>425</sup>

According to Gese, Moses seeks to achieve atonement by offering himself as a כפר (ransom) to substitute his life for the people's.<sup>426</sup> He argues for a non-cultic origin of כפר, as a ransom (Wergeld), which is always understood as a substitution for one's life (Existenzstellvertretung). According to Exodus 32:30ff., atonement is envisaged through an (substitutionary) act of total surrender of one's life (Totalhingabe). In this context, Gese argues that the basic meaning of the verb כפר is the restoring of a right relationship with God which has been disrupted through sin by means of a substitution of life.

How do these preliminary thoughts affect our understanding of Exodus 32:30? For a start it cautions us not to reach any premature conclusions regarding the objectives of Moses' prayers. We will not be able to evaluate the meaning and logic of אֶכְפֶּרָה אֶתְּחַכֶּם הַטֹּאחֲזֶקֶם בְּעֵד הַטֹּאחֲזֶקֶם until we have read Moses' intention in context of his entire second prayer (32:30–33). For the moment we note that unlike his previous prayer (32:11), which started with a confronting “why,” we find an interjection of entreaty (אָנָּה, LXX; δέομαι κύριε = I beseech you Lord<sup>427</sup>), followed by an acknowledgement, possibly even a confession of sin on Israel's behalf (הָטָא הָעָם הַזֶּה הַטֹּאחֲזֶה גְדֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם)

<sup>420</sup> Almost 75% of all occurrences are found in P. Cf. Maass (1994<sup>5</sup>), 844.

<sup>421</sup> Cf. Von Rad (1933), 115, Hesse (1951), 109, Noth (1962), 252.

<sup>422</sup> Lang (1995), 299–300. Cf. Nu. 25:6–15.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>424</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 448–452, Preuß (1992), 191–192.

<sup>425</sup> Gese (1989), 85–91. Aurelius (1988), 83–88, argues that the terminology goes back to a *Hofzeremoniell* which he also finds in the background of the Jacob-Esau narrative (Gen. 32:20), where Jacob, like a vassal seeks to appease the face of his brother (אֶכְפֶּרָה פָּנָיו) in the hope that he will forgive him (אִלֵּי יִשָּׂא פָנָיו).

<sup>426</sup> Gese (1989), 87–88.

<sup>427</sup> Cf. *Joüon* § 105c.



וְאֵלֹהֵי זָהָב.<sup>428</sup> The latter, as we shall see, finds support in the logic and tone of Moses' prayer, and anticipates Moses' final petition where he explicitly identifies himself with Israel's sin (34:9).

A glance at the concordance reveals that the expression *אלהי זהב*, occurs only here and in the preamble to the book of covenant (20:23), where the manufacturing of gods of silver and gold are explicitly prohibited (*לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ אֱלֹהִים כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה*). Thus from a canonical perspective, Moses not only acknowledges Israel's sin by possibly referring back to the covenant stipulations, but also articulates the nature of the people's offence. As already mentioned, the early verses of chapter 32 leave it open whether the bull-calf is perceived as a visual representation of YHWH or whether it is perceived as an actual idol. Moses is quite clear about it here, unless one allows for irony, the calf is perceived as a false god. That is the *חטאת גדולה*.<sup>429</sup> Moreover, it is noteworthy that Moses no longer refers to Israel as *your* (God's) people, but merely as *this* people (cf. 32:9). Is there a sense of uncertainty as to whether the covenant is still valid or not?

#### 4.5.2 "If You will Bear their Sin—But if not, Blot me out of Your Book" (32:32)

Having confessed the severity of Israel's sin, Moses' mediatory role rises possibly to its greatest intensity in Moses' willingness to be blotted out from YHWH's book:

וְעַתָּה אִם־תִּשָּׂא חַטֹּאתֵינוּ וְאִם־אֵין מַחְנִי נָא מִסִּפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ (32:32)

The main clause of the conditional sentence (apodosis) is missing in the MT.<sup>430</sup> The Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX supplement the conditional sentence with a protasis; *ἄφε* or *ἄφες* ("forgive!" imperative), and therefore give Moses' prayer a commanding ring: "forgive their sin!" Hyatt suggests this is the meaning of the MT as well.<sup>431</sup> Coats argues that Moses' appeal to forgive Israel's sin takes here the form of a threat.<sup>432</sup> Does Moses really confront God with a kind of ultimatum? The omission of the apodosis in the MT appears to give the sentence rather a cautious tone of supplication.<sup>433</sup> This line of arguing is not only endorsed by Moses' uncertainty as to whether he could achieve the atonement of Israel's sin or not (*אולי*, 32:30), but also by his confession of Israel's sin.

Moses, being fully aware of Israel's guilt and therefore more cautious in his prayer,

<sup>428</sup> Reventlow (1986), 236 (cf. Deut. 9:9f, 18f., 25).

<sup>429</sup> Renaud (1998), 159, argues here for a deuteronomistic shift in the understanding Israel's sin (cf. Deut. 7:25, 29:16). A development from understanding the calf as "une simple représentation de YHWH" to "une véritable idole."

<sup>430</sup> Joüon (1991), § 167o, r, Cassuto (1967), 423 argue that: "The apodosis of the conditional sentence, *good*, is not expressly stated, because it is self-understood." E.g. if you will forgive their sin, well and good." Cf. Rashi (1946), 185.

<sup>431</sup> Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 311.

<sup>432</sup> Coats (1977), 99.

<sup>433</sup> Reventlow (1986), 236: "Mose wagt nicht, seine Bitte direkt auszusprechen, er legt Jahwe vielmehr eine Alternative vor."

has lost, however, none of his previous commitment to the people. The exact nature of his supplication remains debated and has caused some disturbance and confusion. Calvin for example, condemns Moses' prayer as full of pride and foolishness, for, according to him, it not only presumes that Moses could overthrow God's eternal predestination, but it also blurs the distinction between the innocent and the transgressors.<sup>434</sup> Calvin ascribes the apparently irresponsible tone of Moses' prayer to great mental pressure.

when believers unburden their cares into God's bosom, they do not always deal discreetly, nor with well-ordered language, but sometimes stammer, sometimes pour forth "groans which cannot be uttered,"...since his care for the people...had absorbed, as it were, all his senses, nothing else occupies his mind but that they may be saved.<sup>435</sup>

Calvin creatively ascribes the awkward Hebrew of verse 32 to Moses' mental struggle (cf. § 5.4.2.2).<sup>436</sup> The concept of predestination, however, is anachronistic, and does not appear until some time later (e.g. Dan. 12:1–2, Phil. 4:3, Rev. 3:5, 13:8). The idea of a divine record or a book of life, nevertheless is found in numerous other places in the OT. Although the OT understanding of this "heavenly" book varies, it seems to suggest a record of the righteous (and their deeds, Ps. 139:16, Neh. 13:14) and sometimes of the wicked (and their deeds. Cf. Pss. 69:29, 109:13ff., Mal. 3:16f.). According to this record people are judged. The logic of most passages suggest that it was YHWH's prerogative to maintain the book and thus to bless those who adhere to the covenant with the gift of life and according to later perception with eternal life (Dan. 12:1f.), and to cancel the names of those who disobey and breach the covenant. This would be endorsed in the deuteronomic golden calf account, where it says that YHWH intended to wipe out the names of the covenant breakers from under heaven (וְאֶשְׁמִידֵם וְאֶמְחָה אֶת־שְׁמֵם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם, Deut. 9:14). Though the term סִפֵּר does not occur in Deuteronomy 9:14, the idea is the same. Having one's name cancelled stands in parallel with being destroyed. When the psalmist prays that YHWH should wipe out from the record the names and deeds of his enemies (בִּיחָה), he basically asks that they will be cut off from their covenant relationship with God (Ps. 69:28/29). Moses' prayer should probably be understood in a similar line. In other words, when Moses asks to be erased (בִּיחָה) from God's record (32:32), he appears to express a willingness to be cut off from his relationship with YHWH and thus would subject himself to curse and eventual death (cf. Neh. 13:14, Dan. 12:1–2).<sup>437</sup>

Having gained some clarity over the idea of being blotted out from YHWH's book, we must now ask the more important question as to how the relation between Moses' willingness to be blotted out from the heavenly book and Israel's sins is

<sup>434</sup> Calvin (1854), 265–266.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 265–266.

<sup>436</sup> Cf. Durham (1987), 432.

<sup>437</sup> Eventual death, because there are references which suggest that the deleting from the book and the death of the sinner does not necessary coincide in time (cf. Ps. 139:16). So Kühlewein (1995<sup>5</sup>), 172–173. The metaphor probably derived from the secular practise of keeping a register of the citizens who were alive (cf. Ezek. 13:9), cf. Allen (1997), 446–447.

envisaged. What exactly is the logic of Moses' petition? As mentioned, scholarship is divided over the meaning of verses 30–32. Interpretation can roughly be divided into two camps. i) Those who argue that Moses' offer to be blotted out of the heavenly book is somehow functional for Israel's reconciliation with YHWH. This usually takes the form of Moses expressing willingness to die in the place of sinful Israel in order to obtain atonement for their sins, if YHWH was unwilling to forgive/bear their sins.<sup>438</sup> ii) Those who postulate that Moses' supplication is an expression of extreme solidarity, that is, that he is prepared to share Israel's fate.<sup>439</sup> This line of argument has been explored in various directions. Is it because Moses feels so much at one with Israel that loosing them means life would not make any sense to him any more,<sup>440</sup> or does it reflect the prayer of a frustrated mediator who is tired of living,<sup>441</sup> or does it express the wish of a man who cannot stand the thought of having to cope with the reputation of a failed mediator?<sup>442</sup> In any case, Moses is effectively confirming his previous decision not to become the channel of YHWH's promise by showing His determination to die alongside Israel.<sup>443</sup>

Advocates of the first line of interpretation frequently refer to St. Paul's prayer on behalf of his fellow Jews as an interpretative help (Ro. 9:3).<sup>444</sup> Keil suggests that Moses' commitment to Israel is "just as deep and true as the wish expressed by the Apostle Paul in Rom 9:3, that he might be accursed from Christ for the sake of his brethren ..."<sup>445</sup> Or von Rad writes: "um Israel zu retten, erklärt sich Mose bereit, selbst zum ἀνάρημα für das Volk zu werden (Ex. 32:32 vgl. Rö. 9:3)."<sup>446</sup> Also NT scholarship understands Paul's prayer to echo Exodus 32:32. Dunn considers it as "more than likely" that Paul has Moses' offer in mind, when he writes:<sup>447</sup>

For I could wish (ἡὐχόμεν γάρ)<sup>448</sup> that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people (ἀνάρημα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν), my kindred according to the flesh (Ro. 9:3).

In severe anguish over Israel's future (not least because his Gospel of God's faithfulness to the undeserving is at stake), Paul expresses the intention or wish to be cut off from communion with Christ by delivering himself to the divine wrath in order to save his people from destruction.<sup>449</sup> Dunn notes here Paul's "martyr

<sup>438</sup> E.g. Noth (1962), 252, Gese (1989), 87–88, Childs (1974), 571, Durham (1987), 432.

<sup>439</sup> Cassuto (1967), 423.

<sup>440</sup> Houtman (2000), 673.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Nu. 11:15, Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 311.

<sup>442</sup> Rashi (1946), 185f.

<sup>443</sup> Renaud (1998), 159–160.

<sup>444</sup> Already Calvin (1854), 360, refers to Romans 9:3.

<sup>445</sup> Keil (1864), 231.

<sup>446</sup> Von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 306, cf. Vischer (1949), 209.

<sup>447</sup> Dunn (1988), 532.

<sup>448</sup> Cranfield (1994<sup>3</sup>), 455–457, translates: "I would pray [were it permissible for me so to pray and if the fulfilment of such a prayer could benefit them]" While Dunn (1988), 524, 532, allows for more ambiguity of the Greek.

<sup>449</sup> Although there is an ongoing debate about how Paul envisages his prayer and sacrifice to benefit

aspiration that by sacrifice of oneself...the nation as a whole, might be saved from God's wrath (so classically, Moses [Exod 32:32])."<sup>450</sup>

As mentioned there are a number of OT scholars, who perceive Moses' prayer as a request to stand in the place of the guilty party and receive vicarious punishment. Noth suggests that Moses made an attempt "at atoning for the 'great sin' by offering himself as a vicarious sacrifice."<sup>451</sup> Gese, as indicated, opposes cultic categories in Moses' prayer, but argues that he offers himself as a ransom to substitute his life for Israel.

Mose will sühnen, bietet sich als *kopār* an, d.h. hier seine Existenz, daß er im Buch des Lebens aufgeschrieben ist. Es ist eine Lebensersatzleistung durch stellvertretende Totalhingabe.<sup>452</sup>

Childs speaks of an "exchange" of Moses' life for the forgiveness of Israel.<sup>453</sup> On the Jewish side, Jacob also argues that Moses intended a vicarious act. "Er wird sich selbst als כִּפָּר anbieten."<sup>454</sup> Although the interpretations above vary in details, they all envision that Moses offers himself as a means to achieve vicarious atonement.<sup>455</sup> Such a perception of Moses' intention would not be unlike Isaiah's suffering servant (Isa. 52:13–53:12). How is one to assess this line of interpretation?

For a start, verses 30–32 do not explicitly state that Moses perceives himself as a ransom (כִּפָּר), nor that he is prepared to surrender himself on behalf of Israel. Possibly a more nuanced approach to כִּפָּר in context is via a juxtaposition of Moses' announced objective הִטְאֵתְכֶם בְּעֵד אֶכְפֹּרָה אֵלַי with his actual petition יִעָתָה אֶם-חַטָּאת יִעָתָה אֶם-חַטָּאת (32:32). Having said that, the exact meaning of נָשָׂא חַטָּאת is also contested, and we shall see and argue in § 4.8.2, that the underlying logic of the term in context is the bearing/enduring of sin by YHWH.<sup>456</sup> In other words, the act of כִּפָּר is likely closely related to God bearing Israel's sin. Possibly one could even substitute אֶכְפֹּרָה with הִטְאֵתְכֶם בְּעֵד with "perhaps I can get (YHWH) to bear Israel's sin."<sup>457</sup> This would imply that Moses does not so much have forgiveness in the sense of expiation of sin, or a restoration of the divine-human relationship through offering himself as a ransom in mind, but the pacifying of YHWH's wrath and the deferment of Israel's sins (cf.

the Jews, there is little doubt about his seriousness. Cranfield (1994<sup>3</sup>), 457: "For Paul 'to be ἁνθάμεμα'...is to be delivered over to the divine wrath." It is likely that a similar understanding comes to expression when Paul speaks of Jesus' death; *he became a curse for us* (Gal. 3:13, cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). Caneday (1989), 208–209: "Paul argues that Christ hung 'upon the tree' in Israel's place, bearing the curse of the violated covenant and turning away God's wrath from his people by redeeming them out from under the law's curse."

<sup>450</sup> Dunn (1988), 525.

<sup>451</sup> Noth (1962), 206, presupposing that Exodus 32:21–29 is a later addition, suggests that Moses attempts to make atonement because "the water of cursing has not yet made its effect felt." Cf. 32:20.

<sup>452</sup> Gese (1989), 88.

<sup>453</sup> Childs (1974), 571.

<sup>454</sup> Jacob (1997), 943, cf. Rashi (1946), 185, Ginsberg (1954, III), 131.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 307, 269f, 286f.

<sup>456</sup> Brichto (1983), 18, also translates נָשָׂא חַטָּאת with "bear the offence" and thus rightly notes that נָשָׂא (at least in context) does not mean forgiveness or pardon in the sense of "to wipe the slate clean." It means to withhold punishment,...reprieve has been asked and granted, but not absolution."

<sup>457</sup> Cf. Janowski (1982), 143.

32:11).<sup>458</sup> Although Moses is the subject of כפר it will by implication of the Hebrew syntax depend on YHWH, for He is asked to bear their sins “But now, if you will bear their sin (אִם-תִּשָּׂא הַפֶּחַתָּם).” Moses is obviously aware of this by expressing caution (אֲלֵי, v. 30) about the efficacy of his forthcoming prayer.<sup>459</sup>

Thus on balance, it is more likely that Moses expresses a determination to share the same fate YHWH intended for Israel, i.e the eradication of their names from the divine record. This line of thought is further endorsed by the logic of Moses' prayer in its context. We recall that in his former prayer Moses did not respond to YHWH's offer to make him the seed of a new people (32:10ff.), and thereby implicitly turned down the divine proposal. Here, however, Moses forcefully makes known his determination to be cut off from the elect people alongside Israel, if YHWH will not bear their sins. As if he was saying: “You can cancel me from Your plan, if...” Davidson seems close to the thrust of Moses' prayer by paraphrasing: “If you are looking for a substitute to take the place of the people in your purposes, count me out: either you forgive them or you must think again about the future.”<sup>460</sup> This as we have already suggested, would leave YHWH with no option, but to endure Israel's sin (even if it is only temporarily). Given our discussion of the nature of Moses' former prayer, Exodus 32:32 should not so much be characterised as a “threat” or an “ultimatum,” but rather as “loyal opposition.” Opposition because Moses in effect turns down YHWH's offer to make a new start through him. Loyal, not only because he exhibits solidarity with the offenders to the point of death, but also because Moses presses “what God has already decreed,”<sup>461</sup> that is to maintain His covenant with Israel (cf. 6:6–8).

#### 4.5.3 Divine Mercy and Judgement (32:33–34)

Although it is not easy to determine the precise meaning of YHWH's response to Moses' audacious prayer (especially verse 33), the overall thrust is sufficiently clear. Moses is to lead Israel to the promised land under the guardianship of YHWH's angel (32:34, 33:2). The divine response, however, not only contains a concession, but also a twofold judgement. Firstly, the mention of the angel of YHWH foreshadows the problem of divine presence among the stiff-necked generation (33:3–5), moreover YHWH announces a day of visitation when Israel will be called to account for their sins (וּבְיוֹם פִּקְדֵי וּפְקֻדָּתַי עָלֵיהֶם הַפֶּחַתָּם, 32:34). Here the important concept of divine visitation is introduced. A detailed treatment of the logic of פִּקְד in context is attempted in § 4.3.8.2.

When it comes to elucidating the precise force of verse 33, one is left with two

<sup>458</sup> Cf. Köhler (1957), 212–213.

<sup>459</sup> Hesse (1951), 90, 109, Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 451–452.

<sup>460</sup> Davidson (1986), 73–74.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 74.

major possibilities.<sup>462</sup> One could either interpret verse 33 entirely on the basis of verse 32b, where Moses expresses his willingness to be cut off from YHWH's covenant relationship alongside Israel. This would imply that Moses, as innocent and loyal follower, cannot be eradicated from the heavenly record. If God has no grounds to blot out the one who sacrificially bonded himself to sinful Israel, that would, by the logic of Moses' prayer, suggest that YHWH implicitly acknowledges that He cannot blot out Israel either. Although this would stand in strong tension with YHWH's righteousness, He would reluctantly honour Moses' commitment to Israel by commissioning him to lead Israel to the promised land.

The alternative reading of verse 33 is that YHWH reminds Moses not to present Him with any ultimata by asserting the divine right to blot out from His record whoever is guilty.<sup>463</sup> Hence it would be a statement about divine sovereignty and righteousness.<sup>464</sup> This statement on its own would imply that little mercy will be shown to the sinners and that severe judgement is awaiting Israel as a whole. By implication, Moses' prayer request would and could not be granted.<sup>465</sup> Such a reading of verse 33 would stand in tension with YHWH's earlier decision not to destroy Israel (32:14). In the light of verse 34, however, YHWH's strict sense of justice is qualified by a merciful concession. The time of judgement is postponed to an unspecified date and Moses is to lead Israel, as promised, to Canaan.

On any reckoning, YHWH's response makes it clear that right and wrong matter. The divine resolve contains both mercy and judgement (32:33–35). In sum, Moses' prayer was answered in the sense that Israel as a nation has a future, they will be led to the promised land. Yet the sinful generation is warned of a forthcoming day of divine visitation. By implication, YHWH is willing to endure Israel's sin to a certain point in time. In the light of YHWH's initial intention to consume sinful Israel on the spot (32:10), verse 34 anticipates YHWH's resolve to be slow to anger (34:6) and to first examine Israel's conduct before any further action is taken against them (§ 4.3.8.2). In anticipation of our next section, I would like to suggest that any interpretation of Exodus 32:30–34 which declares Moses' prayer as unsuccessful as not sufficiently nuanced.

#### 4.6 Exodus 32:7–14 and 32:30–34: The Logic between Moses' two Prayers

Commentators often point to several tensions within the narrative flow of chapter 32. Of particular interest to us is the alleged contradiction between Moses' two

<sup>462</sup> I acknowledge dependence on Moberly's argument (1983), 57–58. He reaches, however, a different interpretation of Exodus 32:33 than is suggested here.

<sup>463</sup> Cf. Brichto (1983), 18.

<sup>464</sup> Moberly (1983), 58.

<sup>465</sup> Houtman (2000), 673.

prayers.

There are two separate stories of Moses' intercession: verses 11–14 and verses 30–34. The second of these shows no awareness of the first...Verse 14 says that they (Israelites) were not punished...In verse 34, Yahweh promises to punish them in the future...<sup>466</sup>

According to the canonical text God informs Moses in advance, while still on the mountain, about the people's sinful conduct at the foot of the mountain, whereupon Moses intercedes for the people (32:7–13). Subsequent verses, however, depict Moses as seemingly not knowing of the golden calf incident (32:15ff.). Moreover, it has been pointed out that Moses' first intercession was successful in the sense that YHWH changed His mind regarding the announced judgement (32:14), while the following text tells of a series of punishments (32:20, 25–29, 34–35), and the need for further intercession (32:30–32).<sup>467</sup> Apart from the fact that the two prayers are very different in nature (the first is argumentative and audacious in tone, while the second one is cautious and repentant), the first one achieves its objective: YHWH changes His mind (32:12, 14), whereas the second one is frequently perceived as unsuccessful.<sup>468</sup> Although we have argued above that the latter does not full justice to the logic of the narrative in its final form, we shall attempt in this section to further tease out the logic of the sequence of Moses' two intercessions and related events in chapter 32. As already mentioned, the majority of scholars resolves the problem by ascribing Exodus 32:7–14 to a later, usually deuteronomic, writer.<sup>469</sup> This is not to deny other significant voices who argue that these verses belong to a pre-deuteronomist stage.<sup>470</sup> For our argument it does not really matter who may have added Moses' first prayer, the important thing for our purpose is the appreciation of the effect and logic of having possibly inserted the human–divine dialogue into its canonical position.<sup>471</sup> Thus the following section seeks to show the difference between a reading of the chapter in its alleged earlier form without Moses' dialogue with YHWH on the mountain (32:7–14) and a reading of Exodus 32 in its canonical form. Through this “exercise” we hope to achieve a greater understanding of Moses' first intercessory prayer in its context.

#### 4.6.1 *Exodus 32 without Moses' First Prayer*

For reasons of space and flow of the argument, we will not enter the complex literary–critical discussion on chapter 32. For clarity's sake, we will roughly follow the source division as suggested by Noth, who arguably still provides the most

<sup>466</sup> Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 301.

<sup>467</sup> Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 301ff.

<sup>468</sup> E.g. Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 301, 303, 311, Childs (1974), 558, 560.

<sup>469</sup> Already Noth (1962), 244, has pointed out that prayer served the Deuteronomists as a favourite literary device.

<sup>470</sup> Cf. Greenberg (1977/78), 32–34, Weinfeld (1991), 426–428.

<sup>471</sup> Cf. Balentine (1989), 615.

coherent and influential source-critical model.<sup>472</sup> Although acknowledging the difficulties of source-division in Exodus 32, Noth argues that an earlier form of the chapter consisted of verses 1a, 4b–6, 15–20, 25–34.<sup>473</sup> The narrative, at this hypothetical earlier stage reports that Moses returned from Sinai with the tablets and found Israel worshipping the golden calf. In response to Israel's sin, Moses breaks the tablets and subjects the people to severe punishment. After pulverising the image and scattering it on the water, Moses subjects them to a trial by ordeal (32:20) by making Israel drink, what Noth considers, the "water of cursing (cf. Nu. 5:11–28)."<sup>474</sup> Thereby, so argues Noth, Moses hands over the judgement to God. Since no immediate deadly sickness/plague is registered, Moses returns to YHWH in order to confess Israel's sin and in an attempt to atone for their great sin.<sup>475</sup> YHWH, however, responds to Moses' petition that the guilty will be called to justice. Thereby He announces a day when Israel is called to accountability (32:33–34). In sum, at this hypothetical stage, the account is primarily a story of apostasy and judgement.

#### 4.6.2 Exodus 32 in its Final Form

Once Moses' first prayer is included, the logic of the narrative changes significantly. Following the final form of the text, the reader is allowed to listen to the "divine council" on the mountain. The divine perspective on Israel's disobedience is made known. But even more important is that the reader is aware of Moses' committed defence on behalf of the people before the offended covenant God. With this information in mind, Moses' uncompromising iconoclasm and acts of judgement at the foot of the mountain come to stand in a very different light. No longer do they appear to be driven by spontaneous and emotional rage, but rather they appear as profound statements of divine justice by the one who had just faithfully defended Israel before the heavenly judge. The juxtaposition of Moses' intercession on the mountain (32:11–13) with his act of judgement executed at the foot of the mountain (32:19–20, 27–29) clearly reveals Moses in his twofold prophetic role. Before YHWH, Moses, by definition of his mediatory status, must advocate the people's interest, while before the people he is to assume the attributes of YHWH (32:7–10) and uncompromisingly condemn their deed with divine authority. Ultimately both aspects have the same goal, the well-being of the people and the honour of God.<sup>476</sup>

<sup>472</sup> Cf. Campbell and O'Brien (1993), Boorer (1992), IX. Cf. § 5.2.2.

<sup>473</sup> See Noth (1962), 243–246, for reasons of his literary reconstruction. Compare with Childs (1974), 558–559, who argues, in contrast to Noth, that verses 1–6 "are clearly one piece." Moreover, he ascribes verses 7 and 8 to the original story.

<sup>474</sup> Noth (1962), 249, 251. He understands verse 35 as a still "extant continuation and conclusion of the narrative themes of the water of cursing (v. 20)." The plague in this context means "something like a deadly sickness" and comes possibly as a divine approval of Moses' punishment by ordeal.

<sup>475</sup> Noth (1962), 251.

<sup>476</sup> Brichto (1983), 20, notes: "He (Moses) has developed the attributes of God, alternately gracious in His dealings with an undeserving generation, fiercely exacting in sentence and execution, and again graciously relenting—to give human mortals another chance..."



Unless Exodus 32:7–14 is in place, the reader misses the “divine perspective” on verses 19–29, which in essence says the same thing: Namely that idol worship is fundamentally opposed to YHWH’s Lordship. But more significantly, all subsequent punishments, no matter how harsh they may appear, want to be seen in the light of Moses’ dialogue with YHWH where an appeal to the deeper divine will and purposes was made and mercy was evoked. Thus the final form of Exodus 32 not only shows an awareness of the complexity and subtlety of judgement that contains grace and mercy, but also foreshadows the disclosure of YHWH’s name (34:6–7) and the dynamics of Numbers 14.

Reading the narrative in its final form, we must also address the question of how to handle the different tones and apparently different outcomes of Moses’ prayers. First, with regard to the different tone. Adhering to the logic of the narrative, at the time of Moses’ first prayer, he has not yet seen Israel’s apostasy for himself. The canonical form creates the impression that Moses spend a long and tranquil time on the mountain in the presence of YHWH where the covenant relation has formally been established (cf. 24:18–31:18). “Quietness and serene harmony are typical of the narrative.”<sup>477</sup> Then suddenly, out of the blue, Moses is informed of the people’s idolatrous behaviour down in the valley. To add to Moses’ shock, he is silenced to discuss the doings of the people in any detail (32:10).<sup>478</sup> Given the situation, it appears not as surprising to find Moses’ prayer confrontational and argumentative in tone. Conversely, the respectful and contrite tone of Moses’ second prayer (32:30–32) has to be understood in the light of verses 19–25. In other words, after Moses has witnessed for himself the gravity of Israel’s sin and has taken punitive measures, it seems natural that his prayer contains a confession of the people’s sin and is generally characterised by a cautious tone.

Having attempted to explain the two different characteristics of Moses’ prayers, we must still account for the seeming tension between the two divine responses in their canonical context (32:14, 33–34). According to Exodus 32:14, YHWH “repented” of His intention to consume Israel. Numerous scholars speak of a successful prayer because YHWH apparently forgave Israel.<sup>479</sup> In contrast Moses’ prayer in Exodus 32:31ff. is often regarded as unsuccessful because a forthcoming punishment is announced (32:33ff.) and because Moses’ willingness to die with Israel is declined. With regard to the former, we have already pointed out that the term “forgiveness” in this and other contexts is frequently used loosely, if not carelessly.<sup>480</sup> In our exegesis we have suggested that YHWH’s response in 32:14 does not contain an assurance of forgiveness (in the sense of cancelling sins), YHWH has only withdrawn from His intention to consume Israel on the spot and has implied

<sup>477</sup> Houtman (2000), 610.

<sup>478</sup> In the deuteronomic account Moses only intercedes after he witnessed Israel’s sin for himself (Deut. 9:13–21).

<sup>479</sup> E.g. Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 301.

<sup>480</sup> Brichto (1983), 18, makes a similar point.

that Israel still has a place in the divine plan (at no point does YHWH say that Israel will not be punished). In other words, a careful reading of the text, reveals that verse 14 does not necessarily stand in tension or even contradiction to YHWH's response in verse 33–34 where YHWH maintains His earlier decision not to subject Israel to an immediate deserved punishment. In verse 34, YHWH specifies that He will visit Israel's sin in judgement at a later point in time. On one level, YHWH seems to contest Moses' willingness to die with Israel by making clear that right and wrong matter and that the sinful generation will eventually be judged for their disobedience, on another level, YHWH answers Moses' petition (v. 32) favourably, in the sense that He is willing to "endure" Israel's sin for an unspecified time. We shall see that both Exodus 32:10–14 and 32:33–34 foreshadow YHWH's final and climactic revelation to be gracious and merciful, but not to leave the sinner unpunished (34:5–7). Moreover, the deferment of Israel's sin anticipates YHWH's definite statement to have great patience and to be resolved to further examine Israel's conduct before further action is taken against them (34:5–7).

Furthermore, it will become evident that Exodus 32:33–34 contributes significantly to a better understanding of the complex statement *וְנָשָׂא עֹן וְפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאת וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה* (34:7b, cf. § 4.3.8.2). Not only does Exodus 32:33–34 set the context for YHWH's solemn warning in chapter 34:7, but, as we shall argue, illuminates important aspects of the scout narrative (Nu. 13–14) where the sinful generation eventually receives its judgement. By the time the stubborn generation is visited in actual punishment (Nu. 14), however, YHWH has enabled the next generation to become bearers of the divine promise. Without giving away too many details of one of our major arguments at this stage of my thesis, I can say that the scout narrative provides a context where it is shown how divine grace and righteousness interact and how they are worked out in a specific situation.

Finally, we have seen that even though Moses' second prayer is characterised by a different tone, there is still a profound continuity between the two. Both times Moses' effectively declines YHWH's offer to make him the channel of divine blessing and thereby seems to leave little choice to YHWH but to think of something else. Moreover, Moses' commitment to Israel has not wavered after he has actually witnessed Israel's sinful conduct; rather to the contrary, his solidarity to the people reached a climax in his willingness to die with them, if YHWH will not endure their sin and by implication maintain His covenant commitment to His people. What is more, I would like to suggest that YHWH's response to Moses' second prayer exhibits a similar dynamic to verse 10 where Moses was arguably invited by prohibition to intercede for the people. Although Moses does not immediately respond to YHWH, the ambiguous nature of verse 33, the threat of a forthcoming judgement, and the plague (32:34–34) seems to underline the need for further prayer. This line of thought could be further supported by the mention of the ominous angel of YHWH, who could be interpreted as "a terrible reproach to the honour of

Moses.”<sup>481</sup> According to Muffs, the angel in this context connotes lack of confidence in Moses' leadership, and could thus be taken as a further incentive to take up the dialogue with YHWH, not only to intercede for Israel, but also to clarify Moses' status and role.<sup>482</sup>

In sum, Exodus 32:7–14 serves as a kind of theological commentary to the golden calf event,<sup>483</sup> but also stands in logical continuity with Exodus 32:30–34. Together, by their open-endedness, these prayers anticipate further dialogue and raise a number of central questions such as: What exactly does the immediate future hold for Israel? What has become of the covenant relationship? Is Moses still the favoured mediator? Moreover, the problem of divine presence among a sinful people has been introduced in Exodus 32:34 (reference to the divine messenger). This theme is developed in chapter 33 and becomes the overruling concern of Moses' subsequent dialogue (33:3, 5, 12–17, 34:9). In other words, chapter 32 comes to a close without anything being firmly resolved. Israel having just escaped total destruction, finds itself in a limbo state between being eradicated from the heavenly record and being forgiven. This is probably deliberate, for it creates suspense and effectively prepares the context for Moses' subsequent prayers.

#### 4.7 The Third Prayer: “Engaging God Face to Face”

Exodus 33 forms the bridge between the severely damaged covenant relation depicted in Exodus 32 and YHWH's gracious restoration of the covenant (34:10).<sup>484</sup> At the beginning of Exodus 33, Moses learns two things; firstly that YHWH is going to withdraw His presence from the recalcitrant people (33:3, 5), secondly that Israel's fate is still undecided (33:5). The fact that YHWH is still unresolved leaves the way open for Moses to press on in his attempt to reconcile YHWH to Israel. At the outset of the chapter everything hangs in the balance, whereas at the end of it, YHWH affirms the resumption of His presence among the people and announces a theophany to Moses (33:17, 22). As we shall see shortly, this shift from despair (33:4) to hope for restoration (33:17) is primarily due to Moses' persistent prayer. Understanding Moses' prayer remains the main concern of this section and naturally I cannot do justice to all the other exegetical issues involved in this very rich chapter. Having said that, most themes of chapter 33 are actually related to Moses' intercession.

<sup>481</sup> Muffs (1992), 14.

<sup>482</sup> We shall evaluate Muffs' argument in the context of Moses' third prayer (33:12ff.). Cf. Childs (1974), 572.

<sup>483</sup> Thus Clements (1985), 4–6, seems right in arguing that narrative prayers often serve as a theological instrument in the hands of the writers. Cf. Balentine (1993), 21.

<sup>484</sup> Milgrom (1990), xvii–xviii, sees in Exodus 33:17–34:9 not only the bridge between the broken and renewed covenant, but the very centre of a massive chiasmic structure comprising the entire Hexateuch. This is obviously not the place to evaluate the detailed structure of the Hexateuch/Pentateuch, it underlines, however, the pivotal importance of Moses' prayer in Israel's understanding.

#### 4.7.1 Moses' Third Prayer in Context

Exodus 33 is frequently understood as an accumulation of important traditions evolving around the issue of the presence of YHWH (i.e. account of YHWH's angel, tent of meeting, Moses the covenant mediator, the divine פָּנִים).<sup>485</sup> Thus part of Moses' prayer, recorded in verses 12–17, is often treated independently from its immediate context.<sup>486</sup> Muilenburg states: "verses 7–11 constitute a unity by itself, and have nothing to do with what precedes or follows."<sup>487</sup> Although this may be true with regard to the original tradition of the tent of meeting, in its final form, there is a clear thematic unity. In fact, we shall argue that Exodus 33:1–11 not only prepares the stage for Moses' dialogue with YHWH (33:12–23), but also provides essential information for the logic of the ensuing narrative.<sup>488</sup>

Although there is a change of scene between the tent of meeting account and the beginning of Moses' intercession, on a wider level, both narratives have a common theme, namely the mediatory role of Moses. Moreover, there are several literary indications which suggests that the narrator sought to integrate verses 7–11 and give it a specific theological function in chapter 33.<sup>489</sup> It will become evident in the following pages that it is important for the development of the narrative to distinguish between "*knowing* God face to face" (33:11) and "*seeing* the face of God" (33:20, 23). Buber argues that the tent of meeting account (33:7–11) is indispensable for the subsequent narrative.<sup>490</sup> The full significance of the narrator's distinctive use of פָּנִים will become apparent in our exegesis of Exodus 33:20ff. Moreover, reading the final form of the text, suggests that the narrator intended to say that the main dialogue (33:12ff.) occurs in the tent of meeting.<sup>491</sup> At least the nature of the prayer, an intensive and personal dialogue with God, seems to point to the kind of happening one would expect to take place in the tent.<sup>492</sup> Hence the following verses, on one level, could be seen as a window into the happening of the tent. Thus the concluding and climactic statement that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (33:11), not only brings the tent of meeting account to a close but also serves as a fitting introduction to what follows. Nobody is better qualified

<sup>485</sup> Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 298–301. Noth (1960<sup>2</sup>), 208: "Die sehr verschiedenartigen Stücke von 2 Mos. 33 werden zusammengehalten durch das Thema der Gegenwart Gottes inmitten seines Volkes." Cf. Zenger (1971), 223ff., for an overview of proposed literary compositions.

<sup>486</sup> Muilenburg (1968), 165, argues for an inclusion of verse 1a.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>488</sup> Cf. Houtman (2000), 686.

<sup>489</sup> Cf. Buber (1994a), 143, Blum (1990), 60–63.

<sup>490</sup> Buber (1994a), 145.

<sup>491</sup> Brichto (1983), 30. Contra Houtman (2000), 679, who argues that Moses' dialogue with YHWH in Exodus 33:12–23 takes place on the mountain and resumes the former conversation (32:34, 33:1). He bases his argument on verse 21 which arguably indicates a location on the mountain. Interestingly Exodus 34:2ff. locates the dialogue rather in the tent, since Moses is explicitly asked to go up (not to remain on) the mountain for his climactic audition with YHWH (34:5ff.).

<sup>492</sup> Jacob (1997), 967, Moberly (1983), 66, Renaud (1998), 174.

than Moses for the intensive intercession to follow.<sup>493</sup>

The thematic unity reaches back to the beginning of the chapter. The arrangement of the composition suggests that Moses' third prayer has to be understood in the light of Israel's change of behaviour and attitude. The same people who showed initially disrespect to Moses (32:1) now rise and stand in his presence whenever he went out to the tent of meeting (33:8). In other words, they acknowledge Moses' judgement of their sin 32:19–29 and his mediatory role. There are also some signs of contrition. The people strip themselves of their ornaments and mourn as a sign of repentance (אבל, 33:4).<sup>494</sup> No longer do they bow down to an idol, but stand in awe of YHWH and bow to Him (וַיִּקֶּם כָּל־הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ, 33:10).

In sum, verses 1–11 testify not only to a transformation of the people, but implicitly also to YHWH's relation to them. Even though, as a result of Israel's sin, the presence of God is now found outside the camp, it was possible for individual Israelites to go outside the camp and seek divine counsel (cf. 33:3, 5, 7).<sup>495</sup> This change of attitude on both sides is significant for the story as it unfolds. For it seems that the text presupposes this mutual change of heart for Moses' intercession to be fruitful.<sup>496</sup>

#### 4.7.2 Need for Divine Assurance

As indicated, the overruling concern of Moses' third and final prayer is YHWH's presence among the people (33:3, 5, 12, 14–16, 34:9). On a more immediate level, Moses' prayer raises several other issues; the problem of guidance (cf. 32:34, 33:1–5, 12), uncertainty regarding his and Israel's role and status (33:3, 5, 33:12–13).<sup>497</sup> Although Moses was commissioned to lead Israel into the promised land, YHWH refuses to accompany them, instead an ominous heavenly messenger is introduced (32:34, 33:2). Moses' dissatisfied tone is evident. Three times an accusative אַתָּה is employed in verse 12. Each time it introduces a new point in Moses' argument.<sup>498</sup>

“See, you (אַתָּה) have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’ (הָעַל אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה) but you (אַתָּה) have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you (אַתָּה) have said, ‘I know you by name’ (33:12).

Moses begins his prayer by urging YHWH to see or reconsider (רָא, imperative) His earlier command to bring up the people to Canaan (עֲלֵה כְנָעַן אֶתָּה וְהָעָם, 33:1). Moses clearly refers back to verse 1, yet interestingly he does not mention YHWH's refusal

<sup>493</sup> Cf. Moberly (1983), 72.

<sup>494</sup> Cf. Aurelius (1989), 101.

<sup>495</sup> We shall see in the context of Numbers 12–14 that the tent of meeting is not simply the result of Israel's sin and thus a substitute for YHWH's presence among the people, but in a different context serves as a legitimate place of meeting with YHWH.

<sup>496</sup> Houtman (2000), 686.

<sup>497</sup> Buber (1994a), 205, develops, on the basis of Moses' frequent visit to the tent of meeting, the theme of Moses struggling to understand YHWH's guidance.

<sup>498</sup> Blum (1990), 62.

to accompany Israel on the way. Neither does he explicitly address the issue of YHWH's מלאך (33:2–3).<sup>499</sup> It is clear from context, however, that Moses is at least indirectly concerned with the ominous מלאך who appears to have come between him and YHWH (32:34, 33:2). Who is he? Is YHWH's name in him (cf. 14:19, 23:21)? Is He to bring judgement in God's name (cf. 23:21, 32:34), or is he to protect Israel against the indigenous peoples of Canaan (23:23, 33:2)?

Basically two different approaches have been advocated to the ambiguous מלאך. Either the messenger of YHWH is understood as a sign of YHWH's commitment to the people and thus is seen as a fulfilment to an earlier made promise that YHWH will send His מלאך to go ahead and protect them (23:20ff.).<sup>500</sup> Or it is argued that the divine agent is a sign of YHWH's judgement and comes as a reproach to Moses' honour, because the angel could possibly connote lack of confidence in Moses' leadership.<sup>501</sup> A careful contextual reading, however, shows that the announced angel embodies probably both judgement and grace. Judgement because the מלאך is not a representative of YHWH as on previous occasions (3:2ff., 23:23), but is meant to be a "second rate" substitute for YHWH's personal presence and guardianship (33:2–3).<sup>502</sup> Without YHWH's presence Israel will lose its identity as YHWH's treasured people (19:5–6). Grace because withdrawing from Israel means being spared, and because even in YHWH's consuming anger, He makes arrangement for the people to go to the promised land. Hence even in pronouncing judgement, YHWH intended a degree of continuity of the divine promise.

The issue in question, however, is to do with the fact that Moses has not been informed whom YHWH will send with him in spite of his uniquely close relationship (33:11f.). According to Muffs, Moses voices here his dissatisfaction over the announced transferral of leadership.

Moses' argument means, "You told me that no angel would mediate between You and me. Rather I assumed that our relationship would be direct. That's why You had better return Israel to its former state a people whom the Lord brings out personally, not by the agency of an angel...but only by means of a prophet."<sup>503</sup>

Moses, so Muffs, cleverly integrates YHWH's intended new plan in his prayer and exposes it as contradictory to his initial commission, where he was assured of YHWH's accompanying presence (cf. 3:12–14). Although it is difficult to evaluate in detail whether the issue behind the opening words of the prayer is Moses' offended honour as sole mediator, or his genuine confusion about YHWH's withdrawal, it will become clear that Moses' prayer objective is to restore YHWH's presence among Israel (33:15–16) and that Moses repetitively seeks reaffirmation of his role and

<sup>499</sup> Irwin (1997), 630.

<sup>500</sup> Cassuto (1967), 424, Brichto (1983), 21.

<sup>501</sup> Muffs (1992), 14–15.

<sup>502</sup> In Exodus 3:2ff (cf. Genesis 22:11, 31:11), the angel of YHWH is more than a representative, it is rather an *Erscheinungsform* of YHWH. Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 298–300.

<sup>503</sup> Muffs (1992), 14–15.

status. Moreover, it seems evident that Moses draws attention to a paradox. On the one hand, he does not know whom YHWH will send with him, and, on the other hand, YHWH has assured Moses that he has found favour in His eyes, knows him by name, and talks to him as to a friend (33:11–12). Since a relationship of this degree of intimacy includes usually transparency, one may infer some disappointment and accusation from Moses' opening phrase.<sup>504</sup> Thus it seems likely that Moses' initial words reflect the need of reaffirmation that he still is "truly YHWH's confidant."<sup>505</sup> The golden calf incident has not only put Israel's future into jeopardy, but also raises the question whether Moses' initial divine approval and commission is still valid. Having failed to reach full reconciliation between Israel and YHWH (32:33–34), Moses may well have questioned his role. What is more, there is good reason to think that the announced heavenly messenger comes as a challenge to Moses' leadership. In the light of all these issues, Moses seems to be in need of reconfirmation of his mission and more importantly, he is in search for a fuller understanding of God's ways (33:12–13). It seems that a past experience of God, even if it was as powerful and vivid as the burning bush encounter, cannot sustain a divine vocation. In the face of trials and Israel's sinful conduct, past favours need to be constantly reaffirmed and, as Moberly writes, "made an existential reality."<sup>506</sup>

By arguing that God has said, "I know you by name" and "you have found favour in my eyes," Moses appears to quote an earlier saying of YHWH. It is not clear, however, to what incident reference is being made. The problem is that the prominent Hebrew expressions *בשם ידע* and *הן בעיני* are here for the first time related to Moses and thus in no direct literary relation to any previous account. Having said that, the immediate context provides sufficient background to explain Moses' favoured position. He has commended himself through a mixture of uncompromising loyalty to YHWH in the face of Israel's idolatrous conduct, and tremendous solidarity to Israel in the face of consuming divine wrath. In other words, Moses embodied in his act and prayer to some degree the divine attributes as they were going to be revealed to him at Sinai (cf. 34:6–7). Furthermore, the reference to being known makes good sense in the light of verse 11 (cf. 24:18).<sup>507</sup>

The Hebrew term *בשם ידע* occurs in an unusual high number in Exodus 33:12–17.<sup>508</sup> Apart from Moses, only of Abraham (Gen. 18:19), David (2 Sam. 20), and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) is it said that they are known by God. The verb *ידע* often goes far beyond intellectual knowledge. Frequently it carries the denotation of a personal relationship and intimate knowledge.<sup>509</sup> McKane argues that *ידע* in Jeremiah's call

<sup>504</sup> Buber (1994a), 148.

<sup>505</sup> Houtman (2000), 697.

<sup>506</sup> Moberly (1983), 73.

<sup>507</sup> Renaud (1998), 178.

<sup>508</sup> Six times in five verses. Both synonyms clearly function as *Leitwörter* in this prayer. See Waldman (1979), 67–68, for a suggestive structural analyses of Exodus 33:12–17.

<sup>509</sup> Schottroff (1994<sup>5</sup>), 682–701.



narrative (Jer. 1:5) is synonymous with בָּחַר. God chose Jeremiah for a special purpose before his foetus was formed in the womb.<sup>510</sup>

Before I formed you in the womb I *knew* you (יָדַעְתִּיךָ), and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5).

Given the parallels between Moses' and Jeremiah's call narrative (cf. § 3.1.1), it is at least possible that יָדַע in Exodus 33:12ff. carries also the sense of "being chosen" or singled out for a particular task.<sup>511</sup> This is further endorsed by Moses' birth narrative (Ex. 1–2) which already testifies to God's special provision and prepares the reader for Moses' special role.<sup>512</sup> Moreover, Psalm 106 explicitly refers to Moses as God's chosen one (בְּחִירָה, v. 23). In spite of all the parallels between Moses' and Jeremiah's call and mission, Moses (alongside Samuel) is presented as the archetypal prophetic intercessor (cf. Jer. 15:1).<sup>513</sup> Moses' unparalleled position is doubly reenforced here in Exodus 33:17. Firstly, it is said only of Moses that he is known *by name* (33:17);<sup>514</sup> secondly, apart from Noah, of no other person does the OT say that they have found favour in the sight of YHWH (cf. Gen. 6:8). Not unlike in Noah's time everything depended on one person who found divine favour. In Noah's case the future of the entire creation was in jeopardy, whereas in Moses' time the future of God's chosen people was in danger. On both occasions God's mercy is evoked by the right response of the chosen person. Noah's sacrifice pleased God and therefore He promised never again to destroy every living creature (Gen. 8:20–22). Moses in turn achieved Israel's protection from YHWH's wrath through fervent prayer.<sup>515</sup>

Having underlined Moses' unequalled relationship with God, it is important to note that his prayer in Exodus 33:12ff. takes again the form of a logical argument (cf. 32:11–13). The logic is, if he has really found favour in God's eyes (יָעֲתָה אֵם-נָא קִצְאָתִי) and if he is really known by God, that is chosen for an intimate relationship and a divine mission, then YHWH is to prove and honour that by revealing to Moses the divine ways.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>510</sup> McKane (1986), 6.

<sup>511</sup> Jacob (1997), 969, Muilenburg (1968), 176–178.

<sup>512</sup> Isaiah 63:11 appears to testify to Moses' divine rescue from the Nile: The Hebrew, however, is not perfectly clear whether the rescue refers to Moses or to Israel's deliverance from the Red Sea. See Westermann (1985<sup>6</sup>), 389.

<sup>513</sup> Cf. Thompson (1980), 387, Holladay (1986), 439.

<sup>514</sup> Aurelius (1989), 114.

<sup>515</sup> Cf. Moberly (1983), 91–92.

<sup>516</sup> Contra Irwin (1997), 630, who argues that Moses lost the thread of his argument in verses 12–13. Instead of pursuing his desire for information about the one whom YHWH intends to send, so Irwin, Moses quotes YHWH again on a different matter. Irwin detects "two currents running through the dialogue" which "are distinguished by the two quotations with which Moses begins in vv 12–13 and the inclusions using language from these two quotations in vv 15 and 17" (p. 635). The first current includes vv. 1, 12a, 14–15 and revolves around the issue of who will go up with Israel. While the second current includes 12b–13, 16–17 and centres around the two Hebrew expressions יָדַע בְּשֵׁם and מִצָּחַן בְּעֵין. Irwin argues that these two currents create the impression that neither Moses nor YHWH responds to what the other said. He calls it "cross-purposes" or "delayed response" (p. 633).



## 4.7.3 "Show me Your Ways!" (33:13)

Moses wants to know God's ways so that he can know his God (הִירְעֵנִי נָא אֶת־דְּרָכֶיךָ וְאֶת־עֲדָתְךָ).<sup>517</sup> This petition has to be seen against Moses' uncertainty about the future. On the one hand, YHWH disclosed signs of grace and mercy, i.e. agreed to refrain from annihilating Israel and made even arrangements for Israel's journey to Canaan under the guardianship of the ominous angel (32:14, 33:1ff.), and, on the other hand, a judgement of unknown nature looms over Israel and worse still the whole Exodus to the promised land appears to be futile without YHWH's presence.<sup>518</sup> Thus the term "ways" does not so much refer to the actual way through the wilderness to Canaan,<sup>519</sup> nor does it seem primarily a quest for the criteria by which the covenant is maintained,<sup>520</sup> but goes deeper, to the root of the matter. It is a prayer which seeks to comprehend the guiding principles, the divine will which exercises punishment, mercy, and, forgiveness.<sup>521</sup> Knowing the divine principles, however, are but a means to know YHWH Himself, "so that I may know you." Sarna helpfully articulates Moses' grand quest:

Moses here asks to comprehend God's essential personality, the attributes that guide His actions in His dealings with humankind, the norms by which He operates in His governance of the world.<sup>522</sup>

The quest for mutual knowledge testifies to Moses' uncertainty as to God's plans and purposes for Israel, which remain hitherto nebulous.<sup>523</sup> As Irvin has underlined, YHWH does not directly respond to Moses' prayer. Although God answers (v. 14), He does not respond to Moses' specific quest until verse 19 where He announces a revelation of His name (34:5–7). We have already noted in Moses' first prayer that knowing the mind and will of God is essential for effective prayer.<sup>524</sup> This will be enforced and confirmed in Moses' evocation of YHWH's name in his intercession at Kadesh (cf. 34:5–7, Nu. 14:18f., § 5.4.2.3).

<sup>517</sup> Waw is employed as a voluntative "so that," it has the same meaning as לְמַעַן and is probably for stylistic reason not repeated.

<sup>518</sup> Rendtorff (1999), 61, argues that the prime reason for the Exodus is found in God's desire to dwell in the midst of the people.

<sup>519</sup> So Rashbam, cited from Waldman (1979), 67, Brichto (1983), 26.

<sup>520</sup> Although דרך in its previous occurrence referred most likely to the commandments (cf. 32:8) and the word ידע in certain contexts has strong covenantal connotations (Cf. Waldman [1979], 69–70, and Levenson [1987], 78, 44), the reading advocated above appears more contextual.

<sup>521</sup> Cassuto (1967), 433. Buber and Muilenburg have rightly pointed to the key function of the verb ידע in this passage. Neither of them, however, makes reference to the uneven distribution of the word. Five out of the six occurrences appear on the lips of Moses. One of them is a quote from YHWH. This uneven distribution of the verb gives the impression that Moses is desperately wanting to know YHWH. Brueggemann (1992a), 154, makes a similar observation regarding the formula "find favour in YHWH' eyes." Again this phrase is found four times on Moses' lips, while only once on YHWH's (33:17). This one-sided use of the Hebrew synonyms gives the impression that Moses not only wants to know YHWH, but also seeks divine assurance.

<sup>522</sup> Sarna (1991), 213.

<sup>523</sup> Renaud (1998), 179.

<sup>524</sup> Cf. Waldman (1979), 67–72, Miller (1994), 321–324.

Immediately after the quest to comprehend YHWH's ways, Moses adds in a seemingly appendix fashion, "Consider too that (וְיִצְאָה בִּי) this nation is your people (33:13)." Although, this last clause looks like an appendix, there is good reason to believe that the people have been Moses' main concern all along. This is hinted at in the resumption of the term וְיִצְאָה (consider!) as it was employed at the outset of his prayer where Moses opened the dialogue with reference to the people (33:12).<sup>525</sup> Although the narrative conveys the impression that Moses lacks the courage to bring Israel up, the people, as will become evident, are actually the reason for his prayer.<sup>526</sup> Blum correctly observes that Moses does not mention YHWH's refusal to accompany Israel. Neither is there any mention of Israel's stiffneckedness. Is there a sense of diplomacy in Moses' prayer?<sup>527</sup> It is quite possible that after YHWH's response in Exodus 32:33–33:5, Moses is cautious in mentioning Israel again. Nevertheless, the reader should not forget that ever since Moses' selfless refusal to be the medium of a new start (cf. 32:10, 32), he sought to restore the people back to their deliverer and covenant God. Whereupon a concise divine response follows;

"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (וְיָלַכְתִּי וְהִנַּחְתִּי לָךְ, 33:14).

#### 4.7.4 Divine Presence and Peace Assured (33:14–17)

YHWH's פָּנִים among the people was anticipated in the mobile sanctuary (cf. 29:42–46)<sup>528</sup> before the golden calf incident caused God to renounce His intention to dwell among the stiff-necked people. As a result of that, Moses' overruling prayer concern has been the restoration of YHWH's presence among Israel (33:3). In other words, the brief divine assurance of ongoing divine presence must come as a great relief to Moses.<sup>529</sup> Having said that, on closer examination, God's answer is not only ambiguous, but also does not answer Moses' quest for comprehending the divine ways. YHWH's brief response only takes up Moses' earlier question about who will accompany them to Canaan (33:12a). Although the divine response can only imply that YHWH will personally escort Moses, it has an uncomfortable non-committed and exclusive ring to it. In the MT, there is no qualifying pronoun going with פָּנִים,<sup>530</sup>

<sup>525</sup> The fact that the people are Moses' top agenda is underlined by the fact that they are repeated three times in the second plea (33:15–16).

<sup>526</sup> Renaud (1998), 179–180, Jacob (1997), 970.

<sup>527</sup> Blum (1990), 62.

<sup>528</sup> The word פָּנִים is a synonym for divine presence and carries cultic connotations. Cf. Eichrodt (1985<sup>3</sup>), 35–39.

<sup>529</sup> Noth (1962), 211, thinks that YHWH's brief response is only meant to calm down Moses, while Muilenburg (1968), 170ff., regards the brevity of the divine response as a typical mark of cultic and oracular formulations.

<sup>530</sup> The LXX renders וְיָלַכְתִּי פָנִי with "I myself will go before you" (αὐτός προπορεύσομαι σου), whereas it retains "face" (προσώπον) in verses 20, 23. Cf. Zimmerli (1978), 61. Since the entire prayer seems to be formulated in a deliberate ambiguous way, it appears that later amendments which sought to clarify the divine response, actually robbed it of its likely calculated enigmatic nature.

whereas peace (נחם) is only assured to Moses.<sup>531</sup> The fact that there is no mention of the people, creates the impression that YHWH is still hesitant about the prospect of reconciliation with Israel. Given the tension between the brevity and exclusive tone of YHWH's response, and Moses' prime concern to restore the divine presence among the people, it seems natural that Moses presses the same point. This time Israel is explicitly included in his petition "if your presence will not go do not lead us from here" (אם-אין פניך הלקים אל-תעלנו מן-הר, 33:15).

Just as historical oriented scholarship has pointed out that verses 7–11 go back to an independent tradition associated with the tent of meeting, so it has been suggested that behind Moses' prayer lurks the problem and the fear that YHWH cannot leave Sinai, His home ground, and the uncertainty whether He can be worshipped elsewhere.<sup>532</sup> Such a reading of Moses' prayer is based on the assumption that ANE deities were bound to their particular holy places.<sup>533</sup> In other words, it has been argued that YHWH was originally associated with and restricted to Mount Sinai.<sup>534</sup> Even if that was the concern of the original account of Moses' prayer—and this is disputed<sup>535</sup>—the context and the voices of other scriptural passages contest such an understanding. For a start, Israel's central credal formula: "YHWH led you out of Egypt" (20:2) rails fundamentally against the idea that YHWH is restricted to a certain location.<sup>536</sup> The notion that YHWH is in some sense spatially limited is also clearly corrected in other parts of Israel's Scripture. This comes particularly to expression in the psalms (e.g. Ps. 145:18). The presence of God, according to the psalmist, does not depend on a certain location, but rather on the right attitude of heart. On exactly this issue, the Deuteronomist draws a distinction between spatially limited, "so-called gods" and the ubiquity of YHWH.

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us,

<sup>531</sup> Paying close attention to the text, Cassuto (1967), 434, notes in the exclusive assurance to give peace to Moses a possible deliberate play on words. In Exodus 32, as a result of Israel's idolatry, YHWH asked Moses to leave Him in peace (וְהַיִּחָה לִּי, 32:10) so that He could destroy Israel. Meanwhile, Moses' advocacy and the character of God have changed the situation. YHWH, instead of demanding to be left in peace, promises peace to Moses (וְהַיִּחָה לָךְ, 33:14). Davidson (1986), 76, builds on Cassuto's observation.

Precisely because, faced with the decree of destructive divine anger, he refused to give the Lord 'rest', but strove instead to change the Lord's attitude from anger to compassion, so now Moses is given the assurance of the Lord's presence and is himself given 'rest'; It is his wrestling with God which is prior condition of this 'rest', the new assurance and peace which comes to him.

<sup>532</sup> Cf. Noth (1962), 211f.

<sup>533</sup> See Houtman (2000), 683–684, for bibliographical details.

<sup>534</sup> Noth (1962), 211.

<sup>535</sup> Although the majority of Egyptian gods' power was strictly limited to "a closely circumscribed geographical area," during the time when Egypt was a world power, "the sun god acquired more universal pretensions that went beyond his previous narrow spatial limits." See Hornung (1996<sup>2</sup>), 166ff., for some primary references.

<sup>536</sup> Muilenburg (1968), 180f., argues that Jethro's exclamation: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians." (18:11) gives voice to the wonder that YHWH, the allegedly Mount Sinai confined deity, left His territory and defeated the Egyptian gods on their grounds.

whenever we call upon him (Deut. 4:7)?

YHWH's ubiquity enables Him to listen to the prayer of His people from wherever they call upon Him. To put it differently, if YHWH was restricted to a certain location, that would imply that He is absent in another place. This in turn would prevent Him from hearing the prayer of His people from anywhere else than His "dwelling place." Hebrew Scripture clearly provides a vision of a God who is not limited by space.<sup>537</sup> Moreover, coming back to Exodus 32–33, the story provides clear reason why God refused to accompany Israel on their way to Canaan, as Moberly remarks.

The problem in the present context is not spatial or metaphysical, concerning the possibility of Yahweh's presence away from Sinai, nor is it to do with the affirmation of the identity of the Israelites' God in Canaan with the deity of Sinai, but it is the moral problem of how a holy God can abide with a sinful people. The recognition of this enables a coherent understanding of the material as a whole.<sup>538</sup>

Having seen that not YHWH's presence in Canaan, but YHWH's presence among recalcitrant Israel is the theme and problem of Exodus 33:12–17,<sup>539</sup> we still need to explain the awkward appearing repetition in verse 14 and 15.

He (YHWH) said, פָּנִי יִלְכוּ וְהִנַּחֲתִי לָךְ (33:14).

he (Moses) said to him, אִם-אֵין פָּנֶיךָ הֹלְכִים אֶל-תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזֶּה (33:15).

Childs cautions us not to press the logical consistency of the prayer too much. He thereby draws attention to the extremely emotional tone and the tense nature of the conversation as Moses strives to obtain a further concession from God.<sup>540</sup> Thus it is possible that the narrator seeks to convey a sense of Moses' psychological pressure by reporting his repetitive claim (cf. Nu. 14:13–15, § 5.4.2.2). It is, however, not a mere repetition of verse 14, there is also clear progression in Moses' new plea. It is phrased in the plural. He speaks of "do not lead *us* from here" (v. 15) and mentions *Your people* twice (v. 16).<sup>541</sup>

For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people (אֲנִי וְעַמִּי), unless you go with us (וְהָלַכְתָּ עִמָּנוּ)? In this way, we shall be distinct (וְנִבְלִינוּ), I and your people (אֲנִי וְעַמִּי, 33:16).

Moses starts to reveal his agenda. This time Israel is explicitly included in Moses' prayer. There is a strong sense of oneness between mediator and people. This inseparable entity between Moses and people shows close affinities with Moses'

<sup>537</sup> I acknowledge dependence on Levenson's reasoning (1985), 138. It is noteworthy, however, that, with the growing importance which was attributed to Jerusalem/Zion Israel remained in danger of identifying its temple with the permanent and sole dwelling place of YHWH. See Davidson (1986), 75, 140–169. This phenomenon comes nowhere else so clearly to expression as in the exilic psalms in which deported Israel directs their prayer to their distant home land (E.g. Pss. 42–43, 84).

<sup>538</sup> Moberly (1983), 67.

<sup>539</sup> Aurelius (1988), 109.

<sup>540</sup> Childs (1974), 594.

<sup>541</sup> The LXX seems to thwart Moses' argument in verse 15 by omitting any reference to the people: "...do not bring *me* up from this place;" (εἰ μὴ αὐτὸς σὺ πορεύῃ μὴ με ἀναγάγῃς ἐντεῦθεν).

previous prayer in 32:32. Not only is Moses' solidarity once more underlined, but also an important criterion, concerning Israel is raised. How shall it be known that Moses and the people found favour in YHWH's sight (33:16)? What are the marks of divine approval? The only way to be assured of YHWH's favour is His accompanying presence. It is also YHWH's presence which will distinguish (פלה) them from other peoples. Whether this continues to be Israel's privilege remains an open question at this stage. Moses' prayer alludes to all which was once God's good intention for Israel. It is, however, more than an allusion to the original covenant relationship: It is, as shall become clearer, also an appeal for a gracious renewal of it. Yet the narrative appears intentionally vague at this stage. The petition is not concretely articulated until Exodus 34:9 and conversely the explicit divine response remains outstanding until Exodus 34:10.<sup>542</sup> This is possibly still part of Moses' prayer diplomacy and testifies to Moses' awareness of Israel's guilt and sin. In an ambiguous manner, not unlike Moses' petition, YHWH responds:

"I will (also) do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight and I know you by name" (33:17).

What is one to make of this answer? Commentators range in their interpretation of verse 17 from the view that YHWH remains distant and that His response merely underlines His sovereignty,<sup>543</sup> to the understanding that Moses' prayer reaches here its zenith in terms of highlighting the fundamental issue at stake after the breached covenant, and in terms of its success: the restoration of YHWH's presence.<sup>544</sup> Advocating the former position, Brueggemann soberly remarks that YHWH merely repeats Moses' initial words, "I know you by name and..." (cf. 33:12, 17). It is used "rhetorically to show conflict of the one who insists and the one who grants nothing." According to Brueggemann, at the end of the unit (33:17), Moses is not granted further knowledge about YHWH.<sup>545</sup> Moreover, there is no explicit reference to the people in God's response. Hence Brueggemann concludes that nothing has changed. Everything still hangs in the balance. The only thing which remains certain is that YHWH determines the condition of any possible future relationship. God emerges more than before as the sovereign One who retains the initiative.<sup>546</sup> It seems right to say that YHWH's freedom is underlined by not spelling out the concessions which Moses prayed for. As we shall see shortly, God's sovereignty and freedom are

<sup>542</sup> Following Buber's (1994a), 268, reference to the wordplay between וְנִפְלֵאָה and נִפְלְאָה, Blum (1990), 64, argues that Exodus 33:16 anticipates Exodus 34:10. He points out that in both instances Israel's position is defined in contrast to the other peoples.

וְנִפְלֵאָה...מִכָּל-הָעַם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה (33:16)  
אֲעֲשֶׂה נִפְלְאָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-נִבְרָא בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הַגּוֹיִם (34:10)

<sup>543</sup> Brueggemann (1992a), 154.

<sup>544</sup> Durham (1987), 448. Houtman (2000), 680, 700, argues that "it would not be in keeping with his status as the greater to state openly that he has changed his mind;" yet as far as YHWH is concerned, "the bond between him and Israel has been restored."

<sup>545</sup> Brueggemann (1992a), 156.

<sup>546</sup> (1992a), 154.

further developed in verse 19ff. To argue, however, that nothing has changed does not do justice to the flow of the text. By promising that “also this thing I will do” (גַּם אֵת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲעָשֶׂה), reference is made to the immediately preceding request for divine presence with Moses *and* the people. Moreover, the petition to be distinguished from other peoples is affirmed. Furthermore, the גַּם seems also to reconfirm the first assurance of divine presence and peace (32:14). Given the fact, however, that YHWH still does not spell out His concession, should caution us to talk of an unreserved success where YHWH affirms Moses' prayer without reservation.<sup>547</sup> Yet it is difficult to deny that significant progression has been achieved. The explicit divine assurance, that the בְּרִית is restored, however, has to wait until Exodus 34:10. Even if there is still a sense of unease about the people in verse 17, YHWH seems prepared to give Israel another chance.

The second part of YHWH's response makes clear that this is only granted because Moses found divine favour. We have noticed in verse 12 that it was not entirely clear to what quotation Moses was referring to when he claimed divine favour and that he was known by name; here in verse 17, we hear it from YHWH's lips.<sup>548</sup> By saying that Moses is intimately known to Him, YHWH in effect is saying that nothing is concealed from Him, He knows Moses' heart and motivation (Cf. Jer. 12:3, Ps. 139:23). In other words, not only are Moses' motives transparent and ultimately in line with YHWH's will and character, but YHWH's words come also as a confirmation that Moses was rightly chosen for the office of mediator.<sup>549</sup> That is why Moses' divine favour is strongly underlined and the prayer is not refused. It is noteworthy, however, that Moses' quest to know God and His ways (33:13) has not been answered yet.

In the light of YHWH's previous refusal to accompany Israel, Moses' intercession in these verses seems an extremely audacious undertaking. It is thus interesting to compare briefly the relation between Exodus 32:30–34 and 33:12–17. The former prayer is marked by submission and uncertainty and only few words are spoken. In this passage, however, we find long and brave requests on Moses' lips. There is a sense that Moses' courage to intercede for the people increases during the conversation because YHWH does not refuse his plea (unlike Jer. 7:6, 11:14, 14:11).<sup>550</sup> Although YHWH shows some reluctance in committing Himself to the people, it is noteworthy that Moses' brave words are not presented in a negative light (cf. 3:11–4:17).<sup>551</sup> It is likely for this reason that Moses' prayer increases in

<sup>547</sup> Durham's (1987), 448, 446, suggestion that Moses' prayer reaches here its climax has to be seen against Durham's wider argument that Exodus 33:12–17 is not only literary-wise at the centre of the composite narrative, but also theology wise. We shall argue, however, that Moses' intercession does not reach its climax until his final petition in Exodus 34:9.

<sup>548</sup> Thereby יִדְעֵתִיר בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה (33:17) is chiasmically taken up from verse 12 מִפְּנֵי שֵׁם יְהוָה.

<sup>549</sup> Cf. Scharbert (1989), 127.

<sup>550</sup> Jacob (1997), 968.

<sup>551</sup> See Davidson (1986), 66.

audacity as YHWH is graciously willing to respond.<sup>552</sup> Instead a word of gratitude for granting Moses' petitions, Moses' audacity reaches its climax in his request (imperative) to see YHWH's כבוד (33:18).

#### 4.7.5 "Show me Your כבוד" (33:18)

From verse 18 onwards, there is a shift from "knowing" to "seeing" YHWH's כבוד. It has frequently been pointed out that with Moses' request to see YHWH's כבוד a new theme is introduced. Moreover, there is a shift in tone: Verses 12–17 are passionate and audacious in character, whereas from verse 18 onwards, the nature of the dialogue changes drastically. Moses speaks once (33:18) and remains silent until chapter 34:9. According to Brueggemann, not even verse 18 is really a genuine request but rather a

thematic heading for what follows. All of vv. 18–23 appear to be somewhat removed, balanced theological reflection or meditation on the problem of divine revelation. It is offered by someone who is not informed by the dispute that has just ended but by someone who meditates on the mystery of the divine character and the nature of Yahweh's commitment to Israel.<sup>553</sup>

Brueggemann is not on his own, Noth also argues that Exodus 33:18–23 is a subsequent account (Nachtrag), which is not even consistent in itself.<sup>554</sup> Thereby he refers particularly to the threefold introductory ויאמר in YHWH's speech (cf. 33:19, 20, 21). Renaud takes the possibility of rhetoric into account,<sup>555</sup> but argues that these verses still reflect a complex textual history.<sup>556</sup> For example, following Zenger, he draws attention to verse 19 which, according to him, does not directly respond to Moses' prayer in verse 18 (i.e. the term פָּנֶיךָ does not exactly correspond to כבוד).<sup>557</sup> Furthermore, it has been argued that the theophany in Exodus 34:5–7 is of a different nature from what is announced in 33:18–23.<sup>558</sup> Since we work predominantly with the final form of the text, it remains part of our task to evaluate whether or to what degree the narrative is characterised by inconsistencies and vague connections.

So far the prayer has been for YHWH's presence among the people. This request has received divine approval in verse 17. This raises the question why Moses would pray to see God's כבוד (33:18). According to the book of Exodus, YHWH's כבוד has already been revealed on a number of occasions, most importantly in the theophany at Mount Sinai before the breach of the covenant. On that occasion YHWH's כבוד

<sup>552</sup> There are clearly some conceptual affinities with Abraham's increasingly brave intercession in Genesis 18:17–33. Cf. Scharbert (1984), 92.

<sup>553</sup> Brueggemann (1992), 160–161, associates this theologumenon of glory with the Zion–Jerusalem theologians.

<sup>554</sup> (1959), 212.

<sup>555</sup> Cf. Moberly (1983), 30.

<sup>556</sup> Renaud (1998), 183–184, argues that a deuteronomic redactor interpolated a given text (vv. 18, 21–23) and added verse 19, in order to prepare for YHWH's theophany in 34:5–8.

<sup>557</sup> Zenger (1971), 93, Renaud (1998), 183.

<sup>558</sup> Cf. Zenger (1971), 93, 96, Aurelius (1988), 104.

was publicly visible in the form of a devouring fire (כֹּאֵשׁ אֹכֵלָה, 24:17). Moreover, Moses has already experienced YHWH's כְּבוֹד in the liberation from Egypt (cf. 9:16, 14:4, 18), and in the miraculous providence in the desert, where God escorted His people in a pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness (16:7, 10). Thus it appears that Moses asks for a divine manifestation that he and the people have already seen and experienced before, maybe something analogous to YHWH's presence on the wilderness journey or at Sinai.<sup>559</sup> According to Exodus 33:1, YHWH commissioned Moses to lead Israel to the promised land. After a long and persistent negotiation, Moses' prayer for YHWH's ongoing presence found divine approval (33:14, 17), as we have seen, however, YHWH's response is brief and to some degree ambiguous. Thus it makes good sense to argue that Moses presses on and demands a concrete sign or a proof to assure him of God's guiding presence.<sup>560</sup>

Jacob attempts to understand Moses' request from a slightly different perspective. He points to YHWH's original intention to dwell among Israel in the sanctuary, which was then put into serious jeopardy through the golden calf incident. In the light of the current uncertainties, Moses' request to see God's glory may well be understood as an aspiration for an experience of YHWH as it was promised (29:42–46) and anticipated in Israel's sanctuary (cf. 40:34–35).<sup>561</sup> Such a manifestation would settle all uncertainties regarding YHWH's presence among Israel. These two attempts to understand Moses' request arise both out of the narrative context. Although the former evolves more naturally out of the immediate concerns of divine escort, the second is closely related and is certainly complementary. In short, Moses seems to seek a new divine manifestation as it was visible to the entire people in Egypt, the wilderness, and at Sinai, as a confirmation of, or as a pledge for, divine favour and presence.<sup>562</sup> At the same time Moses' request reveals his prayer objective: that YHWH would dwell among His people.<sup>563</sup> Little does Moses know at this stage that YHWH's presence will in some sense be mediated through him (34:29ff.). Nor is he aware that his aspiration to view YHWH's כְּבוֹד leads to the fullest revelation of YHWH's character (34:6–7).

As mentioned, some scholars detect in the divergence between Moses' prayer for a disclosure of YHWH's כְּבוֹד and YHWH's actual announcement of a manifestation of divine טוֹב, a sign of a later literary composition. Rather than detecting some inconsistency in the terminology of the MT,<sup>564</sup> it is possible, and to our judgement more likely, that the use of טוֹב comes as a deliberate qualification or as a redefinition of Moses' petition to see YHWH's glory. In other words, the logic of the narrative seems to suggest that YHWH's glory is going to be manifested through divine

<sup>559</sup> Jacob (1997), 973, Gowan (1994), 233.

<sup>560</sup> Cf. Durham (1987), 451.

<sup>561</sup> Jacob (1997), 974.

<sup>562</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 31.

<sup>563</sup> Jacob (1997), 973.

<sup>564</sup> The LXX, in contrast, retains the word δόξα in verse 19.



goodness. YHWH's goodness is often used in connection with His covenant loyalty (חסד) and seems thus to give expression to His benevolent commitment towards Israel.<sup>565</sup> The announced manifestation of divine goodness foreshadows the predominantly benevolent tone of Exodus 34:6–7. The immediate divine response is, however, that all of YHWH's goodness (טוב) will pass before Moses and that the divine name will be proclaimed (33:19).

#### 4.7.6 God's Name (33:19)

Apart from the burning bush theophany (3:14, 6:3ff.), Exodus 33:19, and as we shall see 34:5f., are the only occasions YHWH is said to have proclaimed His own name. Everywhere else people call on the name of YHWH in worship and adoration (e.g. Gen. 4:26). Therefore it seems important for the logic of the narrative that it is YHWH Himself who is going to reveal His name anew to Moses. Of course knowing God's personal name is to know His essential nature and His disposition to His people and thereby it is intrinsically related to effective prayer.<sup>566</sup>

The announcement of the proclamation of the divine name is, however, qualified by the following saying: (33:19) וְהִנֵּנִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶחָן וְרַחֲמֵי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶרְחַם. The terms חָן and רַחֵם occur frequently together as a complementary synonym (cf. 34:6, Ps. 86:15, Jonah 4:2), connoting primarily parental compassion (cf. § 4.3.8.2). But how exactly is one to interpret this somewhat enigmatic idiom? The structure of this utterance shows clear affinities with YHWH's initial revelation to Moses at the burning bush: (3:14) אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה. On both occasions a similar idiomatic circular formula is employed. Driver talks of a Semitic idiom and calls it *idem per idem*, which is employed "where the means or desire to be more explicit does not exist."<sup>567</sup> The repetition of the verb most likely underlines the verbal idea. The exact rendering of YHWH's introduction at the burning bush, however, is at least as debated as the verse in question. Possibly its best known renderings "I am whom I am" (e.g. NRSV), or "I will be what I will be"<sup>568</sup> is also reflected in most English translations of Exodus 33:19: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."<sup>569</sup> Both renderings suggest that the idiom seeks to convey primarily divine freedom and sovereignty. Brueggemann takes Moses' request to see YHWH's כְּבוֹד as a penetration into the mystery of God:

The statement of sovereign freedom by God in Exod. 33:19 asserts God's capacity to have

<sup>565</sup> Cf. Pss. 25:7, 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 145:9.

<sup>566</sup> Zimmerli (1963), 11–40, has shown that the divine name encompasses the whole redemptive power of God. Cf. Seitz (2001), 161–163.

<sup>567</sup> Driver (1911), 362–363. Cf. Joüon (1996), § 158o, argues, that the idiom creates a certain nuance of indeterminateness.

<sup>568</sup> Both translations are based on the Qal pointing of the MT. Freedman (1960), 152–155, argues for an original H-stem of אֶהְיֶה and thus renders the idiom; "I cause to be what I cause to be" or "I create what I create."

<sup>569</sup> Cf. NRSV, KJV, ASV, NIV, Luther, JPS renders it: "and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show."

God's own reasons, to act in ways that do not fit our rationality, to practice graciousness that falls outside our own lawfulness.<sup>570</sup>

Lundbom in his study on the *idem per idem* formula, adds another aspect to the debate by arguing that it “serves as a closure device...in argumentative discourse to terminate debate.”<sup>571</sup> In other words, according to Lundbom, Moses is silenced after his request to see God's glory. Lundbom taking the waw of וַיִּתְּנֵהּ (19b) as adversative and the waw of וַיֵּאמֶר (20a) as “thus” arrives at the following translation:

I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you my name, “Yahweh”; but I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Thus he said, You cannot see my face.

The point of verses 19b and 20 are thus

to place a limit on the goodness promised in 19a. Moses does have God's overall favour (v 17), but this does not mean his every request will be granted. God's grace (or favour) is his alone to give and it cannot be presumed upon.”<sup>572</sup>

We do not question that there is an element of divine sovereignty inherent in this saying, nor that YHWH puts a limit to His announced revelation (i.e. Moses cannot see God's face. How exactly פָּנִים is used in this context remains still to be discussed). There is little indication, however, that Moses' prayer is perceived as unreasonably intrusive and therefore of need to be silenced. In the light of YHWH's immediately preceding affirmative statements to give peace to Moses (33:15, 17), one would rather expect an affirmation of YHWH's mercy and grace, than a restrictive divine statement which apparently not only seeks to bring the dialogue to a closure, but also asserts the unrelated divine right to be gracious to whomever He wishes. The same applies to Exodus 3:14. Without going into details, there is good reason to argue that YHWH's disclosure at the burning bush comes not so much as an abstract statement about His being, or about His sovereignty, nor does verse 14 seem to be about bringing the dialogue to an end,<sup>573</sup> but rather as an assurance to be present and act reliably at Moses' side.<sup>574</sup> One should not forget that YHWH seeks to recruit Moses for His purposes rather than to offend him, or to erect a barrier of elusiveness between Himself and His potential mediator. Thus Childs' rendering of אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is more suggestive than most English translations: “I am there, wherever it may be...I am really there.”<sup>575</sup> Fretheim suggest a comparable interpretation of 33:19: “I will have mercy on you...yes, indeed, I will have mercy on you.”<sup>576</sup> Houtman reaches a similar conclusion by arguing that this idiom primarily stresses YHWH's grace and

<sup>570</sup> Brueggemann (1992), 177.

<sup>571</sup> Lundbom (1978), 195ff.

<sup>572</sup> Lundbom (1978), 199.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>574</sup> Buber (1994<sup>4</sup>b), 69–73, understands the *idem per idem* as a divine guarantee to be always present. He famously translates it: “Ich werde dasein, als der ich dasein werde.”

<sup>575</sup> Childs (1974), 69.

<sup>576</sup> Fretheim (1991), 306.

mercy and thus renders it: "...yes, I will abundantly display grace and mercy."<sup>577</sup> Only so, according to him, the revelation provides "hope for the restoration" of the covenant. This line of interpretation, however, may tend towards a cheapening of YHWH's grace and mercy.<sup>578</sup> A covenant had been made at Sinai and it has been broken. Israel's sin cannot be simply forgiven, as Exodus 32:33ff. has made clear and the full disclosure of YHWH's name will underscore (34:6–7). Thus we suggest that 33:19 is neither about YHWH's absolute sovereignty, nor about a seemingly unconditional promise to exercise grace and mercy beyond human understanding, but the enigmatic idiom seems to give expression to a synthesis of both. In other words, YHWH assures Moses of His mercy and grace, and yet He reserves the right to choose who will benefit from His gracious disposition.<sup>579</sup> Or, to play with words, a gracious and merciful God will determine who will be shown grace and mercy. This rather abstract saying will be further clarified in Exodus 34:6–7, which basically reflects the same dynamic.<sup>580</sup> But only in Numbers 14 shall we see how YHWH's attributes are concretely worked out in a specific context.

In Exodus 33:19, YHWH announces a forthcoming disclosure of His nature (cf. 34:6–7), where it will be reenforced that YHWH's glory is primarily revealed in the proclamation of the divine name.<sup>581</sup> In the light of the following verses (20–23), however, it becomes evident that there is not only an audible, but also a restricted visual aspect to YHWH's revelation.

#### 4.7.7 The פנים of God (33:20–23)

After the announcement of a disclosure of the divine name, YHWH warns Moses that he cannot see the divine face and live: "(33:20) לֹא תִכּוֹל לִרְאוֹת אֶת-פָּנַי כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֶנִּי הָאָדָם." The semantic range of the negative of כָּל followed by ל and רָאָה in the infinitive ranges from "you are not able to see...", via, "you are not capable of seeing..." to "you may not see (i.e. moral inability)."<sup>582</sup> Thus on a lexical level the Hebrew allows for both Moses' physical incapability of seeing the divine face, and for a moral warning that seeing the divine face would consume him. At first sight the context does not bring explicit clarification to the meaning of the divine statement

<sup>577</sup> (2000), 701–702.

<sup>578</sup> Aurelius' (1988), 125, reading gives raise to similar unease: "Was betont wird, ist Jahwes durch nichts eingeschränkte Macht—gnädig und barmherzig zu sein."

<sup>579</sup> Similarly Moberly (1983), 78–79; "The formula in 33:19 not only stresses that Yahweh will be gracious but that there is a mystery about it such that it depends entirely upon Yahweh himself as to who will be the recipient of his grace."

<sup>580</sup> Cf. Jacob (1997), 974, Renaud (1998), 186.

<sup>581</sup> Note the clear verbal and conceptual links and parallels between the announcement and revelation of YHWH's name.

"I will make all my goodness pass (אֶעֱבִיר) before you, and will proclaim (וְיִקְרָא) before you the name, 'The LORD'..." (33:19).

The LORD descended in the cloud and...The LORD passed (וַיַּעֲבֹר) before him, and proclaimed (וַיִּקְרָא), 'The LORD...' (34:5–6).

<sup>582</sup> BDB, 407, HAL, 411.

either. In fact, the wider canonical context raises some interesting questions: For example, Exodus 33:11 informs of Moses' intimate dialogue with YHWH (פנים אל פנים), while according to Exodus 24:9–10, YHWH invited Moses, Aaron and his two sons, and seventy elders to climb Mount Sinai where they

saw the God of Israel. Under his feet (וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו) there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness...And he did not lay his hand on the chief men...they beheld God (וַיַּבְהִיזוּ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, 24:10–11).

Following the mutual covenant meal, Moses is invited to enter the cloud without being consumed by the divine glory (24:16–18). At a cursory look these passages appear to stand in tension with Exodus 33:20.<sup>583</sup> Thus the objective of the following section is to explore the logic and dynamics of YHWH's statement in 33:20ff.

With regard to the first Sinai theophany, Exodus 24:9–11 comes as a kind of confirmation that a bond has been ratified. The representatives of Israel are invited to catch a glimpse of the One who entered into a covenant relationship with them. Yet interestingly the writer limits his depiction of YHWH to the pedestal of the enthroned God, namely "...there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness (24:10–11)."<sup>584</sup> Was he short of adequate words to describe the indescribable,<sup>585</sup> or does he intentionally provide the perspective of those who lay prostrate before the heavenly throne (24:1)?<sup>586</sup> In a similar vein one probably ought to understand Isaiah's and Ezekiel's visions in the temple (Isa. 6:1–5, Ezek. 1:26–28). The former claims to have seen the "Lord sitting on a throne." When the prophet comes to the actual description of YHWH, he somehow shifts his attention to the throne, the hem of the royal robe, and the seraphim, who cover their faces in the presence of YHWH's royal holiness.<sup>587</sup> In other words, the impression is created that the prophet is not only overwhelmed by YHWH's majestic reality, but also struggles to articulate the awesome experience.<sup>588</sup> Even though Ezekiel's vision of God is depicted in more details, the prophet is equally short of appropriate words and is lost in awe and wonder when it comes to describe the divine manifestation. Ezekiel obviously tries hard to describe what he sees: "...there was something like a throne in appearance like sapphire; and seated

<sup>583</sup> Janzen (1997), 247.

<sup>584</sup> Buber (1994<sup>b</sup>), 156–160, argues that the waw of וַתַּחַת following אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל should not be translated with "and" but as "namely" (nämlich), thereby underscoring that the encounter with the divine is manifested in and experienced as a spectacular show of dazzling light on the mountain. Cf. Levine (1993), 342.

<sup>585</sup> The fact that there is a shift of verbs in verse 11 (from רָאָה to the technical term חִזָּה which is usually employed for prophetic clairvoyance) could possibly indicate that a special visual experience is envisaged. Cf. Childs (1974), 506–507.

<sup>586</sup> Houtman (2000), 294.

<sup>587</sup> Seitz (1993), 54, notes: "The seraphim are probably not 'above him' (NRSV) but flank him, guarding access to his throne." Moberly (2003c), 124–125, unfolds the royal emphasis of the divine vision.

<sup>588</sup> Cf. Childs (2001), 55, points to the limit of language when it comes to the depiction of a supernatural reality. Moreover, in both Exodus 34:6–7 and Isa. 6 the essence of the theophany is of an audible nature, rather than of a visible one.

above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form.” The human form, however, appears to Ezekiel’s eyes like gleaming embers surrounded by something that looks like fire. Or is it rather like a multicoloured rainbow? He concludes that this extraordinary manifestation “was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (cf. Ezek. 1:26–28).<sup>589</sup> In sum, all accounts testify in their distinct ways that the appearance of God transcends human dimensions. Although their revelatory experience surpasses human experience, they all underline a central biblical understanding, namely that YHWH is close and yet not fully accessible, seen and yet not seen.

Similarly Moberly sees in Exodus 33:20–23 a shift from the guiding concern of sin and forgiveness to that of immanence and transcendence.

One could say that v. 19 presents the theophany as it relates to the moral character of Yahweh in relation to Israel’s sin, while vv. 20–23 concern the access to God by mortal man and the limitations imposed by human finitude as such. Even when man’s relation to God is not hindered by sin, which is the fundamental cause of Yahweh’s wrath and his distancing himself from his people, there is still limits upon man’s access to God, not because man is inherently sinful but because he is *man* not God.<sup>590</sup>

Jacob reinforces this by stating that humans are not created to view the divine פָּנִים.<sup>591</sup> Thus both Jacob and Moberly argue that Exodus 33:20–23 underlines the distance between God and creature. A distance not so much based on sinfulness, but on human limitedness.

Fretheim, by contrast argues that verse 20 does not so much talk of human limit, “rather, it assumes that God can be seen, but one cannot live if this happens.”<sup>592</sup> In other words, he suggests that YHWH is theoretically visible, however, His holy radiance would consume sinful humans, “...for no one shall see me and live” (33:20, cf. Deut. 5:24–25). Such a reading appears to be endorsed by verses 21 and 22, where Moses is shielded from God’s all-consuming glory. The OT is fairly consistent that YHWH’s holy presence endangers mortal beings (cf. 3:6, Judg. 6:22–23, 13:22). This is especially true for sinful and rebellious Israel (Isa. 2:10–11). Exodus 33:5 states that YHWH’s presence among the stiff-necked people would consume them.<sup>593</sup> Viewed from this perspective, it is significant to note that even Moses, the mediator, who did not participate in the sin of the people, and was assured of YHWH’s ongoing פָּנִים (33:14), is in danger of His consuming holy פָּנִים and therefore is in need of special assistance (33:20, 23).<sup>594</sup> Propp argues that Moses got his face disfigured with blistering bumps in the radiant presence of God. In other words, according to

<sup>589</sup> Rendtorff (1999), 54, 217.

<sup>590</sup> Moberly (1983), 80.

<sup>591</sup> Jacob (1997), 975.

<sup>592</sup> Fretheim (1991), 300.

<sup>593</sup> On Israel’s subsequent journey through the wilderness to the promised land, the rebellious and murmuring people are repeatedly endangered by God’s consuming presence (cf. Nu. 11:1, 14:10ff., 16:19ff. etc.).

<sup>594</sup> According to Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 35–36, Exodus 33:20–23 comes as a correction to Genesis 32:31, where Jacob escaped with his life, in spite of having seen and wrestled with God face to face.

him, "Moses would have died had he seen Yahweh's face (Exod 33:20), but a glimpse of his back merely disfigures him."<sup>595</sup> He translates Exodus 34:30: "the skin of his face was burnt to the hardness of horn." Whether God's presence disfigured Moses' face or made it radiant, we shall assess at a later stage (§ 4.3.9.3), here we merely acknowledge that besides expressing YHWH's transcendence, these verses also give expression to the danger inherent in God's very presence.

The intriguing phenomenon of YHWH's presence may be further illuminated by considering the initial theophany at Sinai, when the people were terrified at the sight of the mighty manifestation of YHWH's כבוד (20:18).<sup>596</sup> According to Exodus 24:15–18, God's consuming glory is veiled by a cloud. Although we are not told of the exact reason in this instance, based on other accounts, it can be assumed that the cloud serves as a protection from the devouring radiance of God's presence.<sup>597</sup> Having said that, it is intriguing that Moses was allowed to enter the cloud into God's glory (24:15ff.). Although this privilege finds later expression in the metaphor, "talking face to face with God" (cf. 33:11, Nu. 12:8, Deut. 34:10), it appears to stand in tension with Exodus 33:20 (cf. 40:34–35).

In view of this brief survey of related passages, we submit that the term פנים gives expression to various shades of YHWH's presence. When it is said that Moses *talks* face to face with YHWH, it connotes primarily an intimate relationship, "it is nothing more than a heightened metaphor for a personal meeting and speaking with the invisible God," as Eichrodt puts it.<sup>598</sup> Moses' request and experience in Exodus 33:18–23, however, appear to go beyond *talking* face to face with YHWH, as it was his habit in the tent of meeting. In the tent, there is no immediate vision in view,<sup>599</sup> while in verses 18–23 Moses seeks to *see* God Himself.<sup>600</sup> The text differentiates between "my glory passes" and "I pass..." (33:22). Thus we are dealing here very likely with another form of self-manifestation. There are two layers as it were. Moses can enter the cloud or the tent of meeting and *talk* face to face with God (cf. 24:17, 33:11), or similarly stand in the presence of God on the mountain on the rock (33:21, 34:5). All these references imply already a spiritual and spatial closeness to God, yet the text differentiates between being in God's presence and His actual "passing by."<sup>601</sup> When the very moment comes, Moses needs the protection of the cleft and YHWH's "hand."

while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my

<sup>595</sup> Propp's (1987), 385–386, interpretation depends on one's rendering of the debated form of קרן in the context of Exodus 34:29–35.

<sup>596</sup> The deuteronomistic version of the same event underlines the dangerous aspect of YHWH's כבוד by reporting that the people were afraid of being consumed by the blazing fire (Deut. 5:24).

<sup>597</sup> Cf. § 5.4.1.3.

<sup>598</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 37, cf. Deut. 4:12; cf. 5:5.

<sup>599</sup> Blum (1990), 64.

<sup>600</sup> Zenger (1987<sup>3</sup>), 241, Renaud (1998), 185.

<sup>601</sup> The same distinction is made in the forthcoming theophany in Exodus 34:5–6, where Moses waits in the presence of God (34:5a) for the actual "passing by" (34:6a).

hand (וְשֹׁכְחִי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ) until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen (וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אֲחֻרָּי וּפָנַי לֹא יֵרָאוּ) 33:22–23).

The verb שָׁכַךְ probably means to cover or to lay over. It is difficult to get the exact nuances since this is the only occurrence in the OT. The basic meaning is clear; even Moses needs to be shielded from God's all-consuming glory. Because it is Moses, whose relationship with God is without parallel in the OT (cf. Deut. 34:10), he is graciously allowed a brief sight of YHWH's "back."

This still leaves us with the problem of YHWH's "back." For a start, one should note that it is not the common Hebrew word for "back" (גֻּדֶה/גוֹ) <sup>602</sup> in the anatomical sense which is employed, but instead a rather general and infinite term for "behind or hinder part" (אֲחֻרַּי) is used. <sup>603</sup> The choice of this rather vague term might be deliberate, so that YHWH's elusiveness is preserved and the reader is not misled to take "face" and "back" too literally. Following our argument, "face" and "back" is probably best understood in a metaphorical way, as a distinction between the very immanence of God, that is His consuming presence, and the rather vague sense of YHWH's "afterglow" as Moberly puts it. <sup>604</sup> Maybe the ambiguous "back" ought also to convey a sense of YHWH's elusiveness in a not dissimilar way to the footstool, the hem of the heavenly king, or the rainbow in the previously mentioned visionary experiences. This is further endorsed by Numbers 12:8, where it says that Moses beholds the form of YHWH (תְּמִנֶה יְהוָה) which may refer to Moses' request to see the glory of God (33:18–23). <sup>605</sup> The form (תְּמוּנָה) is contrasted with visions and dreams (Nu. 12:6), a less distinct form of YHWH's manifestation. Yet תְּמוּנָה, not unlike "back," carries a sense of ambiguity, it is only the form or semblance of YHWH, not the "face" the very being of God. <sup>606</sup>

Of course this play on words is just a way of articulating the inexpressible: A theophany or an immediate experience of God. Nevertheless, the writer succeeds in conveying, through metaphors and careful use of anthropomorphic language, a complex and eloquent portrait of God. <sup>607</sup> He achieves a balance of two fundamental aspects of the Hebrew understanding of God. He is seen and yet He is not seen. He

<sup>602</sup> Cf. Ps. 129:3, Pr. 19:29, Isa. 50:6, Ezek. 10:12.

<sup>603</sup> Although the combination of "face" and "hinder part" in the sense of Exodus 33:23 occurs also in 1 Ki. 7:25, 25, Ezek. 8:16, these references do not shed any additional light on our passage.

<sup>604</sup> (1983), 82.

<sup>605</sup> According to LXX rendering of Nu. 12:8 Moses saw the glory of the Lord (τοῦ θεοῦ κύριου εἰδέν). Cf. Allison (1993), 221. The substitution of "glory" for "form" (תְּמִנֶה) and the use of the aorist (adverting to some past occasion) mean that the LXX translator construed the verse in Numbers as a reference to Moses' vision of God's glory as told in Exodus 33–34. The same interpretation was made by the author of the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum on Num. 12:8, which mentions "back of the Shekinah," an unmistakable allusion to Exodus 33.

<sup>606</sup> The decalogue (20:4) makes a further distinction by employing the word תְּמוּנָה alongside פְּסֵל, representations of heavenly and earthly beings.

<sup>607</sup> Childs (1974), 596. The Hebrew writers were not embarrassed by strong anthropomorphic language. The careful use of simple language enabled them to communicate extremely complex concepts (e.g. Gen. 1–3).

is a holy and consuming fire, yet He is gracious and merciful. This ingenious play on words has long been recognised.

And He did well by not showing  
(either) face or form on Mount Sinai,  
so as not to give the heathen an occasion  
to represent Him falsely before men.  
But He did well (also) by putting on the form of a face  
so as to show us His beauty, that we might perceive His glory.  
And although Moses did see,  
he knew that he had not seen.<sup>608</sup>

In sum, it is surely significant for the logic of the narrative that even the divinely chosen mediator and favoured advocate is restricted in his understanding of God. Moses at the end of verse 17 is left in the position of knowing and not knowing, and by the end of verse 23, he is left seeing and not seeing, to use von Balthasar's terminology.<sup>609</sup> YHWH's ways, name, and nature are revealed and yet remain mysterious. It is God's elusiveness, His freedom, and gracious character, which makes prayer meaningful. Even though YHWH's answers to Moses' prayer remain unclear, it has clearly achieved something. It has just "provoked" what is going to be the fullest revelation of God's nature in Scripture. Scripture clearly ascribes to Moses' intercession a deeper insight into God's nature and "economics."

Although it may be possible that the account of Moses' visual experience has been inserted, in its canonical form the visual and the moral are brought together. Exodus 33:18–23 underlines that YHWH's presence cannot be restricted to the sensory or visual sphere, but has clearly also a moral dimension. Thus YHWH's consuming holiness, His moral demand, and His transcending presence are brought together into Moses' experience of God. In the light of YHWH's actual revelation (34:6–7), however, it will become evident, that the visual aspect of Moses' request has been subordinated to the proclamation of the moral aspects of God's nature. Apart from the mention of cloud and YHWH's passing no further reference is made to a visual manifestation. We shall see in a moment that the revelation is primarily portrayed in terms of YHWH's attributes rather than His appearance.

After YHWH's announced the details of His forthcoming revelation (33:19–23), He instructs Moses to cut two new tablets of stone (34:1). The fact that YHWH promises to write on the tablets the same words as were inscribed on the original ones, already adumbrates a gracious renewal of the covenant.<sup>610</sup> Like on the previous theophany at Sinai, Moses is charged to meet similar precautionary measures for the appearance of God (cf. 34:3, 19:10ff.). Anew he is summoned to climb up Sinai and to place himself (נצב) on the top of the mountain in anticipation of YHWH's

<sup>608</sup> Von Balthasar (1991), 41, quote from Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns concerning the Faith*. The same tension comes to expression in Paul's prayer in Ephesians: "I pray that you may...know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:18–19).

<sup>609</sup> Von Balthasar (1991), 37–38.

<sup>610</sup> Renaud (1998), 189.



disclosure (34:1–4). YHWH descends in a cloud as on the previous occasion when He revealed Himself on mount Sinai (cf. 19:9). This time, however, there is no mention of any fear-inspiring meteorological or volcanic manifestations (cf. 19:16–18). Since Moses is about to encounter YHWH in “private,” there appears to be no need to instil and arouse the right attitude in YHWH’s presence.

## 4.8 The Revelation of God’s Name

### 4.8.1 Calling on the Name of YHWH (34:5)

Exodus 34:5 has greatly puzzled exegetes.<sup>611</sup> The Hebrew syntax is ambiguous with regard to who positions himself with or before whom, and with regard to who proclaims the name “YHWH.”<sup>612</sup>

וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה בְּעָנָן וַיִּתְּצֵב עִמּוֹ שָׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה (34:5)

Jacob, based on YHWH’s previous announcement that He will call out His name (33:19), and because there is no explicit change of subject, argues that YHWH is both the subject of יִתְּצֵב and קָרָא.<sup>613</sup> There are, however, some difficulties with such an interpretation. Firstly, it has been pointed out that it is not easy to harmonise a stationary verb with a verb connoting movement (e.g. the standing of YHWH with His passing by; v.6).<sup>614</sup> It could still be argued that the passing refers to the moment when YHWH reveals Himself by leaving the cloud. A more serious problem is posed by the content of previous verses. In 33:21 Moses is explicitly asked to station himself (נִצֵּב, Ni.) on the rock, a place with YHWH (33:21). This is reinforced in 34:2 where Moses is told to go up Mount Sinai to place himself with YHWH (נִצֵּב, Ni.) on the top of the mountain.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מָקוֹם אֲחִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל-הַצֹּר (33:21)  
וְעָלִיתָ בִּבְקָר אֶל-הָרַיִם וְנִצַּבְתָּ לִּי שָׁם עַל-רֹאשׁ הָהָר (34:2)

So these verses provide good reason to argue that Exodus 34:5 confirms that Moses followed the divine instructions and places himself to YHWH. Although the verbs which are employed in these verses are not identical (נִצֵּב and יִתְּצֵב) they are root variants and mean basically the same, namely to station oneself (firmly) for a definite purpose (cf. 7:15, 8:16, 9:13, 19:17).<sup>615</sup> The fact that so far the verbs have only been

<sup>611</sup> Cf. Jacob (1997), 966.

<sup>612</sup> See Scharbert (1957), 131, for four possible translations of the verse.

<sup>613</sup> Jacob (1997), 966, finds further support for such a reading in 1 Sam. 3:10, where the same sequence of verbs occur: “Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’” Cf. 1 Ki. 19:1. Childs (1974), 603, 611, acknowledges the possibility that Moses was the subject of both verbs at an earlier level (type of liturgical use of the divine name), but argues that in its final form it should be read in the light of verse 6 which has most naturally YHWH as the subject of proclamation. Both NIV and NRSV chose this reading.

<sup>614</sup> See Houtman (1993), 50, 279.

<sup>615</sup> HAL, 427, 714.

used with Moses or Israel as the subject, not with YHWH, appears to support the above reading. Possibly the most illuminating parallel is the previous theophany at Sinai, where Moses led the people to Sinai and stationed them (יצב) at the foot of the Mount to witness YHWH's descent on Sinai (19:17ff., cf. Nu. 11:16, Josh. 24:1).

If Moses is the subject of יצב, he would be most naturally the subject of קרא as well (at least grammatically). This would suggest as soon as God descended in the cloud, Moses stationed himself at the appointed place and called on the name of YHWH.<sup>616</sup> קרא בשם יהוה is a common idiom for worship and prayer.<sup>617</sup> In the light of Exodus 33:19, where YHWH announced to proclaim His name to Moses, there is good contextual reason that YHWH is the subject of קרא in verse 6. Consequently the logic between verse 5 and 6 appears to be that once all the necessary preparations are met, i.e. YHWH and Moses are in place and Moses evokes the name of YHWH by which He wants to be remembered/called on for ever (3:15), YHWH honours His announced theophany and answers Moses' prayer call by passing before Moses and by proclaiming His name (cf. 34:6–7).<sup>618</sup>

Jacob thinks that there is little point in Moses praying or calling on the name of YHWH in this context, because he was summoned to come before God.<sup>619</sup> We have already noted, however, that an important aspect of 33:18–34:10 is the distinction between being in YHWH's presence and the actual passing of YHWH. Thus Moses can speak face to face with YHWH in the tent of meeting (33:11ff.), or stand on an appointed place with YHWH (34:4), but when YHWH actually passes, Moses needs the protection of a cleft. The same dynamics appear to be at work in 34:5–6. Moses is already in the presence of YHWH, the cloud has descended and Moses is at the appointed place. By calling on the name of YHWH, Moses appears to give a signal, as it were, that he is ready for the promised moment: YHWH, by implication leaves the cloud and passes before Moses, who is shielded by the cleft and "YHWH's hand," from direct exposure to the consuming glory. It is presumably during this

<sup>616</sup> So Luther's translation, Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 322. Against Moberly (1983), 86, who argues that YHWH is the subject of קרא בשם יהוה in verse 5. He suggests that there is an alternation of subjects among the three verbs of verses 5–6 (i.e. YHWH descends, Moses places himself, and YHWH proclaims).

<sup>617</sup> Cf. Hesse (1951), 91. E.g. Gen. 4:26, 21:33, 26:25, 2 Ki. 5:11.

<sup>618</sup> This sequence of events might be further supported by Psalm 99. It has been noted that the third part of the Psalm, in particular verse 8, not only alludes to Exodus 34:5–10, but also embodies the same dynamics as Exodus 34:6–7 and might be a liturgical summary of it (cf. Muffs [1992], 22. Although Moses (alongside Aaron and possibly Samuel) is referred to as priest, he is remembered in this context as one who successfully called on YHWH's name (i.e. he evoked YHWH on behalf of the people) and YHWH answered him/them out of the cloud.

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,

Samuel also was among those who called on his name (בְּקִרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ).

They cried to the LORD, and he answered them (אֶל־יְהוָה וַהֲוֹא יָעֲנֵם).

He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud...

O LORD our God, you answered them; אָתָּה עָנִיתָם; (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אָתָּה עָנִיתָם).

you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrong doings

(יְהוָה נֶאֱמָר הָיִיתָ לָהֶם וְנָקָם עַל־עֲלִילוֹתָם).

<sup>619</sup> Jacob (1997), 967.

heightened moment of divine presence that YHWH discloses His nature to Moses.

As already mentioned, Exodus 34:6 still poses further problems on the level of syntax. Firstly, it is not entirely clear where the divine speech begins. Does it start with the double YHWH, or is the first YHWH subject of וַיִּקְרָא?

וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל-פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן

Houtman argues for the latter and translates: “YHWH passed before his eyes and YHWH proclaimed: “YHWH is a merciful and gracious God...”<sup>620</sup> Although this reading goes against the Masoretic accents,<sup>621</sup> it is a possible reading and may find support in LXX Vaticanus which records only one κύριος.<sup>622</sup> What might look like an unnecessary repetition of YHWH, however, might actually seek to clarify and underline that YHWH, not Moses, is the subject of קרא. Advocates of this interpretation sometimes refer to the parallel text in Numbers 14:17–18 which records only one יהוה. Moses' quote, however, omits several other words as well. In fact, we shall argue that Numbers 14:18 is not a straight quote from Exodus 34:6–7, but rather a deliberately formulated and context specific prayer (cf. § 5.4.2.3). In other words, the double YHWH of Exodus 34:6 might equally well be context specific. Durham sees here a “deliberate repetition...emphasising the reality of Yahweh present in his very being.”<sup>623</sup> According to him, YHWH seeks to affirm Moses' request to prove that He continues to be present with Israel after the golden calf apostasy in an emphatic way.<sup>624</sup>

A third possibility is to read יהוה יהוה as a nominal clause:<sup>625</sup> That is YHWH is YHWH. This might be further endorsed by the closely related *idem per idem*-construction of רחם and חנן in 33:19 which, as we have seen, foreshadows YHWH's announcement to be אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן (34:6). Jacob argues that 34:6 comes as an important exegetical key to 20:5.

אֲנִכִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָנָא (20:5)  
יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן (34:6)

By the logic of the wider narrative sequence, Exodus 34:6a comes as a redefinition of YHWH's former self-introduction. No longer does He introduce Himself as “I am YHWH, a jealous God...” but proclaims Himself as: “YHWH is YHWH / YHWH is really a merciful and gracious God...”<sup>626</sup> On balance, we note that all three readings seem to fit equally naturally into their contexts. Because no larger exegetical issue is at stake, we content ourselves to leave the issue unresolved at this stage and

<sup>620</sup> Houtman (2000), 708.

<sup>621</sup> The Masoretes, by placing a disjunctive accent (סְגוּלָה on וַיִּקְרָא indicates first major division of the first half verse), suggest that “YHWH YHWH” is part of the direct speech.

<sup>622</sup> The Vaticanus document is preferred by Ralph's version. The Alexandrian text, however, records κύριος twice.

<sup>623</sup> Durham (1987), 453. Repetition of words often bring emphasis (cf. Isa. 6:3).

<sup>624</sup> Renaud (1998), 191.

<sup>625</sup> So Jacob (1997), Cassuto (1967), Dohmen (1993), Scuralik (2001).

<sup>626</sup> Jacob (1997), 968.

acknowledge the inherently difficult character of the passage.

Following our argument that 34:6–7 is presented as a divine utterance, a more significant issue is attached to the fact that YHWH refers to Himself in the third person singular. At the burning bush (3:6) and other instances of revelation, YHWH introduces Himself in the first person.<sup>627</sup> Interestingly in the decalogue we find both; the first two commandments are proclaimed in the first person singular (20:2–6), while the following are presented in the third person singular. This puzzling phenomenon is usually explained on the basis of a complex history of the text.<sup>628</sup> Acknowledging the possibility that Exodus 34:6–7 had originally also a different function,<sup>629</sup> we shall argue that these two pivotal verses are well integrated in the final form of the text and that it makes good sense that YHWH Himself pronounces the divine attributes.<sup>630</sup> The following observations endorse that the canonical text envisages YHWH as the speaker of verses 6–7. Firstly, Moses' quick prostration and prayer in verses 8–9 make much better sense, if seen as a response to a divine self-proclamation. It is as a result and on the basis of YHWH's revelation that he throws himself to the ground and launches his final petition (34:8–9). Secondly, as we shall see in some details, in Numbers 14:17–18 Moses explicitly ascribes the content of Exodus 34:6–7 to YHWH. Thirdly, an interpretation which ascribes verses 6–7 to Moses, ignores the intertextual dynamics between 33:19 and 34:5–6. On the former occasion, YHWH explicitly announces that He will proclaim His name before Moses. Although there is a shift from first person (33:19) to third person (34:6) and an elaboration of the divine name, there are, as noted before, clear verbal parallels which leave no doubt that 34:6 comes as a fulfilment to 33:19. Having argued that in its final form verses 6–7 clearly want to be understood as YHWH's utterance, we must still account for the reason, or at least effect, of the third person singular.

It is particularly the Jewish tradition which has creatively dealt with this phenomenon. Already Rashi has taken the proclamation in the third person to mean

<sup>627</sup> Cf. Gen. 15:7, 17:1, Ex. 3:6, 20:2ff.

<sup>628</sup> Cf. Childs (1974), 399: "no apparent tension was felt by the redactor through this inconsistency. In the subsequent usage of the Decalogue the divine commandments were always heard through a human mediator."

<sup>629</sup> Partially because of the nature of these two verses and sometimes because of the use of third person singular Exodus 34:6–7 has frequently been ascribed to a cultic *Sitz im Leben*. Eissfeld (1965), 73, for example, categorised them as "solemn cult sayings" which "had their setting in particular public festivals for the whole people or the whole cult-community." They were pronounced by a priest on behalf of God. Von Rad (1965), 258, argues that Exodus 33:18ff. functioned as Israel's aetiology of the cultus, thus "provides the justification for a ritual which was understood as a theophany, or perhaps as a substitute for a theophany. The congregation would call upon Yahweh, Yahweh would pass by and declare his name and his attributes and the congregation would prostrate themselves." The term *קריאה* possibly still reflects an originally cultic setting (often used with reference to the sanctuary, e.g. 26:33–34, Deut. 12:5, 1 Ki. 8:6–7). The calling of the name of YHWH is often associated with the sanctuary (Gen. 12:8, 26:25). See Moberly (1983), 116–139, for a detailed assessment of von Rad's reading. Scharbert (1957), 131f., argues that these verses functioned originally as a liturgical prayer or as a "Bekennnisformel."

<sup>630</sup> Spieckermann (1990), 9.

that YHWH taught Moses on Sinai how to pray by giving him a set prayer form. He comments on 33:19:

I will call on the name of the Lord before thee, to teach you the formula when praying for mercy even though the merits of the patriarchs should be exhausted. And according to the manner in which you see Me doing this...and proclaiming the thirteen attributes of mercy, do you teach Israel to do.<sup>631</sup>

Jacob, obviously inspired by his tradition, notes:

Der Heilige...umhüllt sich wie ein Vorbeter...and zeigt dem Mose den Wortlaut des Gebetes; ...Das will sagen: Diese Sätze sind ein Gebet, das gleichsam Gott selbst den Mose gelehrt hat. ...Luther, der die Judenschul des 15–16 Jahrhunderts in Deutschland vor Augen hatte, sagt einmal: Ich gäbe zweihundert Goldgulden, wenn ich beten könnte wie die Juden. Sie haben es eben von dem gewaltigsten Beter, von ihrem Lehrer Moses gelernt, and ihn hat Gott selber unterwiesen!<sup>632</sup>

Such a reading is hermeneutically suggestive, because in essence such an interpretation suggests that theology in its purest form is not only revealed by God Himself, but is also intrinsically linked to prayer.<sup>633</sup> We shall see in some details how YHWH's disclosure of His name provides Moses not only with clear guidelines but also with an "authoritative model prayer" (Nu. 14:18, cf. Pss. 86:15, 103:8). In other words, Moses' prayer, as anticipated in Numbers 14:18, and numerous other passages, according to the canonical witness, is rooted in and legitimated by YHWH's disclosure of His name. And so YHWH passes before Moses, proclaiming His name and thereby revealing His nature and implicitly teaching him how to pray.

#### 4.8.2 God's Name Disclosed (34:6–7)

Exodus 34:6–7 contains undoubtedly the most comprehensive account of YHWH's nature in the entire Bible. Moreover, by the logic of Scripture, it is YHWH's self-portrayal given at the mountain of God in response to Moses' intercession in the immediate aftermath of Israel's paradigmatic apostasy. In other words, the canon ascribes to these two verses the greatest possible scriptural authority. In spite of these incredible credentials, the importance of Exodus 34:6–7 has not been sufficiently acknowledged as it intrinsically deserves.<sup>634</sup> This is even more surprising considering the fact that biblical tradition attest and acknowledge its importance.<sup>635</sup>

<sup>631</sup> Rashi (1945), 190. See Jacob (1997), 970, for one possible way of counting the thirteen Middot.

<sup>632</sup> Jacob (1997), 969–970. Such a reading, as the quote from Rashi indicates, has a long tradition in Judaism. Rabbi Jochanan (Rosch Haschana 17b, *Talmut*, 541) said: "Wenn es nicht in der Bibel geschrieben stünde, so wäre es unmöglich, es zu sagen. Dies lehrt, daß der Heilige, gelobt sei er, sich umhüllte wie ein Vorbeter der Gemeinde und Mose die Ordnung des Gebetes zeigte." Cf. Ginzberg (1954), 137–138. Renaud (1998), 190, talks with regard to the theophany about "un acte fondateur de la prière." Scuralik (2001), 151: "Gott übernimmt die Sprache der Gebete."

<sup>633</sup> Cf. Louth (1985<sup>3</sup>), 1–18.

<sup>634</sup> Cf. Scuralik (2001), 142. Only recently Spieckermann's (2000) and Moberly's (2002) fine treatments ascribe to these verses the theological weight they deserve.

<sup>635</sup> According to the OT canon a significant amount of Israel's subsequent worship, prayer, and "theology" look back to and find their legitimisation in this theophany (cf. Nu. 14:18, Joel 2:13, Jon.

Noth's brief note on verses 6–7 epitomises the lack of commentators' attention: "we have here an addition which is made up of customary, stereotyped phrases" which he considers to stand out of place in their present location.<sup>636</sup> Hyatt does not offer any discussion on the terminology either.<sup>637</sup> Childs, from whom one would expect some theological reflections, is also surprisingly thin. He notes that this "formula in v. 6 by which the nature of God is portrayed" is frequently used in the OT and has nothing more to say about these extremely rich verses than that they are "an eloquent testimony to the centrality of the understanding of God's person."<sup>638</sup> Durham, besides offering some summary remarks regarding the possible origin of these verses, provides only half a page discussion on how verses 6–7 resonate with the wider narrative. He does not, however, look at the terminology as such.<sup>639</sup> Having noted commentators' regrettably brief engagement with these verses, there are a number of specific articles which deal with some aspects of Exodus 34:6–7. We shall see, however, that hardly any of the following treatments pay serious attention to the wider narrative context.<sup>640</sup>

Dentan for example, is particularly concerned with establishing the *Sitz im Leben* of Exodus 34:6–7.<sup>641</sup> Following the consensus of scholars, he regards the passage as a later interpolation. Thus he isolates the two verses from its narrative context and analyses its language and ideas in the light of literary and conceptual parallels in order to pursue his objectives.<sup>642</sup> He reaches the conclusion on the basis of literary affinities with wisdom literature that "the entire formula is a product of the School of the Wise Men."<sup>643</sup> It is not our objective to evaluate his findings, but merely to point out that this passage is usually attributed to either the Jahwist, deuteronomistic redaction, or a later *Jerusalemischer Geschichtswerk*.<sup>644</sup>

Scharbert's treatment of Exodus 34:6–7 is guided by his interest in the relation between collective and individual retribution. Consequently his focus falls on the second part of the two verses. Although his form-critical analysis is now dated and no longer reflects the scholarly consensus, his exegesis of verse 7, as we shall see, contains good insights into the dynamics of YHWH's visitation of the fathers' iniquities to subsequent generations. Scharbert, however, is not interested in how

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4:2, Nah. 1:3, Pss. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Neh. 9:17, see also Pss. 111:4, 112:4, 116:5, Neh. 9:31, 2 Chron. 30:9).

<sup>636</sup> Noth (1962), 261.

<sup>637</sup> Hyatt (1983<sup>2</sup>), 322–323.

<sup>638</sup> Childs (1974), 612.

<sup>639</sup> Durham (1987), 454.

<sup>640</sup> Scoralik's (2001), 141–156 and Moberly's (2002), 177–202, essays are exceptions.

<sup>641</sup> Dentan (1963), 34–51.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 38ff.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>644</sup> Scharbert (1957), 131, attributes Exodus 34:6f. alongside Driver, Eissfeldt a.o. to what is still held by many as the oldest Pentateuch source "J." For more recent form-critical considerations see Aurelius (1988) who ascribes these verses to a deuteronomistic redaction, or Zenger (1971) who argues for a (late) *Jerusalemischer Geschichtswerk*.

divine justice (v. 7b) relates to divine mercy and grace (v. 6–7a), or how verses 6 and 7 fit into the wider canonical context.

Spieckermann, in contrast to Scharbert, is almost exclusively interested in the first part of the passage. In two influential essays he has contributed to a renewed interest in Exodus 34:6–7 and its various parallel texts. But it is particularly because Spieckermann seems to be in tune with the biblical witness, when he argues that Exodus 34:6–7 should be given a central place in the ongoing debate on the centre of the OT, that he deserves fuller exposition.

#### 4.8.2.1 God's Steadfast Love (Spieckermann, 1990–2000)

In his essay “Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr...” (1990), Spieckermann coins the term *Gnadenformel* with reference to אֱלֹהִים רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֲרֹךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת. He not only examines the numerous occurrences and variations of this phrase, but also seeks to understand its historical relatedness to the various parallel forms.<sup>645</sup> He argues that most of the parallel texts are either exilic or post exilic.<sup>646</sup> Its verbal and conceptual roots, however, he ascribes to pre-exilic prophecy and psalms. He concludes that the formula was closely associated with Israel's prayer practice in the cultus. This is still visible in Exodus 34:6–7 where the attributes of YHWH are proclaimed in the third person singular.

Jahwe selbst muß das sagen, was deutlich als von ihm zu Sagens konzipiert worden ist. Ursprünglich war die Gnadenformel kein Eigenlob Gottes, sondern Gotteslob der dankbaren Gemeinde.<sup>647</sup>

Spieckermann is convinced that the formula had originally a different function, yet he acknowledges that contentwise verses 6–7 fit well into their narrative context. Having said that, he is more interested in trying to show the various developments and interpretations of אֱלֹהִים רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן which he believes to be the original core of Exodus 34:6–7.<sup>648</sup> Thus Spieckermann attempts to reconstruct the process which led to the whole composition of verses 6–7. Following Aurelius' tradition historical analyses, he speculates that behind YHWH's visitation to the third and fourth generation is the concrete reality of an exile which came to an end after seventy years of captivity (Jer. 25:11f. etc.).<sup>649</sup> It is in this historical context that the formula was composed out of

<sup>645</sup> Spieckermann (1990), 1, finds twenty scriptural parallels of various degrees.

<sup>646</sup> See also Dentan (1963), 37ff.

<sup>647</sup> Spieckermann (1990), 8–9.

<sup>648</sup> Spieckermann (1990), 10, argues that there is still a visible suture between the earlier tradition and its later added interpretation. The second חֶסֶד in verse 7 takes up the end of the original *Gnadenformel*, in order to interpret YHWH's חֶסֶד in the light of the forgiveness of sin. Dentan (1963), 36, by contrast, argues that it is “hardly conceivable that the shorter form, minus any reference to God's moral demands, can be original. As it stands...the passage is a beautifully balanced statement with regard to the two most basic aspects of the character of God—His love and His justice.”

<sup>649</sup> Spieckermann (1990), 10, regards Exodus 34 in its final shape as a significant chapter of later deuteronomic theology. Interestingly Dentan (1963), 48, argues that there is not “a single

older variants of it (cf. 20:5, Deut. 7:9). Because of its rich reception throughout Israel's traditions, Spieckermann argues that the *Gnadenformel* should be given a more prominent role in the ongoing debate about the centre of the OT.<sup>650</sup>

Ten years later he takes up this task himself and produces an outline for a biblical theology based on "God's Steadfast Love" (2000).<sup>651</sup> It is interesting to note that Spieckermann in this study (in contrast to the one above) clearly distances himself from questions regarding the history behind the text.<sup>652</sup> He not only sets out to work with the final form of the text, but also seeks to conduct his interpretation of the OT text in the light of NT theology.

The Old Testament owes both its name and the realisation of its truth to the second part of the Christian Bible, the New Testament scriptures, the witness of Jesus Christ...It is the task of a Christian Bible's theology—and of an Old Testament theology being part of it—to pay attention to this theme (i.e. God's steadfast love) in the manifold forms and situations witnessed in the scriptures.<sup>653</sup>

In this rewarding, and yet not unproblematic study, he develops the theology of God's steadfast love from Exodus 34:6–7, via the Psalms and prophets to Jesus Christ under the following four headings: i) God's self-determination towards Steadfast Love, ii) Living in God's Saving Presence: the Psalter, iii) With Everlasting Love I Will Have Compassion on You: The Prophets, iv) God's Steadfast Love in Jesus Christ: End and Abundance of the Law.

With regard to Exodus 34:6–7, Spieckermann notes that the theophany comes as a gracious response to Israel's idolatry. In these verses YHWH confirms His determination to love sinful Israel and to be faithful to them. He writes that they were

intentionally shaped as divine speech, because regarding the original sin of idolatry, only God himself can say how he will continue to be perceivable for the Israelites. God remains true to Israel in remaining true to his self-determination towards his *חסד*, his steadfast love. However hurt by adultery God's love takes the shape of mercy and grace, of abstaining from anger and of being ready to forgive the thousands (i.e. numerous) of generations without any limit, although the punishment restricted to four generations would not fail to come. But this is not as remarkable as its juxtaposition, namely God's unlimited love that remains true to Israel. God immediately confirms his self-determination by a new covenant and by new proclamation of his law (Exod 34,10–27)...God does not determine his relationship with Israel momentarily, but fundamentally. He does so not before he has had any experience with Israel, but right at the climax of the crisis occurring during his love-story with Israel, namely having adultery in view. At this point, God's love takes the shape of faithfulness and mercy that is willing to forgive—not only once, but once and over again. All this is expressed by the word *חסד* in Exod 34,6–7 and the enlarged formula of grace, accordingly.<sup>654</sup>

Although Spieckermann works now with the final form, he still places far greater

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deuteronomic element in its vocabulary or style." Cf. Van Seters (1999), 160–170.

<sup>650</sup> Spieckermann (1990), 1–19 (esp. 5–10).

<sup>651</sup> Spieckermann (2000), 305–327.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 305–307.

<sup>653</sup> Spieckermann (2000), 307–308.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 310–312.



emphasis on the first part of the divine speech than on the second. This is also reflected in his exegesis, where he only looks at what he conceives as the central nucleus of the formula, the word pair *חסד/אמת*. This restriction might be partially due to the size of the article, but I suspect that it is primarily due to his hermeneutical starting point: OT theology (in this instance YHWH's steadfast love) has to be understood in the light of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. By this he does not mean to uncover an "immediate testimony to Christ" in OT texts, but to seriously interact with the "authentic testimony" of the text, and to recognise the inherent truth claim of the OT.<sup>655</sup> As far as the methodology is concerned, we would agree that this is an important aspect of OT interpretation. However, when it comes to exegeting Exodus 34:6–7, Spieckermann does not seem to do full justice to his objectives (erudite exegesis). In our judgement, he suppresses the element of YHWH's moral demand and justice (34:7b) and thereby might not do full justice to the dynamics of the divine speech in Exodus 34:6–7. A fuller assessment must wait until we have analysed the passage. At the moment, we would like to juxtapose Spieckermann's treatment of Exodus 34:6–7 with that of Brueggemann, who equally ascribes to this passage a key function in OT theology.

#### 4.8.2.2 Disjunction at the Core of YHWH's Name (Brueggemann, 1997)

Exodus 34:6–7 is very important to Brueggemann. It is not only by far the most cited passage in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, but one could argue that the two verses serve in programmatic ways as the centre of his section of Israel's core testimony.<sup>656</sup> Exodus 34:6–7 is "a self-disclosure on the part of Yahweh, which provides the grounds for the continued life of Israel, after the unparalleled affront to Yahweh in the golden calf."<sup>657</sup> Although Brueggemann seems to recognise the canonical location of YHWH's fullest self-revelation, he is much more interested in the kind of language which is being used to characterise YHWH. He understands Exodus 34:6–7 as a mature self-conscious statement about the character of YHWH, a "credo of adjectives," "a classic, normative statement to which Israel regularly returned."<sup>658</sup> Brueggemann submits that the very character of God depends on the "courage and imagination of those who speak about God."<sup>659</sup>

I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of the Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way."<sup>660</sup>

<sup>655</sup> Spieckermann (2000), 325–327.

<sup>656</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 117–303.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>658</sup> "For each of these adjectives, I suggest that Israel must have available for itself a rich variety of verbal sentences that support and give credence to the adjectival claims." Brueggemann (1997), 216, refers, among other passages, to Psalm 136 in order to concretise the abstract adjectival claims.

<sup>659</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 65.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., 66. His italics.

After some analysis of the terminology employed in Exodus 34:6–7 he observes that all attributes found on YHWH's lips are relational in character, whether they talk of YHWH's gracious solidarity or whether they warn of YHWH's wrath and punishment.<sup>661</sup> In his analyses, he divides the verses into positive and negative adjectives. Thereby Brueggemann emphasises the ominous disjunction within the "credo." The second half is introduced with an adversative conjunction which he renders with "he will really not acquit, *but* will visit the iniquity..."<sup>662</sup> Brueggemann proposes that the negative statement has to be seen as a parallel affirmation. Not least because the same iniquities (עֲוֹן) are first pardoned and then visited. On the one hand, YHWH is for Israel in fidelity, and on the other hand, YHWH is fiercely for Himself. Brueggemann argues that Israel's credo of divine adjectives is congruent with YHWH's acts in history (acts of love and wrath, salvation and destruction). It testifies to Israel's awareness of YHWH's demanding covenant relationship which is endlessly restless.

After having consulted a range of texts, Brueggemann reaches the conclusion that the tension within YHWH cannot and should not be resolved or harmonised. There is a fundamental contradiction between YHWH's self-regard and His commitment to Israel. Thus Brueggemann strongly argues that the second half of Exodus 34:6–7 is no intrusion, but belongs fully to Israel's core affirmation about YHWH.

My thesis for thematization of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh is this: Yahweh is a Character and Agent who is evidenced in the life of Israel as an Actor marked by unlimited sovereignty and risky solidarity, in whom this sovereignty and solidarity often converge, but for whom, on occasion, sovereignty and solidarity are shown to be in unsettled tension or in a acute imbalance. *The substance of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh, I propose, yields a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core of the Subjects's life...* This disjunction is a theological datum of substance, It is not a mark of erroneous, primitive religion that late "concepts of God" can leave behind.<sup>663</sup>

The difference between ancient Israel and the modern faith community is that the latter often "innocently focus on this or that affirmation, as it is pragmatically persuasive, and leave it at that. In contrast, Israel pushed the tension theologically and rhetorically, until it had pushed it into the very life, character, and person of Yahweh."<sup>664</sup>

<sup>661</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 225–226, notes that the Hebrew adjectives describing the divine attributes are significantly different from the classical Christian terminology, such as *omnipotent*, *omnipresent* and *omniscient*. Although the creation, the Exodus and other mighty deeds suggest that Israel takes at least the first one for granted, the Exodus 34 theophany emphasises a different aspect of YHWH; His relationship to Israel and what He does for His people.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>663</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 268. Zenger (1978), 248, argues that the apparent contradiction within YHWH's revelation ought to be handled dialectically:

Diese Souveränität kommt in den nun folgenden "negativen" Aussagen über Jahweh zum Ausdruck, die für normales menschliches Denken dem vorher Gesagten fast total widersprechen. In dieser Zusammenschau unseres Textes wird die Dialektik sichtbar, in der wir Menschen Gottes Sein und Handeln umschreiben müssen.

<sup>664</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 272, argues that Christianity claims a special discernment of a God who is

*Preliminary Assessment:* Brueggemann has rightly recognised Exodus 34:6–7 as an exceedingly important witness to Israel's understanding of God. It is indeed the fullest statement on the character of God in the entire Bible. There are, however, two issues which we would like to mention at this stage. Firstly, by emphasising the dependence of our understanding of God on Israel's rhetoric, Brueggemann devalues or at times even ignores the logic inherent in the wider narrative. Not only does Brueggemann disregard the wider hermeneutically important context (we shall see in our next section how this affects an interpretation of verses 6–7), but also neglects the textual claim that verses 6–7 are YHWH's words, not Israel's credo. Of course on one level they are Israel's words, but taking the claim and logic of the text with utmost seriousness (there is textual distinction between Israel's words about God, and God's word to Israel), one may want to exercise caution in pre-empting the text of its ontological claim to divine reality.<sup>665</sup> Secondly, Brueggemann argues that these verses witness to a profound and fundamental "incongruity" or contradiction within the very nature of YHWH. This implies nothing less than that YHWH is both gracious and merciless, forgiving and unforgiving, loyal and disloyal, reliable and unreliable etc.<sup>666</sup> It seems thus an irony that Brueggemann upholds, in the context of YHWH's positive attributes (34:6), Israel's God over the gods of its neighbours which were marked by fickle, petty, and unpredictable natures.<sup>667</sup> Is not the portrait of Brueggemann's God dangerously similar?

We shall argue, however, that divine love does not contradict divine judgement. If one takes the narrative context of Exodus 34:6–7 into account, it becomes evident that YHWH's visiting of Israel's iniquities is not inconsistent with His fundamental covenant loyalty. YHWH's wrath is directed against a specific sin. Thus one might differentiate between YHWH's circumstantial act against Israel and His absolute will for Israel, without reaching the conclusion that the two are incongruous.<sup>668</sup> Moreover, we shall argue in the forthcoming exegesis that verse 7b protects in some sense the meaning of grace. To put it differently, without the stern warning the impression of "cheap grace" is created.<sup>669</sup> The underlying problem in context is how to

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strongly inclined towards gracious fidelity and love. This portrayal, according to Brueggemann, is not only based on a very selective range of NT material, but raises considerable problems in the face of contemporary atrocities.

In the end, I would not want to conclude that Christian faith has an easy resolution to the tension the Old Testament witnesses about Yahweh. I would not want to gloss over the dreadfulness in the Christian claim, both because Friday is ultimately serious, and because confessing Christians must live in the real world of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. (p. 312)

<sup>665</sup> Although Brueggemann (1997), 66 says: "rhetorical enterprise operates with ontological assumptions," he underscores that "these assumptions are open to dispute and revision in the ongoing rhetorical enterprise of Israel."

<sup>666</sup> Fretheim (1998), 31, on reflecting on Brueggemann's God, speaks of a "however theology." "God is faithful, however..." Fretheim, 25, suggests that Brueggemann's emphasis on the divine disjuncture is a "*postmodern restatement of sovereignty*."

<sup>667</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 226.

<sup>668</sup> I am indebted to Fretheim (1992), 915, for this distinction within the will of God.

<sup>669</sup> Cf. Moberly (2002), 200.

communicate the idea of grace to a stubborn people without skewing the moral demand of YHWH. Thus as we shall discuss in some details, the two elements must stand in dialectical relationship. In order to substantiate our assessment of Spieckermann's and Brueggemann's treatment of Exodus 34:6–7, we seek to gain a firmer grasp of the text in its context.

4.8.2.3 Exodus 34:6–7 and Context

The revelation taken out of context may convey a certain ambiguity regarding YHWH's nature. If one interprets Exodus 34:6–7 in its canonical context, however, the tone of verses 6–7 becomes clearer.

For a start, it is important to note the timing of YHWH's self-disclosure. YHWH revealed His nature right after Israel committed the ultimate sin. There is good reason to argue that adultery between freshly married husband and wife is in view. Pressing the underlying imagery a bit further, one could argue that YHWH proclaims His name against the background of hurt and wrath. After Israel's act of idolatry, Moses sets out to appease "the betrayed husband," through persistent prayer which climaxes in the request to see YHWH's כבוד (33:18). Whereupon YHWH redefined כבוד and announced that He will pass before Moses in all His טוב (33:19). This strongly suggests that Exodus 34:6–7 is above all an expression of divine goodness. This is endorsed by the recognition that YHWH's disclosure comes as a result of Moses' intercession for Israel's sin. In other words, unless one takes into account the full force of Israel's offence, one is likely to miss the true and amazing nature of divine mercy and grace.<sup>670</sup> Secondly, the most comprehensive account of YHWH's name not only has to be seen in conjunction with Exodus 33:18–19, but also wants to be understood in the light of the wider dynamics of Exodus 33:20–23, which emphasises that even Moses is restricted in his comprehension of YHWH. In other words, a hermeneutical framework is provided within which the fullest revelation wants to be understood. Thirdly, another way of catching the tone of YHWH's disclosure is by comparing it with His revelation at Sinai before Israel broke the covenant with their God (20:5–6). At the outset of the commandments YHWH makes Himself known as אל קנא who cannot tolerate any other loyalties.

Exodus 20:5–6	Exodus 34:6–7
כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך	יהוה יהוה
אל קנא	אל רחום וחנון
	אריך אפים
	ורב חסד ואמת
	נצור חסד לאלפים
	נשא עון ופשע וחטאה
	ונקה לא ינקה

<sup>670</sup> Moberly (2002), 198.

פֶּקֶד עֵין אֲבוֹת	פֶּקֶד עֵין אֲבוֹת
עַל־בְּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים	עַל־בְּנִים
עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאִי	עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים
וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים	
לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי	

Regardless whether Exodus 34:6–7 was originally part of a different tradition or not, in its canonical sequence, after the golden calf incident, YHWH's self-disclosure seems to come as a deliberate reformulation of His previous pronouncement.<sup>671</sup> Most striking is the reversal of the order. In the decalogue the negative part, i.e. the warning of divine visitation precedes YHWH's merciful and gracious attributes. Moreover, in the first divine disclosure divine jealousy is given as the reason for judgement (20:5), while after the golden calf incident YHWH's jealousy is no longer directly related to judgement, but comes only later to expression as a general warning regarding the worship of other gods (cf. 34:14, § 4.9.2).<sup>672</sup> Furthermore, according to Exodus 20:6, YHWH's חסד is conditional upon obedience to the commandments, while in Exodus 34:6–7 חסד is proclaimed as the dominant divine attribute. Overall there is a radical shift from an emphasis on divine jealousy to an emphasis on divine mercy, grace, and loyalty without denying justice. The picture of Exodus 34:6–7 emerging here is obviously quite different from that depicted by Brueggemann. The following analyses of verses 6–7 will confirm that.

Taking up His previous enigmatic announcement וַחֲנֹנִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲחִין וְרַחֲמָיו אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶרְחָם YHWH makes now a fundamental statement about His nature. He is basically merciful and gracious. This is the first time, in canonical sequence, that YHWH reveals Himself as אל־רחום.<sup>673</sup> The adjective is closely associated with the noun רחם (womb) and רחמים (motherly affection towards child) and thus seems to connote YHWH's natural loving and compassionate affiliation to His people.<sup>674</sup> YHWH's relation to His people is explicitly compared with that of a loving parent on several places:

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child (בְּרָחִם) of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you (Isa. 49:15, cf. Jer. 31:20, Hos. 2, 11).

As a father has compassion for his children (בְּרָחִם אָב עַל־בְּנָיו),  
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him (רַחֵם יְהוָה עַל־יִרְאָיו), Ps. 103:13).

In Moses' commission, YHWH refers to Israel as His first-born son (4:22). We have argued in the context of Exodus 32:11 that Scripture suggests that this is more than metaphoric discourse (§ 4.3.3.3). It seems thus natural that Israel came to make YHWH's parental compassion or His "womb-pity,"<sup>675</sup> as the foundation for their

<sup>671</sup> Cf. Keil (1865), 240–241, Jacob (1997), 968–969, Moberly (1983), 87–88.

<sup>672</sup> Cf. Dietrich & Link (1997<sup>2</sup>), 99ff.

<sup>673</sup> First occurrences of this form in OT. In 33:19 occurs the first time the related verbal form of רָחַם.

<sup>674</sup> Cf. Tribble (1978), 31–71, Janzen (1997), 252.

<sup>675</sup> Raitt (1991), 39.

prayers of pardon (cf. Pss. 51:3, 78:38, 86:15, Ne. 9:19, 27, 28, 31).

YHWH's "womb-pity" is re-enforced by His gracious disposition (רחון). The semantic range of רחון varies from "being gracious, merciful," to "showing favour."<sup>676</sup> In the light of רחום, רחון could also connote parental care. It adds, however, the sense of a sovereign and generous king who is favourably inclined towards the weaker party (cf. 22:26, Ps. 86:15–16).<sup>677</sup> YHWH's resolution to be רחון resonates with Moses' previous prayer in which the phrase "having found חן in YHWH's eyes" occurs six times (33:12–17, 34:9). In other words, there is a sense that not only Moses' found favour in the eyes of YHWH, but eventually the people will as well. Although mercy and grace mark YHWH's fundamental nature, the second half of YHWH's self-disclosure (v. 7) and the renewed covenant stipulations (34:11–28) make it absolutely evident that "cheap grace" is not being offered. And yet it speaks volumes for God's nature that immediately after Israel's prime sin, God wants Moses to know that He is primarily a אֱלֹהֵי רַחוּם וְחַנוּן.

YHWH's parental compassion and His grace are marked by great patience. He is slow to anger (ארך אפים). The idea behind the Hebrew idiom might be that YHWH's wrath can cool off on his "long nostrils" before it affects or impacts Israel (cf. Isa. 42:14).<sup>678</sup> If one allows for the progression of the wider narrative, then YHWH's patience does not so much stand in tension with His initially quickly kindled wrath (32:10, 11),<sup>679</sup> but comes as a new resolution within YHWH Himself. According to the logic of the account, the divine resolution to be slow to anger is the result of Moses' plea to turn from His burning anger (שׁוּב מִקִּדְרוֹן אַפְּךָ) and to "repent" of His initial intention to consume the people (32:12). In other words, the fact that YHWH allowed Moses to pacify His potentially destructive wrath already foreshadows YHWH's final resolution to be slow to anger (32:11, 34:6).<sup>680</sup>

YHWH's nature is further qualified with רַב־חַסֵּד וְאֱמֶת.<sup>681</sup> חסד and אמת appear frequently as a word pair. Dentan suggests that we are dealing here with a hendiadys in which אמת is complimenting or modifying the first noun.<sup>682</sup> This results in something like "enduring love, kindness, or loyalty." In some of the psalms these two attributes find in their poetical language almost hypostatical status.<sup>683</sup> In Psalm 61:8, the psalmist intercedes for the king, praying to God that חסד and אמת watch

<sup>676</sup> Cf. BDB, 335.

<sup>677</sup> Preuß (1991), 278.

<sup>678</sup> For a graphic illustration of YHWH's patient anger: "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant" (Isa. 42:14).

<sup>679</sup> It is worth noting that out nine occurrences of אף in the book of Exodus five occur in chapter 32, whereby it is a mix of divine wrath (32:10, 11) and Moses' anger reflecting YHWH's wrath (32:19, 20, 22).

<sup>680</sup> Having said that, YHWH's patience has already been probed from the moment of Israel's complaint at the sea (14:11–12), via the complaint in the wilderness (16–17).

<sup>681</sup> LXX: πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός (very merciful and truthful).

<sup>682</sup> (1963), 43.

<sup>683</sup> Stoebe (1994<sup>5</sup>), 613, cf. Pss. 40:11(12), 25:10.

over him! Divine חסד is frequently envisaged as the foundation for all kinds of prayers, especially those of forgiveness (Pss. 25:7, 51:3). But what exactly do these two terms mean in the context of the golden calf incident? חסד is the only attribute which finds mention twice on the lips of YHWH in verses 6–7.<sup>684</sup> Since the term is often closely associated with the divine–human covenant (20:6, cf. Deut. 7:9, Ps. 89:28), and given the fact that the covenant relationship is central to the Sinai narrative, it is perhaps not surprising to find it twice in Exodus 34:6–7. The previous occurrence of the term חסד is in YHWH's self-disclosure at Sinai (20:6) As we have already noted, there it is clearly used in the context of the covenant and is dependent on Israel's love and obedience to the commandment (וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד... לְאַהֲבִי וּלְשִׁמְרִי כְּצִוְתִי). On the basis of this and other, particularly deuteronomic texts, Glueck argues that Israel has a right to divine חסד as long as they adhere to the covenant stipulations.<sup>685</sup> In other words, חסד is a mutual undertaking, as long as Israel is committed to their God, YHWH is obliged to maintain His part of the covenant.<sup>686</sup> By this measure YHWH would not be obliged to renew His bond with Israel because they have failed to live up to its conditions. Although this is clearly part of the idea of חסד, Glueck's category is too narrowly defined. As we shall see in some detail, Moses, knowing that Israel breached the covenant relationship (32:19, 32:31) still appeals to YHWH's חסד when he pleads for the pardon of rebellious Israel at Kadesh (cf. § 5.4.2.3).

סֶלַח נָא לְעֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּגְדֹל חַסְדְּךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לְעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד-הַנֵּה (Nu. 14:19)

Numbers 14:18–19 is not only the next passage which contains the term חסד after Exodus 34:6–7, but it is also directly relevant for our understanding of the term because Moses, on the basis of YHWH's revelation, appeals to YHWH's great חסד. It will become evident in the context of Numbers 14 that Israel's faithlessness to the covenant relationship does not annul YHWH's faithfulness to Israel. Thus there is a clear sense that חסד cannot be limited to a divine obligation, but contains a divine disposition which is worth appealing to in spite of Israel's sin. Judging from Moses' appeal to divine חסד in the face of a potentially broken covenant, it is an appeal to YHWH's faithful commitment to His people that goes beyond their weakness and sin. It goes beyond what Israel deserves or has a right to expect.<sup>687</sup> In other words, the semantic spectrum of חסד and אֱמֶת includes that of grace, mercy, love, and faithfulness, and thus compliments YHWH's parental compassion and His loyalty. Both the Sinai and the scout narrative make it evident that divine חסד is intrinsically related to the divine–human covenant relationship. Rather than strictly adhering to

<sup>684</sup> Spieckermann (2000), 310, is convinced that חסד is the leading term of vv. 6–7 “as an enlargement of the formula of grace, Exod 34:6–7 is to be understood as an interpretation of this term.”

<sup>685</sup> Glueck (1927), 55, 73, 102.

<sup>686</sup> The mutual responsibilities presupposing חסד comes well to expression in Solomon's prayer: “You have shown great kindness (חסד) to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart” (1 Ki. 3:6).

<sup>687</sup> Sackenfild (1998), 90–91.

the letter of Exodus 20:6, YHWH, by reversing the order of His priorities and by emphasising the abundance of His חסד (faithful love) for His people, not only makes a fundamental statement about His nature at the height of a crisis with Israel, but also opens a door for Moses to appeal to parental compassion, grace, faithfulness, and His promise to make a restoration of the covenant relationship possible.<sup>688</sup> In sum, YHWH's חסד and אמת

must relate to Yahweh's willingness, in response to the intercession of Moses (Exod 33:12–18), to show his true nature through renewing the covenant with Israel despite their sin with the Golden Calf, in which they had effectively forfeited their position as the chosen people of Yahweh. The general point is well expressed in the words of the NT, "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim 2:13).<sup>689</sup>

So far YHWH has expressed His rudimentary nature, which is characterised by utter faithfulness. Now, signalled by the first of four participle (נצר), YHWH is to unfold more concretely how His nature bears on His relationship with Israel. In other words, there is good reason to argue that verse 6 contains attributes of YHWH's nature (Wesenseigenschaften), whereas verse 7 explains the divine acts resulting from His nature (Handlungsweisen). In this sense it is probably right to argue that verse 7 comes as an interpretation of verse 6.<sup>690</sup>

First, by guarding (נצר)<sup>691</sup> His (covenant) loyalty to thousands of generations, which is a way of saying, His חסד lasts for an indefinite long time, as the writer of Lamentations knew:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; חסדי יהוה ברי לא־תִכַּח, Lam. 3:22).<sup>692</sup>

Why do His loyalty and mercies never cease? Because great is His faithfulness (רבה אֱמוּנָתוֹ, Lam. 3:23). According to Exodus 32–34, this is only possible because YHWH נָשָׂא עוֹן וְפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאת. It is surely significant that in this context all major terms of Israel's vocabulary on sins are being employed.<sup>693</sup> Although it is not entirely evident from the immediate context how to differentiate between these terms, it is clear that as a totality they seek to give expression to all conceivable sins against YHWH.<sup>694</sup> In other words, they encompass Israel's idolatry with the bull idol too.<sup>695</sup>

<sup>688</sup> Raitt (1991), 54–55, makes a similar point: "It is not true to say that the covenant is what makes forgiveness possible. All the evidence that we have examined adds up to the conclusion that forgiveness is what makes covenant possible...Access to forgiveness is an extension of the original idea of covenant."

<sup>689</sup> Moberly (1997), 429.

<sup>690</sup> So Renaud (1998), 193, Scurlik (2001), 146.

<sup>691</sup> Within semantic range are: "to keep, to protect."

<sup>692</sup> Cf. Ps. 106:1, 2 Chr. 20:21.

<sup>693</sup> Knierim (1965), 229–235, lists another eight cases where all three terms are employed together (cf. 34:7, Nu. 14:18, Pss. 32:1, 5, 51:3–7, Mi. 7:18, etc.).

<sup>694</sup> Knierim (1965), 234: "Die Formel bezeichnet somit zunächst einmal die Summe, die Gesamtheit der Sünden in ihrer Vielzahl...Sie ist für alle anderen Begriffe repräsentativ..."

<sup>695</sup> Houtman's (2000), 707, translation of the verse catches this well: "However great, numerous, and whatever the iniquities may be, he forgives them, but..."



In Exodus 32–34 only the term חטאה is used on a number of occasions (32:21, 30, 31). The making of the אלֹהֵי זָהָב is referred to as a חטאה גדולה (32:31) and the act associated with it is described on several instances with the verb חטא (32:30, 31). Even though the word פשע does not explicitly feature in Exodus 32–34, from Exodus 23:21 (previous occurrence) and other places one can establish that it has to do with breaking a relationship, breaching a covenant,<sup>696</sup> rebellion against a suzerain.<sup>697</sup> Thus this semantic field obviously applies on several levels to the golden calf incident. In our narrative, the term עון occurs on its own only in the context of visiting the עון of the parents (34:7, 20:5). The translation of the term עון has proved notoriously difficult, as a quick comparison of major modern translations reveals: “iniquity” (NRSV), “guilt” (JPS), “sin” (NIV). The problem of an accurate translation of עון into a modern language has to do with the fact that the Israelites envisaged an entire process from the sinful act to its consequences. On one level, it refers to the act of trespassing (it is a nominal construction of the verb עוה, turning from the right way, missing the way; the idea is similar to when the people are said to have turned from the divinely commanded path by making and worshipping a molten calf [32:8]), on another level, it includes the evolving guilt and the resulting punishment for leaving the divinely prescribed way of life.<sup>698</sup>

We shall examine the implication of this in the context of the divine visitation of the fathers' עון. Here in the context of the entire list of sins, the really important thing about these various facets of Israel's understanding of sin is that YHWH, out of His gracious, compassionate, and loyal being, is willing to נשא any sin for an indefinitely long period (to thousands of generations).

The idiom נשא עון (וּפְשַׁע), though important is not straightforward either. It occurs 29 times in the OT, only seven times with YHWH as subject.<sup>699</sup> Hamilton suggests that in the latter case it means “removing the iniquity,”<sup>700</sup> and Houtman speaks of forgiveness of sins.<sup>701</sup> A more literal rendering would be to carry or to bear the iniquities. This adds, as Knierim in his thorough study on OT conceptions of sin established, an important nuance to general renderings such as above:

daß Gott selbst den 'āwōn von schuldigen Menschen an deren Stelle trägt, ist das Erregende and das Eigentliche in der Wendung, die Schuld tragen (*nasa' āwōn*). Das ist die Grundaussage, der Grundvorgang. Daß dadurch, daß Gott den 'āwōn selbst trägt...dem Menschen der 'āwōn weggenommen, vergeben wird, ist die Auswirkung des Grundvorgangs...So macht ohne Zweifel der Begriff “Vergebung” nicht mehr sichtbar, was die Wendung *nasa' āwōn* meint, wenn sie

<sup>696</sup> Sarna (1991), 148, traces the term back to the violation of vassal treaties and suggests that in the religious context it expresses the infringement of God's covenant. Cf. Knierim (1965), 176–184.

<sup>697</sup> “Be attentive to him (angel of YHWH)...do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression (לֹא יִסְחַרְחֶם)....(Ex. 23:21).

<sup>698</sup> Scharbert (1957), 139: “Auf dieser Irrfahrt hat er auch ständig mit den damit gegebenen Gefahren, mit den damit verbundenen Übeln, also mit den Folgen der Sünde zu rechnen.”

<sup>699</sup> Ex. 34:7, Nu. 14:18, Pss. 32:5, 85:3 (2), Isa. 33:24, Hos. 14:3 (2), Mic. 7:18.

<sup>700</sup> Hamilton (1997), 162.

<sup>701</sup> Houtman (2000), 707.

sagt, daß Gott den *'āwōn* (des Menschen)—selbst trage.<sup>702</sup>

This seems to suggest that YHWH out of His nature vicariously carries/bears Israel's sin in order to maintain/guard the (covenant) relationship. YHWH's resolve to carry/bear Israel's iniquities (34:7) could be understood in the light of Moses' previous heartfelt prayer *וַעֲתָה אֵם-תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאֵם-אֵין קִחְנִי נָא מִסַּפְּרֶךְךָ* (32:32). It looks as if YHWH, has taken Moses' previous plea into consideration and has transformed it into a general divine attribute. That YHWH has allowed Himself to be changed by His servant is endorsed by His pre-apostacy warning that His angel will not bear Israel's transgression (*וְשָׂא לְפָשְׁעֵכֶם כִּי שְׁמִי בְקָרְבוֹ*, 23:21), if Israel disobeys.<sup>703</sup> There is possibly some indication that YHWH was inspired by Moses to vicariously bear Israel's sins.<sup>704</sup> Although Moses did not intend to vicariously bear Israel's sins, he showed tremendous costly solidarity, even to the degree that he was prepared to be blotted out of YHWH's book with his people, if YHWH would not bear their sins (32:32). This line of argument would suggest, however, that the sin is not necessarily eradicated, but temporarily put off by a patient God. This interpretation of *נָשָׂא* is obviously compatible with YHWH's forbearance. We shall see that this reading of *נָשָׂא* is enforced and exemplified in Numbers 14 where YHWH patiently "bears" Israel's sins until a time He calls them to accountability (§ 5.4.2.4ff.). In other words, the terminology reflects both YHWH's loving patience and His moral demand. Thus YHWH's moral integrity as it comes explicitly to expression in the following phrase is already anticipated.

*וְנִקְחָהּ לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עֹן אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים* (34:7b)

Before we expose ourselves to the complexity of the second half of verse 7, a word to the proportion between guarding *הַסֵּד* to thousands of generations and visiting the iniquity to the third and fourth generation. Regardless of the exact interpretation, on any reckoning the proportion between YHWH's gracious covenant commitment and His warning is at least 250 to 1 (more likely 500 to 1).<sup>705</sup> Hesse remarks:

Der Zorn fällt gar nicht ins Gewicht gegenüber der Langmut and der Gnade!...Vielmehr and vor allem is Jahwe barmherzig, gnädig, langmütig, reich an Gnade and Treue (v 6). Die Sündigkeit des Volkes muß nicht Jahwes Zorn entfesseln, an ihr kann sich auch seine Langmut erproben (v 9). Zorn and Güte stehen nebeneinander; aber der Zorn kann nie so mächtig werden, daß er die Verheißung gefährdet. Der Zorn wirkt sich da, wo es not tut, mit Maßen aus.<sup>706</sup>

Although YHWH reveals Himself as a God who is above all characterised by mercy, grace, and loyalty, verse 7b makes it absolutely clear that justice matters to Him.

<sup>702</sup> Knierim (1967<sup>2</sup>), 221.

<sup>703</sup> In this context, unlike Exodus 33, the angel of YHWH is a kind of "incarnation" of YHWH Himself (cf. 3:2–4, Gen. 22:11). Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 298–300.

<sup>704</sup> Janzen (1997), 255, renders *נָשָׂא* with "bearing" in the sense of "bearing with" or "putting up with." He goes on to explore some of the implications of such a rendering; "'bearing with' comes at the cost and sorrow to the one who bears, so, in a real sense, the forgiver is the one who bears the sin of the forgiven."

<sup>705</sup> *אלפים* is in the plural and thus means at least two thousand.

<sup>706</sup> Hesse (1951), 115.

Having said that, the interpretation of this verse has proven to be extremely complex. The meaning of each element remains debated. I suggest that the two verses force the exegete to engage with the following three issues: i) translation and interpretation of the idiom *לֹא יִנָּקֶה לֹא יִנָּקֶה* ii) a contextual interpretation of *עַל-בְּנֵי* פָּקֶד עֵין אָבוֹת. Does it mean to punish successive generations regardless of their guilt because of the sins of their fathers, or does it mean that punishment comes to the largest possible family alive during the lifetime of the sinful generation (ie. from great-grand parents to great-grand children),<sup>707</sup> or that YHWH will examine the iniquities of successive generations and then take action on the basis of their standing? iii) How is one best to integrate the meaning of the statement in the wider narrative of Exodus 32–34 and the unfolding narrative of the Exodus generation?

i) The expression *לֹא יִנָּקֶה לֹא יִנָּקֶה* not only introduces what is sometimes called the negative divine attributes, but also comes as a change on the grammatical level. There is a shift from two proceeding participles to a negative infinite absolute construct of the root *נקה*. An overview of the occurrences of this term shows that it is closely associated with legal language.<sup>708</sup> The exact meaning of the Hebrew has been debated.<sup>709</sup> The following interpretations will provide an idea of the complexity of the issue. The first set of the following interpreters argue that the infinitive absolute construct is less definite than the simple (absolute) negative *לֹא נִקָּה*, as we encounter it in the decalogue (20:7<sup>710</sup>), while the second group takes the initial waw as a strong adversative which is reinforced by the infinite absolute construct.

i) Rashi takes this construction to mean that YHWH does not entirely remit the punishment, but “little by little exacts punishment from him (the sinner).”<sup>711</sup> Similarly Jacob: “ohne gänzlich frei zu machen,”<sup>712</sup> Fishbane: “But will not acquit [guilt forever; but will] requite the iniquity of the fathers on their children and grandchildren,”<sup>713</sup> Houtman: “whatever the iniquities may be, he forgives them, but he does not leave them unpunished either.”<sup>714</sup> Scuralik: “aber nicht einfach freispricht (sondern), der heimsucht Schuld von Vätern an Kindern”<sup>715</sup>

ii) Durham: “certainly not neglecting just punishment, holding responsible for the guilt of the fathers both sons and grandsons,”<sup>716</sup> Brueggemann: “he will really not acquit, but will visit”(yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of

<sup>707</sup> Rost (1957), 229–233, Zimmerli (1994<sup>2</sup>), 111.

<sup>708</sup> van Leeuwen (1995<sup>5</sup>), 104–105, notes that *נקה* in Piel always occurs in negative sentences. E.g. Ex. 20:7, 34:7, Nu. 14:18, in divine lawsuit (cf. Jer. 30:11, 46:28, cf. Job 9:28).

<sup>709</sup> According to Levine (1993), 366, it expresses the notion of cleansing or clearing away guilt, debt or obligation.

<sup>710</sup> Cf. Jacob (1997), 969.

<sup>711</sup> Rashi (1945), 192, cf. Childs (1974), 602, “Yet he does not remit all punishment, but avenges the iniquity.”

<sup>712</sup> Jacob (1997), 965. Cf. van Leeuwen: “aber er läßt nicht ganz ungestraft.”

<sup>713</sup> Fishbane (1988), 335.

<sup>714</sup> Houtman (2000), 707.

<sup>715</sup> Scuralik (2001), 145.

<sup>716</sup> Durham (1987), 450.

the parents upon the children),<sup>717</sup> Renaud: “mais il ne laisse absolument rien impuni, visitant la faute des pères sur les fils”<sup>718</sup>

From a strictly grammatical point of view both sets of interpretations are possible.<sup>719</sup> This verse is a good example of the importance of context and how intrinsically connected wider theological issues are with an exact rendering of the Hebrew.<sup>720</sup> In the light of the following discussion we shall argue that neither of the two sets of translation above does full justice to the tone of the passage. The debate over the interpretation of verse 7 revolves largely around the interpretation of the following clause:

פָּקֶד עֵין אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים

Muffs ascribes to Exodus 32:34 an interpretative key for understanding the statement above. After declining Moses' request to bear/endure Israel's sin (32:32–33), YHWH announces a day in the unforeseeable future when He will visit Israel's sins וְיָבִיחַם (32:34). This announcement, according to Muffs, is basically a sign of YHWH's grace who can and does defer punishment. With the help of a three stage model (he acknowledges its limitations), Muffs sets out to examine Israel's “moral sensibilities regarding matters of sin and punishment.” In the first stage, according to his model, “sin has an objective quality. It is like a physical ailment, like a cancer...In this stage, repentance, good deeds, and even the merits of a father do not work. There is no way to cancel this punishment or delay it.”<sup>721</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, Muffs argues, “sin has a subjective nature. It is like a mental disease whose cure is achieved by the repentance of the sinner. Repentance is an inner, psychic process, a type of psychiatric therapy.” On this level Muffs sees healing as a co-operative endeavour between the patient and the divine physician (Jer. 3:22, Deut. 30:1–6). The middle stage reflects “the tension between stages one and three. The attribute of strict justice makes its demands, and the attributes of mercy makes its demands. Justice says, ‘There is an objective obligation here—punishment must be exacted.’ Mercy says, ‘The sinner has repented, forgive him.’”<sup>722</sup> Muffs then raises the question how this paradox can be resolved. How can God forgive the sinner but not erase the sin? God does this by holding back the punishment from the fathers. The exacting of the punishment is delayed, and is exacted from their sons to the fourth generation. Muffs illustrates this stage on the basis of Ahab's repentance and the punishment of his son (1 Ki. 21:27–29), and Solomon's breach of covenant and its consequence for his successors (1 Ki. 11:11–13). Muffs argues that these and other passages illuminate the “doctrine of delaying the punishment of objective sin

<sup>717</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 217.

<sup>718</sup> Renaud (1998), 195.

<sup>719</sup> Cf. GKC § 113, *Jouon* § 123e.

<sup>720</sup> GKC § 113l.

<sup>721</sup> Muffs (1992), 17.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

onto the descendants of the actual sinner.”<sup>723</sup> This is the meaning of “in the day that I punish, I shall punish.”<sup>724</sup> Following Muffs, Fishbane basically agrees,

that the entire attribute formula stresses YHWH's attribute of mercy and forgiveness, for he is a god who can and will *defer* punishment. That such a divine action was considered positively is strikingly confirmed from the encounter between Isaiah and King Hezekiah in 2 Kgs. 20; for there, although Hezekiah sinned, Isaiah announces in YHWH's name that the punishment will be deferred to the sons of Hezekiah, and the latter responds: “The oracle of YHWH which you have proclaimed is *good*” (vv. 12–19).<sup>725</sup>

The understanding of deferred punishment is undoubtedly pervasive in the OT (and ANE in general), as Muffs and Fishbane's examples illustrate.<sup>726</sup> Moreover, the conception of transferring punishment onto somebody else plays an important role in certain conceptions of the Christian gospel. These OT samples show the scriptural roots of the doctrine of vicarious punishment and bearing of sin.<sup>727</sup> In the light of the following points, however, I would like to question whether the concept of deferred punishment is the most helpful interpretative category for understanding Exodus 34:7. Firstly, three thousand sinners were punished on the spot (32:25–29). Secondly, Israel had been inflicted with a plague on account of the golden calf (32:35). Furthermore, there is no explicit mention of successive generations having to pay for the sins of their fathers, rather, taking seriously the unfolding fate of the Exodus generation, as depicted in the Pentateuch, the sinful generation is eventually punished for their own sins by dying in the wilderness without ever entering the promised land (cf. Nu. 14:28–29, 25:9, 26:63–65, 32–35). Their children, however, are led into Canaan and are eventually judged on the basis of their own virtues (Nu. 14:31, 32:14–27). Drawing Numbers 13–14 into our argument is legitimate because Moses appeals to YHWH's revealed nature in almost verbatim fashion in the aftermath of Israel's refusal to enter the promised land (cf. Nu. 14:18, Ex. 34:6–7). We shall argue in our next chapter that Numbers 14 functions in some ways as a commentary on the difficult statement in question. There we shall see that the children of the sinful generation only share in their parents' punishment insofar as they stay in the wilderness with them until the parents die of natural death (Nu. 14:33). The children, however, are given a new opportunity to walk with YHWH into the promised land and enjoy divine favour. We will provide a fuller discussion of this issue in § 5.4.2.4ff. The following preliminary exegesis suggests that verse 7b does not necessarily envisage a collective punishment of the children for the sins of the parents regardless of their moral standing.

As mentioned, Scharbert has made the issue of collective and individual retribution

<sup>723</sup> Muffs (1992), 20, argues, however, that this doctrine reflects only a certain stage in Israel's development of moral consciousness. I.e. it is prevalent in the book of Kings, but no longer in the time of the Chronicler, where everybody is punished for their own sins.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid., 20–23.

<sup>725</sup> Fishbane (1985), 342.

<sup>726</sup> Cf. Milgrom (1990), 393, Weinfeld (1991), 297–298.

<sup>727</sup> Cf. Muffs (1992), 42.

the focus of his study on Exodus 34:6–7. He argues that the semantic range of the much debated verb פקד encompasses not only visiting in judgement and punishment, but could also mean visiting in order to examine or assess the moral standing before action is being taken.<sup>728</sup> Scharbert notes, however, that there is no adequate German rendering of פקד (which applies to English as well). “Heimsuchen” (to visit) is possibly the closest translation.<sup>729</sup> Dohmen, following Schenker, translates פקד in context as “prüfen” (to examine/assess). He translates verse 7b: “er nimmt Schuld, Frevel und Sünde weg, aber er spricht nicht einfach frei, er prüft (vielmehr) die Schuld der Väter an den Söhnen”<sup>730</sup> In other words, God comes first to examine the sins of successive generations before measures are taken.<sup>731</sup> Schenker adds another aspect.

Während der Generation der bösen Väter straft der HERR noch nicht. Er wartet. Er ‘hebt Schuld, Verfehlung, Sünde auf’ aber er hat noch nicht freigesprochen! Während der zweiten Generation, jener der Söhne, wartet er noch immer, auch während der dritten. Aber in der vierten ist das Maß voll. Der Zeitpunkt der Strafe ist gekommen. Warum? Weiteres Zuwarten müsste als Schwäche erscheinen...Gott sagt somit zwei Dinge über sich selbst: Er ist geduldig, aber nicht schwach!”<sup>732</sup>

Schenker understands the postponement of punishment to the fourth generation as an offer for reconciliation, a possibility to return to YHWH. According to him, verse 7 is essentially about divine patience, an attribute which is clearly mentioned in verse 6 (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם).<sup>733</sup>

This line of argument, however, is not entirely unproblematic either, because it suggests that three generations go unpunished regardless of their moral conduct. This not only stands in tension with YHWH’s assertion in Exodus 20:5 that he will visit in judgement those who reject Him, but also with the fact that the guilty Exodus generation has already received partial judgement (32:25ff., 35) and will eventually pay for their rebellion against YHWH (cf. Nu. 14:20ff.). Moreover, the previous usage of פקד in Exodus 32:34, does not naturally refer to later generations but seems most likely to refer to an undefined day in the future when the sinful generation is visited in judgement. This is endorsed by the previous verse which speaks of YHWH’s resolve to judge the actual sinners (32:33). In other words, there is no indication that the immediate narrative or the wider context supports the idea of a deferment of punishment to successive generations.

<sup>728</sup> Scharbert (1957), 139; “Nachschau halten...Jahwe...unterzieht es (the iniquities) einer genauen Kontrolle und sorgt natürlich,...für die Beseitigung der festgestellten Missstände.” HAL: “make careful inspection.”

<sup>729</sup> Scharbert (1957), 139.

<sup>730</sup> Dohmen (1993), 177.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid., 180: “In Ex 34 findet sich neben der “Gnadenformel” von V.6 in V.7 eine “Regel”, die das göttliche Übermaß der in seiner Vergebungsbereitschaft greifbaren Gnade zum Ausdruck bringt im Gegenüber zur Notwendigkeit des Strafens, welche selbst aber wieder mit dem immer als Versöhnungsangebot aufzufassenden Strafaufschub verbunden bleibt.” We shall unpack this statement in § 5.5 and attempt to show that this principle is at work in Numbers 13–14.

<sup>732</sup> Schenker (1990), 89.

<sup>733</sup> Scurlik (2001), 147.

Although Scharbert also allocates פקד to the semantic field of “visiting in order to examine” he develops his exegesis of verse 7 in a more suggestive way. He writes:

Gott sucht den Menschen heim (dh. kommt zu ihm auf Besuch), um seinen Lebenswandel zu kontrollieren; für den Guten ist dieser Besuch mit Heil verbunden, für den Bösen aber mit Unheil. Deshalb kann פקד sowohl “belohnen” [Jer. 15:15, Ps. 106:4] bzw. “sich jemandes liebevoll annehmen” [Gen. 21:1, Ex. 3:16] wie auch “bestrafen” bedeuten [Jes. 13:11, Jer. 23:2, Hos. 1:4].<sup>734</sup>

Scharbert paraphrases verse 7b in the following way: “Das Vergehen der Väter an den Söhnen überprüfen und danach die entsprechenden Massnahmen treffen.”<sup>735</sup> In other words, the collective punishment only applies if the children remain in the sinful ways of the fathers (cf. Jer. 32:18–19).<sup>736</sup> Such a reading is endorsed by YHWH's earlier statement on the relationship between judgement of the iniquities of those who hate Him and divine favour of those who love and obey Him (20:5–6).

Having said that, in the context of a patriarchal society where men were considered as the head of the house, they would naturally form, shape, and imprint their personalities on their families. In other words, evil fathers would often produce evil children and consequently they would come under divine wrath. As reality proves and the unfolding of Israel's history shows, this is not an absolute sociological law (or a vicious circle) which cannot be broken by God's gracious intervention. Keil offers some insightful reflections on the matter and thus deserves quoting at some length.<sup>737</sup>

The human race is a living organism, in which not only sin and wickedness are transmitted, but evil as the curse of the sin and the punishment of the wickedness. As children receive their nature from their parents, or those who beget them, so they have also to bear and atone for their fathers' guilt...Yet there is no *fate* in the divine government of the world, no irresistible necessity in the continuous results of good and evil; but there reigns in the world a righteous and gracious God, who not only restrains the course of His penal judgements, as soon as the sinner is brought to reflection by the punishment and hearkens to the voice of God, but who also forgives the sin and iniquity of those who love Him, keeping mercy to the thousandth generation (Ex. 34:7). The words neither affirm that sinning fathers remain unpunished, nor that the sins of fathers are punished in the children and grandchildren without any fault of their own: they simply say nothing about whether and how the fathers themselves are punished; and, in order to show the dreadful severity of the penal righteousness of God, give prominence to the fact, that punishment is not omitted,—that even when, in the long-suffering of God, it is deferred, it is not therefore neglected, but that the children have to bear the sins of their fathers, whenever, for example...“the children fill up the sins of their fathers,” so that the descendants suffer punishment for both their own and their forefathers' misdeeds (Lev. 26:39; Isa. 65:7; Amos 7:17; Jer. 16:11 ff.; Dan. 9:16). But when, on the other hand, the hating ceases, when the children forsake their fathers' evil ways, the warmth of the divine wrath is turned into the warmth of love, and God becomes רַחֵם וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד (“showing mercy”) to them; and this mercy endures not only to the third and fourth generation, but to the thousandth generation, though

<sup>734</sup> Scharbert (1957), 140.

<sup>735</sup> Scharbert (1957), 141.

<sup>736</sup> Ibid., 149, concludes that the OT does not witness to a development from a collectivism to an individualism, but rather to a process of theological refinement and unfolding of a thought which is clearly present in Exodus 34:7.

<sup>737</sup> I am indebted to Scharbert for this reference.

only in relation to those who love God, and manifest this love by keeping His commandments. "If God continues for a long time His visitation of sin, He continues to all eternity His manifestation of mercy, and we cannot have a better proof of this than in the history of Israel itself" (Schultz), 48.<sup>738</sup>

We shall see in our next chapter that the dynamics of *visiting the iniquities of fathers to the third and fourth generation*, as outlined by Keil and Scharbert, find concrete expression in Numbers 13–14 and 32. It will become evident that the children of the sinful wilderness generation were graciously judged on their own merits. Towards the end of the book of Numbers, there is a sense that the new generation left the unbelief and rebellion of their fathers behind and chose to trust and obey YHWH (Nu. 32:14–27). A more thorough treatment of our suggestion that Numbers 14 comes in several ways as commentary to Exodus 34:6–7 is attempted in § 5.5. Here we merely wanted to advocate the above interpretation as the most suggestive one.

YHWH's self-disclosure as a God who is fundamentally and primarily merciful and gracious is a presupposition for and invitation to prayer. This is particularly reflected in Israel's petitionary and penitential prayers (e.g. Pss. 25, 51). YHWH's goodness serves Israel as a constant reference to appeal to in its prayer life. Moses' final and climactic petition is thus the first prayer in canonical sequence which explores the implication of YHWH's new revelation for Israel's "fallen" state.

## 4.9 Fourth Prayer: The Covenant Mediator

### 4.9.1 Final Petition (34:8–9)

YHWH's manifestation compels Moses to immediate prostration and prayer.

(34:8) ... וַיִּמְהַר מֹשֶׁה בְּקִרְיָה אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה...

Only few have addressed the possible reason for Moses' haste to prostrate himself (מִהָרָה). Gressmann argues that Moses intends to seize the moment and hinder YHWH from passing by, by falling before YHWH and thereby forcing Him to stop and to listen to his plea.<sup>739</sup> Walkenhorst develops this idea by putting forward that only after YHWH's disclosure of His name was the moment right for Moses to take quick action and pray for Israel.<sup>740</sup> Granted that, one is still left with the question of Moses' prayer attitude.

The verb קָרַד (Qal to bow down) occurs 15 times in the OT and is always used in conjunction with the rare *Hištafel* form of חָוָה (to prostrate oneself, worship).<sup>741</sup> It

<sup>738</sup> Keil (1865), 117–118.

<sup>739</sup> Gressmann (1913), 226ff.

<sup>740</sup> Walkenhorst (1984), 198, 206ff.

<sup>741</sup> Traditionally הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה had been traced back to the root שָׁחָה (GKC, § 75kk, BDB) in the *Pa'lel* or *Hitpa'lel* (bow down, prostrate oneself). There is an emerging consensus among Hebraists, however, that it is derived from the root חָוָה. The *Hištafel* "expresses the causative reflexive action to bow down, to prostrate oneself" (Joüon, § 59g, 79t). See Davies (1979), 493–495, Stähli (1995<sup>5</sup>), 530–533 and HAL for more information. LXX: Μωυσής κύψας ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν προσεκύνησεν.



has been argued that the first verb gives expression to a preparatory act, i.e. to bow down or to kneel down, while the second envisages a placing of the hands on the ground before putting one's forehead to the ground.<sup>742</sup> If this was correct, it would resemble an Islamic prayer gesture. Houtman by contrast suggests that we are dealing here with a hendiadys which could be rendered as "making obeisance."<sup>743</sup> Although Moses' physical reaction to YHWH's disclosure is depicted in a standard expression, only the context will tell us whether Moses' attitude is primarily one of fear and petition (cf. Ex. 11:8), or of gratitude and worship.<sup>744</sup> If Exodus 34:6–7 were primarily about manifesting divine sovereignty (Brueggemann), Moses' gesture would most likely connote a final submissive appeal to YHWH's mercy. If, however, as we have argued, YHWH's self-disclosure is foremostly an assurance that He will be merciful and gracious (without denying the stern warning attached to it), then Moses' gesture would be primarily an act of gratitude.<sup>745</sup>

The following texts may shed further light on the semantics of Moses' spiritual attitude. On various occasions, the idiom connotes a gesture of gratitude, for a divine sign of either hope or confirmation: for example in Exodus 4:31, when Moses informed oppressed Israel that YHWH took notice of their misery in Egypt and that He would deliver them the people believed, bowed down, and worshipped (וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ). One finds another occurrence of the idiom in the context of the preparation for the Exodus when YHWH passed over the houses of the Israelites sparing their sons. As a result, Israel, probably in awe and thankfulness, bowed down and worshipped (12:27). The most illuminating and instructive parallel, however, occurs in 2 Chr. 20, where Jehoshaphat and Judah are endangered by a host of aggressive armies. In fear, Jehoshaphat proclaims a national fast in order to seek YHWH's help. Then the king prays to YHWH, appealing to His supreme power, raising the question whether YHWH has not given Canaan as an inheritance to Israel, and appealing to YHWH's name. Finally he summons the people to thrust themselves on YHWH's power because of their own weakness (2 Chr. 20:6–12). In the light of this prayer all Israel waits in its vulnerability before YHWH. Then the Spirit of YHWH descends on Jahaziel, a Levite, and affirms through him that God will fight for Israel (2 Chr. 20:15–16). In response to the "fear not oracle:"

<sup>742</sup> On a number of occasions the idiom is used in conjunction with אִפְסִים אֲרֻצָּה (e.g. 1 Sam. 24:9, 1 Ki. 1:31). Note that the deuteronomic parallel account employs a different idiom: וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה (Deut. 9:18, 25).

<sup>743</sup> Houtman (1993), 454.

<sup>744</sup> Other occurrences of קָדַד and חָוָה connote: i) gratitude for God's guidance (Gen. 24:26, 48), ii) gratitude and awe for divine help (Ex. 4:31, 12:27), iii) fear and discernment (Nu. 22:31), iv) respect when David pays homage before king Saul (1 Sam. 24:9), v) fear when Saul is confronted with Samuel's spirit (1 Sam. 28:14), vi) respect and petition; Bathsheba before David (1 Ki. 1:16, 31), vii) worship before YHWH, and respect before David (1 Chr. 29:20, 2 Chr. 29:30), viii) reverence and worship, preparation for Ezra's sermon (Ne. 8:6).

<sup>745</sup> In a similar vein Zenger (1978), 250, argues that Moses' gesture gives expression to the "dankbar-vertrauende Ja des Menschen zu dem ihm huldvoll-souverän entgegengehenden Gott."

Jehoshaphat bowed down (וַיִּכָּרֶם) with his face to the ground (אֶפְסִים אֲרָצָה), and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshipping the LORD (נָפְלוּ לְפָנֵי יְהוָה). 19...Jehoshaphat...appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy splendour...saying, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever" (2 Chr. 20:18–21).

Jehoshaphat's and Israel's gesture signal tremendous relief and gratitude, because, not unlike our context, the future of Judah stood in jeopardy until YHWH pledged Himself to intervene in favour of them. Just as in Exodus 34:6–7, YHWH made His intentions known to and through a levitical mediator. Moreover, on both occasions, those who prayed had to wait on God in humble fasting in order to hear the final resolution. The godfearing king obviously found favour in YHWH's sight.<sup>746</sup> In the light of our interpretation of Exodus 34:6–7, it makes good sense to argue that Moses' prayer gesture in verse 8 indicates primarily a sense of relief, gratitude, and awe, for YHWH has just assured him that He is above all an אֱלֹהִים רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן...גִּבּוֹר-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת.

There is good reason to argue that Moses intercessory activity reaches its climax in verse 9. Climactic, not only because the increasingly urgent question of Israel's future comes to a peak in verse 9, but also because most major themes of the previous chapters are taken up here.<sup>747</sup> For a start we note that Moses resumes all the major issues which he raised on previous occasions. i) In continuity with Exodus 33:12–17, Moses seeks to undergird his petition once again with reference to his divine favour.

וַעֲתָה אֲסֵנָה מִצָּאֵתִי מִן בְּעִינֶיךָ הוֹדַעְתִּי נָא אֶת-דְּרָכֶךָ וְאֶדְעָה לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ (33:13)  
כִּי-מִצָּאֵתִי מִן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְאֶדְעָה בְּשֵׁם (33:17)...

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲסֵנָה מִצָּאֵתִי מִן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי גִּלְדֵּנָה אֲדֹנָי בְּקֶרְבְּנוּ כִּי עַם-קָשָׁה עָרַף הוּא וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעֹנְוָנוּ וּלְחַטָּאתֵנוּ וְנִחַלְתָּנוּ (34:9)

It is important to note that Moses makes his petition somehow dependant on his relationship with YHWH. On the basis of YHWH's new disclosure of His name, Moses came not only to know the divine ways with Israel (as far as the theophany goes), but also gained assurance that he still enjoys divine favour. ii) Moses prays once again for his major concern that YHWH continues to be present among the people (cf. 33:3, 5, 15). This is obviously also an implicit plea to resume the plans for the mobile sanctuary (25–31). This is done without denying that Israel is a stiff-necked people (cf. 32:9, 33:3, 5, 13–16). iii) Moses' prayer contains a final petition for the reconciliation of Israel's iniquities and sins (וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעֹנְוָנוּ וּלְחַטָּאתֵנוּ). A similar petition was declined the last time when Moses prayed for the pardon of Israel's sin (32:32ff.). iv) Moses' final request to YHWH to take Israel for His inheritance (וְנִחַלְתָּנוּ) echoes a number of previous passages (cf. 23:30, 32:13). In the

<sup>746</sup> Interestingly Jehoshaphat ascribes YHWH's salvific intervention to His חֶסֶד (20:21, cf. Num. 14:18).

<sup>747</sup> Aurelius (1988), 116, even considers Moses' intercession in verse 9 and YHWH's gracious response to be the centre of chapter 34. He argues that YHWH's theophany (he calls it *Bekennnisformel*) prepares for the centrality of Moses' prayer and the divine response.

light of this brief overview, we conclude that Moses' prayer not only stands in clear continuity with his previous prayers, but also reflects his previous concerns in summary form.

Moses' final prayer, however, is not just a summary of previous concerns, but contains also significant new elements. There are at least four unprecedented aspects in Moses' final petition. i) The most interesting and revolutionary development of Moses' petition is perhaps the fact that he makes Israel's stiffneckedness somehow the basis for YHWH's presence and reconciliation. ii) Moses uses new terminology when he appeals for the pardon of Israel's sins and iniquities. In fact, the term סלח occurs here for the first time in the canonical sequence of the OT. iii) Moreover, it is for the first time that Moses explicitly includes himself in a kind of confession of sin in his prayer for pardon (וְיִחַלְתָּנוּ וְלִחְטֵאתָנוּ). iv) Although Moses' prayer וְיִחַלְתָּנוּ echoes a number of previous passages, it is nonetheless an unprecedented request. Let us explore these four new aspects of the prayer.

i) Moses not only explicitly acknowledges Israel's stiffneckedness, but he appears to promote Israel's hopeless state as the principal reason for YHWH's presence among the people and as the reason for divine forgiveness. Such a reading of וְיִחַלְתָּנוּ ascribes causative force to the participle כִּי, that is: "walk in our midst *because* it is a stiff-necked people." Although the particle could also be rendered with a concessive meaning, i.e.: "although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity...and take us for your inheritance,"<sup>748</sup> the former reading of כִּי is more common.<sup>749</sup> Moreover, the causative reading is endorsed by Exodus 33:3 which is linguistically and conceptually related to 34:9 and would not make sense if read concessively.<sup>750</sup> If this were the case the apodosis כִּי עַם־קָשָׁה־עֲרֹךְ הוּא would probably relate to both its preceding and succeeding clauses. In other words, firstly, because the people are stiff-necked it is necessary that YHWH walks in their midst, and secondly, precisely because the people are stiff-necked they need divine forgiveness.<sup>751</sup> Thus Moses' prayer presents us, as Moberly writes, "with the paradox, verging on contradiction, that the same factor, the sin of Israel, which causes Yahweh's wrath, also brings about mercy."<sup>752</sup> In other terms, Moses' prayer implies two things: Firstly, that what initially caused YHWH's divine wrath (32:9–10, 33:3, 5) should now be overruled by divine mercy and grace. Secondly, that the covenant relationship does not so much depend on Israel's obedience, but primarily on YHWH's mercy and grace. Moberly notes here an unsurpassed theology of grace in the OT.<sup>753</sup>

<sup>748</sup> Advocates of a concessive reading: Childs (1974), 602, Durham (1990), 450, NRSV, NIV, and JPS.

<sup>749</sup> Cf. Ibn Ezra, Calvin, Jacob (1997), 970, Moberly (1983), 88, Aurelius (1988), 124, Fretheim (1991), 304, Luther translation (1984).

<sup>750</sup> "I would consume you on the way, for (כִּי) you are a stiff-necked people."

<sup>751</sup> See Houtman (1993), 33–34, for a fuller treatment of the particle כִּי and its paradoxical force.

<sup>752</sup> Moberly (1983), 89.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid., 90.

ii) As noted, the word סָלַח occurs here for the first time in the OT. Interestingly the second occurrence is found in Moses' prayer in Numbers 14:19. More of that in a moment. It is always God's prerogative to grant סְלִיחָה.<sup>754</sup> This is obviously confirmed by Moses asking וְלִחַטְּאֵתָנוּ וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעֹנֵגֵנוּ.<sup>755</sup> As here, the verb often occurs in petitionary prayer with a ל to introduce the object. Most major translations render it with the verb "to forgive" (cf. NRSV, NIV).<sup>756</sup> What exactly, however, does Moses envisage by praying for the סְלִיחָה of Israel's iniquities and sins? As Muffs has schematised, there are various shades of forgiveness in the OT, and its exact nuance can only be determined in context.<sup>757</sup> This is not a straight forward task in Exodus 34:9 for a number of reasons. Firstly, the question arises why Moses uses a different word in his petition for "forgiveness" (סָלַח), after YHWH assured him that He will bear (נָשָׂא) all possible sins, but not entirely clear their record? Does Moses seek complete cancellation or annulment of Israel's sins?<sup>758</sup> Secondly, the exact meaning of סָלַח is further problematised by the fact that Moses' prayer for the "forgiveness" of sins does not receive an explicit divine response. Instead Moses is told of the ratification of a new covenant (34:10) and the divine resolve to drive out the inhabitants from Canaan (34:11). Thus the plea for סְלִיחָה in our context has to be understood in close association with the renewal of the covenant and YHWH's accompanying presence in spite of Israel's, or, perhaps better, because of their stiffneckedness. Like here, in the context of Jeremiah 31:31–34, סָלַח is intrinsically linked with the idiom כָּרַח בְּרִית and the renewal of it. In fact, it has been convincingly argued that the term סָלַח regularly has to do with the preservation of the covenant relationship, rather than the elimination of some particular act of punishment or sin (e.g. Amos 7:1–3).<sup>759</sup> This would be endorsed in the light of YHWH's theophany, where He assured Moses that He will be faithful and gracious, but also that He will not entirely clear the iniquities. These findings will be further developed in the next chapter where we shall see that Moses' petition for divine סְלִיחָה does not preclude punishment or cancellation of guilt (cf. Nu. 14:19ff.), but is primarily concerned with the preservation of the covenant relationship.<sup>760</sup> Such a reading is reinforced by

<sup>754</sup> Hausmann (1999), 261.

<sup>755</sup> Only in Jeremiah 36:3, out of 46 occurrences, appears the verb with the same two objects.

<sup>756</sup> Numerous scholars refer to its possible Akkadian cognate which has probably the meaning of "to sprinkle or to wash" (i.e. ritual cleansing of impurity). Cf. Stamm (1995<sup>5</sup>), 150, Levine (1993), 367.

<sup>757</sup> Muffs (1992), 17f. Raitt (1991), 52, with reference to Barr (1961), notes: "It is the context that is decisive for forgiveness, not the term. The study of forgiveness consists in the study of forgiveness contexts."

<sup>758</sup> According to Stamm (1995<sup>5</sup>), 152, and Stolz (1995<sup>5</sup>), 114, סָלַח is a parallel expression to נָקָה (Pi. unschuldig erklären), נָשָׂא (aufheben), כָּפַר (Pi. entschuldigen). All are concerned with some aspect of forgiveness/pardon. We have argued, however, that נָשָׂא in our context has distinct connotations within the semantic range of forgiveness: namely that of divine bearing or carrying of sins. With regard to סָלַח in Exodus 34:9, according to Houtman (2000), 711, it "does not translate into cancellation of guilt. For that the committed sin is too great. It is going to be punished (34:7b; Num. 14:20ff...Exod. 32:14, 33, 34b)."

<sup>759</sup> Milgrom (1990), 392–396.

<sup>760</sup> It will become evident that Numbers 14 provides in some sense a better context (though not

Moses' final petition to take Israel for His inheritance (34:9).

iii) We have noted that Moses includes himself in a kind of confession of sin in his final petition. Scharbert argues that the inclusive language is an indication of late deuteronomistic authorship.<sup>761</sup> Be that as it may, it is of greater interest to us to note that Moses' inclusive language is in clear continuity with his former prayers where he has already identified himself with his people to the degree that he was prepared to die with them, if YHWH would not endure their sin (cf. 32:30–34). Moreover, in his previous intense dialogue with YHWH, Moses was constantly concerned to secure YHWH's presence among the people (33:12–17). Thus Moses' explicit identification with Israel's guilt and sin stands in logical sequence to his previous prayers. The underlying motive remains the same, by making Israel's guilt and sin his own, he hopes that YHWH would make a new start with Israel for his sake.<sup>762</sup>

iv) The choice of the verb *נחל* is clearly related to the complex term *נחלה*, which, when referring to people rather than to inherited land, seeks often to underline the permanent and enduring relationship emerging from hereditary obligation.<sup>763</sup> In the deuteronomic parallel account Moses implicitly raises the fundamental question whether Israel can forsake its elected status as YHWH's people and *נחלה* by breaching the covenant (Deut. 9:26–29). Here, however, Moses' final plea gives voice to a different concern. For a start we note that Moses' final plea *וְנַחֲלֵהנּוּ* could be translated in at least two different ways.<sup>764</sup> i) “and inherit us,” or ii) “so that you inherit us (ascribing purposive force to the ו).”<sup>765</sup> Either translation suggests that Israel had lost their special status as YHWH's treasured covenant people (19:5, 6:7) and consequently was no longer YHWH's own.<sup>766</sup> Moreover, both translations seem to imply that Moses aims to renew YHWH's original intention to take Israel as His treasured possession among the nations (*סגולה*, 19:5, 33:16).<sup>767</sup> The significant difference between the first and second translation is that the latter appears to suggest that the status of being YHWH's inheritance is only possible if Moses' prior prayer requests are met (i.e. divine presence and pardon). In other words, being reconciled to God is an essential precondition for being YHWH's inheritance.<sup>768</sup>

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without its difficulties) for establishing the meaning of *סלח* in Moses' petition.

<sup>761</sup> (1984), 96.

<sup>762</sup> Cf. Aurelius (1988), 124.

<sup>763</sup> Houtman (2000), 712: “the status of being inheritance brings with it the guarantee of a lasting bond (cf. 19:5).”

<sup>764</sup> LXX reads: “καὶ ἐσόμεθα σοί — and (so) we shall be yours.”

<sup>765</sup> Calvin (1854), 389, opts for this translation: “that thou mayest possess us;” for the copula has the force of the causal participle.”

<sup>766</sup> Cf. Dunlop (1970), 292.

<sup>767</sup> *נחלה* is frequently used as a synonym for *סגולה* “treasured possession/people.” Cf. Weinfeld (1991), 207.

<sup>768</sup> Calvin (1854), 286, makes a similar point and spells out some of the implications:

God could not enjoy the inheritance He had chosen, unless by pardoning their sins. And surely so it is; for such is man's frailty, that they would straightway fall from grace were they not reconciled to God. Nor was this spoken only of this ancient people, but refers also to us; for, in order that God should possess us too, it is needful that our sins should be constantly pardoned.

According to Exodus 19:5, being YHWH's possession is dependent on covenant obedience. Having failed and being still stiff-necked, Israel needs not only a new covenant, but ongoing gracious divine attendance.

#### 4.9.2 Divine Response: Covenant Renewal (34:10–28)

YHWH's response to Moses' prayer, as on previous occasions, does not explicitly answer the petition (cf. 33:14, 17, 19). In other words, there is no overt mention of divine favour, presence, or pardon, nor is there any clear response regarding Israel's status.<sup>769</sup> Instead YHWH announces the ratification of a covenant. The renewal of the covenant, as we have noted, is not totally unexpected, but was in some sense anticipated by Moses' prayer (i.e. the terms *סלה* and *נחלה*<sup>770</sup>) and by the clear theme of YHWH's presence passing by.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֵעָבִיר כָּל־טוֹבִי עַל־פָּנֶיךָ (33:19)

וַיְהִי כַעֲבֹר כְּבֹדִי (33:22)

וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל־פָּנָיו (34:6)

The recurring phrase of YHWH's presence passing by, signals the ratification of a covenant (cf. Gen 15:17, Jer. 34:18, 19).<sup>771</sup> At this stage of the narrative, however, it remains ambiguous who exactly is to be included in the covenant. The Hebrew does not provide any direct object. According to Houtman, verse 10 produces some tension because Moses (or the reader) is left in the dark about YHWH's precise plans.

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אֲנִי כֹרֵת בְּרִית נָגִיד כָּל־עַמֶּךָ אֲעֲשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִבְרָאוּ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם  
וְרָאָה כָּל־הָעַם אֲשֶׁר־אִתָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כִּי־נִזְרָא הוּא אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ (34:10)

A number of interpreters have argued on the basis of the ending of verse 10 (עִמָּךְ) that the covenant relationship applies primarily or exclusively to Moses.<sup>772</sup> "Will the history continue with Moses as YHWH's partner, leaving Israel only the role of the onlooker?"<sup>773</sup> Although "with you" is in the singular, in the light of the subsequent covenant stipulations, which are like the decalogue phrased in the second person singular, it could equally well refer to Israel. This makes good sense because Moses hears the following covenant stipulations in some sense on behalf of Israel to whom

<sup>769</sup> Form-critics sometimes seek to resolve the problem by treating verses 10–26(28) in isolation from the preceding narrative. See Childs (1974), 604–612, Durham (1991), 458ff, for an overview of form-critical arguments involved. In its final form, however, verses 10ff. want to be understood as YHWH's response to Moses' prayer. As we shall see in the following two sections, there are numerous verbal and conceptual links with the preceding narrative which underline the interdependence of these verses in their final form.

<sup>770</sup> Moberly (1983), 93: "Being Yahweh's possession is very much a covenant idea, implying the status of a vassal under its overlord."

<sup>771</sup> In addition it is significant to note the parallel sequence between the initial Sinai theophany and covenant in Exodus 19–24 and Exodus 33–34 (cf. Gen. 15:17ff.). In both instances the making of the covenant and the giving of the law is preceded by a theophany.

<sup>772</sup> Cf. Greenberg (1978), 21.

<sup>773</sup> Houtman (2000), 719–720, argues that the suspense is eventually lifted in verse 27 where Moses is assured that the covenant includes both, himself and the entire people.

he is to proclaim them (34:31). Moreover, “it is more natural to think of Israel rather than Moses as being in the midst of other peoples.”<sup>774</sup> Having said that, the first part of verse 10 suggests that Moses is the primary covenant partner, because YHWH ratifies it before (not with) Moses' people (נֶגְדְּכֶם). The particle נֶגְדְּ suggests that Israel will take the role of mere spectators.<sup>775</sup> This is endorsed in verse 27 where Moses is also distinguished from the rest of the people. But before we explore further the implications of these possibilities, we must try to answer the more urgent question regarding the nature of YHWH's “extraordinary acts.” Scholarship is divided over the exact reference of these unprecedented divine acts. What could possibly qualify as awesome acts? Jacob, with reference to Ramban, notes that Israel has already witnessed the greatest miraculous events in their history. “Was kann sich denn mit der Befreiung aus Ägypten, der Spaltung des Meeres...dem Manna, der Offenbarung am Sinai vergleichen?”<sup>776</sup> Three possible suggestions have been put forward.

i) נִפְלְאוֹת refers to the conquest and possibly to other miraculous acts on the way to the promised land. Reference is often made to Exodus 3:20 where YHWH announces to strike Egypt with His נִפְלְאוֹת in order to deliver Israel from slavery. נִפְלְאוֹת (and יְהוָה מַעֲשֵׂה) is frequently related to the miraculous events associated with the Exodus and conquest.<sup>777</sup> Thus one possible interpretation of נִפְלְאוֹת would be YHWH's resolution to drive out the inhabitants of the promised land on behalf of His covenant people.<sup>778</sup> This interpretation would be supported by the immediate reference to the conquest in verse 11 (v. 24) and the following verses which all presuppose Israel's inhabitation of the promised land. Moreover, YHWH had already announced His intention to drive out the six native peoples of Canaan back in 33:2 (cf. 23:20–33). In addition, the conquest is certainly one of the unique and formative events in Israel's history to which they keep looking back in awe and gratitude (cf. Deut. 26:9, Josh. 24:8–13, Ps. 105:44–45). If this interpretation was along the right line, the usage of the verb בָּרָא could be justified on the grounds that the conquest is a new and a unique event which can only be brought about with divine help.<sup>779</sup> This line of argument presupposes that the final עַמְּךָ refers to Israel and not exclusively to Moses, though he, as their leader, occupies obviously a special role. The conquest would certainly qualify as an awful event (not least for the nations directly concerned).

ii) נִפְלְאוֹת refers to the renewal of the covenant with an undeserving people. Such a reading of נִפְלְאוֹת would also emerge naturally from Moses' final prayer in which he sought to make Israel's sinful state as the reason for divine presence, pardon, and

<sup>774</sup> Moberly (1983), 93.

<sup>775</sup> Jacob (1997), 973.

<sup>776</sup> Jacob (1997), 973.

<sup>777</sup> Jdg. 6:13, Pss. 78:4, 11, 32, 105:2, 5, 106:7, 22, Deut. 3:24, 11:3,7, Ps. 106:13, Cf. Josh. 23:3 and Isa. 52:10.

<sup>778</sup> Durham (1987), 460.

<sup>779</sup> The verb בָּרָא is always used with YHWH as subject and refers to His divine creative activity (cf. Josh. 17:15ff.). Cf. Schmidt (1994<sup>5</sup>), 337.

inheritance. Thus the renewal of the covenant with a stubborn people would indeed be a “fearful” and unprecedented thing. This line of interpretation also presupposes that עַמֶּךָ refers to the people rather than exclusively to Moses (v. 10b). Nevertheless the covenant renewal with sinful Israel requires the help of a covenant mediator. Moberly paraphrases verse 10 in the following way:

The renewal of a covenant with a sinful people is something quite without parallel in history (v. 10a). It will therefore, constitute a powerful testimony to the character of God and the nature of his dealings with people (v. 10b).<sup>780</sup>

Advocates of this interpretation argue that the verb בָּרָא is used because it testifies to a new act which “only creation language combined with language of marvel and awe can adequately describe... (see Micah 7:15–20).”<sup>781</sup>

iii) נִפְלְאוֹת refers to Moses' “transfiguration” (קִרְן)<sup>782</sup> and possibly also to the rewriting of the tablets.<sup>783</sup> According to this view, the extraordinary act is, as Jacob memorably puts it: “das von göttlichem Feuer strahlende Antlitz, mit dem Mose nachher unter das Volk treten wird, so daß sie...Scheu tragen (וַיִּירֹאוּ), an ihn heranzutreten (v. 30).”<sup>784</sup> The unique appearance of Moses justifies the choice of the verb בָּרָא. This interpretation obviously takes the singular ending of verse 10 to refer to Moses only (cf. 32:10). In other words, the announced wonders apply not directly to Israel but primarily to their leader. Israel will only witness what YHWH will do with Moses (אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ). In our discussion of verses 29–35, we shall see that this line of argument stands in logical progression to Exodus 33:16–17, where Moses asked:

“how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way we shall be distinct (וַיִּבְלִינֵנוּ), I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.’ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight’” (33:16–17).

Apart from the fact that the sound of נִפְלְאוֹת in 34:10 echoes back to 33:16, we shall see in a moment that Moses' prayer finds a surprising confirmation and fulfilment in 34:29–35.

So where do these three suggestions leave us? We have seen that all three interpretations arise naturally out of context. Thus it is rather surprising to me, that, as far as I am aware, nobody has argued that נִפְלְאוֹת has the potential to encompass all three aspects. This is not so much a sign of undecidedness on my part, but a recognition that the Hebrew is surprisingly open-ended and would allow for all three possibilities. This is further endorsed by the fact that all three proposals are interconnected and come to a fulfilment in YHWH's work through His chosen

<sup>780</sup> Moberly (1983), 94.

<sup>781</sup> Fretheim (1991), 308.

<sup>782</sup> Jacob (1997), 973, Ibn Esra, Rashban. See § 4.3.9 for a discussion on the notoriously difficult word קִרְן.

<sup>783</sup> Houtman (2000), 720.

<sup>784</sup> Jacob (1997), 973.



mediator. It is through the “transfigured” Moses that YHWH is present in the midst of stiff-necked Israel and renews the covenant with an undeserving people. Moses is going to rewrite and to teach the renewed covenant stipulations to Israel. He is going to protect them from their sins and make sure that they will be sustained by YHWH throughout their journey towards the promised land. Thus there is a clear sense that Israel is going to benefit from YHWH’s marvellous deeds primarily through their mediator.<sup>785</sup> In other words, the renewed covenant relationship encompasses Israel, but it is enacted in and through Moses. This is all confirmed in verse 27 where Moses is separately mentioned as covenant partner. If our interpretation is along the right lines, then the most natural reading of the open-ended divine announcement הָיָה אֲנִי בְרִית נָגֵד כָּל-עַמֶּיךָ would be to take it primarily as an affirmation of divine favour to Moses. But since Moses by the definition of his inclusive prayer and his faithful role as covenant mediator cannot be separated from the people, it is clear that the covenant will be extended through him to the people. This is confirmed by the fact that YHWH’s announcement comes as a favourable response to Moses’ prayer request to be present among the stiff-necked people and to be reconciled to them, so that they can be YHWH’s people and His inheritance.<sup>786</sup>

So the covenant is graciously renewed. Although verses 11–27 make it clear that the new covenant contains not only a promise of marvellous forthcoming events (34:10), but also stipulations. It is important to note that the new covenant is based on the divine resolve to bear the guilt and sins of a people who are fundamentally obdurate (34:9).<sup>787</sup> Since the new covenant could only come about because YHWH graciously allowed Himself to be “changed” by Moses for the benefit of Israel, verses 11–27 should be understood as an appeal to loyal duty. Zenger speaks of “Treuepflicht.”<sup>788</sup> By the logic of the canonical form, verses 11–27 reinstate the covenant in special relation to Israel’s sin. In other words, verses 11–26 address primarily the issues which are directly related to the golden calf incident. In Exodus 32:1–6 a festival to YHWH is proclaimed and various sacrifices had been offered before the calf. In the light of this idolatrous conduct, it seems natural that YHWH is concerned to rectify the legitimate festivals (cf. 23:12–19),<sup>789</sup> or in the words of Sarna, inauthentic (10–17) and authentic worship (18–26).<sup>790</sup> Thus the following

<sup>785</sup> Greenberg (1977–78), 21.

<sup>786</sup> Cf. Jacob (1997), 974.

<sup>787</sup> Aurelius (1988), 126.

<sup>788</sup> Zenger (1978), 252–253.

<sup>789</sup> Houtman (2000), 714. This stands in strong contrast to Rudolph’s (1936), 47ff, literary-critical judgement that in J’s version the decalogue as found now in 20:1–17 originally occupied this location. This is obviously not the place to resume and assess old literary-critical debates, but to underline the lack of appreciation for the logic of the final form. Rudolph derogatorily refers to Exodus 34:10–26 as “Geröll” taken from the book of covenant which functions as a mere “Lückenbüßer” for the allegedly moved Decalogue.

<sup>790</sup> Sarna (1991), 217. Verses 17–26 are taken from the book of covenant. 34:17//20:23, 34:18–20//23:15ab, 34:21//23:12, 34:22//23:16, 34:23//23:17, 34:25–26//23:18–19.

cultic laws are “appropriate to Israel’s cultic sin.”<sup>791</sup>

Verse 11 functions as the heading for the following stipulations. In deuteronomic fashion, Israel is summoned to obedience to the following commandments (שְׁמַר-לְךָ שְׁמִירָה).<sup>792</sup> The stipulations are all related to Israel’s future in the promised land. In fact, verses 12–15 anticipate Israel’s inhabitation of Canaan and warn of the ensnaring dangers of foreign gods and their cults. Moses is to warn Israel not to worship any other god(s) and whore after them, בְּיָדָהּ קָנָא שְׂכִנּוֹ אֵל קָנָא הוּא. In a unique and the most emphatic way, Moses is to reassert YHWH’s jealousy (34:14) over Israel.<sup>793</sup> In comparison to YHWH’s former statement on jealousy (20:6), it is no longer said to have direct punitive consequences (contrast to 20:5). Nevertheless, its strong emphasis and its placement after the golden calf apostasy make it absolutely clear that no compromises are permitted under the renewed covenant either. In the aftermath of the golden calf incident, verse 17, with its prohibition to fashion any cast idols, stands out as a reminder to Israel’s idolatrous conduct which almost costed them their existence. Thereby verse 17, in connection with verses 12–16, reinstates the first and second commandment of the decalogue.

Verses 18–26 give concrete shape to what it means to be totally committed to YHWH in a land which will doubtlessly pose serious risks of compromising Israel’s allegiance.<sup>794</sup> Worship of foreign gods is conceived as an act of adulatory/whoring (זִנָּה, 34:16). The imagery of husband and wife might be in the background (cf. Hos. 1–3, Jer. 3). Thus exclusive loyalty and commitment to YHWH is demanded. Since jealousy can only arise over something dearly treasured or/and possessed, one can assume that YHWH still (or again) regards Israel as His own. As Weinfeld has remarked, divine jealousy and passionate love are very close.

Although *’el qanna*, in the context of idolatry, has a negative meaning (“avenging and punishing”), one must admit that the basic meaning of *qn* which is “jealousy”, applies also to passionate love. Love causes jealousy, and jealousy brings anger that burns like fire (Deut 4:22; 32:21–22). There is, then, a possibility that the term *’el qanna*, refers not only to the clause of punishment, but also to the clause of divine grace.<sup>795</sup>

As already mentioned, YHWH’s slightly ambiguous response in verse 10 gains greater clarity in verses 27–28, where He assures Moses that on the basis of the preceding ordinances (34:11–26) He will renew the covenant relationship with Moses and with Israel. In other words, by this stage it is explicitly pronounced that the new covenant encompasses the people as well. Having said that, Moses is clearly

<sup>791</sup> Moberly (1983), 160.

<sup>792</sup> The summons to guard against disloyalty and idolatry occurs frequently in Moses’ parenthetic speeches in Deuteronomy (cf. 6, 7, 8, 9). Exodus 34:11ff. functions in a similar way to Deuteronomy 10:10ff. as a call to an undeserved and renewed duty to remain loyal to YHWH.

<sup>793</sup> According to Sarna (1991), 110, this anthropomorphic epithet has to be seen in the context of covenant as a marriage bond.

<sup>794</sup> See Moberly (1983), 98–101, for a nuanced interpretation of verses 17–26 and their interrelationship with the immediate context.

<sup>795</sup> (1991), 296.

highlighted as covenant partner. In contrast to the first Sinai covenant, there is no public ritual anymore (cf. 24:3ff.), the bond is renewed on the mountain in the presence of Moses the covenant mediator only. Thus by implication, the covenant is no more directly between God and Israel, but between God, through Moses, with Israel (34:27).<sup>796</sup>

Although verses 27–28 clearly refer back to the first and tenth verse of this chapter and bring clarification to the development of the narrative, there are two major issues which have occasioned a long lasting debate. Firstly, there is the problem of the identity of the writer of the “ten words” (v. 28b). According to the immediate context, it is Moses, because he was summoned to write down the divine instructions in verse 27a and remains clearly the subject until verse 28a. In the light of 34:1 (and 24:12), however, the writer of the decalogue is YHWH, for He initially announced that He would rewrite personally the tablets (34:1). Although there is no clear indication of a change of subject in the middle of verse 28 (i.e. from Moses to YHWH), we have already encountered a similar situation in 34:5–6.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּסֵל־לְךָ שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשֵׁי וְכָתַבְתִּי עַל־הַלָּחֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ  
עַל־הַלָּחֹת הַרְאשֵׁי אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַחְתָּ: (34:1)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כָּתֹב־לְךָ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּרַחְתִּי אֶתְךָ בְּרִית וְאֶת־  
יִשְׂרָאֵל...וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלָּחֹת אֶת־דְּבָרֵי עֲשֻׂרַת הַדְּבָרִים הַבְּרִיָּה: (34:27–28)

The second debated issue revolves around the relation between *these words* (i.e. verses 11–26, 27) and the *ten words* written on the tablets, and how these two sets of “words” relate to the covenant.<sup>797</sup> According to verse 27, the covenant is going to be ratified on the basis of the stipulations/ordinances outlined in verses 11–26, while in verse 28 the ten words (i.e. the decalogue) are referred to as the words of the covenant.

For reasons of space and the flow of the argument we do not want to be drawn into the full complexity of the matter in question.<sup>798</sup> It is quite possible that some of the equivocalness came about through the complex textual history.<sup>799</sup> Cassuto

<sup>796</sup> Greenberg (1978), 21. Cf. Aurelius (1988), 121. There are other indicators within the wider Sinai narrative which suggest that Israel's status has been reduced with the “fall.” Blum (1990), 56, notes:

Die Einsetzung einer ausgesonderten Priesterschaft markiert das Ende des in Ex 19,6 für Israel vorgesehene und in 24,3ff. verwirklichten ‘allgemeinen Priestertums!’ Mit dem ‘Sündenfall’ um das ‘goldene Kalb’ hat Israel gleichsam seine Unschuld verloren, es wird nicht mehr in den selben Stand eingesetzt wie zuvor.

<sup>797</sup> The term עֲשֻׂרַת דְּבָרִים, besides here, only occurs in Deuteronomy 4:13, 10:4. Thus it has been argued that this is a late deuteronomic gloss in order to designate the content of the tablets as the decalogue and to differentiate between the ordinances written by Moses and the ten words inscribed by YHWH. Cf. Childs (1974), 616.

<sup>798</sup> In order to do full justice to the issue, one would have to address the controversial suggestion that verses 11–26 contain an older version of the decalogue (sometimes called the “Cultic Decalogue,” traditionally ascribed to J) which had allegedly been placed here after it underwent several glosses. Cf. Noth (1962), 12–17. For a different view see Rudolph (1936), 41–48. A detailed evaluation of this sort would only distract us from our objective to provide a canonical reading of the narrative. Compare Moberly (1983), 131–135, with Renaud (1998), 214–216.

<sup>799</sup> Cf. Rudolph (1936), 47ff., Childs (1974), 604–616, Renaud (1998), 215.

suggests, however, that the writer intentionally seeks to leave it ambiguous “so as not to attribute an actual physical act” to YHWH.<sup>800</sup> I think, however, that the final form provides sufficient indications to argue that there are two scribal activities envisaged in verses 27–28. First, there is the recording of the covenant ordinances by Moses (i.e. 34:11–26, 27) and secondly the divine inscription of the stone tablets. A change of subject in verse 28 is possibly indicated by the fact that the tablets are not mentioned until the second half of verse 28. A covenant procedure which involved the scribal function of both Moses and YHWH would obviously mirror the first sinaïatic covenant ratification, where Moses wrote down what came to be known as the book of the covenant (cf. 24:4, 21–23) and YHWH produced the decalogue (31:18, 32:15f., 34:28, cf. Deut. 9:10, 10:1–4). This would be further endorsed by the repetition of Moses' extensive fasting period before the reception of the covenant tablets (cf. 24:18, 34:28).

Moses spent again forty days and forty nights in the presence of God (34:28, 24:18). Most modern commentators hardly pay any attention to the reason and purpose of Moses' extensive fasting period.<sup>801</sup> Since the act of fasting, praying, and in this context the renewal of the covenant tablets are closely associated with each other and are pervasive themes in our narrative (even more so in the deuteronomic parallel account where the phrase *וְאֶרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעַיִם לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתָה* functions very likely as a structuring principle of the entire narrative<sup>802</sup>), it seems justified to explore some of the underlying aspects of Moses' extensive act of fasting. It is particularly in Rabbinic literature that one finds the notion that Moses spent the allotted time studying Torah, or more specifically the covenant ordinances as given in 34:11–26 (or 21–23).<sup>803</sup> Given the divine command to write down the covenant ordinances (34:27), the text seems to suggest that considerable time had been spent in recording YHWH's words and reflecting upon them (though note that the decalogue itself was only handed over at the end of the forty day period [cf. 31:18]. This may also be indicated in the sequence of 34:27–28<sup>804</sup>), not least for instructing Israel how to live under the renewed covenant (34:27b, 31). But what is the reason of Moses' fasting itself? Suggestions such as the recording and studying of Torah did not leave him any time to eat and drink, or that Moses was so enthusiastic about the riches of the Torah that he forgot to take any nutrition are interesting and imaginative interpretation, but have little footing in the text.<sup>805</sup>

In the light of several OT texts which associate intense fasting with preparation for receiving divine revelation (cf. 1 Sam. 28:30, Dan. 9:3, 20ff., 4 Ezra 5:13), Houtman

<sup>800</sup> Cassuto (1967), 448.

<sup>801</sup> Childs (1974) does not even mention it.

<sup>802</sup> Cf. Lohfink (1963), 214ff.

<sup>803</sup> Cf. Ginzberg (1954, III), 142f.

<sup>804</sup> Although it is not explicitly mentioned in verse 28, in the light of Exodus 24:18 and 31:18, one can probably assume that Moses spent the entire time in abstinence of food and water *before* YHWH handed over the divinely inscribed tablets.

<sup>805</sup> Cf. Ginzberg (1954, III), 142ff.

proposes:

The meaning may be that Moses, through a long period of rigorous fasting, attained to a state of near-perfect purity and holiness—eating and drinking can make the body unclean (cf. Matt. 15:11)—, had obtained a kind of heavenly existence (2 Henoch 56:2...), and was capable of personal contact with the Holy One. Moses' fasting made it possible to bring about a very intimate relationship. In sum, in this way Moses was uniquely capable of being the mediator of revelation. In case one prefers a close tie between 34:28a and 28b and regards Moses as the one who did the writing, one can envision it like this: Moses, having obtained a heavenly form of existence, acts as a divine scribe.<sup>806</sup>

In the light of Moses' forthcoming "transfiguration" (34:29–35), there might be some warrant to argue that Moses reached a state of unprecedented intimacy with YHWH through fasting. The problem is of course that Moses continued to reflect the heavenly glory after subsequent conversations with YHWH without going through a forty day fasting period.

Fasting itself has multiple meanings and purposes in the OT.<sup>807</sup> The most natural function of Moses' fasting in this context seems similar to Israel's cultic requirements before YHWH revealed Himself on Sinai (19:15). In other words, an aspect of Moses' fasting serves most likely as a vehicle for the right attitude before the momentous occasion of the hand over of the new covenant tablets.<sup>808</sup> Although the time span of forty days and nights must not necessarily be taken literally,<sup>809</sup> there is a clear sense that the text seeks to point beyond an extensive fasting period. For example in Esther 4:16, fasting for three days is considered a long time.<sup>810</sup> No human, however well trained and pious, can survive without any fluids for more than three days (desert conditions!). Thus there is a clear sense that the text seeks to point far beyond an intensive preparation period for the reception of the tablets. Calvin understood that the reception of the covenant tablets was a unique moment in Israel's history:

It must be borne in mind, that this was not a mere fast of temperance or sobriety, but of special privilege, whereby exemption from the infirmity of the flesh was vouchsafed to Moses for a time, in order that his condition might be different from the rest of the human race...Therefore this instance of abstinence was never alleged as an example by the Prophets, nor did any one attempt to imitate what they all knew to be by no means accorded to them.<sup>811</sup>

<sup>806</sup> Houtman (2000), 726–727.

<sup>807</sup> Cf. Brongers (1977), 1–21.

<sup>808</sup> The rationale behind fasting comes helpfully to expression in the preparation for the day of atonement (cf. Lev. 16:29, 31, 23:27, 29:32, cf. 1 Sam. 7:6), where it serves primarily as a vehicle for the right spiritual attitude. Through fasting the regular routines are set aside in order to spend undivided time with God. Cf. Wenham (1979), 236.

<sup>809</sup> The forty day span is frequently mentioned in Scripture (e.g. Gen. 7:4, 1 Ki. 19:8, Ezek. 4:6, Jonah 3:4, Matt. 4:2). This period stands usually for a long round period within which a lengthy process is completed. Cf. Roscher (1909).

<sup>810</sup> Although three days is usually an idiom for an indefinite short period (in contrast to forty as a period for an indefinite long period), in certain contexts such as Esther 4:16 and Jonah's stay in the belly of the fish, it can also indicate a long period. Cf. Simon (1999), 19.

<sup>811</sup> Calvin (1854), 391, shows awareness of the Elijah parallel and draws further attention to the unique forty days fast in Jesus' life.

Although the text remains silent on the exact meaning of Moses' lengthy period of abstinence, Calvin and midrashic commentators speculate that Moses assumed in the presence of God the temporary status of angels who are beyond human needs.<sup>812</sup> As we shall see in a moment, the end of our narrative portrays Moses in some ways similar to the heavenly messengers in their radiant appearance (cf. 3:20, Judg. 13:6, Lk. 2:9).

#### 4.9.3 Divine Approval and Vindication (34:29–35)

After forty days and nights in the presence of God, Moses descends from Sinai with the two inscribed tablets of the covenant. The time in the presence of YHWH, however, has somehow changed the appearance of Moses' face (וַיֵּהָרֶה קָרְן עוֹר פָּנָיו, 34:30). Scholarship has greatly discussed the meaning and significance of this unique phenomenon in the OT.<sup>813</sup> The difficulty circulates around the complex verbal form of קָרַן which occurs only here in the Qal (otherwise in the Hi. “to grow horns”). Possibly based on LXX and contextual considerations the Qal form is usually translated with “to shine, to be radiant, or to be glorified.”<sup>814</sup> The pervasive Hiphil form, however, gave rise to a long tradition which suggests that Moses became “horned” in the presence of God.<sup>815</sup> A third possible interpretation has recently been revived and developed by Propp, who goes into great detail to argue that Moses' face became neither horned nor radiant, but became disfigured through intense exposure to YHWH's כְּבוֹד. Although Moses had been granted the unique privilege of beholding a glimpse of YHWH, he had to endure the side effects of standing in the presence of YHWH's כְּבוֹד (which is like a consuming fire, 24:17), and got his skin burned.<sup>816</sup> Propp argues that קָרַן might simply mean “to blister” or to become “caloused” and thus offers the following translation: “the skin of his face was burnt to the hardness of horn” (34:30).<sup>817</sup> Although Propp's interpretation makes good use of the somewhat odd combination of קָרַן, עוֹר, פָּנָיו, he fails to discuss that Moses did not know (or feel) that he apparently got his face severely burnt (34:24). Moreover, his

<sup>812</sup> Midrashic commentators suggest that Moses abstained from food in the presence of God because he observed the heavenly rules. Like the angels, Moses does not require any food, but is nourished by the radiance of the Shekinah. Cf. Ginzberg (1954, III), 143.

<sup>813</sup> Verses 29–35 are traditionally ascribed to P, because of its distinct vocabulary (particularly, לֵהֲתָה (העדרת). See Moberly (1983), 177–180, for an evaluation of the alleged priestly characteristic of these verses. Regardless of its source, it will become evident that these verses are well integrated into the wider narrative.

<sup>814</sup> LXX: “and the appearance of the skin of his face was glorified” (καὶ ἦν δεδοξασμένη ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου, 34:30). This rendering is also supported by the Peshitta and the Targums (all within the range of “to shine”). Cf. HAL, 1144.

<sup>815</sup> Aquila was the first to translate קָרַן into κερατώδης (became horned). This translation has famously found expression in the Moses sculpture by Michelangelo and the painting of Chagall. Cf. HAL, 1144, Propp (1987), 375.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid., 384–385.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 385–386. He finishes his article by saying: “The story honours Moses as the human most intimate with Yahweh, but it also specifies the price he paid.”

argument that Moses' disclosed his face in subsequent encounters with YHWH in order to gain immunity against divine radiance finds no textual support.

Though not without its difficulties, we suggest that in context it makes better sense to argue that Moses' face reflects the divine radiance. From the previous Sinai event we know that YHWH appears in dazzling and radiant fire, so, according to Sarna, one aspect of Moses' shining face should be understood as "the afterglow of the refulgent splendour of the Divine Presence."<sup>818</sup> Thus Moses' radiance would be recharged, so to speak, whenever, he spends time talking in the presence of God (34:34f.). Sarna's interpretation still does not explain why this had not happened after his previous stay on Sinai in the presence of YHWH (24:17–18, 31:18). A possible reason why this phenomenon only finds expression in Exodus 34 could be that the context demands a divine sign of authentication. Not only has the covenant been renewed in the absence of the people, and thus they needed some kind of confirmation that the relationship had been restored, but also, as we shall argue below, Moses' radiant appearance comes as a concrete sign of divine approval and vindication.

This would obviously be very important in the light of the people's initial intention to replace Moses with the calf (a horned and shiny idol, 32:3, Ps. 106:20). Thus there might be a deliberate play on words and appearance between the authentic mediator and the idolatrous one. It might not be far off the mark to speak of Moses' public vindication as YHWH's true representative.<sup>819</sup> If this reading is along the right lines, then one could add that in Moses' radiant appearance, YHWH has provided once more a visible sign that He speaks and acts through Moses. Initially Moses was equipped with a staff through which he could certify that he was divinely commissioned (4:2ff.). In a similar vein, after the crossing of the sea, the people had witnessed that YHWH acts through Moses and as a result they believed in him (14:31). While at Sinai YHWH spoke to Moses out of a dense cloud in the sight of the people, so that they would believe and trust Moses as the approved mediator of God (19:9). Thus it seems that the radiant appearance comes as another visible sign that guarantees that Moses is the chosen representative of YHWH who speaks and sets forth the new covenant conditions with divine authority.<sup>820</sup>

In addition to that, Moses' radiant face may come as a reassurance to the people and to Moses that God restored the covenant relationship in the aftermath of the calf apostasy. In other words, there is a sense that YHWH does not execute judgement as

<sup>818</sup> Sarna (1991), 221, cf. Childs (1974), 603, 609f., "to shine (of the divine radiance)."

<sup>819</sup> From a Christian typological perspective, one can detect certain parallels with Jesus' transfiguration and his resurrection. Both have been rejected as mediator and God's prophet, and if our reading of Moses' radiant return is along the right lines, both are divinely vindicated. Especially the transfiguration of Jesus provides interesting typological commentary on Moses' status: "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased, listen to him." On both occasions, there was initial fear of the mysterious appearance (Ex. 34:30, Matt. 17:5). Although the synoptic accounts of Jesus' transfiguration have clearly the Sinai narratives in their background, they combine a number of different OT passages in order to make their respective points. Cf. Luz (1990), 506–509.

<sup>820</sup> Coats (1977), 105, Houtman (2000), 714.

a blazing and consuming fire as originally intended (32:10), but reassures Israel of His benevolent presence among them through Moses, His radiant representative. Having said that, Moses' radiance seems not only to symbolise YHWH's presence but also to anticipate YHWH's presence among the people in the tabernacle (35–40).<sup>821</sup>

In sum, one could say that Moses' radiant face comes as a response to Moses' ongoing prayer for divine presence, divine reconciliation, and divine favour. Little did he know that YHWH would answer his prayer for divine presence in this way. There is no need for a divine messenger to guide Moses and the people to the promised land, since he himself resembles the heavenly agent who bears the divine name and speaks with divine authority (23:21).<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>821</sup> Houtman (2000), 714.

<sup>822</sup> Cf. Jacob (1997), 974. Brichto (1983), 36, 40, even argues that the author of Exodus 32–34 intended to say that the agent or messenger which YHWH promised back in chapter 23:20ff. is no angel at all, but rather the prophet Moses. This line of interpretation has a long Jewish tradition. Already Maimonides (1904), 34, drew attention to the parallel between Exodus 23:21 and Deuteronomy 18:18–19 in order to support the notion that both passages speak of a prophet.



## Chapter Five

## Moses' Intercessory Prayer at Kadesh (Nu. 13–14)

## 5.1 Introduction

The primary focus of this chapter remains on Moses' intercessory prayers. Thereby we look at Moses' prayer's theological function in the scout narrative, its form, and its rich theological content.<sup>823</sup> Similarly to Moses' intercessions in Exodus 32–34, the narrative setting of the prayer is that of rebellion and divine judgement. Thereby the character of the prayer continues to evoke important questions about God's nature, especially with regard to divine reputation and covenant commitment in the face of a rebellious and unbelieving people.

Having said that, in contrast to our examination of Moses' prayer in Exodus 32–34 we will interact with some of the wider issues posed by the scout narrative as well. This is partially due to the fact that Numbers 13–14 has received significantly less scholarly attention than Exodus 32–34 and because we hope to show that YHWH's response to Moses' prayer (14:20–35<sup>824</sup>) stands not only in important canonical relationship to Numbers 14:11–19, but also to Exodus 32–34. In our previous chapter we have seen that in spite the fact that the breached covenant relationship was renewed and YHWH graciously resumed His presence among Israel, a day of judgement was announced (Ex. 32:34), a time of divine visitation when Israel will be called to account for their sins (Ex. 34:7b). What came as a disturbing and somewhat abstract reality in the golden calf narrative will take concrete shape in Numbers 14 where YHWH's name (Ex. 34:6–7) is not only for the first time paradigmatically evoked in prayer, but also enacted in a specific situation.

5.1.1 *From the Golden Calf Incident to Kadesh*

After Israel spent almost one year at Sinai, they resumed their journey through the wilderness (cf. Ex. 19:1, Nu. 10:11). Their eventful journey seems to come to an end as they reach Kadesh at the southern border of the promised land (12:16, 13:26). It is important to note that in the canonical order since the golden calf incident the

<sup>823</sup> Throughout this study I refer to the twelve Israelites who were dispatched to reconnoitre the promised land as scouts, rather than spies. This decision is based on Milgrom's (1990), 100, argument that the Hebrew root used in chapter 13–14 is *חָוֵר* (to scout, to seek out) as opposed to *רָגַל* (to spy out, cf. Josh. 7:2). Moreover, and more importantly, it is unlikely that Moses sent twelve tribe leaders on a spying mission. He would not have sent leaders on such a dangerous undertaking, nor would he have sent them in such a large number (cf. Jericho spy story). Thus it is preferable to think of them as scouts who represent all tribes.

<sup>824</sup> All biblical references without specification in this chapter refer to the book of Numbers.

theme of the promised land has not featured in any significant way.<sup>825</sup> Apart from the priestly instructions concerning Israel's conduct in the land, there are only two brief references (10:29, 11:12). In Numbers 13–14, however, the prominent and important theme is resumed and developed in significant ways.

From the preceding wilderness accounts, it is evident that Israel would have never reached the goal of their journey without YHWH's gracious help and Moses' persistent advocacy. We briefly recall: As a result of Moses' intensive intercessory prayers after the golden calf scandal, God renewed the covenant (Ex. 34:9–10) and graciously took His place among the people. First through the radiant covenant mediator (Ex. 34:28ff.) and then in Israel's sanctuary (Ex. 40:34–36). In spite of the "divine escort," the canonical account presents Israel's journey through the wilderness towards the promised land as a chain of severe crises. In fact, in what came to be called the wilderness narratives one finds almost a consistent fourfold pattern of Israel's disobedience: At Taberah (11:1–3), at Kibroth-hattaavah (11:4–34), and then in the Aaron–Miriam incident (12:1–16), the people complain (i), therefore YHWH's anger is kindled and sends or announces a punishment (ii), then the afflicted party cries to Moses for help, he in turn prays to God (iii), and finally as a result of Moses' intercession some kind of divine resolution is introduced (iv).<sup>826</sup> Interestingly, there is no mentioning of forgiveness in these accounts, they only report of some kind of supernatural intervention which prevented the people from being destroyed until the next rebellion occurs.<sup>827</sup> The fact that Israel complained constantly and thereby provoked YHWH's anger gives clearly a negative ring to these stories. They are rightly also called the "murmuring narratives."

It is intriguing that the parallel accounts which depict Israel's wandering through the wilderness from the Red Sea to Sinai exhibit a different characteristic (Ex. 15–18). The difference becomes best apparent when one compares the first two wilderness events recorded in Exodus 15:22–26 and Numbers 10:33–11:3. On both occasions, Israel starts to complain after having journeyed for three days into the wilderness. In the former case, Israel's complaint goes unpunished, whereas, in the latter case YHWH deals severely with seemingly the same offence.<sup>828</sup> Although Israel complains in the early stages of their wilderness journey in seemingly the same way against Moses (לִן עַל) in Mara (Ex. 15:22–27), in the wilderness of Shur (Ex. 16:1–36), and in Massa and Meribah (Ex. 17:1–17), God responds graciously to Israel's complaint. As a result of Moses' prayer for the needy party, God helps them to overcome their thirst and hunger by providing miraculously and by

<sup>825</sup> In Exodus 32 Moses appeals to the promise made to the fathers (Ex. 32:13) and as a result of Moses' prayer, God eventually agrees to lead them to the promised land (cf. Ex. 32:33f., 33:3–5, 34:11ff.). The renewed covenant instructions centre on proper worship once Israel settles in Canaan (Ex. 34:10–26). In Numbers 13–14 the land is the starting point (13:1). Cf. Levine (1993), 380.

<sup>826</sup> Cf. Reventlow (1986), 232–233, Balentine (1989), 597–616.

<sup>827</sup> Cf. Coats (1968), 147.

<sup>828</sup> Cf. Milgrom (1990), xvi.

manifesting His presence.<sup>829</sup> How does one account for this different tone?

Childs has worked out two distinct patterns within the wilderness traditions. One is pre-Sinaitic and one is post-Sinaitic. He argues that in the pre-Sinai accounts Israel's complaints emerge from genuine need for water or food, whereas in the post-Sinai stories, Israel's complaint seems "without a basis in a genuine need, and is usually explicitly characterised as an illegitimate murmuring."<sup>830</sup> Thus the two patterns, according to him, reflect a different emphasis. The first focuses on Israel's miraculous preservation, while the second focuses on Israel's disobedience and corresponding divine punishment. In Numbers 11:1–4 the people simply had a murmur (אָנן, *Hitpo*) about their misfortune, while the rabble among them had a strong craving (אִידָּה, *Hit*). Later on, Miriam and Aaron protest against (דִּבְרָה בִּ), Moses' leadership (12:1–16). This as we shall see, proves also unjustified. In chapter 21:4–9 Israel is said to have become impatient with God. In all of the post-Sinai incidents, Israel's complaints are perceived as rebellious, disobedient, and unfaithful. Therefore they end up in divine judgement.<sup>831</sup> That this distinct emphasis is divided into pre- and post-Sinai cannot be a coincidence, but serves most likely to convey a theological assertion. Before the Sinai event, Israel was ignorant of the covenant stipulations and the law therefore were in a sense innocent or not yet responsible for its behaviour before God, whereas afterwards, Israel had agreed to the covenant conditions, it swore allegiance to YHWH and was warned that rebellion would have severe consequences (Ex. 23:21, 24:7). In addition, the divine presence "tabernacling" among Israel (Ex. 40:38, Nu. 10:33–36, 14:14), is another new element in the people's experience. The tabernacle assumes in many aspects the role of Sinai. The portable sanctuary ensures not only "a means by which the continued avenue of communication with God could be maintained,"<sup>832</sup> but also brings moral and cultic obligations. Israel is to be holy, because a holy God dwells among them (cf. Lev. 11:45). In the light of YHWH's immediate presence, it appears natural that any form of offence is handled more seriously. The problem of a holy God among a sinful people is categorically raised in Exodus 33:3–5. Thus one may infer that Sinai marks the beginning of a new "dispensation" in Israel's history. To the people of God the divine will is revealed (through Moses and the law), they have entered into covenant union with their God, and they experience YHWH's immediate presence in their midst. This new dispensation brings not only increased privileges, but also increased accountability (cf. Amos 3:2).<sup>833</sup> Or to put it differently, YHWH's כְּבוֹד brings both deliverance and judgement.<sup>834</sup>

<sup>829</sup> Initially it seems that YHWH meant to test (נִסָּה) Israel's obedience and trust through and during their wanderings in the wilderness (Ex. 15:25–26, 16:4). Israel, however, managed to test (נִסָּה) YHWH's patience instead (cf. Ex. 17:2, 7, Nu. 14:22). Cf. Alexander (2002<sup>2</sup>), 246.

<sup>830</sup> See Childs (1974), 258, for a detailed account of the distinct patterns.

<sup>831</sup> Cf. Balentine (1985), 56–57.

<sup>832</sup> Sarna (1991), 237.

<sup>833</sup> Cf. Preuß (1991), 88.

<sup>834</sup> Cf. Struppe (1988), 234.

Another aspect deserves mentioning. It is quite possible, as Childs argues, that the redactor (of J) of these accounts intended to say that “Israel’s rebellion and disobedience increased and intensified following the disaster with the calf.”<sup>835</sup> We have seen that the golden calf incident seriously endangered the covenant relationship. In fact, we have suggested that there is reason to argue that the nature of the renewed covenant relationship is not the same anymore. Although the bond has been graciously restored, it had seriously been ruptured and stained by Israel’s sin. Israel no longer lives under the original covenant, the bond has only been renewed with Israel through their loyal mediator (§ 4.9.2).

Understandably Moses’ intercessory activity gains in importance in the post-Sinai, post-golden calf context. This comes particularly well to expression in the wilderness narratives where the people repeatedly approach Moses as the only channel of hope in the face of divine judgement (cf. 11:2, 12:10ff., 21:4–9 etc.). Although the wilderness traditions are dominated by the theme of rebellion and Moses’ mediatorship, we shall argue that Numbers 13–14 is unlike the preceding rebellions. It is far more severe in its nature. The magnitude of the divine judgement and God’s intention to start all over again with Moses makes this incident in many ways comparable to the golden calf apostasy. For good reason, Numbers 13–14 has been identified as the second main focus of theological reflection on the nexus of sin, judgement, prayer, and divine verdict.<sup>836</sup>

According to Olson, Israel’s rebellion in Kadesh is even more severe than the golden calf incident for the following reasons.<sup>837</sup> For a start he notes that Numbers 14 comes as the climax of three preceding rebellions of smaller magnitude (11:1–3, 4–34, 12:1–16).<sup>838</sup> There is a progression from the margins of the people to its leaders and finally to both the people and its leaders (13:2, 14:1–2). But even more significant is Numbers 13–14’s position in the entire Pentateuch. Ever since the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–9, 15), the Pentateuch looks forward to this very moment when Israel reaches the threshold of the promised land.<sup>839</sup> Thus by planning to return to Egypt Israel was about to undo salvation history. Seebass, although acknowledging the severity of Israel’s sin at the border of the promised land, challenges Olson’s reasoning by saying that the golden calf incident was by the standard of the canon, by far the more serious offence than Israel’s rebellion at the

<sup>835</sup> Childs (1974), 260. There is a prominent Jewish tradition which partially ascribes later disasters, judgement, and other evil to the golden calf incident. Ginzberg (1954<sup>4</sup>), 120: “there is no sorrow that falls to Israel’s lot that is not in part a punishment for their worship of the Golden Calf.” Fretheim (1991), 279, with reference to the creation traditions in Exodus, suggests that Exodus 32 functions as Israel’s fall story. Since the term “fall” entails the connotation of inherent corruption and disobedience, there is obviously a danger of reading classical Christian theology into it. Genesis 3 and Exodus 32, in context, only seem to suggest that humanity and Israel is tending to disobey and rebel against the divine commandments.

<sup>836</sup> Cf. Blum (1990), 134–135.

<sup>837</sup> Olson (1985), 145.

<sup>838</sup> See Wenham (1997), 96–97.

<sup>839</sup> Olson (1985), 145.

border of the Canaan. In the former case, Israel committed a concrete and fundamental offence (greifbares Fundametaldelikt),<sup>840</sup> they clearly trespassed the second commandment, which together with the first one form the essence of the entire decalogue.<sup>841</sup> Rather than arguing in favour of one or the other, it seems more important to us to draw attention to the parallels between these two “archetypal sin stories”<sup>842</sup> and doubtless darkest moments of Israel’s early history. Both events in effect deny YHWH’s lordship, His election, the Exodus, and His promise. On both occasions YHWH makes Moses privy to His destructive intentions (“Your people... have acted perversely” [Ex. 32:7–10], “I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them” [Nu. 14:12]), and presents him with the possibility of becoming the patriarch of a new people (Ex. 32:10b, Nu. 14:12b).

### 5.1.2 Moses' Prayer and the Ambiguity of the Twofold Divine Response

Just as in Exodus 32:10–14 and 34:9 Moses attempts to persuade YHWH to let go of His wrath and pardon Israel through rational reasoning (14:13–19). What is more, in Numbers 14:17–19 Moses explicitly appeals to YHWH’s revealed name (cf. Ex. 34:6–7). On both occasions, Moses’ prayer climaxes in his request for divine pardon (סלח, cf. Ex. 34:9, Nu. 14:19). In Exodus 32, as a result of Moses’ prayer, YHWH changed His mind (נחם) concerning His destructive intentions (Ex. 32:14). The divine punishment was put off and eventually, through persistent intercessory activity, the covenant was restored and YHWH resumed His presence among Israel and committed Himself to take His people to the promised land (Ex. 34:10ff.). In Numbers 14, however, the outcome of Moses’ prayer is different. Although YHWH also refrains from His destructive plans, due to Moses’ prayer, and initially affirms Moses’ petition for סליחה (סְלִיחָהּ, 14:20), within the same breath He pronounces judgement on the rebellious generation (14:21ff.). YHWH declares first that all those who despised and rebelled against Him shall not see the promised land (14:23), with the exception of Caleb and his descendants. In the second part of YHWH’s response (14:26–35), however, a somewhat different verdict is given. Not only Caleb and his descendants will be led to the promised land, but also Joshua and His offspring (14:30), and all the little ones of the entire rebellious wilderness generation (14:30–31).

Scholarship not only regularly points to the apparent contradiction within YHWH’s response, but also argues that the the divine word of “forgiveness” in context is meaningless. Aurelius contrasts the outcome of Numbers 14 with that of Exodus 32–34.

In Ex 32–34 hat Gottes Vergebung erkennbare Folgen...die Gerichtsankündigung in v34b, wird aufgehoben und die Geschichte einem besseren Schluß zugeführt, dem neuen Bund von Ex 34.

<sup>840</sup> Seebass (1995), 85.

<sup>841</sup> Cf. Zimmerli (1994<sup>2</sup>), 115–120.

<sup>842</sup> Kaufmann (1960), 159.

In Nu 14 bleibt hingegen das vorgegebene Ende der Geschichte, die Bestrafung bestehen. Das Wort von der Vergebung hat daran nichts geändert.<sup>843</sup>

Given the view above, it does not come as a surprise that Moses' prayer is thought to have achieved nothing. Brueggemann suggests that YHWH acts against the prayer of Moses and destroys those who have "not listened."

Yahweh acts, not in the interest of Israel, but in Yahweh's self-regard. Yahweh's graciousness is only to the one (Caleb) who has a different spirit...In this text there is not an ounce of room for steadfast love outside of adherence to Yahweh's commanding authority. There is no spillover of graciousness outside the embrace of Yahweh's righteous will.<sup>844</sup>

Close adherence to the canonical text, we believe, results in a more subtle and more positive reading of Moses' intercessory prayer and YHWH's response than advocated above. Having said that, Moses' prayer in Numbers 14 is the longest and possibly the most complex intercessory prayer recorded in the Pentateuch. This is not only due to its rich theological content, but possibly also due to its complex *Entstehungsgeschichte*.

## 5.2 A Historical Critical Reading

It has long been argued that Numbers 13–14 is a composition of several sources which have been extended and complemented over time. Scholarship is rightly agnostic about the exact details of the historical process behind the narrative in its present form. There is, however, some consensus that one can still distinguish between two sources within the narrative. This conviction is often based on two things. Firstly, on larger assumptions about the nature of the Pentateuch (§ 2.1), and secondly, on the text itself. With regard to the latter, analysts have pointed to a series of doublets and tensions in the narrative.<sup>845</sup>

Since the objective of this paper is to provide a canonical reading of the text, I refrain from any thorough historical critical investigations or even from any detailed assessment thereof. Having said that, it is obvious that the final shape of the text can be appreciated more fully, if one has some understanding of its likely, or at least possible, historical development. But more than that, an awareness of the underlying historical critical issues will sharpen our questions for the forthcoming canonical reading of Numbers 13–14. Perhaps my concern is best articulated in the words of Childs:

<sup>843</sup> Aurelius (1988), 140, similarly Coats (1968), 148.

<sup>844</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 307, 220.

<sup>845</sup> The source hypothesis in its classical form rests on five literary criteria: i) duplication and repetition of material, ii) variations in the divine name, iii) contrasting viewpoints in the text, iv) variation in language and style, and, v) evidence of compilation and redaction of parallel accounts. These points are helpfully summarised by Campbell and O'Brien (1993), 6.

Historical critical reconstructions can aid the interpreter in understanding Israel's own witness by seeing how its witness to the content of its experience with God over generations led to a reshaping of its faith in a manner often very different from the actual historical development, at times overriding, subordinating or recasting the noetic sequence in the light of a new and more profound ontic interpretation of the ways of God with Israel.<sup>846</sup>

### 5.2.1 Doublets, Tensions, and the Documentary Hypothesis

Apart from the tension within YHWH's twofold response to Moses' prayer (14:20–35), scholarship has referred to a number of other seemingly incongruous statements in the account. Firstly, concerning the extent of the land explored by the scouts. Did they reconnoitre the entire land of Canaan (13:2, 17), from the very south (wilderness of Zin) to the very north (Rehob, near Lebo-hamath, cf. 13:21), or did they scout out only the area around Hebron in the south of Canaan (13:22–24)? Thereby one is frequently referred to the Deuteronomic version of the scout narrative and Joshua 14:6–15. Both depict a limited expedition to the Hebron region (cf. Deut. 1:19–46, Nu. 32:9).

There appears to be further support for a once independent tradition in the Deuteronomic version of the scout account. For there, Joshua is not mentioned among the scouts. Milgrom points to Deuteronomy 1:37–38, where the reason for Joshua's permission to enter the land is not his loyalty to YHWH, as stated in Numbers 14:6, but his appointment as Moses' successor. Milgrom also refers to Caleb's remark to Joshua later on (cf. Josh. 14:7–8), which seems to imply that according to one tradition he was not among the scout party: "Moses...sent me [not us]...I [not we] was loyal to the Lord my [not our] God."<sup>847</sup> Related to this, source critics refer to Numbers 13:30 where Caleb stands out alone as faithful among the scouts. It is for this reason that only he is exempt from the divine punishment (cf. 14:24). These statements stand in tension with Numbers 14:6ff. and 14:38 where Joshua is put alongside Caleb. Thus it has been frequently pointed out that the contents of YHWH's twofold response (14:20–25, 26–35) stand in a contradictory and awkward relation to each other. As mentioned, in the first divine response, YHWH announces to Moses that none of the people who witnessed God's glory and signs will see the promised land (14:20–23), except Moses, Caleb, and his descendants (13:30, 14:24), whereas, the second announcement is made to Moses and Aaron, saying that Joshua, his descendants and the children of the rebellious generation are included in the divine concession (14:30–31).

Many modern scholars attribute these discrepancies to two different underlying sources.<sup>848</sup> It has long been argued by literary critics that Numbers 13–14 is a

<sup>846</sup> Childs (1992), 416.

<sup>847</sup> Milgrom (1990), 389.

<sup>848</sup> Wenham (1993<sup>2</sup>), 125–126, by contrast disagrees with a two-source theory and argues for a basic unity of the narrative. He acknowledges the doublets and tensions in Numbers 13–14, nevertheless, he suggests that "repetition is a characteristic feature of biblical narrative, even within stories all assigned to one source."

composition of what is often called the old epic, which is usually attributed to J (or JE), and, either a once independent Priestly tradition or a thorough Priestly redaction.<sup>849</sup> Although the nature of the Priestly material continues to be hotly debated, there is some agreement among scholarship regarding general source divisions in Numbers 13–14. Thus it might prove helpful to set out Numbers 13–14 in its alleged source divisions and briefly comment on their hypothetical earlier versions. Such an exercise, though admittedly hypothetical, will not only lead to a greater appreciation of the diachronic dimension of the canonical text, but will ultimately also sharpen our questions for our canonical reading of Numbers 13–14.

### 5.2.2 Source Division according to M. Noth

For clarity's sake, we will follow the source division as suggested by Noth, who arguably provides still the most coherent and influential model.<sup>850</sup> Noth and others argue that the P-source provides the structure for the scout narrative. Because of the characteristic formulas and terms of P, it is only on a few occasions, according to Noth, that one cannot clearly distinguish between the versions. Moreover, the deuteronomic parallel account provides an important insight into the "tradition-chain" of this material. Noth suggests that Deuteronomy 1:22–46 is based on the J-account.<sup>851</sup> Thus he reaches the conclusion that P is found in Numbers 13:1–17a, 21, 25, 26, 32, 33; 14:1–3, 5–10, 26–38.<sup>852</sup> Hence the other material is attributed to older versions, that is primarily to the Yahwist.

I am fully aware that the terminology and even the existence of the "Yahwist" has been seriously questioned from several angles for the last three decades.<sup>853</sup> Yet even if there has never been a Yahwist or an independent J tradition, the theory that two distinct sources are in the background of Numbers 13–14 still provides us with a

<sup>849</sup> Although there is a wide consensus about the source division of P (see for example Blum [1990], 221ff.), scholarship is divided over the issue whether P was originally an independent literary source, parallel to the J/JE (as advocated in the classic documentary hypothesis), or whether it has been from the beginning an elaborate redaction of earlier literary material. The latter is advocated by proponents, such as Cross (1973), 293ff., Rendtorff (1977), 112ff., 136–170, Blum (1990), 221–222, 229–232. See Childs (1979), 122–124, 146–150, for some judicious thoughts on the complexity of the matter.

<sup>850</sup> The usefulness of a such an exercise has recently been identified by Campbell and O'Brien (1993) who provide a full account of the Pentateuch in its source-critical divisions as identified by Noth. Although the model provided by Noth has been under severe attack for the past three decades, there are still numerous scholars who largely uphold the source division of Noth and regard the *Quellenhypothese*/*Urkundenhypothese* as still the most helpful model in diachronic pentateuchal research. For example, Boorer (1992), IX, Seebass (1993–), 76ff., and Schmidt (2002), 40–58.

<sup>851</sup> According to Noth (1972), 131.

<sup>852</sup> Noth (1966), 90, Coats (1968), 138–139, Sakenfeld (1975), 319, Budd (1984), 141–142, 151–153, and Boorer (1992), 333 agree on almost every detail with Noth's source division. See also Baentsch (1903), 515 and Gray (1912), 129–134, for an understanding very close to that of Noth.

<sup>853</sup> Cf. Rendtorff (1977), Blum (1990), Moberly (1992b), 176ff. In addition, a recent collection of essays seeks to show that diachronic Pentateuch research can altogether dispense with the Yahwist. *Abschied vom Jahwisten*, edited by Gertz, Schmid and Witte (2002).



heuristic model which we believe generates important questions to pursue in our reading of the final form of the text.<sup>854</sup>

<i>The Priestly Document in Numbers 13–14 according to Noth</i>	<i>The Yahwist Narrative in Numbers 13–14 according to Noth</i>
<p>13:1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.” 3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD,</p> <p><i>all of them leading men among the Israelites.</i></p> <p><i>4 These were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph (that is, from the tribe of Manasseh), Gaddi son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Machi. 16 These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua. 17 Moses sent them</i></p> <p>to spy out the land of Canaan.</p> <p>21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath.</p> <p>25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.</p> <p>32 And [Heb.; NRSV, So] they brought to the Israelites an unfavourable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that</p>	<p>13:17b And he said to them, “Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes.</p> <p>22 They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Wadi Eshcol, because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.</p> <p>...</p> <p>26 at Kadesh.</p> <p>...</p> <p>27 And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us; <i>it flows with milk and honey</i>, and this is its fruit. 28 Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.</p> <p><i>29 The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.”</i></p> <p>30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.”</p> <p>14:1b And the people wept that night. 4 So</p>

<sup>854</sup> The layout of Noth's source division is adapted from Campbell & O'Brien (1993). The text is taken from the NRSV. The indented text in italics indicate supplementary material within a source. Text which is considered as secondary additions within the supplementary material is further indented (e.g. 14:18). The three dots indicate a gap within a source.

we saw in it are of great size. 33 There we saw the Nephilim

*the Anakites come from the Nephilim*  
33 and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

14:1a Then all the congregation raised a loud cry. 2 And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them. "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. 6 And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, "The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only, do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." 10 But the whole congregation threatened to stone them.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: 27 How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me?

*I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, which they complain against me.*

28 Say to them, "As I live," says the LORD, "I will do to you the very things I heard you say: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census, from twenty years old and upward, who have complained against me."

30 *Not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.* 31 *But your little ones, who you said would become booty, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have despised.* 32 *But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in the wilderness.* 33 *And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and shall suffer for your faithfulness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness.*

34 *According to the number of the days in*

they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain and go back to Egypt."

11 And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me?"

*And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? 12 I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."*

13 *But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for in your might you brought up this people from among them, 14 and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people; for you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go in front of them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, 16 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.' 17 And now, therefore, let the power of the LORD be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying,*

*18 'The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.'*

19 *Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now."*

20 *Then the LORD said, "I do forgive, just as you have asked; 21 nevertheless--as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD-- 22 none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23a shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors*

...

23b *None of those who despised me shall see it.* 24 *But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.*

25 *Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys*

*which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.*

35 I the Lord have spoken; surely I will do thus to all this wicked congregation gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die.

36 And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report about the land-- 37 the men who brought an unfavourable report about the land died by a plague before the LORD. 38 But Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh alone remained alive, of those men who went to spy out the land.

Turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea."

39 When Moses told these words to all the Israelites, the people mourned greatly. 40 They rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, "Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned." 41 But Moses said, "Why do you continue to transgress the command of the LORD? That will not succeed. 42 Do not go up, for the LORD is not with you; do not let yourselves be struck down before your enemies. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will confront you there, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you." 44 But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, even though the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, had not left the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them, pursuing them as far as Hormah.

### 5.2.3 The Yahwist

Before we attempt to sketch out the major characteristics of the "J-account," it is important to note that Noth and others do not ascribe the substance of what is widely held to be J's version of Numbers 13–14 to the Yahwist himself.<sup>855</sup> Rather he

<sup>855</sup> After von Rad's influential work *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch* (1938), 9–86, the Yahwist had long and widely been accepted as a narrator and primarily as theological editor (rather than being a *Schriftsteller*). Von Rad advanced the thesis that the Yahwist reinterpreted ancient traditions of tribal Israel in the light of a powerful davidic kingdom. It is, or at least used to be, widely acknowledged that the Yahwist provided the basic scaffold of the Pentateuch (Hexateuch). Wolff (1982<sup>2</sup>), 42, comments: "Here we have...in magnificent style, the oldest literary composition of the oldest traditions in Israel. It has determined to a great extent the outline and theme of the present-day Pentateuch, the Torah, as basic canon." Levin (1993), 436, suggests that the work of the Yahwist is the most important among the other Pentateuchal writers. "Er ist der 'grosse Baumeister' gewesen." Conventionally, the J account is ascribed to the Solomonic period (about 950–930 BC) because of its political stability, its literary culture, and its international developments (von Rad [1938], Wolff [1982<sup>2</sup>]). This dating, however, has been challenged from several corners. Although Van Seters (1994) maintains largely the scope of the Yahwist source, he dates it to the Persian period. He hardly allows for any historical traditions and describes the material as ideological fiction, reflecting the interest and beliefs of exilic Israel. One of the main problems with van Seter's view seems to be his lack of appreciation of the depths of the redactional, or we may say canonical process, that the text still witnesses to. A synthesis of the previous views is provided by Levin. After a lengthy enquiry, he (1993), 434, concludes that the "jahwistische Geschichtswerk" had been composed from earlier sources by the Jewish upper class who had been deported to Babylon between 597 and 586 B.C. He suggests that they intended to provide a self-understanding of their national pre-history, an "israelischen Nationalepos," which sought to bring hope of return to the land. A third major group questions the existence of a continuous J source all together. Rendtorff (1977), and his pupil Blum (1990) advance the thesis that it was the Deuteronomist who linked older literary blocks for the first time into something like a predecessor of the Pentateuch.

is believed to have composed earlier material into sequential literary form. Following the form-critical pioneers such as Gunkel and Gressmann, Noth criticised Wellhausen for a “too bookish a view of how pentateuchal sources were produced,”<sup>856</sup> and thereby attempted to penetrate behind the Yahwist's sources to the earliest traditions (mainly oral ones) which originated and circulated, according to him, at local shrines and village settings.<sup>857</sup>

### 5.2.3.1 The Calebite Theory

On the basis of Numbers 13–14, Gressmann reached the hypothetical conclusion that the Yahwist made use of what originally was an “ethnographische” and “ätiologische Sage” which depicted how Caleb explored and conquered the area of Hebron.<sup>858</sup> He believed that the saga originally said that YHWH helped Caleb to conquer the fertile land which was inhabited by the giants around Hebron because of his courage.<sup>859</sup> This saga, so speculates Gressmann, was probably mutilated by the northern tribes, in order to uphold the fiction of a united conquest of all Israel through the area east of the Jordan.<sup>860</sup>

Noth, who also attempts to trace the development of the Calebite tradition argues that the Caleb–Hebron saga was originally a southern Palestinian occupation tradition.<sup>861</sup> Similar to Gressmann, Noth believes that because of the emergence of an influential central Palestinian tradition, which claims that Israel as a whole entered Canaan from the east across the Jordan, the Caleb–Hebron–occupation tradition, which testified to a limited conquest from the south, needed some adjustment before it could be added to the cluster, “guidance in the wilderness.”<sup>862</sup> Consequently, so goes the hypothesis, the south Palestinian tradition of a once successful conquest was reshaped and expanded in the course of time into an all-Israel encompassing attempt to enter Canaan. Thereby the focus of the account has clearly shifted. Caleb is no longer presented as successful conqueror of Hebron, but is merely promised the

<sup>856</sup> Campbell & O'Brien (1993), 7.

<sup>857</sup> In the case of Numbers 13–14, Noth (1966), 91, 98–99, points to the numerous concrete references, to places and peoples, such as the defeat at Hormah (vv. 43–45) and concludes that behind the J narrative must lie a local tradition.

<sup>858</sup> Gressmann (1913), 295, seeks to support his hypothesis by saying that in sagas only the places are reconnoitred which were conquered. He points to Jazer (Nu. 21:32), Jericho (Jos. 2), Bethel (Judg. 1:23ff.) and Lajis (Judg. 18). Moreover, it is possible that Numbers 21:2–3 still refers to a once successful conquest story (cf. 14:45). Cf. Budd (1984), 154.

<sup>859</sup> Gressmann (1913), 294.

<sup>860</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>861</sup> Noth (1972), 130, 134.

<sup>862</sup> Noth (1972), 130, 38–62, believed that the development of Israel's tradition emerged from *G* (= *Grundlage*, an oral or partially written tradition which possibly originated in the period of the judges and formed the basis for J and E), which contained five major theological themes: i) Guidance out of Egypt, ii) Guidance into the Arable Land, iii) Promise to the Patriarchs, iv) Guidance in the wilderness, v) Revelation at Sinai. According to Noth, these themes express the fundamentals of Israel's faith and were gradually compiled in the above order and subsequently complemented by originally independent traditions (songs, stories and other literary forms).

area of Hebron because of his loyalty to YHWH. Moreover, the tradition which once belonged only to the south became applicable to all Israel.<sup>863</sup> The modified version tells of an abortive attempt to occupy the promised land; Israel, and now Caleb as well, were condemned to remain in the desert for forty years. Hence, according to Noth, that which was originally a occupation story, was joined to the theme of "Führung in der Wüste" and thereby introduced for the first time the idea of a "wilderness sojourn of long duration" and provided a reason for the the delay of the conquest.<sup>864</sup> The narrative, according to Noth, seeks also to provide the answer why it was the Calebites who had the privilege of possessing the important city and its fertile area around it (cf. 13:23–24).<sup>865</sup> This, Noth suggests, is still visible from the fact that Caleb's descendants are always mentioned alongside Caleb (Nu. 14:24b, Deut. 1:36, Josh. 14:9).<sup>866</sup>

Coats builds on the Calebite-theory but gives it a distinct sociological setting. He suggests that Judah, who claimed loyal Caleb as their ancestor, used an earlier form of the scout account as a means to legitimise its religious and political superiority over the other Israelite tribes. Thereby he points to the emphasis on the people's rebellion and rejection of Moses and YHWH in the J account. He detects in this movement a "rejection of the basic tenets of Israel's election," which results in death in the wilderness without seeing the promised land.<sup>867</sup>

The rejection is absolute. Neither this generation nor their offspring shall have another chance to become heirs to the election faith. The single exception lies in Caleb and his descendants. Since Caleb appears as the chief representative for the tribe of Judah, the exception gives the murmuring tradition a decidedly pro-Judean flavor.<sup>868</sup>

Coats argues that this tradition originated as a southern polemic against the North at the time of the schism of the kingdom. As a result of Jeroboam's erection of the two rival cult centres in Dan and Bethel (1 Ki. 12:25–32), the South utilises the tradition against the northern cult.

Its purpose is to argue that the northern rights to election were forfeited when the fathers in the wilderness rebelled. And in the place of that election, a new election faith is now enjoyed in Jerusalem through the Davidic heir.<sup>869</sup>

The possibility that Judah used something like a Calebite-tradition as a polemic against the North depends to certain degree on Caleb's affiliation with Judah. Nowhere in the supposed J source, however, does it say that Caleb was a Judean;

<sup>863</sup> (1972), 132–135. According to Noth the Calebite saga developed and established itself first among the southern sacral federation of Judean tribes before it reached the all Israel encompassing context of Pentateuchal tradition (J).

<sup>864</sup> (1972), 135 (1966), 97–112.

<sup>865</sup> Noth (1972), 130–133 (1966), 91.

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>867</sup> Coats (1968), 250.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

the only reference to that is found in the name list in Numbers 13:6.<sup>870</sup> This detailed list of the scouts' names and the tribes, however, is usually attributed to the Priestly writer. Since we do not want to be further drawn into the "source-and form-critical debate," for reasons stated earlier on, it is not my intention to assess these hypothesis. I will restrict myself to the following observation.

Any reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of the tradition and its development which seeks to reach back to the pre-literary stage must acknowledge its lack of hard evidence and its hypothetical nature.<sup>871</sup> Although these hypotheses are speculative, they may nonetheless give us some idea of the possible diachronic depths and complexity of the "make-up" of the canonical text and thereby help us appreciate some of the tensions in the final form of the text. The strength of Noth's understanding of the Pentateuch (five major themes which act as magnets for other traditions) is that it criticises the source-critical legacy which tended to look for "unpolluted" sources. Noth's concept of a living engagement with the received tradition clearly refutes such an understanding.<sup>872</sup> The Yahwistic account and the work of the Priestly writer, according to Noth, ought to be understood as an important part of this ongoing engagement with the received traditions.

### 5.2.3.2 The J-Account

According to the Yahwistic version, the scouts set out from Kadesh (13:26) and explore only the fertile vicinity around Hebron (13:22–24). The account dwells on the description of the fruitful area and on the depiction of the strong inhabitants (13:27–29). As a result of the latter, the people hesitate to go up and conquer Hebron. Even Caleb's encouragement to go up and to occupy the land is in vain. It is particularly noteworthy that "J" mentions among the scouts only Caleb by name (13:30). After a night of lamenting the people decided to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt (14:1b, 4). In other words, Israel could not generate sufficient trust and faith that with the help of their God the opposition could be overcome. Instead they reject and despise the divine promise, that is the land. This major offence calls for a serious judgement. Following Noth's boundary division, an earlier form of "J" was without verses 11b–23a, and thus the divine judgement followed immediately the people's rebellion. None of those who despised YHWH shall see the land, except for Caleb and his descendants (14:23b–24). After the divine verdict is pronounced to

<sup>870</sup> Coats (1968), 151f., is aware that Caleb was very likely a non-Israelite. He is regularly referred to as a Kenizites (Nu. 32:12, Josh. 14:6, 14, 15:17). The Kenizites, according to Genesis 36:11, 42, are said to be part of the Edomites. Based on Numbers 13:6 and Judges 1:10, Coats assumes that Caleb has been gradually identified as a leader of Judah.

<sup>871</sup> Gressmann (1913), 296, even attempted to come up with his version of the allegedly missing end of the Calebite sage. Whybray (1987), 194, has some harsh words regarding Noth's hypothesis: "Much of Noth's detailed reconstructions of the Pentateuchal traditions was obtained by piling one speculation upon another."

<sup>872</sup> Olson (1985).

Moses, the “J” account reports of Israel’s attempt to enter the land. This happens in spite of Moses’ explicit warning (14:41–43). Their endeavour failed greatly (vv. 43–45).

Moses’ dialogue with God is of special interest to us. Most source analysts agree that Moses’ prayer is a later addition to J or at least contains supplementary material.<sup>873</sup> Before we spare a few thoughts on the effect of Moses’ dialogue with YHWH on its supposed earlier form, we note that not everyone agrees on the exact literary boundaries and on the dating of Moses’ prayer.

### 5.2.3.3 Moses’ Prayer: A Later Addition?

The conjecture that Numbers 14:11–23/25 is the work of a later editor is based on literary boundaries, on terminology, and theology. Noth and more recently Budd and Balentine understand Moses’ prayer as a deuteronomistic insertion.<sup>874</sup> Thereby they point to its apparently characteristic deuteronomistic terminology. The word *אֵתָהּ* (signs [& wonders], 14:11b, 22) is highlighted as possibly the most typical deuteronomistic term.<sup>875</sup> Moreover, reference is made to the pillar of cloud and fire (14:14), which occurs also in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 1:38). Furthermore, the idea of forgiveness (*סָלַח*, 14:19–20) and the concept of “testing YHWH” (*נִסָּה*, 14:22) is equally found in Deuteronomy.<sup>876</sup> Budd assembles a more extensive list of words and phrases which he considers to be deuteronomistic. He reaches the conclusion that Numbers 14:11b–23a reveals yahwistic, deuteronomistic and other influences.

It may therefore be best to take it that vv 11b–23a, along with Exod 32:7–14, are an expansion of the Yahwist’s text, probably of exilic date. In view of the prominent deuteronomistic elements it would not be inappropriate to call it a deuteronomistic gloss, but this should not be taken to preclude influence from elsewhere. In Deuteronomy there is special interest shown in this story and that of the golden calf, and this confirms the general appropriateness of the description as deuteronomistic. At the same time the section evidently builds closely on the Yahwist’s work, and in particular on the theme of the cruciality of Mosaic intercession, as set out in the stories of Taberah (Num 11:1–3) and Miriam (Num 12:1–16).<sup>877</sup>

<sup>873</sup> I.e. Wellhausen (1963<sup>4</sup>), 102. Baentsch (1903), 515–516, Coats (1968), 138–139, Blum (1990), 133–134, Levin (1993), 376–377. Seebass (1995), 89ff. See Boorer (1992), 334ff., for a recent detailed treatment of the source divisions.

<sup>874</sup> Noth (1966), 108–109, Budd (1984), 152f. Aurelius (1988), 132, and Balentine (1985), 66–71, (1993), 131–135. Others are more cautious in attributing the passage to the Deuteronomist. Wellhausen (1963<sup>4</sup>), 102, ascribes Numbers 14:11–25 to a later redaction of J. Similarly Gray (1912), 129, and Coats (1968), 138–139, who suggests that Moses’ prayer is not deuteronomistic, but an addition within the J source itself. Sakenfeld (1975), 323ff., chooses to use the more neutral term pre-priestly tradition which according to her supplements the old epic (JE). Seebass (1995), 91–93, however, finds hardly any evidence to suggest that Moses’ prayer is deuteronomistic. He concludes on the basis of a comparison with Exodus 32–34, that Numbers 14:11–23 is an early post-exilic complement.

<sup>875</sup> Cf. Noth (1966), 96, Budd (1984), 152, Blum (1990), 134. Cf. Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 26:8, 29:2, 34:11.

<sup>876</sup> Budd (1984), 152, refers to Deuteronomy 6:16, 29:19 (or in Deuteronomistic literature) 1 Ki. 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50.

<sup>877</sup> Budd (1984), 152–153. Cf. Blum (1990), 134, 177, Boorer (1992), 337–338. Consult Weinfeld

Boorer reaches a similar conclusion to that of Budd, stresses, however, more the continuity with Exodus material which is usually regarded as older than Deuteronomy.<sup>878</sup> Lohfink takes it a step further by asserting that it is wrong to label Numbers 14:11ff. (and Ex. 32:7–14) as deuteronomistic. He thinks it is safer to speak of “deuteronomischer Sprach- und Gedankenwelt nahestehend.”<sup>879</sup>

Balentine, who has done a significant amount of interesting work on Moses' prayers, suggests that Numbers 14:11–23/25<sup>880</sup> is a Deuteronomistic text because of its theological content. He understands the human–divine dialogue primarily as a “prayer for divine justice” and argues that Moses' prayer in Numbers 14, as in Exodus 32:7–14, represents an important biblical paradigm for those who “stand in loyal opposition” (term adopted from Coats) to God and His ways of executing justice.<sup>881</sup> By referring to Moses' threefold–prayer in Numbers 14:13–19 Balentine talks of a Deuteronomistic “stock of legitimate reasons that the pray-ers could use” in order to persuade God to refrain or modify the intended judgement.<sup>882</sup> As we shall see later in greater detail, the first argument is about YHWH's endangered reputation among the nations (14:13–16). He infers that God's reputation was particularly at stake during the exilic era. The Babylonian setting encouraged a reflection on YHWH's power in relation to other gods, or whether He could be persuaded to intervene once more for the sake of His name.<sup>883</sup> The second argument with which Moses implicitly confronts God, according to Balentine, is related to divine justice. “Is it right to kill this people like one man, Moses asks (הֲכִמּוֹתָהּ אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, v. 15)?” Again, Balentine argues that the exile would be the context where the question of justice would be most critically raised. Ezekiel, like Abraham before him (Balentine attributes Gen. 18:22–33 also to the Deuteronomist), demand a justice which differentiates between innocent individuals and corporate guilt, or between the sins of the parents and the children (cf. Ezek. 18:2).<sup>884</sup> The third and last appeal of Moses is to God's nature, as revealed on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:6–7). A gracious, merciful, and loyal God, who nevertheless brings about justice (14:17–19). Balentine admits that this text is not necessarily restricted to the exilic period, although “the description of a God who is characterised by loyal love as well as just punishment would be particularly welcome” among an exilic audience.<sup>885</sup>

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(1972), 329–337, for a detailed view of Deuteronomistic terminology.

<sup>878</sup> Boorer (1992), 337. E.g. Exodus 10:1–2, 13:22, 14:19.

<sup>879</sup> Lohfink (1960), 117.

<sup>880</sup> Balentine (1993), 131ff., appears to have changed his understanding of the boundaries. In his earlier essay (1989) he set the boundaries after verse 23, while in his recent book he extended it to verse 25. He gives, however, no reason for the change.

<sup>881</sup> See (1989), 603.

<sup>882</sup> Balentine (1993), 138. Even in modern Judaism appealing to God's reputation and His gracious qualities (Ex. 34:6–7, Nu. 14:18), and invoking the merits of the fathers are the three pillars of Jewish prayers for forgiveness. Cf. Weinfeld (1991), 416–417.

<sup>883</sup> Balentine (1993), 132.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid., 133. Cf. § 5.4.3.

<sup>885</sup> Balentine (1993), 133. Cf. Coats (1968), 147.



A mirror-reading of Moses' prayers, as we have already noted, is based on various larger assumptions about the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of the Pentateuch (§ 2.1). Reading the narrative in its totality, as we shall attempt in a moment, will make it evident that questions of divine reputation and divine righteousness are firmly embedded in the logic of the wilderness account.

#### 5.2.3.4 The Literary Boundaries of Moses' Prayer (Nu. 14:11–23/25)

Noth argues that Numbers 14:11b–23a is a later addition. He has pointed out that verse 11a and 11b stand in a parallelism. Both begin with the “עַד-אָנָה” question” and are followed by YHWH's complaint about the behaviour of the people towards Him.

11a עַד-אָנָה יִנְאָצְנִי הָעָם הַזֶּה  
11b וְעַד-אָנָה לֹא-יִאֱמִינוּ בִּי בְּכָל הָאֲחֻזּוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ

Obviously that in itself is not a conclusive observation regarding a possible insertion; it is, however, in conjunction with verse 23 that many source-critics present their argument. Noth and others have pointed to the verbal correspondence between verse 11a and 23b (Pi, נִאָּץ). The verb does not occur in the verses between (i.e. 11b–23a). Moreover, Noth recognises a clear interruption between 23a and b.<sup>886</sup>

23a אִם-יִדְּאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבֹתָם  
23b וְכָל-כְּנָעֲנִי לֹא יִרְאוּהָ

Whether there is a “deutlicher Bruch,” as Noth remarks, or rather a subsequent qualifying clause is debatable,<sup>887</sup> since the feminine suffix of יִרְאוּהָ seems to point back to הָאָרֶץ in verse 23a.<sup>888</sup>

Seebass suggests that verse 23b belongs to the inserted pericope because it complements and qualifies verse 11a. הָעָם הַזֶּה in verse 11a stands unqualified, only in verse 22 it is specified with “all men (כָּל-הָאֲנָשִׁים) who have seen God's glory and signs,” women and children are seemingly excluded, apart from those who despised YHWH (כָּל-כְּנָעֲנִי, v. 23b).<sup>889</sup> Hence verse 23b, according to Seebass, specifies that the people who despised God (v. 11a) are not identical with the entire people, but only with those who were responsible, the men and those who spurned God.<sup>890</sup> There is some warrant behind this suggestion which we will come back to in our fuller narrative reading. Moreover, such a source division could be endorsed by arguing that verses 11a, b, and verses 22, 23a, b stand in a loose chiasmic structure

<sup>886</sup> Noth (1966), 97, Coats (1968), 138.

<sup>887</sup> So Seebass (1995), 91.

<sup>888</sup> Noth (1966), 97, speculates that a sentence about the promised land has gone missing between v. 11ab and v. 23. See also Boorer (1992), 335.

<sup>889</sup> Milgrom (1990), 112, by contrast understands הָאֲנָשִׁים as a generic term for person (cf. NRSV). He believes, however, that children are not included. Milgrom's observation is suggestive since it also anticipates the explicit statement in YHWH's second response (cf. 14:31).

<sup>890</sup> Seebass (1995), 90–91.

and thus belong together.<sup>891</sup>

And the LORD said to Moses,

A) "How long will this people despise me (נִאֵץ)?

B) And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? (בְּכֹל הָאֲתֹתָאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ)

B') ...none of the people who have seen...the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness (וְאֶת־אֲתֹתֵי אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וּבְמִדְבָּר)

A') ...none of those who despised me (נִאֵץ) shall see it.

A third significant group of scholars argues that verses 11–25 belong together because they form a coherent whole.<sup>892</sup> They are convinced that neither in verse 11, nor in verses 20–25 are any compelling interruptions. The divine speech, in verse 11, according to Aurelius, leads naturally to Moses' intercession (14:12–19), which in turn anticipates a divine resolution. This resolution takes the form of a refusal of the promised land and a command to return to the desert (v. 25). In the light of Caleb's reported loyalty, verse 24 fits naturally into the divine verdict.<sup>893</sup>

Regardless of the exact literary boundaries, the addition of Moses' prayer achieves an important effect on the supposedly earlier version of J. As we shall elaborate later on, it achieves the sense of a complex and subtle divine verdict that involves pardon from destruction, maintenance of covenant loyalty, and punishment, in an intricate relationship.<sup>894</sup> It will become evident in our close reading of the final form that YHWH's response is (possibly deliberately) ambiguous as to how exactly this subtle mix of pardon and judgement is worked out.<sup>895</sup> Moreover, we shall argue that the second part of YHWH's response seeks to build on verses 20–25 in its own distinct way.

Although there remain minor disagreements regarding the exact boundaries of Moses' prayer, it is really the division between verses 25 and 26 which is of crucial importance. As far as I am aware, there is an unanimous agreement among source analysts that there is a source division between these two verses; an issue which we will attend to in some detail in the following sections.

#### 5.2.4 The Priestly Writer

According to Noth, the Priestly writer made use of the Yahwistic account, expanded and edited it in order to fit his objectives.<sup>896</sup> In general "J" is traditionally believed to

<sup>891</sup> See also Newing (1987), 211ff. and Milgrom (1990), 113.

<sup>892</sup> Wellhausen (1963<sup>4</sup>), 102, Baentsch (1903), 525, Aurelius (1988), 131–133, Blum (1990), 133–134.

<sup>893</sup> Aurelius (1988), 132.

<sup>894</sup> Cf. Boorer (1992), 352.

<sup>895</sup> Cf. Olson (1985), 136, Boorer (1992), 354f.

<sup>896</sup> According to the classical documentary hypothesis, the purpose of P was twofold. Firstly, P sought to legitimate the post-exilic cult by projecting back their agenda into Mosaic age. Secondly, P set out a detailed programme to provide authoritative guidelines. It is debated, however, whether the programme had been written in early post-exilic times by the Jerusalem priesthood in order to legitimise their practices (so Wellhausen), or whether it was written still in exile in preparation and

be concerned with recording YHWH's acts in history, while P is among other things concerned with YHWH's presence among the people, especially in the cult.

With regard to Numbers 13–14 in particular, P is concerned to involve *all* Israel (העדה, 14:2) in the scout mission. This comes to expression in the list of representatives of the entire people (cf. 1:5–15). Noth notes that none of the names in the Priestly list are compound with Yahwistic elements, except that of Joshua (cf. esp. 13:8). This, according to him, comes from a conscious Priestly calculation that none of the men who were born before God revealed Himself as YHWH to Moses (cf. Ex. 6:2–3) could have had a Yahwistic name. In the case of Joshua, who as the prospective leader of Israel had to be among the scouts, the Priestly writer explains that Moses renamed his assistant from יהושע to הושע (13:16).<sup>897</sup> The Priestly writer can further be identified by his references to Aaron. The high priest, is closely linked to Moses, they both prostrate themselves before the people (14:5, cf. Lev. 9:24, Nu. 16:4, 22, 17:10, 20:6). Moreover, Joshua, the representative from Ephraim, is put alongside Caleb in condemning the rebellious people before the “Priestly כבוד” appears (14:10).

But it is really in Numbers 14:26–38 that the Priestly author expands the earlier account.<sup>898</sup> Although these verses come as a broad parallel to Numbers 14:11–23/25, the Priestly elaboration offers significant clarifications. The author is very specific about who will die. Namely those who murmured<sup>899</sup> and those age 20 and over (14:29, cf. 1:3, 20, 45). Moreover, he mentions a more immediate punishment on the guilty scouts whose evil report provoked the murmuring (14:37). Although there is a strong emphasis on punishment, it is important to note that both Caleb (representative of Judah) and Joshua (representative of Ephraim) and their descendants (14:30–31) will be the recipients of the promised land. In other words, it is essential for the Priestly writer that the promise continues to affect Israel as a whole.

It is widely agreed among scholars that the land is of special concern to the Priestly writer. Thus it is no surprise that the narrative begins with YHWH's summon to send men to reconnoitre the promised land (13:1–2). Arguably one of the most significant contributions of the Priestly writer is his understanding of and emphasis on the promised land. He underlines that the scouts explored not only the

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hope for restoration (so Cross [1973]). According to Westermann (1984), 188–189, Israel lost its national existence in exile, it could survive only as a “gottesdienstliche Gemeinde.” Hence P created an account which stresses that communion with God (Gottesdienst) has been embedded in Israel's history. In spite of the wide consensus regarding the “late” dating of the Priestly writer, it is important to note that a number of Jewish scholars, under the influence of Kaufmann (1960), argue for a pre-exilic dating of the Priestly composition, indeed even for contemporary dating to that of J (in the traditional sense). See Wenham (1999), 134–139, for a helpful overview.

<sup>897</sup> Noth (1966), 92.

<sup>898</sup> Contra Levin (1993), 376–377, who suggests that Numbers 14:26–35 is older than vv. 11–25.

<sup>899</sup> There is a great stress on Israel's murmuring. The verb מָרַן appears several times in the Priestly material (cf. § 3.3.1).

Hebron area but the land from the very South to the very North (14:21). The reference to the entire land in verse 21 obviously looks back to Numbers 13:2, 17a, and possibly to Genesis 17, where the land is promised to Abraham as an “everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8).<sup>900</sup> Thus Sakenfeld argues that the Priestly material in Numbers 13–14 has to be seen in the light of its wider theological framework. That is, God entered into an unconditional and everlasting covenant relationship (ברית עולם, Gen. 17:2, 4) with Abraham and his descendants (vv. 7, 13) and thereby promised to give the land to his descendants for ever (לאחוזת עולם, v. 8). In other words, according to P, the covenant is ultimately not affected by Israel's rebellious behaviour in the wilderness. The Priestly writer, however, must still

wrestle with how God can be present with an unholy people. Their (P) answer is bifocal: because God forgives in accordance with his promise to be faithful, and because a new generation who were not personally unholy in the wilderness context will be recipients of the consummation of the promise, the land itself. Herein lies a lesson of hope for the people in exile: as God forgave in the wilderness in days of old, so will he forgive anew his people in exile and bring again a new generation to the land.<sup>901</sup>

The Priestly account of Numbers 13–14 and the Priestly writings in general have been described as:

a powerful affirmation of faith in God's unconditional commitment to Israel which, although delayed by human fragility, will never be deflected from the ultimate goal of God's love.<sup>902</sup>

In sum, our attempt briefly to describe the hypothetical earlier layers of Numbers 13–14 could be broadly summarised as follows:<sup>903</sup>

- i) Calebite occupation tradition associated with Hebron and its vicinity.
- ii) Yahwist transforms (an) earlier occupation tradition(s) into an account about Israel's abortive attempt to occupy the promised land from the South. The failure is due to Israel's rebellion and unbelief.
- iii) A possible expansion of J is Moses' intercessory prayer which underlines the mediator's loyalty to the people and provides an elaborate divine perspective on Israel's sin and judgement.
- iv) The Priestly redaction underlines that the entire land had been reconnoitred. Moreover it highlights that both Joshua and Caleb were faithful to their commissioning. There is also an emphasis that Israel as a whole rejected the land and consequently deserves divine punishment.

### 5.3 A Canonical Reading of Numbers 13–14

The underlying objectives of the remainder of this chapter could be aptly summarised in a comment on Numbers 13–14 by an important forerunner of what came to be called “theological exegesis.”

<sup>900</sup> God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:1–14 is usually identified as a Priestly key story. See von Rad (1979<sup>4</sup>), 197ff.

<sup>901</sup> Sakenfeld (1975), 329–330.

<sup>902</sup> Campbell & O'Brien (1993), 22.

<sup>903</sup> Compare Budd (1984), 155.

we must still, or again, read these histories in their unity and totality. It is only then that they can say what they are trying to say. To be sure, the history of the spies does contain different elements. There is a “historical” element in the stricter sense (the persons and cities and localities mentioned). There is also an element of saga (the account of the branch of grapes carried by two men, and of the giants who inhabited the land). There is also the element which has its origin in the synthetic or composite view (fusing past and present almost into one) which is so distinctive a feature of historical writing in Old and New Testament alike. It is to the latter elements that we must pay particular attention in our reading of these stories if we are to understand them, for they usually give us an indication of the purpose which led to their adoption into the texts. But in relation to them, if we are discerning readers, we shall not overlook the historical elements or even jettison those which seem to have the character of a saga. When the distinctions have been made they can be pushed again into the background and the whole can be read (with this tested and critical naivety) as the totality it professes to be.<sup>904</sup>

It is one thing to attempt to differentiate between the various traditions and to allocate to them particular theological accents and historical settings. It is another thing to read the narrative in its final form and try to understand the logic and dynamic of the canonical text. Having said this, the following section wants to be read with the previous discussion in mind: It seeks primarily to underline the logical progression of thought of Numbers 13–14 in its final form. We shall underline the structural and conceptual unity of the text and thereby see that there are several *Leitwörter* which form bridges between alleged source divisions and give the whole narrative a coherent harmony. This is not to deny that there remain some tensions in the final form, but rather than utilising them as a way behind the canonical text, we shall attempt to probe the literary effect created by them. Thus we shall look at controversial issues such as the scope of the mission, the juxtaposition of Caleb and Joshua, and YHWH's twofold response. Moreover, special attention is given to the theological effect created by the position of Moses' prayer in the sequence of the narrative.

### 5.3.1 Coherence and Logic of the Narrative

The whole plot of Numbers 13–14 revolves arguably around the decision whether Israel should “go up” to the promised land or not. The term *עלה* functions clearly as one of the dominant *Leitwörter* of the account. It occurs not less than twelve times in the narrative.<sup>905</sup> It starts with Moses' command to “go up” and to scout out the promised land (עָלוּ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּנְנָגָב וְעֹלִיתָם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, 13:17), alternates between Caleb's exhortation to “go up” and the scout's fearful estimation that they cannot “go up” (13:30, 31), and comes to a close in the people's resolve to “go up” to the land (לֵאמֹר הִנֵּנוּ וְעָלִינוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם וְעָלִינוּ אֶל-רֹאשׁ-הָהָר), even though Moses warns them not to “go up” (אַל-תַּעֲלוּ) anymore because of their sinful behaviour (14:40–42).

In addition to this, one could argue that the entire scout narrative is framed by a set of verbally and conceptually related statements.<sup>906</sup> At the outset Moses

<sup>904</sup> Barth (1958), 479.

<sup>905</sup> 13:17 (2x), 21, 22, 30 (2x), 31 (2x), 14:13, 40, 42, 44.

<sup>906</sup> Although I have developed my own observations, I am indebted to Milgrom (1990), 387–390, for

dispatches the scouts to go up into the land according to “the word of YHWH” (עַל־יְהוָה, 13:1–3). At the end of the story, the people did not act according to “the word of YHWH.” In fact, by going up into the land they transgress the word of God (וַיֵּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְמֹדָע זֶה אֲתֶם עֹבְרִים אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה, 14:41). Yet both parties had the same goal to “go up” into the hill country (עָלָה אֶת־הָהָר, 13:17, 14:40, 44). The text plays with words when it says that initially “they went up” (עָלָה) into the hill country to the Canaanites (13:21) into the land of promise (cf. 13:23), while the second time the Canaanites (and Amalekites) “came down” (יָרַד) from the hill country and thereby the land of promise became a land of destruction (cf. 14:44–45).<sup>907</sup>

Another set of elaborate literary connections is associated with YHWH's presence among Israel, which occurs first in YHWH's complaint about Israel's unbelief in spite of all the signs he has done בְּקִרְבּוֹ (14:11) and is developed in significant ways throughout the rest of the narrative. In the light of verse 11 it is ironical that even the Egyptians acknowledge YHWH's powerful presence “in the midst” of Israel. They will tell the Canaanites that YHWH is הֵנָּה בְּקִרְבָּם (14:14). As the story proceeds Moses warns Israel not to go up into the hill country בְּקִרְבָּם (14:42). But obdurate Israel thinks it knows better and so gets crushed by the inhabitants of the hill country due to YHWH's absence from their “midst” (וְאֶרֶץ בְּרִית־יְהוָה וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־יָשׁוּ בְּקִרְבָּם הַמִּתְחַנֵּה, 14:44).

The account commences with the scouts' mission and moves from a confirmation of the goodness of God's promise, to the emergence of anxiety among the people, to an open rebellion against the leadership, and ultimately against YHWH Himself. The rebellion comes to a climax in the intervention of YHWH and the announcement of judgement. Before the divine judgement is finalised and executed, however, we encounter an intense dialogue between Moses and God. Following the prayer, YHWH makes known His verdict to Moses, and then to Moses and Aaron. In other words, apart from the depiction of the mission, one could say that the development of the narrative is carried forward in four major dialogues.

- i) Scouts Report to People (13:27–33)
- ii) People's Reaction to Report (14:1–10)
- iii) YHWH's Dialogue with Moses (14:11–25)
- iv) YHWH's Response to Moses and Aaron (14:26–35)

Each set contains similar elements. All include an element of complaint and destruction. Moreover, all, apart from the last, involve some mediatory activities. In the first dialogue, the people, on account of the scouts' report, complain against Moses. As a result of that, Caleb attempts to avert the complaint of the people (13:30). This attempt at mediation, however, is countered by an exaggerated and evil report, which emphasises the destructive intentions of the land. The second dialogue starts with complaint of the people (14:1–3). Their complaint engendered fear and

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basic structural observations.

<sup>907</sup> Milgrom (1990), 388.

disobedience which is countered by Caleb's and Joshua's attempt to awaken the people's senses (14:6–9). Their good intentions are thwarted by an enraged mob which sought to destroy its leaders (14:10). The third dialogue starts with a divine complaint about the behaviour of the people (14:11) and progresses into a judgement of destruction. This intention is opposed by Moses who tried to pacify the divine anger. As a result of Moses' intercession, YHWH reconsiders His destructive judgement. The fourth cluster, which is actually a monologue, begins also with a divine complaint (14:27) and moves on to clarify the judgement.

Before we attempt to unfold the four dialogue-clusters in some details, a few thoughts on the scope and purpose of the scouts' mission.

### 5.3.1.1 *The Mission*

Israel's time in the wilderness appears to come to an end when they reached Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran (13:3), the threshold to the promised land. Before Israel enters into Canaan, at YHWH's command Moses commissions a group of representatives from each tribe<sup>908</sup> to inspect the the land (13:1–20). Judging from the nature of the mission the representatives are not elders but leaders (נָשִׂיָא) who are suitable for the nature of the job. This would also explain why their names (13:4–5) are different from the previous list (1–2). Since the mission is not without its danger Moses encourages the scouts to be of good courage (13:20). The purpose of the mission is probably twofold. It has clearly a practical aspect, the collection of information about Canaan regarding the nature of the country and the military strength of its inhabitants (13:18–20). But this is probably only a means to a larger purpose, namely the testifying to and affirming of God's promise.<sup>909</sup> The enormous fruits come not only as a tangible confirmation of the promise, but also as an encouragement for all the good things lying ahead.

The account in Numbers 13:2 stands in tension with the deuteronomic version in which the initiative to scout out the land comes not from God, but from the people (cf. Deut. 1:20–23). There the idea is that God has already explored the promised land in advance, as Moses' exhortation to the people seems to imply:

“See, the LORD your God has given the land to you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you; do not fear or be dismayed” (Deut. 1:20).

In response to that the people said:

“Let us send men ahead of us to explore (חַפֵּר) the land for us and bring back a report to us regarding the route by which we should go up and the cities we will come to” (Deut. 1:21–22).

In the deuteronomic account the people's suggestion to dispatch some scouts in advance is probably motivated by fear and distrust.<sup>910</sup> It has been suggested by

<sup>908</sup> See Wenham (1979), 116, Milgrom (1990), 100.

<sup>909</sup> Barth (1958), 480.

<sup>910</sup> Moses approves of their suggestion and thereby seems also to distrusts God. According to Milgrom (1990), 100, it is for this reason that he is also condemned to die in the desert without

Rashi and more recently by Milgrom that the scouts' mission, as depicted in Numbers 13:2, also reflects YHWH's irritation. Rashi puts forth that the divine command to Moses (Nu. 13:2) means:

שְׁלַח-לְךָ SEND THEE (more lit., for thyself) — i.e. according to your own judgment: I do not command you, *but if you wish to do so send them*. — *God said this* because the Israelites came to *Moses* and said, "We will send men before us etc." as it is said, (Deut. 1:22): "And you approached me, all of you, [saying, We will send men, etc.]", and Moses took counsel with the Shechinah (the Lord), whereupon He said to them, I have told them *long ago* that it (the land) is good, as it is said, (Ex. III. 17): "I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt...[unto a land flowing with milk and honey]". By their lives! *I swear* that I will give them now an opportunity to fall into error through the statements of the spies, so that they should not come into possession of it (the land).

How are we to assess Rashi's interpretation? Probably because of the tension between the two accounts, Rashi felt compelled to harmonise them. Moreover, he read the final outcome of the scout story into his interpretation. Thereby he created his own account based on several biblical texts. Having said that, according to the Samaritan Pentateuch the substance found in Deuteronomy 1:20–23, forms actually the beginning of Numbers 13. It might be partially for this reason that Milgrom endorses a similar Midrash.<sup>911</sup> He points to the chieftains who were explicitly chosen *by God* in order to conduct the census of all war capable Israelites (cf. 1:4–17). The scouts, by contrast, are chosen *by Moses*. Milgrom takes this as a sign of YHWH's disapproval of the mission. "Therefore, God, as it were, told Moses: If you want them, you must pick them."<sup>912</sup> In other words, send them for *yourself* (שְׁלַח-לְךָ). How are we to assess these interpretations? Both commentators obviously conduct their interpretation with an awareness of the contrasting report in Deuteronomy 1:20–23. This problem gives raise to the wider important issue of how to deal with apparently conflicting statement in the Bible. Of course one could resort to a historical-critical solution and simply attribute it to two different underlying traditions. Apart from not being historically well founded,<sup>913</sup> such an explanation stands in strong tension with a long Jewish tradition that the Torah is of divine origin, dictated to Moses, as it comes to expression in the eight principle of the *אמונת* *אֵשֶׁת*.<sup>914</sup> As Levenson masterfully argues, one does not necessarily have to subscribe to the historical authorship of Moses, in order to uphold the unity and divinity of the Torah. It is an important aspect of the Jewish belief (and in its distinct way also of the Christian belief) to affirm in faith that the Torah (or Christian Canon) forms an

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entering the land (Deut. 1:37).

<sup>911</sup> Milgrom (1990), 100.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid.

<sup>913</sup> What is more likely, as we have already noticed with regard to Moses' prayer, is that the author of Deuteronomy modified the original tradition in order to make his own theological point. Possibly he could not attribute to Moses, or even to God, a mission with the purpose to confirm the divine promise. Thus Deuteronomy ascribes the mission to lack of faith, covered up as a strategic military operation. Cf. Weinfeld (1991), 144–145.

<sup>914</sup> See Levenson (1993), 63–65. The eight principle mainly sought to protect the unity and divinity of the Torah (possibly against Muslims and Christians).



“indissoluble unity and a revelation from God,” even if historical critical studies point to contradictions within it.<sup>915</sup> Thus according to Levenson, the challenge for the modern Jewish (and Christian) biblical scholar is not to deny the historical process behind the text, but rather to relativise it and to cherish Maimonides' principle by conducting exegesis with an awareness of the literary simultaneity of the canonical text.<sup>916</sup> Thus it seems to me that although Rashi's and Milgrom's interpretations are biased in the sense that they affirm the unity of the Torah, there is good textual reason for their interpretations. In other words, when it comes to normative decision-making, the witness of all relevant accounts need to be taken into account. Yet before one is in a position of listening to two narratives in concert and unity, one must let each account speak in its own distinct voice. With regard to Numbers 13 only, one cannot detect any irritation in YHWH's command to Moses, nor is there any indication that the divine commission is the result of Israel's prior suggestion to send a dispatchment ahead. Rather YHWH commissions Moses to appoint representatives from each tribe in order to inspect the land for its soil, people, and cities (13:1–20). Thus there is a sense that the land is not passively handed over to them, Israel needs to get involved. Even though YHWH will lead them, the people have to do their share.

As we have mentioned earlier on, there is a debate as to the exact extent of the mission. In verse 1, the scouts are sent to scout out (תור) the land of Canaan, this is confirmed in verse 17 where it says that Moses sent the representatives to inspect (תור) the land Canaan. He charged them to go up in the Negeb and to go further into the hill country. Since Canaan is paralleled with Negeb and the hill country (ההר), one probably ought to take the latter in a general sense, i.e. the entire area beyond the Negeb. This is confirmed in verse 21 where it is stated that they covered an area from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, Lebo–Hamath. Although neither of these locations can be clearly identified,<sup>917</sup> from chapter 34:8, we know that Lebo–Hamath is located at the northern border of Canaan. That the mission encompasses the entire land is further suggested by the duration of it. In forty days the scouts would seem to go way beyond Hebron.

This still does not answer the question why the narrative zooms in on the vicinity of Hebron and does not report from any other stage of their mission (13:22–24). Of course, the short answer would be via the Calebite-theory, a theory which in its core might be correct. Nevertheless, the need remains to describe the effect of the possible merging of the traditions as the final form of the text describes it. In the light of the subsequent development of the narrative, it makes good sense to focus on the most prominent and critical aspect of the mission. As we shall see in a moment, the narrative unfolds around the Anakites who lived in the area of Hebron (13:22, 28,

<sup>915</sup> Levenson (1993), 65. See Childs (1985), 13, for a similar understanding from a Christian perspective.

<sup>916</sup> Levenson (1993), 78–79.

<sup>917</sup> See Wenham (1979), 231 and Ashley (1993), 237 for possible identifications of the sites.

33) and around the enormous fruits they picked up in the valley of Eshcol, which is very likely in the Hebron area (13:23–24, 27).<sup>918</sup> Moreover, it is ultimately the strong inhabitants associated with the vicinity of Hebron which lead to the collapse of Israel's hopes. Thus the story gives the impression that Hebron and its wider area were the highlight of the trip. Having said that, the narrative in its final form clearly envisages a mission to the entire land of Canaan, this is indicated by the fact that the Hebron report is framed by statements about the whole land (13:17–21, 25). More important is YHWH's first response to Moses: not only Hebron is promised to Caleb and his descendants, but the entire land shall become their inheritance (14:24).

### 5.3.1.2 Scouts' Report to the People

After forty days the delegation returns to Kadesh from their mission (13:25–26). They have investigated the promised land. The scouts report what they have seen and produce the enormous fruits of the land before Moses, Aaron, and the people. It is interesting to note that the scouts initially produce a factual report of the land. The enormous fruits confirm the goodness and the fertility of the land. In fact, their depiction as an *אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ* (13:27) resonates with YHWH's initial promise to Moses (Ex. 3:8, cf. 33:3). But it is not all milk and honey; the report balances the bountifulness of the land with potential danger.<sup>919</sup> Because of Canaan's fortified cities and its tall and strong built inhabitants, the majority of the scouts caution Israel of possible danger. A list of war-minded people such as the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites is produced (13:29–30). Taking the sequence of the canon into account, it would have been particularly the Amalekites who struck a note of trouble and fear (cf. Ex. 17:8ff. Deut. 25:17–19).<sup>920</sup>

Thus the narrative implicitly raises the question how Israel is going to respond to the scouts' report. Are they going up in good faith, embracing the divine promise that YHWH is about to fulfil (13:1–2) in spite of the dangers, or are they going to give up the opportunity which they have been waiting for and yield to fear by focusing only on the negative aspects of the report? At this stage the situation is still in the balance, though the use of the interjection *הִם* in verse 30 indicates that the report evoked some audible disturbances among the people.<sup>921</sup> It is noteworthy that Caleb does not deny or play down the danger, nevertheless, he is confident that Israel can go up and claim their inheritance (*עֲלֵה/יכַל*, 13:30). The use of a double infinitive absolute followed by the same verbs suggests that Caleb purports to repress the possibility of fear spreading among the people by encouraging them to

<sup>918</sup> Noth (1966), 93.

<sup>919</sup> The narrative distinguishes between the two aspects of the report with a strong adversative (*כִּי* אָמַס, 13:28).

<sup>920</sup> See Levine (1993), 95–96, on the Amalekites.

<sup>921</sup> *הִם* is an apocopated Hiphil derived from the natural sound *הִם*, i.e. hush! Keep silence! See GKC, § 105, Baentsch (1903), 522.

take immediate action: עָלֶה נַעֲלֶה וְיִרְשְׁנוּ אֶתְּהָ בְּיָכוֹל נִכְלֶה לָּהּ (13:30).<sup>922</sup> Caleb's attempt, however, is blocked by the scouts' assertion that they "cannot go up" (לֹא יִכְלֶה/עֲלֶה) and conquer the land (לֹא נִכְלֶה לְעֹלֹת אֶל־הָעָם בְּיָחֹזֵק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ) (13:31).

These are the first indications that what started out as an affirmation of the goodness and truthfulness of YHWH's promise is gradually tipping towards a position which is coloured by fear and lack of faith. The scouts started to distort the truth as if they attempted to persuade the people not to enter the promised land. They brought forth an evil report, as the text puts it (13:32, דְּבַת הָאָרֶץ, וַיִּצְיֵאוּ דְבַת הָאָרֶץ). The word דְּבַת in this context means a distorted and evil account of a true report.<sup>923</sup> Thereby they made use of the legendary semi-divine Nephilim<sup>924</sup> in whose sight the Israelites appear like grasshoppers (13:33). These men of great stature (אֲנָשִׁי מְדֻחִים, LXX: γίγαντες),<sup>925</sup> according to the difficult passage in Genesis 6:1–4, are the result of the union between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." The Hebrew text qualifies Nephilim, by adding the clause that the sons of Anak stemmed from them.<sup>926</sup> Thus it is clear that by ascribing to the Anakites stature and strength of these primordial semi-divine figures, the scouts deliberately played with the already fearful psyches of the Israelites.<sup>927</sup> It is difficult to determine whether the scouts ascribed to the war-gearred giants cannibalistic practices or whether they merely alluded to their destructive nature.<sup>928</sup> In any case, the reality was distorted in

<sup>922</sup> The infinitive absolute used before the verb of the same stem serves here, as often, to emphasise the verbal action. In English this can only be rendered by a corresponding adverb. Such as "Let us surely go up...for we are surely able to do it." See GKC, § 113 l–r. RSV: "Let us go up at once...for we are well able to overcome it" (13:30).

<sup>923</sup> See BDB, 179. This is reinforced from God's perspective by the qualifying adjective דְּבַת הָאָרֶץ רָעָה (cf. 14:37).

<sup>924</sup> The meaning of Nephilim remains uncertain. The root נָפַל to fall, has led to several suggestions concerning the meaning. Rashi (1946), 65, suggests that it refers to Shemchazai and Azazel who fell from heaven in the generation of Enosh. Calvin (1855), 62, with reference to Lapidé, thinks that they got their name because of their enormous stature which caused those who saw them to fall. Thus he suggests the Qal is being put for the Hiphil. Baentsch (1903), 523, cites Schwally who argues that נִפְלִיִּים is derived from נָפַל (Fehlgeburt) caused by the union between divine and human beings (Levine (1993), 359 thinks that the name refers to the fallen status of the gods (the "fallen ones") who had been excommunicated from the celestial sphere.

<sup>925</sup> Targ. Ong. גְּבִירִיא.

<sup>926</sup> This qualifying clause does not exist in the LXX.

<sup>927</sup> It has been suggested that the account of the enormous cluster of grapes (required two men to carry it on a pole, 13:23) goes back to the same tradition of the gigantic inhabitants of the Hebron vicinity. Cf. Coats (1968), 145.

Although the Anakites were very likely a historical people, considering the biblical data, one is left with a rather vague picture. There is not much known about them apart from their fearful reputation (cf. Deut. 1:28), their might and strength (Deut. 2:10–11, 20–21, Josh. 14:15). By the time the next generation was about to enter Canaan, the Anakites have become arguably symbols of fear and terror ("You have heard...Who can stand up to the Anakim," Deut. 9:1–2). Cf. Miller (1990), 35.

<sup>928</sup> The Hebrew literally reads that the land devours its inhabitant (אֶרֶץ אֹכֶלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ). As Milgrom (1990), 107, has shown, the comparison with grasshoppers fits nicely. Firstly, the scouts compared themselves sizewise with insignificant insects, but also with, according to the law, the smallest edible creature (cf. Lev. 11:22). Thus there might be an allusion to the idea that they would be

order to destroy the people's hope. Calvin comments that we see here "as in a mirror, how impiety gradually gathers audaciousness in evil."<sup>929</sup> He is certainly right in pointing out that once emotions have gained momentum and all the shame of distorting the truth is cast aside, the scouts not only discredit God's words, but also deny that He will give to them the land.

In sum, initially the scouts reported of a good land with fortified cities and strong inhabitants; by verses 32–33 they have become semi-divine giants who in some sense "devour" its inhabitants. Thus Numbers 13:27–33 portrays a movement from a confirmation of the divine promise (goodness of land) to a position which is heavily prejudiced by fear and possibly wilfully distorted by lack of faith.

### 5.3.1.3 People's Reaction to the Report

As a result of the distorted report the people rise, lift their voices (cry), weep throughout the night and complain against Moses and Aaron (14:1–2). The narrative describes Israel's reaction in four seemingly progressive verbs attached to three different designations for all Israel.<sup>930</sup>

(1) וַתִּשָּׂא כָל־הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת־קוֹלָם  
(2) וַיִּבְכוּ הָעָם בְּלַיְלָה הַהוּא  
(3) וַיִּלֶּנוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Even if this accumulation of verbs and various designations for Israel is ascribed to different underlying sources, in its final form the sequence creates the impression of a development from fearful emotions to a calculated complaint against their leadership. The fact that YHWH promised to battle for them and to hand over the exceedingly good land is forgotten (13:2, Ex. 17:14). Their fear grew out of proportion, anxiety grew much larger than what they had desired so much. As a result of a fabricated report, Israel loses courage and falls "under the evil influence of their little faith" (cf. Heb. 3:12).<sup>931</sup> Thereby they reached a conclusion which surpasses the exaggerated evil report of the scouts.<sup>932</sup>

"Would that we had died (לֹד־מָתוּנוּ) in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died (לֹד־מָתוּנוּ) in this wilderness! 3 Why does the LORD bring us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 And they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt" (נִתְּנָה רֹאשׁ) (שׁוּבוּנָה מִצְרָיִם, 14:2–4).

In their despair, Israel had expressed regret for leaving Egypt before (cf. 11:5. Ex.

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devoured by the giants. Gray (1912), 151, suggests, that it does not so much refer to cannibalism, but refers to the infertility of the land. Another suggestion has been put forward by Noth (1966), 95, who thinks that it refers to war-minded inhabitants. He thereby points to a similar usage in Ezekiel 36:13–15, where אָכַל is used in the sense of destruction by war. It is possible that the scouts were referring to hostile and battle oriented inhabitants of enormous stature.

<sup>929</sup> Calvin (1855), 61.

<sup>930</sup> Dillmann (1886), 74–75.

<sup>931</sup> Von Rad (1960), 69.

<sup>932</sup> Barth (1958), 481.

17:3). On this occasion, however, for the first time it is more than a strong wish that the Exodus had never happened,<sup>933</sup> they were about to appoint a suitable leader to lead them back to the “house of slavery” (14:4). The double cohortative (give us a head [i.e. let us appoint a chief<sup>934</sup>]” ...and let us return...) underlines the people’s commitment to revolt. This according to Coats is nothing less than

the rejection of the principal event and theological affirmation which constitute Israel’s election: ‘I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage and redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgement. And I will take you for my people, and I will be your God’ (Ex. 6:6–7a).<sup>935</sup>

In other words, Israel has not only lost its heart but also implicitly despises YHWH and His previous acts of salvation. Thereby they reverse the Exodus and betray God’s plans for the future, they emerge as nothing less than traitors or obstacles in *Heilsgeschichte*. In a sense they decline all forthcoming promises,<sup>936</sup> and in particular the invitation into the land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>937</sup> In the light of this “anti-Exodus” (to use Levine’s term) one can appreciate why the rebellion in Numbers 13–14 is sometimes perceived as even a worse offence than the golden calf incident.

Moreover, Israel, not unlike in the golden calf narrative, seeks to replace God’s appointed mediator (cf. Ex. 32:1ff.). Rashi suggest that the word רָאשׁ in this context denotes that Israel intended to turn to idolatry.<sup>938</sup> Although at first sight there is no textual support for such an interpretation, it is peculiar that YHWH later on condemns Israel for its idolatry or whoredom (זָנוּת, 14:33). This expression is usually used in the context of idolatry. The prophets in particular use this word when Israel was engaging in forbidden cults or showed foreign alliance (e.g. Jer. 3:1, 9, Ezek. 22:20ff.). In Exodus 34:15 YHWH talks about the “prostitution to other gods” (זָנוּה). In the context of the scout narrative, זָנוּה does not easily fit Israel’s sin of rebellion and unbelief for there is no turning to anybody or anything else except to their self-centred fears.<sup>939</sup> One could possibly allow for the possibility that YHWH perceived Israel’s desire for new leadership as nothing less than whoredom, an unfaithfulness of the worst sort. Just as God equals the people’ murmuring against Moses, to murmuring against Himself (cf. 13:30, 14:2, 14:27), so He might take Israel’s betrayal of Moses personally as well.

<sup>933</sup> “וְלֹא” followed by perfect expresses a strong wish that something happened in the past. *GK*, §151e.

<sup>934</sup> This translation is supported by the LXX: ἀρχηγός.

<sup>935</sup> Coats (1968), 146–147.

<sup>936</sup> Von Rad (1960), 69.

<sup>937</sup> De Vaux (1972), 177 with reference to Cyril of Alexandria offers a memorable Christian typological analogy, by comparing the promised land with the heavenly kingdom and in particular with the heavenly banquet (Lk. 14:15–24). Cf. Olson (1996), 89.

<sup>938</sup> (1946), 66.

<sup>939</sup> Luther famously paraphrased the first commandment “you shall have no other gods before me” in his *Kleiner Katechismus* (1998), 64, as: “Wir sollen Gott über alle Dinge fürchten, lieben und vertrauen.” In other words, by fearing the inhabitants more than God, they commit idolatry. Cf. Olson (1996), 88.

Israel's blasphemous decision triggered a sequence of reactions. First, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces (14:5), then Joshua and Caleb rend their clothes in horror (14:6) and make a last attempt to summon Israel to their senses.

*i) The Reaction of the Faithful Leaders:* It is peculiar and unique that Moses and Aaron prostrate themselves before the assembly of the congregation (יִפְּלוּ מִנֶּשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, 14:5). Usually this gesture is a result of YHWH's appearance (cf. Ex. 34:8, Lev. 9:24, Nu. 16:22, 17:10, 20:6). On this occasion, however, God appears only when the people attempted to stone their leaders (14:10). Commentators do not agree about the significance of their prostration. If their prostration happened as a result of a divinely announced judgement, (Nu. 16:21–22, Deut. 9:18), then their intention would be clear, namely the pacifying of God and pleading on behalf of the sinful party:

Separate yourselves from this congregation, so that I may consume them in a moment. They fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?" (16:21–22)

In this instance falling on the face is an act of loyal opposition (cf. Josh. 7:6–7, Ezek. 11:13). They challenge God's intentions with the ultimate goal to protect those who did not participate in the rebellion. In Numbers 14, however, the judgement is pronounced after their prostration. Because the act of falling on one's face is often a sign of worship (cf. Ezek. 1:28), Wenham suggests that it is an expression of "their awe at the sacrilegious blasphemy of the people."<sup>940</sup> This interpretation is not completely satisfactory because one would rather expect a reaction such as Caleb's and Joshua's, who tear their cloth in frustration and terror of what has occurred and of what might happen. Since on most other occasions the inferior party falls before the greater party, de Vaulx suggests that Moses and Aaron fell down as victims. Being treated like sinners, they were afraid for their lives.<sup>941</sup> Similarly, Ramban thinks that the two leaders intended to propitiate the people. This might apply to Aaron, who according to the description of Exodus 32 submitted to the people's request to make a god, not, however, to Moses, who audaciously judged the people for making the golden calf. Moreover, when Moses' and Aaron's lives are actually endangered, as in the people's forthcoming attempt to stone them, there is no mention of prostration. Thus it appears unconvincing to think that they were pleading for mercy. In the light of YHWH's forthcoming intervention, it might be more likely to think of the leaders' reactions as a pouring out of distress before the Lord, and moving Him to interpose.<sup>942</sup> Calvin recognises the ambiguity of their action and comments: "nothing remained except to call upon God, yet in such a sort that the prayer should be made in the sight of all, in order to influence their minds."

<sup>940</sup> Wenham (1979), 121.

<sup>941</sup> De Vaulx (1972), 175, recognises, however, that the preposition לִפְנֵי may only denote a geographical description and not a reverential one.

<sup>942</sup> Keil (1865), 92 and Dillmann (1886), 75.

He carries on by saying that they did this not because they were afraid of the people, but because they were “anxious for the welfare of the people.”<sup>943</sup> Whether they intended to turn the people's minds is speculative, at least the self-abasement of the leaders before the people encouraged Caleb's and Joshua's response. The intriguing thing is that neither Moses nor Aaron articulates a prayer. This is unlike other instances. Thus there might be an element of alarming helplessness<sup>944</sup> and despair in their reaction. Muffs remarks:

There are times when the prophet, in spite of the severity of the situation, has nothing to say any more. In that hour of desperation, he utilises the final weapon in his armoury: the silent prayer of falling on his face.<sup>945</sup>

Remembering that the prostration comes as a result of the people's open rebellion and their decision to appoint a new leader, one could add an aspect which has not been explored yet. While in chapter 12, Moses' own family had challenged the legitimacy of his unique office (12:1–8), here the whole people call his position into question. On the previous occasion Moses did not defend or justify his status, but left his vindication entirely to God. Thus it seems possible to detect in the silent prostration a sense of trust that God will vindicate him once again. This might be endorsed by the reference to Moses' being *עָנִי* *מֵאֵד מְכֹלֵי הָאָדָם*. The word *עָנִי* in Numbers 12:3 is often translated with “meek” (cf. KJV, RSV). Meek in the sense of gentle or submissive, however, is problematic because it does not do justice to Moses' nature as depicted in this pericope and elsewhere. One cannot easily describe Moses as the meekest person on the earth and ascribe to him the charismatic leadership of Israel. What kind of virtue, Coats asks, belongs to Moses more than to any other person in the world?<sup>946</sup> The problem with finding a suitable rendering for *עָנִי* is connected with the fact that this is the only occurrence in the singular. All the other twenty occurrences of *עָנִי* are in the plural and are semantically related to *עָנִי*.<sup>947</sup> Both terms are frequently found in legal texts and the psalms, where it often refers to the poor and vulnerable (e.g. Ex. 22:24, Deut. 15:11, Ps. 69:33f. etc.), who are oppressed by the rich and powerful (cf. Isa. 3:14–15, 11:4, Am. 2:7). This semantic field, however, does not really fit into the Numbers passage which is about Moses' incomparable status. Another aspect of *עָנִי* which might contribute better to our understanding of Moses' character comes to expression in Deuteronomy 8:2–5 where the context of the verb *עָנָה* is Israel's forty years in the desert. According to the deuteronomic account it is a time when God humbled (*עָנָה*, Pi.) Israel in order to know what is in their hearts and ultimately in order to bring

<sup>943</sup> Calvin (1855), 66.

<sup>944</sup> Baentsch (1904), 524, remarks that in the priestly texts Moses and Aaron usually fall on their faces when they are helpless. Cf. Milgrom (1990), 108, Seebass (1995), 113.

<sup>945</sup> Muffs (1992), 32.

<sup>946</sup> Coats (1982), 100.

<sup>947</sup> Cf. Martin–Achard (1995<sup>5</sup>), 346. Against Rahlfs (1892), 73, who distinguishes between “sich in Knechtstellung befinden” (*עָנִי*) and “sich in Knechtstellung versetzen” (*עָנָה*).

them to a deeper understanding of Himself (Deut. 8:3). What is envisaged by the writer of Deuteronomy is a learning process. The imagery is that of a father disciplining his child through various hardships (Deut. 8:3–5), in order to teach a fundamental truth about life, that is trust in and obedience to God.

The meaning of “being humbled” is thus the painful learning and appropriating of a particular way of human living in relation to God, as particularly exemplified by Moses.<sup>948</sup>

Those who are being humbled or the עני fully rely on God, they look to God for help and provision (Deut. 8:3–4). There are a significant number of passages where “עני” does not refer to poverty and all the attributes attached to it in the literal sense, but to a spiritual attitude. For example in Psalm 22 עני occurs in synonymous parallelism with those who seek God (cf. Ps. 69:33).

The poor/afflicted (עניים) shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD! (Ps. 22:26)

The עני seek God for help and salvation (Pss. 76:9, 147:6) because they trust Him for their vindication (Ps. 149:4). Von Rad also detects this devout confidence in Moses' attitude in Numbers 12:

when his right to exercise this office is called into question, Moses does not speak on his own behalf; he leaves his vindication entirely to God.<sup>949</sup>

Thus it seems most likely that עני in the context of Numbers 12 emphasises Moses' trust and confidence in God (16:5). Just as Moses is eventually vindicated and his status reaffirmed in chapter 12, so it is possible that Moses, and this time Aaron as well, silently trust that YHWH will intervene and vindicate them anew as the chosen leaders.

Ashley points rightly to the suspense building up between Moses' and Aaron's prostration and the actual divine intervention in verse 10. This suspense is further intensified by the silence. Although the people's offence occurred in Numbers 14:1–4 the reader is left in anticipation until God intervenes in the last minute to save the leaders from being stoned to death. Because YHWH does not appear until verse 10, it is impossible to judge whether the purpose of their gesture is intercessory, in the sense of propitiating God's forthcoming wrath (cf. 17:6–15), or whether it is simply an act of obeisance before YHWH, anticipating divine judgement.<sup>950</sup> The narrative possibly leaves the intention of their action deliberately ambiguous. The suspense in the narrative marks the tense and emotional undertone of the situation and thus the exact significance of their action should not be pressed. After all, it is a common human phenomenon, when faced with extreme pressure, to

<sup>948</sup> Moberly (2000), 101.

<sup>949</sup> Von Rad (1960), 13. See also Schildenberger (1961), 72.

<sup>950</sup> Budd (1984), 156, understands their prostration as a means to “avert immediate wrath, holding up the flow of events, thereby giving Joshua and Caleb the opportunity to argue their case.” Olson (1996), 79, speaks of their action as partially awaiting the divine wrath and partially interceding for God's forgiveness.



act incoherently and irrationally. At the moment only absolute prostration before the living God will do. Thus it seems preferable to understand Moses' and Aaron's gesture as a mixture of many motives.<sup>951</sup>

What is less ambiguous, however, is the picture of Moses, the servant of God, who had been exalted by YHWH above the people and its leaders (12:6–8) is lying prostrate before them like a humiliated criminal and this very likely for their sake. Moreover, it is clear that Moses, and this time Aaron as well, put once more their lives at risk for sinful Israel.

The sequence of the narrative suggests that their action encouraged Caleb and Joshua to take a definite stand. Both tear their clothes as a sign of horror in the light of the scouts' blasphemous intention to choose a new leader and their refusal to enter the promised land. Quite possibly their action is also a sign of great distress at what might follow (cf. 2 Ki 22:11ff., Jonah 3:5ff.). This is the first time that Joshua is mentioned alongside Caleb.<sup>952</sup> Calvin suggests that on the previous occasion Joshua kept modestly silent because he wanted to prevent a tumultuous outbreak of dispute. He goes on, that although Caleb was the more audacious and outspoken one, Joshua's position as the minister of Moses remains clear. As the argument escalates, Joshua, being encouraged by Caleb's bravery joins him in an explicit act of condemnation of Israel's behaviour.<sup>953</sup> Although Calvin is well known for his commitment to a literal and careful reading of the text, in this instance he reads too much into Joshua's silence.<sup>954</sup> For example there is no textual warrant that Caleb was more audacious and outspoken than Joshua apart from this incident (cf. 11:28–29). Moreover, we will see that it is not the most natural reading to say that Joshua was encouraged by Caleb's bravery to take a stand. Keil suggests that Caleb was simply the first to speak out, but this mutual act of condemnation makes clear that Joshua was standing all along besides him.<sup>955</sup> Wenham, not dissimilar from Calvin, provides a more sophisticated and nuanced explanation as to why Joshua is only mentioned alongside Caleb in Numbers 14:6.

His (Joshua) silence hitherto makes good psychological and literary sense. Had he spoken out earlier in defence of the plan of conquest, his testimony could have been too easily dismissed as biased; he was Moses' personal assistant and therefore entirely associated with the Mosaic programme of exodus and conquest. But in the context of this programme his intervention is most appropriate here.<sup>956</sup>

Why? Because, according to Wenham, as Israel was about to elect a new leader to

<sup>951</sup> Ashley (1993), 247.

<sup>952</sup> Source critics, as we have noted, attribute this section usually to P, who was apparently interested in presenting a representative from Judah and Ephraim as loyal scouts, whereas the previous audacious call to go up into the promised land against the advice of the other scouts came only from Caleb (13:30, J).

<sup>953</sup> Calvin (1855), 61, 66.

<sup>954</sup> Cf. Calvin (1994<sup>2</sup>), xvii, xxii, cf. Kraus (1977), 14–18.

<sup>955</sup> Keil (1865), 90–91.

<sup>956</sup> Wenham (1979), 121.

take them back to Egypt (14:4), Joshua, as their prospective leader, had to step in. Moreover, the logic of the narrative suggests that Joshua, having seen that Moses, his master (cf. Ex. 33:7–11), openly condemned the people's behaviour, feels confirmed to take side with Caleb. Olson is cautious of Wenham's psychologising of the story in order to explain the apparent tension. He warns of bringing "more into the text than is there."<sup>957</sup> Furthermore, he thinks that it still does not "explain why Caleb and not Joshua is singled out later in Numbers 14:24."<sup>958</sup> It comes as a surprise that Olson who commends the final version of chapter 13–14 for its careful construction, full of suspense, irony, and dramatic dialogue,<sup>959</sup> expresses his reservation for an imaginative reading of Wenham's sort. Especially as Wenham's reading exhibits narrative features such as suspense and dramatic dialogue, whereas Olson does not even attempt to engage with the narrative effect of the Caleb, Joshua–Caleb, Caleb, Joshua–Caleb sequence (13:30, 14:6, 24, 30) other than to point to the textual history of the text.<sup>960</sup> Although Wenham psychologises the text, all of his assumption are taken from the surrounding canonical context.<sup>961</sup> One might even add that in the light of Numbers 11:28–29 where Moses reprimands Joshua's outspoken and over zealous behaviour when he expressed concern for his master's prophetic authority, it makes good sense that this time Joshua held back his opinion until Moses took a definite stand on the matter. Moreover, the immediate context provides a further clue. Until Numbers 14:4, the dispute was over the issue of land, whether it was conquerable or not, now the issue moved on to human and divine leadership. Thus it seems natural for Joshua as Moses' assistant and prospective leader to step in at this point of the story.<sup>962</sup>

Let us now briefly turn to Numbers 14:24 and try to address the effect created by the exclusion of Joshua from the first divine concession. Calvin already showed an acute awareness that the text moves from only Caleb to both Joshua and Caleb, a sequence which is to be repeated in the divine response (14:24, 30). He explains this pattern on the basis of Caleb's bravery, "he had, as it were, uplifted the banner, and had stood forth first to encourage Joshua."<sup>963</sup> God, according to Calvin, honours Caleb's courageous act by distinctively commending him first. To put it differently, the divine response corresponds to the sequence of Caleb and Joshua's speeches (13:30, 14:6–9). Hence one could say that the divine response corresponds to this pattern. There is, as we have already pointed out, a symmetry of correspondence in

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<sup>957</sup> Olson (1985), 132.

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>959</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>960</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>961</sup> Joshua is depicted as an audacious and loyal army leader against the Amalekites in the pre-Sinai wilderness tradition (Ex. 17:8–13). Moreover, Joshua serves Moses as an intimate assistant (Ex. 24:13, 33:11) before he is eventually appointed as his successor (27:18–23).

<sup>962</sup> Ashley (1993), 248.

<sup>963</sup> Calvin (1855), 79.

the final shape of the text, a symmetry which adds to the suspense of the story.<sup>964</sup> Moses is left in suspense as to what happens to Joshua his assistant, who according to Numbers 14:6–9 remains loyal to YHWH alongside Caleb. It will increasingly become clear that part of the nature of the narrative is to unfold things gradually, bit by bit.

We return to the actual content of the two loyal scouts' counter argument. For a start we note a close correspondence in their saying to that of the exaggerated report of the scouts. Both statements begin with the following words *לֵאמֹר הָאֲרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עָבְרָנוּ* (cf. 13:32, 14:7). Although both parties travelled the land and have seen the same things one concludes that it devours its inhabitants, the other that it is an exceedingly good land and that in the name of YHWH the opposition could be, by implication, "devoured" like bread (14:9).<sup>965</sup> In other words, the two faithful scouts do not content themselves with praising the goodness of the land anew. Nor do they allude to Israel's own military power as Caleb may have done in his previous attempt to avert the people's anxiety (13:30). This time they advance to the very issue at stake, namely whether YHWH is still on their side or not. Judging from the protasis (*אִם־חָפֵץ בָּנוּ יְהוָה*) Caleb and Joshua reckon that there is still a chance for Israel to return to God (14:8). But this chance is heavily dependent on Israel's attitude. Thus the heart of the problem is not the powerful inhabitants of the promised land, nor their fortified cities. It is a question of whether God is with Israel or not, whether He still delights in them or not. It is a question of whether faith is placed in the one who defeated the Egyptian army and performed many other signs in the wilderness (14:22, Deut. 1:30–31).<sup>966</sup> It is a question of whether trust is placed in the divine promise.

Introduced with an intensive clause which dominates the entire warning,<sup>967</sup> the two scouts admonish the people:

9 Only, do not rebel against the LORD (*אַךְ בִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם*); and do not fear the people (*אֶל־הָעָם*) of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them (*אֶל־הָעָם*, 14:9).

From the twofold admonition not to fear, it becomes clear that the root of the problem is anxiety and little faith. If Israel put their trust in their God, the conquest would not prove more difficult than eating bread<sup>968</sup> because Canaan's protection

<sup>964</sup> Ashley (1993), 248.

<sup>965</sup> Thus the narrative marks a new emphasis on the goodness and fertility of the land. This comes to expression in the reoccurring key idiom *וְהָלַב וְדָבַשׁ* (14:8, 13:27) and in the related expression *טוֹבָה הָאֲרֶץ מֵאֵד קִמָּד* (14:7).

<sup>966</sup> Von Rad (1953), 48, argues that Holy War provided the original context for the biblical demand on faith. "The fighter's chief duty was to submit confidently to Jahweh's way and not to be afraid in the face of the enemy's superior numbers—in a word, to have faith."

<sup>967</sup> Frequently the emphatic particle *אך* extends to the entire sentence See GKC § 100i, 153.

<sup>968</sup> Rashi (1946), 66. Ashley (1993), 250, points us to other passages where the imagery of eating up an enemy is employed (Cf. 24:8, Deut. 7:16, Jer. 10:25).

would be removed (v. 9).<sup>969</sup>

Although Caleb and Joshua assure the rebellious people that their fear is groundless and unreasonable, the people would not trust them, fear has already crippled Israel and made them deaf to anything. The situation gets worse and comes to a climax with the people's decision to stone their leaders. The text is not absolutely clear whether Moses and Aaron were also physically threatened. Moses certainly was violated on previous occasions (cf. Ex. 17:4).<sup>970</sup> In any case the scene has been described as that of a mutiny, a mob-lynching scene.<sup>971</sup> Wenham, based on legal texts such as Leviticus 20:2, 27, 24:23 and Numbers 15:36, argues that the people's attempt to stone Caleb and Joshua is more than a mob-lynching (cf. Ex. 17:4); it is a calculated and judicial death sentence for a major crime. Namely, false accusation of rebellion against the Lord and false witness.<sup>972</sup> Such a reading would be endorsed, if the reference to stoning were read as the execution of the judgement and the two previous utterances as the charge (14:3) and the defence (14:7–8) of those involved in the trial.<sup>973</sup> The two interpretations do not necessarily contradict each other, but are actually complementary. It could well be that the congregation who had judicial authority yielded to a kind of "lynch-judiciary."<sup>974</sup> In any case, it is clear that driven by existential fear the people attempted physically to destroy those who in the name of the divine promise reprimanded them to hold fast unto their God (a scenario which foreshadows a long history of suffering and persecution of those who would speak out for God with an uncompromising prophetic voice).<sup>975</sup> Again and again, to use Barth's words, Israel judged its divine judges in the person of faithful servants such as Caleb, Joshua, Moses, Jeremiah, suffering servant etc (cf.

<sup>969</sup> Literally: "their shadow has departed from over them (כָּרַח צִלָּם מֵעֲלֵיהֶם)." On a number of occasions צִלָּ is taken figuratively for protection or defence (cf. Pss. 91:1, 125:5 etc.). According to Isaiah 25:4, צִלָּ is one of the divine attributes to offer shelter and refuge. Thus in Numbers 14:9, the removal of the Canaanites' צִלָּ could either refer to the protection of their gods, (cf. Noth [1966], 96), who have to depart with the entrance of a stronger deity (Gray [1912], 153–154), or it could mean that YHWH removes His protective shadow from the Canaanites. The theological reason for this might be implied in Genesis 15:16, where it says that their sin has defiled the land. In other words, YHWH was prepared to destroy them when Canaan's measure of iniquity was full (cf. Lev. 18:25, 20:23, Deut. 9:4–5, cf. Dillmann [1886], 75). Since the Hebrew is ambiguous and the idea is not further developed in the text, we can contend ourselves with the general sense of it, which is sufficiently clear.

<sup>970</sup> Milgrom (1990), 109, suggests that אַהֲרֹן (14:10) refers either to Moses and Aaron (14:5) or to Joshua and Caleb (14:6–9). There is no evidence, however, that not all four leaders were threatened to be stoned. Since YHWH's glory appeared and prevented the execution of anybody, there is no practical relevance to this ambiguity.

<sup>971</sup> Baentsch (1903), 525, Davies (1995), 142.

<sup>972</sup> Wenham (1979), 122.

<sup>973</sup> Westermann (1970), 243.

<sup>974</sup> Cf. Seebass (1995), 115. It is interesting to juxtapose the act of stoning as depicted in Numbers 14:10 with that in chapter 15:32–36. In the later the execution was conducted after a thoughtful consideration of the law (Ex. 35:3, Nu. 15:36) and after a consultation with God (Nu. 15:34–35). Whereas in the former case, judgement emerged out of anger and threat.

<sup>975</sup> See Westermann (1985<sup>2</sup>), 196–197.

Acts 7).<sup>976</sup> The people's attempt to kill their leaders obviously comes as their final word on the issue of God's promise and God's appointed servants.

As a result of the two loyal scouts' report the people were about to stone their leaders, had not YHWH intervened at the right time before all the people. In the light of the theophany reported in verse 10 one might expect a divine address or a divine act of some sort. Instead a kind of suspense is created through YHWH's dialogue with Moses (14:13ff.) and the outcome of YHWH's appearance becomes only clear after the prayer in verses 20ff. and 26ff. We have noted that according to source critics the plot would make sense without the human–divine dialogue.<sup>977</sup> Thus it seems worthwhile to explore the how Moses' prayer affects its context.

#### 5.3.1.4 YHWH's Dialogue with Moses

We have seen that the immediate context of Moses' prayer, on the one side, is that of Israel's rebellion against its leaders and the announcement of the divine punishment (14:1–12), and on the other side, that of a twofold divine response (14:20–35), followed by a divine punishment (14:37). Thus the prayer is sandwiched in between a sin–judgement order. Without the human–divine dialogue, it would be an account of rebellion and judgement. This is not to say that the prayer disturbs the flow of the story, rather it is an acknowledgement that it brings a change of perspective.<sup>978</sup> The prayer or human–divine dialogue, as Balentine observes, “creates a literary break between the introduction and the conclusion and thus an interruption in the cause–consequence sequence.”<sup>979</sup> We have noted that the prayer begins right after the glory of YHWH appeared at the tent of meeting (v. 11), the place at which one would expect the divine resolution to be implemented. Westermann has rightly pointed to a regular pattern in connection with the appearance of YHWH's כבוד in the wilderness tradition.<sup>980</sup> YHWH's כבוד appears at the tent of meeting (cf. 14:10, 16:19, 17:7, 20:6), addresses Moses (and Aaron), and brings about an act of judgement, nowhere, however, does one find a prayer of this nature and extent. This strongly suggests that special attention should be paid to the uniqueness and intention of the prayer.

*i) The Effect of Moses' Prayer:* One does not need to subscribe to the view that Moses' prayer is an interpolation in order to note that the text itself creates a literary break. This change of scene raises the question of the theological function of the prayer in its wider narrative. What does it contribute to the development of the narrative? In what way does it supplement or modify the final form? Why, if at all,

<sup>976</sup> Barth (1958), 482.

<sup>977</sup> Cf. Seebass (1995), 91.

<sup>978</sup> BHS, based on some manuscripts, marks verses 11–25 as a paragraph by putting a “פ” (*petûḥā*) in front of verse 11 and at the end of verse 25.

<sup>979</sup> Balentine (1993), 132.

<sup>980</sup> Westermann (1970), 240–245, cf. § 5.4.2.

was Moses' prayer put there, or why was it left there? Following our observations one can say that the sequence "sin–judgement" is precisely interrupted

at the point where one would expect to find the execution of divine justice...Within this "interruption" fundamental questions concerning divine intentions are raised and ultimately resolved with an assurance of God's forgiveness. Following on the heels of this prayer the narrative then returns to understand it as a judgement tempered with divine love and limited by divine commitment to justice and fair play...the narrative moves on to its conclusion, a conclusion which is presented as having emerged out of their joint deliberations.<sup>981</sup>

We have already indicated our disagreement with the notion that Moses appeals to YHWH's justice and to "fair play" (cf. § 1.2.5, 4.2.3); apart from that, Balentine's observations strike us as very suggestive, because from a literary perspective, the outcome or the divine resolution, as stated after Moses' intercessory prayer, is presented as the direct result of the divine–human dialogue.

The final form of the text conveys the sense that YHWH's intention to disinherit all Israel evoked Moses' prayer (14:11), as a result of which a different divine verdict is pronounced. Although YHWH's response still contains a stern judgement, in the light of YHWH's original intention to destroy the entire people, it comes to look like an act of grace.<sup>982</sup> Nevertheless, rebellion will end in punishment, yet the motives for this punishment have become transparent through Moses' dialogue with God. The reader is assured that punishment is not a legalistic and hot tempered execution, but that the final verdict grew out of an intense dialogue with Moses, the loyal mediator. Moreover, it comes as a kind of guarantee that the judgement is well pondered, that the critical issues have been raised, and appeal to YHWH's former promises, and His merciful and gracious nature have been made. The overall picture which emerges from the final form of the narrative is that of a mature theological reflection on the complex interplay between Israel's sin, God's merciful and gracious character, and Moses' intercessory prayer.

### 5.3.1.5 YHWH's Twofold Response

The complexity of the divine verdict is further unfolded in YHWH's twofold response.<sup>983</sup> Both parts of the divine response are framed by a divine oath (formula, *הִיאֲנִי*, followed by *אִם/לֹא*, 14:21, 23, 28, 30). The substance of the oath is

<sup>981</sup> Balentine (1989), 602.

<sup>982</sup> Lohfink (1960), 118, speaks of a "Gnadenerweis."

<sup>983</sup> The opening verse of the second part of YHWH's response (14:26) is echoed back in verse 11 (with the difference that Aaron is also addressed in the second response. This might imply that Aaron and the Levites are also exempt from the judgement [cf. 1:3, 47–48, 14:29]).

(14:11) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עַד־כִּמְשֶׁה יִנְאָצְנִי הָעָם הַזֶּה

(14:26) וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר

While the double interrogative *עַד־כִּמְשֶׁה* which characterised the divine complaint in verse 11 is echoed in verse 27 with the exclamation *עַד־כִּמְתִּי*.

(14:27) עַד־כִּמְתִּי לְשִׁעָרָה הָרְעָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר הִקְמָה מִלִּינִי עָלַי

These structural observations reveal clear verbal and conceptual links across the alleged source divisions.

punishment, that is death in the wilderness for all אנשים (vv. 23, 29). The content of the divine judgement is extended and clarified in the second response. In the first announcement YHWH informs Moses that none of the men who have seen the divine glory in Egypt and in the wilderness and yet tested and disobeyed YHWH will see the promised land (14:21–23). They are all to return to the wilderness (v. 25). Only Caleb and his descendants will eventually inherit the land (v. 24). A closer reading of YHWH's first response, however, raises a number of unanswered questions. Since there is no mentioning of destruction by plague anymore (cf. Nu. 14:12), Moses was seemingly left in suspense as to what exactly happens to the people who have despised YHWH. Has his prayer achieved anything? Moreover, the question arises of who exactly is affected by the judgement. So far Moses only knows of all the men who have tested and despised God all the way up from Egypt (cf. 14:22–23). Does this include women and children as well? How about Joshua, his assistant, who according to Numbers 14:6–9 remained loyal to YHWH alongside Caleb?<sup>984</sup> I seems to me that the second part of YHWH's response fills out these uncertainties bit by bit. It will hopefully become evident that YHWH's second address sheds considerable light on the first verdict. In other words, it will clarify as to how exactly the punishment is envisaged and who is affected by it.

For clarity sake we recall YHWH's first response and juxtapose it with the answer providing parallel.

<i>First Response (14:20–24)</i>	<i>Second Response (14:26ff.)</i>
(20) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה (אֶל-מֹשֶׁה)...	(26) וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן...
(21) וְאֵלֶּם חֵי-אֲנִי...	(28) אָמַר אֱלֹהִים חֵי-אֲנִי...
	(29) בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יִפְּלוּ פְגָרֵיכֶם
(22) כִּי כָל-הָאֲנָשִׁים הָרְאִים	וְכָל-פְּגָרֵיכֶם לְכָל-מִסְפָּרְכֶם מִבְּנֵי עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה
אֶת-כְּבֹדִי וְאֶת-אַחֲתִי אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי	וְנִמְעָלָה אֲשֶׁר הִלִּינְתֶּם עָלַי
בְּמִצְרָיִם וּבַמִּדְבָּר וַיִּנָּסוּ אֹתִי זֶה עֹשֶׁר פְּעָמִים	
וְלֹא שָׁמַעוּ בְּקוֹלִי	
(23) אִם-יֵרְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר	(30) אִם-יִסְתַּחֲסוּ חֲבָאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָם	נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶת-יְדִי
וְכָל-מִנְאֲצִי לֹא יֵרְאוּהָ	לְשֹׁכֵן אֲחֵיכֶם בָּהּ
(24) וְעַבְדִּי כָלֹב	כִּי אִם-כָּלֹב בְּרִיָּפָנָה וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נוּן
עָקַב הָיְתָה רוּחַ אֲחֵרָת עִמּוֹ וַיִּמְלֵא אֲחֵרֵי	
	(31) וַיִּסְפְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר אִמְרַתֶּם לְבֹי יְהוָה
וַהֲבִיאתִי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בָּא שָׁמָּה וְזָרְעוּ וַיִּירְשֻׁנָּה	וַהֲבִיאתִי אֹתָם וְזָרְעוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר מְאֻסָּתָם בָּהּ

According to the first response, Moses does not know what exactly happens to the

<sup>984</sup> Even if one attributes this response to J, who was not concerned with Joshua, one must admit that the response implicitly says that the punishment of not seeing the land concerns only the men of the wilderness generation and does not include the children. Olson (1985), 136, argues that the "J account itself seems to leave the question of who will not inherit the land open or at least ambivalent."

הָאֲנָשִׁים. He only knows that they will not see the land (v. 23). Moreover, he is in need of clarification of who these אֲנָשִׁים are. With these ambiguities in mind we turn to the second column.

Verse 29 not only sheds light on the identity of הָאֲנָשִׁים, but also clarifies the verdict. The הָאֲנָשִׁים refers to everybody included in the census from age twenty onwards who murmured against God. Although the term הָאֲנָשִׁים is still ambiguous at this point, since it could be taken as generic for adult person rather than exclusively for men, it becomes clear from verse 30 onwards that the punishment includes all adults except for Caleb and Joshua (14:29–30). The entire adult generation is doomed to remain in the wilderness until they die of a natural death.<sup>985</sup>

Looking back at the sequence of Caleb's and Joshua's interventions, we noticed that first Caleb (13:30) and later both, Caleb and Joshua (14:6ff.), speak up on behalf of YHWH. The divine response follows this order. First, Caleb is commended for his faithfulness (14:24) and then both loyal scouts are awarded alongside each other (14:30). Thus the careful reader recognises not only a progression within the narrative but also a symmetry.<sup>986</sup> The second divine response corresponds further to this pattern. With great literary skill and with considerable irony it is said that those who wished to die in Egypt or in the wilderness, rather than to enter the promised land (14:2) are now condemned to do so just as they wished (כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבְרָתָם בְּאֶזְנֵי כֵן) (אֶעֱשֶׂה לָכֶם, 14:28–29, 32). Continuing the ironic tone one could say that both the two faithful scouts and the people receive from YHWH what they wished in the first place, whereas all who were afraid to fall (נָפַל) by the sword of the enemy (14:3) are now destined to fall (נָפַל) by divine judgement in the wilderness (14:29, 31). Milgrom develops this correspondence of irony further:

Those who made Moses and Aaron fall in fear of being stoned by the people will fall in death (14:5, 29, 32)...In the meantime, only the leaders whom they wished to depose will be saved (14:4, 12), whereas those who would rather return to Egypt will now have their wish, only to die on the way (14:4, 25). In time, those who feared to die by the sword have their fears realised (14:3, 43), those who did not believe that "God is with us" now discover that He is not (14:9, 42–43), and those who would have killed the faithful scouts are killed by the enemy (14:10, 45).<sup>987</sup>

What is more, in the first response we read only of Caleb and his offspring, whereas, in the second response Moses is instructed to proclaim that all children are to be brought into the land. Their children, whom they were afraid would be taken booty will eventually be brought into the land (14:3, 31). We shall see in our next section that the sentence of the children suffering for the sins of their parents stands in some sense as a commentary on YHWH's sovereign attribute: "visiting the iniquity of fathers upon the children up to the fourth generation."

In sum, we have seen that chapters 13–14 are saturated with conceptual and

<sup>985</sup> Verse 35 speaks inclusively of כָּל־הָעֵדָה הָרָעָה and Numbers 32:13 reads: "all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD had disappeared."

<sup>986</sup> Ashley (1993), 261.

<sup>987</sup> Milgrom (1990), 388–389, cf. Olson (1985), 147–148.



verbal links. Although some tensions remain, particularly with regard to the extent of the territory which had been reconnoitred, we have shown that overall the final form of the text exhibits ample evidence that the scout narrative is carefully composed. With regard to the twofold divine response which looked at first sight a bit odd, we have seen that it is so well integrated into the story that what initially looked like a contradiction, may actually serve a rhetorical purpose. The flow of the chapter is constructed in such a way as to build up suspense and dramatic dialogue,<sup>988</sup> while gradually clarifying the nature of Israel's fate.

Given the nature of the story, an account about the representatives of Judah and Israel, it is possible that there were once compelling political or religious reasons for fusing different traditions and sources. Regardless of what the pre-history of Numbers 13–14 was, the received form of Numbers 13–14 does not sustain the kind of polemical reading suggested by Coats, because it is clear that the text insists that both, Caleb, the representative of the South, and Joshua, the representative from the North, are the bearers of the divine promise. In other words, the canonical form gives the impression that the divine promise continues to be valid for people from all of Israel. Since the exact history behind the text is no longer clear, it discourages from any effort to allocate it to a particular historical or social setting. The end product is a narrative of archetypal nature, encompassing south and north, which is no longer about Caleb only, or about claiming religious superiority on the basis of ancestral roots, but it is about those who rebel against God and those who trust His promises, it is about human response to the divine promise, and it is about a mediator evoking divine grace and mercy over judgement.

#### 5.4 Moses' Intercessory Prayer and God's Response

Before we look closer at the dynamics of Moses' prayer, it is important briefly to locate Israel's second sin story in its wider context. Not only shall it become evident that the canon presents Israel's sin at Kadesh as the climax of a long period of murmuring and rebellion, but also that Moses' outstanding intercessory attempt to persuade YHWH to be merciful and true to His name is presented in close proximity to Numbers 12:6–8, an unparalleled statement of Moses' archetypal prophetic status.

##### 5.4.1 *The Context*

It is to the credit of Olson, who analysed the structure of the book of Numbers, that the centrality of the scout narrative in Numbers became particularly evident.<sup>989</sup>

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<sup>988</sup> Cf. Olson (1985), 75.

<sup>989</sup> Olson (1985).

Without going into details of his thesis, he argues that the book contains two major parts (chs. 1–25, and chs 26–36).<sup>990</sup> Each part begins with a census list. They

serve to divide the book of Numbers into two separate generations of God's holy people on the march. One generation ends in failure and death in the wilderness (Numbers 1–25). A second arises, whose end is not yet determined but whose perspective is one which is poised on the edge of the promised land (Numbers 26–36).<sup>991</sup>

He expounds convincingly how the scout narrative is linked to the census lists in chapter 1 and 26.<sup>992</sup> All the initially numbered “from twenty years old and upward” (מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְיָמָעֵלָה) in Numbers 1:3, 18, 45, are those who rebelled against God and were condemned to die in the wilderness.

“As I live,” says the LORD...your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and of all your number, numbered from twenty years old and upward, (מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְיָמָעֵלָה) who have murmured against me (14:28–29).

Moreover, there is an implicit connection with the mustering of all who are “able to go to war” (1:3, 45) and the scout account. Moses and Aaron enrolled an enormous army of over 600,000 men.<sup>993</sup> What is this army for? Since Israel did not encounter any military opposition in the vicinity of Sinai, a safe guess would be for the conquest of the promised land. From this perspective, the scout account would be their first military expedition.<sup>994</sup> With regard to the second census list in Numbers 26, Olson refers to the concluding verses of the second census:

63 These were those enrolled by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who enrolled the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho. 64 Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had enrolled the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. 65 For the LORD had said of them, “They shall die in the wilderness.” Not one of them was left, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun (26:63–65).

Verse 64 clearly looks back to the first census, while verse 65 refers to YHWH's verdict pronounced to the rebellious people in Numbers 14:28–30 and at the same time confirms that with the new census of the new generation His punishment has come to a fulfilment. The scout narrative is once more echoed in a significant way in Numbers 32:6–15, where Moses challenges the new generation not to commit the same sin as their fathers in the wilderness. In other words, the scout incident came to stand as a benchmark against which later potential rebellions are measured.

#### 5.4.1.1 *The Climax of the Murmuring Narratives*

Another important indicator which points to the pivotal position of Numbers 13–14 is the fact that the narrative comes as the climax of three immediately preceding

<sup>990</sup> See Wenham (1997), 18–21 and Lee (2000), 201–220, for an evaluation of Olson's structure of the book.

<sup>991</sup> Olson (1985), 83.

<sup>992</sup> Ibid., 138–144.

<sup>993</sup> See Wenham (1993<sup>2</sup>), 60–74, and Ashley (1993), 60–66 on the problem with large numbers.

<sup>994</sup> Olson (1985), 139.

rebellions of smaller magnitude. On the first two occasions, Israel complains about the harsh desert conditions (cf. 11:1–3, 4–35),<sup>995</sup> while on the third instance, Miriam and Aaron question Moses' unique status (12:1–16). Back in chapter 11, the rebellious attitude possibly started with the riffraff (11:1, 4),<sup>996</sup> progressed via the Israelites (11:4ff.) to its leaders (12:1–3), and finally took hold of both, the people and some of its leaders (14:1–10).<sup>997</sup> Thus it could be argued, that Israel's rebellion as depicted in Numbers 13–14 comes as the climax of a progressive movement of complaints and rebellion.

The accumulation of the key word of the murmuring narratives; לִין clearly underlines the climactic position to Numbers 13–14. לִין and its cognates occur, with the exception of Joshua 9:18, Psalm 59:16, only in the wilderness narratives (i.e. Ex. 15–17, Nu. 14–17). Thus the designation “murmuring narratives,” which is obviously derived from this root, seems justified. The root appears 15 times as a verb and 8 times as a noun. Only in the scout narrative on its own the word occurs 7 times (cf. 14:2, 27, 29, 36). Nowhere else in the “murmuring narratives” arises such a noteworthy accumulation of the word, except for Exodus 16 where it appears 6 times (cf. Ex. 16:2, 7, 8, 11).<sup>998</sup> We have already seen, however, that in the pre-Sinai context, the canon presents the reason for the people's murmuring as understandable because of lack of water and food (cf. Ex. 15:24, 16:2, 7, 17:3). While in the post-Sinai context and in particular in the scout narrative, the murmuring is perceived as rebellion against YHWH. Fear of the Canaanites gave rise to it, but at its roots is unbelief in God and misconception of YHWH's history of deliverance.<sup>999</sup> The people's sin results in a vicious attempt to stone their leaders.

#### 5.4.1.2 Israel's Sin and the Appearance of God

YHWH's כְּבוֹד appeared in the sight of Israel at the tent of meeting when Israel was about to stone their leaders (14:10b).

וּכְבוֹד יְהוָה נִרְאָה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The MT reads literally that YHWH's כְּבוֹד appeared *in* the tent of meeting. Since this would stand in tension with the fact that the כְּבוֹד appeared to all Israelites, it

<sup>995</sup> Although the exact reason for Israel's complaint in verses 1–3 is not stated, one could assume in the light of the preceding account (10:29–36) that it has to do with marching in the wilderness.

<sup>996</sup> Riffraff or rabble seems to be a good rendering of the unique Hebrew word אֶסְפָּרָף. See BDB, 63, HAL renders it with “a bunch of vagabonds and equals it with עָרָב, a term which refers very likely to the non-Israelites, or the mixed crowd who joined the Hebrews on the Exodus (Ex. 12:38). According to Rabbinic tradition these non-Israelites dwelled at the margins of the camp. Thus rabbies connect it with the consuming fire at the outskirts of the camp (11:1). Cf. Milgrom (1990), 83. Even if this interpretation was not correct, on the basis of Numbers 11:4, one could say that it was the rabble who encouraged the Israelites to complain. So Snaith (1967<sup>d</sup>), 227.

<sup>997</sup> Olson (1985), 144.

<sup>998</sup> See Schunck (1995), 509–512, for statistical details.

<sup>999</sup> Knierim (1994<sup>5</sup>), 871, puts it memorably: “Die Rebellion gründet in einer totalen Fehlinterpretation der Befreiungsgeschichte als Verderbensgeschichte.”

has often been assumed that the כבוד settled at the entrance of the tent as is probably the case in Numbers 16:19, 20:6.<sup>1000</sup> The LXX solves the tension differently by saying that YHWH's glory appeared in a cloud above the tent (καὶ ἡ δόξα κυρίου ὤφθη ἐν νεφέλῃ ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου).<sup>1001</sup> On the basis of this and probably because YHWH's glory is often closely associated with the cloud, BHS proposes to add בענן על־אֹהֶל. At Mount Sinai the essence of YHWH's כבוד seems to be perceived as the blazing fiery substance wrapped by the cloud.<sup>1002</sup> The same phenomenon is encountered at the tabernacle (the "mobile" Sinai), where the cloud covers the tent, whereas the כבוד dwells in it (Ex. 40:34–35, 1 Ki. 8:10, Ezek. 1:4).<sup>1003</sup> In Numbers 14:10, according to the MT, however, there is no mention of a cloud, nor is there anything in the text which suggest that YHWH's כבוד is manifested in a fiery appearance.<sup>1004</sup> Neither is there any reference to a blazing and fiery appearance of YHWH's glory in any of the other theophanies in the wilderness (e.g. 12:5, 16:19, 20:6). Although one could assume it on the basis of other texts which speak of YHWH's appearance in judgement, it is safer to assume that in this account YHWH's כבוד is manifested in a different way, maybe through an overwhelming sense of majesty and glory.<sup>1005</sup> Based on the secular usage of כבוד/כבד (e.g. heaviness, importance) Preuß suggests: "Ist vom göttlichen kabod die Rede, so ist auch damit eine gewisse "Wucht" seiner Erscheinung gedacht."<sup>1006</sup> According to Westermann, it was Rendtorff who has first noticed that the OT distinguishes between two groups of texts which depict the appearance of YHWH's כבוד. One is associated with Israel's cult and one with the wilderness traditions.

In der einen erscheint der *kebod jhwh*, um Jahwes Macht gegenüber dem murrenden Volk durchzusetzen und seine Beauftragten zu schützen (Ex 16,10; Nu 14,10; 16,19; 17,7, 20,6 vgl. Lev 10,3, Ex 14,4; 17,18 verbal). In der zweiten Gruppe von Texten bleibt die Erscheinung des Kabod ganz im kultischen Bereich.<sup>1007</sup>

Westermann has refined this observation by pointing out that the wilderness narratives in which YHWH's כבוד appears follow all a fivefold pattern (Ex 16:10, Nu. 14:10, 16:19, 17:7, 20:6). i) The occasion: murmuring or mutiny, ii) localisation at the tent of meeting, iii) appearance of YHWH's כבוד, iv) YHWH's word to Moses (and Aaron), v) and finally an act of YHWH.<sup>1008</sup> On all occasions the

<sup>1000</sup> See Budd (1984), 157.

<sup>1001</sup> Same in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

<sup>1002</sup> Cf. von Rad (1983<sup>2</sup>), 240.

<sup>1003</sup> Weinfeld (1995), 31, states that in P and Ezekiel the cloud belongs inseparably to the theophany as a "cloak to protect against the mortal danger of viewing the deity...Only once, at the consecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 9:23), does God reveal himself to Israel without such protection."

<sup>1004</sup> Against Gray (1912), 154.

<sup>1005</sup> Westermann (1970), 245, speaks of a "unausweichliche Majestät oder Herrlichkeit," which can, but must not, manifest itself in a fiery appearance.

<sup>1006</sup> Preuß (1991), 191.

<sup>1007</sup> Rendtorff (1963), 30.

<sup>1008</sup> Westermann (1970), 240–245, seems to miss the fact that in Exodus 16:10 there is no mention of the tent of meeting, YHWH's glory appeared in a cloud in the desert. The absence of the tent of

appearance of YHWH's כבוד brings about a turning of a threatening situation and is associated with the tent of meeting (אהל מועד). We have already encountered the importance and the ambiguity attached to the tent of meeting in Exodus 33. The tent of meeting as depicted in Exodus 33, Numbers 11 and 12 is not to be mixed up with the tabernacle in the middle of the Israelite camp. On these occasions the texts are clear that the tent is located outside the camp for oracular purposes, which is visited by the divine cloud (no mention of כבוד) whenever necessary (Ex. 33:7–11, Nu. 11:16–30, 12:4–10). In Numbers 14 and all the other references where YHWH's כבוד settles on the tent of meeting, however, the reader is left wondering whether YHWH appeared outside or in the middle of the camp on the tabernacle, which is also called the tent of meeting (cf. 1:53, 2:2, 3:7, 25, 38 etc.). The tent of meeting (i.e. tabernacle) in the camp was used for cultic purposes and provides the dwelling place of God (Ex. 29:45).<sup>1009</sup> Thus there was no access to its inner rooms (e.g. Ex. 40:34–38). Although some scholars have tried to argue that they are the same tent,<sup>1010</sup> it is more likely that the final form of the text witnesses to two traditions which have deliberately been fused.<sup>1011</sup> Both tents reflect the Sinai event in several ways. They are places set apart for revelation, places where YHWH would descend (ירד) in order to speak through His mediator to Israel (cf. Ex. 19–24, 33:7ff, 34:35).<sup>1012</sup> The tabernacle, however, assumed some additional functions. Although Westermann comments on the priestly writer's perception of the tent of meeting, what he says could also be taken as a reflection on the final form of Numbers 14–20.

Er (P) lokalisiert das Geschehen jeweils am Zelt, um damit zu sagen, daß alles kultische wie geschichtliche Wirken Jahwes an seinem Volk jeweils vom heiligen Ort ausgeht und vermittelt wird durch seinen dort wirkenden Mittler. Der heilige Ort wird zum Zentrum allen Geschehens. Hier antwortet Gott auf die Klagen des Volkes und kündigt die Rettung aus kreatürlicher Not an, aus Hunger (Ex 16) und Durst (Nu. 20); hier bietet er dem unschuldig Bedrängten Asylschutz und Hilfe (Nu. 14,10); hier erteilt er Rechtsentscheid durch Gottesurteil, wo Rechtsanspruch gegen Rechtsanspruch steht (Nu. 16); von hier aus läßt er Sühne schaffen, um der tödlichen Seuche unter dem Volk Einhalt zu gebieten.<sup>1013</sup>

Having underlined the importance these texts attach to the tent of meeting, it should come as no surprise that YHWH's glory appeared there in the sight of everybody when the enraged mob is about to stone its leaders. The perfect timing and the context suggest that with the appearance of the divine כבוד comes both, a sense of

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meeting, however, is expected since it is only later on that Moses is instructed to pitch a tent outside the camp and call it אהל מועד (Ex. 33:7).

<sup>1009</sup> Struppe (1988), 236: "Jahwe hat sich an das Zelt gebunden, er wohnt dort—aber so, daß er je neu rettend und richtend in der Geschichte der Gemeinde erfahrbar wird. Die Aussage vom Kommen und Erscheinen Gottes bilden mit der "Wohnvorstellung" eine spannungsgeladene Einheit." Contra von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 247–254, who argues that YHWH does not dwell in the tent, but only chooses to appear there.

<sup>1010</sup> De Vaux (1972), 136–151.

<sup>1011</sup> Because of the complexity attached to the tent of meeting, it is best to determine its function in context. For a more detailed discussion see Childs (1974), 590–591, and Milgrom (1990), 386–387.

<sup>1012</sup> Cf. Blum (1990), 62, on the contextual function of the tent of meeting.

<sup>1013</sup> (1970), 244.

relief to those who have counted on divine loyalty and justice, and a sense of threat to those who did not trust and accept YHWH's rule and order.<sup>1014</sup> In other words, YHWH's appearance brings both rescue to His endangered servants and judgement to the party which intended to judge its leaders.<sup>1015</sup>

Lack of trust in God, dismissal of the promised land, and on the top of that violent disregard for the chosen leaders evoked YHWH's wrath. In despairing words, reminiscent of the lament psalms (cf. Ps. 13), YHWH expresses His anger to Moses, His servant.

עֲדָאֲנָה יְנֹאצְנִי הָעַם הַזֶּה  
וְעֲדָאֲנָה לֹא־יֵאֱמִינוּ בִּי  
בְּכָל הָאֲחֻזּוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ (14:11)

YHWH's speech is phrased in a double question. The repetition of penetrating interrogatives is frequently found in the OT and serves usually to underline complaint and accusation (cf. Ex. 32:11–12, Nu. 11:11). The repetition of עֲדָאֲנָה however, is only found in Psalm 13:2–3 (where the “עֲדָאֲנָה–question” appears four times within two verses!). In the lament, the psalmist expresses perplexity about how God could bring such profound suffering upon the one praying, when YHWH has previously done such great things. Gerstenberger is certainly right when he pointed out that the lament is an *Anklage*, a statement of protest and complaint, rather than *Klage*, which connotes self-pity and resignation.<sup>1016</sup> The lamenting period is not only a time of honest emotional outbursts, but it is also a time of suspicion and serious reflection on the way things were.<sup>1017</sup> Although the עֲדָאֲנָה and “לִמָּה–question” are primarily rhetorical question which do not necessarily seek an answer, they certainly seek to provoke a response. How far the human lament serves as an analogy to understand God's anger and possibly pain, remains to be explored in the following pages.

The OT attributes a whole range of human emotions to God. It is undisputed that that they should be understood metaphorically. However, rather than rejecting it as anthropomorphic human projection, the biblical interpreter ought to take this figurative language seriously and as “reality depicting.”<sup>1018</sup> This does not mean that YHWH gets angry and frustrated in exactly the same way as humans do. There is a fine edge between referring to God and defining Him. The metaphor which is often compared with a lens gives significant insights into the nature of God, without falling into the trap of literally identifying with God. This would be idolatry.

There is another important dimension to the interpreter who subscribes to the

<sup>1014</sup> Struppe (1988), 232–233.

<sup>1015</sup> The polarity of salvation and judgement which seems to be intrinsic to the appearance of YHWH's כְּבוֹד is, as we have argued, also inherent in YHWH's name as proclaimed in Exodus 34:6–7.

<sup>1016</sup> Gerstenberger (1963), 393–408.

<sup>1017</sup> See Brueggemann's (1995), 3–33, creative engagement with the lament.

<sup>1018</sup> See Thiselton (1996<sup>2</sup>), 315, Fretheim (1984), 7.

outlook and assumptions of Scripture. From the perspective of Scripture, God's revelation of His nature, or the divine utterances, are the ultimate reality, whereas the human response is only secondary. In other words, the God of the OT is not a human projection but a "living God" who entered actively into Israel's history. This, as von Rad observes, has strong implications for our way of talking about God:

Tatsächlich hat sich Israel auch Jahwe selbst menschengestaltig vorgestellt, aber diese uns geläufige Formulierung läuft nun, alttestamentlich gedacht, in falscher Richtung, denn man kann im Sinne des Jahweglaubens nicht sagen, Israel habe Gott anthropomorph gesehen, sondern umgekehrt, es hat den Menschen für theomorph gehalten.<sup>1019</sup>

Thus biblical language which depicts YHWH in human terms is not mere anthropomorphism, but as Childs writes, "a truthful reflection of the free decision of God to identify with his creation in human form and yet to remain God."<sup>1020</sup> With these thoughts in mind we turn now to the angry God who reveals His troubled Spirit to Moses.

The divine question *עַד-אֵנָה* makes clear that the divine patience has reached its limit. The divine accusation and subsequent punishment are clearly linked with the people's attitude. They have spurned (*נָאץ*) God and expressed lack of faith (*לֹא-אֲמִינִי*) in God's power (v. 11b, cf. v. 22). Scholars rightly point to the significance of the word *נָאץ*.<sup>1021</sup> In the Piel the verb *נָאץ* refers without exception to the despising, spurning, or condemning of God, or His acts.<sup>1022</sup> Sakenfeld helpfully refers to Deuteronomy 31:20 in order to underline the seriousness of the offence:

20 For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I promised on oath to their ancestors...they will turn to other gods and serve them, despising me (*וַיִּנְאֹצוּ*) and breaking my covenant.

In this divine speech addressed to Moses, despising YHWH is aligned with breaking the covenant. Despising God has severe consequences and results often in being cut off from the covenant relationship (cf. 1 Sam. 2:17–34). And indeed, a punishment of destruction is announced in the following verse. But before we move on to the judgement we ought to understand better the nature of Israel's sin.

The people have despised YHWH and would not believe in Him in spite of all His salvific and miraculous signs (*אֵימֹת*) which He has performed from Egypt and throughout the wilderness journey. God's mighty acts, such as the plagues and the Exodus were not merely to inspire fear among the Egyptians and to establish YHWH's supreme rule over Pharaoh (cf. Ex. 7:3, 8:19), but they are also meant to teach Israel to listen and trust YHWH as their Lord (cf. Ex. 10:2, Nu. 14:22, Deut.

<sup>1019</sup> Von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 159. Heschel (1999<sup>2</sup>), 51–52, makes the same point: "God's unconditional concern for justice is not an anthropomorphism. Rather, man's concern for justice is a theomorphism."

<sup>1020</sup> Childs (1992), 358.

<sup>1021</sup> See Coats (1968), 147, Sakenfeld (1975), 321. *נָאץ* reoccurs in verse 23 where the severity of despising YHWH is once more underlined and its implications spelled out.

<sup>1022</sup> See Ruppert (1998), 122. According to Coats (1968), 146, the meaning of *נָאץ* connotes sometimes even "overt rejection" (cf. Isa. 1:4, 5:24).

4:34f.). The mighty deliverance from Egypt and the miraculous providence in the wilderness are signs (אֵימֹת) which testify to God's presence and involving activity (cf. Deut. 29:2–5). Thus behind the divine accusation in Numbers 14 is most likely the expectation that these signs, when recognised, should have led to faith in God and His words (14:11, 22).<sup>1023</sup> Although the passage only implicitly says that YHWH's mighty acts are meant to evoke trust and belief in God, it can be argued on the basis of other OT passages. For example, acknowledging the possibility that Israel may prove sceptical and may not believe in the legitimacy of Moses' divine commission, YHWH was not only prepared to authenticate Moses' role with a show of signs, but through them also sought to motivate the people to believe and trust in him (cf. Ex. 4:1–5, 14:31).<sup>1024</sup> In a similar way, the many signs which were performed throughout Israel's journey to Canaan meant to motivate Israel in their belief. Helfmeyer calls them "faith signs" because they seek to promote Israel's faith.<sup>1025</sup> Thus the implication in Numbers 14:11 is clear, YHWH's visible manifestation of presence and power should have led to a firmer trust and confidence in God.<sup>1026</sup> Noth even suggests that the purpose of these signs was to lead Israel to "an unconditional trust in her God."<sup>1027</sup>

The verb which is used is אָמֵן and has essentially to do with trust, belief, firmness, and security.<sup>1028</sup> The Hiphil is either followed by the preposition לְ and can refer to a person or thing (cf. Ex. 4:31, Deut. 9:23, Ps. 106:24 etc.) or by בְּ, as in our case, and should be rendered as "trusting or believing in somebody/something (cf. Ex. 14:31, Deut. 1:32, Ps. 106:12 etc.). In other words, Israel was supposed to hold onto the divine promise, to make itself secure in it, to place trust in YHWH,<sup>1029</sup> and to take the promised land as a firm reality. Abraham, to whom the promise has initially been given could not base his faith on any signs of the sort Israel could look back. In fact, all the external circumstances seemed to work against him, childless state, old age, and landless is not the best starting position to become a great nation (Gen. 12:1–3), nevertheless, he believed in God, or as von Rad puts it: "er hat sich darin 'fest gemacht'; das war sein Glaube."<sup>1030</sup>

(Gen. 15:6) וְהָאֱמֵן בִּיהוָה וַיִּחְשְׁבֶהָ לֹא צָדָקָה

This passage is of considerable importance for teasing out the theological depth of Israel's unbelief as depicted in Numbers 14. Not only is Genesis 15:6 the first significant occurrence in the narrative sequence of the Bible of the Hiphil of אָמֵן

<sup>1023</sup> Rashi (1946), 66.

<sup>1024</sup> Snaith (1967<sup>4</sup>), 243, reminds us rightly of the analogous usage of "signs" (σημεῖον) in the Gospel of John.

<sup>1025</sup> Helfmeyer (1977<sup>2</sup>), 176ff.

<sup>1026</sup> See also Helfmeyer (1977<sup>2</sup>), 176.

<sup>1027</sup> Noth (1966), 108.

<sup>1028</sup> See HAL.

<sup>1029</sup> Zimmerli (1994<sup>2</sup>), 147.

<sup>1030</sup> Von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 185.



followed by בִּיהוּדָה, but also this account is an OT reflection on the nature of faith which reached paradigmatic stature in both Judaism and Christianity (cf. Neh. 9:8, Sir. 44:19–21, 1 Macc. 2:52, Ro. 4:5, Gal. 3:11, Jas. 2:23).<sup>1031</sup> It is intriguing that Abraham exercised trust in God's promise and plans in spite of its, from his perspective, unrealistic dimensions. Belief as von Rad writes, "is an act of trust, a consent to God's plans in history."<sup>1032</sup> YHWH honoured this unreserved trust in the following covenant.

18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim" (Gen. 15:18–20).

This covenant which contains the promised land for Abraham's ancestors was endangered by the golden calf disaster. Only through divine grace, evoked by Moses' intercessory effort was the covenant restored. In Exodus 34:10 the re-establishment of the covenant is followed by the same list of peoples (Gen. 15:19–20), who God was going to expel from Canaan (cf. Ex. 33:2, Nu. 14:9). In Numbers 13–14, Abraham's descendants are being put to the test whether they trust in the promise made long ago and believe that with divine help they can expel the indigenous people from Canaan (cf. 13:29).

Isaiah 7:9 has been identified as another OT key passage for understanding biblical faith.<sup>1033</sup> The context of Isaiah 7:9 is the threat of the Syro-Ephramite coalition against Ahaz, the recalcitrant Judean king. Although it is not absolutely evident why the allied armies intended to dethrone the king of Jerusalem and replace him with the son of Tabeel (Isa. 7:6), it is evident that Ahaz was under severe political pressure from all sides (cf. 2 Chr. 28), not least because the divine decree of an ongoing davidic dynasty was at stake (cf. 2 Sam. 7, Pss. 2, 89). Isaiah's seemingly unrealistic counsel to "take heed, to be quiet, and not to fear" (Isa. 7:4) ought to be seen against the failed attack of the coalition (Isa. 7:1, cf. 2 Ki. 16:5). In memorable words Isaiah challenges the seemingly entrapped king to exercise his faith in his covenant God and the davidic promise in spite of the military threat of the coalition.<sup>1034</sup>

אִם לֹא תִאֱמָנִינוּ כִּי לֹא תִאֱמָנִנוּ<sup>1035</sup>

Although the NIV seeks to reproduce the tone of the Hebrew pun by rendering it: "...If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all (Isa. 7:9),"<sup>1036</sup> it is

<sup>1031</sup> Cf. Von Rad (1971<sup>4</sup>c), 130–136, Jepsen (1977<sup>2</sup>), 305, Moberly (1992a), 29–54, Levenson (1993), 56–60.

<sup>1032</sup> Von Rad (1979<sup>3</sup>), 185, 190.

<sup>1033</sup> Cf. Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 283, Preuß (1992), 175–176, Wright (1996), 259.

<sup>1034</sup> Cf. Levenson (1987<sup>2</sup>), 156–160, Seitz (1993), 75–78.

<sup>1035</sup> The verb אִמַּן is used here without preposition and object, it is used absolutely. Nevertheless, from the context we can assume that it refers to believe in God. It is slightly puzzling, however, that both verbs are in the plural despite being addressed to a singular king. Is it because the king is also to answer on behalf of his people?

<sup>1036</sup> The NIV overlooks the emphatic affirmative particle כִּי which introduces the apodosis. Thus

difficult to reproduce an English translation which does justice to the Hebrew word play on the same root in different forms (אָמַן Hiphil = believe, Niphal = be established).<sup>1037</sup> In the light of the seemingly hopeless political situation the prophet appears to summon the king to put his trust in the divine promise of an everlasting davidic kingdom and an unconquerable Zion (2 Sam. 7:12–16, cf. Pss. 2, 46). In other words, Ahaz is called to trust in YHWH's faithfulness. Thereby the way of faith seems to stand in opposition to the human way of preservation. Isaiah, in some sense, puts an ultimatum before the king, either exercise your trust in God and His promise or bring a disaster over Jerusalem, like that to befall the northern kingdom. In the world of *Realpolitik* the only hope of survival seemed to Ahaz a treaty with the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III. From 2 Kings 16:7 we know that the davidic king and son of God opted rather for the sonship of the Assyrian suzerain: "I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." Isaiah's counsel to Ahaz, as Seitz writes:

means at a minimum that Ahaz must stand firm in the promise to David and not denounce his sonship, his servanthood. Ahaz is king only because Yahweh has chosen him. If he chooses to become the servant and son of another, then he must expect his overlord to demand payment.<sup>1038</sup>

Just as Israel at the threshold of Canaan had the choice between going forward, trusting in YHWH and His promise, or abandoning faith and losing it all, so Ahaz was confronted with the option of alliance with Assyria or alliance with YHWH.<sup>1039</sup> Since the text does not say that Isaiah gave any special political instruction to the king, one can assume that the prophet simply wanted to evoke the king's faith in YHWH's promise of an ongoing dynasty. This does not necessarily mean that Isaiah's exhortation to exercise faith is far detached from the reality of politics, but rather he hoped that Ahaz's political decision would be grounded in and generated by faith in his God and the davidic promise.<sup>1040</sup>

This obviously raises the question of the relation between faith and human action. Moberly succinctly poses the question: "Does it mean trusting God and 'keeping the powder dry' (i.e., taking appropriate military action), or does it mean trusting God and taking no action?"<sup>1041</sup> He is right in concluding that generally the former is envisaged in Scripture, though the latter is also advocated on special occasions, such as the Exodus, where God takes over completely. In the scout narrative, however, some human action was required, besides holding firmly on to the belief that God

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Motyer's (1994<sup>2</sup>), 83, rendering is preferable "indeed you will not stand at all."

<sup>1037</sup> Wright (1996), 259 suggests to render it with the idiomatic "trust or bust."

<sup>1038</sup> Seitz (1993), 77.

<sup>1039</sup> Later on in Isaiah 28:16 a similar situation occurs. In a divine oracle YHWH promises security to those who put their trust in Him. Here again faith comes as an alternative to the desperate attempts to achieve security through political alliance with an earthly suzerain.

<sup>1040</sup> Jepsen (1977<sup>2</sup>), 306.

<sup>1041</sup> Moberly (1997), 432.

will hand over the promised land to Israel, Moses had mustered an enormous army of 600,000 men. Numbers 1–2 depicts the careful ordering of an military camp with God in the midst.<sup>1042</sup> In other words, even though God was in their midst, appropriate military action had been taken. Together they should have provided the foundation of good courage and faith. Thus the land, is not just handed over to Israel, they need to get involved. Even though YHWH will lead them, the people have to do their share. This is underlined by the need of a risky mission to reconnoitre the land (13:20). Thus belief, as Moberly puts it, has almost always the added sense of “acting in response to what is heard with trust or obedience.”<sup>1043</sup> In the context of the scout narrative, however, belief was less demanding than a faithful response to what was promised to the patriarchs, belief was strongly encouraged by the knowledge and ongoing experience of divine signs which God performed in order to awaken and maintain Israel's trust. But even divine patience comes to an end, God's exclamation “how long...” accentuates both His enduring perseverance and the frustration over a hopelessly unbelieving and rebellious people.

#### 5.4.1.3 “Let Me Destroy Them!”

The full force of YHWH's anger and frustration comes to expression in the announcement of the judgement (14:12). The threefold first person singular in which the intended judgement is voiced underlines the severity of it. Pestilence<sup>1044</sup> is put in parallelism with the threat of disinheritance.

אֶפְרַיִם בְּדָבָר  
וְאֶתְשֶׁה אֹתָהּ לְגִי־גֵדוֹל וְעַצֹּם מִמֶּנּוּ (14:12)  
וְאֶתְשֶׁה אֹתָהּ לְגִי־גֵדוֹל וְעַצֹּם מִמֶּנּוּ

The NSRV renders the Hebrew: “I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.” Newing, however, argues that the prefixed verbs are all in the cohortative rather than in the future/imperfect and thus translates: “Let me strike it with plague and let me destroy it and let me make you into a greater and mightier nation than it.” He bases this translation on the following two points. Firstly, on the biblical understanding that the prophetic intercessors can influence YHWH's will to some decree, and secondly, on the basis of Hebrew grammar.<sup>1046</sup> Let us briefly consider the latter. The Hebrew form of אֶפְרַיִם (נִכְחַ) is ambiguous since הִ/לֵּ verbs are identical in the cohortative and imperfect.<sup>1047</sup> What is more, the cohortative and imperfect forms when they have a pronominal suffix are also identical.<sup>1048</sup> Thus in terms of syntax,

<sup>1042</sup> Cf. Kaufmann (1960), 185.

<sup>1043</sup> Moberly (1997), 431–432.

<sup>1044</sup> MT: דָּבָר, LXX: θάνατος (death).

<sup>1045</sup> The language in Numbers 14:12 reminds of the curses listed in Deuteronomy 28:21ff.

<sup>1046</sup> Newing (1987), 213–214. Followed by Milgrom (1990), 109 and Seebass (1995), 117.

<sup>1047</sup> There are no cohortatives ending in “הִ” for הִ/לֵּ verbs. See Lambdin (1996<sup>12</sup>), 145.

<sup>1048</sup> Verbs with a הִ/לֵּ root drop the final “הִ” before the suffixes. Thus יִהְיֶה. See Lambdin (1996<sup>12</sup>),

the verbs could be either in the cohortative or in the imperfect. With regard to context, the cohortative frequently expresses a “wish, or a request for permission, that one should be allowed to do something.”<sup>1049</sup> By implication YHWH would be consulting Moses for approval to execute the judgement. Although this may sound extraordinary at first, we have argued in the context of Exodus 32:10, where YHWH asked Moses to leave Him alone so that He can destroy apostate Israel (Ex. 32:10), that there YHWH makes His decision vulnerable to the response of the covenant mediator. By using confrontational language, YHWH seeks to elicit a “loyal opposition” (cf. § 4.3.2.1). The notion that YHWH makes the people’s fate somehow dependent on Moses’ response is supported by the renewed offer to make him the new Patriarch of Israel.

God’s dialogue with Abraham over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah provides a comparable and complementary account. Although Genesis 18:16–33 is an extremely rich passage raising several important issues which would be relevant and enriching for the discussion in question, for reasons of space and focus we restrict ourselves to the question of Abraham’s decree of influence.<sup>1050</sup>

YHWH and His two mysterious agents are on the way to investigate the charges against the two cities. On the way to pay His visit God decides that He will first make Abraham privy to His intentions:

The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do...No, for I have chosen him (יִדְעָתִי), that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen. 18:17ff.).

YHWH’s question seems to be directed to the two divine agents who are presumably members of the divine council (cf. Gen. 19:13, Jer. 23:18).<sup>1051</sup> The decision to share with Abraham the divine plans is rooted in his election (עֲדָה, cf. § 4.3.7) to be Israel’s patriarch who is to assume the role of a teacher of righteousness and justice. Abraham is given here the privilege of access and participation in the divine committee which will later characterise YHWH’s prophets (cf. Am. 3:7, Jer. 23:18, Gen. 20:7).<sup>1052</sup> Jacob infers: “Der erste Prophet und Mitwisser Gottes ist Abraham.”<sup>1053</sup> After having informed Abraham about the gravity of Sodom’s and Gomorrah’s sin (Gen. 18:20), God said: “I must go down and see whether they have

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273, GKC, § 751.

<sup>1049</sup> GKC, § 108c.

<sup>1050</sup> See MacDonald (2002), for a recent suggestive treatment of Genesis 18:16–33, in which he goes against the widespread notion that Abraham is not only portrayed as exemplary just man who challenges YHWH’s justice in ANE bargaining fashion, but also as theological teacher of God. Instead MacDonald argues that the “dialogue is an interactive lesson in which Abraham learns the extent of Yhwh’s mercy towards his creation so that Abraham and his descendants may follow in that same way.”

<sup>1051</sup> Jacob (1934), 447, Wenham (1994), 50. On the complex and in some sense deliberately mysterious picture of the three figures see particularly von Rad (1979<sup>4</sup>), 203ff.

<sup>1052</sup> Fretheim (1984), 49.

<sup>1053</sup> Jacob (1934), 447.

done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I want to know” (אֲרִידֶה נָא וְאִרְאֶה הַכְצַעְעָקְתָּהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כָלָה וְאִם־לֹא אֲרִידֶה, Gen. 18:21). Not unlike the NRSV translation of Numbers 14:10, it does not ascribe any optative nuance to the cohortative (אֲרִידֶה) followed by a particle of entreaty (נָא).<sup>1054</sup> Given the fact that there is again some grammatical and, as we shall see in a moment, contextual warrant to argue that God is making His judgement deliberately vulnerable to Abraham's response, one could render God's speech with: “Allow me to go down so that I can see whether...”<sup>1055</sup> Two observations follow: i) God, although being informed about the sinful state of the two cities, wants to make sure for Himself. In other words, it underlines the righteous judge's conscientiousness.<sup>1056</sup> ii) By implication, God makes His judgement somehow subject to the response of Abraham who is to become the “father of righteousness and justice” (cf. Ex. 32:10ff). This interpretation would be endorsed by two contextual features. Firstly, if one attributes any integrity to Abraham's “bargaining” intercessory prayer, one must concede that the destruction of the cities is at this stage only a possibility.<sup>1057</sup> Verse 21 confirms that God has not yet decided over the exact future of the cities for He must first “go down to see” and then He will know.<sup>1058</sup> Surely it is not just a matter of briefing Abraham, for if God was determined to destroy the two cities (or the rebellious wilderness generation), why does He consult His chosen servant at the last moment?<sup>1059</sup> Moreover, does the final clause of verse 21 וְאִם־לֹא אֲרִידֶה not contain a ray of hope and thereby comes as a subtle invitation to intercede as encountered in Exodus 32:10.

Es ist Gott selbst, der die Fürbitte will, und ihr Sprecher soll Abraham sein. Im Rat des Gerichte Gottes soll die Stimme der Menschlichkeit der Mensch führen. Daß Gott sie anhören will, ja herausfordert, zeigt, daß es im Grunde seine eigene andere Stimme ist.<sup>1060</sup>

Secondly, this interpretation would be endorsed (though does not depend on it)

<sup>1054</sup> Joüon, § 114b: “The volitive nuance is sometimes optative...When the speaker manifests his will in a way which is dependent on someone else's will: *I want to kill (if you allow it)*, the nuance is *I would like to kill, let me kill, allow me to kill*. The entreating particle...is very often found after the cohortative; it adds a nuance of prayer...”

<sup>1055</sup> Even if the cohortative followed by נָא only seeks to underline the divine resolution and urgency (i.e. “I want to go down” cf. Joüon, § 114d), one could still argue on the basis of verse 22 that God makes His plans vulnerable to Abraham's response.

<sup>1056</sup> Rashi (1946), 74.

<sup>1057</sup> Fretheim (1984), 50, MacDonald (2002).

<sup>1058</sup> Jacob (1934), 448–449: “Es wird also in diesen beiden Versen über Sodom und Gomorra noch keineswegs die Sprache eines endgültigen und unabänderlichen Vernichtungsurteils geführt...da wird noch einmal gezögert, ob es nicht doch aufgehoben werden könne, falls etwa ein mildernder Umstand geltend zu machen ist.”

<sup>1059</sup> Even if the writer of Genesis 18:17–32 “only” intended to provide a theological reflection on the righteousness and justice of God after the destruction of the cities (Westermann [1986], 292: “His [writer] purpose was to show indisputably that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a just action. His argument is directed at removing any possible doubt about God's righteousness which could arise as result of the catastrophe”), it is still legitimate to follow the intrinsic logic of the narrative flow.

<sup>1060</sup> Jacob (1934), 448–449.

by a textual issue in verse 22. In the MT we read that Abraham remained standing before God. The תִּקְנֵי סוֹפְרִים (ancient scribal corrections), according to early Jewish traditions, however, preserved what might have been the original form which stated that YHWH remained standing before Abraham (וַיֵּהָרָה עֹדְנֵנוּ עִמָּד לְפָנַי אֲבָרָהָם).<sup>1061</sup> This would imply that while the two heavenly agents went ahead to the cities, YHWH remained in a position of deference before Abraham as if He were obliged to wait and see what Abraham has to say regarding the judgement of the cities,<sup>1062</sup> or as if God were petitioning Abraham to go ahead with His plans.<sup>1063</sup> Regardless, whether one prefers the scribal emendation or the MT, in the latter the sense is still that Abraham does not let God depart but continues to stand before Him in prayer.

With this background in mind Newing's translation seems suggestive. One could maybe add a refinement to his translation by integrating the special translation value of the cohortative in sequence (incl. imperatives and jussives), which expresses purpose or result.<sup>1064</sup> Thus:

"Let me strike them with plague and  
let me destroy them  
so that I can make of you a nation greater and mightier than they (14:12)."

If this rendering is correct, three things must be pointed out. Firstly, it would imply that the judgement is not yet settled, it is more a suggestion or an intention at this stage. Secondly, YHWH opens once again His decision to the sphere of Moses' influence and makes the outcome to some decree dependent on Moses' response. Finally, YHWH's intention to destroy Israel must be balanced against the divine frustration and disappointment which preceded and will accompany any form of divine resolution.<sup>1065</sup> In other words, if judgement is to follow, it is not with the strict and cold indifference of a judge, but with the anger of one who has been despised and rejected.

#### 5.4.2 Prayer and Twofold Response

The greatness of Moses' prayer becomes evident by recalling the circumstances. It is spoken in the face of disloyalty and hostility towards him. It would have been easy to allow personal anger and irritation to take over and affirm YHWH's intention to punish such a hopelessly disloyal people, and to accept YHWH's offer to become the new patriarch. On a previous occasion, when Moses was overwhelmed by the

<sup>1061</sup> This is one of 18 allegedly deliberate scribal emendations. Cf. Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford (1998), 38, 191. The contention goes that the scribes modified the text because it was considered irreverent to pose YHWH in a position which implies service or inferiority to Abraham. So Jacob (1934), 449, Ginsburg (1966), 347–363. McCarthy (1981), 70–76, however, partially on the basis of total lack of support from the other textual witnesses, argues that the rabbinic and midrashic traditions which regarded Genesis 18:22 as a תִּקְנֵי סוֹפְרִים "may not be trusted." Cf. Tov (1992), 65–66.

<sup>1062</sup> Janzen (1982), 19.

<sup>1063</sup> Miller (1994), 268.

<sup>1064</sup> See Lambdin (1996<sup>12</sup>), 119.

<sup>1065</sup> Fretheim (1984), 55, 57, 107–126.

complaints of the people, he allowed his emotions to gain the upper hand (11:14–15, cf. Jer. 15:10). In the light of this emotional dialogue, Moses' prayer in Numbers 14 comes across as surprisingly selfless. Maybe the difference between Numbers 11 and 14 is that on the former occasion Moses' was overpowered by helplessness and frustration, whereas in Numbers 14, the situation is much more serious, the future of Israel is at stake. By putting forth the same offer to Moses (14:10), the notion that God was only testing His servants' intercessory commitment is not entirely convincing.<sup>1066</sup> This might be a plausible aspect in Exodus 32:10, here, however, the repeated offer seems to rather underline the divine anger and God's determination to do something about Israel's sin. Although the text does not comment on Moses' psychological state, it is hard to avoid the impression that Moses is torn between anger for those who attempted to stone him and a sense of responsibility for those who were entrusted to him (cf. 12:7). This charged and complex situation, in the words of Clements, "occasions one of the truly great prayers of the Bible."<sup>1067</sup>

#### 5.4.2.1 In the Light of Numbers 12:6–8

The immediate canonical context makes it once more evident that prophetic categories underlie Moses' forthcoming intercessory prayer. Not unlike the account of the tent of meeting in Exodus 33 (particularly verse 11), Numbers 12 sets the scene for Moses' prayer dialogue (14:13–19), by highlighting his unparalleled prophetic status.<sup>1068</sup>

As a consequence of a power struggle between Aaron, Miriam, and Moses, YHWH asserts that His servant Moses has unique and superior access to the divine mind (12:6–8). Unlike the "standard" prophet who encounters God through slightly enigmatic means such as dreams (בְּחֻלֹּם, cf. Deut. 13:2–7), visions (בְּמִרְאָה), riddles (בְּחִידָה), Moses enjoys direct communication (פֶּה אֶל־פֶּה). Moses is vindicated before Miriam and Aaron as the prophet *par excellence*, as the one who is entrusted with all God's house (12:7, עֲבָדֵי מֹשֶׁה בְּכָל־בֵּיתִי נֶאֱמָן הוּא).<sup>1069</sup> Being entrusted with the entire household, the servant needs direct access to the master (cf. Gen. 24:2). The metaphors are probably drawn from the royal court where only the most loyal and trusted servants are admitted direct access to the king and can speak to him "mouth to mouth" (12:8).<sup>1070</sup> Thus the following prayer could perhaps be seen as a dialogue

<sup>1066</sup> Calvin (1854), 73.

<sup>1067</sup> (1986), 44.

<sup>1068</sup> Seebass (1995), 84. The canonical connection between Numbers 12 and 13–14 is further indicated by the final verse of chapter 12 which reports that Israel encamped in the wilderness of Paran (12:16) and thereby establishes an obvious link with the scout narrative, which at the beginning narrates that Moses dispatched the scouts from the wilderness of Paran (13:3).

<sup>1069</sup> Jepsen (1977<sup>2</sup>), 296, points to the difficulty in rendering the participle נֶאֱמָן. It could be translated with the adjective "reliable." Thus Moses would be contrasted to Aaron and Miriam as faithful and loyal. Because such a rendering does not fit neatly into the context, it has been suggested to translate the participle more like a verb. Hence "he is entrusted, he is authorised."

<sup>1070</sup> Milgrom (1990), 96, notes that these most trusted servants of the king are literally called: "those

between Moses, the chosen “royal advisor” and the king. As in the immediate aftermath of the golden calf incident, Moses is again drawn into the sphere of divine decision making, he is admitted to the counsel. Moses is not only informed of the destructive plans, but as shown above, there is good reason to argue that YHWH even asks him for a concession to proceed with His destructive intentions (14:11). We inferred from that that the divine decision is not final at this stage but only a possibility. The “royal advisor” can still contribute something which might influence the king’s final verdict. This confirms again that YHWH would not judge Israel without first consulting His chosen servant.<sup>1071</sup> Moses, being entrusted with the royal household, uses once more his special relationship with the king and His insights into divine affairs by setting out to persuade YHWH to avert from His wrath, to change His destructive intention and reconsider the situation.

Moses’ prayer consists of two major arguments which prepare the grounds for his petition in verse 19. Firstly, an appeal to YHWH’s reputation and honour among the nations (14:13–16), and secondly, an appeal to YHWH’s nature as He has revealed Himself to Moses in the aftermath of the golden calf incident (14:17–19, cf. Ex. 34:6–7).<sup>1072</sup>

It has been argued that verse 15 contains an additional appeal to God’s justice. Balentine believes to detect in the statement “if you kill this people like one person” the concern for justice for the innocent individual.<sup>1073</sup> Judging from YHWH’s response (14:31ff.), this concern is indeed in Moses’ prayer. In § 5.4.2.6 we shall see that this issue receives considerable attention by YHWH. Having said that, judging by the logic of Moses’ prayer he subsumes this concern under the heading of divine reputation. For it is on the grounds of YHWH’s alleged intention to kill Israel as one man that His reputation as a powerful and loyal God would seriously be endangered (14:15–16).<sup>1074</sup>

#### 5.4.2.2 *Renewed Appeal to Divine Reputation (14:13–16)*

Moses implicitly rejects anew the possibility of personal glory by not even mentioning the invitation to become the new patriarch, instead he re–appeals to

who see the face of the king” (2 Ki. 25:19).

<sup>1071</sup> Miller (1998), 230ff.

<sup>1072</sup> Milgrom (1990), 110–111, Davies (1995), 142.

<sup>1073</sup> Balentine (1993), 132–133.

<sup>1074</sup> Moreover, Olson (1996), 83, has suggested that verse 19 contains an appeal to YHWH’s consistent character, especially His steadfast love and His continuous acts of forgiveness in the past. It is not necessary, however, to see here a third separate appeal, rather God’s regularity seems to me an aspect and consequence of His revealed nature (i.e. His patience and loyal love). What is of greater concern, however, is Olson’s use of the concept of divine forgiveness. There is no record of YHWH having explicitly forgiven Israel on previous occasions. Not only is there no mention of divine forgiveness in the wilderness tradition, nor after Moses’ only explicit previous petition for סליחה (Ex. 34:9). In the context of the latter reference, we have argued that not forgiveness in the sense of absolution of sins is envisaged, but the restoration of the covenant relationship. We shall develop this line of argument in due course.



YHWH's international reputation (14:13–16) which He acquired through the Exodus and which would be seriously endangered if He destroyed Israel. Although the same logic is applied as in his previous prayer (Ex. 32:12, cf. Deut. 9:28), it is sharpened and context specific. Considering that Israel was about to enter Canaan, it makes good sense that the argument is extended here from the Egyptian to the inhabitants of the promised land (14:13–14, cf. Josh. 7:9). Unlike his previous appeal (32:12), Moses refers here to YHWH's presence among the people which was granted to him after his prayer recorded in Exodus 34:9. Moreover, he seems to recapitulate YHWH's special relationship with Israel by referring possibly to the Sinai revelation<sup>1075</sup> and the divine guidance through the wilderness in the pillar of cloud and fire (cf. Ex. 13:21, 14:17–20, 24).<sup>1076</sup> Even though the overall argument of Numbers 14:13–16 is reasonably clear, there are some tensions and difficulties with the clarity of the Hebrew which we shall attend before we re-address the wider theological issues.

13 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־הִעֲלִיתָ בְּכַחַד אֱתֶּהֱעֵם הַזֶּה מִקִּרְבּוֹ 14 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּה הֵעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עִין בְּעֵין נִרְאָה אַתָּה יְהוָה וְשָׁנָנְךָ עֲמֹד עֲלֵהֶם וּבַעֲמֹד עָנָן אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם וּבַעֲמֹד אֵשׁ לַלַּיְלָה...

One of the grammatical difficulties is the confusion over the subject(s) of וַיֹּאמְרוּ and שָׁמְעוּ in verse 14. A literal Hebrew translation reads: “They will say to the inhabitants of this land, they have heard that You YHWH are in the midst of this people.” According to the MT the first one most likely refers to the Egyptians who will inform the inhabitants of Canaan of Israel’s destruction. But who is the subject of שָׁמְעוּ, is it the Egyptians or the inhabitants of Canaan who have heard of YHWH’s special presence among Israel? The Septuagint seeks to bring some clarification by making the inhabitants of Canaan the unambiguous subject of both verbs:

ἀλλὰ καὶ	וַיֹּאמְרוּ
πάντες	אֶל־
οἱ κατοικοῦντες	יֹשְׁבֵי
ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ταύτης	הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
ἀκηκόασιν ὅτι	שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־
σὺ εἶ κύριος	אַתָּה יְהוָה
ἐν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ	הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּקִרְבָּה

The LXX could be translated as: “Certainly all those dwelling in this land have heard that you Lord are among this people.” Based on the LXX, the BHS proposes to replace the first two words of verse 14 and to read instead: וְגַם כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת. This, however, does not eliminate the tension completely, since YHWH’s special presence, especially the pillar of cloud and fire, is more naturally associated with Egypt than with the Cananites (cf. Ex. 13:21).

<sup>1075</sup> E.g. Ex. 24:10, or to YHWH’s tabernacling presence (cf. Ex. 33:11, also. Ex. 29, 33, 40, Lev. 9:23). It is possible though that in context עֵין בְּעֵין refers to the pillar of cloud and fire.

<sup>1076</sup> Noth (1966), 96.

The tensions are often attributed to later redactions of the text.<sup>1077</sup> The end result is sometimes described as a confused, corrupt, and unintelligible text.<sup>1078</sup> Because of the smooth connection between verses 12 and 15, it has been suggested that verse 15 “would form a very suitable beginning to Moses’ appeal, and was, perhaps, originally such.”<sup>1079</sup> This would read:

12. Let me strike them with pestilence and let me disinherit them, so that I can make of you a nation greater and mightier than they. But Moses said to YHWH...15 “Now if you kill this people all at one time (וְהָמַתָּה אֶת-הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד),<sup>1080</sup> then the nations who have heard about your fame will say, 16 “It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness (14:15–16).”

Seebass agrees that the text makes perfect sense without verse 14.<sup>1081</sup> Even if one could verify with total certainty that verses 13 and 14 are the result of later glosses, it is still legitimate to comment on the effect and logic of the final form of the text.

Recalling the situation, Moses is being faced by an enraged and hurt God who seeks to destroy all Israel just as one man. Being confronted with such a horrifying prospect might well have shaken Moses’ senses and rationality. After all this is a natural human phenomenon when put under great stress.<sup>1082</sup> Could it be that the final form seeks to give expression to this tremendous moment by depicting the beginning of Moses’ prayer as confused and incoherent utterance? Even if this was not the writer’s intention, the text appears to create the impression that it took Moses a sentence or two (verses 13–14) to find his train of thought and to articulate a coherent argument. We have already argued for a similar situation in Exodus 32:32 and 33:12–17, where it is plausible that the text seeks to underline the highly charged moment when Moses battles in an intensive prayer for YHWH’s ongoing personal presence.<sup>1083</sup> Moreover, we have sensed some ambiguity in the significance of Moses’ and Aaron’s prostration in Numbers 14:5 and have suggested to view it in a similar vein. Thus regardless whether Numbers 14:13–14 is the result of a complex

<sup>1077</sup> E.g. Gray (1912), 156–159, Noth (1966), 96.

<sup>1078</sup> Cf. Dillmann (1886), 76, Baentsch (1903), 526, Davies (1995), 143.

<sup>1079</sup> Gray (1912), 157.

<sup>1080</sup> Literally: “to kill this people as one man.” This expression occurs frequently in the OT when reference is made to a group’s unity, or to a united action (eg. Judg. 6:16, 20:1, 11, 1 Sam. 11:7, Neh. 8:1). In this context it means to slaughter the people as if they were a single human being, or as the NRSV renders it, all at once. Cf. Baentsch (1903), 527.

<sup>1081</sup> According to him (1995), 117–118, the main argument is articulated in verse 15, whereas verse 14 serves only as a prelude to the following verses.

<sup>1082</sup> A psychological reading is based on the conviction that the modern reader shares a common humanity with the ancient writer. Although we may have different social mores, such as the degree and manner in which fear should be expressed, inner reactions of common experiences remain similar. Psychological approaches to biblical interpretation have only been tentatively received. This is partially due to the fear of imposing modern psychological categories onto the text which were foreign or of no interest to the ancient writers. There might be some warrant for such concern in the light of some of the highly subjective reader response approaches. A helpful guideline would be that a psychological reading must be consistent with the text, but it need not be limited to the original meaning. Cf. Gunn & Fewell (1993), 46–51.

<sup>1083</sup> Cf. Childs (1974), 594.

textual history or not, in its final form it has the potential to convey a sense of the tremendous psychological pressure which rested on Moses at this crucial point of Israel's early history. If such a reading of the text has any warrant, it would be wrong to press the logical coherence of this prayer too much.

Having said that, the overall logic of Moses' argument is clear enough. Moses seems to say that the Egyptians, after their defeat at the Red Sea, closely watch Israel's fate in the wilderness and what is more, if YHWH destroys Israel the news about the mass destruction would spread via the Egyptians to the Canaanites. On Mount Sinai Moses cautioned God that the Egyptians could mistake divine judgement for evil intention (Ex. 32:12). This time Israel's destruction might not only put YHWH's integrity into question, but also His power.<sup>1084</sup> Consequently the nations could conclude that in spite of God's presence among Israel, He proved powerless, preferring to kill them in the wilderness than to bring His promise to a fulfilment and take His people into Canaan as sworn to the patriarchs (14:16, cf. Deut. 9:28).<sup>1085</sup> Muffs attempts to catch the tone of Moses' first appeal by paraphrasing it as follows:

Don't You know what You are doing to the reputation You have had among the nations of the world as a Great God...You are desecrating Your own name! The gentiles will say..."He was not able to complete the act of redemption and hid his aborted redemption deep in the sands of the desert."<sup>1086</sup>

We have already noted in the context of Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:12 that the Exodus was not only about fulfilling the divine oath made to the patriarchs (Ex. 2:24, 6:4, 8) and about redeeming Israel from the hands of an oppressive power (Ex. 3:7–10, 16, 10:3), but it was also about establishing YHWH's name as supreme God over Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Ex. 7:5, 9:15–16, 14:4, 15:11). The question now is, whether Moses is genuinely concerned about YHWH's reputation at this moment,<sup>1087</sup> or is it rather an "audacious rhetorical device coupled with moral blackmail?"<sup>1088</sup> One thing is clear, Moses' argument relates well to the situation of the scout incident.<sup>1089</sup> After all, there would be a good chance that the indigenous peoples of Canaan reach the conclusion that their deities were stronger than YHWH, if Israel has not even attempted to enter their land.<sup>1090</sup> Such a corollary would clearly

<sup>1084</sup> Brueggemann (1995), 46.

<sup>1085</sup> Although there is no mention of an explicit oath given to Israel in the Pentateuch (cf. Gen. 15:18, 22:16, 26:3), on a number of occasions the oath made to the patriarchs is said to come to a fulfilment with Israel inheriting Canaan (Ex. 6:8, 13:11).

<sup>1086</sup> Muffs (1992), 12.

<sup>1087</sup> Spencer (1999), 81, believes that Moses intercedes not only for the people but in a sense also for God. Moses was "horrified to imagine that God will be blasphemed by those who hear of the ruin of God's people." Spencer draws some parallels with the Lord's prayer which also begins with the honour of God's name and thus senses here a mutual important theological point, namely that every prayer request ought to be subordinated to God's sovereignty and honour.

<sup>1088</sup> Muffs (1992), 12.

<sup>1089</sup> Cf. Greenberg (1977–78), 33.

<sup>1090</sup> Glatt-Gilad (2002), 63–74, suggests that the concept of divine reputation derives from the

endanger YHWH's reputation as אֱלֹהֵי מִלְחָמָה who defeated the superpower of the day (cf. Ex. 15:3ff.) and would thus obviously be fundamentally opposed to God's plan to make His name great among the nations (Ex. 14:19).<sup>1091</sup> Thus Moses makes evident that not only Israel's just punishment is at stake, but also YHWH's will and fame (שְׁמֵנוּ, 14:15).<sup>1092</sup>

We have already seen that since the Exodus YHWH's reputation is closely tied up with the fate of Israel. They came to be seen as YHWH's special protégé (cf. Ex. 14:14), whatever happens to the people of God will naturally be associated with YHWH's power and trustworthiness. In other words, since YHWH has bound Himself to Israel He cannot restore or maintain His reputation without taking the well-being of Israel into consideration. For the sake of His own glory and honour He cannot completely forsake/destroy His people (Isa. 49:15–16, 54:7–8, Hos. 11:8–9). Eichrodt helpfully reflects on the wider implications Israel's destruction would have on YHWH's reputation.

For with Israel's misfortune dishonour falls on God's name, and with her destruction Yahweh's name, too, would be exterminated from the world. Thus men can pray God to give his own name the honour which is due before the whole world by pardoning and succouring Israel.<sup>1093</sup>

Although Israel's pardon would be a means to uphold YHWH's reputation among the nations, it would seemingly compromise His moral nature and demands. Thus the question remains whether there is a way that YHWH's reputation of power and integrity can be maintained among the peoples without infringing His holiness.

Being aware of the tenuous nexus of divine power, alleged impotence, and compassion, Moses in a clever way connects the first argument about YHWH's reputation to his second appeal by asking for a display of strength (כֹּחַ) which is consistent with the nature of YHWH as revealed on Sinai (cf. 14:17–18, Ex. 34:6–7).

וַעֲתָה יִגְדַּל־נָא כֹחַ אֱלֹהֵי כְאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לֵאמֹר יִהְיֶה אֲרִדְּ אִפְסִים וְרַב־חֶסֶד ... (14:17f.)

We shall attempt to analyse how the invocation of YHWH's name will affect the complex issue at stake in the next sections. At the moment we are concerned with the semantic range of כֹּחַ in verse 17. Following its usual meaning, most major English translations render it with power or strength (cf. NRSV, NIV). They are in tune with the previous occurrence in verse 13, where Moses refers to YHWH's power in delivering Israel from Egypt. As we shall see, however, there are good reasons to argue that Moses does not so much appeal to YHWH's "military might," but redefines the concept of power. For כֹּחַ not only seems to define YHWH's name

pervasive ANE view that victory and defeat of a people is intrinsically linked with the power or impotence of their gods.

<sup>1091</sup> Joshua's prayer reflects the same logic when he said: "...O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has turned their backs to their enemies! 9 The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will you do for your great name?" (Josh. 7:7–9)

<sup>1092</sup> The LXX's rendering τὸ ὄνομα σου underlines the idea of divine reputation.

<sup>1093</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 477.

as appealed to in verse 18 (“now let my Lord’s כח be great, as you have declared”), but also stands in immediate association with אָרְךְ אַפִּים יְהוָה. In Nahum 1:3, which shows clear literary affiliations with Numbers 14:17, the two terms stand arguably in parallelism.

יְהוָה אָרְךְ אַפִּים וְגָדוֹל כֹּחַ<sup>1094</sup>  
וְנָקָה לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה

The parallelism suggests that כח expounds the idea of divine patience and thus has sometimes been interpreted as divine forbearance.<sup>1095</sup> The same logic applies to Numbers 14:17 where Moses’ appeal to a show of כח is followed by an invocation of divine patience and abundant kindness (אָרְךְ אַפִּים וְרַב־חֶסֶד, 14:18a). Thus Levine’s translation might be close to the mark: “Now, then, let my LORD’s forbearance be great, as you, yourself, have declared, in the following words:”<sup>1096</sup> This would mean that Moses implicitly appeals to God not to unleash his anger against Israel, but to control His justified wrath.<sup>1097</sup> This line of interpretation is endorsed in verse 19, where Moses further defines YHWH’s greatness.

Forgive (סָלַח־נָא) the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love (גְּדוֹלַת חַסְדְּךָ), just as you have pardoned this people (נִשְׁאַתָּה לָעָם), from Egypt even until now.

Here it is clear that Moses does not ask YHWH to display His power in military terms, but in terms of covenant commitment (חֶסֶד) and in patient endurance (נְשָׂא) of the people.<sup>1098</sup> Patience, restraint of wrath, and steadfast love, according to Moses, are not a weakness but a sign of real strength.<sup>1099</sup> In other words, Moses suggests to exert power in some other way than YHWH has initially proposed, yet in such a way that both the nations as well as Israel may come to a realisation of His might.<sup>1100</sup> Thereby he proposes a transition from YHWH’s military greatness to a greatness marked by patience and loyalty, and, as we shall see, by moral demand (14:18).

#### 5.4.2.3 Moses Prays God’s Name Back to God (14:18–19)

We have noted that Moses’ prayer proceeds similarly to that in Exodus 32:12. On both occasions he appealed to YHWH’s reputation. At Mount Sinai he continued his argument by reminding YHWH of the promise made to the patriarchs (Ex.

<sup>1094</sup> BHS suggests to amend the MT: כח to חסד as in Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:18. There is, however, no textual support for this and seems to miss the very point Nahum makes by modifying the standard “formula.” Besides that, only if כח is rendered with forbearance is a contrast established to נָקָה לֹא יִנָּקֶה (i.e. but YHWH will not leave unpunished...)

<sup>1095</sup> Gray (1912), 157, Milgrom (1990), 111, Levine (1993), 366.

<sup>1096</sup> Levine (1993), 360.

<sup>1097</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>1098</sup> Aurelius (1988), 137–138.

<sup>1099</sup> Cf. Seebass (1995), 118. Milgrom (1990), 111, quotes the Mishna which conveys the same idea: “Who is mighty? He who conquers his passion” (Mish. Avot 4:1).

<sup>1100</sup> Gray (1912), 157.

32:13), this is now replaced by an appeal to YHWH's deeper revelation of His nature and His ways of dealing with Israel (34:6–7). In other words, Moses seeks to make YHWH accountable to His Name as it has been reformulated to Him.<sup>1101</sup> According to the new disclosure, YHWH is resolved to be primarily a God of mercy, grace, and great covenant loyalty (וְרַב־חֶסֶד). Moreover, it seems as if divine justice will be characterised by divine forbearance (אֲרֻךְ אַפַּיִם). From a canonical perspective Moses' intercessory move makes good sense. Just as YHWH instructed him, he prays God's Name back to God (cf. § 4.8.1).<sup>1102</sup> Calvin offers some profound theological thoughts as he contemplates on the relationship between Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:17–18.

We derive a general piece of instruction, that there is nothing more efficacious in our prayers than to set His own word before God, and then to found our supplications upon His promises, as if He dictated to us out of His own mouth what we were to ask. Since, then, God had manifested Himself to Moses in that memorable declaration...he was able to derive from thence a sure directory for prayer...since He who has spoken will prove Himself to be true.<sup>1103</sup>

How efficacious Moses' intercession was, as we shall see in a moment, is disputed. But Calvin has certainly touched the heart of the innerbiblical relation between the two accounts. Brueggemann is one of few modern interpreters who recognises the canonical logic behind the two important passages and rightly argues that Moses is presented as the first of many to appeal in prayer to YHWH's revealed nature (cf. Pss. 25, 86, 103, 145 etc.).<sup>1104</sup>

Because Brueggemann's reading of Moses' prayer in Numbers 14 will be in the background of the ensuing discussion, we quote at some length.

Only once, in Num 14:18, is the recital of Exod 34:6–7 quoted in its entirety. The intent of Moses in the recital is to appeal to Yahweh's faithful solidarity for Israel (that is, to the first half of the formula), for the quote in the mouth of Moses is immediately followed in v. 19 with the imperative petition, "forgive the iniquity of this people..." Thus Moses, by the use of "iniquity" in v. 19, appeals precisely to the phrasing of Exod 34:7a, "forgiving iniquity." Unlike Moses, however, Yahweh will make intentional use of the entire quote from Exod 34:6–7 that Moses has reiterated, attending not only to the first part to which Moses appeals, but also to the second half, over which Moses apparently glides without mention. As a

<sup>1101</sup> In the sense that YHWH reformulated His initial disclosure as a jealous and fiercely just God who would only extend His covenant commitment to those who love and obey Him (Ex. 20:5–6) to a God who will be first of all characterised by mercy, grace, and covenant commitment. For more details and an exposition of the divine attributes see § 4.8.2.3.

<sup>1102</sup> Aurelius (1988), 137: "Moses beruft sich auf die (aus Ex 34:6f zitierte) Proklamation der Gnade Jahwes als eine geschichtliche Gegebenheit, ein in bestimmter Stunde ergangenes Gotteswort."

<sup>1103</sup> Calvin (1950) vol. 4, 75. Seitz (2001), 163, makes a similar point: "if prayer is to be understood rightly, it must be situated within the reality of God's disclosure of himself, which is the central revelatory truth at the heart of the Old Testament."

<sup>1104</sup> Brueggemann (1995), 43–49, helpfully shows how the paradigm initiated by Moses is followed up in various psalms. Israel takes up YHWH's attributes in several prayers. In Psalm 86, the one praying insists with reference to Exodus 34:6–7 that YHWH lives up to His nature. While in Psalm 103 the psalmist contemplates in amazement and gratitude, in Psalm 145, the one who prays rejoices in the nature of YHWH. Like the psalmists Jonah knows the characteristics of YHWH, unlike them, however, he protests against God's character. "He would rather die than live in a world governed by such gracious solidarity." Cf. (1997), 213–228.

consequence, Yahweh will forgive Israel: "I do forgive, just as you have asked" (v. 20). This assurance, however, is immediately followed by "nevertheless" (*'ûlm*), a disjunctive conjunction matching the conjunction in the middle of Exod 34:7: "Nevertheless...none of those who despised me shall see [the land]." (vv. 21, 23)

This dramatic encounter in Number 14 is perhaps an exception to the use made of the paradigmatic characterization of Yahweh. If so, it is a remarkably illuminating exception. In it, Yahweh acts in faithful solidarity, as asked by Moses. But Yahweh also acts in fierce sovereignty, befitting the claim of Exod 34:7b. Except in the case of Caleb, the generation for which Moses intercedes receives nothing of Yahweh's generous solidarity. In this case, Yahweh's fierce sovereignty has won over Yahweh's compassionate solidarity.<sup>1105</sup>

Brueggemann helpfully draws attention to the close literary and theological relationship between Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:18ff. Provocatively and consistent with his understanding of Exodus 34:6–7, as expressed in his theology of the OT, Brueggemann maintains that the divine resolution witnesses to YHWH's fundamental disjunction within Himself and is generated by fierce sovereignty.<sup>1106</sup> Not unlike our previous assessment of Brueggemann's treatment of Exodus 34:6–7, however, I would like to question whether his reading does full justice to the dynamics of Moses' intercessory prayer and the portrayal of YHWH's response in Numbers 14:20ff.

For a start we would like to take issue with Brueggemann's statement that Numbers 14:18 "is the recital of Exod 34:6–7...in its entirety." Although Moses undisputedly refers back to YHWH's nature as revealed on Sinai, there are actually several omissions in his prayer. Brueggemann is not on his own in failing to note the differences between the two passages, let alone in attempting to theologically evaluate the discrepancies.<sup>1107</sup> A comparison of the two passages shows that Exodus 34:6–7 is more elaborate than Moses' quotation in Numbers.<sup>1108</sup>

<sup>1105</sup> (1997), 270–271.

<sup>1106</sup> It is noteworthy that Brueggemann's understanding of the dynamics between Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:18ff. has undergone some changes. In an earlier essay (1995), 46–47, he writes:

Yahweh might have wished to act only according to divine omnipotence but is constrained by a hard, relentless commitment made to Israel. The very character of Yahweh, as Yahweh has articulated that identity, gives Moses and Israel a foothold against God and a space from which to speak imperatives that Yahweh must heed...The truth and power of God's costly solidarity are not Israel's wish or invention. They are rather God's free offer of God's own self...The creedal disclosure of Exod. 34:6–7 and the initial "pray-back" of Moses in Numbers 14 form a tap root for Israel's recurring prayer to this You who does *wonders of costly solidarity*.

In other words, there is no mention of a fundamental disjunction at the heart of YHWH's revelation yet. Rather the emphasis is much more, as we perceive it, on divine covenant loyalty and solidarity with His people.

<sup>1107</sup> Gray (1912), 157, merely notes that Numbers 14:18 is a quotation from Exodus 34:6–7. So de Vaulx (1972), 173, Budd (1984), 158, Davies (1995), 144, and Brueggemann (1997), 219. Baentsch (1903), 527, just expresses surprise that Exodus 34:7a is omitted in Numbers 14:18, since according to him it contains the key to YHWH's response in verse 20.

<sup>1108</sup> Some of the ancient versions of Numbers 14:18 such as the Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, and other manuscripts are closer to Exodus 34:6–7. See following footnotes for details.

<i>Exodus 34:6–7</i>	<i>Numbers 14:18</i>
יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן	יְהוָה
אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד	אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד
וְאֱמֶת	
נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים	
נֹשָׂא עוֹן וְפָשַׁע	נֹשָׂא עוֹן וְפָשַׁע
וְחַטָּאת	
וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה	וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה
פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת	פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת
עַל־בָּנִים	עַל־בָּנִים
וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים	
עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רַבָּעִים	עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רַבָּעִים

The discrepancies between the two texts can and have been explained on the grounds of textual history,<sup>1109</sup> but guided by the final form of the texts and their canonical relationship, the question must be reformulated along the following lines. Why is it that Moses omits *יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן* (Ex. 34:6a.), *וְאֱמֶת* and *לְאֲלֹפִים*? Moreover, Moses does not cite the entire list of the various sins (i.e. *וְחַטָּאת*), and skips *עַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים*. Furthermore, the question arises, why Moses includes reference to YHWH's demanding nature (i.e. *וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת*) when he, as Brueggemann argues, intends to appeal to YHWH's faithful solidarity for Israel. This is all the more striking in the light of all the subsequent appeals to Exodus 34:6–7 where YHWH's demanding attributes are consistently omitted.<sup>1110</sup>

Before we explore the possible reasons underlying the altered quotation in verse 18, it should be noticed that *וְאֱמֶת* and *חַטָּאת* are actually attested in a number of manuscripts and versions.<sup>1111</sup> Yet, one could still try to explain the Masoretic text's omission. Apart from Ashley, none of the Christian commentators, as far as I am aware, attempt to explain theologically the absence of either of these two words or of the other more weighty omissions. Ashley's suggestion, however, that the author "wished to hasten on to the forgiving nature of God," is a bit thin.<sup>1112</sup> This interpretation is all the more troublesome when one considers that Moses omitted the references to divine mercy and grace (*יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן* and *לְאֲלֹפִים*).

On the Jewish side, Bekhor Shor sought to explain the absence of *אֱמֶת* on the grounds of its meaning. He suggests that reference to God's truth or justice, as he renders it, would be inappropriate in an appeal to YHWH's mercy.<sup>1113</sup> This line of argument depends to a certain extent on the above rendering of *אֱמֶת*. If one translated it as dependability, as Jepsen argues, Moses' prayer would have been seemingly

<sup>1109</sup> E.g. Seebass (1995), 119, based on the text critical principle *brevius–potius*, argues that Numbers 14:18 served as the *Vorlage* for Exodus 34:6–7 and not the other way round. He suggests that Exodus 34:6–7 is a combination of Exodus 33:19b and Numbers 14:18.

<sup>1110</sup> E.g. Pss. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Jonah 4:2, Joel 2:13. Cf. Milgrom (1990), 392–396.

<sup>1111</sup> Cf. LXX, Sam., Targ. Onk.

<sup>1112</sup> Ashley (1993), 258.

<sup>1113</sup> Bekhor Shor, cited from Milgrom (1990), 111.



strengthened by adding it.<sup>1114</sup> With regard to חטאה, Bekhor Shor also attempts to explain the omission on the basis of its meaning. He translates it as inadvertent sin (e.g. Lev. 4:2) and thus points to its inappropriate designation for Israel's rebellion.<sup>1115</sup> Although Muffs seems to give the phenomenon more thought, I am not certain whether he clarifies the dynamics in any significant way:

(Moses) omits the first part of the revelation, "he rewards with loyalty to the thousandth generation," which does not fit the situation at this time. Rather he quotes the end of the section, "he bears sin and iniquity and does not expunge the record, but punishes the sin of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation" (Num 14:18). Logically speaking, the formula "he punishes the sin of the fathers," situated as it is after "And now, my Lord, have patience (v 17)" and before "as you have carried this people...up to now" (v 19), cannot be anything but an expression of mercy and at least partial forgiveness. It certainly is not an expression of strict justice and total destruction, as it is usually understood.<sup>1116</sup>

Unlike Brueggemann, we have already noted that Muffs and others argue that וְנִקְהָה עֲוֹן אֲבוֹתָיִם לֹא יִנְקֶה פֶקֶד עֲוֹן אֲבוֹתָיִם could be interpreted as an expression of divine mercy and patience stating that YHWH can and does hold back the punishment from the fathers and defers it to later generations. We have voiced our doubts and will shortly reinforce our previous findings that this is not the most likely reading of Exodus 34:7b. and Numbers 14:18 either (cf. § 4.8.2.3). This is endorsed by the fact that the sinful generation is not spared from judgement. Moreover, if Moses really sought the forgiveness of the people (or at least partial forgiveness), as Muffs and Brueggemann suggest, why does Moses omit the two mercy evoking attributes (רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן and נִצְרָה הַסֵּדֶר לְאֵלֵינוּ)? Before we attempt to resolve some of these problems we recall the dynamics of the whole passage.

We call to mind YHWH's angry appearance. He seeks to strike His covenant people with a fatal plague (14:12), but Moses rather than conceding to YHWH's intentions, appeals first to divine forbearance (strength defined by patience) and enforces then his plea by emphasising that YHWH is a God of great patience and covenant commitment (14:17–18a), who bears/endures Israel's iniquities and rebellion. This is not unlike Moses' first prayer after the golden calf incident where he first sought to pacify YHWH's destructive wrath (Ex. 32:12). Moses' emphasis on divine patience and long suffering commitment is underlined in his actual petition (14:19).

סְלִיחָה נָא לַעֲוֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּגְדֹל חַסְדְּךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לָעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד-הַנֶּה

By recalling YHWH's patience and commitment to the people all the way from Egypt to the threshold of the promised land, Moses implicitly reminds God that He has always tended to show covenant loyalty (חסד) and has endured (נשא) this obdurate people. Moses' plea for סְלִיחָה receives an immediate divine response:

<sup>1114</sup> Jepsen (1977<sup>2</sup>), 309–316.

<sup>1115</sup> Bekhor Shor, cited from Milgrom (1990), 111. חטאה as we have seen in chapter 4.7, refers usually to sin in the sense of missing a goal.

<sup>1116</sup> Muffs (1992), 21–22.

“סִלַּחְתִּי כְּדָבָרְךָ” (v. 20). YHWH grants Moses' petition. This, however, is not the entire story.

#### 5.4.2.4 Pardon Granted, but... (14:20–25)

Following YHWH's concession of pardon, within almost the same breath (introduced by a sharp disjunction), YHWH also announces severe punishment.

20 nevertheless (וְאֵלֶּם), -as I live (חַי־אֲנִי), and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD (וְיִמְלֵא כְבוֹד־יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ)– 22 none of the people (וְיִנְסוּ אִתִּי זֶה עֶשֶׂר פְּעָמִים) who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times (וְהָיָה רֹחַ אֲחֵרֶת עִמּוֹ וְיִמְלֵא אֶתְרִי<sup>1118</sup>) and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it (אִם־יֵרְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבוֹתָם וְכָל־מִנְאָצִי לֹא יֵרְאוּ). 24 But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly (הָיָה רֹחַ אֲחֵרֶת עִמּוֹ וְיִמְלֵא אֶתְרִי<sup>1118</sup> וְהָבִיאוּ אִתּוֹ וְעַבְדִּי כָלֵב עִקֵּב), I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it (14:21–24).

The text makes it as forceful as possible that the divine verdict is final. YHWH's response is phrased in such absolute language that it becomes clear that there is no room for negotiation, not even for Moses. YHWH swears by His life.<sup>1119</sup> The common oath formula חַי־אֲנִי occurs only twice in the Pentateuch, here (14:21, 28) and Deuteronomy 32:40. This observation on its own underlines the seriousness of the matter,<sup>1120</sup> but it is even more emphasised by the following clause in which YHWH announces that His כְּבוֹד, that is His powerful presence (cf. Ps. 96:3),<sup>1121</sup> will be manifested in כָּל־הָאָרֶץ.<sup>1122</sup> In the light of Moses' warning that YHWH's

<sup>1117</sup> The Hebrew literally reads: “Because all the men (כִּי כָל־הָאֲנָשִׁים) who have seen my glory...and have not obeyed my voice, 23 they shall certainly not (אִם־יֵרְאוּ) see the land that I swore...nor shall any of them who despised me see it.”

The particles אִם and אִם־לֹא are commonly used in the context of an oath or formulas of swearing (cf. 2 Sam. 11:11). The latter ought to be paradoxically rendered with *certainly* (affirmative), whereas the former with *certainly not*. The peculiar usage of the particles אִם and אִם־לֹא is used to “introduce promises or threats confirmed by an oath” (esp. after such formulae as חַי־יְהוָה אֲנִי...as well as after imprecations. The underlying logic, however, remains an enigma to scholarship. One has attempted to explain the idiomatic usage of these particles on the basis of a kind of self-imprecation. E.g. The Lord do so unto me, *if* I do it, resp. *if* I do it *not*. GKC (§149b) notes: “Possibly, however, the consciousness of the real meaning of the formula was lost at an early period, and אִם־לֹא simply came to express *verily*, אִם, *verily not*.”

<sup>1118</sup> The expression וְיִמְלֵא אֶתְרִי is sometimes called a pregnant phrase (for לֵלֶכְתָּ אַחֲרַי) and means to follow completely and uninterruptedly (lit. “fulfilled to walk behind me,” or “and he made full the walk after me”). This comes as a strong contrast to the unbelieving and rebellious spirit of the people. The same phrase is used to describe Caleb's behaviour in Numbers 32:11ff., Deuteronomy 1:36, Joshua 14:8, 9, 14. Cf. Gray (1912), 159, GKC, § 119gg.

<sup>1119</sup> Humans swear by God, God swears by His own life or being, since there is no superior being (cf. Gen. 22:16). So Gray (1912), 158.

<sup>1120</sup> Seebass (1995), 119.

<sup>1121</sup> So Gray (1912), 158, Milgrom (1990), 112.

<sup>1122</sup> From the context it is not absolutely clear whether הָאָרֶץ refers to the entire world or just Canaan. The former makes good sense in the light of Moses' argument about YHWH's reputation among Egypt and Canaan (Not unlike Isaiah 6:3 and Psalm 72:20, verse 21 might look to YHWH's final [eschatological] goal in salvation history [Dillmann {1886}, 77], the display of His power and

reputation could be endangered among the nations this comes as a strong assurance that YHWH is going to vindicate or establish His glory in a way that His greatness will be evident in Israel and particularly in Egypt and Canaan.

The substance of YHWH's oath is introduced by a causal conjunction כִּי. Namely, because all the adults have experienced and despised YHWH's powerful presence they shall not see the land (vv. 22–23). YHWH has repeatedly shown His כבוד and goodwill to them, nonetheless Israel has continually lost faith in their God and what is more they have consistently tested (נִסָּה) Him (14:23).<sup>1123</sup> As we have seen, there are several indications that Numbers 13–14 embodies the climax of a long period of testing the divine patience. Ten times (עֶשְׂרֵי פַעַמִּים) is probably a Hebrew synonym for again and again.<sup>1124</sup> The text is clear the limit has been reached, the judgement is absolute, the rebellious generation must return to the Red Sea and ultimately die in the wilderness, with the exception of Caleb and his descendants (14:24–25).<sup>1125</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of Israel's apostasy at Sinai, YHWH graciously put off their well deserved punishment "till the day of His visitation" (Ex. 32:34). Israel's continuous sins had filled up the measure as it were.<sup>1126</sup> YHWH's definite verdict makes it as forceful as possible that there is a limit to YHWH's "long suffering fidelity towards Israel, a limit already anticipated in Exod 34:7b."<sup>1127</sup> According to Brueggemann, YHWH's righteous will has taken over, he suggests that YHWH's verdict mirrors His nature as revealed to Moses. Yes, He forgives, nevertheless (וְאֵלֶּם)...none of those who despised Him shall see the land, except for Caleb. The strong disjunctive conjunction וְאֵלֶּם not only mirrors the abrupt conjunction in the middle of Exodus 34:7, but, according to Brueggemann, also indicates that "Yahweh's fierce sovereignty has won over Yahweh's compassionate solidarity."<sup>1128</sup> Except for Caleb, Moses' intercession has seemingly achieved nothing.<sup>1129</sup> This raises the question of the logic and impact of the divine concession in verse 20. We have already noted that Aurelius reaches the conclusion that the divine word of forgiveness does not affect the final outcome of the punishment.<sup>1130</sup>

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justice throughout all the world. Cf. Milgrom (1990), 311. Alternatively, as Gray (1912), 158, has pointed out, הָאָרֶץ could refer only to Canaan. He prefers this interpretation because verses 22–23 associate YHWH's כבוד with Israel and the promised land. Cf. Seebass (1995), 120.

<sup>1123</sup> With YHWH as the object of נִסָּה (Pi), it has negative connotations and means to test or to prove God to see whether he will act in an awaited or desired way (cf. Ex. 17:2–7, Deut. 6:16, Ps. 106:14). See Snaith (1967<sup>4</sup>), 246.

<sup>1124</sup> Ten frequently connotes completeness or full measure. See Budd (1984), 158. Keil (1864), 94, informs us that the Talmud ('Arakin 15ab) takes "these ten times" literally. Possibly it is equivalent to a "dozen times." Cf. Gray (1912), 158.

<sup>1125</sup> Caleb is mentioned in strong contrast to the unfaithful people (Waw disjunctive).

<sup>1126</sup> Zimmerli (1994<sup>2</sup>), 176, Muffs (1992), 16.

<sup>1127</sup> Brueggemann (1997), 307.

<sup>1128</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>1129</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>1130</sup> Aurelius (1988), 138–140, compares Numbers 14 with its Deuteronomic counterpart in chapter 1. He points out that Moses' intercessory prayer, and its subsequent divine forgiveness which are all of central importance in the book of Numbers, do not feature in the scout narrative in Deuteronomy 1.

In a similar vein, Coats does not attribute much content to the word סלח either.

The rebels will not be destroyed immediately but may wander through the wilderness until the natural end of their lives. But this is the only consequence of the forgiveness announced in vs. 20, for there is no indication beyond the verb סלח that the people were reconciled either with Yahweh or with Moses. The oath in vss. 21–22 only emphasizes the punishment and continuing alienation of the rebels.<sup>1131</sup>

YHWH's word of סליחה and Moses' prayer (14:19–20) are pushed into the background, or are even in danger of totally fading away. According to the opinions above, not only is the word סלח meaningless in this context, but also Moses' prayer seems to have failed to achieve any real remission of punishment.

These views, however, need to be challenged. In the following section we shall argue that Moses' prayer clearly achieved something. One only needs to juxtapose the initially intended punishment as uttered in verse 12 with YHWH's second response (vv. 20ff). In verse 12, YHWH talked about disinheritance (ירש)<sup>1132</sup> by plague and a new beginning with Moses, whereas in verse 23 there is a tone of hope in the judgement. Firstly, there is no mention of destruction by plague anymore (apart from the guilty scouts, cf. 14:37) and what is more important, there has been introduced a qualification of who is not going to see the land; namely, none of the men (אנשים) who have tested and despised YHWH all the way, in spite of all the miraculous signs (14:22–23). We have already argued that YHWH's punishment of not seeing the land is directed only against the Exodus-wilderness generation, while their descendants, by implication, are not affected. What is only implied in the MT, is spelled out in the LXX. In relation to the Deuteronomic parallel account (1:39), the LXX reads:

אם	ἢ μὴν οὐκ
יָאֵר	ὄψονται
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ	τὴν γῆν
אֶשֶׁר	ἦν
נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	ὥμοσα
לְאַבְרָם	τοῖς πατράσιν αὐτῶν
	ἀλλ' ἢ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῶν ἃ ἐστὶν μετ' ἐμοῦ
	ὧδε ὅσοι οὐκ οἶδασιν ἀγαθὸν οὐδὲ κακόν
	πᾶς νεώτερος ἄπειρος τούτοις δώσω τὴν γῆν
וְכָל־	πάντες δὲ
בְּנֵי־	οἱ παροξύναντές με

The outcome of the accounts, however, appear to be the same, namely the remaining in the desert or even returning to where the journey started.

<sup>1131</sup> Coats (1968), 148.

<sup>1132</sup> Note again the correspondence of terminology. Back in Numbers 13:30 Caleb exhorts the people to go up and “inherit” (ירש) the land (עלה נעלה וירשנו אתה, 13:30). As a consequence of Israel's behaviour YHWH passes judgement on them by disinheriting (ירש) them (אֶכְנֶה בְּדֶבֶר וְאֶוֹרְשָׁנִי, 14:12), whereas Caleb who initially suggested to enter the land, is to inherit it (ירש) with his descendants (וְיָרְשָׁנָה) (14:24). In the Hiphil ירש, when it is followed by a personal accusative object means “to bring to ruin, destroy, or to disinherit” (cf. Ex. 15:9). See BDB, 440.

לֹא	οὐκ
יִרְאוּהָ	ὁψονται αὐτήν <sup>1133</sup>

This is particularly interesting because the LXX clearly anticipates verse 31 and thereby provides an important bridge between the alleged J and P version.

In contrast to the LXX the MT only implies that besides Caleb and his children the offspring of the whole nation could see the land.<sup>1134</sup> Such a reading of the MT would be further endorsed by the introduction of the land oath to the fathers. Even though the oath is mentioned in conjunction with those who despise God, the fact that YHWH mentions it lets the reader suspect that the divine oath made to the Patriarchs might somehow be fulfilled.<sup>1135</sup> In other words, one does not even have to take YHWH's second response (vv. 26ff.) into account in order to discern a clear possibility of hope in the first verdict.<sup>1136</sup> Although the verdict contains undoubtedly a sentence, it is remarkable that not many of the commentators have noticed the complex and subtle relationship between judgement, grace, and loyalty. Intrinsically related to this nexus is what we believe the often misunderstood concept of סליחה.

#### 5.4.2.5 The Objective and Logic of Moses' Prayer

In order to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of Moses' prayer and the divine response, we propose to re-examine the meaning of the word סלח in its present context. We have already noted in Exodus 34:9, that it is exclusively YHWH's prerogative to grant סליחה.<sup>1137</sup> This is once again confirmed in Numbers 14:19 where Moses prays סלח־נָא לַעֲוֹן and in verse 20 YHWH responds כִּדְבָרְךָ סלחתי. Moreover, we have seen that Moses' prayer for "forgiveness" (סלח לַעֲוֹן) in Exodus 34:9 did not result in annulment of guilt and sin, but in the gracious renewal of the covenant relationship in spite of their stiffneckedness (Ex. 34:10). In other words, YHWH resumed His presence among the rebellious people, patiently enduring their stiffneckedness. In the light of the pronounced judgement in Numbers 14:21–35, it is evident that the word סלח cannot mean forgiveness in the sense of cancellation of Israel's sins, nor annulment of punishment.<sup>1138</sup> Rather the pronouncement of סליחה in Numbers 14 somehow encompasses the punishment of

<sup>1133</sup> Could be translated: "...but as for their children who are here with Me, as many as have not known good and evil, every one that is young and inexperienced, to them will I give the land, but all who have provoked Me..."

<sup>1134</sup> Olson (1985), 136, Boorer (1992), 352f.

<sup>1135</sup> Boorer (1992), 348.

<sup>1136</sup> As we shall see in a moment, YHWH's second response clearly sheds more light on YHWH's solidarity and sovereignty.

<sup>1137</sup> Hausmann (1999), 259.

<sup>1138</sup> Milgrom (1990), 395–396, points helpfully to Amos, where as a result of the prophet's intercession for pardon (סלח), YHWH initially "repents" (נחם) and cancels (temporarily) the punishment but not the sin (Am. 7:1–8, 8:1–2).

disobedient Israel.<sup>1139</sup> Thus the granting of סליחה in context has not so much to do with the elimination of punishment, but with the preservation of the fundamental covenant relationship.<sup>1140</sup> Milgrom agrees that this is exactly the situation in Numbers 14.<sup>1141</sup>

It is interesting to note that according to Jeremiah 31:31–34, which exhibits considerable verbal and conceptual affinities with both Exodus 34:9ff. and Numbers 14:19ff. (all three narratives contain the verbal cluster: ברית, חסד, סלח), YHWH renews the covenant relationship with Israel only because they repent of their sinful ways and God is willing to forgive their guilt and no longer remembers their sins (cf. Jer. 31:34).<sup>1142</sup> Neither Exodus 34 nor Numbers 14, however, explicitly say that the covenant restoration or maintenance presupposes the removal/forgetting/cleansing of Israel's guilt and sin. In fact, Moses' prayer seems to imply rather the opposite, YHWH is to resume His presence among Israel *because* of their stiffneckedness (Ex. 34:9) and in Numbers 14:19 Moses appeals to YHWH's great covenant loyalty which has manifested itself in God's patience in enduring/bearing Israel's rebellious nature. Moreover, it is conspicuous that neither Moses, nor any other intercessory figures of earlier periods of Israel's history, such as Abraham (Gen. 18:23–33), Samuel (1 Sam. 7:5–9, 12:15), Elijah (1 Ki. 17:17:23), or Elisha (2 Ki. 6:15–20), urged the people to turn from their sinful path to YHWH's ways so that He can forgive them (cf. Jer. 36:3, 18:X–X). As mediators of the covenant their primary role is to ensure that YHWH maintains His covenant relationship and that the divine promises reach eventually their fulfillment.

The notion that Moses' prime objective is the maintenance of the covenant relationship is further endorsed by his appeal to YHWH's great חסד (14:19). חסד with YHWH as subject refers to divine covenant loyalty. There are numerous passages in which חסד is used as a synonym of ברית (cf. Deut. 7:9, 12, Pss. 86:5, 89:25, etc.). Thus it seems no coincidence that from the collection of the divine attributes, Moses highlights YHWH's great חסד and asks Him to operate according to it.

סלח-נא לעון העם הזה כנגדל חסדך וכאשר נשאתה לעם הזה ממצרים ועד-הנה (14:19)

The greatness of God's covenant loyalty (חסד), as noted, is marked by His ongoing willingness to carry the people (נשא לעם), that is probably referring to enduring their obduracy and rebellious nature, and bearing their guilt from Egypt to the promised land (cf. § 4.8.2.3).<sup>1143</sup> Hence, by appealing to YHWH's חסד Moses refers primarily to God's continuing faithfulness in upholding the covenant relationship. It is important to note, however, that within this framework of ongoing relationship there

<sup>1139</sup> In the following chapter (15:25, 28), we learn that there is no priestly means to atone for sins committed highhandedly. Sacrificial atonement has clearly its limitations (cf. 1 Sam. 3:14).

<sup>1140</sup> Sakenfeld (1975), 327. Cf. Hausmann (1999), 261.

<sup>1141</sup> Milgrom (1990), 396.

<sup>1142</sup> Scharbert (1960), 337, Hausmann (1999), 261.

<sup>1143</sup> See Sakenfeld (1975), 323, Milgrom (1990), 112, Seebass (1995), 119.

is also space for punishment and for exercising justice among a people who despised God (14:11, 23). In other words, the divine granting of סליחה in Numbers 14 means above all the continuation of the covenant relationship for subsequent generations, but does not preclude punishment of the guilty generation. Sakenfeld summarises the meaning of סלח in Numbers 14 as the

preservation of the community, and this preservation need not be precluded or even cheapened by punishment of the community while the relationship is being continued.<sup>1144</sup>

By citing fully YHWH's demanding side and His right to visit in judgement Israel up to the fourth generation, it becomes evident that Moses regarded YHWH's wrath as a legitimate possibility. Nevertheless, he attempted to push the divine right to punish as far back as possible by focusing on the reality of God's covenant fidelity. This, as Milgrom argues, explains partially Moses' two major omissions in his quotation of Exodus 34:6–7:

The major omissions ("A God compassionate and gracious..." and ("extending kindness to the thousandth generation") are due to the particular nature of Moses' plea. He did not ask for cancellation of punishment but only for its postponement or for its execution as long as God would maintain His covenant with Israel.<sup>1145</sup>

In sum, we can say that Moses never asked for forgiveness, in the sense a modern reader would most readily understand the term, but for the maintenance of the covenant and for an assurance that YHWH's people will ultimately settle in the promised land. It became clear that Moses' prayer was not in vain, as a matter of fact, he secured YHWH's commitment to uphold the battered covenant relationship and thereby Moses bid YHWH to be true to His divine nature and plan (Ex. 34:6–7). Even though some of YHWH's righteous wrath must be expressed, the next section enforces that He allowed Himself to be restraint by His mediator and wants a covenant relationship with His people.

#### 5.4.2.6 Adults from Age Twenty Must Die, Except... (14:26–35)

We have attempted to show how the second part of YHWH's response stands not only in "organic" continuation to the first one, but also how it brings essential clarification to the first part of YHWH's response (§ 5.3.1.5).

With prophetic authority Moses is to make known the divine verdict to Israel.<sup>1146</sup> All adults included in the census from age twenty are condemned to remain in the wilderness until their bodies fall there, except for Caleb, Joshua and all the children under twenty years of age (14:29–31).<sup>1147</sup> The latter shall ultimately *know*<sup>1148</sup> the

<sup>1144</sup> Sakenfeld (1975), 327.

<sup>1145</sup> Milgrom (1990), 111.

<sup>1146</sup> The formula אָמַר אֱלֹהִים חַי־אֱנִי נֹאמְרֵיהֶן (14:28) signals a divine oracle and is frequently found in the prophetic books. The formula occurs only twice in the Pentateuch, here and in Genesis 22:16.

<sup>1147</sup> The Syrian version supplements the text with words from the Deuteronomic parallel account and reads: "and your children, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall go enter the land"(cf. Deut 1:39).

land which their parents had rejected (14:31), whereas the rebellious generation, including their innocent offspring, are to *know* what it means to live with divine opposition (14:34).

וַיִּרְעוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ (v. 31)  
וַיִּרְעֻם אֶת־תְּנוּאָתִי (v. 34)

The commentators have rightly pointed to the disturbing force of תְּנוּאָה, which connotes nothing less than active opposition or frustration on God's part.<sup>1149</sup> The meaning of this difficult expression might be illuminated by looking ahead to the time when the tribes of Reuben and Gad nearly succeeded in frustrating YHWH's intention to give the land to the new generation (32:7–9). As there were signs of a new insurrection among the new generation, Moses fiercely rebukes Reuben and Gad for their cowardly selfish interests and compares them to the scouts in chapter 14.

7 Why will you discourage the hearts (לְקַחַת הַתְּנוּאָה)<sup>1150</sup> of the Israelites from going over into the land that the LORD has given them? 8 Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. 9 When they went up to the Wadi Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the hearts (וַיִּנְיאוּ) of the Israelites from going into the land that the LORD had given them (32:7–9).

Interestingly the rebellion back in Kadesh–barnea is described with the same root (נִא) as the potential opposition on the border of the Jordan.<sup>1151</sup> Thus one could infer from that, that just as Israel, via the scouts, opposed and frustrated YHWH's plan to bring them into the promised land, so does YHWH oppose Israel's intention to go forward and frustrate them by sending them back to the Red Sea (14:25). By using the same root (נִא), Moses warns the new generation that YHWH's punishment fits the crime.<sup>1152</sup> In a seemingly *lex talion* style Israel's opposition is matched by YHWH's opposition (§ 5.3.1.5). Olson concludes that the reader is left with the impression that God's condemnation of the entire wilderness generation “to a gradual forty–year death in the desert is a punishment that fits the crime.”<sup>1153</sup> A year

<sup>1148</sup> BHS proposes to read וַיִּרְעוּ they shall tend [רעה] the land), probably influenced by רעים in verse 33. The LXX reads: αὐτὸν ἀληγοσυμῆστος τῆς γῆς (they shall inherit). This reading is possibly based on Deuteronomy 1:39 which reads וַיִּרְשׁוּהָ. In the light of the contrastive and meaningful parallel between parents and children as shown above, I suggest to leave the Massoretic text as it stands. Cf. Ashley (1993), 267.

<sup>1149</sup> Cf. Loewe (1968), 142–57. Ancient versions sought to soften it by insisting that it means not YHWH's opposition or frustration but Israel's opposition, i.e. “you murmured against me.” So Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon. cf. Milgrom (1990), 311. The LXX takes the sharp edge by paraphrasing it with “you shall know the passion/the anger of my wrath (τον θυμὸν τῆς ὀργῆς μου).” Cf. Snaith (1967<sup>4</sup>), 248.

<sup>1150</sup> Oppose or frustrate might be a better translation. Cf. Milgrom (1990), 269.

<sup>1151</sup> The root נִא occurs only nine times in the OT. Once in 14:34, four times it is used in the context of a father or husband having the legal right to oppose, disapprove, or frustrate the vow of his daughter or wife (cf. 30:6, 9, 12). Twice it is used in the context of the Gadites and Reubenites wanting to remain east of the Jordan (32:7, 9). Twice it is used of YHWH's opposition: once to the nations (Ps. 33:10), and once to Job (Job 33:10). See BDB, 626.

<sup>1152</sup> McEvenue (1969), 458.

<sup>1153</sup> Olson (1996), 85.



in the wilderness for each day of the scout's mission. Does it really fit the crime? Behind the harsh calculation is the idea that within forty years the rebellious generation dies and up to four new generations can emerge.<sup>1154</sup> The precise nature of YHWH's punishment remains to be discussed.

At first sight, however, there is a disturbing sense, at least to modern readers, that the longer the rebellious generation remains alive and can enjoy its offspring (up to their great-grand children), the longer the innocent offspring is affected by the punishment (cf. 14:33). Milgrom hypothetically asks whether it would not have been better for the innocent children, if the sinful parents had been immediately consumed by YHWH's wrath as initially intended (14:12), then YHWH could have brought them into the promised land straight away.<sup>1155</sup> Instead, the punishment for the parents had been softened by allowing them to die a natural death in the desert, while the children are to roam in the desert, suffering for and sharing in their parents' guilt. As we shall see in our next and final section, Scripture provides various conceptions of Israel's life in the wilderness. So before we reach any premature conclusion regarding Israel's time in the wilderness and the nature of the divine judgement, we seek to further elucidate the logic of YHWH's visitation of the sinful generations' iniquities to the fourth generation.

#### 5.4.3 *The Logic of Visiting the Iniquities of the Parents to the Fourth Generation*

In this section we hope to show that the sentence of forty years in the wilderness and the children sharing in the sins of their fathers stands in important ways as a commentary on the complex concept of visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon children up to the fourth generation (14:18, Ex. 34:7b). In our previous discussion on the meaning of the divine attribute *נִנְקָה לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עֹן אָבוֹת עַל-בְּנֵיהֶם* ... we have seen that a significant number of scholars argue that it is about delaying and deferring punishment to the descendants of the actual sinners (§ 4.8.2.3). Although the “doctrine” of deferred punishment is widespread in the OT, we have questioned that this is the most likely interpretation of the divine attribute as expressed in Exodus 34:7b and Numbers 14:18. Based on our previous analysis of the matter in question, we shall seek to unfold the logic of divine visitation upon subsequent generations in the context of the scout narrative.

First, we recall that the punishment of the initiators of the rebellion is not deferred; apart from Caleb and Joshua, the scouts were subjected to immediate destruction by plague (cf. 14:36–37, cf. Ex. 32:25–29, 35). Moreover, it is questionable whether deferral of punishment is the right category for what happens to the rebellious wilderness generation. In spite the fact that the children share in the parents' punishment, they have a genuine chance to eventually enter the promised

<sup>1154</sup> The same mathematics, though reversed, are applied in Ezekiel 4:6, where the prophet is to lie on his side, carrying Israel's *עֹן* or forty days in order to “equal” the forty years of Israel's guilt.

<sup>1155</sup> Milgrom (1990), 395.

land and be reconciled to God. The sinful generation, by contrast, is to die in the wilderness. To be more precise, the divine judgement has an immediate impact on them; they are to roam the desert for forty years. This time span allows a fourth generation to be born in the wilderness. Hence in this context divine visitation up to the fourth generations seems to mean that YHWH's punishment encompasses all succeeding generations born within this timeframe. To put it differently, the succeeding generations only share in the punishment as long as the rebellious generation lives. While they are alive, the innocent youth is to remain with their parents in the wilderness as shepherds<sup>1156</sup> and are to endure the consequences of their parents' sins, or in the words of the text, they have to carry their harlotry (וְנָשְׂאוּ אֶת־זִנוּתֵיכֶם עִדְהֶם פְּגִרְיָכֶם בְּמִדְבָּר, 14:33).<sup>1157</sup>

Although the children are eventually given a genuine opportunity to do better than their fathers and respond in faith and obedience to YHWH, it remains a fact that they have to bear the repercussions of their parents' sins.<sup>1158</sup> Not only to modern individualistic sensibilities is this a disturbing concept of justice, but also the OT itself recognises its problematic. For example, during Israel's exile the problem became acute when the children of the exiles became aware that their misery is caused by their parents' sinful conduct. The cynical proverb "the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" brings this clearly to expression (cf. Jer. 31:28, Ezek. 18:2). One could argue that the children of the exiles experienced in a similar way to that of the wilderness generation what it means to bear the consequences of YHWH's opposition up to four generations.<sup>1159</sup>

If the parents' sins overrule the descendants' conduct, who should care about morals? From the speeches of Ezekiel we understand that the exile has possibly generated an atmosphere of resignation among the second generation exiles.

you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" (Ezek. 33:10, cf. 18:2ff.)

Ezekiel seeks to address this nihilistic attitude in chapter 18 by illustrating on the

<sup>1156</sup> Probably based on Targum Jonathan and Vulgate, BHS proposes חַעֲרִים (nomads) or נַעֲרִים (wanderer). De Vaulx (1972), 174, is most likely right in suggesting that for the settled author "tout berger est nomade."

<sup>1157</sup> Following the rabbis we have suggested that Israel's desire for new leadership (14:4) could be perceived as unfaithfulness, change of alliance could well be understood as idolatry (obviously in a metaphoric sense). It should be noticed that any defection from God's commandments can also be described as idolatry (e.g. 15:39). This would be further endorsed, as McEvenue (1969), 461, argues, by the loose chiasmic structure in verses 33 and 34. There וְנָשְׂאוּ אֶת־זִנוּתֵיכֶם is set in parallel with תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם. This seems to suggest that זִנוּה in this context refers to Israel's wider sin as depicted in the scout narrative.

<sup>1158</sup> We have argued that logic of the term נִשְׂא עֲוֹן is that the evildoer has to carry the consequences of his/her evil deeds him/herself. Here, however, the children are to participate in enduring the punishment.

<sup>1159</sup> Possibly Jeremiah's estimate that the punishment of exile will not last longer than seventy years (cf. Jer. 29:10ff, 25:11) has to be seen in this light, since this time span coincides with approximately three to four generations during which YHWH wrath might be evident. After that, however, God's faithfulness and mercy is expected to predominate again.

bases of three generations (father, son, and grandson) how each individual's conduct affects matters of life and death. By means of a series of commandments (Ezek. 18:6ff.) Ezekiel elucidates the will of God to the cynical second generation and seems to conclude that the fathers' sins do not fatalistically affect the future of the next generation (Ezek. 18:14–17, 20, cf. 31:29–30). Ezekiel goes further by explaining that not even one's own past determines one's future, provided one genuinely acknowledges and repents of one's sins (Ezek. 18:21ff., 33:11).

Scholarship has frequently highlighted the apparently innovative new idea of individual autonomous accountability in Ezekiel 18. According to von Rad, Ezekiel was possibly the first prophet to proclaim that individual's conduct will have direct bearing on their standing before God (Ezek. 33:12, cf. 18).<sup>1160</sup> Although this might sound at first more tolerable to modern (Christian) ears than the idea of inter-generational collective judgement, recent scholarship on Ezekiel 18 has rightly pointed out that such a reading stands in tension with several other passages in Ezekiel which seem to take corporate retribution for granted (Ezek. 20, 21, 23).<sup>1161</sup> Moreover, even though Ezekiel's speech is phrased in individualistic language, a closer look reveals that it is addressed to Israel as a corporate whole ("House of Israel," Ezek. 18:25, 32).<sup>1162</sup> There is good reason to argue that God addresses the nation "through the individuals who make up this nation."<sup>1163</sup> Thus it seems that the aim of Ezekiel 18 is not to undermine traditional notions of communal responsibilities, but to bring the entire generation to acknowledge and repent of its sins (vv. 1–20) in order to liberate itself from its guilt.<sup>1164</sup> In other words, the prophet seems to encourage a generation, which in despair laments about a seemingly fatalistically determined future (Ezek. 33:10), that moral obedience to God still matters and that YHWH judges each generation according to its own merits (Ezek. 18:30–32).<sup>1165</sup>

Although Ezekiel 18 seems to reject the doctrine of inter-generational retribution and the notion that a generation can either rest on its past merits or is hopelessly condemned because of its past sins, the reality of exile stands in complex tension with Ezekiel's pastorally oriented message. This tension between inter-generational, individual, and communal responsibilities is also recognised by Jeremiah who juxtaposes these aspects without attempting to resolve them.

18 You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation, but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their children after them, O great and mighty God...whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings (Jer.

<sup>1160</sup> See von Rad's (1993<sup>10</sup>), 240–242, discussion on the seemingly new paradigm started by Ezekiel. Similarly Lindblom (1962), 387.

<sup>1161</sup> Joyce (1989), 76, Kaminsky (1995), 162.

<sup>1162</sup> Joyce (1989), 47, suggests that the individualistic language is borrowed from "liturgies of entrance" and then was reapplied to a national crisis.

<sup>1163</sup> Kaminsky (1995), 171.

<sup>1164</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>1165</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 485.

32:18–19).

A few verses before that, Jeremiah explains that YHWH punishes the guilty together with their children only if the latter continue in the way of the former (Jer. 31:30–31). It seems thus that for Jeremiah and Ezekiel the inter-generational, the communal, and the individual responsibilities are intrinsically linked and complement each other. Kaminsky concludes his study on *Corporate Responsibility* with the following words:

Such a theology affirms the importance of God's relationship to society and to the individuals who compose that society. This type of theology can empower people inasmuch as they can now see that their actions as individuals are part of a larger narrative framework that belongs to the community as a whole.<sup>1166</sup>

Although there is fresh emphasis that God judges each generation according to their own deeds in the teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the situation of the second generation exiles is arguably similar to that of the children of the rebellious wilderness generation.<sup>1167</sup> Both parties have to bear the sociological consequences of their parents' sin. Nevertheless, in both cases they are to be the potential heirs of the divine promise. In both cases, YHWH's underlying mercy and faithfulness, eventually provides a new chance for the new generations to (re)settle in the promised land.<sup>1168</sup> Already the scout narrative makes it clear that the children will ultimately not be pursued in judgement for their parents' sins (14:30ff.).<sup>1169</sup> In fact, Numbers 32 makes it clear that their standing with God will depend on their response to the divine promise. In other words, it is up to them whether they choose to follow in the footsteps of their fathers or whether they will exercise obedience and trust in God. Their response will not be tainted by their fathers' sins, but will stand

<sup>1166</sup> Kaminsky (1995), 189. Ringgren (1977<sup>2</sup>), 13–14, reckons that this dilemma between the concept of individual and communal responsibility is never reconciled in the OT. A possible attempt to come to terms with this tension is the people's confession of their own sins along with the sins of their fathers (cf. Lev. 26:40, Ps. 106:6). Cf. Scharbert (1958), 197, Preuß (1991), 70.

<sup>1167</sup> Ezekiel consistently presents the wilderness period as a type of YHWH's future judgement (Ezek. 20:35–38).

<sup>1168</sup> The modern (Christian) reader might be disturbed by the concept of collective retribution. On second thoughts, however, it gives expression to a social reality. Certain human behaviour or actions have severe consequences on their children, or next generation in general. Life experience confirms again and again the intrinsic connection between the "sins of the parents" and the fate of the children. Cf. Koch (1984), 108, Dietrich (1997<sup>2</sup>), 103–104. Just as we were brought up and educated, so we will (usually) bring up our children. Moreover, the social and religious background will to a large degree determine people's future. The phenomenon of corporate and inter-generational guilt can also be observed on a national level. Contemporary Germans still have to bear the burden of their parents' and grand-parents' war crimes. Another example of collective punishment would be the global pollution which is being accumulated for subsequent generations. If we turn with our query to the NT, we will soon discover that the NT has a great deal to say about community responsibility. Not only in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 12, but already in Isaiah 1:5ff is the people of God envisaged as one body with many members. Preuß (1991), 70–71. Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 230–231, even suggests that the NT does not know of any individual relationship with God which does not have its roots and goal in the community.

<sup>1169</sup> Seebass (1995), 128.

on its own.<sup>1170</sup> This comes well to expression in Numbers 32:6–15 when the new generation is about to enter the promised land and the tribes of Reuben and Gad wish to remain in the Transjordan and thereby endanger the courage and faith of the new generation anew like the scouts did before them. Thus they are warned not to commit the same mistake as their parents. The warning comes into focus in Moses' concerned and challenging question:

Will you be like them?...For if you turn away from following him (the Lord), he will again abandon them in the wilderness; and you will destroy all this people" (32:14–15).

The book of Numbers ends with the new generation at the threshold of the promised land. Olson suggestively argues:

The new generation is on the brink of entering this marvellous land enjoying the fulfilment of the promise. Its future lies open before it. Thus the new generation which ends the book of Numbers stands as a paradigm for each succeeding generation who likewise stands on the edge of the promised land, awaiting the fulfilment of the promises of God.<sup>1171</sup>

The rebellious generation, however, was punished to die in the wilderness. Interestingly, these forty years in the wilderness were not marked by a miserable existence.<sup>1172</sup> Although the book of Numbers says not much about this period,<sup>1173</sup> Deuteronomy envisages the wilderness period as a time of divine providence and protection, even if this involved testing (Deut. 8:2). It is, however, not the invention of the Deuteronomist to view the desert time as a time of blessing. Exodus 16:35 (JE), in a kind of canonical preview, describes how Israel was regularly fed with Manna, and Amos speaks of the Lord's guidance for forty years in order to give Israel eventually the land of the Amorites (Am. 2:10, cf. 5:25). There are, however, also more negative references to Israel's wilderness period:

For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways" (Ps. 95:10).

Overall, however, the OT envisions the wilderness period as one of formation and blessing. The following texts would confirm that (Jer. 2:2–6, 31:2–3, Hos. 2:16ff.

<sup>1170</sup> Thus the overall picture of sin–punishment according to Numbers 13–14 comes close to that of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The concerns of Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarding communal versus individual punishment is also reflected in Deuteronomy 7:9–10, where the element of "keeping covenant loyalty with those who love him to a thousand generations" is juxtaposed with a warning to the individual.

<sup>1171</sup> Olson (1985), 96–97.

<sup>1172</sup> McEvenue (1969), 455–456.

<sup>1173</sup> In fact, the chronology in the book of Numbers has puzzled scholars for some time. Milgrom (1990), xi, illustrates the problem well. Chapters 1–10:11 cover events which happen within nineteen days. Chapter 21:10 to the end of the book describe events which take place within five months of the fortieth year (cf. 20:28, 33:38). This leaves the chapters in the middle (10:12–21:9). The first part of these chapters (10:12–14:45), however, depict events at the very beginning of the forty years (cf. 14:34), whereas Numbers 20:1–21:10 the end of the period (cf. 20:1). Thus all that is left for the intervening thirty eight wilderness years is the account of the Korahite rebellion (16–17) and several laws (15, 18–19). In other words, although the forty years in the wilderness are firmly embedded in the rhetoric of the book of Numbers, the text does not seem to intend to describe this period, rather as Milgrom suggests, it serves more as "a period of transition, allowing for a new generation to arise (26:65).

9:10, 13:5).<sup>1174</sup> It is, however, Deuteronomy which enriches the picture of Israel's wilderness period in significant ways. With hindsight, Israel came to see their time in the wilderness not so much as a time of punishment (although this aspect is not denied. Cf. Deut. 1:19–46), but as a time of discipline and growing understanding of God (Deut. 8:2–4). He did not forsake them and leave them unprotected: “these forty years the Lord our God has been with you; you have lacked nothing” (Deut. 2:7, 32:10). In other words, the punishment to remain in the desert for the rest of their lives was not dictated by sickness, disease, and famine, rather Israel is sustained, their clothes did not wear out and they did not lack anything (cf. Deut. 8:4, 29:5, Neh. 9:21). Moberly sees in the Deuteronomic perspective a “striking example of a characteristic biblical understanding of how God can bring good out of bad.”<sup>1175</sup>

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<sup>1174</sup> See McEvenue (1969), 455. Barth (1966), 14–23.

<sup>1175</sup> Moberly (2000), 101. There seem to be some conceptual parallel with the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden of Eden. There as well, God showed mercy within the framework of judgement, by providing the basic needs for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21).

## Chapter Six

## Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: Concluding Summary

We started our thesis by drawing attention to the intrinsic connection between prayer as presented by the canon and theological interpretation of Scripture. A survey of research on intercessory prayer in the OT followed. An overview and exposition of recent approaches enabled us not only to build on the works of others, but also to situate our own reading among the diversity of approaches to OT intercessory prayers. In contrast to two other major studies on intercessory prayer, the prime objectives of this study was to reconsider the significance of the canonical portrayal of Moses the intercessor in the aftermath of “documentary” pentateuchal criticism. In other words, we attempted to adhere closely to the logic of the two prime accounts in question and to analyse carefully the dynamics of Moses’ prayers in their narrative contexts. Unlike pure synchronic studies, we allowed the diachronic dimension of the text to inform and to enrich our reading of the final form of the narratives. The focus, however, was on the intercessions’ rich theological contents and their theological functions in the immediate and wider narrative contexts.

### 6.1 Moses as Prophet

Taking the texts as the OT presents them with utmost theological seriousness includes respecting the canonical portrayal of Moses. It has long been noticed that the canon ascribes prophetic characteristics to the portrait of Moses. Yet surprisingly the implication of that for Moses’ role as intercessor have not really been developed. Thus one primary goal of this dissertation was to examine Moses’ intercessory activity, as depicted in Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 14, not only in the light of his “prophetic” call and commission (Ex. 3–6), but also in view of the portrayal of other OT prophets in their intercessory function. With regard to the latter, we have argued that prophetic authority has by nature two sides: The proclamation of the divine will, usually in form of divine ultimata and judgement, and the advocacy of the sinful people before the divine judge (§ 3.1.3). According to the canonical witness the proclamation of threat and judgement often go hand in hand with prophetic intercessory prayer. Both aspects have ultimately the same goal, the well-being of the people and the realisation of YHWH’s will and purposes.

It has been important for us to underline that effective prophetic intercession and genuine prophetic speech are intrinsically related to an intimate knowledge of God’s

plan and will. Only when the intercessor has insight into the divine will and council can he, on the one hand, participate and influence the divine decision-making process, and on the other hand, instruct or rebuke the people with divine authority. It is for this reason that the OT ascribes intercession primarily to people with prophet-like prerogatives.

We have shown that right from the inauguration of Moses' ministry his role is characterised by what became later a twofold task particularly associated with the prophets: The representation of YHWH before the people, and the advocacy of the people before YHWH (cf. § 3.1.3, 4.3). In other words, what came to characterise a major function of the prophets, is clearly rooted in the canonical portrayal of Moses' mediatory role. By situating Moses' intercessory activity in the context of what became arguably one of the most important roles of the prophet and by identifying some key aspects of the logic of prophetic intercessions, we attempted to establish a framework of relevant categories within which to unfold the dynamics of Moses' prayers as presented in Israel's two prime sin accounts: the golden calf apostasy and the rebellion at Kadesh.

## 6.2 Moses' Intercessory Prayers at Sinai (Ex. 32–34)

It has been our objective to provide a close *Nacherzählung* of the texts in question. It is thus natural that our exegesis of Moses' prayers in Exodus 32–34 occupied the longest chapter of our thesis. Four prayers are recorded, each one of them extremely rich and complex in theology. I do not presume for a moment that I have captured all the nuances and subtleties of these prayers, nevertheless it is hoped that our reading makes a modest contribution in the following areas: the dynamics and logic of each prayer, their relation to one another, and their function and effect in their narrative contexts.

### 6.2.1 First Prayer (32:10–14)

While Moses was still on the mountain in YHWH's presence, he was made privy to Israel's idolatrous behaviour at the foot of the mountain. YHWH not only informs His mediator of the people's sinful conduct, but also shares with him His plans of judgement. We have argued against the notion that YHWH's "leave me alone" reflects a firmly determined decision to annihilate the sinful generation which genuinely sought to refrain His covenant mediator from any interference. Rather we followed a long interpretative tradition which suggests that YHWH implicitly invited (by prohibition), possibly even tested, His mediator to challenge His justified yet circumstantial wrath. This line of interpretation has been substantiated by a number of observations: Firstly, YHWH could have simply proceeded with His intentions or He could have "shut the door" just as He did when Moses pleaded to enter the



promised land with Israel (Deut. 3:23ff.). Secondly, and following from that, it appears that YHWH makes His decision intentionally vulnerable to Moses' response (cf. Nu. 14:12). The imperative "leave me alone" opens the door "not to leave Him alone." Thirdly, by presenting Moses with the offer to make him the new patriarch at the cost of the death of the sinful generation, YHWH makes His intention and the fulfilment of the divine promise clearly susceptible to Moses' response. All these points endorse the view that YHWH's "no" is a subtle divine invitation to intercede.

I have sought to expound the underlying logic of Exodus 32:10ff. in the light of the dynamics of what became the classic form of prophecy. Just as the prophets (especially those under deuteronomic influence) confronted sinful Israel with a message of doom in the hope to provoke a response of repentance and change of heart, so YHWH sought possibly to elicit Moses' intercession through confrontational language (cf. § 4.3.2). Eagleton, with reference to Jonah's prophecy, describes the linguistic phenomenon as follows: "Effective declarations of imminent catastrophe cancel themselves out, containing as they do a contradiction between what they say and what they do."<sup>176</sup> If this analogy is anywhere near the underlying logic of Exodus 32:10ff. it would also explain the paradox between a subtle divine invitation to intercede and the statement that YHWH changed His mind as a result of Moses' prayer (32:14). YHWH's initial reaction is genuine and has the potential for destruction. Yet just as often in prophetic announcement of judgement, YHWH's intentions are only exploratory at the initial stage and the final outcome is intrinsically linked to the response of the addressed party. Destruction, though a possibility, would undermine YHWH's ultimate salvific purposes (cf. Ezek. 33:11).

Such a reading of Exodus 32:10ff. is further endorsed by innerbiblical interpretations of Moses' intercessory activity. The writer of Psalm 106 reads Moses' prayer through the helpful image of "standing in the breach" (עֹמֵד בַּפְּרִיץ, v. 23). Ezekiel 22:30 makes it clear that YHWH expects and in some sense invites the prophetic mediator to defend sinful Israel from the divine wrath by covering for the offence with prayer. Hence, as hoped for, Moses faithfully disagrees with YHWH's intention and urges Him to turn from His justified intentions (32:13–14). Faithful disagreement, because Moses seeks to persuade YHWH through two rational (32:11–12) and one emotional argument (32:13), that the acquittal of the people and the preservation of the covenant is in the best interest of YHWH as well.

According to Hesse, Moses' prayer participates in YHWH's internal dilemma whether to be a God of wrath or of promise, and thereby seeks to prove wrong the "YHWH of wrath" through persistent listing of counter-arguments:

Sie (Fürbitte) hat die Funktion, durch Aufzählung der Gegengründe den Zorn Gottes als widersinnig zu erweisen. Der Verfasser ruft gegen den zürnenden Gott den Gott der

<sup>176</sup> (1990), 233. This bears some semblance with Austin's concept of "performative" language, language which gets something done.

Verheißungen auf. Er weiß, daß Gott einen Kampf mit sich selbst auskämpfen muß; in diesem Kampf greift nun Mose mit seiner Fürbitte ein. Er stellt sich in ihr ganz auf die Seite des Gottes der Verheißung, den er sozusagen gegen den Gott des Zornes ausspielt...Da aber Gott eher von seinem Zorne lassen als seine Verheißungen unerfüllt lassen und sich damit selbst zum Gespött machen kann, ist der Weg vorgezeichnet, den Mose mit seiner Fürbitte gehen muß: Er muß sich mit aller Kraft an die Verheißung hängen, Gott damit sozusagen in den Ohren liegen, so lange, bis er die Absicht der Vernichtung aufgibt. So nur kann der Widerstreit überwunden werden, daß man Gott zu dem Handeln veranlaßt, daß seinem Wesen und seinen Absichten am meisten entspricht.<sup>1177</sup>

Hesse's understanding of Moses' prayer attitude reminds of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (Lk. 18:1–7), who eventually gives in to the widow's persistent pleas. We do not deny the audacious and persistent tone of the prayer, but in the light of our reading of verses 11–13, Moses does not so much seek to persuade and pacify the God of wrath on the basis of the divine promise made to the patriarchs (presumably that is meant by "Verheißungen," cf. § 4.3.3), but rather in response to YHWH's invitation by prohibition, and on the basis of a deeper understanding of the divine plan he attempts to convince God to pursue His initial intentions. In other words, Moses takes sides with God, his intercession is profoundly in tune with YHWH's nature and purposes and because of this he "dares to assert his prerogative with the confidence of one who is intimate with God, and with the vehemence of his own longing that God's salvation shall be fully realised."<sup>1178</sup> As a result, YHWH changes His mind regarding the intended judgement (Ex. 32:14). Henceforth Moses' prayer secured the continuing existence of Israel as the people of YHWH. As indicated, however, the wording of verse 14 does not exclude the possibility of punishment of a less radical kind. To be more precise, verse 14 is not so much about divine forgiveness of Israel's sin, as it is often assumed, but it is primarily about an assurance that the Sinai generation will not be eradicated and that they have a future as God's people.

### 6.2.2 Second Prayer (32:30–33)

We have argued that Moses' second prayer is often misunderstood on several levels. One of the more serious misinterpretations is to ascribe a vicarious atoning function to Moses' willingness to be canceled from YHWH's book. Careful reading of the text makes it evident that what Moses has in mind is to express his inseparable loyalty to the people. He is prepared to have his name wiped out from the book alongside the sinful people. Hence to conclude that Moses intended to stand in the place of Israel à la suffering servant would be forcing the text too much. Nor does the text say that Moses' offers himself as a כִּפָּר. The immediate context does not provide sufficient grounds for any vicarious reading of Moses' prayer. What is clear, however, is Moses' compassionate bond to the people. He has already proven his solidarity to the people in his previous prayer, where he implicitly rejected

<sup>1177</sup> Hesse (1951), 112–113.

<sup>1178</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 450.

YHWH's offer to make a fresh start with him at the cost of Israel (32:10–13). This time Moses spells out a solidarity of unprecedented nature, he is prepared to bear the divine wrath with the sinful and to die with them, if YHWH will not give them a second chance. Thus Moses, once more, refuses, as forcefully as he possibly could, to be part of God's future plan, unless it includes contemporary Israel as well. In Exodus 32:30–33, prayer and deed become one. Moses acts as he prays. In other words, his actions substantiate and authenticate his intercessions (cf. Jas. 5:16b, 1 Pet. 3:12). One could even go so far as to say that Moses embodies in a sense the divine attributes of costly solidarity without cheapening YHWH's wrath (Ex. 34:6–7, cf. Lev. 11:45).

Another point where we took issue with a significant number of scholars is regarding the relationship between Moses' first and second prayer. Often one finds the questionable position that Moses' first intercession was successful, whilst his second was not (cf. § 4.6). According to Exodus 32:14, YHWH changed His mind regarding His intention to consume Israel. Some scholars speak of a successful prayer because YHWH apparently forgave Israel. Whereas Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:31ff. is frequently regarded as unsuccessful in the sense that his willingness to die with Israel is declined and because forthcoming punishment is announced (32:33ff.). Scholarship frequently seeks to resolve the tension with reference to Moses' first prayer being a deuteronomic interpolation without giving the canonical sequence a fair hearing. We have attempted to elucidate the logic between the two prayers by reading Exodus 32 without and with Moses' first prayer. By way of this exercise we acknowledged the possibility that Moses' first prayer is a later insertion. But instead of stopping there, we have attempted to tease out the function and effect of Moses' first prayer in its canonical context. Thereby we have suggested that Moses' first prayer, not only transformed a hypothetical earlier account of sin and judgement into a much more nuanced theological discourse on the complexity of judgement that contains grace and mercy, but also that the two prayers stand in logical relationship to each other. Thereby we have particularly addressed the alleged contradiction and the different tones between the prayers (cf. § 4.6.2). We have concluded that both Exodus 32:10–14 and 32:33–34 are in a profound sense open-ended and anticipate further dialogue and clarification regarding the exact future of Israel. Moreover, both prayers foreshadow YHWH's final and climactic revelation to be gracious and merciful, but not to leave the sinner unpunished (34:5–7).

### 6.2.3 *Third Prayer (33:12–23)*

Having acknowledged the possibility that Exodus 33 is a composition of various traditions, we have argued that in their final form the alleged underlying traditions are all more or less related to Moses' intercessory role and provide important, if not essential, information for the unfolding of the narrative. Verses 1–11 not only introduce the fundamental problem of how a holy God can live among a sinful

people, but also testify to a transformation of the people and implicitly also of YHWH's relation to them. This change of attitudes on both sides is significant for the development of the story. For it seems that the text presupposes this mutual change of heart for Moses' intercession to be fruitful (cf. § 4.3.7.1). Moreover, we have suggested that the alleged tradition of the divine messenger is integrated in Moses' prayer (33:12) and contributed to the grand request to know YHWH, that is His divine principles and His nature (33:13). This in turn reaches its climax in Moses' daring petition to see YHWH's glory (33:18). Despite the fact that verses 18–23 are frequently ascribed to a later writer and numerous scholars have drawn attention to seemingly unresolvable tensions between the first and second part of the human–divine dialogue, we believe we have offered a coherent reading of the canonical text.

Moses' third prayer has understandably been described as the climactic one, because it is arguably in this intense dialogue that the fundamental breakthrough happens. At the outset of the chapter everything hangs in the balance, Israel's future is still undecided, Moses is uncertain regarding his role and YHWH's purposes, while at the end of it, YHWH affirms the resumption of His presence among the people and announces a show of His goodness to Moses in a forthcoming theophany.

In contrast to his previous prayer, Moses' dialogue with YHWH is characterised by an increasingly brave and insistent tone. Although it became clear that the objective of Moses' prayer has always been the restoration of the breached covenant relationship, he initially mentioned sinful Israel only in a seemingly incidental manner, as if he carefully explored YHWH's reaction after the previous divine word of reproof (32:33). Encouraged by not being opposed this time, Moses becomes bolder and speaks of Israel more directly. Although YHWH shows some reluctance in committing Himself to the people, we noted that He does not dismiss Moses' plea either. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Moses' brave words are not presented in a negative light (cf. 3:11–4:17). It is likely for this reason that Moses' prayer increases in boldness as YHWH is graciously willing to respond. Moses' audacity reaches its climax in his request to see YHWH's glory (33:18).

Much of the narrative provides a commentary on what it means to dialogue with YHWH face to face as with a friend (33:11). Although Moses' prayer-requests thus far have been only partially granted, there is a clear progression in the dialogue, with each oral interchange Moses moves one step closer to his ultimate goal: God's presence among Israel and the restoration of the breached covenant relationship (33:13, 18). Reading Moses' intercessory prayers in their canonical sequence, one gains a sense that the more Moses engages in prayer the deeper he is led into the

divine mystery.<sup>1179</sup> Vischer insightfully catches the dynamic of Moses' prayer:

Vorhang um Vorhang fällt und das letzte Geheimnis enthüllt sich und wird gerade dann, wenn es enthüllt, erkannt als das Geheimnis Gottes, das niemals eingesehen und durchschaut werden kann, das unergründlich verborgen ist in den Tiefen der Gottheit.<sup>1180</sup>

There is a clear sense that God's revelation is intrinsically connected to Moses' response. His self-involvement enables an encounter with God of unprecedented nature. Through the use of a variety of metaphors and anthropomorphic language a complex and sophisticated biblical truth is established: God is gracious and merciful and yet holy and morally demanding, He is seen and yet unseen, He is close and yet He transcends human perception. These unresolvable tensions are inherent in Exodus 33:18–24 and are confirmed in the actual revelation of God's name (34:6–7). The text, as Moberly observes, articulates, in its own way, "that sense which has been fundamental to classic theology that to know God is to know the one who surpasses knowledge."<sup>1181</sup>

Although it may be possible that the account of Moses' visual experience has been inserted, in its canonical form the visual and the moral are brought together. Exodus 33:18–23 underlines that YHWH's presence cannot be restricted to the sensory or visual sphere, but has clearly also a moral dimension. Thus YHWH's consuming holiness, His moral demand, and His transcending presence are brought together into Moses' experience of God. In the light of YHWH's actual revelation (34:6–7), however, it has become evident, that the visual aspect of Moses' request has been subordinated to the proclamation of the moral aspects of God's nature. Apart from the mention of cloud and YHWH's passing no further reference is made to a visual manifestation. We have seen that the revelation is primarily portrayed in terms of YHWH's attributes rather than His appearance.

#### 6.2.4 *The Revelation of God's Name (34:6–7)*

Exodus 34:6–7 is often extrapolated by form-critics and treated in its own right as a confessional formula of some kind. By the logic of the narrative, however, the two verses come as the fulfilment of Exodus 33:19ff. where YHWH announced that He will pass before Moses in all His goodness and proclaim His name. In other words, the fullest revelation of YHWH's nature is in an important way the result of Moses' intimate dialogue with YHWH. Moreover, there is good reason to argue that the final form suggests that YHWH teaches Moses through the disclosure of His name how to use the divine name in subsequent prayer. YHWH does this by adopting the language of prayer Himself. In the context of Israel's renewed rebellion at Kadesh, we have seen how Moses prayerfully appropriates YHWH's name as revealed on

<sup>1179</sup> In the context of Exodus, it is clear that Moses does not seek to penetrate the divine mystery in order to satisfy his own "mystical" desires, but does it for the sake of the people he was entrusted with.

<sup>1180</sup> Vischer (1943), 253.

<sup>1181</sup> Moberly (2002), 199.

Sinai (Nu. 14:18ff., Ex. 34:6–7, cf. § 5.4ff.).

Moreover, we have submitted that YHWH's disclosure of His name not only reveals the divine character to a unique extent, but also testifies to a divine re-characterisation. In joint engagement with the problematic tension between Israel's sin and YHWH's ultimate purposes, God allowed Himself in His sovereignty to be persuaded by the persistent prayer of His faithful mediator to overcome justified wrath with grace and loving compassion. The revelation of YHWH's name came as an affirmation to Moses (and through him to Israel) that YHWH is primarily and fundamentally for Israel. This is not to say that divine pardon can easily be presumed upon, for verse 7b comes as a stern warning that the moral order still matters. We have argued that verses 6–7a give expression to YHWH's fundamental nature, whereas verse 7b gives expression to His action if Israel's offence persists. Thereby we have maintained that God's visitation of Israel's iniquities stands not in an unresolvable tension with His fundamental covenant loyalty. The immediate and wider context of verses 6–7 make it evident that YHWH's wrath is provoked by and directed against a specific sin. In other words, divine wrath and judgement are circumstantial and temporary, and as the proportion of thousands to four generations indicates, they cannot overrule YHWH's faithfulness and love.<sup>1182</sup> Distinguishing between YHWH's circumstantial act of judgement and His loving ultimate will for Israel, does not mean the two are incongruous. For:

Anger is an act, a situation, not an essential attribute. This distinction is implied in the words which are of fundamental importance for the understanding of all biblical words: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious..."<sup>1183</sup>

Not only does Heschel endorse the centrality of Exodus 34:6–7 by ascribing to it the function of a hermeneutical key to the Bible, but also differentiates between specific acts of judgement and never-ending underlying divine love. This comes particularly to expression in the prophets, where YHWH's wrath is consistently proclaimed as short-lived, while His love goes on forever (cf. Isa. 54:8, 57:16–17, Jer. 3:5, 12, Ps. 30:5).

Divine wrath according to Exodus 34:7 will manifest itself in the form of divine visitations of the sinful generation and their descendants before appropriate measures are taken. Thus YHWH's wrath is not a seemingly uncontrollable force within YHWH, but rather it is characterised by great patience (cf. 34:6, Nu. 14:18, Jer. 15:15, Joel 2:13 etc.). Patience, in the light of YHWH's willingness to bear Israel's sins, is the restraint of deserved wrath, it is the divine enduring of disloyalty and personal offence in the hope that Israel will ultimately recognise Him as Lord and God without having to assert it in power and judgement (cf. Pss. 78:38–40, 89:29–35). Although the moral order is upheld and punishment is exerted if

<sup>1182</sup> Cf. Deut. 4:24–31, Jer. 31:35–37, Lam. 3:22–23.

<sup>1183</sup> Heschel (1999), 71.

necessary, the fact that YHWH has adjusted His priorities out of His inmost nature and Moses' mediation, reveals that He is fundamentally graciously and loyally committed to His people. This comes well to expression in Moses' final prayer and YHWH's response.

#### 6.2.5 Fourth Prayer (34:8ff.)

In gratitude and worship for the affirmative re-characterisation of the divine name, Moses prostrates himself and embarks on his climactic prayer in which he resumes most major themes of his previous prayers and boldly advances them in the light of YHWH's new revelation. Holding together personal divine favour and the good of the people he prays: "If I have found favour in your eyes then walk in our midst for they are a stiff-necked people and pardon our guilt and sins and take us for your inheritance" (34:9, cf. 33:13). In total solidarity and in tune with his previous unswerving loyalty to Israel (32:32) Moses identifies himself with the people's guilt and sin and makes their pardon depend on his intimate relation with YHWH. Moreover, we have seen that there is good reason to argue that Moses actually promotes Israel's recalcitrant nature as the reason for the resumption of YHWH's presence and pardon. Fretheim helpfully comments:

Moses' prayer assumes that Israel will always be a stiff-necked people; it is the nature of its very being in the world that it cannot extricate itself from such a condition. But it is precisely *because* Israel is such a people that it *needs* God's close presence and constant pardon...Only because of such a God, who chooses to dwell among the people and stands ready to forgive, can a stiff-necked people move into a future worth talking about.<sup>1184</sup>

Agreeing with the gist of this statement, we found ourselves in disagreement with the majority of interpreters when it comes to the interpretation of Moses' petition וְסַלְחָהָם לְעֹנֵינוּ וְלְחַטֹּאתֵינוּ. We have argued that Moses, even here in his final prayer, did not have primarily Israel's forgiveness (in the sense of cancellation of sins) in mind, but rather the renewing of the covenant relationship. This notion is not only endorsed by YHWH's immediate response אֲנֹכִי כָרַח בְּרִית, but has also been further substantiated in the context of Moses' prayer in Kadesh (Nu. 14:19) where the concept of divine סְלִיחָה is unfolded in YHWH's twofold response (Nu. 14:20–35).

In response to Moses' faithful response God incorporates the mediator's prayer arguments in His purposes and renews the covenant with the undeserving people (34:10, 27).<sup>1185</sup> This time, however, the covenant is ratified only in the presence of YHWH and Moses. We believe that there is a deliberate emphasis on Moses' key role in the renewal of the divine-human bond. We have suggested that one aspect of Moses' radiance served to vindicate him before the people as the God-sent covenant mediator. It is possible that the text suggests that YHWH initially resumed His

<sup>1184</sup> Fretheim (1991), 304 (his italics).

<sup>1185</sup> Vischer (1943), 254: "Der sinaitische Bund ist ein von vornherein gebrochener, und dennoch gehalten; gehalten einzig und alleindurch die unergründliche Erklärung, die der Mittler durch sein Dazwischentreten Gott abgerungen hat."

presence among the sinful people in the “transfigured” Moses. He is to summon the people in God’s name to grateful obedience and it is primarily through Moses’ mediatorship that the divine נפלאה will be administered.

In conclusion, it has rightly been pointed out that the flood account (Gen. 6–8) and the Sinai narrative (Ex. 32–34) exhibit important conceptual parallels. They both witness to the essential role of the divinely favoured mediator in *Heilsgeschichte*. In both accounts God’s first gift (i.e. creation/covenant) is endangered by sin (cf. Gen. 6, Ex. 32). In the flood story we read that God saw that humanity was fundamentally wicked (Gen. 6:5), while the golden calf incident testifies to Israel’s fundamental stiff-neckedness (32:9). Both times God’s wrath is kindled to the degree that He intended to bring complete destruction (בלה/מחה, cf. Gen. 6:7, Ex. 32:10, Deut. 9:14). In both cases, however, it is because of one man who found divine favour (מצא חן בעיני יהוה, cf. Gen. 6:8, Ex. 33:12ff.) that God changes His mind and is willing to re-establish a new covenant. Moberly insightfully observes:

Both narratives display the same theological tension that on the one hand God’s mercy is shown to continuously sinful man and is dependent upon himself alone, and on the other hand this mercy is shown through a man who is chosen by God and whose right response to God, whether through sacrifice or prayer, constitutes the necessary medium through which this mercy is shown.<sup>1186</sup>

In other words, Moses’ faithful intercessory prayers are taken up and integrated in YHWH’s will and purposes. God shows mercy, yet it is clear that neither humanity after the flood, nor Israel after their apostasy live anymore within the framework of the original covenant. For both it is a new situation. Creation and Israel are stained with sin and yet their continuous existence is guaranteed by a God who in relation with a faithful mediator chooses to renew and maintain a covenant relationship which is primarily based on mercy and grace. The flood, according to Perlitt, has not changed humanity, but God whose grace prevails.<sup>1187</sup> Aurelius makes a similar observation regarding the post-golden calf situation. Here also, the people remain stiff-necked, but YHWH underwent a change of attitude towards sinful Israel. This adjustment of divine priorities became particularly evident in the light of YHWH’s previous revelation (cf. 20:5), where covenant obedience was a condition for divine favour. In Exodus 34:6–7, however, YHWH emphasises His loving compassion over His moral demand. He no longer speaks of Israel’s destruction, but pardons them, renews the outstanding promises and commits Israel anew to a covenant relationship.<sup>1188</sup>

<sup>1186</sup> Moberly (1983), 92.

<sup>1187</sup> Perlitt (1970), 392: “Die Flut hat offenbar nicht den Menschen verwandelt, sondern Gott.” Cf. Preuß (1991), 280.

<sup>1188</sup> Aurelius (1988), 116.



### 6.3 Numbers 13–14

It has become clear that the scout narrative is rightly called the second main focus of theological reflection in the canonical sequence of the Pentateuch on the nexus of rebellion, divine judgement, prayer, and the divine re-evaluation. Moreover, we have seen that the relation between the golden calf account and the scout narrative goes far beyond common themes. There are numerous conceptual and verbal parallels between the two narratives. It is in the context of Numbers 13–14 that the problem of YHWH's presence among a fundamentally rebellious people is significantly developed in relation to the outstanding promised land (cf. Ex. 33:1–6). Moreover, it is in these chapters that the outstanding divine warning of a forthcoming judgement (Ex. 32:34) finds a concrete resolution. For our purposes most important, however, was the intrinsic relationship between YHWH's fullest self-disclosure of His name (Ex. 34:6–7) and Moses' praying the divine attributes back to YHWH in the face of a threatening judgement (Nu. 14:11ff.). Ensuing from this intricate connection, we have argued that YHWH's response to Moses' prayer provides a helpful innerbiblical commentary on the meaning and implications of YHWH's attributes.

#### 6.3.1 *From a Diachronic to a Synchronic Reading*

In chapter 2 we have argued for the importance of keeping the synchronic and diachronic dimension of the text in its proper relationship. Besides providing some ideas of the diachronic depths and nature of the canonical text, we have allowed tensions and doublets, which were allegedly created by the composition of several layers, to bring some important questions to a reading of the final form. For example, we enquired after the function and role of Moses' prayer (which is widely held as a later insertion) in the final form of the narrative, or we have enquired after the narrative logic behind juxtaposing the "jahwistic" divine response (Nu. 14:20–23/25) with that of the priestly writer (Nu. 14:26ff.).

We started with a brief exposition of the characteristics of the supposedly underlying traditions and sources of Numbers 13–14. Acknowledging the likelihood that earlier layers had once a particular *Sitz im Leben* and addressed a particular situation, we found it striking to note that the final form overwrites as it were, or transforms the concerns and objectives of the earlier accounts. To be more precise, what possibly once started off as a southern tradition associated with Caleb's successful conquest of Hebron, was transformed into an abortive attempt by the entire people to occupy the promised land. Eventually the tradition found its way into the so called "J" source where it possibly provided a reason for the extensive period in the wilderness and the delay of the conquest. In an allegedly subsequent expansion of "J" (14:11–23/25), the writer introduces a divine-human dialogue which sought to provide a theological perspective on the subtle nexus of deserved punishment and YHWH's ultimate will and purposes. Working with the widespread

scholarly consensus that Moses' prayer is a later addition, we have sought to reflect on the effect of Moses' prayer on the final form of the narrative. It is found between YHWH's intention to destroy Israel and the actual pronouncement of the punishment. In the light of Moses' prayer the subsequent resolution comes to look like an act of grace. In other words, the account of Moses' intercession provides the reason why Israel is not destroyed as originally intended by YHWH and why the covenant relationship is eventually graciously preserved. Not unlike the portrait of YHWH in Exodus 32–34, there emerges the picture of a God who is genuinely responsive to prayer and who allows Himself to be moved to show mercy without denying His moral demanding nature.

Having said that, we have seen that on the "J" level the divine resolution remains somewhat ambiguous as it is not entirely clear who will be affected by YHWH's judgement. Does it include women and children as well? What happens to Joshua? The priestly writer, we have argued, brings some clarification as to how exactly the judgement is envisaged. Moreover, he expanded the "J" account by emphasising that the entire land was at stake and that the entire people were involved in the rebellion, and that Caleb and Joshua, representatives from both north and south remained faithful to their commission. Given the nature of the story, an account about the representatives of Judah and Israel, it is possible that there were once political or religious reasons for fusing different traditions and sources. Regardless of what the pre-history of Numbers 13–14 was, the canonical form advocates the view that the divine promise continues to be valid for the entire people. The end result provides a narrative of archetypical nature, addressing theological issues which in some sense transcend historical particularity. In other words, the canonical form is a mature reflection on the complex interplay of human rebellion, divine judgement, prophetic mediation, and God's merciful and gracious response.

The divine resolution encompasses both judgement and mercy. Although all the people who have despised YHWH are punished, YHWH maintains the covenant relationship with Israel as a people. By implication, the prayer of the covenant mediator was successful. Israel can continue as YHWH's people; their children will be the bearer of the divine promise made to their ancestors, and they will eventually be given the chance to inherit the promised land alongside the two loyal scouts.

### 6.3.2 *Moses' Paradigmatic Prayer*

As mentioned, within this mature reflection on the reality of divine judgement which is undergirded by divine grace, mercy, and loyalty, Moses' prayer plays an essential role. Just as in Exodus 32–34, the canon makes it evident that prophetic categories underlie Moses' dialogue with YHWH. In Numbers 12:6–8, Moses is vindicated as the archetypal prophet who enjoys unparalleled access to YHWH's council. Being entrusted with the entire house of Israel, he does not waver when YHWH intended to make Moses the new Patriarch of Israel. Instead he sets out once again to pray for

the rebellious people of little faith.

In the first part of Moses' intercession, he employs the same argument as in his first prayer in Exodus 32:11–12. Although there is nothing to say in the defence of Israel's great sin, Moses, being aware that YHWH's name is intrinsically associated with the well-being of His covenant people, seeks again to persuade YHWH to act for the sake of His reputation among the nations. Rather than promoting another show of divine "military might," Moses cleverly suggests an alternative by appealing to YHWH's name as revealed to him on Sinai (Ex. 34:6–7) and thereby redefines divine greatness and power in terms of patience, loyalty, and moral demand.

The close literary and conceptual relationship between YHWH's self-disclosure in Exodus 34:6–7 and Moses' prayer in Numbers 14:18–20 has long been noticed and has engendered debates on the exact historical relationship between these two passages. We, however, were more concerned to underline the canonical interrelatedness between the two accounts. Brueggemann is one of few who offers substantial, though not unproblematic, reflections on the canonical relationship between the two passages. By the logic of the canon, Moses clearly prays back, in slightly modified form, the divine characteristics as they were revealed to him. By implication Moses entreats YHWH to be as He said He would be and act in a manner that conforms to His revelation. We have seen that YHWH's twofold response confirms that He has accepted His self-disclosure as binding. In contrast to the great majority of scholars, we have argued that the divine resolution is not one of fierce sovereignty, belittling Moses' prayer, but rather a sophisticated and complex statement which implicitly affirms pardon and covenant loyalty without failing to execute divine justice. Thereby we have argued that the meaning and concept of divine *סליחה*, as envisaged in this context, is often misunderstood. Moses never prayed for Israel's forgiveness in the sense of annulment of guilt and sin, but rather for a state which enables the preservation of divine covenant loyalty. Thus we have reasoned against any notion that ascribes little or no effect to Moses' prayer, rather we hoped to show that Moses' intercession is not only frequently misunderstood, but also that it achieved its objectives: that is the continuance and preservation of YHWH's covenant relationship with Israel and the assurance that they as a people will eventually settle in the promised land.

In sum, Moses' prayer was not in vain. As a matter of fact, he secured YHWH's commitment to uphold the battered covenant relationship and thereby Moses bid YHWH to be true to His divine nature and plan (Ex. 34:6–7). Even though some of YHWH' righteous wrath must be expressed in chastisement and punishment, He proved Himself true to His patient steadfast love and allowed Himself once again to be restrained by His prophetic covenant mediator.

### 6.3.3 YHWH's Name Enacted

An important and, as far as I am aware of, not developed aspect of Numbers 14:20ff. is that it provides an innerbiblical commentary on YHWH's nature as revealed to Moses on Sinai (Ex. 34:6–7). To be more precise, we have attempted to show that YHWH's judgement resolution exemplifies how His holy name (34:6–7) is enacted in a concrete context. We have noted in our reading of Exodus 34:6–7 that the second half of the divine self-disclosure came as somehow abstract, since it did not find any direct application in the context of Exodus 32–34. Of course, together with verse 6 it forms a beautifully balanced statement on the goodness of God who is committed to His people, but who nonetheless demands moral integrity. Flowing from the divine loving commitment to the people, YHWH allowed Himself to be persuaded by His mediator to renew the covenant relationship without failing to exercise just punishment. Having said that, it was not entirely clear to me how the immediate punishment of three thousand Israelites and the inflicting of a plague on the sinful generation is to be understood in the light of the divine prerogative to visit with view to examine the children up to the fourth generation for their fathers' sins. We have postulated that Numbers 14:20–35 sheds significant light on the enactment of the divine name, particularly on the logic of YHWH's visitation.

In our previous discussion on the meaning of the divine attribute *וַיִּנָּקֵה לֹא יִנָּקֵה פֶקֶד* וַיִּנָּקֵה לֹא יִנָּקֵה פֶקֶד, *עֲזָן אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים*, we have seen that a significant number of scholars argue that this slightly enigmatic saying is about delaying and deferring punishment to the descendants of the actual sinners (§ 4.8.2.3). Acknowledging that the “doctrine” of deferred punishment is pervasive in the OT, we have questioned that this is the most likely or precise interpretation of the divine attributes as expressed in Exodus 34:7b and Numbers 14:18ff. Thereby we have pointed out that the punishment of the initiators of the rebellion is not deferred, since apart from Caleb and Joshua the scouts were subjected to immediate destruction by plague (cf. 14:36–37, cf. Ex. 32:25–29, 35). Moreover, we have questioned whether deferral of punishment is the right category for what happens to the rebellious wilderness generation. In spite of the fact that the children share in the parents' punishment, we have seen that they have a genuine chance eventually to enter the promised land and to be reconciled to God (Nu. 32). The sinful generation by contrast is to die in the wilderness. In other words, the divine judgement has an immediate impact on them; they are to roam the desert for forty years instead of settling in the promised land. This time span allows a fourth generation to be born in the wilderness. Hence in this context YHWH's visitation to the fourth generation seems to mean that the judgement encompasses all succeeding generations born within this timeframe. By inference, the succeeding generations only share in the punishment as long as the rebellious generation remains alive. While they are alive, the innocent youth is to remain with their parents in the wilderness as shepherds and are to partake in the punishment (14:33). Having said that, beyond that, the children are not the bearers of their parents' guilt, but are the

potential bearers of the divine promise. YHWH's underlying faithfulness eventually provides a new chance for the new generations to settle in the promised land. YHWH's response makes it clear that the children will ultimately not be pursued in judgement for their parents' sins. In fact, Numbers 32 makes it evident that the new generations' standing with God will depend on their own response to the divine promise (32:6–15). Olson has suggestively argued on the basis of the canonical shape of the book of Numbers that each generation of Israel is given the same chance as the wilderness generation had.

The new generation is on the brink of entering this marvellous land enjoying the fulfilment of the promise. Its future lies open before it. Thus the new generation which ends the book of Numbers stands as a paradigm for each succeeding generation who likewise stand on the edge of the promised land, awaiting the fulfilment of the promises of God.<sup>1189</sup>

The rebellious generation was sentenced to die a natural death in the wilderness. Interestingly, these forty years were not marked by a miserable existence. Although the book of Numbers says not much about this period, with hindsight, Israel came to see their time in the wilderness not so much as a time of punishment (although this aspect is not denied. Cf. Deut. 1:19–46), but rather as a time of discipline, providence, and growing understanding of God (Deut. 8:2–4).

#### 6.4 Prophetic Intercession and God's Holy Mutability

In conclusion we venture some theological reflections based on Moses' intercessory prayers. We started this thesis with, on the one hand, recognising the intrinsic importance of biblical prayers for the formation of a theology based on the Bible, and, on the other hand, by showing awareness of the difficulties attached to any interpretation of prayer. Here we would like to address the problem of divine mutability and bring it into biblical context (i.e. from the perspective of Ex. 32–34 and Nu. 13–14). To be more precise, we would like to take issue with the legacy which regards divine repentance or change of mind as a result of prayer as an alarming *theologumenon*, or as a naive anthropomorphism.<sup>1190</sup> According to Jeremias, there is hardly any other divine attribute in the OT which is more problematic and disturbing than God's *Reue*.<sup>1191</sup> The notion of divine repentance or change of mind could at worst convey the impression of capriciousness on God's part, or as standing in tension with His steadfastness and integrity, and with the traditional held view of an omniscient God. If God is omniscient, why does He need to be advised by His

<sup>1189</sup> Olson (1985), 96–97.

<sup>1190</sup> Especially Kant (1998), 184–187. Cf. Reventlow (1986), 14–21. Schleiermacher (Predigtband 4, 357), maintains the wholly otherness of God and limits prayer to a means of renewing one's God-consciousness. In other words, he denies biblical prayer its distinct character by reducing it largely to praise and thanksgiving. Cf. Müller (1984), 86, Cullmann (1997<sup>2</sup>), 18.

<sup>1191</sup> Jeremias (1997), 9.

mediator and be reminded of His overarching purposes and nature? These larger questions have already been implicitly answered in the course of our exegesis, so here we simply wish to draw together our findings and briefly summarise them in a more focused manner.

For a start it is clear that the OT is not embarrassed about depicting God in human ways. Acknowledging the metaphoric value of anthropomorphic language, it is exactly this anthropomorphic language which helps to perceive God in a truly personal and responsive fashion.<sup>1192</sup> It is surely noteworthy that all the adjectives employed in YHWH's fullest self-disclosure are relational in character (cf. Ex. 34:6–7). Moreover, by the logic of the OT, it can only talk about God, either descriptively or prescriptively (i.e. third or first person) because YHWH in His grace and free decision revealed Himself in ways that are comprehensible to humans (i.e. in anthropomorphic language). Strictly speaking, however, the OT perceives humanity as theomorphic and not God as anthropomorphic.<sup>1193</sup>

Having said that, we believe that there is good reason to argue that all biblical passages which talk about change of God's mind could be understood in the light of YHWH's disclosure of His name (Ex. 34:6–7). God not only speaks of His merciful and gracious nature, but also of His justice. Hence God's constancy is not only found in His fundamentally loving commitment to His people which enables Him to show mercy and grace in the light of appropriate human response, but also in His moral nature, which, gets stirred at the sight of human sin. Both Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 present us with a context of grave human sin and the threat of divine judgement. It is in this context that we have to examine the concept of "divine mutability."<sup>1194</sup> Neither narrative depicts YHWH as an immutable and impassible God, but as a living God who is genuinely responsive to the development among His people.

In both incidents sin stirs up divine wrath and provokes YHWH to announce judgement. In other words, God's good original intention and purposes with Israel have been endangered by sin and divine wrath. Divine change of mind has to be seen against this background. As we have just noted, not only His tendency towards grace and mercy belong to YHWH's constancy, but also His commitment to justice. The will of God, however, as Miller puts it "is always open to a transcending appeal to

<sup>1192</sup> This tension is also embodied in all anthropomorphic statement of God. Statements such as God being angry and repenting must not be taken literally. They are metaphors. Thus if God is literally perceived as getting angry and repent exactly in the same way as humans do, one is in danger of creating an idol (idolatrous human projection). Aquinas was already concerned to carefully differentiate between referring to God and defining Him. Metaphorical statements give significant insights into the divine nature and character of God, without falling into the trap of literal identifying with God. They provide us with figurative speech which is reality depicting, without claiming to be directly descriptive and thereby preserving God's otherness. Cf. Thiselton (1996), 315–319.

<sup>1193</sup> Cf. von Rad (1992<sup>10</sup>), 159.

<sup>1194</sup> According to Miller (1998), 221, divine change of mind in response to prayer occurs always in the context of a prophetic intercessor seeking the "reversal of God's intention to punish the people in judgement."

the divine will to mercy and compassion.”<sup>1195</sup> It is in the context of a loyal and responsive God that Moses’ intercessions, and any other prayer, has to be understood. YHWH’s nature enables Him to respond to any kind of development and incorporate it in the shaping of the future, for the better or for the worse (cf. Jer. 18:1–12). The notion that God takes “prophetic” prayer genuinely into account when it comes to work out His judgement is not a sign of divine weakness or inconsistent behaviour. Rather it is a sign of true greatness. God can and chooses to accommodate human prayer in His will and plan. As Barth observes:

Wenn es einen kümmerlichen Anthropomorphism gibt, dann die Zwangsvorstellung von der Unveränderlichkeit Gottes, die es ausschlieÙe, daß er sich durch sein Geschöpf so oder so bestimmen lassen könne! Gott ist wohl unveränderlich, aber unveränderlich in seiner Lebendigkeit, in der Barmherzigkeit, in der er sich seines Geschöpfes annimmt! Und eben darin besteht seine Majestät, besteht die Herrlichkeit seiner Allmacht und Souveränität im Unterschied zu der Unbeweglichkeit eines höchsten Götzen: daß er dem Bitten seines Geschöpfes Raum geben kann in seinem Willen...Es geschieht offenbar in vollkommener Treue auch gegen sich selbst, wenn er das Geschöpf — das Geschöpf in dieser Einheit mit sich selbst! — an seiner Allmacht und an seinem Werk, an der Erhöhung seiner Ehre und an dessen eigenem Heil, indem er es bitten heißt und indem er seinem Bitten Erhörung gewährt, aktiv teilnehmen läßt, ihm im Gnadenreich und im Weltreich wahrhaftig Raum an seiner Seite gibt.<sup>1196</sup>

According to Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14, divine sovereignty is not so much manifested in YHWH’s freedom to act for Himself, but rather in His freedom to honour His relationship with His chosen servant (and His people) and to allow Himself to be persuaded to overcome justified wrath with loving loyalty.

The results of our exegesis enable us to bring the nexus “holy mutability” and prophetic intercessory prayer more into focus. Besides creating the portrait of a God who is genuinely responsive to prophetic intercessions and who can incorporate prayer into the outworking of the divine plans, there is good warrant to argue that God *expects* His servants to avert Him from His circumstantial wrath and to persuade Him to act in accordance with His innermost being and His ultimate will for Israel.

We have suggested that the consumption of Israel in the immediate aftermath of the golden calf incident or after the rebellion at Kadesh was a real possibility, yet it is surely revealing of YHWH’s personality that He chooses first to consult Moses about His plans before He executes the punishment. In a similar way God informed Abraham about His destructive plans for Sodom: “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do” (Gen. 18:17). In other instances God shares His plans of judgement with the prophets so that they could warn the sinful party of a potentially destructive forthcoming punishment (cf. Am. 3:7). There is a pervasive pattern in Scripture that God before executing His judgement makes His intention known to His servants and gives them a chance to participate in the outworking of the divine

<sup>1195</sup> Miller (1998), 221.

<sup>1196</sup> Barth (1951), 119–120.

resolution.

In our reading of Exodus 32:10 we have seen that there is good reason to argue that YHWH seeks to “provoke” Moses not to let Him go ahead with the destruction of Israel. It seems as if God chooses to make His will vulnerable to Moses by presenting him with the implicit option of not letting Him go ahead with the deserved judgement. Since this comes close to a divine invitation to persuade God to act differently from what is announced, it does hardly justice to the dynamics of the narratives to juxtapose God’s omniscience with Moses’ prayer, or to talk about Moses’ prayers as an unexpected and futile intrusion into the divine rule, as Enlightenment scholarship tended to characterise petinary prayer.<sup>1197</sup> Rather Moses’ prayer is evoked and made “an integral part of the way God’s sovereignty in history is exercised.”<sup>1198</sup> That God incorporates the intercessions of His servant in the outworking of His purposes has been endorsed by two conceptually related passages from Ezekiel (Ezek. 22:30–31, 13:5). God chooses not to act on His own, but in collaboration with His chosen servants.<sup>1199</sup> His servants are part of the heavenly council and thus are intimately familiar with the Kings’ nature and ultimate purposes.<sup>1200</sup> In our exegesis it became evident that through Moses’ intercession one comes particularly close to God’s character and salvific intentions for His people. We have seen that Moses’ intercessions are successful because he argues, as Lohfink puts it, in a “God-like” manner.

Er (Moses) tritt in den innergöttlichen Konflikt selbst ein, er spielt Gott gegen Gott aus. Gott muß dem Fürbitter weichen, wenn dieser sich auf Gottes Wort berufen kann. Daraus folgt für jedes Bittgebet, daß es zuerst darauf ankommt, sich auf die Seite von Gottes Wort zu stellen. Je deutlicher um das gebeten wird, was Gott selbst schon zugesagt hat, desto sicherer ist, daß dieses Gebet ans Ziel kommt.<sup>1201</sup>

Moses’ intercessory prayers are effective because they are in profound tune with God’s nature, and because they aspire to the realisation of YHWH’s deeper plan with Israel. In other words, YHWH’s change of mind is in a sense a reversal to be true to Himself. Moses’ prayer derives its persuasive power “from the fact that it is at bottom a reflection of God’s will in a human soul—which is the reason why, in the New Testament, prayer of this kind is ascribed to the operation of the Holy Spirit (Ro. 15:30, Phil. 1:19, Eph. 6:18f.).”<sup>1202</sup>

<sup>1197</sup> Kaufman (1972), 146–147, expresses a similarly low view of petitionary prayers: “This is no God who ‘walks with me and talks with me’ in close interpersonal communion...we should hardly expect that he can or will bend his cosmic activity much to meet our private and peculiar needs or wishes.” Cf. Miller (1998), 211.

<sup>1198</sup> Wright (1996), 140.

<sup>1199</sup> The inauguration of a prophetic mediator in itself, in our case the appointment of Moses, confirms not only YHWH’s choice of working in corporation with His chosen servants, but also reflects His fundamental commitment to Israel.

<sup>1200</sup> Wright (1996), 140: “God not only allows human intercession, God invites it and builds it into the decision-making processes of the heavenly council in way we can never fathom.” Cf. Miller (1998), 219.

<sup>1201</sup> Lohfink (1971), 58ff.

<sup>1202</sup> Eichrodt (1985<sup>5</sup>), 450.



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