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RODNEY LAMAR PLUNKET
"BETWEEN ELIM AND SINAI": A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF
EXODUS SIXTEEN SHAPED BY ITS CANONICAL CONTEXT

Ph.D.

1996

This thesis constructs a theological interpretation of Ex 16 through the use of a method designed in light of contemporary hermeneutical discussion, in dialogue with current approaches to biblical texts (especially current approaches to OT narrative texts), in response to the perceived nature of Ex 16, and with a desire to provide some indication of Ex 16's significance for Jewish and Christian faith. This thesis begins with an analysis of Ex 16's manna and quail narrative from the perspective of four of the motifs which it contains (i.e., murmuring, testing, divine provision, and sabbath observance). It then creates and analyzes a wider pentateuchal narrative context appropriate for the study of Ex 16. The study of that wider context reveals a narrative flow that is sufficiently unified to convey a meaningful and compelling message and, as a result, that narrative flow is able to inform and enrich the interpretation of its constituent narratives; that ability is utilized to generate an enhanced theological reading of Ex 16.

Although this thesis does not respond to all of the issues relevant to the current uncertainty with regard to biblical studies in general and pentateuchal studies in specific, it is one partial response to that uncertainty. It seeks to demonstrate that a detailed study of a biblical text which is sensitive to the structure and the nature of that text in its canonical form and which is sensitive to the ability of that text's wider canonical context to define and enrich that text's message has the potential to create a valid theological interpretation of that text.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

“BETWEEN ELIM AND SINAP”:

A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS SIXTEEN

SHAPED BY ITS CANONICAL CONTEXT

A THESIS SUBMITTED

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

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BY

RODNEY LAMAR PLUNKET

1996



JUL 1997

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To Margaret, Callie, and Chad
whose encouragement, understanding, and faith
were often all that kept me at it

In Loving Memory of Ralph Snell
whose lessons from the Old Testament
fused a little boy's world with the world of ancient Israel
and caused him to believe that the lessons of that collection should be lived

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For the first three years of this research project I was also working as a minister of the Washington Church of Christ in Washington, County Tyne & Wear, England. The Bible studies which were a regular part of that ministry increased my enthusiasm for this project. It is fitting, therefore, that I thank all who blessed my life during this American's efforts at ministry on English soil. I especially thank my colleague and brother, Rodney Thomas; the value of his partnership in that ministry is beyond measure.

Since 1993 I have worked on this thesis at the same time that I served as the Preaching Minister for the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. Words cannot express my appreciation for this Church family's encouragement and prayers with regard to my research. I especially thank the elders for giving me several study-leaves and the Broadway staff for their willingness to take on extra responsibilities during my absences. My secretary, Patsy Rogers, and Broadway's Education Minister, Bill Starcher, deserve to be singled out for their uncommon efforts to give me time to complete this project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament Books

Gn	Genesis	Zech	Zechariah
Ex	Exodus	Mal	Malachi
Lev	Leviticus	Pss	Psalms
Num	Numbers	Ps	a single psalm
Dt	Deuteronomy	Jb	Job
Josh	Joshua	Prv	Proverbs
Jdg	Judges	Ru	Ruth
1 Sa	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs
2 Sa	2 Samuel	Eccl	Ecclesiastes
1 Kgs	1 Kings	Lam	Lamentations
2 Kgs	2 Kings	Esth	Esther
Isa	Isaiah	Dan	Daniel
Jer	Jeremiah	Ezr	Ezra
Ezk	Ezekiel	Neh	Nehemiah
Hos	Hosea	1 Chr	1 Chronicles
Jon	Jonah	2 Chr	2 Chronicles

Journals and other published works

<i>ATR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblestiftung, 1977.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Cross Currents</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CRBR</i>	<i>Critical Review of Books in Religion</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>

<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
<i>HKB</i>	Holladay, William L. <i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner</i> . Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971.
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Sup</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>NEB</i>	New English Bible
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>Trad</i>	<i>Tradition</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>Today</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>Wor</i>	<i>Worship</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Miscellaneous

ch.	chapter
chs.	chapters
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
p.	page
pp.	pages
v.	verse
vv.	verses

INTRODUCTION: WHY AND HOW¹

In *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, R. W. L. Moberly writes, “*how we use the Bible depends on why we use the Bible*. In practice, many of the disagreements about how are, in effect, disagreements about why, and failure to recognize this leads to endless confusion.”² Moberly’s insight regarding the formative sway of the why of one’s use of the Bible exerted guiding influence upon this introduction as his insight caused this introduction to be written with the purpose of revealing the why/the aim/*the goal* of this thesis’s reading of Ex 16. This introduction also reveals the how/the strategy/*the method* which that goal generated and the way in which that method was developed and employed.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the canonical form of Ex 16 in search of

¹ The form and style of this thesis follow Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 5th ed., revised and expanded by Bonnie Birtwhistle Honigsblum (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). Her “method B” for shortened references has been employed. That method proceeds in the following manner: if only one work of an author is referred to in this thesis, then after the first full reference to that author’s work all later references list only the author’s surname and the relevant page number; but if more than one work by an author is referred to in this thesis, then after the first full reference to a specific work by that author all later references to that same work list only the author’s surname, a shortened form of the relevant work, and the relevant page number. When two authors share the same surname then the shortened reference will include forenames to distinguish one author from the other.

² R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 2.



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meanings which that chapter conveys for the purpose of creating a theological interpretation of Ex 16 which is shaped by that pentateuchal narrative's canonical context. It is hoped that the resultant theological interpretation will provide some indication of Ex 16's significance when it is situated within the wider contexts of Jewish and Christian faith.

Exodus 16 has been chosen as the subject of this thesis because of its perceived importance within the Pentateuch as a whole. Several attributes of this narrative reveal that importance. First, it is densely packed with motifs and themes which are found in other desert period narratives,³ (this feature, as will be noted later, is central to the method employed in the production of this thesis). Second, it is the first extended narrative following Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, a crossing which clearly signals a new beginning for Israel. Third, it is very similar to the narrative in Num 11:4ff which is the first extended narrative after Israel's departure from Mt Sinai. Fourth, Ex 16 contains the first canonical reference to sabbath observance and the first canonical occurrence of the associated nouns, *שַׁבָּת* and *יְהוָה שַׁבָּתוֹ*; the sabbath emphasis of Ex 16 combined with the central importance of sabbath observance to the faith of Israel makes this chapter an object of keen interest for any student of the religious teachings of the OT.

As has been noted above, this thesis has been designed to analyze the *canonical form* of Ex 16 in search of meanings which that chapter conveys for the purpose of creating a theological interpretation of Ex 16 shaped by that pentateuchal narrative's canoni-

³ Even though later narratives contain some of these same motifs and themes, few, if any, contain as many as is the case for Ex 16. More will be noted concerning Ex 16's motifs and themes below.

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cal context. An attendant and secondary goal of this thesis has been to provide some indication of Ex 16's wider significance. An important reason for choosing the above goals for this thesis is the current state of the academic study of the Bible in general and the OT and the Pentateuch in particular. It is widely recognized that the fields of theology and biblical hermeneutics currently are in a state of extreme uncertainty.⁴ Basic questions concerning how to read the Bible are answered in widely divergent ways, and there is a heightened degree of disagreement concerning how to read the *Pentateuch* due to two current realities. One of the current realities is that those scholars who proceed on the basis of historical-critical analysis are themselves divided concerning what conclusions are appropriately drawn from that analysis.⁵ A second reality is that this disagreement is taking place at the same time that the historical-critical paradigm is itself in decline "as the sole dominant model of academic scholarship."⁶ This thesis has been designed to relate to the current state of biblical studies but in an indirect manner in that it seeks to demonstrate some of the meaning of the canonical form of one pentateuchal narrative (Ex 16) and

⁴ E.g., Charles J. Scalise, *Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena: A Canonical Approach*, Studies in Biblical Hermeneutics, 8 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1994), 1 reports, "The declaration that Christian theology is in crisis has become a commonplace in our pluralistic age. Multiple paradigms compete unsuccessfully for widespread consensus in the field. When one confronts this 'shattered spectrum' of late twentieth-century theology, bewilderment—rather than mere confusion—seems the order of the day. One wonders how scholarly theological construction ever became entangled in such complex and often faddish linguistic thickets. Scholars from similar religious communities and traditions commonly talk past one another. Eminent theologians frequently use the same terms (e.g., salvation, church) to point to radically different referents."

⁵ More will be said concerning the divisions among these scholars below.

⁶ Scalise, 2, n. 6.

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some of the significance of a canonical context that is appropriate to that narrative. In so doing, this thesis accomplishes two things. First, it demonstrates that there is support, from within the pentateuchal material, for those who contend that the canonical form of the text should be the primary target of interpretive analysis; that support is supplied by the rich readings which such an approach generates. Second, it qualifies the significance of those approaches which encourage the atomization of the text on the basis of one theory of the Pentateuch's composition or another.⁷

This thesis's concern with the canonical form of the text is due primarily to the influence of Brevard S. Childs⁸ which is well known in OT study (Childs' influence will be discussed below as a part of the description of this thesis's method). This thesis is also, however, indebted to the hermeneutical discussion of Sandra M. Schneiders in her book, *The Revelatory Text*.⁹ We turn now to a discussion intended to reveal the persua-

⁷ Even though it is an overstatement, it is appropriate here to note the comment by Samuel E. Loewenstamm in "Methodological Approaches to the Study of the Exodus Tradition," ch. in *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, trans. Baruch J. Schwartz (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 16-17. Loewenstamm writes that "a method which begins the inquiry by dividing the text into sources provides no opportunity to analyze its present literary structure, since the given text has ceased to be a subject for scholarly research." There is no methodological reason that a person, after dividing the text into documents, could not, so to speak, put it back together and study the text in its received form. However, such a process has not been the norm. Generally, when a scholar has divided the text in order to study it, the text has stayed divided with little value being given to the text in its canonical form.

⁸ The two works by Childs which most influenced this research are *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); and *Exodus: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1974).

⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). Schneiders' work is both a summary of and a response to the current debate regarding hermeneutics and method in the field of biblical

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siveness of Schneiders' book and the influence which it exerted upon this thesis.

In the early pages of her book, Schneiders articulates her view of the difference between "explanation" of a text and "understanding" of that same text, and what she says reveals a concern which underlies the production of this thesis. She writes,

explanation is the analytical and synthetic work by which we distance the text,

studies. However, it is focused upon the NT. It is hoped that this thesis provides some direction in demonstrating how Schneiders' work might be employed with regard to the OT.

Due to the fact that Schneiders' work is on what might be referred to as "a leading edge", it is appropriate to point out that reviews of her book have been quite positive but with some reservations. For example, even though Walter Moberly in Review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra Schneiders, in *ExpTim* 104 (November 1992): 56-57 writes, near the beginning of his review, "In my judgment [Schneiders' book] is quite simply the best—i.e., most readable, most comprehensive, most thoughtful and thought provoking—introduction to what contemporary hermeneutical theory means for the interpretation of the New Testament"; in the final line of that same review he states, "Given that ideological suspicion can undercut whatever presents an unwelcome perspective, it remains unclear from Schneiders' discussion what constraints there are to enable the ideologically suspicious genuinely to hear a witness which they may find initially uncongenial." However, none of the reviews known to the author of this thesis reject or even criticize Schneiders' concern that the interpretation of a biblical text should have an integrative or transformative significance, and it is that concern which has had the greatest impact upon this author.

The thirteen other reviews of Schneiders' book known to this author are listed below to give the reader easy access to judgments of her work (these are all of the reviews that I could find through the ATLA data base and it is noteworthy that several influential journals appear not to have reviewed it). Since all of these reviews are of the same work this footnote will give only the information needed to locate each review which will be listed alphabetically according to the reviewer's name: William Baird, *Encounter* 54 (Winter 1993): 92-94; Karen Barta, *TS* 54 (March 1993): 165-66; Mary C. Boys, *CC* 42 (Summer 1992): 249-50; Michael Cahill, *TToday* 49 (October 1992): 414-16; Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *JR* 74 (January 1994): 93; Anthony D. Hopkins, *RevExp* 90 (Winter 1993): 136-37; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 6 (1993): 287-88; Morny Joy, *JAAR* 63 (Winter 1995): 903-07; Lewis S. Mudge, *Christian Century* 109 (September 1992): 848-49; Irene Nowell, *Wor* 67 (May 1993): 281-82; Donald Senior, *CBQ* 55 (July 1993): 609-10; Frances M. Young, *Theology* 96 (January-February 1993): 70-71; Phyllis Zagano, *ATR* 74 (Fall 1992): 503-04

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that is, establish it in its otherness, so that it does not say what we project into it but says to us what it has to say. Understanding is the event in which the text's meaning comes home, that is, in which we overcome the distance by appropriating the meaning, incorporating it into our own world.¹⁰

Just four pages after the above quotation Schneiders gives an important rationale for an effort on the part of biblical exegetes to provide not only meanings of the text but also opportunities for religious appropriation of those meanings when she notes,

the spiritual ferment of our times has led those interested in spirituality, that is, in Christian religious experience, to raise serious questions about the validity of interpretation that is often enough if not unassimilable, at least useless for the Christian religious quest.¹¹

Then, in the book's fifth chapter, she writes, "Hermeneutics is concerned with the process of drawing an ancient text forward into the present not as a relic of past ages but as the bearer of existential possibilities for the present."¹² In the early pages of the sixth chapter she writes, "In its most complete sense, . . . , meaning should be considered an *event that perdures* in and through transformative appropriation."¹³

That same sixth chapter contains a very important section entitled "Understanding of Meaning as Appropriation."¹⁴ Schneiders begins that section with the following paragraph:

¹⁰ Ibid., 17. Paul Ricoeur in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. and ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 182-83 expresses a similar view of what it means to understand a text when he writes, "To understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation."

¹¹ Schneiders, 21.

¹² Ibid., 151.

¹³ Ibid., 161.

¹⁴ Ibid., 172-78.

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Both Ricoeur and Gadamer agree that understanding in the fullest and most proper sense of the term, as the final object of interpretation, involves a 'fusion of horizons.' The world horizon of the reader fuses with the horizon of the world projected by the text. The reader enters into and is transformed by the world before the text even as this world . . . is modified by the reader's critical interpretation. We have seen how this happens in the case of the reader or spectator caught up in the world of art. For the space of the aesthetic experience the reader is absorbed in the reality of the text and at the end is a 'different person.' Sometimes the difference is minor, a slightly different slant on some aspect of life, but sometimes the encounter is profoundly transformative, as was Augustine's reading of the *Life of Antony* or Teresa of Avila's contemplation of the sculpture of flagellation. In some way the two worlds have fused, and the reader or viewer now lives a transformed reality.¹⁵

In the next to the last sentence of this book, Schneiders writes, "The integral interpretation of any biblical text is the process of engaging it in such a way that it can function as locus and mediator of transformative encounter with the living God."¹⁶

Despite the obvious attractions of Schneiders' proposal for a Christian minister (such as myself), this thesis will be concerned solely with the meaning of Ex 16 in its canonical context; the issue of transformative significance will not be addressed. Such is due to two factors. The first factor is that contemporary theology departments and seminaries are better equipped to train persons to discover meanings through critical exegesis and, as a result, this author has received much more instruction in the conducting of that type of research than in the discussion of a text's transformative potential. The second factor is related to the first; it is that biblical scholarship is much more open to accept research as credible and legitimate which applies itself to the discovery of meanings

¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹⁶ Ibid., 197.

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through critical exegesis than it is to accept research which also engages with a text's transformative significance.¹⁷ Given this climate and this author's training it is not appropriate here to engage in a discussion of this text's significance as "locus and mediator of transformative encounter with the living God," but it should be made clear that an interest in such issues has been a significant factor that has contributed to the motivation for this research and has led to the way that determinative meanings discovered within the text

¹⁷ The following note from Schneiders makes the same point: "The second approach to the faith aspects of the biblical text is concerned with the **appropriation of biblical faith** in its institutional, intellectual, and personal dimensions by the contemporary reader/believer. . . . Suffice it to say that this aspect of the interpretive project is much less methodologically controllable, and biblical scholars have often been loath to get involved in it, preferring to deliver the more or less demonstrable results of exegetical and critical research to theologians and pastors in hopes that they will be able to make the connection between the hard data established by exegesis and criticism and the faith life of the Church." Schneiders then points out that in a later chapter of her book she suggests "that such a division of labor is neither necessitated by scholarly integrity nor advisable, since it short-circuits the interpretive endeavor." *Ibid.*, 122.

Schneiders' sentiments here are clearly in line with Gadamer's awareness that "application is an element of understanding itself" and that "we are forced to go, as it were, one stage beyond romantic hermeneutics, by regarding not only understanding and interpretation, but also application as comprising one unified process. . . . we consider application to be as integral a part of the hermeneutical act as are understanding and interpretation." In this same vein Gadamer also writes, "We, too, are determined that application is neither a subsequent nor a merely occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application was not the relating of some pre-given universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditional text seeks to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he understands it as such and only afterwards uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal thing, the text; i.e., to understand what this piece of tradition says, what constitutes the meaning and importance of the text. In order to understand that, he must not seek to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation, if he wants to understand at all." (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation was edited by Garrett Barden and John Cumming from the 2d ed. [New York: Crossroad, 1975], xx, 274-75, 289).

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have been stated, i.e., they have been stated so that their transformative potential is not diminished or hidden.¹⁸ It is also hoped that the nature of the exegetical analysis contained in this thesis will be such that the reader will not find it too difficult to discern the text's significance for his or her particular context.¹⁹

This concludes the introduction's discussion of the goal of this thesis. We turn now to a discussion of method.

It should be made clear that it is not the *primary* purpose of this introduction nor the thesis which follows to contend for the method employed in the production of this thesis nor to critique any other. Never has the *primary* purpose of this research been to contend for this method's theoretical validity or for its standing with regard to other contemporary approaches. Instead its central purpose from the beginning has been to study Ex 16, using relevant tools and relevant scholarly resources, to develop an approach suitable to this thesis's goal. However, the fact that this thesis does not give much space to theoretical discussions of method or hermeneutics does not indicate that its author has a low regard for these important and controversial issues in the field of biblical studies; on

¹⁸ In other words, this thesis maintains its interest in "transformative meanings", i.e., meanings that have the potential to produce a transformative encounter with God as envisioned by Schneiders.

¹⁹ The term "significance" here and above is to be understood as it is defined and as it is contrasted with the term "meaning" by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. in his *The Aims of Interpretation*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976; Phoenix edition, 1978), 3-4. Hirsch writes that for him "the term 'meaning' refers to the whole verbal meaning of a text, and 'significance' to textual meaning in relation to a larger context, i.e., another mind, another era, a wider subject matter, an alien system of values, and so on. In other words, 'significance' is textual meaning as related to some context, indeed any context, beyond itself."

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the contrary, interaction with the ongoing debate regarding such matters has had significant influence in shaping the method which has been adopted as will be seen in the discussion of method to follow and as has already been suggested by the discussions above.²⁰ To summarize then, this author chose to develop and employ a particular perspective, a perspective shaped both by the nature of Ex 16 and by relevant scholarly writings; and he chose to test that perspective—not theoretically but practically—by exploring its ability to apprehend meanings genuinely conveyed by the biblical text.

The method employed in this thesis was greatly influenced by the work of Brevard S. Childs. The most important influence is perceived in that this thesis granted significant interpretive influence to Ex 16's canonical context by using data gained from portions of that context to guide and enrich this thesis's interpretation of Ex 16. The granting of such significance to canonical context is one of the hallmarks of Childs' approach, and the way that such has enriched his readings certainly encouraged the use of the same here. However, it should be pointed out that although such a step was taken with the encouragement of Childs' work it would not have become an established part of the method of this thesis had not preliminary work with the text revealed some of the

²⁰ In addition to Schneiders', some other works concerning hermeneutics which have been influential upon the formation of this thesis are: Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, *Religious Perspectives*, vol. 17 (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), especially pp. 347-57; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Texas Christian University, 1976); Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*; E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (London: Yale University Press, 1967); Hirsch, *Aims of Interpretation*; and Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Toward a Hermeneutics of Consent*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

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potential which such would grant.

A second very important influence which the work of Childs exerted upon the method of this thesis has to do with Childs' view of the way that a text's prehistory should influence one's study of that text. A very clear expression of Childs' perspective in this regard is found in his commentary on Exodus where he writes,

an even more important reason for interpreting the final text is a theological one. It is the final text, the composite narrative, in its present shape which the church, following the lead of the synagogue, accepted as canonical and thus the vehicle of revelation and instruction. Much of the frustration which the preacher experiences in using commentaries stems from the failure of the interpreter to deal with the text in its canonical shape. Rather, the interest of the commentator centers on various problems of its prehistory. *In my judgment, the study of the prehistory has its proper function within exegesis only in illuminating the final text*²¹ (emphasis mine).

The thesis before you is in complete agreement with that principle, and so another element of Childs' influence upon this thesis is revealed. However, there is a considerable difference in the way that this principle is employed in Childs' writings and the way that principle is employed here. A description of that difference is germane for at least two reasons: first, because such a description grants important insights into the method of this thesis; second, because even though focusing upon an important *difference* between this thesis and the approach of Childs, the description of this difference also grants additional insights into the influence which Childs' work had upon the method employed in the production of this thesis.²²

²¹ Childs, *Exodus*, xv.

²² N.B.: The description of this difference between the method of Childs and the method of this thesis will also reveal an even greater difference between the method of this thesis

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The difference between Childs' use of the study of a text's prehistory and the use made of the same by this thesis results from the influence of several publications. Three publications which influenced this writer's view of source-critical data are the two relevant books by Van Seters²³ and the relevant monograph by Whybray,²⁴ because the effect of these works has been to generate skepticism regarding many long-standing conclusions regarding the prehistory of the pentateuchal text. Their works generate skepticism for at least two reasons. One reason is that Whybray and Van Seters demonstrate that the current state of evidence allows either one of their quite different conclusions to be cogently argued; another reason is that either of their views unseats many of the previously held notions regarding the prehistory of the Pentateuch.

Anyone who thinks that the view of either Whybray or Van Seters has established a new *terra firma* for the study of the prehistory of the text needs to note the preliminary status of Whybray's work²⁵ as well as the very inadequate response of Van Seters to

and the methods employed in other pentateuchal studies in which typical historical-critical presuppositions play a significant role. By "typical" historical-critical presuppositions I refer specifically to those scholarly assumptions that the Pentateuch is comprised of pre-canonically independent documents which can and should be detached from the canonical form of the Pentateuch in order truly to be understood.

²³ John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); and *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

²⁴ R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup, 53 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

²⁵ In R. N. Whybray's more recent work, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 12 he notes the uncertainty with regard to theories concerning the Pentateuch's composition when he writes at the beginning of his chapter entitled, "Who wrote it? Problems of Composition", that "There is at the present moment no consensus whatever about when, why, how, and through whom the Pentateuch reached

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Whybray's contention that "there appears to be no reason why (allowing for the possibility of a few additions) the first edition of the Pentateuch as a comprehensive work should not also have been the final edition, a work composed by a single historian."²⁶

(Van Seters' brief response to Whybray's contention is contained in a single endnote).²⁷

These works by Van Seters and Whybray are not the only ones which can be contrasted to reveal the level of disagreement. Three other works which have impacted this thesis's view of the Pentateuch's prehistory are the two relevant books by Erhard Blum²⁸ and the Graham I. Davies review²⁹ of Blum's work in this area. Blum's view is that the so-called Priestly material was composed with full knowledge of the tradition that was to be reworked and to which the Priestly material was designed to be added.³⁰ In contrast,

its present form, and opinions about the dates of composition of its various parts differ by more than five hundred years." He concludes that chapter with these words, "[I]t is important to realize that in such a matter as this we are dealing entirely with hypotheses and not with facts. Proof, either in the mathematical or in the logical meaning of that word, will never be attainable. The only *fact* available to us is the text of the Pentateuch in all its complexity" (p. 27).

²⁶ Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch*, 232-33.

²⁷ Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 23, endnote 37. Van Seters here, quite dismissively and unpersuasively, writes, "Many of [Whybray's] views are similar to those expressed here and in my earlier work. In a short treatment at the end of the book he offers 'an alternative approach.' This consists of taking my suggestion about the form of the Pentateuch as a history and suggesting that there was only one author/historian who composed the whole of the Pentateuch. His remarks about such a history, however, I regard as far too vague and imprecise to add anything further to the discussion."

²⁸ Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984); and Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990).

²⁹ Graham I. Davies, "The Composition of the Book of Exodus: Reflections on the Theses of Erhard Blum," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Mehaem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox, et al., (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 71-85.

³⁰ In *Studien*, 241-42 Blum writes, "... die Kompositionellen Texte nicht sogleich in den

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Davies' view is that it is much more likely that the Priestly material "was not from the outset designed for combination with the older material but was intended to replace it as the standard written account of Israel's origins."³¹ Again the extreme differences in viewpoint do not lend confidence to the one considering making extensive use of data concerning the Pentateuch's prehistory.

The final source of influence relative to the Pentateuch's prehistory is so recent that this writer has been unable to access the book which fully reveals it. That book is comprised of papers concerning the book of Exodus which were presented at the 44th Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense which took place in August of 1995.³² Even though this writer was unable to access this book, its editor, Marc Vervenne, reviewed the papers which comprise it in December of 1995,³³ and from that review the awareness that source-critical studies are in state characterized by disagreement is increased, because the views of E. Otto and Van Seters relative to the Pentateuch's composition are strikingly

Haupttext eingeschrieben, sondern zunächst 'für sich' (freilich unter Kenntnis der zu bearbeitenden Überlieferung) konzipiert wurden." In *Ibid.*, 333 Blum writes, "Vielleicht das auffälligste Merkmal der priesterlichen Komposition ist, daß sie im Dialog mit sich selbst steht, näherhin: daß sie in Anknüpfung an und als Auseinandersetzung mit der nicht-priestlichen Überlieferung, auf der sie 'Aufblat,' gestaltet ist."

³¹ Graham I. Davies, 81.

³² Marc Vervenne, ed., *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction, Reception, Interpretation*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, vol., 126 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996). This writer sought to buy this book upon the realization that it had been printed, but the American distributor had not yet received it and could not obtain it in time to be included in this thesis. Interlibrary loan efforts were also unproductive because the book was either still at the bindery or too new to release on interlibrary loan by the few American libraries that had already received it.

³³ Marc Vervenne, "The Book of Exodus: Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense XLIV (1995)," *ETL* 71 (December 1995): 512-18.

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different.³⁴

It is due to the present state of uncertainty with regard to the prehistory of the pentateuchal text,³⁵ which this brief survey of several sources reveals, that this thesis will employ the designations J, E, and P. only to communicate the views which others hold regarding a pentateuchal passage(s). However, this thesis does not depart from the principle stated by Childs above. The prehistory of a text will be used to enlighten that text when its prehistory is sufficiently clear to be capable of doing so. E.g., the material contained in Num 16-17 all but forces the reflective reader to sense that pre-canonical forms of this material once existed. In such a case the interpreter should seek to discern the most likely content and purpose of those previous forms and then to note the changes made when the material was given its canonical shape. Following that, the interpreter should seek to determine what ends were served by those changes. Such a process truly illuminates the text's final form in that it highlights the point(s) made by the canonical form of the relevant passage. Since that point(s) was deemed sufficiently significant to warrant the adaptation of pre-existing material, it certainly warrants special interest on the part of the serious student of the OT.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 513-14.

³⁵ It seems to the author of this thesis that it is time to acknowledge with Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn in *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 12 that "Despite sometimes large claims about the dating of biblical material, scholars actually know very little about the Bible's literary history."

³⁶ The difference between the view of this thesis and that demonstrated by traditional source criticism is made clear via the very apt analysis of source criticism provided by Adele Berlin in *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, Ind.:

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This thesis's view of historical-critical data relative to the Pentateuch can be summarized as follows. Due to the current state of the study of the prehistory of the Pentateuch, this thesis assumes only the bare minimum of historical-critical data. I.e., it is assumed both that the Pentateuch appeared sometime during the exilic or post-exilic periods³⁷ and that the Pentateuch is comprised of various types of material much of which existed prior to its present canonical form. Such a minimal view has been taken in an effort to lessen the likelihood that the conclusions of this pentateuchal research will be negated by the next scholarly consensus regarding the Pentateuch's origin.³⁸ Such an

Eisenbrauns, 1994), 121. There she writes, "The whole thrust of source criticism is toward the fragmenting of the narrative into sources, while, at the same time it ignores the rhetorical and poetic features which bind the narrative together." The approach of this thesis is to focus upon the items that unite a narrative even when elements exist within the narrative which reveal that an earlier form(s) of that narrative once existed. Elements which indicate the existence of an earlier form(s) are not denied in this thesis, but they are not allowed to nullify the force and meaning of elements which serve to unite the narrative in its canonical form; in fact, this thesis seeks to employ the former elements to illuminate the role and meaning of the latter.

³⁷ However, this thesis does not attempt to *prove* that this material achieved its final form sometime during either the exilic or post-exilic period.

³⁸ Burke O. Long in "The 'New' Biblical Poetics of Alter and Sternberg," *JSOT* 51 (1991): 83 expresses his desire "to see an age of biblical studies in which critics admit to standing on slippery places, and refuse the prescriptive power of assent which . . . [some] scholars . . . might wish for." The author of this thesis admits to being on just such "slippery places" and thinks it unwise to take along anything which will only increase the degree of instability. Such explains the bare minimum of historical presuppositions which this thesis employs, as it seems obvious that to add to those previously noted would make traversing the "slippery places" even more difficult.

Due to its minimal amount of historical-critical presuppositions this thesis may be criticized as lacking in rigor or of being insufficiently critical or objective. In defense it must be stated that the author of this thesis sought—from the very beginning of this research—to be rigorous, critical, and objective: rigorous in the sense of following a carefully developed method with precision and exactitude; critical in the sense of seeking to use all relevant data as part of a method characterized by careful analysis and judgment;

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approach, it seems to the author of this thesis, is in the spirit of Childs although it does not conform to his actual practice.

To continue this introduction's description of the way in which Childs' canonical approach affected this study of Ex 16, it is appropriate to take note of Paul R. Noble's

and objective in the sense of seeking to reach conclusions based upon the nature and likely intention of the text rather than being based upon the thoughts and feelings of this thesis's author. In short, the goal of this research has been to allow what is most certain with regard to the origin and the nature of the Pentateuch to dictate the method which was employed and then to use that method to arrive at objectively justifiable meanings actually borne by the canonical text.

However, this author's concern with objectivity should not be taken as a claim to be unaffected by subjective bias. Such a claim is always specious. Two recent works which reveal the presence of unconscious (or, at least, unacknowledged) subjective bias within scholars who certainly were seeking (and in most, if not all, cases claiming) objectivity are David Penchansky, *The Politics of Biblical Theology: A Postmodern Reading*, Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics, 10 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1995); and Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, and the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

The approach of this thesis runs counter to much hermeneutical theory in being concerned to discover meanings which conform to the actual meaning intended by the original framer(s) of the Pentateuch. The very cogent and persuasive argument of Hirsch supports such an approach. He writes, "As soon as anyone claims validity for his interpretation (and few would listen to a critic who did not), he is immediately caught in a web of logical necessity. If his claim to validity is to hold, he must be willing to measure his interpretation against a genuinely discriminating norm, and the only compelling normative principle that has ever been brought forward is the old-fashioned ideal of rightly understanding what the author meant" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 26). Hirsch's view is supported by Krister Stendahl when he writes, "The normative nature of the Bible requires, . . . , a serious attention to original intentions of texts." Just two paragraphs later Stendahl writes, "Actually, the more intensive the expectation of normative guidance and the more exacting the claims for the holiness of the Scriptures, the more obvious should be the need for full attention to what it meant in the time of its conception and what the intention of the authors might have been" ("The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *JBL* 103 (1984): 9. "Author" is a problematic term relative to the Pentateuch, but if one replaces it with "framer" the views of Hirsch and Stendahl conform to and contend for the approach employed in the production of this thesis.

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rigorous and enlightening analysis of Childs' canonical approach.³⁹ It was unfortunate that Noble's work appeared too late to exercise any but the slightest influence upon this thesis, and this author cannot claim to have evaluated Childs' approach to the extent of Noble; but there were evident similarities between Noble's analysis of Childs' work and this thesis's relationship with the same, similarities which it is appropriate to list because doing so gives additional insights into the method employed herein and because doing so further reveals the relationship between Childs' approach and the approach employed in the study to follow. The first similarity is that both Noble's work and this thesis sought to determine what of Childs' approach could and should be retained and used and what should be jettisoned. The second similarity is that both were seeking to determine what might be added to Childs' approach in order to improve it. The third similarity is that both agree that the strongest argument in support of some form of Childs' approach is (to quote Noble), "Childs' claim that studying the final form of the text reveals a fullness of meaning—and, in particular, of theological meaning—that is simply lost if the canonical text is dismembered into its component parts"⁴⁰ (it accurately can be said that one of the effects that this thesis is designed to produce is the awareness or increased awareness that focusing one's exegetical efforts upon "the final form of the text" does indeed reveal "a fullness of meaning" and thus demonstrates the value and validity of such an approach).⁴¹

³⁹ Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs*, Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 16 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴¹ Two more similarities between this thesis and Noble's work should be noted here (instead of in the text) because, even though they are significant, they are not as relevant

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The *method* for reaching this goal developed over time in interaction with both the text and secondary sources. One of the very early methodological decisions was to use insights into biblical narrative gleaned from Bar Efrat,⁴² Alter,⁴³ and Sternberg⁴⁴ to assist

to the demonstration of the relationship between this thesis and the works of Childs as are the other similarities which have been listed. The first of these additional similarities serves to highlight an important justification for the actual nature and purpose of this thesis. On the final page of Noble's work he writes as follows, "As we have noted before, the whole point of a sound methodology is that it allows the subject-matter to 'speak for itself'; therefore methodological proposals need to be tested out by seeing if they do in fact handle their subjects in an illuminating way. Without this safeguard, it is all too easy for methodological discussions to drift into *a priori* analyses of how interpretation ought to proceed, which follow from their author's prior philosophical commitments but make little contact with the realities of historical and exegetical practice. Hermeneutical reflections and interpretative practice then, need to make progress together, through each reflecting critically upon the other" (Ibid., 370). As will be made even clearer in the remainder of this introduction, the method of this thesis has been developed in engagement with several scholars whose work is much more concerned with the theoretical. Therefore, this thesis can be appropriately viewed as an effort "to make progress together" with these more theoretical writings by actually engaging in "interpretative practice."

A second similarity between Noble's work and this thesis is important to note because of the opportunity provided to indicate that this thesis's concern for objective meanings (as noted above in footnote 38) is also foundational to Noble's theoretical version of canonical hermeneutics. That similarity can be seen through the following statement from Noble. He writes, "I am not suggesting that there is one, single, way in which a particular text can be interpreted, which all interpreters must therefore adopt. On the contrary, I shall myself be arguing for a version of plurality. This, however, will be an objectivist version, because the nature and scope of this plurality will ultimately be determined by the text, not by the interpreter's historical situatedness" (Ibid., 235). Noble's concern for objective meanings truly borne by the text is a foundational concern in his work (note that it appears as the fourth element in his list of eight "principal elements in a revised canonical hermeneutics" on p. 369) as it is for this thesis.

⁴² Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, JSOTSup, 70 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989).

⁴³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

⁴⁴ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987).

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in analyzing Ex 16 as well as insights gained from the actual exegetical work of R. W. L. Moberly⁴⁵. One of the effects of those insights was to create a heightened sensitivity to what this thesis refers to as the *flow*⁴⁶ of a narrative text and the way in which

⁴⁵ Moberly's works which have especially influenced this thesis are *At the Mountain of God*, JSOTSup, 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983); "Did the Serpent Get it Right," *JTS* n.s., 39 (April 1988): 1-27; "The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah," *VT* 38 (1988): 302-23; "Abraham's Righteousness (Genesis XV 6)," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplements to *VT*, vol. 41 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990): 103-30; and the book from which a quotation was taken to begin this introduction, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (this last work's treatment of the call of Moses was especially influential, pp. 7-26).

⁴⁶ The word "flow" is used to refer to the type of *movement* which a story conveys. A narrative has movement in that it creates a sense of change or development with each change or development having a meaningful relationship to what has gone before. The word "flow" has been chosen because it suggests a movement like the movement of fluids. The movement of fluids is unpredictable, and, yet, it is prepared for by the fluid's previous motion. In fact, the shape of each progressive movement is the result of previous motion encountering and interacting with different sets of influences.

Such is also true of the type of movement encountered in a good story and it is this "good story" type of movement which is sensed within the group of pentateuchal narratives which serves as an appropriate canonical context for the study of Ex 16. That movement is unpredictable; one is never sure what will happen next, but whatever does happen is prepared for by previous elements within the story. As those elements encounter and interact with other influences newly introduced or newly indicated by the story, the next progressive movement takes shape and is sensed by the reader.

Related to "flow" is "plot." "Plot" is important to chapter four of this thesis, therefore it is appropriate to define that term here in the introduction. The definition of "plot" employed in this thesis is the one found in C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 5th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1986), 377-79. In their two page definition of "plot" Holman and Harmon write that "plotting is the process of converting story into plot, of changing a chronological arrangement of incidents into a causal and inevitable arrangement." They go on to say that a plot is a "pattern," a "pattern of events," and that "without conflict, without opposition, plot does not exist." They then write, "These forces may be physical (or external), or they may be spiritual (or internal); but they must in any case afford an opposition." Such is the meaning of the term "plot" as used within this thesis. It is that conflictual energy woven into Ex 16's narrative, a conflictual energy which ties the greater portion of its material together and creates a "pattern of events" rather than just a "chronological arrangement of incidents." The reader

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that flow shapes and enriches each element of the text.⁴⁷

The works of Bar-Efrat, Alter, and Sternberg, however, not only motivate the reader to be sensitive to the flow of *individual* narratives. Their works also encourage the same kind of sensitivity with regard to blocks of narrative material comprised of a plurality of texts. In addition, their works encourage sensitivity to the way the reading of an individual narrative is enriched when its role in a larger contextual block is discerned and valued.⁴⁸ These narrative flow sensitivities were found, through preliminary study of Ex 16, to contribute greatly to the goal of this research project and were also found to be compatible with the concern for the canonical form and placement of a text, a concern encouraged by Childs and adopted by this thesis. It was natural, therefore, to grant such sensitivities significant methodological influence in this thesis and, as a result, to seek to understand Ex 16 within as wide a canonical context as practicable.

It should be noted that an approach to a biblical text which seeks transforming meanings within that text and which accepts that text's canonical form and placement as *the* form and context in which that text is to be understood requires two levels of coherence and cogency.⁴⁹ First, it requires that the individual text targeted for special study

should also note the discussion of "plot" in Bar-Efrat, 93-95.

⁴⁷ See Bar-Efrat, 93-140; Alter, 3-12; and Sternberg, 129-52 for the material which most caused this author to seek a heightened sensitivity to the "flow" of biblical narrative.

⁴⁸ There are too many ways in which Bar Efrat, Alter, and Sternberg encourage sensitivity to narrative flow in larger blocks of material and also encourage sensitivity to the way an individual narrative is enriched when its role in one of these larger contextual blocks is understood and appreciated to list all of the possible references here. The material which most impacted this author is referred to in footnote 47 above.

⁴⁹ Coherence, as used here, indicates that a literary composition has sufficient unity to

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possess its own *internal* coherence and cogency. Second, it requires that the material comprising an appropriate canonical context for that passage also form a coherent and cogent whole.

The reason that coherence and cogency were required within the target text for the approach of this thesis to reach its goal is not difficult to ascertain. If the text is unconvincing or uninteresting (i.e., not cogent) or incoherent as it stands then the only choice for the one seeking transforming meanings is to modify the text in some way, i.e., create a different, non-canonical form of the text. Such a necessity reveals that coherence and cogency in the canonical form of Ex 16 are indeed required for the method of this thesis to realize its stated goal. Equally required for this thesis to realize its goal is the presence of a coherent and cogent canonical context in which the target passage can naturally be placed, for if the canonical form and ordering of the narratives which comprise that context have not resulted in a coherent and cogent whole then that context will be unable to impart transformative meaning to the target text or any other text, because transmission of meaning requires that the relevant medium possess a modicum of coherence and cogency. Simply put, a whole with no meaning (i.e., incoherent and not cogent) cannot impart meaning because it has none to impart. Therefore, this study of Ex 16 constantly evaluated the relevant material to determine the absence or presence (and resultant influence) of coherence and cogency within Ex 16's canonical context.

warrant viewing it as a meaningful whole, while cogency indicates that a literary composition makes a convincing and compelling point.

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However, an initial, guiding presupposition must be acknowledged. That initial, guiding presupposition was that coherence and cogency would indeed be found. That presupposition was based on many factors, three of which were especially influential. The first factor was the *prima facie* unlikelihood of a collection like the Pentateuch being formed and arranged so poorly that it could not be viewed as a meaningful whole and/or it could not make a convincing or compelling point.⁵⁰ The second factor was the persuasive power of the work of Childs, while the third factor was the persuasive power of the works of Bar Efrat, Alter, and Sternberg.⁵¹

Now that a description has been given of the way in which this thesis came to be composed of a study of Ex 16 placed firmly within an appropriate canonical context, it is

⁵⁰ Even though the arrangement of certain portions of the Pentateuch (e.g., the legal codes of Leviticus and Numbers) often are problematic, it still seems to this author that the Pentateuch as a whole comprises a meaningful whole capable of making a convincing and compelling point.

⁵¹ The persuasive power upon this author of Childs, Bar-Efrat, Alter, and Sternberg consists primarily in the very rich readings of the text which their work contains and the way that those readings reveal both coherence and cogency in the relevant texts. The reader is referred to the following examples, one from each of these authors, which give some indication of that persuasive power. An excellent example from Childs is his treatment of the material contained in Ex 19:1-25; 20:18-21 (*Exodus*, 340-84; Childs' treatment of this material is employed by this thesis), a treatment which demonstrates coherence and cogency in this rather difficult material. Bar-Efrat's work contains many examples which exert persuasive power regarding the presumption of coherence and cogency, but one which is very appropriate to the approach of this thesis (due to the fact that it deals with a large block of material) is Bar-Efrat's analysis of the narratives concerning David (136-38). An outstanding example from Alter is the one with which his work begins (3-12), i.e., his analysis of Gn 38; the richness of Alter's reading of this text results from the fact that he reveals coherence and cogency where others have not. (Another reading of Gn 38 which has the same effect is Noble, 163-69). Sternberg's treatment of "The Wooing of Rebekah" (131-52) is another which exerts persuasive pull with regard to the presumption of coherence and cogency.

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fitting to describe the way in which that appropriate canonical context was chosen.

Clearly, the most appropriate canonical context for this study of Ex 16 would be comprised of all the narrative material in the Pentateuch. However, space limitations would not permit the analysis of such an expansive context. How then could Ex 16's role within the Pentateuch's narrative material meaningfully be apprehended without analyzing that entire context? The answer of this thesis was generated through interaction with an important characteristic of Ex 16. Exodus 16 is packed with motifs and themes which are very influential in both Ex 16 and other portions of the Pentateuch (e.g., murmuring/complaint, the absence of some physical necessity, Israelite nostalgia for Egypt, testing, *torah*, an appearance of the glory of the LORD, divine provision, manna, quail, and sabbath). Therefore, it was natural to select several of these to make them objects of special study and analysis because of the way that such could enrich the reading of Ex 16. Four of these motifs were chosen, then pentateuchal narrative passages which employed one or more of those same motifs were joined together in canonical order to form an appropriate canonical context. Then several other narratives were added because they were found to add significantly to this context and to one's understanding of Ex 16 by providing insights into the nature of Israelite faith and/or insights into how Moses and Aaron were affected by their leadership roles. In this manner a context was created which is not so large that it is unmanageable but is extensive enough to grant valid insights into Ex 16's role as a part of the entire collection of pentateuchal narratives.

The four motifs which were chosen were selected due to their perceived importance within Ex 16 and due to their ability to generate interaction with other of Ex 16's

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motifs which space limitations would not allow to be singled out for detailed analysis.

The four chosen were murmuring, testing, divine provision, and sabbath observance. The role of these four motifs in Ex 16 are considered, each in turn, in the first four chapters of the thesis.

Chapters five and six⁵² construct a canonical context in which to place Ex 16 as described above. Passages which comprise this context and which also possess similarities that are deemed to be especially significant are analyzed by a process of comparison and contrast.⁵³ One note with regard to these chapters is in order; it is that the context analyzed includes only those relevant narratives found in Genesis,⁵⁴ Exodus, and Num 11:1-21:9.⁵⁵

The seventh chapter of this thesis brings together elements from the preceding six chapters and concludes the main body of this thesis. It has three purposes: one, to sharpen the portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith as it further reveals the flow of this pen-

⁵² Chapter five considers the relevant narratives found in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Chapter six considers the relevant narratives found in the book of Numbers.

⁵³ Gabriel Josipovici in *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), 95-96 writes, "Comparison and contrast, Eliot said, are the main tools of the critic, and the student of the Bible, that most complex, yet most reticent of books, would do well to take that advice to heart." The author of this thesis has been unable to find where T. S. Eliot said, "Comparison and contrast are the main tools of the critic," but in Eliot's *Selected Essays*, new ed., (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 21 he does say, "Comparison and analysis, I have said before, and Remy de Gourmont has said before me . . . , are the chief tools of the critic." Further reading of Eliot indicates to this writer that contrast was so much a part of Eliot's analysis that Josipovici's statement is a not unacceptable version of Eliot's method.

⁵⁴ Genesis 22:1ff.

⁵⁵ More will be said later about the decision to go no further than Num 21:9.

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tateuchal narrative material and as it reveals some of Ex 16's role within this portrait; two, to reveal the enhancement of Ex 16 which results from placing it within this pentateuchal narrative context; three, to summarily conclude this thesis.

Since the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of this thesis make so much use of this pentateuchal narrative context, composed as described above, it is now necessary to discuss the validity of viewing the pentateuchal narrative context analyzed in this thesis as a sufficiently unified block of material to be employed as an appropriate canonical context within which to study Ex 16 or any other passage which this context includes. These narratives from Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers are distributed throughout the Pentateuch. Often they are separated by hundreds of lines of Hebrew text (e.g., the legal material of Sinai serves to break up the narrative material of both Exodus and Numbers). The question can fairly be asked, 'If this appropriate canonical context is so unified, so coherent, so cogent, and so imbued with narrative flow why are the narratives which make it up canonically separated from one another by materials excluded from this thesis's appropriate context—separated from one another by materials which the compiler(s) of the canon seemed to think flowed very well with the passages herein chosen for special analysis and use?'

The answer is two-fold. First, it is true that the entire Pentateuch (every genre included) would have been an even more appropriate context within which to study Ex 16. However, selectivity was required to keep this thesis within its limits, and no matter how extensive the context chosen one would always have profited by expanding it. Why stop at the Pentateuch? Why stop with the OT?

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Second, it is important to note that the narratives which serve as elements of this study's canonical contexts are held together by frequent itinerary notations⁵⁶ which maintain the narrative flow that this thesis requires. Each successive itinerary notation encourages the reader to think back to the previous one. In some cases the reader's mind is taken back to a narrative included as a part of the context employed by this thesis (e.g., the itinerary notation in Ex 17:1 takes the reader back to Ex 16:1; the same occurs in Ex 19:2 relative to Ex 17:1 & 8; and in Num 12:16 relative to Num 11:35; and all of these verses are in narratives included in the context employed within this thesis for the study of Ex 16). These itinerary notations also reveal that the narrative flow of the Pentateuch is important to the canon and can be studied and appreciated for its own sake. In fact, such a study allows the other types of material to be viewed as woven within a coherent and cogent narrative flow which grants meaning to every constituent element whatever its genre.

Since this thesis deals with a significant portion of the pentateuchal material and focuses upon the canonical form of the text, it is appropriate to relate it to other recent works which approach pentateuchal material in a similar fashion as doing so will further prepare the reader for what is to follow. The two works to be employed for this purpose are *The Theme of the Pentateuch* by David J. A. Clines⁵⁷ and *The Book of the Torah: The*

⁵⁶ E.g., Ex 15:22, 27; 16:1, 35; 17:1; 19:1-2; Num 10:33; 11:35; 12:16; 20:1; 21:1.

⁵⁷ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup, 10 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982).

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Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch by Thomas W. Mann.⁵⁸ We turn first to the work by Clines.

Clines' argues "that the Pentateuch is a unity—not in origin, but in its final shape" and asks "what the Pentateuch as a whole is about; that is to say, what is its theme."⁵⁹ The similarity between such an approach and the approach of this thesis is clear. However, Clines deals with the whole of the Pentateuch in order to articulate its theme, while this thesis deals only with selected narratives in order to better understand Ex 16. In spite of that difference, an important convergence between the two works is clear. To perceive that convergence, the theme which Clines proposes must be noted. Clines' proposal is as follows:

*The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfilment—which implies also the partial non-fulfilment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise of blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and a re-affirmation of the primal divine intentions for man.*⁶⁰

Clines sees the patriarchal promise to be a singular promise made up of three elements. The three elements are "the promise of the descendants", "the promise of relationship", and "the promise of land".⁶¹

Since this thesis does not analyze the whole of the Pentateuch, it is inappropriate for it to contest or confirm the theme articulated by Clines. However, as noted above,

⁵⁸ Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ Clines, *Theme*, 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32-37.

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this thesis arrives at a conclusion that naturally converges with the theme proposed by Clines. The relevant conclusion is that the desert period narratives, herein evaluated, portray the Israelites as a people of fluctuating faith who frequently disobey and even rebel against the LORD. Such results in the life of Moses and the Pentateuch concluding on the wrong side of the Jordan; or, to more clearly converge with Clines, Israel's failures in the desert result in the theme of the Pentateuch being "*the partial fulfilment . . . of the promise to . . . the patriarchs*"⁶² (underlining mine).

The similarity between Thomas Mann's work and this thesis is revealed by Mann's own statement of the twofold purpose of his work. He writes that his purpose is,

1) to delineate the internal literary (i.e., redactional) cohesiveness of larger units (e.g., Gen. 1:1-11:9, or the "Jacob cycle," or Num. 1-10) and 2) to delineate the narrative integrity of the Pentateuch as a whole, i.e., how the larger units constitute "books," and how the sequence of these books makes sense.⁶³

In addition, Mann is critical of pentateuchal studies that disassemble the canonical text without arriving at any meaningful impression of the whole. However, Mann is still more comfortable with standard historical-critical views regarding the composition of the Pentateuch than is the case with regard to this thesis. Such a difference is made clear by Mann's discussion of the J, E, D, and P documents in the introduction to his work⁶⁴

As was true with regard to the work of Clines, an important conclusion of this

⁶² Ibid., 29.

⁶³ Mann, *Torah*, 7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2-5.

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thesis naturally converges with the work of Mann. In his final paragraph Mann writes, “The Torah ends with a charge, and thus with a question: will Israel *be* the new community God has created, or not? The way of Torah lies open, but it is a straight and narrow path.”⁶⁵ These lines are followed by Moses’ words in Dt 30:19-20 through which reference is made to the setting before the people of life and death, blessing and curse. Mann’s “way of Torah” is the way of life and blessing, and the emphasis which he ascribes to that “way” converges with this thesis’s contention that Ex 16 reports the LORD’s initial effort to determine “if the people can be habituated to a life conformed to divine law.”⁶⁶ I.e., Mann’s work and this thesis converge because Mann contends that the Pentateuch is concerned to describe and commend “the way of Torah”, while this thesis, in effect, contends that in Ex 16 the canon reports the LORD’s initial effort to place the people of Israel upon that way—“the way of Torah”.

To conclude this introduction, the goal and the method of this reading of Ex 16 should be briefly summarized. The why/the goal of this reading is to analyze the canonical form of Ex 16 in search of meanings which that chapter conveys for the purpose of creating a theological interpretation of Ex 16 which is shaped by that pentateuchal narrative’s canonical context, and it is hoped that the resultant theological interpretation will provide some indication of Ex 16’s significance when it is situated within the wider contexts of Jewish and Christian faith.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁶ See p. 65 below.

⁶⁷ A paragraph from Childs helps further to articulate the goal and the motivation for this

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The method employed to achieve this goal was shaped by two important decisions. An early methodological decision was the taking of insights from Bar-Efrat, Alter, and Sternberg to facilitate a reading of Ex 16 that was sensitive to the nature of biblical narrative. The second methodological decision was related to the first because the works of Bar-Efrat, Alter, and Sternberg certainly influenced it; that decision was to place Ex 16 within an appropriate narrative context in an effort to construct an enriched reading of this pentateuchal text demonstrating some of what it *receives* from the larger collection of which it is a part and some of what it *gives*.

thesis. In his review of *Holy Scripture, Canon, Authority, Criticism*, by James Barr, in *Int* 38 (January 1984): 69 Childs writes, "By a canonical approach to exegesis I am suggesting an interpretation which is consonant with the shape which Israel gave its Sacred Scripture, but which also involves the interpretative activity of the modern reader in confrontation with an ancient canon which is heard in a fresh way by each new generation. In this respect modern canonical exegesis must be post-critical in nature. It does not seek to reprimatinate first century Christian interpretation, but seeks to explore the nature of the canonical scriptures for a community of faith living on the other side of Baur and Wellhausen."

CHAPTER ONE

THE MURMURING MOTIF IN EXODUS SIXTEEN

This chapter demonstrates the significance and intent of the murmuring motif in Ex 16 as it identifies the object of this murmuring. The murmuring root (לָוַן) is quite densely packed in Ex 16. Five of the eight OT occurrences of the *noun* form are located in Ex 16 (vv. 7, 8 [used twice], 9 & 12), while three of the fourteen occurrences of the *verb* form are found here (vv. 2, 7, & 8).¹ In fact, there is no other OT passage which employs this root so intensively.² It is, therefore, worthwhile to give this term and the motif it bears significant attention as we seek a better understanding of Ex 16. Consequently, the purpose of this first chapter to evaluate the significance, the intent, and the object of the murmuring narrated in Ex 16.

Interaction with Ex 16 has revealed that in the process of determining the object of Ex 16's murmuring, one also apprehends that motif's significance and intent in Ex 16. As a result, this chapter of the thesis will focus primarily on the object of Israel's murmuring in Ex 16, but, in its conclusion, it will list the concomitant results of this study relative to

¹ The noun forms are located in Ex 16:7, 8 (used two times), 9, 12; Num 14:27; 17:20/5, 25/10. The verb forms are located in Ex 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27 (used two times), 29, 36; 16:11, 17:6/16:41; 17:20/5; Josh 9:18.

² Num 14 comes the closest with six occurrences, two short of the number of occurrences in Ex 16.

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this motif's significance and intent in the quail and manna narrative.

It might seem unnecessary to inquire concerning the object of Ex 16's murmuring since v. 2 says that the murmuring was "against (לַעֲדָת) Moses and Aaron."³ However, these words have been taken by some to mean that Israel was really "fighting with God . . . , but tried to conceal its unbelief by directing it to Moses."⁴ Others take the text to mean that Israel was, in fact, murmuring against Moses and Aaron and not the LORD.⁵

The object of Israel's complaint in Ex 16 is important to determine because without that determination one is unable to decide whether this murmuring is an expression of uncertainty relative to the LORD (which is the case if the murmuring is directed against him) or is an expression of uncertainty relative to Moses and Aaron (which is the case if Moses and Aaron are the only intended objects of Israel's murmuring). To express this in

³ Throughout this thesis English translations of the Hebrew text are the author's own except where otherwise indicated.

⁴ Childs, *Exodus*, 287. A similar interpretation is found in John I Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX.: Word, 1987), 219. Andrew C. Tunyogi in "The Rebellions of Israel," *JBL* 81 (1962): 386 simply assumes that Ex 16 and several other desert complaint narratives where the LORD is not said in the text to be a target of the people's complaint "represent Israel as rebelling *directly* against God" (emphasis mine); he then builds the entire thesis of his article around that assumption. In addition, R. P. Carroll in "Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 182 is referring to these desert rebellions when he writes, "The person against whom the rebellion is directed in these stories is either Moses or Yahweh; often it is difficult to separate one from the other." These views encourage the reader to make Yahweh, in some sense, a target of Israel's complaint even when only Moses or Moses and Aaron are said in the text to be the targets.

⁵ For example see Dean S. McBride, "Transcendent Authority: The Role of Moses in Old Testament Traditions," *Int* 44 (July 1990): 233; and M. M. Kalisch, *Exodus*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855), 285.

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another way, if one accepts Coats' view that in Ex 16:3 the people are expressing "a desire that the Exodus had never occurred,"⁶ our inquiry asks if this negative critique of the exodus caused Israel to doubt their God or their leaders.

As will become apparent, it is the position of this author that Israel's complaint here is not intentionally directed against the LORD but is intentionally directed only against Moses and Aaron. However, this case is a cumulative one and the detailed exegesis of the relevant verses in Ex 16 is closely related to conclusions drawn due to evidence from several similar complaint narratives (the most relevant of these narratives will be commented upon briefly here and then more thoroughly in this thesis's fifth chapter). If the reader feels that the conclusions drawn here with regard to the object of Ex 16's complaint are stated with too much certainty, it is because it has been difficult for this author not to write with an awareness of the case as a whole.

We turn now to the seven verses in Ex 16 which are most relevant to the murmuring motif in Ex 16. They are vv. 2-3, 6-9, and 12.

Verse two reports that "all the congregation of the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron." The question raised by these words is in what sense should the text's words, "against Moses and Aaron," be read? This question cannot be answered by v. 2 alone. We must look further into Ex 16.

Verse 3 is especially important because it contains the only account of Israel's complaint. The complaint begins with the optative phrase, *וְיָשָׁב*, which is used nineteen

⁶ George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 89.

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times⁷ in the OT as an idiom to introduce a wish.⁸ (יִתְּנֵנוּ occurs only twice, in Jb 14:4 & 31:31, with no connection to a wish. It should also be noted that יִתְּנֵנוּ occurs three times⁹ and יִתְּנֵנוּ once,¹⁰ and all four of these occurrences introduce a wish). The qal infinitive construct, מוֹתָנוּ, which follows literally means “our dying.” Due to the timelessness of both יִתְּנֵנוּ and the infinitive, מוֹתָנוּ, the most exact rendering into English is, “If only our dying/death were.”

The next important element in v. 3 is the preposition ב. It is used four times in the first half of v. 3 to introduce the conditions of Israel’s wished for death. It is to these four conditions that we now turn.

The first of these conditions is Israel’s wish that their dying were “in the hand of the LORD” (בְּיַד־יְהוָה). Some scholars take בְּיַד־יְהוָה מוֹתָנוּ together as nothing more than a reference to an early (pre-exodus)¹¹ or natural death.¹² If that is the intention of

⁷ These nineteen occurrences are located in Ex 16:3; Num 11:29; Dt 5: 29; 28:67 (used twice); Jdg 9:29; 2 Sa 19:1/18:33; Jer 8:23/9:1; Pss 14:7; 53:7/6; 55:7/6; Jb 6:8; 11:5; 13:5; 14:13; 19:23 (used twice); 23:3; 31:35.

⁸ All of the following Hebrew grammars refer to this phrase as a means of introducing a wish. The first two also have helpful discussions of this phrase. Friedrich H. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. Emil Kautzsch, 2d English ed., rev. by Arthur E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 476-77; Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans., rev. T. Muraoka, Subsidia Biblica, vol. 14/II (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 2:616; and Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 680.

⁹ These three occurrences are located in Isa 27:4; Jer 9:1/2; Jb 29:2.

¹⁰ This occurrence is located in Song 8:1.

¹¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 89; Durham, 219.

¹² Kalisch, 287; and Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 189.

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this expression it is of little or no assistance in determining the real object of Israel's murmuring. However, it is very unlikely that this phrase is a reference to nothing more than an early or natural death. It is unlikely for at least four reasons. First, the phrase בְּיָד־יְהוָה occurs thirty-nine times in the OT,¹³ and in every other occurrence it refers to items of clear theological import such as God's power (e.g., Josh 4:24), God's direction (e.g., 2 Chr 29:25), or God's control (e.g., Jer 51:7). To reduce its significance here to that of a vague, spiritualizing element in an idiom for an early or natural death is suspect.

Second, to read $\text{בְּיָד־יְהוָה מוֹתֵנוּ}$ as such an idiom ignores the function of the preposition ב mentioned above. All available translations and commentaries take the other three phrases governed by ב in v. 3 as free-standing conditions of Israel's wished for death. Surely, the consistent use of ב in these phrases indicates that the first such phrase also functions as the same kind of free-standing condition and is not a part of an idiom with מוֹתֵנוּ .

Third, if this phrase functions here as an idiom, then the בְּיָד־יְהוָה could be dropped and מוֹתֵנוּ with the three prepositional phrases which follow could still be interpreted as an appeal for an early or natural death. In no other occurrence of בְּיָד־יְהוָה can it be removed from the passage without leaving a void which would have to be filled. It is

¹³ These thirty-nine occurrences are located in Ex 9:3; 16:3; Num 11:23; Dt 2:15; Josh 4:24; 22:31; Jdg 2:15; Ru 1:13; 1 Sa 5:6, 9; 7:13; 12:15; 2 Sa 24:14; 1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 3:15; 1 Chr 21:13; 28:19; 2 Chr 29:25; Ezr 7:6, 28; Jb 12:9; Ps 75:9/8; Prv 21:1; Isa 19:16; 25:10; 40:2; 41:20; 51:17; 59:1; 62:3; 66:14; Jer 25:17; 51:7; Ezk 1:3; 3:14, 22; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1.

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very difficult to attach so little significance to it here.

Fourth, בְּיַד־יְהוָה is nowhere else used with מוֹתָנוּ or any other form of מוֹת. This fact makes it difficult to believe that בְּיַד־יְהוָה מוֹתָנוּ functions here as an idiom.

In conclusion, it seems likely that the Israelites are here wishing that their death were to be or to have been a result of “the power of the LORD”¹⁴ rather than whatever power they saw their death resulting from in Ex 16:3, and they are not intending to convey a negative attitude toward the LORD. In fact, even though it is conceivable that the people are consciously murmuring against the LORD at the same time that they are wishing that their death were by his power (cf., Jb 2:9), it is somewhat less difficult to presume that the people were intentionally complaining only against Moses and Aaron and wishing that their deaths were not in the control of Moses and Aaron but in the control of the LORD. Therefore, the phrase, בְּיַד־יְהוָה, at least suggests that the Israelites are murmuring against Moses and Aaron and not that they are intentionally murmuring against

¹⁴ It is appropriate now to discuss the meaning and translation of בְּיַד־יְהוָה in Ex 16:3. This phrase occurs in seven other OT passages (2 Sam 24:14; Isa 62:3; Jer 51:7; Ps 75:9/8; Prv 21:1; 1 Chr 21:13; and 2 Chr 29:25). None of these occurrences are absent of a reference to the power, authority, or control of the LORD, although some (e.g., Isa 62:3) appear to include other items as well, but the reference to the power, authority, or control of YHWH is the obvious common denominator among these seven occurrences. Such a realization and the recognition that such an understanding accords well with the intent in Ex 16:3 leads to the conclusion that בְּיַד־יְהוָה in Ex 16:3 should be understood as a reference to the power of the LORD. P. R. Ackroyd in “יָד, *yād*,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:410 suggests that יָד in Ex 16:3 be rendered with “by the power of”. When בְּיַד־יְהוָה is understood in this way the reader hears the Israelites wishing that their deaths were to be or to have been the result of the power of the LORD.

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the LORD.¹⁵

Now we turn to the next phrase in v. 3, “in the land of Egypt” (בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם).

The only point to be made here is that there is a contrast between the phrase, “in the land of Egypt,” and the phrase, “into this desert,” in the second half of v. 3. Israel’s murmur is an expression of dissatisfaction with the environment into which the exodus has brought them and, at the same time, an expression of nostalgia for the environment from which it has taken them. Israel’s murmuring is to be seen as an expression of dissatisfaction with the exodus as a whole (be reminded of the conclusion of Coats referred to on p. 31 above).

בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ עַל-סִיר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאֶרְצֵנוּ לֶחֶם לְשִׂבְעָה (the translation of these phrases is considered in the two paragraphs which follow) are the words which form the final two conditions of Israel’s desired death. These two prepositional phrases further emphasize Israel’s dissatisfaction with their present environment and their nostalgia for Egypt. The people are remembering their lives in Egypt as times when they had plenty to eat, and they certainly view those times as more blessed than the life-threatening time which they are encountering in the desert. Again their dissatisfaction with the exodus is clear.

Another issue is raised by these last two conditions. Until these phrases Israel’s

¹⁵ The view of Benno Jacob is noteworthy here. He notes that the people’s only reference to God is here in v. 3 where they state “the wish to have died by HIS hand.” Jacob sees this as indicative of the fact that “this was false piety, as they sought to align HIM against Moses and Aaron.” *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, N. J.: Ktav Publishing House, 1992), 440.

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wish has been expressed in a timeless way. However, an infinitive construct with \beth is normally a temporal construction with the preposition rendered as “when.” If that is the case here then the Israelites appear to be wishing that they had died in the past, in Egypt, and, therefore, prior to the exodus.¹⁶

However, it is intriguing to consider the possibility that the \beth here refers to the place of their death rather than the time of their death. If such were the case, then the preposition would literally mean “in” but would come into English as “where” since “in our sitting” and “in our eating” are not idiomatic English expressions.¹⁷ If this is the intention then Israel is not expressing a desire to have preempted the exodus by dying before its occurrence but are wishing that they had remained in Egypt and finished out their lives there undisturbed by “saviours.” In other words, this second reading portrays the Israelites longing for a death controlled by the LORD in the land of Egypt rather than a death in the desert through the agency of Moses and Aaron. The intended nuance of the preposition here is uncertain, and neither the temporal nor the spatial option should be discounted.

Israel’s very critical assessment of their deliverance from Egypt is stridently

¹⁶ It might be suggested that the Israelites are wishing that they had died by the power of the LORD when the angel of death caused the firstborn of Egypt to die just prior to the exodus. In fact, just such a reading is referred to (although rejected) by Kalisch, 287. This seems an unlikely reading because only the firstborn die on that occasion, and there is nothing in Ex 16 which clearly alludes to that event.

¹⁷ See the NEB and Moffatt’s *New Translation* both of which render \beth with the two infinitives in Ex 16:3 as “where.” See also the NIV which renders it as “there.”

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expressed in the second half of v. 3. The finite verb in this clause is הוֹצֵאָנוּ . It is noteworthy both because this hiphil form of אָצַח is the characteristic way of referring to Israel's exodus and because the suffix which it bears directs the force of Israel's complaint at Moses and Aaron. The straightforward way to read this charge is that Israel is accusing Moses and Aaron alone of having instigated this seemingly disastrous exodus. The validity of this straightforward reading is strengthened by the contrast between "by the power of the LORD in the land of Egypt" above and the "you have brought us out to this desert" here. The other term which is relevant to our query is לְהַחֲיוֹתָנוּ (the hiphil infinitive construct form of חָיוּת with the preposition לְ). This form contrasts artfully with מוֹתָנוּ , the qal infinitive of מוֹת , in Ex 16:3. The message is, to paraphrase, 'Better to die by the power of the LORD, in the land of Egypt, . . . , than to be caused to die/be killed by you (Moses and Aaron) through starvation in this desert.'

In conclusion, our analysis reveals that the more natural and defensible reading of Ex 16:3 is as a complaint against Moses and Aaron with no intended criticism of the LORD. In fact, the desire to die "by the power of the LORD" could be read as a statement of Israel's ultimate faith in the LORD¹⁸ as opposed to their extreme disenchantment with Moses and Aaron. We turn now to vv. 6-9 & 12 to determine their effect upon the interpretive decisions taken relative to v. 3.

¹⁸ However, it seems more likely to this author that Jacob is correct (see footnote 15 above) in seeing this as a "false piety"—false in the sense that the more complete portrait of Israel never portrays them as having the ability to place ultimate faith in anyone.

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First, we analyze two quite similar phrases in vv. 6 & 12. Verse 6 speaks of the evening (the time of the quail's imminent arrival) when Israel "will know that the LORD brought you out¹⁹ from the land of Egypt." Little needs to be said to draw out the significance of this statement. If at evening Israel "will know"²⁰ that it was the LORD who brought them out from Egypt, then, at the very least, Israel was uncertain regarding who should receive credit or blame for the exodus prior to that time? Israel is presented here as being skeptical of assigning the exodus to the LORD and of needing the miraculous provision of food to be convinced that it was indeed his work.

The comparable phrase in v. 12 follows the LORD's promise (spoken to Moses)

¹⁹ Note that the verb is אָצִיחַ, the hiphil perfect of אָצַח which is the standard verbal form used to refer to the exodus, and be reminded that this same root is used in v. 3 as an element in Israel's murmur. In v. 3 Israel claims that Moses and Aaron have brought them out (אָצִיחַוּ). In v. 6 Moses counters saying that "the LORD brought you out (אָצִיחַוּ)."

²⁰ As has been noted by several scholars (e.g., O. A. Piper, "Knowledge," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick [New York: Abingdon Press, 1962], 3:43) the phrase כִּי יִדַע followed by יְהוָה or אֱלֹהִים or both can refer to the placing of faith or trust in God. Some of the clearest examples of such a meaning are to be found in the following OT passages which are listed giving sufficient context so that the faith/trust nuance can readily be observed. Those passages are Dt 4:32-40; Isa 49:22-23; 60:15-22; Jer 31:31-34; Ezk 20:33-44; 24:16-24; 34:25-30; 37:1-14; Joel 2:21-32; Pss 20; 46:8-11; 56:8-13. However, even in the passages listed above, the faith or trust comes because of some evidentiary experience which "proves" something about the nature or the work of God. The point of Ex 16:6 is that the people still needed more to realize or to have faith or to believe that the LORD was the one responsible for the exodus. Durham is surely right when he interprets this phrase in v. 6 to mean, "Yahweh will bring at evening an experience that will prove his Presence in the exodus from Egypt . . ." (Durham, 220), indicating that the people still need convincing. Nahum M. Sarna in *Exodus, The JPS Torah Commentary* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 87 notes that the reference to knowing "that the LORD brought you out from the land of Egypt" in v. 6 is in reaction to what "was charged in v. 2," i.e., that the exodus was due to Moses and Aaron.

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concerning the forthcoming meat and bread. After giving that promise he says, "Then you will know that I am the LORD your God." This can be viewed as a shortened restatement of the similar phrase in v. 6 leaving that verse's relative clause ("who brought you out of Egypt") to be understood. On the other hand, it can be read as a statement designed to reveal the depths of Israel's religious uncertainty.²¹ Whichever interpretive decision is made it is clear that the provision of meat and bread should certify for the Israelites that it is YHWH who is with them in the desert. He is their God. Therefore, both the statement from Moses (v. 6) and the one from the LORD (v. 12) perfectly suit v. 3's complaint as interpreted above.

However, if one decides that the Israelites are really murmuring against the LORD, then these two phrases are very awkward if not inexplicable. If the Israelites are murmuring against the LORD and expressing their desire that he had not taken them out of Egypt, then they do believe that he is the author of the exodus and they do believe that he is their God (although a God in whom they are disappointed). They would not need quail and manna to know that the LORD brought them out of Egypt, and they would not need quail and manna to know that he was their God. They would instead have needed these food items to be assured that the LORD their God was not inept, inadequate, fickle, or

²¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92-93 concludes that this form of the second name-revealing formula and its differences from the first such formula (v. 6) indicates that the "murmuring motif has been secondarily incorporated into the more positive narrative of the people's petition for Yahweh's aid." This supposition is not without merit, but it does not pertain to the present purpose which is to understand, if possible, the text of Ex 16 in its canonical form.

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cruel. The more natural interpretation of these verses is clear, and it supports the reading of v. 3 proposed above.

We turn now to the four verses in Ex 16 which report that the LORD has heard Israel's murmuring. In v. 7 Moses and Aaron inform the people that the LORD has heard their "murmuring against the LORD," and they go on to say, "and what are we²² that you murmur against us?" In the second half of v. 8 Moses says, "The LORD heard your murmurings which you are murmuring against him and what are we?²³ Your murmurings are not against us but against the LORD."²⁴ In v. 9 Moses says to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Draw near before the LORD, because he has heard

²² Although its significance is unclear, the reader's attention should be drawn to the rare occurrence here and again in v. 8 of what Joüon, 120 refers to as "[t]he primary form" of the first person plural pronoun, אנכי. This form is found only five times in the Hebrew Bible (Ex 16:7 & 8 and in Num 32:32; 2 Sa 17:12; and Lam 3:42. It is also found in the pausal form, אנכי, in Gn 42:11. In contrast, the form which Jouon, *Ibid.* refers to as "the secondary form," אנכיך, occurs 121 times in the Hebrew Bible.

²³ Sarna, *Exodus*, 87 refers to the question rendered literally above as, "what are we?", as "[a] self deprecating rhetorical question that is intensified by the use of Hebrew *mah*, literally 'what,' employed of things rather than persons."

²⁴ See Robert Althann's "Unrecognized Poetic Fragments in Exodus," *JNSL* 11 (1983): 16-18 for a well-reasoned case for treating Ex 16:8 as poetic. His case should be read as a counterpoint to the contention from Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 134 that v. 8a is an "incomplete sentence." Althann's translation of this verse as a whole is as follows:

“And Moses said,
‘YHWH truly gives you
meat in the evening to eat
and bread in the morning to satisfy you.
YHWH has indeed heard your murmurings
which you have murmured against him.
But we are nothing;
not against us are your murmurings
but against YHWH.”

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your murmurings.” In v. 12 the LORD says to Moses, “I have heard the murmurings of the sons of Israel.”

When Israel’s complaint in Ex 16 is read as an instance of murmuring against the LORD, then the repetitive declaration that the LORD has heard their murmuring with the accompanying insistence that the LORD is the object of that murmuring is viewed as an exposure of Israel’s camouflaged “unbelief,”²⁵ and if one dismisses what has already been said concerning v. 3 and the relevant phrases in vv. 6 & 12, then such a reading might seem acceptable. However, there are reasons why this interpretation should not be accepted, reasons that are independent of the interpretations advanced above.

The first of these reasons flows naturally from a reflective reading of these verses. One cannot help but wonder why the text so emphatically and repetitively declared that the murmuring is against the LORD when v. 2 says that the murmuring is against Moses and Aaron; v. 7 has Moses and Aaron asking, “What are we that you murmur against us?” and v. 8 has Moses saying, “What are we? Your murmurings are not against us but against the LORD.” The reader should at least examine the possibility that these statements are to reveal to the Israelites that although they are conscious of murmuring only

²⁵ Childs, *Exodus*, 287. The reader might feel that Childs’ reference to “camouflaged unbelief” and this thesis’s reference to murmuring that is effectively but unconsciously against the LORD are not significantly different from one another. However, the difference is significant because Childs’ view is that the people, in fact, are murmuring *consciously* against the LORD but are seeking to hide (camouflage) that fact; the view of this thesis, on the other hand, is that the Israelites are not conscious that the LORD is the real object of their murmuring; they think that they are only murmuring against Moses and Aaron.

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against Moses and Aaron, they are somehow, in fact, murmuring against the LORD.

A second reason comes from a comparison of Ex 16 with two other Exodus passages, Ex 5:10-21 and 14:5-14. These two other narratives also report occasions during which the Israelites complain about their circumstances to Moses (and Aaron), and they are relevant because they portray Israel *inappropriately* criticizing their leaders. Their criticisms are inappropriate because Moses (and Aaron) are being blamed for events they did not cause; they have been brought about by the LORD.

The story in Ex 5:10-21 is shortly after the LORD's quite forceful commissioning of Moses which Moses accepts with great reluctance (Ex 3:1-4:17), and is immediately after the initial dialogue of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh (Ex 5:1-9). This initial dialogue does not have the desired effect, as Pharaoh actually increases the people's labours. In Ex 5:20 the Israelite foremen are leaving Pharaoh following a fruitless attempt to persuade him to relent concerning the increased burdens. In v. 21 they meet Moses and Aaron and say to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge, because you have made our scent to stink in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." The foremen have no difficulty in criticizing Moses and Aaron while, at the same time, demonstrating a connection with the LORD which their discontent with Moses and Aaron does not disturb. In fact, the foremen's criticism of Moses and Aaron reveals their conviction that the recent actions of Moses and Aaron do not conform to the will of the LORD. The reader knows that their conviction is errant and their criticism inappropriate, because Moses and Aaron have only done what has been commanded by the LORD; he is responsible for all that has taken place, including

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Pharaoh's refusal (see Ex 4:21-23 where the LORD says that he "will harden" Pharaoh's "heart so that he will not let the people go"). The effect of this story is to create sympathy for the maligned and misunderstood Moses (and Aaron), a sympathy which is increased by the poignancy of Moses' subsequent prayer on behalf of the Israelites (Ex 5:22-23).²⁶

The second story which it is relevant to compare with Ex 16 is located in Ex 14:5-14 which is both contextually and thematically near to the Ex 16 story.²⁷ Exodus 14:5-14 narrates the Egyptian army's pursuit of the departing Israelites and the Israelites' response to the appearance of that oncoming army. The criticism of Moses is found in vv. 13-14. It is especially significant that before the Israelites voice their complaint they become frightened and cry out "to the LORD" (v. 10). The verb translated "cried out" is קָרָע. It is used 55 times in the Hebrew Bible.²⁸ This verb generally conveys an appeal for help and it always conveys that meaning when the LORD is the object; and in the Pentateuch it always conveys a cry for help regardless of its object. The picture is clear.

²⁶ For an insightful discussion of Moses' prayer here see Jürgen Ebach, "Lord, why have you done Evil to this People?" trans. John Bowden, in *Coping with Failure*, ed. Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette, Concilium, 1990/5 (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 117-27.

²⁷ Durham, 187 says that the "protest to Moses" in Ex 14:10-12 "is an anticipation of the murmuring and rebellion motif to come in the narratives of the wilderness journey, in both Exodus and Numbers."

²⁸ Gn 4:10; 27:34; 41:55; Ex 5:8, 15; 8:8/12; 14:10, 15; 15:25; 17:4; 22:22/23, 26/27; Num 11:2; 12:13; 20:16; Dt 22:24, 27; 26:7; Josh 24:7; Jdg 4:3; 7:23, 24; 10:12, 17; 12:1; 1 Sa 10:17; 13:4; 1 Kgs 20:39; 2 Kgs 2:12; 3:21; 4:1, 40; 6:5, 26; 8:3, 5; Isa 19:20; 33:7; 42:2; 46:7; 65:14; Jer 22:20; 49:3; Pss 34:18; 77:2/1; 88:2/1; 107:6, 28; Jb 19:7; 35:12; Lam 2:18; Neh 9:27; 2 Chr 13:14.

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Israel's cry for help is directed to the LORD while their complaint is aimed at Moses. Again the reader is confronted by an example of inappropriate criticism of Moses as well as the Israelite tendency to remove the LORD from blame for negative circumstances while vigorously blaming their leaders (this narrative will be discussed further in chapters five and six).

These earlier stories in Ex 5 & 14 prepare the reader to see the same type of inappropriate criticism in Ex 16, because in Ex 16 the Israelites are murmuring against their leaders because of an event (i.e., the exodus) which is the LORD's doing. In response, Moses and Aaron insist that the people are really murmuring against the LORD (vv. 7-12). This response of Moses and Aaron is, however, an element that separates Ex 16 from these earlier narratives which are otherwise quite similar. In Ex 16, according to the reading being suggested here, the response of Moses and Aaron reveals to the people both that it is inappropriate for them to direct this criticism against their leaders and that they are really complaining against the LORD. This type of response is not found in the earlier narratives discussed above (a fact to which we will return in chapter six of this thesis); however, one does see in Ex 16 the same Israelite tendency which is observed in the stories above, the tendency to distance the LORD from any blame for negative circumstances.

The third reason for contending that these phrases in Ex 16:7-12 should not be read as an exposure of Israel's disguised unbelief grows out of a comparison between this material and the narrative in Num 16-17. Two verses within Num 16-17 are especially relevant; they are Num 16:11 and Num 17:6/16:41. We look first at Num 16:11 and the

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verbal similarity between that verse and Ex 16:7 & 8. Num 16:11 says, “Therefore, you and all your company are gathered against the LORD, and Aaron, what is he that you murmur against him?” The similarity between this verse and Ex 16:7-8 is striking. The noteworthy point is that Num 16:3 clearly reveals that its murmurers are not intending to oppose the LORD but are intentionally gathered only against Moses and Aaron, but in Num 16:11 (quoted above) Moses contends that Aaron is an inappropriate object for their murmuring, and that they have, in effect, “gathered against the LORD.”²⁹

Exodus 16’s very similar material should be interpreted in the same way.

The second relevant verse in Num 16-17 is Num 17:6/16:41. There the Israelites accuse Moses and Aaron of being responsible for the deaths of “the LORD’s people” following the deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and many associated with them—deaths brought about by the earth opening up and by fire “from the LORD.” The most natural reading is that the people do not believe that the LORD is responsible for these deaths; they believe that Moses and Aaron are responsible. The Israelites have again distanced the LORD from a circumstance which they view as blameworthy.

In summary, a reflective reading of Ex 16:7-12, the earlier portrayal of inappropriate Israelite criticism of their leaders in Ex 5 and Ex 14, and a comparison of Ex 16:7-12

²⁹ John Marsh, “Introduction and Exegesis of the Book of Numbers,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 2:221-22 says that “Moses chides Korah for inciting the Levites to demand the status of priests, which he describes as rebellion against Yahweh himself, not simply against Aaron and his authority.” Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, The JPS Torah Commentary (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 133 when commenting on Num 16:11 says, “The real thrust of the rebellion is against the LORD, who has chosen Moses and Aaron.”

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with Num 16-17 all support the interpretation that Ex 16:7-12's repetitive insistence that the LORD is the object of Israel's murmuring has the purpose of making clear that to murmur against the exodus is effectively to murmur against the LORD because he is its author (see the discussion of the LORD as object of Israel's complaint in Num 11:4-35 below for further support of this interpretation). This interpretation is also supported by its conformity with the more natural reading, as outlined above, of the other relevant material in Ex 16.

This study of the murmuring motif as it is employed in Ex 16 had two purposes. Its first and most obvious purpose was to determine the intended object of Israel's murmuring in Ex 16. After the foregoing analysis, it has been concluded that Israel intended to murmur only against Moses and Aaron; but, since their complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the exodus and with its results, the words of Moses, Aaron, and the LORD make clear that they are effectively murmuring against the LORD because he is the author of the exodus. The message to Israel is (to paraphrase), 'Your murmuring is much more serious than you think. Its real target is divine.'

The second purpose of this section was to demonstrate the significance and intent of the murmuring motif as it is used in Ex 16. Its significance and intent are clarified by noting the preceding analysis which reveals four important functions of this motif in the manna and quail narrative. First, it shows the people's critical attitude toward their leaders. Second, it shows the people's propensity for doubting the LORD's involvement in anything accompanied by negative effects. Third, it shows Israel's disenchantment with the exodus. Fourth, since Israel's doubts in Ex 16 about the source of the exodus follow

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God's demonstration of delivering power through the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea,³⁰ and the sweetening of the water at Marah; they expose the shallowness of their faith, a shallowness which characterizes Israel during the desert period.

³⁰ One should also remember that following the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea the people are reported to have "feared the LORD" and to have "believed in his servant Moses" (Ex 14:31).

CHAPTER TWO

THE TESTING MOTIF IN EXODUS SIXTEEN

In Ex 16:4 the LORD says that he is providing bread for the Israelites “in order to *test*¹ (נִסֶּה²) them.” Why does he not just *feed* them? Is travelling in a desert toward an unknown destination not test enough? Why use the bread as a test? It seems redundant and somewhat mean-spirited. The purpose of this chapter is both to develop some understanding of the testing motif’s role here and to determine if the testing motif is truly integral to this chapter.

¹ The very idea of divine testing troubles many, but since that issue is not relevant to the purpose at hand one quotation from James L. Crenshaw will suffice. In *A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence, Overtures to Biblical Theology*, 12 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984): 2-3 Crenshaw writes, “The fundamental assumption lying behind divine testing is that God lacks a certain kind of knowledge, that is, precisely how men and women will act in trying circumstances. Of course, such ignorance arises from human freedom, which is itself a gift from the transcendent one. Therefore, the divine act of self-limitation has created the necessity for such testing. On the other hand, humans can use adversity as a crucible within which character is shaped. That is why the psalmist [in Ps 26:2] openly invited God to pose a test, confident that he would emerge victorious. This devout believer actually welcomed the refining fire, for he was certain that the test would be fair.”

² For discussions of the verb, נִסֶּה, the reader should consult the following sources: BDB, 650; HKB, 239; G. Gerleman, “נִסֶּה *nsh pi.* versuchen,” in *THAT*, ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1976), 2:69-71; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Press, 1985), 356; and Marvin R. Wilson, “נִסֶּה,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980): 2:581.

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It is commonly suggested that the statement, “in order to test them whether they will walk in my law or not,” is a deuteronomic gloss.³ If such is the case then the problem with why the LORD would test the people at this time might seem to vanish. The reader can simply dismiss the testing motif as not integral to this material. Such a solution, however, is too simplistic for at least two reasons.⁴

First, it is uncertain that the “testing clause” is a deuteronomic gloss, and neither Hyatt nor Childs classify it as such.⁵ Pertinent to the classification issue are the number of references to divine tests found elsewhere in the Pentateuch (e.g., the LORD’s test of Abraham in Gn 22 and the references to divine tests of Israel in Ex 15:25 & 20:20, all three of which employ ׀ׁׁ and only one of which, Ex 15:25, is suspected of being a later addition). Also notable are the non-narrative references to divine testing, references which also employ ׀ׁׁ . These passages are located in Dt 8:2, 16; 13:4/3; & 33:8. Another item of relevance is the use of ׀ׁׁ in Ex 17:1-7; Num 14:20-23; & Dt 6:16, passages which refer to Israel’s tests of the LORD. These tests are relevant because of the way in which the canon juxtaposes them with the LORD’s tests of Israel. The juxtaposition is achieved by the canonical viewpoint that the *divine* tests are wholly justified, while Israel’s tests of the LORD are unjustified and inappropriate. The theological import of the relation-

³ For example Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 83-84.

⁴ These two reasons should not be perceived as an attempt to convince the reader that the “testing clause” in Ex 16:4 is not deuteronomic and late. The purpose is to reveal why it is simplistic to dismiss the “testing clause” as not integral to this material.

⁵ Childs, *Exodus*, 275 & 286; and J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), 173-175, & 178.

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ship between these two groups of tests should produce a very cautious attitude toward the removal of any biblical reference to divine testing. Therefore, the quantity and quality of OT testing material mean that one can never be certain that "the testing clause" in Ex 16:4 was not a part of this narrative at a very early stage.⁶

The second reason that the removal of Ex 16:4's "testing clause" is too simplistic is provided by the analysis of Ex 16 to follow. This analysis leads the author of this thesis to argue that "the testing clause," if it is a gloss, has been added with such sensitivity that it clarifies what is already intrinsic to this text.

One of the techniques used in this analysis of Ex 16 is to read the material as if "the testing clause" were absent. The purpose and effect of this technique will become obvious as we proceed.

Two terms are used to provide easy designations in the analysis which follows. The first term, "the gathering clauses," is used to refer to all of v. 5 as well as the clause in v. 4 which says, "Behold I am raining bread for you from the heavens, and the people will go out and they will gather the daily portion." The second term, "the testing clause," refers to the clause in v. 4 which says, "in order that I shall test them if they will walk in my law or not."

Our analysis begins with a brief look at vv. 4-5. The canonical structure of these

⁶ Childs, *Exodus*, 286 writes, "Because of the emphasis in Dt 8 on manna as a test, most critical scholars (Bäntsch, Noth, etc.) have eliminated this phrase as a secondary expansion and alien to the earliest source. The historical critical issue is, however, certainly debatable. In my own judgment, a strong case can be made for seeing a parenthetic element already in the earliest literary level."

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two verses serves to connect the LORD's test of the people to both the daily gathering of bread and the doubling of the sixth day's supply, a connection clearly demonstrated by W. A. M. Beuken.⁷ However, נִסֵּי is found nowhere else in ch. 16, and vv. 4-5 are comprehensible without the נִסֵּי clause. Therefore, if the two "gathering clauses" are not clearly connected to the remainder of the chapter or are not connected in a way which relates to testing, then one could contend that testing is not integral to this narrative. This awareness helps focus the study which follows.

Upon leaving vv. 4-5 one encounters several verses (vv. 6-12) that do not directly connect with the "testing clause" or the "gathering clauses." However, these verses do keep the forthcoming miraculous provision of meat and bread before the reader (see vv. 8 & 12).

In v. 13a the reader encounters the report of the arrival of quail, and since quail could come under the category of לֶחֶם because that word is frequently employed as a generic for food (e.g., Jdg 13:15-16), the reader should determine if לֶחֶם is used as just such a generic in v. 4 and then more narrowly for bread only in vv. 8-32.⁸ Such a possibility is rendered unlikely by the use of לֶחֶם in vv. 13b-29 where it exclusively refers to "bread" and the bread is clearly connected to vv. 4-5, a connection that does not exist rela-

⁷ W. A. M. Beuken, "Exodus 16:5, 23: A Rule Regarding the Keeping of the Sabbath," *JSOT* 32 (1985): 6. Beuken's analysis of the structure of these verses leads him to the conclusion that "testing of Israel is the centre of the events of the ordinary days and of the sixth day."

⁸ See Cassuto, 193 for just such an understanding of לֶחֶם in these verses.

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tive to the meat. (Note that nothing that is reported connects the meat with vv. 4-5. The meat nowhere in Ex 16 is clearly referred to as DQ^{L} ; its coming is not associated with “the heavens;” its gathering is unreported; the supply of it is not doubled on the sixth day; it is not said to be an item which will be gathered on a daily basis, and it is not involved in any event that can be classified as a test). Therefore, it is likely that DQ^{L} in vv. 4-5 refers exclusively to the bread as it does throughout Ex 16 and that the quail is in no way connected to “the testing clause” or “the gathering clauses.”

Verses 13b-15 are clearly connected with “the gathering clause” in v. 4 in that they report the arrival of “the bread ($\text{DQ}^{\text{L}}\text{Q}$) which the LORD has given.” The coming of the bread with the dew adds to this connection because it is another way of saying “from the heavens” as in v. 4.⁹ However, these verses are in no way connected to “the testing clause.”

Verses 16-21 contain clear links with the “gathering clause” of v. 4. An obvious link between vv. 16-21 and “the gathering clauses” is the verb UQ^{L} which occurs twice in vv. 4-5 and is a component of both “gathering clauses.” It does not occur again until here, in vv. 16-21, where it is used four times.¹⁰

A study of the smaller units which comprise vv. 16-21 reveals that the clear links back to v. 4’s “gathering clause” all occur in vv. 16-18 & 21. We will shortly discuss how

⁹ Childs, *Exodus*, 288.

¹⁰ It should also be noted that the very similar Q^{L} occurs with UQ^{L} in v. 16 as a synonym also referring to the “gathering/taking” of the daily bread.

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to treat vv. 19-20 which appear to be exceptional for their absence of such linkages, but first an analysis of v. 16 followed by an analysis of vv. 17-18 is in order.

To look specifically at v. 16 is to encounter two very natural links back to v. 4. First, v. 16 uses טָקַל in reference to the gathering of the bread. Second, it refers to an amount to be gathered as does v. 4 (v. 4, “daily portion;” v. 16 “an omer per person”). Through these links the reader is being encouraged to make the connection between v. 4 & v. 16. Once the connection is made the differences support and strengthen it. Verse 16’s “an omer per person” is naturally construed as a sharpening of v. 4’s “daily portion,” a sharpening which allows v. 4’s “gathering clause” to be transformed into a command.

When v. 16 is interpreted as if v. 4’s “testing clause” were absent, then it is simply a report of Moses giving a command in accordance with the LORD’s words in v. 4, a command which Israel obeys. On the other hand, when “the testing clause” is retained the transformation of v. 4’s “gathering clause” into a divine command causes one to ask if this transformation of “the gathering clause” takes place in order to create a test of the people? This question cannot be answered without first analyzing Israel’s response to the command. That response is recorded in vv. 17-18, and to these verses we now turn.

One should begin by noting the two clear connections between vv. 17-18 and v. 4’s “gathering clause.” The first connection consists in the fact that vv. 17-18 are exclusively concerned with the *gathering* of the divinely supplied bread. The second connection is the verb לָקַט which occurs twice. Also notable is the use of the participles of רָבַח and קָטַט . Each are used twice to refer to large and small *gatherings* of bread.

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A relevant question with regard to these verses is how the Israelites managed to have the exact amounts that the LORD required. Some suggest that these exact amounts are the result of Israel's scrupulous obedience to the set limits.¹¹ Others contend that they are the result of a miracle.¹² If it is decided that the precise amounts are the result of obedience, then vv. 16-18, taken together with "the testing clause" of v. 4, could form the report of a "gathering test" which Israel passes (i.e., Israel receives a command from the LORD and scrupulously abides by it). If, on the other hand, it is decided that the correct amounts are due to divine intervention, no test can be found here.

Those who argue for a miraculous element in vv. 17-18 fail to take seriously the two clauses which open and close this report of Israel's gathering. Verse 17a says, "And the sons of Israel did so/thus/just so (כִּן)," a statement which refers back to the command to gather "one omer per person." The last clause of v. 18 says, "each man according to his eating gathered." The phrase "according to his eating" (לְפִי־אֲכָלוֹ) is identical to the phrase used in the command recorded in v. 16. In other words, v. 16 commanded them to gather לְפִי־אֲכָלוֹ, and v. 18 reports that they did just that. The remainder of the material in vv. 17-18 is best understood to be saying that those who gathered *much* still only col-

¹¹ A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus*, 2d. ed. revd. Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co, 1917), 98; Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 132; and Cassuto, 197.

¹² Childs, *Exodus*, 289; G. Henton Davies, *Exodus*, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1967), 139; and Durham, 225.

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lected one omer per person (indicating that they had larger families) and that those who gathered *little* also had the daily portion which was their due (indicating that they had smaller families).¹³

However, the question remains as to whether the gathering which proceeded upon v. 16's command can be construed as a test. If vv. 17-18 are read without the "testing clause," then it is unnatural to see any sort of test here. The reader simply would see the Israelites behaving exactly as God had said in v. 4.

On the other hand, when the "testing clause" is permitted to influence one's read-

¹³ Note that for the text to carry a supernatural intention the participles מְרַבֵּה and מְרַבֵּיט have to bear a comparative force (i.e., more than and less than the exact "one omer per person"). That is not the characteristic meaning of any forms of מְרַבֵּה or מְרַבֵּיט (see BDB, 589, 915-16). When these words do have a comparative force (and מְרַבֵּיט appears to carry such a force clearly only once [Ex 30:15]) this comparative intention is not usually left implicit (as would be the case in Ex 16:17-18) but is normally made explicit by a comparative מִן which follows (e.g., Ex 30:15; 36:5; 2 Sa 18:8; 2 Chr 25:9; Eccl 2:7; Jon 4:11).

Numbers 33:54 is very similar to the usage in Ex 16. In Num 33:54 we find these same two verbs (however, they are hiphil imperfects instead of hiphil participles as in Ex 16). The relevant portion of Num 33:54 says, "and you shall inherit the land by lot according to your clans; to the much (רַב) you shall make much (רַבִּיט) its inheritance, and to the little (רַבֵּיט) you shall make little (רַבֵּיט) its inheritance." Any implied comparison relates to the differing sizes of the clans involved, and the amount of land that they receive is apportioned according to the size of each clan (i.e., the much/many receive much, and the little/few receive little). The same point is being made in Ex 16:17-18, but the use of cognate nouns is not required, because the passage makes clear that they all gathered as they were commanded. Since this is the case, the reader is left to draw the correct inference. Yes, gathering much is *more than* gathering little, but it is *not more than* an omer per person.

This grammatical point also serves to demonstrate the improbability of interpretations which suggest a combination of both obedient gathering and supernatural intervention as the intended meaning of these verses. Two who put forward such an interpretation are S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), 150; and Beuken, "The Keeping of the Sabbath," 7.

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ing of vv. 17-18, then these verses can be viewed as the recounting of a divine test. Missing, however, is Moses, Aaron, or the LORD responding favourably to Israel's careful compliance. It could be argued that such a response is absent because this test is so easy. Telling hungry people to gather free bread is not much of a test, and telling them to gather one omer (about "2.3 litres, a little more than two dry quarts"¹⁴) per person, a very generous daily amount, is not either. It might also be suggested that to have emphasized the successful passing of such a simple test would have softened the negative significance of Israel's more important failures which follow. However, the way in which the gathering is reported likely will lead some readers to believe that this story clearly reports a test which the people passed, while others will think it only possible that such is the case. As a result, this writer feels that the report of the initial gathering of the manna adds little to the case that the "testing clause" is an integral part of Ex 16.

We now turn to vv. 19-20 where the reader encounters both a prohibition relative to the divinely supplied bread and the consequences of Israel's failure to respect that prohibition. In v. 19 Moses tells the people to keep none of the bread overnight, but in v. 20 it is reported that "they did not listen to Moses, and some kept some of it until morning and it became wormy and it stank and Moses was angry with them." It should be noted that this is the first section of the narrative since the arrival of the bread which has no clear linkage back to "the gathering clauses." In an effort to seek a linkage between vv. 19-

¹⁴ Ovid R. Sellers, "Weights and Measures," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4:835.

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20 and a “gathering clause,” it might be suggested that the phrase *דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ* (literally, “portion of a day in its day”) in v. 4 is being turned into a command as was done with the same phrase in v. 16. The command would then be emphasizing the “in its day” element and legislating that a whole day’s portion must be gathered *fresh* “in its day.” However, such a reading seems forced and unlikely.

Upon further analysis one discovers that this material connects to v. 4’s “testing clause” rather than to “the gathering clauses.” Such a connection is made clear by seeking to answer a question which naturally flows out of the consequences of Israel’s attempt to keep the bread overnight. That question is, Was the fact that the bread became wormy and odorous due to the inherent nature of the manna or was it due to something else? The complete narrative reveals the answer. In v. 24 the people are commanded to keep the bread overnight, and they find that it does not spoil, and an even longer period of non-spoilage is indicated by vv. 32-34 which instruct that an omer of manna be placed permanently “before the LORD.” These examples of non-spoilage make clear that the nature of the bread is subject to the will of the LORD; and that is not surprising because the manna is “from the heavens” and the LORD is its provider. His power over it is a concomitant assumption. Therefore, the spoilage that takes place in v. 20 is due to divine causation; the LORD effects the spoilage in order to punish Israel for disobeying his command.

But why did this disobedience require such a response? Many readers would sense that if these people under these circumstances throw out edible provisions as commanded, they are demonstrating trust in the LORD—trust that he will resupply them with food in the morning. To fail to keep this command is the exact opposite; it reveals

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an absence of trust. Therefore, the LORD is using the command in v. 19 to assess, to *test* the people's faith.

Consequently, if vv. 19-20 are read in association with "the testing clause," then the awareness that a divine test is taking place is simply engendered more quickly, and the reader sees the LORD doing precisely what he told Moses he would do; he is using the bread as an occasion to test the people. It is also noteworthy that when "the testing clause" is included we have a clear connection from vv. 19-20 back to v. 4 to which every other verse in vv. 16-21 connects. Without "the testing clause" that linkage, if it exists at all, is very vague.

We turn now to v. 21, a transitional verse which records the lasting result of both the command and the prohibition which govern Israel's bread gathering. Verse 21 is transitional because it concludes the material on normal gathering and, by emphasizing the daily routine of that gathering, prepares for the forthcoming departure from that routine. The connections back to "the gathering clause" of v. 4 are the use of טָקַט and the interest in the amount gathered (כִּפֵּי אֶכְלֹו).

Before moving onto vv. 22-30, the conclusions reached so far should be listed. First, the recurring verb טָקַט , the interest in the amount of bread gathered, and the similarity in wording between v. 4's "gathering clause" and the command of v. 16 make clear that "the gathering clause" in v. 4 is clearly linked with vv. 16-18 & 21. Second, vv. 16-18 may narrate a mild test, but one should be temperate in contending for such an interpretation. Third, there is no *clear* link between vv. 19-20 and "the gathering clauses," but

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these verses do connect to the “testing clause” in v. 4. Fourth, the material in vv. 16-18, material which clearly is connected with v. 4’s “gathering clause,” naturally prepares for the test in vv. 19-20. In other words, just as in vv. 4-5 “the gathering clauses” are connected to “the testing clause,” so here the gathering of the bread is connected to a test.

We turn now to vv. 22-30 and a summary of the contents of these verses. The events reported are set in motion by the doubled bread supply on the sixth day. The question of the elders concerning this apparently unexpected phenomenon prompts Moses to reveal privileged information. This information concerns the observance of the seventh day as “a holy sabbath to the LORD,” a day for which they are to prepare by cooking the extra bread on the sixth day and by keeping it overnight. Verse 24 then reports that this extra bread does not spoil overnight and that the people, after discovering the non-spoilage, hear from Moses that they are to eat the remainder of the sixth day’s bread on the seventh day, and that there will be no divinely supplied bread on that day.

Verse 27 reports that some of the Israelites broke the sabbath day’s non-gathering rule.¹⁵ Verse 27 initially may seem misplaced because it returns to the beginning of the seventh day, even though that beginning has already taken place in v. 24. However, its

¹⁵ Hans Walter Wolff well captures the lesson transmitted by the failed effort to collect manna on the seventh day. In “The Day of Rest in the Old Testament,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 7 (July 1972): 73 he writes, “Now, of course, some of the people had to go out on the seventh day . . . to gather their bread, but ‘they found nothing,’ the narrator tells us in v. 27, not without a bit of derision. Business on the seventh day is simply mocked as senseless, for its results are zero; it fails to recognize the care that God provides. Man does not live from his own untiring efforts, but from God’s activity.”

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placement here allows related material to be kept together in two unified sub-sections; i.e., all the formative principles concerning the manna and the sabbath are in vv. 23-26, and all the effects of the people's sabbath breaking are in vv. 28-29.

These last two verses (vv. 28-29) record the LORD's words to Moses after the people have broken the sabbath's non-gathering rule. Verse 30 concludes this section with the very brief note that "the people rested on the seventh day."

We must give special attention to the two verses within this section which serve to link this material with the "gathering clause" of v. 5. Verse 22 begins this new section of Ex 16 and is linked with v. 5's "gathering clause" through its reference to "the sixth day," its use of וַיִּזְכֹּר , and through its reference to the doubling of the Israelites' provision of bread on the sixth day. The other verse within this section which contains links with the "gathering clause" of v. 5 is v. 29. Here one reads of the LORD's giving of "two days" supply of bread "on the sixth day." An interesting feature of vv. 22-30 is that only vv. 22 & 29 clearly relate to "gathering clause" material, a much smaller proportion than was found to be the case for vv. 16-20. Verses 22-30 primarily serve to highlight sabbath legislation and the people's response to it.

If one reads vv. 22-30 without the influence of the "testing clause" the sabbath material is both unexpected and hermeneutically unattached. It is difficult to know what the "point" of God's institution of the sabbath at this particular time might be. Clearly the manna did not require the sabbath, and the sabbath did not have to be introduced here.

When one looks forward to the giving of the Ten Commandments in Ex 20 and notes the amount of space given there to the sabbath command (Ex 20:8-11) then the sus-

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picion can grow that Ex 16's sabbath emphasis has something to do with the commandments which are to come, but what specifically has it to do with them? How is the sabbath emphasis of Ex 16 connected with the sabbath command in Ex 20? The only prima facie certainty is that the LORD introduces sabbath observance here before presenting it again (formally and officially) as a part of the Ten Commandments.

The hermeneutical vagueness of this passage when read without the "testing clause" should push the reader toward deeper reflection. One would not expect the sabbath to be employed with no meaning and no theological or ethical import, but what meaning is intended? The search for an answer leads to the awareness that here we have a test, a test of Israel's willingness to obey the LORD's commands. The following paragraph demonstrates the validity of that conclusion.

To begin, it is important to remember that vv. 16-20 employ the elements of v. 4's "gathering clause" to create a test of Israel's trust. Might it be that we are encountering a similar use of v. 5's "gathering clause" here in vv. 22-30? Is the prohibition against food-gathering on the seventh day a test as was the prohibition against keeping the bread overnight in vv. 19-20? If so, then vv. 22-30 are as closely connected to vv. 4-5 as vv. 16-20 were to v. 4. Second, note the words of the LORD following the people's attempt to gather bread on the sabbath. He says, "How long do you (pl) refuse to keep (לִשְׁמֹר) my commandments?" These words of the LORD suggest that the meaning/the goal of this introduction to the sabbath was to determine the Israelites' willingness to keep/obey the LORD's commands. When one adds to this the realization that many of the OT passages concerned with divine testing concentrate on obedience (variously

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described as “fear of the LORD,” “keeping” the LORD’s commands, and “heeding” the voice of the LORD [see Gn 22:1-19; Ex 15:22-26; 20:18-21; Num 14:20-24; Dt 6:16-19; 8:1-20; 33:8-11]) then the impression grows that this material can and should be read as a test. Third, when this sabbath material is placed in its wider context, a context which leads to the divine legislation given at Mt Sinai, surely the most natural reading is that here in Ex 16 the LORD is doing something which prepares for and/or looks forward to the more complete revelation of his will which is forthcoming. In summary, when one reads Ex 16:22-30 as if v. 4’s “testing clause” were not present, the reflection which the passage then requires still leads to a solid awareness that the events here narrated constitute a divine test, a test to determine if the people can be habituated to a life conformed to divine law.

When vv. 22-30 are read *with* the benefit of v. 4’s “testing clause” the interpretation is very similar to the one reached above. One views this material as the narration of a test of the people to determine if they will obey the LORD’s law. Such a reading is supported by the canonical text’s connection between v. 4’s “testing clause” and the material in vv. 22-30. This connection consists in the fact that the term *תִּוְּחָה* (which occurs only twice in Ex 16) is found as a part of v. 4’s “testing clause” and again in v. 28. In both occurrences it has to do with obedience to the will of the LORD, and in both occurrences the word *תִּוְּחָה* comes from the mouth of the LORD. Consequently, the function of “the testing clause” relative to vv. 22-30 is the same as that which it bore relative to vv. 16-20; it is to alert the reader in advance to the presence of a divine test.

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Now we can conclude our analysis of vv. 22-30. This analysis has confirmed that divine testing is integral to this material, because it has demonstrated that a reader who reflects meaningfully upon vv. 22-30 even while deliberately absenting from consideration “the testing clause” will still become aware that the events recorded comprise a divine test of Israel.

This analysis of the significance of the testing motif in Ex 16 began with two goals. The first and primary goal was to determine if the testing motif is truly integral to this narrative. The second goal was to develop some understanding of Ex 16’s use of this motif. A brief summary of our findings relative to these two goals can now be given. Careful reflection upon the relevant sections of this chapter has demonstrated that the divine testing of Israel is indeed an integral and essential element of Ex 16 and thereby the first goal of our analysis has been realized. The second goal has also been attained, because from the above analysis a meaningful and natural interpretation of Ex 16’s use of the testing motif can be constructed. That interpretation is that in Ex 16 the LORD is testing his people for two reasons: to determine if they trust him to provide daily provisions and to determine if they are willing to obey his commands.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DIVINE PROVISION MOTIF IN EXODUS SIXTEEN

In this chapter the role of the divine provision motif in Ex 16 will be analyzed.

The divine provision motif is especially important to Ex 16 because it is kept before the reader in a higher percentage of Ex 16 than is any other motif or theme.¹ As a result, the study of this motif's role within Ex 16 also reveals the manner and effect of Ex 16's narrative flow.

Exodus 16 begins with a brief travel itinerary reporting the people's departure from the idyllic Elim and their entrance into the desert of Sin (v. 1). Their previous encounter with a desert in Ex 15:22f resulted in a murmur relative to a typical desert deprivation, the absence of water. Exodus 16's desert encounter produces a similar result; the people murmur due to the lack of food (vv. 2-3).

In vv. 4-5 the LORD addresses Israel's complaint for which he appears to be prepared in advance, because he responds immediately without any prompting from Moses (contrast with the adjacent murmuring narratives in Ex 15:22-26 & 17:1-7), and because he so quickly reveals his intention to provide $\square\eta\text{ }^{\text{h}}$ and to use it as a means of testing the

¹ Note that the motif of divine provision is variously referred to in vv. 4-8, 12-27, 29, & 31-36. By contrast, the murmuring motif drops out of the narrative after v. 12.

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people.² The structure of these verses connects this test to the daily gathering of the $\square\eta\text{ל}$ and the doubled supply of it on the sixth day.³

Verses 6-12 contain several repetitions and present the reader with a surprising chronology. The initial surprise is that immediately after the LORD's words to Moses in vv. 4-5, Moses and Aaron, in vv. 6-7, make an enigmatic statement to the people about events that are to take place in the evening and morning. The reader is puzzled because nothing that Moses and Aaron say in vv. 6-7 is based clearly upon the LORD's words in vv. 4-5.

Verse 8 provides some enlightenment because the word $\square\eta\text{ל}$ appears, and it is connected with the morning referred to in v. 7. Verse 7's reference to the evening is also clarified by v. 8, and it is clearly connected to the motif of divine provision but with reference to meat which is surprising, because all that the LORD refers to in v. 4 is $\square\eta\text{ל}$, presumably bread, and the narrative as a whole makes it unlikely that $\square\eta\text{ל}$ is applied in Ex 16 to anything other than the bread.⁴

Verses 9-10 focus upon the people's murmuring and recount an appearance of the LORD's glory, but they do not relate to the previous references to evening and morning

² The previous chapter on the testing motif in Ex 16 should be consulted for the treatment of the clause referring to divine testing in Ex 16:4 which is often classified as a deuteronomic gloss.

³ See Beuken, 6 for a brief analysis of vv. 4-5 which ends with the conclusion that "testing of Israel is the centre of the events of the ordinary days and of the sixth day."

⁴ See pp. 54-55 above for reasons that it is unlikely that $\square\eta\text{ל}$ in Ex 16 refers to anything other than the bread.

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or the divine provision of food, and no additional information relevant to these items is given until vv. 11-12, at which time divine authority for the confident assertions of vv. 6-8 finally arrives. The placement of vv. 11-12 generates several questions. Why are these words from the LORD located here? Should they not have preceded the statements of Moses and Aaron in vv. 6-8? Does not the reference to the LORD having “heard the murmurings of the sons of Israel” in v. 12 make clear that vv. 11-12 should be located immediately after vv. 1-3? Obviously one can only provide speculative answers to these questions, and it must be pointed out that all of the reasons for the present arrangement are beyond the contemporary reader. However, the next five paragraphs describe the effect that the canonical arrangement of Ex 16:1-12 might have on a reader who works reflectively with this material.

To begin, note that if vv. 11-12 were moved so as to immediately follow vv. 1-3, then v. 4 would no longer be a part of the LORD’s immediate response to the people’s murmur⁵ and, in fact, it would be difficult to find a suitable location for any of the material contained in either v. 4 or v. 5. Moreover, it would create the misleading implication that the provision of the meat in Ex 16 is to be as significant as the provision of bread.

However, if one accepts the judgment that once vv. 4-5 were included then vv. 11-12 could not follow vv. 1-3, the question remains as to why vv. 6-12 progress as they do.

⁵ As is noted below in ch. 6, the canonical placement of Ex 16:4-5 causes the LORD’s words to stand as the first response to the people’s complaint here. Such an order is unique among pentateuchal complaint narratives, and this unique feature portrays the LORD as ready for this instance of murmuring and even eager to respond to it.

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Why does the divine declaration paralleling the assertions of Moses and Aaron not precede those assertions? Rearranging the verses so that vv. 11-12 do precede vv. 6-8 provides one possible answer, because such a rearrangement causes *all* the vital information concerning the evening and morning food supplies (i.e., the information contained in v. 12) to be given before vv. 6-8 causing them to become mere repetitions of previous material.

Contrast that effect with the one created by the canonical arrangement. The canonical form of the narrative provokes surprise. The reader encounters vv. 6-7 and wonders what is going to happen at evening and morning. The reference's vagueness creates an air of mystery. The reader's curiosity is only partially satisfied by v. 8's revelation that there will be meat and bread at the times referred to in vv. 6-7, because there is still no divine authority and, therefore, no known base for these confident affirmations. The reader is drawn along to vv. 11-12 where the LORD finally confirms the words of his leaders.⁶

The point is that the effect of the canonical arrangement is to awaken curiosity, to arouse questions, and, thereby, to encourage an eager and inquisitive engagement with the text; and it should be noted that the text does not even answer all the questions which it raises. For example, one is never told how Moses and Aaron know that the plans

⁶ It might be asked why it would not have been preferable to have dropped vv. 6-8 from the narrative and to have allowed vv. 11-12 alone to tell of the evening and morning supplies of meat and bread. Two responses are in order. First, vv. 11-12 are addressed only to Moses, and the message conveyed would have to be communicated to the people. Second, the effect of the material in vv. 6-8 relative to the *de facto* target of Israel's murmur (discussed above in chapter one) adds a substantial ingredient to the story and would have been a significant loss.

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revealed in vv. 6-8 are the plans of the LORD. Does Moses, as Cassuto affirms, simply “draw the necessary inferences” and correctly deduce what the LORD will do?⁷ The very fact that Cassuto asks that question demonstrates the power of provocation intrinsic to this material in its canonical form. Questions are raised which cannot be answered, questions which cause the story to live in the reader’s imagination.⁸

It is worthwhile to note at least three additional effects created by the canonical sequence of vv. 6-12. First, by placing the declaration concerning the LORD’s responsibility for the exodus (v. 6) in its present location, the material is able to make clear—quite early in the narrative—that the people’s murmur is both an expression of dissatisfaction

⁷ Cassuto, 193.

⁸ It should be pointed out that there are three places in Ex 16 (vv. 16, 23, 32) where Moses makes confident and canonically approved statements which he ascribes to the LORD even though it is nowhere reported when or how the LORD revealed his will relative to the matters communicated.

Verse 32’s command might seem to be different from the other two examples because v. 34 might be read as a post factum reporting of a divine command which came prior to and authorized the words of Moses in vv. 32-33. However, as will be argued later, v. 34 is deliberately anachronistic and serves to connect the commandments in vv. 32-33 with cultic items which are not in existence at the time in which Ex 16 is set. Therefore, v. 34 is not to be viewed as a report of a divine communication but as an explanatory note from the narrator which connects a later tradition concerning the manna’s preservation with the command of v. 32.

Also relevant to the assertions of vv. 6-8 and the divine authorization in vv. 11-12 is the command in v. 19. It has Moses alone as its reported source although divine approval and origin are doubtlessly assumed.

That which makes the assertions of vv. 6-8 somewhat different from these other examples is that in v. 12 the LORD gives Moses the relevant information *after* the assertions from Moses and Aaron with no implication that there had been a similar exchange prior to the one in v. 12. This serves to sharpen one’s wonder as to how Moses and Aaron were able to make such assertions before they were divinely authorized. This wonder naturally precipitates the question noted above.

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with the exodus from Egypt and an expression of doubt about who is responsible for it. Second, the placement of vv. 6-7 ensures that the reader is aware, again at an early stage in the narrative, that the food supplied by the LORD is to demonstrate to the people that the LORD is the author of the exodus. It is important that such a point be made this early in the narrative so that the murmur in v. 3, which reveals doubts concerning the author of the exodus, not be too distant from the response to that murmur. Third, the repetitions contained in these verses serve clearly to affirm that the people's murmur, although intentionally directed only against Moses and Aaron, is, in effect, directed against the LORD (note especially the statements in vv. 7 & 8 beginning with "what are we").⁹

Due to our primary interest in the motif of divine provision, two additional observations concerning vv. 6-12 should be listed because they further underline the importance of the role of the divine provision motif in these verses. First, note the amount of emphasis placed upon the divinely supplied food even before it arrives (i.e., the vague allusion in vv. 6-7 and the clear references to the divine provision of meat and bread in vv. 8 & 12). Second, notice the interplay between the motif of divine provision and such significant items as murmuring (vv. 6-12), the glory of the LORD (vv. 7 & 10), and the exodus from Egypt (v. 6).

In v. 13a the reader learns the way in which the LORD provides meat for the peo-

⁹ The material in chapter one above should be consulted with regard to the intended target of Israel's murmuring in Ex 16.

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ple—quail cover the camp. This clause is noteworthy for its very succinct reporting of this event.¹⁰ It should also be noted that the quail's evening arrival clearly connects with vv. 6 & 8 and quite naturally with v. 12. This is the final reference to the provision of meat in this chapter.

In vv. 13b-15 the divinely supplied bread arrives, and it is noticeable that the bread's coming is given far more attention than is the report of the quail. There are at least three linkages created by this report of the bread's coming. First, the reference to its coming "in the morning" connects the bread's actual appearance with the allusions to it in vv. 7-8 & 12. Second, the reader is encouraged to remember vv. 4-5 because the bread comes with the dew and, therefore, "from the heavens" as in v. 4.¹¹ Third, an etiology for the designation "manna" is begun in v. 15 which is completed in v. 31.¹²

In vv. 16-18 one encounters more connections back to vv. 4-5 (especially to v. 4). The connections consist of the central focus on *gathering* the bread, the use of the verb וַיִּקְרָא for that gathering (וַיִּקְרָא occurs twice in vv. 4-5 and not again until vv. 16-18 where it is used three times), and the concern with the amount gathered ("the daily portion" in v. 4 and "an omer per person" in v. 16). It should be noted, however, that even though these

¹⁰ Such brief reportage of the provision of the quail has the effect of preparing for Num 11, a divine provision narrative which associates the desire for meat with Israelite dissatisfaction with the exodus from Egypt. More will be said in chapter six about the effect created when these two presentations of the divine provision of quail are read in light of one another.

¹¹ Childs, *Exodus*, 288.

¹² This etiology and the function of the description of the manna is discussed below as a part of the analysis of v. 31.

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verses clearly connect back to vv. 4-5, they do not do so in a way that disconnects them from the intervening material in vv. 6-12. The reader is able to discern the relationship between vv. 16-18 and vv. 4-5 and yet still perceive the additional connections that run through the entirety of the narrative up to this point, and it should be noted that it is the divine provision motif that bears these connections and, as a result, holds this material together as a cohesive literary unit.¹³ (The question raised by vv. 16-18 concerning how the Israelites managed to have the exact amounts that the LORD required has been answered above in chapter two).

In vv. 19-20 the divinely provided bread retains its high profile status, for here it is used in a test of the people's trust of the LORD.¹⁴ The test is created by a command which requires that any bread remaining at the end of the day be discarded. Hopefully a reader of Ex 16 will remember that these people are in the desert, and that they had been afraid of starving just the day before. For them to keep a command to throw out edible provisions would be a sign that they believe that their food requirements will be met. On the other hand, refusal to abide by the prohibition would be a sign that they are very skeptical concerning the satisfaction of those food needs. Note that the prohibition and the people's unsatisfactory response in vv. 19-20 is the first *clear* fulfilment of v. 4's

¹³ This unity and the importance of the divine provision motif relative to it is clarified by observing that the murmur of vv. 1-3 is immediately responded to in vv. 4-12 with promises of divinely supplied provisions. In vv. 13-14 the promised provisions arrive. In v. 15 the process of naming the divinely supplied bread is initiated, and in vv. 16-18 the daily amount of bread is prescribed and gathered.

¹⁴ See chapter two above for a more detailed treatment of the divine test of the people which is reported in vv. 19-21.

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statement that the LORD is going to use the bread as a means of testing the people's willingness to "walk" in his הַיָּרֵךְ.¹⁵ Therefore, these verses tie the motif of divine provision to the motif of divine testing and to its corollary, obedience, connections made previously in vv. 4-5.

Verse 21 has two important functions in this narrative. First, it summarizes the effect of the commands and events of vv. 16-20. Second, it sets the stage for the material which follows by creating a picture of a daily pattern of bread gathering which is routine and reliable, a pattern which is deviated from in vv. 22-30. Due to the purpose of this chapter it is important to note that in this verse the divinely supplied bread and, therefore, the divine provision motif, are again used to connect the various elements and sections of this story together.

In vv. 22-30 the second clear test of the people is narrated, and again a bread-related prohibition is the means of testing. Verse 22 begins this section and provokes this question, How do the people come to gather twice the normal amount of bread? There can be no doubt that the doubling is somehow effected by divine power,¹⁶ but when does

¹⁵ This is the first *clear* test; but there is a possibility, as noted in chapter two above, that vv. 16-18 report a prior test of the people.

¹⁶ Scholars agree that the canonical form of this text assumes that divine power was exerted to bring about the doubling of the amount of manna collected. E.g., see Durham, 225; Beuken, 7; and the especially striking viewpoint of McNeile, 99. McNeile writes, "This section on the Sabbath seems to be due to a later writer, who understood v. 18 as describing a miracle. On Friday a further miracle occurred; each man after gathering his prescribed amount, found that the portion had mysteriously doubled itself." This quotation reveals that McNeile believes that there was a pre-canonical form of v. 18 which did not intend to report a miracle whereas this canonical form does.

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the doubling occur, and when is it discovered? As noted above (in chapter 2), the regular daily gathering involved the collection of one omer per person, and the two verses that relate the doubled gathering (vv. 5 & 22) give no indication that the people behaved any differently on the sixth day. The difference is that when the bread is “brought in” (אָב) and “prepared” (פִּינָה), as described in v. 5, it is found to be twice the normal amount.¹⁷

Therefore, the miracle occurs somewhere between the gathering of the bread and its preparation, and the doubling is discovered when the bread is prepared. The fact that “leaders of the congregation” in v. 22b tell Moses about this unexpected occurrence is an altogether explicable and natural response. The people are surprised by what has happened, and the text implies that surprise is the intended effect, because the question which the surprise provokes gives Moses opportunity to expose the people to a preliminary portion of the Torah (sabbath observance), a preliminary portion which will be used

¹⁷ This view is very similar to that held by a majority of scholars. See, for example, Beuken, 6-7; and Kalisch, 298-99 who believe that the discovery of the doubling is to be viewed as taking place at the time when the people took the bread into their tents to measure it, and they seem to suggest that the creation of the bread’s doubling is to be placed just prior to that measuring, a view compatible with the relevant comments made by Rashi, *Exodus*, trans. M. Rosenbaum et al. (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1934), 84-85; S. R. Driver, *Exodus*, 150; Davies, 139-40; and A. H. McNeile, 99. The main difference between the view proposed here and the one affirmed by most of these writers is that all of them (with the exception of McNeile, 98) see a similar miracle taking place in vv. 17-18, a view with serious deficiencies as previously noted above in chapter two.

Cassuto, 197 interprets v. 22 as the report of a doubled amount of bread *on the ground* on the morning of the sixth day, an occurrence which the Israelites regarded “as an opportunity to gather more than usual.” Such a reading is not based on any clear indication within the text and runs counter to the way in which the doubling of the bread is described in v. 5.

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to test the people for the purpose previously disclosed in v. 4.

Verses 23-30 contain Moses' communication of the sabbath regulations to the people and the effects which proceed from that communication. The organization of these verses is noteworthy. Verses 23-26 primarily delineate the sabbath regulations, with the exception that v. 24 reports that the bread which was kept overnight did not perish as it had previously. Note that vv. 24-25 indicate that some of the sabbath regulations are not given until after the sabbath has arrived. Verse 27 then reverts back to the arrival of the sabbath and reports the failure of some to keep the sabbath's non-gathering prohibition. The effect of arranging the material so that the narrative returns to the beginning of the seventh day after having already done so in v. 25 has been discussed in chapter two above. Verse 30 reports that "the people rested on the seventh day" indicating that they learned to abide by the sabbath regulations. (The fact that the text merely reports that the people learned to abide by the sabbath regulations is appropriate in that their obedience is now informed by the realization, from actual experience, that there would be no bread to collect on the seventh day in any case. Such an awareness makes it much easier to rest as commanded, and therefore, no great credit is appropriate nor given. To have realized such on the basis of Moses' words alone in v. 25, however, would have been commendable).

In v. 31 the etiology of the name "manna" is completed, an etiology which was begun in v. 15 and which is not self-evident. The phrase מַנָּהּ מִי הִוא in v. 15 is usually taken to mean "what is it?" but the etymology is far from clear. Sarna represents the scholarly

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consensus when he writes,

Hebrew *man hu* is a folk explanation for the term by which the inhabitants of the wilderness knew the substance described above. The usual Hebrew would be *mah hu*, but the form *man* may be an ancient dialectic variant.¹⁸

However one views the etymological issues regarding the term, “manna,” the *function* of Ex 16’s etiology for this term and the *function* of the attendant description of the manna are not difficult to discern. The “what is it?” etiology serves to emphasize Israel’s surprise upon first encountering this substance,¹⁹ while the very appealing description of the manna emphasizes the goodness of the LORD’s provision.²⁰

Although vv. 32-34 are thematically unified they appear to preserve a collection of material that became a part of the manna story as it grew and developed. The canon uses this variety of material to create an account in which each element adds to and builds

¹⁸ Sarna, *Exodus*, 89; also see his relevant note (#26) on p. 249. Geza Vermes in “He is the Bread: Targum Neofiti Exodus 16:15,” in *Neotestamentica Et Semetica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 256-63 discusses a Targumic reading of this etiology in Ex 16:15 which is based on the fact that the text reads *הוּא הוּא* instead of *הוּא הוּא*.

¹⁹ Dt 8:3 & 16 also refer to the people’s ignorance of the manna at the time of its initial arrival and, thereby, encourage the reader to remember the surprise preserved in Ex 16’s etiology. Deuteronomy 8:3 & 16 also associate divine testing of the Israelites with the divine provision of the manna which makes even stronger the connection between Dt 8 and Ex 16.

²⁰ Readers interested in any connection that might exist between the manna and some natural phenomenon are referred to F. S. Bodenheimer, “The Manna of Sinai,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 10 (February 1947): 2-6; and, to update that work, Sarna, *Exodus*, 89; and Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1991), 182. The latter two works differ in a way that the reader should find provocative. A very negative view of such natural explanations for the provision of manna can be found in an article by Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr. That article is “The Manna Narrative of Exodus 16:1-10,” *JETS* 18 (Winter 1975): 198. All detailed commentaries on Exodus provide information on the *meaning* of the descriptions preserved in vv. 14 & 31.

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upon the previous one. Note how this effect is achieved. In v. 32 Moses says, to an unspecified audience, that the LORD has commanded that an omer of the bread be kept for future generations so that they would know of the LORD's provision for the people while they were in the desert. In v. 33 Moses continues to speak, but specifically to Aaron, the future high priest. He tells Aaron that the manna to be preserved is to be placed "before the LORD," which deepens the religious dimension of this exercise and keeps it from being viewed as nothing more than an aid to Israel's memory. Verse 34 advances the account further by pushing the outcome of the previous command to the time after the construction of the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle, thereby deepening even further the cultic significance of the preservation of the manna. This effect is created by the inclusion of the term "testimony" (עֵדוּת) which is consistently used elsewhere in the Pentateuch to refer to cultic items that do not exist at the time reflected in the Ex 16 story.²¹

²¹ Note that Ex 16:34 contains the first canonical occurrence of the term "testimony" (עֵדוּת/עֵדוּת). The following paragraph surveys the OT occurrences of עֵדוּת/עֵדוּת and makes clear that in each occurrence this term relates to an item or items which are not thought of as existing at the time of Ex 16.

עֵדוּת is used in connection with the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments in Ex 31:18; 32:15; & 34:29, and the stone tablets also appear to be the intended referents in Ex 25:16, 21; & 40:20. The ark contained in the tabernacle's Holy of Holies is called the ark of the testimony in Ex 25:22; 26:33-34; 30:6, 26; 31:7; 39:35; 40:3, 5, 21; Num 4:5; 7:89; & Josh 4:16. The phrase "before the testimony" (לְפָנֵי הָעֵדוּת), as in Ex 16:34) occurs in Ex 30:36 in a section solely concerned with tabernacle worship. This phrase (לְפָנֵי הָעֵדוּת) is also found in Num 17:19/4 & 25/10 with the minor difference that the final vowel is long instead of short. These occurrences in Num 17 are especially relevant to Ex 16's usage because they are used in relation to Aaron's rod that budded which is treated in a manner that is strikingly reminiscent of the treatment of the manna in

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Verse 34's inclusion of a blatant anachronism warrants additional discussion. An

Ex 16:32-34. Therefore, it is especially important to note that "before the testimony" in Num 17 clearly refers to a location inside "the tent of testimony" (i.e., the tabernacle) as vv. 22-23/7-8 make clear. The phrase "the tent of testimony" is found in Num 9:15; 17:22-23/7-8, 18:2; & 2 Chr 24:6 and in each of these occurrences has reference to the tabernacle. The phrase "tabernacle of the testimony" occurs in Ex 38:21; Num 1:50, 53; & 10:11. In Ex 27:21 one reads of "the veil which is before (לְפָנֵי) the testimony" and in Lev 24:3 of "the veil of the testimony" and both of these expressions refer to the curtain which divided the tabernacle's interior. In Lev 16:13 the mercy seat which is upon the ark of the covenant/ark of the testimony is described as "the mercy seat on the testimony." In Pss 19:8/7 & 78:5 "testimony" is used in synonymous parallelism with הַדָּבָר, and in Ps 119:88 the phrase "testimony of your mouth" (God's mouth) is used to indicate divine legislation. In 2 Kgs 11:12 and the parallel account in 2 Chr 23:11 "the testimony" is an undefined object given to the child King Joash/Jehoash possibly to lend some form of authentication to the overthrow of Queen Athaliah and the replacing of her with her grandson. Some scholars view the text as corrupt at this point and emend it so as to read "bracelets" instead of "testimony" (e.g., James A. Montgomery, *The Books of Kings*, ed. Henry Snyder Gehman, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960], 420-21 & 425; and Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, *The Books of Chronicles*, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910], 428). However, attention should be drawn both to John Gray, *I & II Kings*, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1964), 518 who argues that הַדָּבָר here should be retained as it "signified specifically the king's obligations in the covenant," and to T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 141 who simply dismisses emending the text to refer to bracelets as "unlikely"; Hobbs translates הַדָּבָר as "the dedicatory plaque." Raymond B. Dillard in *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 15 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987) translates הַדָּבָר as "a copy of the covenant" (p. 176) and makes some comments concerning what kind of covenant it might have been (p. 182). For our purposes it is only important to note that "the testimony" in 2 Kgs 11 and 2 Chr 23 refers to something which did not belong to the time of Ex 16. The exact referent of הַדָּבָר in Pss 60:1 & 80:1 is a matter of dispute (see A. A. Anderson, *Psalms: Volume I*, The New Century Bible [London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972], 50; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 441; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990), 100-01; and contrast what is said in BDB, 730 & 1004 about the relevant phrases in the entry concerning הַדָּבָר with what is said about the same phrases in the entry concerning הַשִּׁשִּׁי), however, these references also do not relate to anything which existed at the time in which Ex 16 is set.

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anachronism which serves to relate the manna to Israel's cult and, more specifically, to Aaron's rod that budded is unlikely to be accidental or incidental. It is much more likely that this is a deliberate and undisguised anachronism which reveals that the party or parties responsible for this pentateuchal material had no guiding principle which precluded the use of a note that connected a command from one point in time with an item or items constructed at a later point in time. Ex 16:34's view of a pre-tabernacle event from a later point in time is only slightly less conspicuous and is as effective as the statement in Gn 22:14 which ties an event in the life of Abraham with a saying which was current at the time of the narrator/editor. Exodus 16:34, therefore, should be treated as a significant and meaningful part of this chapter as a whole.

Verse 35 concludes the manna story by reporting that the manna was eaten throughout Israel's forty year sojourn in the desert. It thereby clarifies, with an economy of words, why Ex 16 gives such little space to the provision of quail in contrast to the extensive treatment given the provision of manna. Not only is such the case because the manna is connected with divine testing while the quail are not, but it is also because the manna is to be regularly provided for forty years while the quail are not.²²

Exodus 16:36 contains a note composed after the people no longer knew the omer as a standard of measure. It explains the omer by relating it to the ephah.²³ One can only

²² See Num 11:4-35 for a divine provision narrative based upon the assumptions which are developed in Ex 16, i.e., the manna is a regular provision while the quail are not. Josh 5:12 reports the cessation of manna provision and assumes that the manna was provided throughout the desert period. No such report exists regarding the quail.

²³ See Sarna, *Exodus*, 92 and his note 45 on p. 246 for a brief and helpful discussion of

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speculate as to when such a note might have been written. The important effect is that again one sees that the text is unabashed in including narrator's comments which ensure that the story connects with the minds of later readers.

The purpose of this section has been to concentrate upon the divine provision motif in Ex 16 in order to discern the manner and effect of the narrative's movement and to appreciate more fully the contribution of the divine provision motif to that movement. The foregoing analysis prompts two conclusions relative to the manner and effect of Ex 16's narrative flow. First, the manner and style of Ex 16's narrative flow serves to keep the reader fully engaged in the story that it tells. Second, the canonical form of this narrative conveys Israel's God to be one who uses even his blessings to encourage his people to move forward toward a more complete actualization of life lived according to his will.

The contribution of the divine provision motif to this story's purpose is difficult to overstate. It holds the story together; it gives thematic unity to the whole, and it is used to ensure that all the other ingredients are well-integrated into the total presentation.

these two terms.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MOTIF OF SABBATH OBSERVANCE IN EXODUS SIXTEEN

It is striking to realize that Ex 16 contains the first OT occurrence of the word “sabbath” and the first sabbath command. Equally striking is the fact that “sabbath” is employed five times in this chapter within a space of only seven verses.¹ Very few OT chapters have a similar or greater density of “sabbath” occurrences.² Why does Ex 16 contain the OT’s first sabbath command? What is the role/the contribution of the sabbath observance motif within Ex 16? How does the sabbath material affect this chapter? These and related questions are the focus of the discussion which follows.

It is easy to undervalue the sabbath test’s role in Ex 16, because the word “sabbath” does not appear until v. 23, and all the references to the sabbath are confined to vv. 23-30. However, a careful reading provokes the realization that the preparation for the sabbath test actually begins in v. 4. Notice how this preparation takes place. In v. 4 the LORD tells Moses that bread will be rained down for the people and that they will go out daily to gather that bread, and he also tells Moses of the special purpose that he has

¹ שָׁבֹת occurs four times in Ex 16:23-29. שְׁבִיטָה occurs once in v. 23.

² Only nine OT chapters have a similar or greater density of occurrences of “sabbath” (שָׁבֹת/שְׁבִיטָה). Exodus 31:13-17 has 6 occurrences; Lev 23:3-39 has 13; Lev 25:1-8 has 8; Lev 26:2-43 has 5 (notice that these are spread out over 42 verses); 2 Kgs 11:5-9 has 4; Neh 13:15-22 has 10; Jer 17:21-27 has 7; Ezk 20:12-24 has 6; Ezk 46:1-12 has 5.

The Motif of Sabbath Observance in Exodus 16

for this bread and the bread gathering routine. He says that it is “in order that I shall test them if they will walk in my law or not.”

The bread is rained down; the people do gather it on a daily basis, and the people are tested. As suggested above (in chapter two) it is possible that the canonical form of Ex 16 intends that the command, to gather “an omer per person,” be seen as a test, but it is even more natural to view as a test the command not to leave any of the bread “until morning.”

However, neither of these incidents has as clear a connection to הַוֶּחֱרַת, and therefore, as clear a connection to v. 4, as does the sabbath test, because it centres around three items—the daily routine of bread gathering, the doubling of the bread supply on the sixth day, and the sabbath command—all three of which are connected to הַוֶּחֱרַת. The gathering routine is connected to הַוֶּחֱרַת because it takes the reader’s mind back to the LORD’s words in vv. 4 & 5 where he refers to the gathering of the bread³ and to the related test which the LORD connects with הַוֶּחֱרַת. The doubling of the bread supply on the sixth day is connected to הַוֶּחֱרַת because that doubling is foretold in v. 5, immediately after the LORD’s words concerning testing and הַוֶּחֱרַת. And the reference to the sabbath causes any informed reader to think of הַוֶּחֱרַת because of the sabbath command’s inclusion in the Ten Commandments which are foundational to biblical הַוֶּחֱרַת. Therefore, the specific test which is prepared for by vv. 4-5 is the sabbath test of vv. 22-30, and the status of the

³ Notice that vv. 4 & 5 use the verb טָקַף twice, while vv. 22-30 use it three times (vv. 22, 26, & 27).

The Motif of Sabbath Observance in Exodus 16

sabbath test within Ex 16 is heightened by placing the preparation for it at such an early point in this chapter.

Once the reader recognizes that the preparation for this sabbath test begins in v. 4, an additional awareness is possible; it is that the sabbath test serves as the climax of Ex 16's plot,⁴ a realization easily demonstrated by describing the flow of this chapter.

To describe Ex 16's flow one must begin with vv. 1-3 where the murmuring of the Israelites provides the occasion for the words of the LORD in vv. 4-5, and these words from the LORD prepare the reader for a test which will have some relationship to bread gathering and תוֹרָה. However, a test related to bread gathering and תוֹרָה, i.e., the sabbath test, is not reported until vv. 22-30, but the intervening verses lead up to and prepare for the sabbath test. Verses 6-12 do so by predicting the coming of the bread and by making clear that the murmuring of the people against Moses and Aaron was, in fact, murmuring against the LORD and was an indication of the people's paucity of trust,⁵ and, as a result of casting their murmuring as murmuring against the LORD and as a sign of the weakness of Israel's trust, a serious deficiency in the people is revealed which leads toward the sabbath test because it is at the conclusion of the sabbath test that the negative impact of that deficiency has its climactic effect.

The build up to the sabbath test continues through vv. 13-19. These verses prepare for the sabbath test in three ways: first, by reporting how the gathering of the bread

⁴ See this thesis's introduction, pp. 20-21, footnote 46, for a discussion of the term, "plot," as employed here.

⁵ This paucity of trust is described above in chapter one.

The Motif of Sabbath Observance in Exodus 16

became a daily routine (a daily routine which is central to the sabbath test); second, by reporting the failure of some to obey a bread-related command—a failure very similar to the one reported as a result of the sabbath test (compare v. 20 with v. 27); third, by adding to the awareness—an awareness initiated in vv. 6-12—that the Israelites have a serious faith deficiency (hereafter referred to as a faith deficit).

Fully to appreciate the significance of the third item, i.e., Israel's faith deficit, one must observe the way in which this narrative progressively reveals the negative significance of that deficit. Such an observation requires, first, a review of vv. 6-12 targeting the response which Israel's faith deficit receives and, second, a portrayal of this deficit as revealed in vv. 13-29.

We begin by noticing that in vv. 6-12 this deficit is met by the promise that some things are about to happen in the evening and the morning which will resolve their doubts. This is the initial response in Ex 16 to Israel's faith deficit. Notice that the verbiage is not impassioned, and the tone is not intense but almost plaintive. It does not appear that Moses, Aaron, or the LORD are angry. Then one comes to vv. 19-20. Here the reaction to the people's faith deficit—in this case the failure to dispose of leftover bread—intensifies slightly, because the text reports that "Moses was angry." But in vv. 22-30 the intensity is increased significantly. When the people fail the sabbath test, it is not Moses but the LORD who is angry. And, in contrast to v. 20 which reports no observable manifestation of Moses' anger, in vv. 28-29 the LORD's anger is expressed through the most strident language from the LORD contained in this chapter. Therefore, the intensification of reactions to the people's faith deficit clearly reaches its peak in the sab-

The Motif of Sabbath Observance in Exodus 16

bath test, a peak which adds to the awareness that with the close of the sabbath test the real plot of Ex 16 with its attendant conflictual energy ends.

The conclusion then is that the plot of this chapter reaches its climax with the sabbath test. This conclusion can be supported further by noting the kind of material which follows after the report of the sabbath test. One simply needs to observe that after the intense rebuke from the LORD, which concludes the sabbath test, the chapter becomes much more sedate and a plotless report rather than a lively drama. Such makes clear that the plot energy ends with the sabbath test, and this further substantiates the vital importance of the sabbath test to Ex 16 as a whole.⁶

We can now summarize the contributions which the sabbath test makes to Ex 16. First, since it is joined to the daily bread gathering routine and to the sixth day doubling of bread, the sabbath test helps to tie vv. 22-30 back to vv. 4 & 5 and, thereby, enhances the unity of the entire chapter. Second, since the plot of Ex 16 reaches its climax in the sabbath test, this test serves to focus the energy of this chapter and adds to this chapter's ability to be both compelling and memorable.

⁶ Berlin, 102-10, lists and discusses six common elements of "well-formed narratives." One of these is "Result or Resolution." Exodus 16:30's statement that "the people rested on the seventh day" clearly fits under that heading. For as Berlin says, "The result is the end of the action, but not necessarily the end of the discourse" (p. 107). Exodus 16:30 reports the final action of the plot which began in the opening verses of this chapter even though Ex 16's discourse continues beyond v. 30.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CONTEXT FOR EXODUS SIXTEEN: PART ONE

As was stated in the introduction, this chapter is the study of narratives in the books of Genesis and Exodus which connect naturally to Ex 16 and together with similar narratives in the book of Numbers form an appropriate canonical context for the study of the manna and quail narrative. Many of the narratives which are seen to connect naturally with Ex 16 are those which employ one or more of the four motifs analyzed in the previous four chapters. However, this chapter also will analyze *all complaint narratives* (i.e., complaint narratives which do not use לָלֵךְ as well as those that do) and all other pentateuchal narratives in Exodus and Num 11:1-21:9¹ which convey something about the nature of Israelite faith. Such is the case, because these additional narratives add to the awareness that the pentateuchal flow, of which Ex 16 is a part, is both cohesive and coherent. Since the murmuring in Ex 16 is directed against Moses and Aaron, this study also will include those narratives which contribute to an understanding of how Moses²

¹ More will be said later within this chapter about the decision to go no further than Num 21:9.

² The study of Moses as portrayed in the OT has produced several works during the past two decades which can serve as comparison and contrast points for the portrayal of Moses which this thesis is able only to outline. Six such works are: Van Seters, *Life of Moses*; Trent C. Butler, "An Anti-Moses Tradition," *JSOT* 12 (1979): 9-15; George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOT Supplement Series, 57 (Sheffield: JSOT

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and Aaron were affected by their leadership roles. The amount of analysis accorded individual narratives will vary according to the perceived relevance of each narrative, i.e., passages considered to possess a high degree of relevance (due to the fact that they contain more similarities to Ex 16 than other passages) will be analyzed much more extensively. A detailed analysis of a particular narrative will normally involve the following: a summary of that narrative's contents, a discussion of the target of any Israelite complaint which that narrative reports, a delineation of that narrative's noteworthy similarities and dissimilarities relative to Ex 16, and the effect or effects of this narrative on the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. Chapter six will utilize this data to summarize this thesis's results.

The reader should be prepared for a phrase used often in the next two chapters. That phrase is, "the Pentateuch's/pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith," and it expresses what this canonical context for Ex 16 creates, i.e., it creates a picture/a portrait of Israel's erratic faith during their time in the desert.³

The first narrative to analyze is found in **Gn 22:1-18**. The words, "and it came to

Press, 1988); Daniel Jeremy Silver, "By a Prophet the Lord brought up Israel out of Egypt," in *Essays on the Occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of the Dropsie University*, (Philadelphia: Dropsie University Press, 1979), 423-39; and James Nohrnberg, "Moses," in *Images of Man and God: Old Testament Stories in Literary Focus*, ed. Burke O. Long (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), 35-57.

³ Be reminded, as was noted in the Introduction, that this portrait goes only as far as Num 21:9. That means that the phrase, "the Pentateuch's/pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith," is somewhat of a misnomer. However, it was the shortest phrase that this author could devise to express what is created by the bringing together of those pentateuchal narratives which were felt to connect most naturally with Ex 16.

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pass after these things that God *tested* (נִדְּוּ)⁴ Abraham,” introduce the narrative of Abraham’s offering of Isaac.⁵ The significance of this particular test is easy to clarify. First, it involves two of Israel’s patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac. Second, the narrative is connected to foundational OT concepts (e.g., God’s promise to Abraham, vv. 15-18; the fear of the LORD, v. 12, and the related theme of obedience, v. 18; “the mountain of the LORD,” v. 14; and sacrifice, vv. 1-14). Third, it proves the quality of Abraham’s faith in a way which goes beyond any of his other difficult and testing experiences. Fourth, when read in the context of the whole of Abraham’s life it reveals an increase of faith from the time reported in Gn 17:17 when Abraham laughed at the idea of having a child in his old age to the willingness here to sacrifice that beloved son who finally had come after such a trying wait. Gn 22:1-18 is especially germane to this study because it contains the first occurrence of נִדְּוּ in the Hebrew Bible and because it reports a type of divine provision (i.e., the provision of the ram to replace Isaac in v. 13).

The **similarities** between this narrative and Ex 16 are fairly obvious and relate

⁴ See John I. Lawlor, “The Test of Abraham: Genesis 22:1-19,” *GTJ* 1 (Spring 1980): 28 for a discussion of several biblical uses of נִדְּוּ with the goal of discerning its meaning here in Gn 22.

⁵ To access the rich scholarly resources which deal with this narrative the reader is advised to make use of the relevant bibliographies in Westermann, 351; and Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1994): 96-97. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 328 concisely conveys some of the power of this narrative when he writes, “every sentence vibrates with restrained emotion, which shows how fully the author realises the tragic horror of the situation.”

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primarily to their uses of the testing motif. First, the party being tested is not told that this experience is a test.⁶ Second, in both cases the reader is told that the experience is a test even before the narration of the test begins. Third, the goal of both tests is to determine obedience (note *בְּקִלְיָי וְשָׁמַעְתָּ* in Gn 22:18 and the LORD's purpose in Ex 16:4 for the test as revealed in v. 4) to a clearly enunciated command (or, in Israel's case, commands). Fourth, both test narratives include an etiological element (Gn 22:14 & Ex 16:14-16, 31). Fifth, as noted above, both narratives report a type of divine provision.

The **dissimilarities** between the tests are also noteworthy. First, at the heart of Abraham's test is a practice (child sacrifice) that is prohibited elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Dt 12:31; 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; Jer 7:30-31), while at the heart of Ex 16's test is both the gathering of the manna, which the canon presents as a regular routine of the desert period (Ex 16:21 & 30; Num 11:6; and Josh 5:12), and the honouring of the seventh day as a sabbath to the LORD, which is included in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:8-11 and Dt 5:12-15) and commanded in a variety of OT texts (e.g., Ex 31:12-17; Lev 19:1-3, 20; 23:3; Neh 9:13-15; 13:15-22; Isa 56:1-8; Jer 17:19-27; Ezk 20:20). Second, Abraham's test is a much more severe test of him than Ex 16's test is of Israel. Third, Abraham passed his test while Israel did not. Fourth, Gn 22's test comes toward the end of Abraham's life (and at the end of the Abraham cycle of stories),⁷ while Ex 16's test comes at the beginning of Israel's life as a nation and in an early entry to the desert period

⁶ Moses is told of the forthcoming test in Ex 16, but he is not the one being tested.

⁷ Jonathon Magonet, "Abraham and God," *Judaism* 33 (Spring 1984): 161-62.

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cycle of stories. Fifth, Abraham realizes that the ram has been given by the LORD and names the place יְהוָה יְרָאֵה to signify that fact and to praise the LORD for that provision; in Ex 16, even with advance notice that the LORD would supply meat and bread, the people do not respond to those provisions with the kind of faith and gratitude manifested by Abraham. Sixth, Abraham possibly⁸ is indicating his faith in the LORD relative to divine provision even before it is provided when he responds to Isaac's inquiry by saying, אֱלֹהִים יְרָאֵה-לּוֹ הַשָּׂה לְעֵלְיָה בְּנִי, in Gn 22:8. Nothing similar is found in Ex 16 nor in any of the other narratives which report the divine provision of food or water for the Israelites in the desert. Seventh, Gn 22's test does not involve the divine provision of *food* as does Ex 16's test. Eighth, Ex 16's test is referred to elsewhere in the OT while Abraham's test is not.

A notable effect of this narrative upon the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith is produced by the fact that the commandment given to Abraham was so much more testing than the commandments which Israel disobeyed in Ex 16 and elsewhere in the Pentateuch. If one feels that to compare Israel's test in Ex 16 to Abraham's test in Gn 22:1ff is unfair due to the fact that this test of Abraham came so much later in his relationship with God, two things should be remembered. First, Israel had witnessed the plagues in Egypt, had crossed the sea on dry ground, had seen the Egyptian army drowned, had drunk the sweetened water at Marah, had been miraculously provided with quail and bread, and had already experienced the negative consequences of disobeying a

⁸ I would even say "likely."

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command from the LORD in Ex 16:19-20 before the fateful act of disobedience in Ex 16:27. Second, the reader should remember that this test of Abraham in Genesis is not really his first. Even though the word $\pi\varphi$ does not occur anywhere else in the Abraham material, the reader should realize that the divine command in Gn 12:1 to leave his country and his family and move to an unknown place was also a test—another which Abraham passed—and that test is placed at the beginning of Abraham’s relationship with God. When Abraham’s response to these two testing commands is compared to Israel’s tests in Ex 16 and elsewhere, the distinction is sharp. To grasp fully this effect, the LORD’s words concerning Abraham in Gn 26:5 and the LORD’s words which reveal his desire for Abraham’s descendants in Gn 18:19 should be noted. In Gn 26:5 the LORD says, “Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (NRSV). Genesis 18:19 reveals that the LORD wanted to be able to say the same of Abraham’s descendants; there the LORD says that he had “chosen [Abraham], 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” (NRSV). The LORD wanted Israel to be a people like Abraham, a people who would obey him as Abraham did. The failure recorded in Ex 16 is, at the very least, an example of the considerable disparity between themselves and their great ancestor; and, as will be seen, the whole of the Pentateuch’s portrait of Israel’s fluctuating faith makes clear that the disparity between Israel and Abraham reaches proportions significantly greater than those revealed in Ex 16.

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Another **effect** of Gn 22:1ff on this portrait of fluctuating faith grows out of the study of Gn 22:15-18 by R. W. L. Moberly. After demonstrating that “the remarkable obedience of Abraham in xxii 1-14 has been met with a divine promise of remarkable emphasis,” Moberly writes,

Abraham by his obedience has not qualified to be the recipient of blessing, because the promise of blessing had been given to him already. Rather, the existing promise is reaffirmed but its terms of reference are altered. A promise which previously was grounded solely in the will and purpose of Yahweh is transformed so that it is now grounded *both* in the will of Yahweh *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. . . .

Theologically this constitutes a profound understanding of the value of human obedience—it can be taken up by God and become a motivating factor in his purposes toward man.⁹

Such an awareness encourages the reader to imagine the positive effect if Israel had responded obediently throughout their time in the desert to the LORD’s testing plans as revealed in Ex 15:25-26. The effect on this pentateuchal portrait of Israel’s fluctuating faith is that it looks even darker because contrasted with what might have been.

Exodus 2:11-15 records the first example of Moses’ involvement with his people. The passage begins with Moses observing an Egyptian beating one of “his brothers” which prompts Moses to kill the Egyptian and hide his body. Later, when Moses seeks to intervene in a struggle between two Hebrews, the offender in the struggle retorts with a cynical query concerning Moses’ authority to intervene, and he frightens Moses into fleeing Egypt by making clear that he knows about the slain Egyptian. This passage’s double

⁹ Moberly, “Commentary on the Akedah,” 318, 320-21.

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usage of וְיִרְאֵה (v. 11) indicates that Moses' involvement with the Hebrew people has been initiated by an awareness that they are his kin,¹⁰ but—in spite of apparently worthy motives—Moses is rebuffed by a kinsman and has to run for his life. This narrative pre-figures the type of trial which will, in time, characterize and discomfort Moses' relationship with his people.¹¹

Exodus 4:29-31 is a narrative following closely after Moses' commissioning by the LORD. It records the first meeting of Israel's elders with Moses and Aaron. Aaron tells them what the LORD had said to Moses and shows them the signs which the LORD had prescribed. Verse 31 says, "And the people believed, and they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, and they bowed down and prostrated themselves." Here is an early sign of faith among the Israelites,¹² but that faith is soon tested and weakened (as will be seen) when Moses and Aaron's first

¹⁰ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 41 writes regarding this passage, "The narrator wastes no time in making it clear that Moses identifies himself with Israel. Repeated reference is made to 'his' 'people, kinfolk' . . . as he comes to the defense of a fellow Hebrew." Durham, 19; and Childs, *Exodus*, 30 make the same point.

¹¹ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 41-46 makes much of the fact that this narrative anticipates and/or foreshadows much that will come later, and on p. 44 he writes; "Moses authority to intervene in this dispute is challenged. The accuser becomes the accused. Though an Israelite, he is not recognized as a judge over 'us' (=Israel?). This relates ahead to the refusal of the Israelites to listen to Moses (6:9-11; cf. 4:1) and to disputes concerning Moses' authority (5:21; 14: 11-12; cf. Num. 16:12-14). . . . As the Hebrew accused Moses of trying to kill him, so also would the Israelites in the wilderness (16:2-3; 17:3-4)."

¹² Noth, *Exodus*, 50 sees the prostration of the people here in a similar way. He writes, "they bow themselves in worship before their God who has taken them to himself, and thereby show themselves ready for whatever God has prepared to happen to them."

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meeting with Pharaoh only results in an increased workload.

Exodus 5:15-21 records the displeasure of the beleaguered Israelite foremen upon seeing Moses and Aaron after those foremen have had a fruitless meeting with Pharaoh concerning the increased workload. This narrative is discussed in chapter one, but the reader should remember to include it as an important element in the biblical portrait of Israel's relationship with Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 5:22-6:9 begins with Moses' prayer on behalf of the people.¹³ The LORD responds to the prayer with words of assurance. He also gives Moses a message for the people. Moses delivers that message, but the people's spirits are too low; they do not heed (אָזְנָה) the message. There is a noteworthy similarity between this narrative and Ex 16. In Ex 6:7 the LORD says, "And you will know that I am the LORD your God who brought you out from under the forced labour of Egypt" (compare with Ex 16:6 & 12). In Ex 6:7 this wording describes a divine goal for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The expression of such a goal in Ex 6 before the plagues and before the departure

¹³ An insightful discussion of Moses' prayer in Ex 5:22-23 is provided by Cornelius Houtman in *Exodus: Volume 1*, trans. Johan Rebel and Sierd Woudstra, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok Publishing House, 1993), 497-99. It seems to this author that Houtman has diagnosed correctly Moses' state here when he writes (p. 499), "To my mind attributing Moses' questions to unbelief is going too far. It may be said that Moses was disillusioned because the reality of the situation was appreciably more cruel than he had ever dared think. His actions have led to a redoubling of the forced labour and to a rift between him and the people, and YHWH had in no way given any indication of being involved in the course of events. The harsh reality of the situation had undermined the force of YHWH's earlier assurances and Moses had landed up in a crisis situation. Like Jeremiah (e.g., 11:18ff; 12:1ff; 15:10, 18; 18:19ff; 20:7, 14ff) he has grave misgivings with regard to his calling and with regard to his God."

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from Egypt makes clear that an important divine purpose of Israel's deliverance is so they might know that YHWH is their God and that he is their deliverer. The importance ascribed to this purpose is further indicated by biblical declarations that the LORD is using Israel's deliverance as a means of showing *the Egyptians* that he is the LORD (see Ex 7:5, 17; 14:4, 18 as well as similar statements in Ex 8:6/10 & 9:14). The LORD is presented as using the exodus to reveal himself to all who witness it, and yet, the Israelites themselves frequently failed to ascribe this act of deliverance to the LORD.¹⁴

Exodus 10:1-2 also records a divine statement of the goal previously enunciated in Ex 6:7 and, thereby, further emphasizes that goal's importance. Here Moses is told by the LORD that the hardening of Pharaoh is so the LORD might perform signs which can be recounted to future generations of Israelites with the result that "you (pl) will know that I am the LORD."

Parts of **Ex 14:10-15** have already been selectively analyzed above in chapter one, but these verses require additional treatment here. Be reminded that this narrative records Israel sighting the pursuing Egyptian army and the results of that sighting which begin with the people becoming frightened and crying out to the LORD. Then they sarcastically ask Moses if he has brought them out into the desert to die because of a shortage of graves in Egypt. This question is followed by another which makes clear their resentment of Moses for having brought them out of Egypt (v. 11). They even claim that while still in Egypt they had stated their preference for remaining and serving the Egyptians, and

¹⁴ Be reminded of the discussion of Ex 16:6 in chapter one of this thesis.

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they go on to declare that it would certainly have been better to do that than to die in the desert (v. 12). The similarity between their words here and their murmur in Ex 16:3 is easy to see; in both passages the Israelites are expressing their disenchantment with the exodus, and they are laying the blame for it on Moses and not on the LORD.

An intriguing feature of this narrative is the presentation of Moses when faced with Egypt's military might. Exodus 14 primarily portrays Moses as confident during this crisis (vv. 13-14), but in v. 15 the LORD asks Moses, "Why (למה) are you (sg) crying out (קול) to me?" The previous verses have indicated that only the people cried out (קול) to the LORD (v. 10) and only they demonstrated fear (vv. 10-12), but the LORD's question in v. 15 suggests that Moses had also cried out.¹⁵ Plaut says, "In his first contact with incipient rebellion Moses must have prayed for help,"¹⁶ and it is certainly true that to cry out to the LORD is a type of praying, but the reader must be cautioned against assuming that the LORD's question has reference to a calm and fearless sort of prayer. Why would the LORD ask an accusing question if Moses' prayer had been calm and fearless? One may suspect that a variant tradition has been incorporated here, which, in its complete form, portrayed Moses as crying out in connection with the onslaught of Egyptian chariots, but even the one who harbours such suspicions should

¹⁵ See Childs, Exodus, 218-21 for a summary of this material's source-critical problems which serves to demonstrate how tentative and "slippery" this type of data is.

¹⁶ W. Gunther Plaut, "Exodus," in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. Gunther Plaut (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 480. Note that Childs, *Exodus*, 226 also leans toward "traditional midrash" in seeing this reference in its canonical setting as an allusion to an unreported prayer.

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recognize that in their canonical context these words of the LORD indicate that Moses was not totally unruffled as he saw the power of Egypt coming and as he felt the people's rising fear. Moses, at some point, although outwardly calm before the people, expressed his anxieties to the LORD; and the effect achieved by this somewhat "mixed picture" of Moses is fully concordant with the overall presentation of this very human man of God,¹⁷ and the canon's use of its material is found to produce an effect that is both coherent and meaningful.

The next relevant passage for the understanding of the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith is Ex 14:31. This verse immediately follows the crossing of the sea and the destruction of Egypt's pursuing forces. It says, "When Israel saw the great power (הַגָּדֹל הַיָּדֹהֵדֹהֵד) which the LORD produced (הַשֵּׁעַר) against Egypt, then the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant, Moses."¹⁸ This expression of faith is especially significant because it is one of only two times (see Num 21:5-7) during the desert period that Israel's attitude toward Moses is so parallel to their attitude toward the LORD, and this one is wholly positive (that cannot be said of

¹⁷ In several of the complaint narratives Moses demonstrates clear signs of fear/insecurity (e.g., Ex 15:24-25; 17:4; Num 11:11-15, 21-22), and insecurity on the part of Moses is not only found relative to Israelite complaining. It is an important part of the commissioning narrative in Ex 3:1-4:17, Moses' prayer in Ex 5:22-23, and Moses' responses to the LORD in Ex 6:10-12 & 28-30. It is intriguing to discover that the only type of occasion on which Moses is consistently bold is when he is pleading or acting to save the people of Israel (see Ex 32:9-14; 34:6-9; Num 11:1-3; 14:11-20; 16:41-50; & 21:4-9).

¹⁸ The importance of the people believing in Moses is enhanced by Ex 19:9 in which the LORD says that he wants the people to hear him speak to Moses from the cloud so that the people will "believe in you forever" (וְגַם-כִּי-יִשְׁמְעוּ-לְעוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם).

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the example in Num 21). The apparent strength of their faith is further emphasized by the verses which immediately follow. **Exodus 15:1-21** contains the songs praising the LORD which flow out of the faith described in 14:31. These songs are sung by “Moses and the sons of Israel” and “Miriam . . . and all the women.” The fear of and belief in the LORD, the belief in Moses, and the songs of praise are a combination which forms the high point for Israel’s fluctuating faith during the desert period.

However, Ex 15 does not conclude until it reports the first example of Israelite murmuring (רָבַד). In **Ex 15:22-26** the people murmur due to the absence of drinkable water. This narrative is of special significance for our purpose because of its numerous similarities with Ex 16. It is, therefore, appropriate to analyze this material in detail and to compare and contrast it with Ex 16.

Analysis of Ex 15:22-26 is made difficult by the nature of this material. The reader can understand why Wellhausen thought of v. 25 as an “isolated” and “dislocated poetical fragment,”¹⁹ and why Noth viewed vv. 22-27 as an assortment of material from various sources some of which is only loosely connected to the surrounding material.²⁰ B. Robinson asks if this material is “as it stands (whatever sources it may draw upon), homogenous, or is it a hotch-potch of motifs?” He convincingly answers his own question by showing the thematic unity of the passage (his statement of its theme is “security through obedience”), a unity which his “close linguistic examination” of Ex 15:22-27 con-

¹⁹ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black & Alan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1985), 343 & 439.

²⁰ Noth, *Exodus*, 127-29.

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firms. He concludes that "Ex 15:22-27 is thus found to be a carefully crafted artefact, with its several parts closely knit together through the use of elaborate word-plays, and the whole anchored to its context by the use of echoes and anticipation."²¹ Robinson's conclusion is assumed in the analysis of Ex 15:22-26 which follows.

In an effort to understand Ex 15:22-26 it is appropriate first to inquire concerning the **object of the murmuring** reported in v. 24. Hopefully the argument advanced in chapter one of this thesis has negated any tendency simply to assume that a murmur "against Moses" (Ex 15:24) is also an expression of conscious un-faith relative to the LORD. In fact, chapter one's analysis of the murmuring in Ex 16 should cause one to conclude that the murmuring in both Ex 15 and Ex 16 is intended only for Moses (and Aaron) and not the LORD; since the people in Ex 16 are blaming negative circumstances on their leaders alone without an intended reference to the LORD (as also exemplified in Ex 5:20-21 & 14:10-12), it is unlikely that they are intending to murmur against the LORD in Ex 15—a text in very close proximity to Ex 16 and a text which lists Moses alone as the complaint's object. Therefore, the reader of Ex 15:22-26 should view Moses alone as the object of Israel's murmuring.²²

Now we turn to v. 25 which is important due to its implementation of the testing

²¹ Bernard P. Robinson, "Symbolism in Exod. 15:22-27 (Marah and Elim)," *RB* 94 (1987): 377-79.

²² Cassuto, 184 is the clearest of the commentators in viewing the complaint here as against Moses. He paraphrases the sentiment of the Israelites as follows, "What can we drink? or, We cannot drink . . . and you, Moses, are to be blamed for this." Childs, *Exodus*, 268 simply says, "The people's discontent . . . is turned against Moses."



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motif which contains the second occurrence of הִקְדִּי in the Hebrew Bible. In Ex 15:25 we read, “There he made for them a statute (קָרָן) and an ordinance ($\text{טֻפְשֵׁי$), and there he tested (הִקְדִּי) them.” To compare and contrast Ex 15:25’s occurrence with the one in Ex 16:4 we must have a clearer idea of Ex 15:25’s referent (i.e., what is the “statute and ordinance” of v. 25?). The only material which can be described as “a statute and an ordinance” is found in v. 26. It says,

If you will indeed heed ($\text{שָׁמַעְתָּ$) the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his eyes, and listen/give ear to his commandments and keep (רָחַשׁ) all his statutes (וְיָקִי), all the diseases which I put upon Egypt I will not put upon you, because I the LORD am your healer.

When we remember that up to this point in Exodus the LORD has given very little legislation (the only item which clearly fits into such a category is the Passover legislation in Ex 12:1-28) it becomes clear that the “statutes” and “commandments” referred to are the ones which the LORD will give later. This interpretation is confirmed by the close proximity of Ex 16 where we again meet הִקְדִּי (v. 4) and הִקְדִּי (v. 28) and encounter another important legislation term, הִקְדִּי (vv. 4 & 28), along with three clear commands from the LORD (vv. 16; 20, 22-29). Therefore, Ex 15:22-27 purposefully prepares the reader for a period of divine testing and is not itself the report of a divine test of Israel,²³ which means that the word, הִקְדִּי , in v. 25 means “to set up a test” rather than the simpler

²³ Childs, *Exodus*, 268 notes, “Both Wellhausen and Bähr thought it to be of great importance that here was a fossil of an older law-giving tradition to that of Sinai (cf. Dt 33:8f) This hypothesis cannot be ruled out of court, but there is insufficient evidence ever to settle the matter.” Since it is the effect of the canonical form with which this thesis is concerned, it is appropriate only to note the existence of this hypothesis.

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and more common, “to test.” Ex 16’s test, coming immediately afterwards, is to be seen, in its canonical setting, as the first specific test of the series prepared for in Ex 15:25-26.²⁴

The focus of our analysis now turns to a delineation of the **similarities** and **dissimilarities** between Ex 15:22-26 and Ex 16. There are at least five significant **similarities**. First, both narratives employ the verbs לָוּ (Ex 15:24 contains the first OT occurrence of לָוּ) and הָפַז and their attendant motifs. Second, in both of these narratives the people’s murmuring is the result of the absence of some physical necessity. Third, both of these narratives employ the motifs of divine provision and divine testing (15:25 & 16:4). Fourth, both narratives include an etiology which directly relates to the divine provision motif (Ex 15:23 & Ex 16:15, 31). Fifth, both emphasize obedience to divine legislation (15:25-26 & 16:4, 16-30). Sixth, in both narratives the stated object of the murmuring is not the LORD but a leader (Moses in Ex 15:22ff) or leaders (Moses and Aaron in Ex 16).

There are at least ten noteworthy **dissimilarities** between these two narratives. First, in Ex 15 Moses alone is the stated object of the murmuring (v. 24), while in Ex 16 Moses *and* Aaron are the stated objects. Second, in Ex 15:22-26 Moses cries out to the

²⁴ The difficulty of interpreting in any other way this narrative’s reference to a test is exemplified by Childs, *Exodus*, 269-70. Childs tries to interpret this reference to testing as having something to do with the preceding story, but such an effort leads him to suggest, without conviction, “Perhaps it is that Israel had been tested and had responded in unbelief. The motif of murmuring is evidence that she had failed the test” (270). Since in the very next narrative (Ex 16) murmuring is not seen as a failing of a test, it is difficult to believe that the reader is supposed to know that such is the case in Ex 15:22ff.

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LORD immediately after the people's complaint, and it is this cry which initiates the LORD's resolution of the problem, while in Ex 16 the LORD is the first to respond to the people's complaint, and in his response he reveals his plan to provide bread. Third, in Ex 15:22-26 the people's complaint is milder than the one in Ex 16 and the complaint in Ex 15 does not include an expression of disenchantment with the exodus from Egypt nor a fear of dying as it does in Ex 16:3. Fourth, Ex 15's murmuring initially results in Moses crying out to the LORD for assistance (v. 25), while in Ex 16 the immediate response is from the LORD (v. 4), and there is no crying out to the LORD from Moses. Fifth, in Ex 15:25 Moses is portrayed as actively involved in providing the physical necessity called for by the people's murmuring, whereas in Ex 16 the provision is supplied solely by the LORD. Sixth, in Ex 15 the testing motif *follows* the provision of a physical requirement (drinkable water), while in Ex 16 that motif is introduced *before* the provision of food, and it uses the bread provided by the LORD as the means of testing Israel. Seventh, Ex 16 narrates a specific test of the people by the LORD; Ex 15:22-26 does not; instead, Ex 15:22-26 reveals a divine goal for Israel's desert period; it is to be a time when the LORD will test Israel concerning obedience to his commandments. Eighth, Ex 15:22-26 is not so much enunciating a specific command as it is prescribing that their response to forthcoming divine commands should be a response of obedience (note שמע and שמר in Ex 15:26); Ex 16, on the other hand, enunciates three specific commands (vv. 15b-16, 19, 25-26). This difference also amounts to a difference in goals between these two passages. Ex 16 is determining if the people will obey the LORD's commands;

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Ex 15 is telling the people, in advance, the rewards of obeying the LORD's commands.

Ninth, even though both of these narratives employ שמע, in Ex 15:26 it is used as a part of the LORD's instruction that the people "heed/obey" his voice, while in Ex 16:7-9 & 12 it is used to indicate that the LORD has heard the murmurings of the people and in Ex 16:20 it is used to report that the people did not heed the voice of Moses. Tenth, even though both narratives employ שמר, in Ex 15:26 it is used as a part of the LORD's instruction that the people "keep" his statutes, while in Ex 16:28 it is used in the LORD's indicting question concerning the people's refusal to "keep" his commands.

There are three notable **effects** of this narrative on the Pentateuch's wider portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. One effect of this narrative with its instance of murmuring so soon after the people have feared and believed in the LORD, have believed in Moses, and have sung praises to the LORD is to convey that the faith expressed in Ex 14:31-15:21 has not been paired with a concomitant ability to keep on believing when negative circumstances arise.

A second **effect** of this narrative is the way in which it and Ex 16 influence each other. Central to this relationship is the material located in Ex 15:25-26. Here the LORD presents his plan for testing the people during the desert period. This plan is articulated soon after Israel's murmuring request for drinkable water in v. 24. The first implementation of this plan comes in Ex 16, a narrative which also begins with an Israelite murmur relative to the absence of some physical requirement (this time it is food). By recounting food and water complaints and connecting them with testing in adjacent narratives the

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reader is encouraged to realize that the plan to test the people is revealed after Ex 15's murmur because the plan is to use the deprivations which are an inevitable part of life in the desert as a means of testing the people's willingness to obey the LORD's commands.²⁵ It also enables the reader to combine the test description in Ex 16:4 with the description in Ex 15:26 (including its promises). After the forthcoming analysis of Ex 17:1-7 it will be possible to demonstrate further that the relationship between Ex 15:22-26 & Ex 16 is an important step in the progressive description of Israel's fluctuating faith.

The third **effect** of this narrative on the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith also results from its relationship with Ex 16. As noted above with regard to dissimilarities between Ex 15:22ff and Ex 16, in Ex 15:26 the LORD expresses his desire for the people to heed (שמע) his voice by keeping (שמר) his statutes. However, in Ex 16:7-9 & 12, the verb שמע occurs four times but is used to reveal that the LORD has heard/heeded the voice of the people. In Ex 16:20 שמע occurs again, but this time it is used when the people do *not* heed/obey the voice of Moses. Then, in Ex 16:27-29, שמר is used to indicate that the people have *not* kept the LORD's "commandments and laws." The effect, which will become more obvious through the course of this study, is that the LORD is hearing and heeding the voice of the people but they are not heeding his voice

²⁵ Carroll, 188 notes that "the desert situation provided a scenario for grace and an ideal setting for teaching lessons in the exercise of faith." Certainly the flow from Ex 15:22-27 to Ex 16 indicates just such an awareness on the part of the LORD. However, in spite of being an "ideal setting," the desert results, as will be seen, are far from ideal.

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and they are not keeping his commands.

The next relevant narrative is Ex 17:1-7. In these verses the people travel to Rephidim and find no water. This absence prompts the people to “contend (רִיב)²⁶ with Moses” (v. 2). Moses responds in v. 2b by asking them, “Why do you contend (רִיב) with me? Why do you test (נִסֶּה) the LORD?” These questions do not diminish the people’s quarrelsomeness. In v. 3 they “murmur (לָלוּ) against Moses, and ask, ‘Why now (הַיּוֹם) have you brought us up²⁷ from Egypt to kill us (אָרַח), our children (בְּנֵינוּ), and our livestock (צִמְקֵינוּ) with thirst?’” Moses then “cries out (צָעַק) to the LORD” afraid that the people are about to stone him (v. 4). The LORD responds (vv. 5-6) by giving Moses instructions for the provision of water which involve Moses’ rod, the elders, and the “rock at Horeb.”²⁸ Moses is said to follow these instructions (v. 6), and the text immediately proceeds to give etiologies for the two place names assigned to the location of this

²⁶ This is the first occurrence of the verb רִיב in the OT. B. Gemser provides a detailed study of this term and its significance for OT theology in “The RIB—or Controversy—Pattern in Hebrew Mentality,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, Supplements to *VT*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955): 120-37.

²⁷ Notice the possibly sinister overtones of הֵאָרַח, the hiphil of אָרַח, due to its frequent meaning of bringing up/offering up an animal as a sacrifice (e.g., Gn 22:13).

²⁸ See Childs, *Exodus*, 308 for a brief summary of the proposals relative to this anomaly. A noteworthy proposal which is not found in Childs’ summary is one that was expressed orally to me by R. W. L. Moberly. He suggested that Ex 17:6’s statement, “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb,” might be a typological gloss with the purpose of encouraging the reader to make a connection between the LORD’s presence with Moses when by the rock here in Ex 17 and the LORD’s presence with Moses in Ex 33-34 at the rock of Horeb, the cleft of which keeps Moses from seeing the “face” of God. Read in this way the Horeb reference would convey the meaning of “I will stand before you there as at the rock of Horeb.” Since no other reading is entirely satisfactory, this one merits consideration.

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event (v. 7); the name Massah refers to the Israelites' test (יָדָוּ) of the LORD at this place and Meribah to their contending (רִיב).

The **object** of Israel's contending (רִיב) and murmuring (לִי) in Ex 17 is said in three separate clauses to be Moses (vv. 2-3, twice by the narrator and once by Moses). Verses 2 and 7 are especially noteworthy because in these verses, which refer to the people's complaint, one also finds Moses referring to the people's testing (יָדָוּ) of the LORD. The reader comes first to Moses' pair of questions in v. 2. These questions seem to link the people's contending (the object of which is said to be Moses) with their testing of the LORD leaving the reader wondering how Israel's contending and testing relate to one another. Is Moses, through these questions, saying that to murmur against him is tantamount to testing the LORD? Such a perspective is similar to the message of Ex 16 that to murmur against the exodus (even though blaming it upon Moses and Aaron) is in effect to murmur against the LORD. The reader's questions are answered in v. 7 through the supplying of further information. Moses makes clear that the test of the LORD is constituted by the people's previously unreported question, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?" The most natural reading of this question is to understand it as one which the people verbalized at about the same time that they contended with Moses.²⁹

²⁹ This is the most natural reading due to the use of לְאָדָם to introduce the people's question. It should also be noted that the reporting of an event or statement after the narrated time of that event or statement is a discernible phenomenon in biblical narratives. See Bar-Efrat, 175-84 for a discussion of these "flashbacks." Also note Gn 42:21 for an artful use of this technique in the Joseph story.

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However, one might also view Moses' report of this question to be revealing either what the people were consciously asking within themselves (although not articulating) or what they were effectively but unconsciously asking. Whichever interpretation one adopts, a clear distinction is retained between the people's complaint and their test of the LORD. Their complaint is due to the absence of water and the resultant fear of death. The test, on the other hand, is to determine (presumably by seeing if the needed water is supplied) if the LORD is really with them. Therefore, the only object against whom Israel is consciously complaining here is Moses.

The **similarities** between Ex 17:1-7 and Ex 16 encourage the reader to think back to Ex 15:22-27 and to Gn 22. As a result, the comparison which follows frequently refers back to these two other narratives as well as to Ex 16. The first similarity is that the narratives in Ex 15, 16, & 17 are all introduced by travel itineraries. (Note also the importance of travel in Gn 22:1-19's test narrative). Second, three of these test narratives involve a complaint on the part of Israel concerning some physical requirement (Ex 15, water; Ex 16, food; Ex 17, water). Third, in all four test narratives the LORD supplies something needed by the parties involved (in addition to providing Israel with water and food in the Exodus narratives, the LORD supplies a sacrificial animal for Abraham in Gn 22). Fourth, all four narratives contain an etiological element (Gn 22:14; Ex 15:23; 16:15, 31; and 17:7). Fifth, all four narratives employ the testing motif (נִסֵּי) is used once each in Gn 22; Ex 15; & Ex 16 and twice in Ex 17). Sixth, the test narratives in Ex 15, 16, & 17 all expose the developing role of Moses. Seventh, the narratives in Ex 15, 16, & 17 all employ the verb נִלְנַל (to murmur). Eighth, the complaints in Ex 15, 16, & 17 all target

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a leader or leaders. (The remainder of this list of similarities relates only to the narratives in Ex 16 and Ex 17:1-7). Ninth, note that in both Ex 16:3 & 17:3 the Israelites express strong dissatisfaction with the exodus and even use similar expressions to give voice to that dissatisfaction (Ex 16:3 says, “for you have brought us out to this desert to kill all of this congregation with hunger,” and Ex 17:3 asks, “Why now have you brought us up³⁰ from Egypt³¹ to kill us, our sons, and our livestock with thirst?”), and in these same verses express nostalgia for Egypt. Tenth, in both Ex 16 and Ex 17:1-7 the people’s complaint indicates that someone other than the LORD was responsible for the exodus. (Ex 17:3 indicates that Moses is responsible, while Ex 16:2-3 indicates that Moses *and Aaron* are responsible).

The noteworthy **dissimilarities** between Ex 17:1-7 and Ex 16 are as follows. First, the complaint in Ex 17 includes both contending (vv. 2 & 7) and murmuring (v. 3), while only murmuring terminology is employed in Ex 16. Second, in Ex 17 the test is of the LORD by Israel, the reverse of Ex 16’s test. Third, in Ex 17 Moses alone is the stated object of the murmuring (vv. 2-3), while in Ex 16 (v. 2) both Moses and Aaron are the stated objects; and Aaron is not even mentioned in Ex 17:1-7, but he plays a conspicuous role in Ex 16 (see vv. 2, 6, 9, & 33). Fourth, in Ex 17 the complaints result in an initial response from Moses, while in Ex 16 it is the LORD who initially responds to Israel’s murmur. Fifth, Ex 16’s complaint does not seem to be as intense as the one in

³⁰ See footnote 27 above with regard to this expression.

³¹ The regret that they had ever left Egypt is also voiced in Ex 16’s test (v. 3a).

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Ex 17 which causes Moses to fear for his life (17:4). Sixth, in Ex 17 Moses has an agency role relative to the divine provision which he does not have in Ex 16. Seventh, Ex 17:1-7 contains no specific command, while Ex 16 contains three (vv. 16, 19, 29). Eighth, the events reported in Ex 17:1-7 establish no regular routine as do the events of Ex 16.

Exodus 17:1-7 has at least three important **effects** upon the portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. First, its reference to a test of the LORD adds a new ingredient relative to Israel's disenchantment. Not only are they complaining against their leader/leaders; they are also testing the LORD due to insecurity concerning his presence. The LORD has sought to make his presence known in Egypt, at the Red Sea, at Marah, and through the provision of quail and Manna. Exodus 17:1-7 reveals the people's persistent skepticism and lack of faith.

The second **effect** is the result of placing Ex 17:1-7's complaint immediately after the murmuring narratives in Ex 15:22-26 and Ex 16; this placement conveys a series of progressively intensifying complaints. In Ex 15:22 the reported murmur is simply a question; "What shall we drink?" In Ex 16:4 their murmur contains a note of despair and a strong nostalgic desire to have never left Egypt. In Ex 17:2-4 the people demand water, nostalgically wish again that they had never been brought out of Egypt, and cause Moses to fear for his life.

The third **effect** is somewhat similar to the second in that it also is due to the canonical arrangement of Ex 15:22-26; Ex 16; and Ex 17:1-7, but this effect relates to the testing motif rather than the murmuring motif. The development of this effect can be outlined as follows. First, in Ex 15:22-27 the LORD reveals his plan to use the desert period

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as a time of testing. Second, he carries out the first such test in Ex 16 with disappointing results. Third, in Ex 17:1-7 the people reveal an even greater degree of un-faith; they make what should be an opportunity for the LORD to test Israel into their own test of the LORD, and even the divine provision of water here is viewed as a response of the LORD to a test of him by the people. The tables have been turned, and the canonical assessment is that it is a negative turn away from the LORD which is even more shameful when contrasted with Abraham's faithful obedience in Gn 22:1ff and elsewhere in Genesis.

It is appropriate at this point to note again Ex 19:9³² because it reveals the LORD's interest in the way that the people viewed Moses. In this verse the LORD says that he wants the people to hear the LORD talking to Moses from within the thick cloud so that the people will believe in Moses forever (וְגַם-כִּי-יִשְׁמְעוּ לְעֵינֵיכֶם). The preceding analysis prepares us to read this statement as an expression of the LORD's desire for the people to have a sense experience of the relationship between Moses and the LORD so that they would trust that Moses' work with the people was being directed by the LORD. Unfortunately, the people were not easy to convince, and later stories reveal their unwillingness to connect Moses with the LORD in a way which could elicit the kind of belief in him that the LORD desired.

Exodus 20:20 is extremely important to the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith as this brief analysis will show. Exodus 20:20 is part of a four verse peri-

³² Brief notice was given this verse in footnote 18 above.

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cope that follows the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt Sinai. Ex 20:20 reads, “And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid, for in order to test (נִדְּוּ) you (the) God has come and in order that his fear shall be before you that you sin not.’” Childs convincingly reveals the importance and the intent of vv. 18-21 as they function within their canonical setting. For our purposes it is important to note that what v. 20 is calling a test is *both* the awe-inspiring theophany *and* the divine transmission of the Ten Commandments.³³ The Israelites have already accepted the covenant in principle in 19:8. Both the theophany and the law-giving (the items which together follow on from 19:8 and lead up to 20:18) *test* the seriousness of this “in principle acceptance” by theophanically revealing God’s power and by verbally communicating his radical demands. God is testing Israel to determine if an attitude can be created within the Israelites which will produce long-term obedience.³⁴ The canonical assessment is that the people’s initial response was satisfactory (see Dt 5:1-29), but the LORD was uneasy about the longevity

³³ Childs, *Exodus*, 371-73.

³⁴ Moshe Greenberg in “נִדְּוּ in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 273-76 argues that נִדְּוּ in Ex 20:20 means, not “to test,” but “to have experience of.” Childs, *Exodus*, 344 is not convinced by and actually opposes Greenberg’s case, and most commentators understand נִדְּוּ here to mean either “to test” or “to prove” (e.g., Fretheim, *Exodus*, 218-19; Sarna, *Exodus*, 115; and Hyatt, 217). However, Durham, 303 is persuaded by Greenberg’s case (with qualifications).

It is clear in both Greenberg and Durham that their problem with translating נִדְּוּ as “to test” is that they can see no sense in which the events preceding Ex 20:20 can be construed as a test. Hyatt’s brief note exemplifies the view of other scholars who have no problem in seeing a test here. He writes, “Thus Yahweh has come to Israel in order to **prove** her, to test the sincerity of her faith and protestations of obedience (cf. Dt 8:2)” (Hyatt, 217).

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of that response (see Dt 5:29). Israel's transgressions from Ex 32 onwards are the proof that the generation of adults tested at Sinai had not been shaped by that test into a people who would continue to fear the LORD.

The **similarities** between the test in Ex 19 & 20 and Ex 16's test are as follows. First, both are divine tests of Israel. Second, both employ explicit commands and are concerned with the obedience of Israel to those commands. Third, both involve a sabbath command. Fourth, both are a part of the desert period story cycle. Fifth, both narratives expose the reader to the developing role of Moses. Sixth, as with Ex 15 & 17, the account of the test in Ex 19 & 20 is similar to Ex 16's test in that it begins with a travel itinerary. Seventh, in both Ex 16 and in Ex 19-20 Israel is unaware that they are being tested during the course of those tests.

The **dissimilarities** between these two tests are as follows. First, there are interesting differences between the goals of the two tests. Ex 16 is a test to see "if they will walk in my law or not" (16:4) and employs specific commands to determine such. The results are then reported as a part of the narrated test. The test found in Ex 19 & 20 has the goal of creating an attitude of obedience within the Israelites. For the generation of adults at Sinai the final verdict is not known until Num 14. This dissimilarity is emphasized when one notices the distinction between the way commands are used in these two tests. In Ex 16 commands are used as test cases to assess Israel's ability to obey God. In Ex 20 the Ten Commandments are used to expose Israel to a portion of the LORD's covenant requirements in an effort to produce a godly, obedient, and long-standing fear of God. Second, Ex 19-20 does not involve a complaint (no murmuring or contending) on

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the part of Israel which is such a significant element in Ex 16 and other test narratives in the Pentateuch. Third, the reader is left uninformed that Israel is undergoing a test (in Ex 19:16-20:17) until that specific test is completed, at which time Israel is informed as well.³⁵ Fourth, due to the long term goal(s) of this test and Israel's failure to attain that goal(s), it would be saying too much to suggest that the Israelites passed the test in Ex 20:20, but their early response to the test at Mt Sinai was certainly more in line with God's will than is the case in Ex 16. Fifth, Ex 19-20 does not involve the divine provision motif as does Ex 16.³⁶

The effect of this test in Ex 19-20 is profound. One only has to remember two items about the previous set of test narratives in Ex 15:22-26; Ex 16; & Ex 17:1-7 and use those items to realize the effect of this test in Ex 19-20 on the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. First, one needs to remember that those previous test narratives reveal a faithless digression. Second, one needs to remember that the LORD's stated

³⁵ Victor P. Hamilton in *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 101 contrasts Abraham's test and the test here and writes, "The major difference between the two is that in Ex 20:20 the people know well, via Moses, that through the revelation of his law God will test his people." This statement seems, to this thesis's author, to be contrary to the presentation contained in Ex 19-20. The people indeed knew, from the words of the LORD via Moses, that something very special was going to happen; but these chapters report no words which prepared them for a divine test.

³⁶ Some might view the giving of the law as a divine provision, but such a broad definition of the divine provision motif would cause it to be too widespread for this thesis to cover (e.g., the LORD provided Noah with instructions on how to build the ark, and he provided Joseph with the interpretations of dreams) and it would connect Ex 16 with passages containing similarities that are much less obvious than is the case with regard to the ones that have been chosen.

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desire for the people during that period, according to Ex 15:26, was that they “earnestly heed the voice of the LORD” and “keep (שמר) all his statutes,” but Ex 16 & 17 reveal that this divine intention was not fulfilled. That is why Ex 19:5’s expression of the same intention in such similar terms is so significant (note the similarity between the “heed” clause in Ex 15:26 which is *אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ*, while its counterpart in Ex 19:5 is *אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַעוּ בְּקוֹלִי*; and the “keep” clause in Ex 15:26 which is *וְשָׁמַרְתָּ* *כָּל־חֻקָּיו*, while the “keep” clause in Ex 19:5 is *וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי*).³⁷ When these items are used to enlighten the reading of Ex 19-20 one is encouraged to read the test narrative in Ex 19-20 as a carefully orchestrated divine effort to accomplish what these previous tests had not, i.e., to teach the people to “heed the voice of the LORD” and “to keep all of his statutes.” Such an awareness is increased when one looks at the above list of dissimilarities between Ex 16 and Ex 19-20. Although that list contains only five dissimilarities; they are highly significant. Note the goal differences³⁸ and the fact that Ex 19-20 is absent of any murmuring or complaining to initiate the test. God is the sole initiator of this test which makes the test in Ex 16 appear opportunistic by comparison. Note also that God is in complete control of the test in Ex 19-20 from beginning to end. Israel can only be awed and transfixed; they cannot alter the course of the test.

³⁷ The reader’s attention also should be drawn to Ex 20:6 where the words of the LORD again encourage the keeping of his commandments (*וּלְשָׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי*).

³⁸ The goal differences between these two tests as stated above are that “Ex 16 is a test to see ‘if they will walk in my law or not’ (16:4) and employs specific commands to determine such. The results are then reported as a part of the narrated test. The test found in Ex 19 & 20 has the goal of creating an attitude of obedience within the Israelites.”

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It is now fitting to analyze three passages which are very similar to one another. They are **Ex 19:8; 24:3; & 24:7**. Ex 19:8 contains the people's response to the LORD's offer (through Moses) of a covenant with him (Ex 19:3-6). Their response is, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." In Ex 24:3 one finds a similar affirmation voiced under similar conditions, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (the rendering into English is the same as for Ex 19:8 although there are differences in Hebrew between the two statements³⁹). Ex 24:3's affirmation follows a more in-depth revelation of the LORD's covenant requirements as well as the LORD's declaration of the Ten Commandments and should, therefore, represent a more informed and more reliable response to the LORD's offer. The people's commitment in Ex 24:7 follows Moses' reading of the Book of the Covenant as part of a solemn religious occasion and should represent an even higher degree of reliability. In addition, the response in Ex 24:7 sounds stronger because the people say, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do *and we will obey* (וְנִשְׁמָע).")"

Exodus 32 is a narrative which follows a profusion of religious commands which are given by the LORD to Moses on the top of Mt Sinai (Ex 25:1-31:18). The narrator reports that the period of time which elapsed during Moses' stay on the mountain was forty days (Ex 24:18). During Moses' absence the people grew restless and caused Aaron to make a golden calf about which they say, "This is your god (אֱלֹהֵי אֲלֹהֵיךָ),

³⁹ Ex 19:8's affirmation is, כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה; while Ex 24:3's affirmation says, כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה.

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O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (v. 4). Aaron attempts to connect the idol with YHWH (v. 5), but the *people's* idolatry appears to be a turning away, not only from Moses, but also from the LORD (vv. 1, 3, & 8).

This narrative reveals that the high impact effort in Ex 19-20 at instilling faith in the Israelites has not had the desired effect. The people were terrified before the LORD for a short time, but the power of it waned in a matter of weeks. In addition, when one remembers that the “*all* that the LORD has spoken” (referred to in Ex 24’s promises of obedience) includes five divine statements which prohibit the worship of other gods and/or idols (Ex 20:3-6; 20:22-23; 22:20; 23:24-25, & 32-33), then the weakness of Israel’s promises in Ex 19 & 24 is apprehended.

In Ex 36:3-7 one reads that the people were over-generous in their contributions toward the construction of the tabernacle. This passage is an ambiguous element in the portrait of Israel’s fluctuating faith, because it can be viewed in at least two ways. One, it can be read as a sign that Israel is demonstrating meaningful loyalty to the LORD and a genuine desire to worship and serve him. Two, (in light of previous events) it can be read as a sign of Israel’s capacity for outward and short-term demonstrations of devotion without attendant attitudes of resolute commitment. The complete pentateuchal portrait confirms the correctness of interpretation number two.

This concludes the study of narratives in the books of Genesis and Exodus which connect naturally to Ex 16 and, together with similar narratives in the book of Numbers, form an appropriate canonical context for the study of Ex 16. Chapter six continues the development and analysis of an appropriate canonical context for the study of Ex 16 by

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evaluating relevant narratives in the book of Numbers.

CHAPTER SIX

A CONTEXT FOR EXODUS SIXTEEN: PART TWO

The book of Numbers has many narratives which naturally fit into the canonical context which this thesis is developing and analyzing. To those narratives we now turn.

In **Num 11:1-3** Israel complains and is punished by the LORD, a punishment ended by the intercession of Moses. The analysis of this narrative proceeds more concisely by reporting first its **effect** upon the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith, followed by an analysis of the object of this narrative's complaint in conjunction with the discussion of its effect.

There are at least four notable **effects** of this narrative relative to the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. The first two are the result of two unique features of this narrative, and the third is the result of a rare feature. The first feature which is unique for a pentateuchal complaint narrative is that there is no stated circumstance which generates the complaint. It is interesting to read the speculations of commentators as to what the circumstance might have been.¹ However, they fail to observe the effect that the lack

¹ E.g., Milgrom, *Numbers*, 82 says, "It can be shown that the wilderness narratives in [Exodus and Numbers] are, in the main, parallel The murmuring over water in Exodus (15:22-26) follows the three-day march from Sinai and precedes the manna/quail episode (chap. 16). Similarly in Numbers, the Taberah incident (11:1-3) follows upon a three-day march from Sinai (10:33) and precedes the manna/quail account (11:4-34). The

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of such has upon this narrative. The absence of a stated circumstance suggests that this complaint has no legitimate rationale. The text says, “The people were *like*” (note the preposition כ) “those who complain about evil” (v. 1). The natural interpretation (as a result of both the use of “like” and the lack of any reported circumstance) is that they do not have an evil or adversity about which to complain but complain as if they do.² Therefore, Israel is being presented here as a people for whom complaining comes easily; substantial provocation is not required.

A second **effect** is created by the second unique feature of Num 11:1-3. It is the absence of a description of the people’s complaint. This absence, combined with the previously noted absence of a legitimate rationale, further enhances the impression that Israel here is engaging in random and unprovoked complaining.

Taberah complaint—unspecified in the text—may therefore be assumed to be the lack of water.” George Buchanan Gray, *Numbers*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), 99 writes, “The people murmur on account, no doubt, of some hardship described in the introduction to the story which has not been reproduced here.” The reader interested in further speculation is referred to Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, The Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 5 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), 121; and N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, The Century Bible, new ed. (London: Nelson, 1967), 226. Since Milgrom’s suggestion is the most substantial, it should be pointed out that even though there are parallels between the two complaint narratives in Ex 15 & 16 and the two complaint narratives in Num 11, such parallelism does not support the assumption that the parallel complaints originate from the same cause. Additional weaknesses in Milgrom’s reading (as well as the others that are referred to) are revealed in the analysis of this narrative to follow (note especially footnote 2).

² The reader should note that whenever Israel is clearly portrayed as complaining about some legitimate need, even though the complaining appears to be an inappropriate response, the LORD still provides what is lacking. The fact that the LORD provides nothing but the fire of punishment further confirms the suggested reading; there is no legitimate need to be met.

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A third **effect** is connected with the very rare feature (only the complaint narrative in Num 11:4-35 shares this feature) that the narrator of this complaint narrative nowhere says who is the **object** of the complaint. The effect achieved fits well with the points made in the two previous paragraphs; the people randomly complain without cause and without focus. This nebulous moaning angers the LORD and causes him to punish the people.

The fourth **effect** is created by the placement of this narrative immediately after the report of the LORD's personal guidance of his people as they set out from Mt Sinai. For Israel to have that kind of divine presence and leadership and still complain as they do in Num 11:1-3 portrays the people as calloused to the activity of the LORD on their behalf.

There is only one noteworthy **similarity** between Num 11:1-3 and Ex 16. It is that both narratives explicitly relate that the LORD heard (שמע) the people's complaint (Num 11:1 & Ex 16:7-9 & 12).

There are several notable **dissimilarities** between Num 11:1-3 and Ex 16. The first three important differences are the same as the three unusual features of Num 11:1-3 noted above. The fourth dissimilarity is that this narrative does not use אָדָנָי nor the testing motif. The fifth dissimilarity is that Ex 16's complaint is referred to with the verbal root, לָוַן, while Num 11:1-3 employs the very rare, נָאָ (found only here and in

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Lam 3:39).³ Sixth, the LORD's reaction to Israel's complaint in Num 11:1-3 is anger (חרה) and punishment, a reaction quite different from his reaction in Ex 16. Seventh, Num 11:2 records that Israel "cried out (קעצ) to Moses" for help in the face of the LORD's punishment; there is no need for such a plea in Ex 16.⁴ Eighth, in Num 11:3 Moses intercedes on behalf of the people, and this results in the cessation of the LORD's punishment; in Ex 16 Moses has no intercessory role.

Immediately after Num 11:1-3 the reader is confronted by another complaint narrative which also employs the testing motif—Num 11:4-35.⁵ This narrative is uniquely similar to Ex 16 and, as a result, is uniquely relevant to our purpose. It is useful to begin the analysis of this narrative by noting that this material is variously attributed to J, J and E, J and the JE redactor, or J and a source independent of J and E. See Budd, 124 & 126 for a summary of the various source analysis viewpoints as well as that author's own conclusion. It is not, however, attributed by any available critic to P. In contrast, Ex 16 is considered to represent primarily the P document; in fact, all of the verses which are relevant to the murmuring motif are classified as P,⁶ and, whatever one's view of source

³ See Budd, 119-20 for a useful though necessarily cautious discussion of this term.

⁴ In fact, this is the only place in the Pentateuch where Moses is the indirect object of the verb קעצ.

⁵ It is significant to note how closely the narrative in Num 11:1-3 is tied to the narrative in Num 11:4-35 through the non-use of a travel itinerary. Although the narrative indicates that there had been a move (notice the name change from v. 3 to vv. 34-35) by not reporting any travel details the material presents these two complaint incidences as if the second occurred immediately after the first.

⁶ See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 87; Childs, *Exodus*, 275; and Noth, *Exodus*, 129-37.

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critical analysis, there are several reasons to suspect that Ex 16 and Num 11:4-35 (or at least many of their elements) developed independently in their pre-canonical history.⁷

Narratives which are both so similar and so different afford a special opportunity to analyze and evaluate the way in which the biblical narratives have been united, and such analysis and evaluation are essential in determining if the process of composing the canon produced a coherent or an incoherent whole. If the effect is an incoherent composite, then the only way to do OT theology is to separate the material into various sources and then determine if a concordant theology can be constructed from these. On the other hand, if the canonical composite does form a coherent whole, the argument for the priority of the OT canon relative to the “doing” of OT theology receives support.⁸

The narrative in Num 11:4ff begins in v. 4a with reference to an “assembly” (עֲדָתָם) among the Israelites which “desired a desire” (הָאָזְנוּ וְרָצוּ אֹתָהּ).⁹ In v. 4b all the

⁷ See Budd, 124-27; Gray, 102-20; and Childs, *Exodus*, 280-82.

⁸ Be reminded that the primary purpose of this chapter is to place Ex 16’s murmuring motif within the Pentateuch’s portrait of Israel’s fluctuating faith with the aim of enhancing the appreciation and understanding of Ex 16’s narrative as well as the other relevant narratives. It is not the purpose of this chapter to conduct a detailed evaluation of any passage relative to the manner of its inclusion in the canon as a whole; however, there is throughout an underlying argument, an argument especially clear in this section on Num 11:4-35 and in the section on Num 16-17, that the canonical narratives have indeed been wisely and artfully combined. The reader is encouraged both to realize and to evaluate this underlying argument.

⁹ W. Gunther Plaut, “Numbers,” in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. Gunther Plaut (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1091; Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 320-21; Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 207-08; Milgrom, *Numbers*, 83; Snaith, 227; and Gray, 102 all connect this group (עֲדָתָם) with the עֲדָתָם in Ex 12:38. However, Budd, 127 is skeptical of such a connection and suggests that this

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Israelites, while weeping, ask, "Who will feed us meat?" The picture being presented is of the desire for meat having spread from some smaller group among the people to the people as a whole.

In vv. 5-6 this desire for meat develops into verbalized nostalgia for the food they ate while in Egypt and an expression of boredom with manna. In response, vv. 7-9 give the narrator's favourable description of the manna and relate that it came with the dew. The description of the manna in these verses is different from the one found in Ex 16:14, 23, & 31,¹⁰ and there is no canonical effort to harmonize them. However, it should be noted that the two descriptions do have elements in common (i.e., they both compare manna to coriander seed; they both refer to boiling it; they both say that it comes with the dew), and they both present the manna as something very appealing.

In vv. 10-15 Moses voices an intriguing complaint to the LORD.¹¹ In order to

term refers to "those governed not by powers of discrimination and insight, but by sensual appetite." The fact that the text is quite vague concerning the identification of this group and yet very explicit concerning that group's desire and the fact that their desire is emphasized again at the end of this narrative suggests that Budd's minority view focuses the reader more on the clear intent of the passage than does the majority view which can actually distract from it by turning attention away from illicit desire to racial or cultural deficiencies.

¹⁰ Snaith, 227-28; Gray, 105-06; and Budd, 127 all discuss these differences and deal with them in various ways.

¹¹ See Samuel E. Balentine, "Prayer in the Wilderness Traditions: In Pursuit of Divine Justice," *HAR* 9 (1985): 53-74 for an extensive treatment of many of the relevant issues regarding the prayer of Moses here as well as his prayer dialogue with the LORD in Num 14:11-23. Also see Jacob Neusner, *Sifre to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation*, Brown Judaic Studies, 119 (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1986), 2:96-97 for a rabbinical perspective which turns the words of Moses' complaint here, as Neusner says, "into something deeper, namely, the plea that [Moses] die so as not to see the punishment that is coming on the people." Even though this view seems unacceptably forced, it

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stay focused upon the purpose at hand it can only be noted that the impression created by Moses' complaint is that he feels trapped between the people's desire for meat (he sees it as a demand) and the LORD's anger. Moses feels, whether rightly or wrongly, that the people's request for meat is directed solely at him (v. 13). The reader senses that the level of tension is growing and that it is having a marked effect on Moses.

In vv. 16-17 the LORD responds to Moses' complaint by initiating a process which will authorize seventy elders to relieve some of Moses' burdens. In vv. 18-20 the LORD speaks concerning the people's desire for meat. For some undisclosed reason the people have to sanctify themselves in preparation for the meat's coming.¹² Then the LORD's words become foreboding. He says that the meat will become "loathsome" (רָעִיף) to the people, because they have "rejected" him and have expressed regret at having left Egypt. This is the first time that the complaint in Num 11:4-35 is seen to be directed at the LORD. It is also the only place in any desert period complaint narrative which describes a complaint of Israel as an example of having "rejected" the LORD. In fact, it is the only complaint narrative in the Pentateuch which employs רָעִיף.

In vv. 21-22 Moses again speaks. He expresses doubt that enough meat can be provided for such a large group of people, and his doubt is stated quite sarcastically. The

can serve as a reminder of the sympathy and loyalty toward Moses which the pentateuchal material naturally engenders.

¹² Budd, 128 suggests a possible "double-edged" significance of the need for the Israelites to sanctify themselves. On one hand, the sanctification is "a solemn preparation for a holy appearance." On the other hand, it may also be a way of preparing for "a day of slaughter along the lines envisaged in Jer 12:3."

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reader who is sensitive to the previous complaint narratives is intrigued by Moses' sharply worded skepticism, but these words accord well with the mood of Moses as conveyed by his complaint in vv. 11-15, and vv. 11-15 & 21-22 together convey the escalation of embittered speech which is typical when pent up emotions are released. An important effect of Moses' words is to reveal the corrosive influence that the people's incorrigibility is having upon him. Moses' response to the pressure is very human and very believable. It also shows the negative power of Israel's attitude toward the LORD and his chosen leader.¹³

In v. 23 the LORD responds to Moses' seemingly impertinent doubts quite temperately. He asks, "Is the hand of the LORD short? Now you will see if my word will come true¹⁴ for you (sg) or not."

Verses 24-25 record that Moses reports "the words of the LORD" to the people and also assembles seventy of the elders as the LORD instructed in v. 16. The LORD, as promised in v. 17, places upon these elders the spirit or Spirit which is upon Moses, and the elders prophesy but only on this one occasion.

In vv. 26-30 one finds the story of the unexpected prophesying of Eldad and Medad. The response which the occurrence elicits from Moses is his wish that "all the people of the LORD" were prophets (v. 29). In this context the story underlines the

¹³ Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities*, 3.13 does not portray Moses as the one who expressed skepticism about the possibility of finding sufficient food for such a large group of people. Josephus has someone else say it and even has Moses very confidently assert that the food would "soon appear." The fact that the canonical text preserved the reading as it is demonstrates its willingness to present Moses as less than superhuman.

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pressure that Moses feels as the only full-time prophet among the people. He wishes there were more; he wishes they were all prophets.

Verses 31-35 report God's provision of an extravagant amount of quail, the people's gathering of the quail (note that the "desire" of the people is again emphasized by how long they worked to gather it all), and the fact that the people who desired/craved/lusted after (קָוָה אֵימָר)¹⁵ the meat were killed by a divine plague while eating the very meat they had so desired. They are then buried at this place which accordingly receives the name "the graves of desire" (Kibroth-hattaavah in English versions). By beginning and ending with references to the ones who craved, this narrative is tied artfully together.¹⁶

The **object** against or toward whom this complaint is consciously directed is not given by the narrator (as noted above, Num 11:1-3 & Num 11:4-35 contain the only two complaint narratives where the object toward whom the complaint is directed is not given

¹⁴ HKB, 325 gives this rendering for קָוָה אֵימָר in Num 11:23.

¹⁵ Eryl W. Davies, *Numbers*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 113 argues that not just those who originally "desired a desire" were slain by the plague in Num 11:33 because "it is the people in general who complain in v. 10, and it would be reasonable to expect them to be included in the punishment." This is not a major point; however, this narrative, up to this point, has only used the verb for "desire" (קָוָה) for those who "desired a desire" in v. 4. It would seem most likely that they are the ones whom the LORD is being portrayed as slaying here.

¹⁶ The fact that this narrative predicts an evil consequence of the quail in vv. 19-20 and yet reports a very different punishment connected with the eating of the quail in vv. 33-35 suggests that these elements of the narrative were originally independent of each other (cf. Gray, 119). However, their use together in Num 11 does not convey random composition. Instead, it reveals a purposeful use of the material to create a portrait of the depth of the LORD's anger in the face of ongoing and increasing incorrigibility on the part of Israel.

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by the narrator). However, in v. 13 Moses sees it to be against himself and reports that they are demanding him to give them meat to eat. The question is, are the people really making such a demand of Moses or is this his perception of events due to his obvious sense of being unduly and unrealistically responsible for Israel? The LORD's framing of the people's question in v. 18 likely provides the answer. He words the question exactly as it is worded in v. 4, "Who will feed us meat?" This indicates that there is a gap between Moses' perception and reality. In light of the adjoining narrative in Num 11:1-3 in which the people's complaining is unfocused and random, one is justified in taking this complaint as also having no personal target against whom it is intentionally directed.

The sense in which the LORD himself is an **object** is noteworthy. Nowhere is it indicated that the people intentionally aimed their complaint at him. Yet God says that they have "rejected the LORD." How have they done so? Verse 20 provides the answer. They "have wept before him saying, 'Why now (נָא) did we leave Egypt?'" The people have rejected the LORD by rejecting his work, the exodus from Egypt.

It is now appropriate to list the significant **similarities** and **dissimilarities** between Num 11:4-35 and Ex 16. The **similarities** are as follows. First, both narratives are immediately preceded by another, considerably shorter, complaint narrative with which a mutually influential relationship is evident. Exodus 16 is preceded by the complaint narrative in Ex 15:22-26, while Num 11:4-35 is preceded by the complaint narrative in Num 11:1-3. Second, both expressions of discontent are initiated by food concerns. Third, both complaints express nostalgia for Egypt (Ex 16:3; Num 11:4, 18-20). Fourth, both narratives include an appealing description of the manna (Ex 16:14; & 31; Num 11:7-

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8), make a connection between dewfall and the manna's arrival (Ex 16:13-14; Num 11:9), and refer to the preparation of the manna (Ex 16:23; Num 11:8). Fifth, both narratives indicate that Israel's complaint is effectively directed against the LORD because directed negatively against the exodus from Egypt. Sixth, both refer to the divine provision of quail. Seventh, Moses has no agency role relative to the divine provisions of food in either of these narratives. Eighth, Ex 16 and Num 11:4-35 are the only two divine provision narratives in which the LORD provides food; the three other pentateuchal divine provision narratives recount the supplying of water. Ninth, both passages contain etiologies (Ex 16:15, 31; Num 11:34).

The relevant **dissimilarities** between the two narratives are as follows. First, Num 11:4-35 does not begin with a travel itinerary as does Ex 16. Second, the complaint in Num 11:4-35 is initiated by a smaller group among the people as a whole; the complaint in Ex 16 is not initiated by a smaller group among the people. Third, "murmuring" (רָגַז) does not occur in Num 11:4-35, instead the complaint is connected with the people's weeping (בָּכָה, vv. 4, 10, 13, 18, & 20). In Ex 16 בָּכָה does not occur and the רָגַז terminology designates the people's complaint. Fourth, the people are not suffering from a total absence of food in Num 11:4-35, and there is no fear of dying, while in Ex 16 the complaint is due to an absence of food and the attendant fear of death. Fifth, Num 11 is the only passage in the OT where the people are said explicitly to complain about the manna. (This author believes that Num 21:5 also reports a complaint about the manna, but Num 21 does not make such as explicit as is the case here). Sixth, Num 11 does not

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indicate that the manna is divinely provided as does Ex 16. (However, the reference to dewfall encourages the reader to remember Ex 16's explanation of the manna's origin, and there is nothing in Num 11 which prohibits supernatural involvement). Seventh, there are dissimilarities between the way the two passages describe the manna, and there is no canonical effort to harmonize them. Eighth, in Num 11:4-35 the LORD's response to the people's complaint (and greed) includes both anger (הָרַח, vv. 10 & 33) and punishment (v. 33), while his response in Ex 16 involves neither anger nor punishment. Ninth, in Num 11:4 & 35 inappropriate desire is highlighted. Desire is not mentioned in Ex 16. Tenth, in Num 11:20 the LORD says the people have "rejected" (סָרַח) him. This verb does not occur in Ex 16 nor in any other complaint narrative. Eleventh, the most obvious difference between these two narratives is the way in which the provision of the quail is presented. In Num 11:20-21 the LORD says that the people will eat meat (presumably the quail) for an entire month. In Ex 16 the duration of the provision of quail is never related (although the duration of the manna provision is related [v. 35]). In Num 11 the LORD's promise to provide meat (presumably the quail) is accompanied by words of foreboding and anger (vv. 19-20). Nothing comparable accompanies his promise in Ex 16. In Num 11:21-23 Moses doubts the LORD's ability to provide enough meat. No such doubt is found in Ex 16. In Num 11:31-32 the medium of the quail's coming (a wind from the LORD), the volume of quail provided, and the people's gathering of the quail are all narrated in some detail. Ex 16 refers to no medium, gives less information than Num 11 relative to volume (v. 13 simply reports that "they covered the camp"), and gives no

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report of the people gathering the quail. In Num 11:33-35 the “greedy” ones are slain by a divine plague while they are eating the quail; there is nothing comparable in Ex 16.

Twelfth, Num 11:4-35 does not employ the term $\pi\theta\eta$ nor the testing motif which that verb bears. Thirteenth, in Num 11:4-35 Aaron is not mentioned; in Ex 16 Aaron plays a conspicuous role. Fourteenth, even though both narratives include an etiology, they differ in that Num 11:35 explains a place name while Ex 16:15 & 31 explain the name given to the divinely supplied bread.

The **effect** of this narrative relative to the Pentateuch’s portrait of Israel’s fluctuating faith is considerable. Much relevant to the effect of this narrative has already been made clear in the analysis above. However, in addition, it is useful to note the way in which this narrative’s close proximity to the complaint narrative in Num 11:1-3 enhances its effect. In vv. 1-3 the people murmur randomly. The LORD punishes them. The people cry to Moses for help. He prays on their behalf and the LORD ceases punishing them. Immediately the text presents us with another instance of Israelite complaining; and here it only requires one group, dissatisfied with desert fare and desirous of meat, to create a nationwide phenomenon of weeping, complaining, and nostalgic pessimism. The effect of adjacent narratives which portray Israel complaining for no good reason is to emphasize that the spiritual state of the people is very low, and no divine action—neither punishment nor provision—improves it.

Another relevant **effect** of this narrative is created by the statements of Moses. These statements, as noted above, provide the reader with a window into Moses’ troubled emotional state. To appreciate fully the effect of the words of Moses in

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Num 11:10ff, one need only remember the earlier narratives which reveal the stormy relationship which Moses had with Israel, and the reader is encouraged to review Ex 2:11-15; 5:15-6:9; 14:15; 15:25; & 17:2-4, as these clearly demonstrate the frequent difficulties encountered by Moses in his relationship with Israel. The special force of Num 11:4-35 is that its presentation reveals a more radically troubled Moses than any previous narrative. The Pentateuch's Moses has never before expressed doubts when the LORD promised to deliver food, in fact, he has seen the LORD deliver everything as promised, but here Moses sarcastically voices disbelief that the LORD is able to provide sufficient meat for his people. By placing this narrative at this point in the story cycle the reader is encouraged to infer a building up of pressure within Moses since the beginning of his leadership of the people of Israel.¹⁷ His sarcastic expression of doubt in Num 11:21-22 powerfully conveys the debilitating force of Israel's doubts and complaints.

Immediately following Num 11:35 the text recounts another complaint engendered by desire. In **Num 12:1-16** the reader encounters a new set of complainers. They are "Miriam and Aaron," Moses' sister and brother. Budd provides a useful summary of this story when he writes,

In this story the Yahwist tells of the opposition of Miriam and Aaron to Moses, and in particular of their challenge to the uniqueness of his relationship to

¹⁷ Even if one thinks it probable that the various traditions of divine provision of food and water during the desert period developed independently in their pre-history, it is still unlikely that the final compilers were insensitive to the differences between them, and certainly the communities of faith which look to the OT as sacred scripture have always been aware of all of these stories with their differences. What one can *know* is that the effect of the canonical presentation is to picture Moses as suffering and weakening under the constant burden of being placed between a recalcitrant people and a demanding God.

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Yahweh and therefore the supremacy of his word. Miriam is stricken with leprosy, and after Mosaic intercession on her behalf, has to be excluded from the camp for seven days before the journey can proceed.¹⁸

One effect of this narrative on the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith is to make clear that Israel's willingness to oppose the LORD's chosen leader is a widespread tendency reaching even into Moses' own family. It is also another example of Israelites finding it easy to criticize Moses without intentionally reflecting any antagonism toward the LORD.¹⁹

A second effect of this narrative is again to reveal that the LORD is heeding/hearing/listening to (עָנָה) what his people say, and he wants them to do the same with regard to his words. Numbers 12:2 uses עָנָה to refer to the LORD hearing what Miriam and Aaron said when they opposed Moses, and Num 12:6 uses עָנָה as a part of the LORD's command to Aaron and Miriam to hear/heed his words.

In Num 13-14 the reader comes to a defining moment for the desert period Israelites. Here the adults annul their chance of ever residing in the promised land. The narrative comes immediately after the criticism of Moses by Miriam and Aaron in Num 12 (the travel itinerary which concludes that story begins the one in Num 13-14).

¹⁸ Budd, 138.

¹⁹ Even if one argues (as does Budd, 135) that the main intent of this narrative was to establish the primacy of Mosaic revelation over prophetic revelation, it still must be noted that the compiler(s) maintained the integrity of the desert period story cycle by placing this story so that it is part of a very difficult period of Moses' time as Israel's leader.

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The story begins in Num 13 by recounting the selection of the twelve spies²⁰ and their journey through the land of Canaan. These spies then return to the people to whom the majority of the spies give a discouraging report, a report which is dissented from by one spy, Caleb.

The discouraging report has an effect for which the reader has been duly prepared by the previous narratives. Numbers 14:1-4 says,

And all the congregation raised (רָשׁוּ) and lifted up (קָמוּ) their voices²¹ and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron and all the congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would that we had died in this desert. And why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our small children will become plunder. Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’ And each man said to his brother, ‘Let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt.’

These verses convey the unanimity of Israel’s negative sentiment by ascribing its various expressions to “all the congregation,” “the people,” and “all the sons of Israel.” This unanimity is further emphasized in v. 10 when “*all* the congregation” prepare to stone Joshua and Caleb immediately after these two spies have appealed to the people not to “rebel²² against the LORD” (v. 9).

²⁰ The effect of describing the selection of these twelve spies is to reveal that these were leading men among the tribes of Israel and, therefore, well represented the people. Such creates the likelihood that the faithlessness which caused them to view Canaan as unconquerable was characteristic of the majority of the people. That awareness is confirmed by Num 14.

²¹ The use of this periphrastic expression serves to convey intense grief resulting from Israel’s easy acceptance of the discouraging report given by the majority of the spies.

²² There is only one other pentateuchal occurrence of the verb דָּרַךְ (Gn 14:4), but it does not refer to rebelling against God. The seriousness, from the biblical perspective, of rebelling against the LORD is conveyed by Josh 22:10-34, a narrative which uses דָּרַךְ six times.

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In v. 10b the LORD breaks onto the scene, and in vv. 11-12 he restates a previous plan to wipe out the people and form a new nation from the line of Moses (cf., Ex 32:9-14). In vv. 13-19 Moses effectively intercedes for Israel, which, as has been noted above, is the one difficult role that Moses boldly fulfils whenever needed. The LORD (vv. 20-38) agrees not to destroy the people, but decrees that those twenty years old and older will die in the desert and never enter Canaan (the exceptions are Joshua [vv. 30 & 38] and Caleb [vv. 24, 30, & 38]). Especially germane to the concerns of this study is the LORD's statement in vv. 22-23. There he says,

Surely all the men who have seen my glory and my signs which I have performed in Egypt and in the desert and have *tested* (וִיָּסוּ) me these ten times and have not listened to my voice (וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי) shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers. And all who have treated me irreverently shall not see it.²³

In vv. 39-45 Moses reports the LORD's decision to the people; the people mourn, and then, after acknowledging that they have sinned (v. 40), the Israelites make a catastrophic attempt to invade Canaan against which they are forewarned by Moses.

This narrative contains several elements of special importance relative to the purpose of this paper. It will therefore be analyzed in greater detail.

²³ See Edward G. Newing, "The Rhetoric of Altercation in Numbers 14," in *Perspectives of Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 211-28 for an extremely careful and illuminating analysis of Num 14:11-24 (the dialogue between the LORD and Moses). In the final lines of this article (p. 228) Newing writes, "Each speech of the dialogue is internally coherent and integrated in itself. Each part or section is clearly marked off from its neighbours and yet its dependence on its fellows is dramatically shown by the linkages. All in all this is a fine example of ancient Israelite prose writing. It embodies the great theological motifs of the Pentateuch and deserves the detailed rhetorical analysis it has been subjected to here."

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The narrator says that “the Israelites murmured (לון) against (על) Moses and Aaron” (v. 2), but the overall narrative presents a more complex picture relative to the **object** of the murmuring here. In v. 3 the people question why the LORD has done this to them, which indicates either doubt as to whether it really is his doing or a willingness to actually complain against him (although more obtusely than against Moses and Aaron). Their desire in v. 4 to appoint a new leader again demonstrates their dissatisfaction with Moses (and, to a lesser extent, Aaron) and reconfirms Moses (and Aaron) as the primary if not the only target for their complaint. In v. 10, the people’s outrage is trained on Joshua and Caleb, which, though more than a complaint, shows Israel’s willingness to attack anyone who threatens their monolithic sense of betrayal and despair. In v. 11 the LORD asks, “How long will this people spurn,²⁴ and how long will they not believe in me²⁵ with all the signs which I have performed in their midst?” This is the only place in any complaint narrative where the verbs פאן and און are used; their occurrence (see footnotes 24 & 25) underlines the seriousness of Israel’s condition here as diagnosed by the

²⁴ The verb פאן is rarely used in the desert period story cycle. In fact, it is not found in Exodus and occurs only three times in Numbers (14:11, 23; & 16:30). All three of the occurrences in Numbers relate to complaints which are perceived to be especially grievous and incur stern punishment. The pattern of usage in Numbers combined with comparable implementation in passages like Dt 31:20 and Ps 107:11 demonstrates that when the biblical text refers to someone(s) *spurning* the LORD it is a particularly damning judgment.

²⁵ און, the verb rendered as “believe” in this phrase, is another which is infrequently used in either Exodus or Numbers (Ex 4:1, 5, 8 [2 times], 9, 31; 14:31; 19:9; Num 12:7; 14:11; & 20:12), and this is the only complaint narrative which states that Israel is failing to believe in the LORD. It is noteworthy that during two of the infrequent high points of Israelite faith (Ex 4:31 & 14:31), the narrator reports that Israel did believe, while here, at arguably their nadir, they are absent of such believing.

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LORD. In vv. 26-36 the LORD employs the murmuring terminology (רָלַל) in earnest (elsewhere only in Ex 16:12; Num 17:20/5 [2 times], & 17:25/10 is רָלַל used by the

LORD). In Num 14 the LORD uses the verb form of רָלַל four times (vv. 27 [2 times], 29, & 36) and the noun form once (v. 27). What is of special interest is that in vv. 27-29 the LORD clearly refers to himself (אֲנִי) as the object against whom the people are murmuring,²⁶ and in v. 36 he refers to “all the congregation” murmuring against Moses (כָּל־עַמְּךָ).”

The analysis of previous complaint narratives (especially Ex 16) gives credence to a reading of Num 14 which views only Moses and Aaron as the objects against whom Israel *intentionally* is murmuring. Such a reading would view the people to be distancing the LORD from blame for what they view to be an ill-starred debacle (the Israelite propensity for removing the LORD from any blame has been noted above). They do so by doubting that he was ever involved. However, the text does not clearly reveal that such a meaning is intended nor does it negate a reading which would ascribe to the people a consciousness of murmuring against the LORD. Suffice it to say that Moses & Aaron and the LORD are the objects of Israel’s murmuring here, and any sense in which they differ as objects is somewhat vague. This lack of clarity adds to the impression that this com-

²⁶ The connection between the complaints voiced by the people in vv. 2-3 and the LORD’s words in vv. 26-33 could hardly be clearer. He alludes to their wish in v. 2 to have died in the desert when he sentences them to just such a fate (vv. 28-29), and he refers to their fear in v. 3 that their small children would become plunder and negates that pessimistic prediction by saying that these children would, in fact, “know the land which you have rejected” (v. 31). There can be no doubt that the murmuring of the people in vv. 2-3 is seen by the LORD as an instance of murmuring against him. The reader should remember, however, that the same is true of Ex 16’s murmuring.

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plaint is much more dangerous than the previous ones, because if it is not consciously directed against the LORD it is so close as hardly to matter.

The significant **similarities** between the complaint narratives in Num 13-14 and Ex 16 are as follows. First, both narratives begin with a travel itinerary (Num 12:16; Ex 16:1). Second, both narratives make extensive use of נָלַח in designating the complaint; Num 14 uses this root six times and Ex 16 eight times.²⁷ Third, both narratives state that all the Israelites murmured (Num 14:2-3 & Ex 16:2). Fourth, the expression of the people's murmuring in Num 14:2 is very reminiscent of the Israelites' murmuring in Ex 16:3 (i.e., both murmurings express strong dissatisfaction with the exodus [Num 14:2-4 & Ex 16:3], both murmurings express nostalgia for Egypt [Num 14:2-4 & Ex 16:3], both refer to dying in the desert and dying in Egypt [Num 14:2 & Ex 16:3]), but the Num 14 statement is even more despairing (i.e., there is no desire for their dying to be "by the LORD's hand" as in Ex 16:3, and in Num 14 they wish that they had died in the desert, the perceived possibility of which is what actually leads to the frightened murmuring of Ex 16). Fifth, in both narratives a murmur that the narrator describes as against Moses and Aaron is said by a character or characters to be against (לַיְהוָה) the LORD (Num 14:2, 27-29; Ex 16:2, 7-8). Sixth, both narratives involve an appearance of "the glory of the LORD" to all the Israelites (Num 14:10; Ex 16:7; 10). Seventh, in Num 14:11 the

²⁷ Exodus 16 uses this root more than any other OT passage, and Ex 16 is the only OT passage which uses נָלַח more often than Num 14. When one considers that this root only occurs twenty-two times in the entire OT, this number of occurrences clustered in these two chapters is striking.

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LORD's first verbal response to Israel's words and actions is comprised of two questions beginning with הַיֵּשׁוּבִים ("How long will this people spurn, and how long will they not believe in me with all the signs which I have performed in their midst?") both of which are addressed to Moses.²⁸ In Ex 16:28 the LORD responds to the failure of some to honour the sabbath by addressing a question to Moses which also begins with הַיֵּשׁוּבִים ("How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?").²⁹ Eighth, both narratives employ הִשְׁמַע (Num 14:22; Ex 16:4). Ninth, both narratives promote obedience of the LORD's commands (in Ex 16:28 the LORD is angry because the people have not kept (לֹא שָׁמְעוּ) his "commandments and laws and in Num 14:22 the LORD is angry because the people have not listened to/heeded (לֹא שָׁמְעוּ) his voice). Tenth, both of these narratives use שָׁמַע to refer to the LORD hearing the people's complaint (Ex 16:7-9, & 12 and Num 14:27) and to refer to the people not heeding what they should have (Ex 16:20 and Num 14:22). Eleventh, both narratives provide insights into the role of Moses.

The significant **dissimilarities** between Num 13-14 and Ex 16 are as follows.

First, the complaint in Num 14 is more prolonged and more intense than the one in Ex 16 (e.g., note that the people lift up their voices and weep in Num 14 before they murmur; nothing comparable is reported in Ex 16). Second, in the murmur of Num 14:2 the people

²⁸ Note also the synonymous expression, יְהִי־עַד , in Num 14:27 where the LORD asks the very similar question, "How long must I bear this evil congregation which murmurs against me?" This translation is from Budd, 149.

²⁹ It is important to note that these similar questions do not tie Ex 16's murmur with Num 14's murmur, but tie Ex 16's failure relative to sabbath-keeping with Num 14's murmur and associated action.

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express a desire to have died in the desert, while Israel's murmur in Ex 16:3 expresses anger at the prospect of just such a death. Third, the Israelites go so far as to make plans to return to Egypt in Num 14:4; no such plans are made in Ex 16. Fourth, the first response to Israel's complaint and rebellion in Num 14 is that Moses and Aaron fall on their faces (v. 5). In Ex 16 the first response to the murmur is the LORD telling Moses of the plan to provide daily bread for the people "in order to test them" (v. 4), and nowhere in the narrative does any person fall on their face. Fifth, in Num 14 Joshua and Caleb seek to change the people's minds, and neither Moses nor Aaron speak to the people until after the people's fate is sealed. In Ex 16 only Moses and Aaron address the people (vv. 6-10), and the intensity of their address is mild in comparison to the speech of Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:6-9). Sixth, the LORD's response to the people's complaint and associated behaviour in Num 14:11-12 & 20-35 is far more severe than anything the LORD does or says in Ex 16. Seventh, in the above delineation of similarities between Num 14 and Ex 16 the correspondence between the LORD's question in Ex 16:28 and his questions in Num 14:11 is noted, but an important difference between the questions in Num 14 and the question in Ex 16 is that in Ex 16 the LORD's question relates to the people's failure to keep the sabbath and is unrelated to the people's earlier murmuring, whereas in Num 14 the LORD's questions are his initial response to the people's murmuring and associated conduct. Eighth, in Num 14:1-10 the unfaithful words and actions are attributed to "all the congregation." In Ex 16 the murmuring is attributed to "all the congregation" (v. 3), but the two failures to obey commands are only attributed to some of the people (אִשָּׁרָא, referring to "some," in v. 20 and אִשָּׁרָא, meaning "some of the

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people,” in v. 27). Ninth, in Num 14:13-19 Moses has to intercede to save the people due to the LORD’s intense anger. No such intercession is required in Ex 16. Tenth, the test in Num 14:22 is a test by Israel of the LORD, the converse of the test reported in Ex 16. Eleventh, as noted above, Num 14 connects Israel’s words and actions here with rebellion against the LORD (v. 9), spurning the LORD (vv. 11 & 23), and failure to believe in the LORD (v. 11). None of these descriptions are found in Ex 16; instead the disappointment recorded there is Moses’ anger (v. 20) when the people seek to keep the manna overnight, and the divine question, “How long do you (pl) refuse (יָרִיד) to keep my commandments and my laws?” (v. 28) when the people fail to honour the sabbath. It would be a mistake to view the anger of Moses and a divine charge of refusing to keep the commands of the LORD as minor, but Ex 16 does not relate how or even if Moses communicated his anger to Israel, and the LORD’s charge that they have refused to obey his commands does not even apply to all the people (Ex 16:27-28); in addition, Moses’ anger and the LORD’s charge in Ex 16 do not have the intensity of the *three* very negative descriptions of Israel’s response to the LORD found in Num 14. The greater seriousness of the complaint in Num 14 as compared to Ex 16’s complaint is unmistakably revealed by the vastly dissimilar outcome of the people’s behaviour in the two narratives (i.e., a verbal rebuke in Ex 16:28-29; the denial of the right of those twenty years old or older to enter Canaan and the death by plague of ten of the spies in Num 14:26-38). Twelfth, in Num 14:40 the Israelites confess that they have sinned (v. 40); no confession for their disobedience in Ex 16 is reported. Thirteenth, the motif of divine provision, which plays a significant role in Ex 16 and in several other similar narratives, is not a part of Num 13-

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14.

The **effect** of Num 13-14 on the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith is considerable, because it reveals Israel's failure—in spite of God's many mighty acts—to believe that God could give them Canaan. To apprehend meaningfully the force of this narrative one only must realize that this is the worst example of Israelite un-faith encountered to this point in the pentateuchal material. It is the worst case because it presents the people weeping, murmuring, testing the LORD, planning to return to Egypt, and seeking to execute two men who dare to speak in favour of taking the land of Canaan. This is a wholehearted turning away from all that the exodus was and was to accomplish. This was rebellion; Joshua and Caleb knew it, and the narrator is certain that such a knowledge should have been shared by "all the congregation."

A second **effect** is achieved by placing this narrative here after the three complaints in Num 11-12. Such an arrangement creates a picture of continuous complaining which gradually escalates until it becomes outright rebellion with consequences so frightening that Moses and Aaron fall to the ground apparently to avert the wrath of the LORD.³⁰ This development reconfirms the observation made above relative to Num 11 that "the spiritual state of the people is very low, and no divine action, neither punishment nor provision, improves it." In Num 14 the people's spiritual state drops to a new low, but it has been dropping for sometime. The desired effect is likely that the reader is saddened, but not surprised.

³⁰ Budd, 156.

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Another effect of this narrative upon the Pentateuch's overall portrait is created by Israel's attempt to take the land of Canaan even when Moses has told them that the LORD was not with them and that they would be defeated. They had been persuaded by the majority of the spies that it was impossible to take the land when Joshua, Caleb, Moses, and Aaron believed that they could. Now Moses, whom the people believe to the extent that they confess when he tells them the LORD's words after the appearance of the LORD's glory, is not believed when he says that they cannot take the land because the LORD is not with them.³¹ Israel's respect for Moses is again revealed to be extremely low.

Another effect results from the potent thrust of this narrative which virtually forces itself upon the overall portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. The reader realizes that the rebellion which the canonical text presents in Num 14 developed from the doubt and instability which progressively escalates from Ex 14:10-12 and possibly even from Ex 5:15-6:9. After Num 14 the reader can think back over the previous material and realize that the times when Israel believes (Ex 5:31 & 14:31) are the "blips," the irregularities. The times of disbelief reveal the habits of Israel's heart. They are the norm.

Further to reveal the effect of this narrative upon the Pentateuch's portrait of

³¹ It might be suggested that the text is encouraging the reader to realize that the people believed Moses here because of the deaths, "before the LORD," of the ten faithless spies. Even though such a reading would make even clearer the lack of respect which the people had for Moses' words on their own, the lack of a connection within the text between the people's confession and the deaths of the ten spies causes this author to view such a connection as unlikely. The text encourages the reader to assume that the people believed Moses' words because of the appearance of the LORD's glory.

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Israel's fluctuating faith, it is appropriate briefly to note that in Num 15:1ff the LORD immediately turns to giving instructions concerning what the Israelites are to do when they enter the land of Canaan. To portray the LORD as anticipating the Israelites' entry into Canaan immediately after his bitter and angry disappointment with the current adults indicates an attribute of the LORD which could be referred to as optimistic perseverance. This attitude serves like a counterweight to balance, at least partially, the times when the LORD's anger is so vitriolic that he is ready to destroy the people.

Only two pentateuchal narratives make reference to the sabbath. One is found in Ex 16, and the other is found in Num 15:32-36. The amount of space which this thesis grants to the narrative in Num 15:32-36 is due to two unique opportunities which this narrative provides. First, since this thesis is exclusively concerned with narratives and since Num 15:32-35 is the only narrative apart from Ex 16 which employs the motif of sabbath observance opportunity, Num 15:32-35 provides the only opportunity for this thesis to study the pentateuchal view of the sabbath outside of Ex 16. Second, the narrative in Num 15:32-35 is very different from any other passages included in this pentateuchal portrait of Israelite faith (due, in part, to the fact that it is not placed in a specific time frame³²). In addition, its canonical placement reveals the kind of sensitivity which is of great interest for this thesis; as a result, it provides a unique opportunity to observe the effects of the canon's arrangement of its material.

Num 15:32-36 tells of a man who was found gathering wood on the sabbath. The

³² Reference is to narrated time and not the actual moment of occurrence.

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man was brought before “Moses, Aaron, and all the congregation.” He was then “held in custody because it had not been specified³³ what should be done to him.” The command then came from the LORD that the man was to be stoned “outside the camp,” a command which the people obeyed.

A perplexing question raised by this narrative is, ‘Why do the people, including Moses and Aaron, have to wait for a word from the LORD in order to know what they were to do?’ Three answers have been proposed, and the review of these answers allows us to observe the potential interpretive influence of the canon on its constituent parts; more space has been given to the final proposal because it is considered the most convincing.

The first answer, which is supported by several fairly recent works, is that the need for divine guidance was due to uncertainty concerning whether the man’s wood gathering was, in fact, divinely prohibited work.³⁴ There are at least two important criticisms of this answer. First, it hardly seems credible that neither Moses or the people were able to reason from a prohibition against manna gathering to a prohibition against wood gathering.³⁵ Second, the two verses which precede the wood gathering narrative prepare one to read this story as an example of a high handed (i.e., defiant) sin,³⁶ and it is rather diffi-

³³ See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 126 and 312, n., 51 for פֶּרַח rendered as “specified.”

³⁴ Ashley, 291; Budd, 176; and J. Weingreen, “The Deuteronomic Legislator—a Proto-Rabbinic Type,” in *Proclamation and Presence*, ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 87-89.

³⁵ This criticism is expressed by Milgrom, *Numbers*, 408.

³⁶ The following all make a connection between vv. 30-31 & Num 15:32-36 and either suggest or affirm that this connection indicates that Num 15:32-36 should be read as an

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cult to understand how a sin could be a noteworthy example of a high handed sin and no one present at the time be quite sure that it was a sin at all.³⁷ This answer is unconvincing.

The primary answer of the rabbis,³⁸ an answer followed by Gray,³⁹ is that Moses knew the man had committed a capital offence but was unsure of the *mode* of execution. Weingreen rejects this proposal. He says that "there are many other examples of the death penalty being laid down for certain crimes without the mode of execution being given."⁴⁰ The point of this objection from Weingreen appears to be that if the breaking of the sabbath required divine guidance relative to the manner of execution, then all the other unspecified capital offence commands would as well. Weingreen's implication, that such a state of affairs is hardly credible, seems valid.

Milgrom is another who responds negatively to the suggestion that the uncertainty in Num 15:32-36 relates to the mode of execution. He says,

example of a high handed sin: Ashley, 291; Budd, 175; Gray, 182; Marsh, 2:218; and Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 131.

³⁷ Budd, 175, says that the wood gatherer's narrative is introduced "here because it illustrates sin 'with a high hand,'" and Ashley, 291, says, "The placement of the current verses after Num 15:30-31, which dealt with the 'sins with a high hand,' shows that vv. 32-36 are probably meant to serve as an example of such sin." This is surprising because both of these writers contend that the people were unsure whether this man's gathering of wood really was a breaking of the sabbath.

³⁸ For a good review of rabbinical opinion regarding the question of why Moses had to inquire of the LORD, see Bernard J. Bamberger, "Revelations of Torah after Sinai," *HUCA* 16 (1941): 104-07. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 408 also provides a limited survey of rabbinical opinion.

³⁹ Gray, 182-83.

⁴⁰ J. Weingreen, "The Case of the Woodgatherer," *VT* 16 (July 1966): 362.

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This explanation is unconvincing: One could assume that stoning was the accepted mode of execution (Dt 13:11; 17:5; 21:21; Lev 20:2, 27;; 2 Chr 24:21; Ezk 16:40; 23:47; 1 Kings 21:13), especially since it is specified by oracle (Lev 24:14; Josh 7:25).⁴¹

One should also add Ex 19:13; 21:28-32 to Milgrom's list of texts on stoning to show how early stoning is divinely commanded in the desert period cycle of stories. Equally relevant are Ex 8:26; 17:4; Num 14:10 which demonstrate that stoning was not only the divinely commanded method, it was also the people's instinctive method.

Another weakness of this second proposal is that an assumption which drives it is that the breaking of the sabbath recorded in Num 15:32-36 occurred later in time than the prohibitions and accompanying penalty prescriptions in Ex 31:14-25 & 35:2. However, the story of the wood gatherer leaves unclear the time of its occurrence. The only chronological indicator is found in v. 32 where the reader is merely informed that these events occurred while the Israelites were in the desert. This chronological vagueness along with the wood gathering narrative's proximity to the material concerning sinning with a high hand, allow and encourage the reader to place the story of the wood gatherer in any time frame during the desert period when it could serve to illustrate sin with a high hand, and such would only require that it be placed at a time later than Ex 16's prohibition against gathering on the sabbath. This second proposal is also unconvincing.

Another suggested reason for the uncertainty in Num 15:32-36 is that the people did not know the penalty for such a crime, i.e., they did not know that a *capital* offence

⁴¹ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 408.

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had been committed. Milgrom devotes most of a two page excursus to the support of this particular answer. He begins by noting that other than Num 15:32-36, "The penalty for violating the sabbath is stated in only one context: the building of the tabernacle (Ex 31:14-15; 35:2)." He goes on to say,

The text of this case predicates that Moses indeed did not know the penalty for the violation of the sabbath. Work was forbidden on the sabbath, particularly that of gathering, as stipulated by the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:10) and the case of the manna (Ex 16:27-29). But in neither instance was a penalty stipulated. To be sure, the penalty is indeed prescribed in the context of the building of the tabernacle (Ex 31:14-15; 35:2). But the sabbath law is not germane to the context; it is an editorial insertion to indicate that the need to build the sanctuary should not overrule the required sabbath rest.

Milgrom then leads to the following conclusion which overlaps significantly with his view of the "*karet* law." He says,

It is therefore proposed that the case of the wood gatherer, which was decided by oracle, provided the precedent for the principle that all work on the sabbath would be punishable by death and *karet*. Furthermore there is no need to be concerned that the generalization is now found in Exodus and the case in Numbers. The case of the wood gatherer could have happened at any time during the wilderness sojourn. It was placed here in juxtaposition to the *karet* law of 15:30-31 for yet another reason: to inform us that he who "acts defiantly" to "spurn the word of the Lord," "revile the Lord," and "violate his commandments" in respect to the sabbath shall be not only "cut off from his kin" (vv. 30-31) but also stoned to death.⁴²

It does not appear that anyone has yet published an evaluation of Milgrom's proposal, so some analysis is in order. First, Milgrom's confusing use of the word "germane" injects an unnecessary ambiguity and vagueness into his argument, but this criticism is relatively

⁴² Ibid., 408-10. See 405-08 for his excursus on the "*karet* law".

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minor and the discussion of it is confined to a footnote.⁴³

Second, Milgrom's understanding of the relationship between Num 15:32-36 and Ex 31:14-15; 35:2 is unconvincing. One cannot say that "the generalization is now found in Exodus" (i.e., Ex 31:14-15; 35:2) "and the case in Numbers"⁴⁴ because it is very unnatural to view Ex 31:14-15; 35:2 as the generalization of the specific case found in Num 15:32-36. Such a view is unnatural because Num 15:32-36 relates to ordinary day-to-day duties performed on the sabbath while Ex 31:14-15; 35:2 relates to more holy work performed on the sabbath. Therefore, while it is true that the sabbath material in Ex 31:14-15; 35:2 and the sabbath material in Num 15:32-36 both prescribe the death penalty for sabbath breaking, they are still concerned with forms of sabbath breaking that are easy to distinguish from one another, and it is not self-evident that the death penalty of Num 15:32-36 would cover the transgression of Ex 31:14-15 and Ex 35:2 nor that

⁴³ In the material quoted above from Milgrom, *Numbers*, 409 he writes that "the sabbath law is not germane to the context; it is an editorial insertion to indicate that the need to build the sanctuary should not overrule the required sabbath rest." This is a confusing usage of the word "germane." According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1986), 951; this word means "true or complete: genuine" or "closely akin" or "having a close relationship: appropriate, pertinent," and it functions as a synonym of "relevant." It is, therefore, difficult to know in what sense the sabbath law is not "germane" to the context of Ex 31:14-15; 35:2, especially after reading Milgrom's own understanding of the function of the sabbath law in Ex 31:14-15; 35:2. One can only guess that he is using the phrase "not germane" to mean not original, i.e., an addition. This does not appear to be an accepted definition of this term, and, even if it were, it is a very poor use of language when something is both appropriate and relevant to the context (as Milgrom's own reading indicates it is) but somehow "not germane" to that same context. Such a confusing usage introduces a minor but unnecessary fog into his presentation.

⁴⁴ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 409.

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Ex 31:14-15 and Ex 35:2 would cover the transgression of Num 15:32-36.

Third, a strength of Milgrom's proposal is that it takes seriously the placement of this narrative within the canon and consistently views the wood gathering as an example of the high handed sin about which the previous two verses are concerned. Fourth, another strength of Milgrom's proposal is that it takes note of this narrative's chronological vagueness, and it allows that vagueness to enhance the interpretation.

Although the proposal of Milgrom has weaknesses, those weaknesses are not fatal. On the contrary, its exegetical strength⁴⁵ has convinced this writer that the uncertainty in Num 15:32-36 is not due to the inability to decide if gathering wood was work nor is it due to nothing more than ignorance concerning the *mode of execution* which a sabbath breaker should suffer; the uncertainty is due to a lack of information concerning what, if anything, was to be done to punish a sabbath breaker. Moses and the people clearly assumed that something was to be done, hence the holding of the wood gatherer in custody, but they had to wait for the LORD to reveal to them what it was they were to do.

Before we conclude our analysis of Num 15:32-36 it is relevant to highlight the sensitivity with which this brief narrative has been placed in its canonical location. This sensitivity of placement is easy to demonstrate; simply notice that this narrative illustrates defiant sin, the LORD's harsh treatment of a defiant sin, and that gathering on the

⁴⁵ The richness of Milgrom's interpretation is fully appreciated when one reads carefully his material concerning Num 15:30-31 & 32-36 in the body of his commentary and also in the two relevant excursuses. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 125-26 & 405-10.

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sabbath is such a defiant sin, and notice that all three of these points are made due to the text's placement. Also be aware of how difficult, if not impossible, it would be to find another pentateuchal location which could have utilized this narrative to the same extent. Therefore, the placement of this narrative serves to strengthen the awareness that the canonical ordering can be very sensitive and often provocative as well (provocative in the sense that a text's *placement* is sometimes the very thing which causes a text to provoke questions and to provoke re-readings of earlier material to answer those questions, and it is those re-readings which cause the interplay between passages to be detected).

The important **similarity** between Num 15:32-36 and Ex 16 is that in both narratives the LORD speaks to Moses with regard to the sabbath breaking, and in both cases those words indicate the importance which the LORD attaches to sabbath observance. The important **dissimilarity** is that the sabbath breaking in Ex 16 results in angry words from the LORD, while the sabbath breaking in Num 15:32-36 results in the people waiting for a divine word and in obeying that word by stoning the offender. (Hopefully, the reader is aware that there are many other dissimilarities between these two narratives. However, this author could detect no interpretive impact which would be generated by listing them).

Careful attention to this similarity and dissimilarity brings to the surface two **effects** which Num 15:32-36 has upon the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith, because they cause the reader to realize that the people's attitude toward the sabbath had radically changed since Ex 16's sabbath test. By the time of the narrative of Num 15:32-36 the people are taking the sabbath with sufficient seriousness to involve

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themselves in its enforcement and in the resultant execution. This recognition keeps the reader from concluding that the sabbath test of Ex 16 and/or the sabbath legislation at Mount Sinai was wholly ineffectual. Instead, one comes to realize that the effort to establish sabbath observance was not a total failure. Num 15:32-36 indicates that sabbath observance was finally established to the extent that a very high percentage of the people honored the day and actively participated in its enforcement.

When combined with all that the Pentateuch indicates concerning the extreme importance of the sabbath for the religion of Israel, the similarity between the LORD's response to the breaking of the sabbath in Ex 16 and Num 15 has an important effect upon one's reading of Ex 16 and, as a result, upon the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith as a whole.⁴⁶ What the sternness of the LORD with regard to sabbath breaking reveals is that one possible reading of Ex 16 is invalid. That possible reading is that the sabbath is merely a test case in Ex 16, and that the LORD just as easily could have employed another forthcoming Mount Sinai command to accomplish his goal. Such a reading does not fit the total picture presented by the Pentateuch. Instead that total picture provokes the more likely assumption that the sabbath is chosen as the commandment for Ex 16's הַיּוֹם test because the sabbath was especially important to the LORD and his הַיּוֹם.

⁴⁶ A contemporary source which effectively demonstrates the special importance of the sabbath by showing how sternly it is punished relative to other seemingly similar transgressions is Milgrom, *Numbers*, 405-10.

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Numbers 16 & 17 describe a momentous four day period which includes several Israelite objections as well as the various responses which they initiate. The contribution of these two chapters to the Pentateuch's overall portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith can hardly be overstated.⁴⁷ Their special relevance, their significant interpretive difficulties, and the sheer amount of material which they contain creates the necessity of giving more space to Num 16-17 than has been the case with any other passage included in this portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith. To these two chapters we now turn.

Numbers 16:1⁴⁸ introduces four antagonists; they are Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On; but only the first three are referred to elsewhere in the narrative.⁴⁹ This opening

⁴⁷ Although there are many source-critical questions which are relevant to these chapters, such will not be the focus here. Instead the emphasis will be upon the message of these chapters in their canonical form. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 414-423 for his "Study in Redaction" which reveals the evidence for the composite nature of this material. This excursus from Milgrom also discusses the form effected by the canonical arrangement of Num 16 as well as the insight which he thinks it provides relative to Num 11:4-34 and Num 13-14. Equally relevant is Alter, 133-37.

⁴⁸ See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 130 and 312-313 (endnote 2); and Jonathon Magonet, "The Korah Rebellion," *JSOT* no. 24 (1982): 3-25 for discussions of the enigmatic נִקְחָה in Num 16:1a. Magonet's conclusion with regard to the difficulty with this term (p. 22) is especially noteworthy. He points out that just as "there is no object to the 'taking'" in v. 1, there is no stated "object to the 'taking'" in Num 17:12/16:47 in which Aaron responds to the command from Moses regarding the censer. In response to that, Magonet writes, "perhaps here we have the final confirmation that the real object of Korah's rebellion, despite all the arguments about the democracy of holiness or the abuse of power by Moses and Aaron, was his own desire and ambition to be the priest, and himself take the censer, the fire and the incense, and stand before the Lord." On pp. 22-23 Magonet cites rabbinical evidence which seems to lend some support to his view.

⁴⁹ In fact, On is mentioned nowhere else in the OT, and it is not possible confidently to attach any interpretive significance to the inclusion of On here. Milgrom suggests a textual emendation, but without certainty, and he goes on to say, "Alternatively, one might justify the retention of the name On the son of Peleth on the basis of the fact that both names occur in the genealogical lists of the tribe of Judah (1 Chr 2:26, 33). There is evi-

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verse also informs the reader that Korah is from the tribe of Levi, while the other three are from the tribe of Reuben.

Verse 2 reports that these men “rose up before *Moses*” along with “250 . . . representatives of the assembly, men of renown.” Verse 3 adds that this group “assembled against *Moses and Aaron*” and said, “You assume too much⁵⁰ (רַב־לְכָם), because all the congregation, everyone of them, is holy,⁵¹ and the LORD is among them, so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” The accusation is clear. Moses and Aaron are being charged with elevating themselves unduly and, thereby, of creating for themselves positions of power which contravene the status conferred by the LORD upon the people as a whole. All the people are holy; God is in the midst of the entire nation, consequently, there is no rationale for some to be as far above others as are Moses and

dence that the tribes of Reuben and Judah shared the same clans” (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 313, endnote 4). However, the exact form On (אֹן) does not occur in that genealogical list, instead the name found is Onam (אֹנָם), a difference that does not strengthen the case.

⁵⁰ This rendering of רַב־לְכָם is given by BDB, 913; but this rendering should be compared with the renderings and relevant comments found in Milgrom, *Numbers*, 130; Snaith, 256; Budd, 179 & 186; and John Sturdy, *Numbers*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 116. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 130 rightly states that the most literal rendering is “You have too much,” but he does not render it that way in his translation because, I suspect, he senses, along with other commentators and translators, that such a wooden translation does not capture the actual intent of this phrase as it is used here and in v. 7.

⁵¹ Two items should be mentioned here. First, the reference to holiness serves to connect Num 16:1ff to the immediately preceding material in Num 15:37-41. (Note Num 15:40 where the people are encouraged to remember to be “holy to your God”). Second, the accusation in 16:3 is connected canonically to previous pentateuchal references to Israel’s holiness (Ex 19:6; 22:30/31; Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).

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Aaron.

Moses' reaction (v. 4) to this accusation indicates the enormity of it; he falls on his face.⁵² This is the second time in the pentateuchal narratives that Moses has reacted in such a way to an Israelite complaint. The first time is in Num 14:5 where both he and Aaron⁵³ fall on their faces in response to the most damaging complaint-cum-rebellion of the desert period. Moses' identical response here suggests that this incident has the potential to carry a comparable degree of seriousness.

Verses 5-7 record Moses' initial verbal response to the charge of v. 3,⁵⁴ a response

⁵² Budd, 181 & 186, influenced by the apparatus of *BHS*, suggests that the text be emended to read that Moses' face (countenance) fell rather than he fell on his face. Such an emendation would indicate that Moses is depressed by v. 3's charge. Budd acknowledges (p. 181) that such an emendation "is without specific textual support, but since there is a prostration later in the story (v. 22), at a point where an act of intercession is obviously appropriate, this emendation is acceptable." As is the case with many suggested textual emendations, this one is impossible to prove or disprove. I have followed the text as it stands because of the absence of any textual evidence in support of a change and because the material which follows proceeds naturally from the unemended form of this verse. It is also relevant to note that even when the text is accepted as it stands it is not always taken to mean that Moses is appealing for divine intercession or guidance. (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 131; and Snaith, 256 do not interpret it in such a way. Snaith's relevant statement is quoted below in footnote 54). The one previous example of such an act (Num 14:5) is also open to interpretations other than an appeal for divine intercession or guidance (e.g., Milgrom, *Numbers*, 108).

⁵³ The fact that only Moses falls on his face here serves to place him at the forefront in responding to the charges levelled at him and Aaron in v. 3. Moses' leading role continues throughout this narrative.

⁵⁴ Verses 5-7 may indicate that Moses received divine instructions while upon his face, because these verses report that he immediately arose to decree what must be done to resolve the situation precipitated by "Korah and all his band" (v. 5). However, uncertainty that such is intended comes from two directions. First, in Num 17:10/16:45 Moses also falls on his face (along with Aaron), and, immediately following that action, he (in 17:11/16:46) tells Aaron what to do to check a plague sent by God. The uncertainty arises because in 17:11/16:46 it is difficult to assume that Moses was told to take this

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which, from the canon's own perspective, provides the reader with an accurate description⁵⁵ of the complaint of "Korah and all his congregation."⁵⁶ His response begins in v. 5 with the report that he "spoke to Korah and all of his congregation saying, '(In the) morning the LORD will make known who is his and who is holy, and he will bring him near to himself, and whom he will choose he will bring near to himself.'" Note that Moses refers to the LORD's granting of holy status to an individual or individuals without referring to the holy status bestowed upon every Israelite. In this way his response is tailored to the charge of v. 3 without taking up the complex issue of how an entire people can be holy, and yet, at the same time, someone(s) from among that people

action by the LORD, because the action he initiates serves to bring to an end a plague sent by the LORD which the text nowhere indicates the LORD regretted or desired to suspend. The uncertainty relative to the intention of these later verses tends to increase the level of uncertainty concerning an intentional implication of a divine revelation in Num 16:5-7. Second, it is not certain that Moses fell on his face in v. 4 in an effort to seek divine guidance. Snaith, 256, for example, contends that "Moses was not interceding with God," but fell on his face "because he felt himself helpless." The one clear example in this narrative of a prostration which relates to intercession is found in 16:22, but its very explicitness tends to further emphasize the lack of such in the other two reports of prostration. The conclusion of this author is that the text shows no concern to clarify explicitly the purpose of either the prostration in 16:5 or 17:10/16:45.

⁵⁵ These speeches of Moses clearly bear the canonical and, therefore, authoritative understanding of the rebellion herein recounted.

⁵⁶ It is instructive to note Budd's view (pp. 186-87) that the term "his (i.e., Korah's) congregation" here indicates that "Korah has created a rival 'Israel.'" This view is credible because of the rarity of the form יִקְרָא which occurs three times in these two chapters (Num 16:5, 6, & 17:5/16:40), always in relation to the group associated with Korah, and only once elsewhere in the OT (Jer 30:20). Also noteworthy are the occurrences of קְרָאֵם in Num 16:11 & 16. This form is used only three times in the OT (the third occurrence is located in Ps 74:2), and in Num 16 it is used on both occasions to refer to Korah's supporters. Budd's persuasive reading increases one's awareness of the extreme volatility of the situation reported in Num 16:1ff.

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can be holy in an exclusive sense. Moses simply declares that such is the case without ever intimating that an explanation is needed. Moses, in these verses, also makes clear that the holy status which Korah and his company desire can only be given by the LORD.

In vv. 6-7 Moses prescribes a procedure whereby the LORD will make known *his* choice. It is noteworthy that this procedure relates exclusively to the cult (i.e., offering incense in censers before the LORD) and is reminiscent of the Nadab and Abihu story in Lev 10:1-7 & Num 3:4. Numbers 16:7 further clarifies the purpose of this procedure by emphasizing, in harmony with v. 5, that “the man whom the LORD will choose, he is the holy one.”

In v. 7's final clause Moses directs the charge, that he and Aaron “assume too much,” back at his accusers. He even uses their own phrase, רַב־לָקַח, with the same rather unusual meaning⁵⁷ which they have intended. This answering of a charge with an almost identical counter-charge creates a picture of two parties completely at odds; they see the same state of affairs (i.e., the leadership of Israel) in strikingly different ways.

⁵⁷ The phrase רַב־לָקַח is used eight times in the Hebrew Bible (Num 16:3, 7; Dt 1:6; 2:3; 3:19; 1 Kgs 12:28; Ezk 44:6; 45:9) and Num 16 has two of only three biblical occurrences with this exact nuance of “you assume/take on too much;” the other is in 1 Kgs 12:28, and the two Num 16 occurrences are the only ones which relate to power and/or prerogative. 1 Kgs 12:28 conveys the idea of too much trouble or difficulty. Deuteronomy 1:6; 2:3; Ezk 44:6; & 45:9 contain similar usages, and some likely would categorize these occurrences of רַב־לָקַח together with the ones in Numbers and 1 Kings. However, there are also notable differences between the occurrences in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel and those in Numbers and 1 Kings, differences which the reader will be left to evaluate.

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Verse 7 ends by identifying those specifically associated with Korah as Levites. Such an identification leads naturally into vv. 8-11 where the levitical status of these accusers is further emphasized and is of central importance.

In vv. 8-11 Moses indicts Korah and the Levites represented by him for being dissatisfied with their God-given role relative to Israel's cult. Especially significant is Moses' use of הֲקִעַט ("Is it not enough?") in v. 9,⁵⁸ a phrase which Milgrom aptly describes as the "semantic opposite" of רַב־לָכֶם, a realization which rightly leads Milgrom to note that הֲקִעַט and רַב־לָכֶם assist in unifying this material.⁵⁹ More will be said below concerning הֲקִעַט due to its recurrence in v. 13.

One can understand why source-critical analysts have sensed, due to the repetition in v. 8 of "and Moses said," a transition of some kind between vv. 7 & 8.⁶⁰ However, other writers contend that repetitions like this one are deliberate devices which perform important functions.⁶¹ Bar-Efrat's suggestion is especially relevant. He says that repetitions of this kind serve the narrator as a means of "hinting that there has been a

⁵⁸ The occurrence and usage of שָׁמַע in Num 16:8 will be discussed below.

⁵⁹ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 419. See footnote 65 below for Milgrom's relevant comment.

⁶⁰ E.g., Sturdy, 117, refers to vv. 8-11 as an "addition to P," while Marsh, 2:220, says that vv. 3-11 are derived "from two strands of P," and Budd, 182, refers to "doubts . . . about the unity of the section" and notes the difference between vv. 4-7 and vv. 8-11. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 414-23, provides an extended excursus on his view of the way in which Num 16:1-35 came to have its present form, but he does not deal in detail with these verses.

⁶¹ See Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 18; and Bar-Efrat, 43-45.

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break in the character's words." Bar-Efrat gives several examples of this phenomenon and through these examples demonstrates that these pauses occur for a variety of reasons.⁶²

It seems likely that the repetition of a speech introduction here in Num 16:8 should be viewed as an indication that Moses paused to allow his words in vv. 4-7 to be absorbed by Korah and company before continuing his very forceful response to their challenge.

As an additional response to any attempt to atomize this material one should draw attention to the fact that its present form is both coherent and meaningful, because it serves to cast the revolt of Korah as one not consciously directed against the LORD but against Aaron (and Moses) on behalf of Levites who are not satisfied with their role because they want a more prestigious and/or a more powerful position. Moses argues that the conscious intention of these antagonists is at variance with the fact that it is the LORD, and not Moses and/or Aaron, who has chosen those who serve in the tabernacle. As a result, the complaint of these Levites is against the LORD, and not against Aaron, in spite of their contrary intention⁶³ and in spite of their desire to be seen as contending for the will of the LORD.

It has previously been stated (in footnote 55) that, from the viewpoint of the canon, the speeches of Moses in vv. 5-11 convey the rebellion of Korah and company as it really was. Such an understanding opens the way for a more detailed analysis of the canon's depiction of this rebellion in Num 16:1-11, and such an analysis is relevant for

⁶² Bar-Efrat, *Ibid.*

⁶³ See pp. 47-48 above for relevant comments concerning Moses' way of referring to the complaint here in Num 16:11.

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our purposes because it serves as an additional indication of the way in which Israel's faith problem often is presented in the Pentateuch as the result of their misunderstanding of the role of Moses (and Aaron). The following paragraph seeks to provide just such an analysis.

Verses 5-10 state that Korah and his company want to be priests, but it is clear that they are not trying to open up the priesthood for all Israelites; this means that the request of v. 3 is not a request for all the people to be equal relative to power and status. The accusers are not seeking some extreme form of egalitarianism, instead they are making two arguments at once. One is that the positions held by Moses and Aaron are excessive and out of harmony with the people's shared status under God (v. 3). Another is that they (Korah and company) should be allowed to be priests (vv. 5-11), a position they do not intend to grant to every Israelite. It is not at all apparent that the base from which they argue (the holiness of *all* the congregation) can support both of their contentions simultaneously, and, therefore, it is *possible* that the text's reporting deliberately depicts a contorted logic in order to reveal that a self-centred desire for status and position is the real reason for this dispute. Korah and his associates believe that only Moses and Aaron stand between them and the positions which they crave. Moses' speeches, on the other hand, declare that these complainants are rebelling against the LORD's choices and, as a result, against the LORD himself, and, therefore, it is the LORD who stands opposed to their requests and not Moses or Aaron. The contrast could hardly be sharper. Korah wants to be seen as a champion, both of the LORD and of the people, in a struggle against two autocratic and power-hoarding leaders. Moses, however, paints Korah as one who

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refuses to be satisfied with the special levitical privileges already granted him and his fellows by the LORD. The story's conclusion validates the perspective of Moses and graphically condemns the counter-perspective held by the accusers.

Numbers 16:12-14 recounts a communication between Moses and two of the other antagonists introduced in v. 1, Dathan and Abiram. From a canonical viewpoint Moses is summoning them so they can have some part in the 'censer test' previously described in vv. 6-7.⁶⁴ (The part assumed for them may be nothing more than observers). Therefore, these verses serve, as do vv. 1-3, to tie Dathan and Abiram closely to Korah in this dispute.

The response of Dathan and Abiram to Moses' summons is both significant and intriguing and can be divided up into the following five elements. First, they refuse to "come up" as summoned. Second, they complain that the state out of which the exodus removed them was identical to the state into which the exodus was supposed to bring them. (Their application to Egypt, in v. 13, of terms normally reserved for the promised land is a fundamental rejection of all that the LORD had done since first responding to their cries in Ex 2:24). This complaint is intensified through its use of טַעֲנִי, the expression which Moses employed in v. 9 in his counter-attack against the dissatisfied Levites and Korah.⁶⁵ Third, the fact that *Moses* (notice, not the LORD) has led them out of such

⁶⁴ The way that the canonical arrangement of this material leads the reader to understand that Dathan and Abiram are being summoned by Moses relative to the 'censer test' is demonstrated below in footnote 69.

⁶⁵ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 419 brings out the impact achieved by the double implementation

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a blessed state weakens any claim that he might have to be an appropriate leader. Fourth, Moses' right to lead is further weakened by the fact that he has not brought them into the type of place which they were promised and out of which they came.⁶⁶ Fifth, they also refuse to "come up"⁶⁷ because they believe he is preparing to deceive⁶⁸ "those men," and "those men," the context demands, are Korah and the Levites aligned with him.⁶⁹

of רב־לַכֶּם in close proximity with the double implementation of טַרְטֵי when he writes, "By the use of the key words *rav lakhem* (v. 7) and its semantic opposite *ham'at* (v. 9), the Levite insert was locked to the preceding and following pericopes, which contain the same terms. The effect is striking: The former term became an inclusion, a rebuttal by Moses of the mutineers (vv. 3-7), and the latter, a verbal boomerang hurled by Dathan and Abiram against Moses (vv. 9 & 13)."

⁶⁶ Reading the לָאָּ of the MT rather than the לָאָּ/לָאָּ/לָאָּ preferred by Milgrom (*Numbers*, 133) and suggested by the LXX. Milgrom's suggestion is weakened by the fact that the term לָאָּ never occurs in the MT with לָאָּ pointed with *qibbûs*, whereas it is used three times with לָאָּ pointed with *hōlem* (Num 16:14; Ps 119:3; Esth 5:12). לָאָּ is used 137 times in the MT.

⁶⁷ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 134 notes that the phrase, "We will not come up!" occurring at both the beginning and the end of this speech frame it "in an inclusion." See also his comparison of the role of this phrase to the role of רב־לַכֶּם in vv. 3 & 7 (p. 132).

⁶⁸ It is commonly assumed (see Gray, 201; Budd 187; and Milgrom, *Numbers*, 134) that the phrase הַיְיָ הַיְיָ הַיְיָ is an idiom for deception.

⁶⁹ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 134 suggests that the phrase "those men" refers either to the elders who accompanied Moses (v. 25) or, more likely, to themselves." J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1937) 640 designates the phrase as "a euphemism for 'us'." Gray, 201 says that "it refers to the Israelites who followed Dathan and Abiram, mentioned in part of the story not reproduced here, or referred to in the clause 'men of the children of Israel' in v. 2." However, the canon has located this material in between two pericopes which are exclusively concerned with Korah and the group of Levites associated with him. As a result the summons from Moses to Dathan and Abiram, in the canonical arrangement, is most naturally understood as a summons to have some part in the testing of Korah and company. Therefore, Dathan and Abiram (in Num 16:14c) are rejecting Moses' invitation to attend that test because they believe that Moses will deceive "those men," i.e., Korah and the 250 men with him.

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In v. 15 Moses becomes very angry⁷⁰ in response to the words from Dathan and Abiram. He asks the LORD to reject an "offering" which, in this context, is the offering of incense which Moses has prescribed in vv. 6-7.⁷¹ Moses also declares to the LORD that he has not dealt unfairly with his antagonists, a declaration affirming that the attitude of these complainants toward him is not the result of any injustice on his part.

Verses 16-17 support the identification of v. 15's offering with the offering of incense referred to in vv. 6-7 (cf., footnote 69 above). These verses do so by reporting, so soon after Moses' mention of an offering in v. 15; Moses' additional words concerning

⁷⁰ Rendering לַיָּהּ according to the meaning suggested by D. N. Freedman and J. R. Lundbom, "הָרָהּ הָרָהּ; הָרָהּ הָרָהּ; הָרָהּ הָרָהּ. Meaning," in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:171-72; BDB, 354; and HKB, 116; rather than "aggrieved," "upset," "depressed," "distressed," or "despondent" as suggested by Milgrom, *Numbers*, 134 and Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 33 & 355 endnote 7. Although the verbal root הָרָהּ with לַיָּהּ is sometimes used in contexts that permit one of the meanings employed by Milgrom and Sarna (e.g., Gn 4:5-6) there are more occurrences where anger is the much more natural meaning (e.g., 2 Sa 3:8; 22:8; Ps 18:8/7; Neh 3:33/4:1; 4:1/7), and there are no occurrences where anger is implausible. (This construction, הָרָהּ with לַיָּהּ, occurs forty-eight times in the following twenty passages: Gn 4:5-6 [twice]; 18:30-32 [twice]; 31:36; 34:7; Num 16:15; 1 Sa 15:11; 18:8; 20:7; 2 Sa 3:8; 6:8; 13:21; 19:43/42; 22:8; 1 Chr 13:11; Neh 3:33/4:1; 4:1/7; 5:6; Ps 18:8/7; and Jon 4:1-4 [twice], 9 [twice].

⁷¹ This offering/oblation is generally said to relate to some offering of Dathan and Abiram (see Budd, 187; Snaith, 258; and Marsh, 2:222), and in the pre-history of this pericope such a connection might well have applied. However, in its present context Hertz's connection of this term with the offering of incense which is to follow in vv. 17-18 is much more credible (see Hertz p. 640, where he quotes from Rashi). Such is the case because of the emphasis upon the incense offering in the verses which immediately precede vv. 12-14 and in the verses which immediately follow v. 15. Note that Milgrom, *Numbers*, 134 also grants a degree of plausibility to connecting this term to the incense offering of vv. 17-18.

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the impending incense offering of Korah and his fellows, an offering which Moses describes with words and themes previously noted in vv. 6-7.⁷² Verse 18 simply reports that the men involved did as commanded, but it also creates an air of expectancy by placing all of those involved at the doorway of the tent of meeting awaiting an unknown outcome.

In v. 19a the influence of Korah is more fully indicated. He gathers *all* the congregation against Moses and Aaron. This half verse, thereby, reveals a magnitude of pressure against Moses and Aaron which adds to the awareness briefly discussed in footnote 56 above.

Verse 19b says that “the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.” The LORD’s glory has appeared previously to all of Israel in Ex 16:10 & Num 14:10 during disputes between the Israelites and their leaders, and both of those appearances are followed by words from the LORD which directly relate to the relevant disputes (see Ex 16:10-12 & Num 14:10-12). The appearance here is no exception. In vv. 20-21 the LORD announces his intention to “consume” all the people “instantly” (עַל־כֶּכֶּל), words which further strengthen the ties between these events and those recorded in Num 14:10-12 where the LORD announces a similar intention. The response, in Num 16:22, of Moses and Aaron to the words of the LORD also adds to the resonance between Num 14 & Num 16 because of two notable similarities between these two narratives. First, in

⁷² The description in vv. 16-17 does, however, add to the description found in vv. 6-7. Note that, in distinction to vv. 6-7, vv. 16-17 make it explicit that all the 250 disgruntled Levites are to offer incense and that Aaron is to do the same.

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both narratives Moses and Aaron fall on their faces (see Num 14:5 & 16:22). Second, in both narratives a plea is made for God not to wipe out the nation of Israel. A difference between these two narratives is that in Num 14 only Moses verbally pleads to the LORD on behalf of the people, while in Num 16 both Moses and Aaron voice their intercessory appeal, which, given the fact that Aaron is a prime target of the attack reported in Num 16, paints a picture of Aaron along the lines of the one of Moses, i.e., Aaron is also a leader who cares for the people even when those same people are angrily attacking him.

In vv. 23-24 the LORD responds to the pleas of Moses and Aaron by giving them instructions which will serve to preserve the majority while making it possible for the LORD to slay the primary instigators of this rebellion along with their families. He tells Moses to remove the people from the proximity of the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.⁷³

It is notable that Korah is included with Dathan and Abiram in v. 23, is not included in v. 25, but is included again in v. 27, and is tied to those swallowed up by the earth in v. 32. The narrative's intriguing use of Korah is discussed below in conjunction with the analysis of v. 32.

The effect of vv. 20-24 is to ensure that not even a hint of vindictiveness is connected to either Moses or Aaron. Such an effect is created by making it clear that the

⁷³ Gray, 204; and Milgrom, *Numbers*, 136 point out the unusual and enigmatic usage of *קָשַׁרְתִּי* here. However one views this unexpected word choice the verse is, at the very least, seeking to portray the setting apart of those who are radically rebelling against Israel's divinely appointed leaders.

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judgment about to take place is a reduced version of the LORD's original intention to destroy the entire congregation of Israel, and that this reduction of the divine judgment has been attained only because of the intercessory efforts of Moses and Aaron.

In vv. 25-27 Moses, with the elders in attendance, tells the people to separate themselves from the dwellings of these three men, a command which the people obey. The scene is set with the wives, sons, and small children of these three men standing in front of their tents waiting. This is a picture which prepares for the type of punishment of which the LORD has warned in Ex 20:5 & 34:7, and it seems unlikely that these rebels are unaware that their separation is due to a forthcoming judgment between themselves and Moses. It is conceivable, therefore, that these men are being presented as confident and assured in their defiance and that they even believe that the LORD is on *their* side.

In vv. 28-30 Moses stakes the divine origin of his leadership on something entirely new taking place to bring about the deaths of these men and their families. He even foreshadows the nature of this event by referring to the ground swallowing them up. Moses' prediction and the fulfilment which follows are for the purpose of showing the people that "these men have spurned the LORD" (v. 30d); they also may imply that Moses knows what the LORD intends without being told, or, on the other hand, they may imply that Moses's words play at least some part in determining what the LORD chooses to do. Either way, the close connection between the LORD and Moses is again confirmed and accentuated.

Verses 31-34 report a very exact and dramatic fulfilment of the words of Moses. The text even uses the verb "to swallow," *קָלַע*, which Moses has used in v. 30. An

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especially intriguing element within these verses is the reference to Korah, and even though this narrative contains two references to Korah after v. 32 (Num 17:5/16:40 and 17:14/16:49) this study is expedited by addressing at this point the interpretive difficulties which the Korah references engender. Note that these references are not a problem which impacts the study of Num 16-17 alone, because the problem also relates to Num 26:9-11 and Dt 11:6.

Several questions are raised by the Korah references,⁷⁴ but the one which is made the most obvious by the canonical form of the text concerns the how, when, and where of Korah's death. It will now be shown that the analysis of the Korah references produces important benefits for this study, because it provides an opportunity to demonstrate that sensitivity to the canon's lead can bring the reader to a view which integrates all data, and yet, focuses upon the point(s) which the canonical form of the story is most concerned to make.

It should be emphasized that sensitivity to the canon's lead in Num 16 does not mean that the questions surrounding Korah's death are ignored. They must not be ignored, because it is the canon itself which provokes them. To hide from these questions would be to hide from the canon or to pretend its nature was something other than it is. On the other hand, to view these questions as a license to divide the text and to seek to

⁷⁴ See Gray, 186ff; Budd, 178ff; and Milgrom, *Numbers*, 414ff for source-critical analyses which expose the difficulties surrounding the references to Korah in Num 16. Ashley, 301-03 rejects much of the source-critical position, but for his difficulty with the ambiguity surrounding Num 16:32 see Ashley, pp. 319-20.

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reconstruct pre-canonical stories back of Num 16-17 and to give primary attention to those reconstructions is to divert the exegete's attention from the point which the canonical form of this narrative was designed to make.⁷⁵ Therefore, the questions provoked by the canonical presentation of Korah will not be ignored nor will they be used as a license to divide and reconstruct. Instead, they will be used to direct attention to the point of this story in its canonical form.

The uncertainty surrounding the death of Korah can be expressed in question form as follows; was Korah "swallowed" by the earth with Dathan and Abiram, or was he burned up along with the 250 Levites? One cannot be certain, because, as Milgrom notes, "both solutions are derivable from the text."⁷⁶ So what is the exegete to do who is seeking to be led by the canonical form of this narrative? She or he must recognize that a principle is revealed by this insoluble uncertainty concerning the manner of Korah's death. That principle is that the canonical version of this story is not primarily concerned with historical questions of when, where, and how; its primary goal is to ensure that theology be expressed, theology which conforms to what Israel came to know as a result of belief in YHWH.

The exegete must, therefore, ask the following questions—what is the theological

⁷⁵ Gray feels that the canon's treatment of its material here is of an inferior standard. On p. 192 he writes, "The real point of this important story was for long obscured owing to the additions made by a later writer, who turned Korah and 'all his company' into Levites." On p. 207 he describes the reference to Korah in v. 32 as "an unskillful attempt of the editor to unite in death the two sets of rebels who, even in his form of the story, had in life been constantly divided."

⁷⁶Milgrom, *Numbers*, 416.

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message of this material, and how do we use the problematic Korah references to stay focused upon that message? Robert Alter's analysis is extremely helpful with regard to answering these two questions. In his discussion of Num 16-17 he writes,

Certainly our notions about the spatial integrity of the location of a narrated action, the identity of personages, the consistency of agency and motive in the development of plot, are all flagrantly violated. Given the subject of the story, perhaps there were compelling political reasons for fusing the two rebellions. *Perhaps all these considerations of narrative coherence seemed less important to the writer than the need to assert thematically that the two separate events—the attempt to seize political power and the usurpation of sacerdotal function—comprised one archetypal rebellion against divine authority and so must be told as one ale* (emphasis mine).⁷⁷

Alter's suggestion fits well with the canon's utilization of Korah in this narrative, because Korah is the person who unites the Levitical rebellion against Aaron with the Reubenite rebellion against Moses, and the connecting of Korah to both of those groups is that which has created the uncertainty regarding his death. Alter's suggestion is also sensitive to the canon's lead in that it acknowledges the problem and seeks to discover what point might be so important that such problematic by-products did not disallow that point from being made.

A further support for Alter's suggestion is discovered when one reflects upon the attitude which it should produce within a faithful reader. Surely the appropriate attitude is one of almost reverential reserve with regard to opposing political or spiritual authority. One must have very good reasons—much better than those of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, et al.—before rebelling against a leader or leaders. One must be sure that the

⁷⁷ Alter, 136.

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leadership opposed is also opposed by the LORD, because, if such is not the case, the rebel risks inciting divine anger.

It is notable that such an attitude accords very well with other OT passages. E.g., Jeremiah makes clear that the LORD is with Babylon in their assault upon Jerusalem, and, when giving counsel to Zedekiah, the prophet says,

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, If you will only surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and the city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be handed over to the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand (Jer 38:17-18, NRSV).

Zedekiah does not do as Jeremiah advises; he does not surrender, and Jer 39:1-8 reports the gruesome fulfilment of the prophet's words. That fulfilment is not without similarities to the experience of the rebels of Num 16.

There are other OT passages which place the LORD on the side of an unlikely ruler, and, thereby, serve to counsel against intemperately opposing powers, authorities, and leaders. E.g., Habakkuk's struggle with the LORD's utilization of the Chaldeans makes the point very effectively, but no OT character exemplifies the appropriate attitude toward authority and leadership any better than does David toward his antagonist, King Saul (see 1 Sa 24; 26; & 2 Sa 1). David displays respect for Saul even when he knows that Saul's reign has become horribly unhealthy. (E.g., see 1 Sa 22:11-19 where eighty-five of the LORD's priests and their families are slain on the order of King Saul, and go on to read the report to David of that event in vv. 20-23). Therefore, the reading of Num 16 suggested by Alter is supported by the fact that its effect upon the devout

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reader resonates well with the teaching of other OT passages.

Now the analysis of the Korah references can be summarized. What has been discovered is that an approach which seeks to be sensitive to the canon's lead should utilize fully the text's ambiguities to find the real point of the passage, because they can serve as markers with two functions. The first function of the ambiguities is to mark the items that are not the main point of the passage (i.e., this text's main point is not to describe Korah's death; if it were there would be no uncertainty about how, when, and where). Second, the ambiguities are produced because of the canon's concern to make a point which it believed had great importance. Careful analysis of the ambiguities, therefore, can reveal what point has been served by their creation, and, thereby, the ambiguities can mark the main point(s) to which the canonical form of the text is committed.

Verse 35 takes the reader back to the 250 men standing at the tabernacle and with chilling brevity reports their death by fire, fire "from the LORD." Again the reader is reminded of the Nadab and Abihu story (see Lev 10:1-3 & Num 3:4).

Num 17:1-5/16:36-40 reports the treatment prescribed by the LORD for the censurers of the 250 rebellious Levites. These verses are not as relevant to our study as are the verses which follow. We will, therefore, move on.

Numbers 17:6/16:41 reports that on the next day Israel murmured (רָלַל) against Moses and Aaron,⁷⁸ and went so far as to charge that it was Moses and Aaron who were

⁷⁸ Notice the striking similarity between the wording found in Ex 16:2 and the wording here especially after one adopts the *Qere* form of רָלַל in Ex 16.

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responsible for those who had died, and they refer to those who had died as “the people of the LORD.” Such a report creates a picture of substantial support for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram⁷⁹ from within Israel and demonstrates that the people of Israel have not learned the intended lesson from the preceding acts of judgment, i.e., they have not come to realize that Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and those allied with them had “spurned the LORD” (Num 16:30d). Even worse, they are refusing to ascribe to the LORD the mighty acts of judgment of the preceding day. It is intriguing to realize that this Israelite charge conveys the belief that “the people of the LORD” could be killed while the LORD was powerless or unconcerned to stop such from happening.

It is likely that listeners/readers have always felt a certain amount of surprise that the dramatic deaths of the dissidents in Num 16:31-35 were insufficient to lead to an Israelite awareness that Moses and Aaron were, without doubt, the leaders chosen by the LORD. It is also likely that the material has been purposefully composed so that it generates just such a surprise. The portrait effected is one of extreme torpidity on the part of Israel.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ This level of support for Korah’s rebellion serves to strengthen Budd’s view of “Korah’s congregation,” a view discussed above in footnote 56.

⁸⁰ This degree of unbelief after such spectacular and miraculous events may seem, to the modern reader, incomprehensible; and one might argue that such a presentation is untenable for any type of literature which is attempting to present a believable picture. However, a reading of myths extant during the biblical period is helpful, because these writings indicate that spectacular events were a part of the Ancient Near Eastern world, and that many of these spectacular events were performed by characters who, outwardly at least, were human. (See “The Story of Two Brothers” and “The Epic of Gilgamesh” in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969], 23-25 & 72-99), and

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Numbers 17:7/16:42 portrays the LORD reacting immediately to the complaint of the Israelites. "The glory of the LORD appeared" within the cloud covering the tent of meeting. This clearly indicates, as noted by Milgrom, "that God desired an audience" with Moses.⁸¹

In 17:8/16:43 Moses and Aaron respond to the LORD's summons; they go to the front of the tent of meeting, and, immediately (in 17:9-10/16:44-45) the LORD tells Moses to "get away from" (הָרָחוּק with קָח)⁸² "this congregation." These words, especially in light of the preceding events, indicate that the LORD is preparing to kill the Israelites, and, in response to that awareness, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces. Such a prostration on the part of just Moses occurs in 16:4, and Moses and Aaron have done so together in 16:22.⁸³ The same response here increases the reader's awareness that the LORD is preparing to strike the Israelites with killing force.

However, the text takes an unexpected and unprecedented turn in 17:11/16:46. It

even more relevant is the fact that Ex 7:8-12, 20-22; 8:6-7, 16-19; 9:11 report that miracles were performed by non-Israelites (i.e., Egyptians) who were opposing the will of the LORD at the time that they performed those miracles.

It would seem, therefore, that when miracles are thought to be performed by various people through the agency of various powers, good *or* evil, no miracle or series of miracles necessarily elicits trust or loyalty toward the wonder worker(s). When the observers of a wonder do not put their trust in the wonder worker, which is the response of Israel here, it would seem to indicate that the observers are skeptical of that wonder worker, but not of his ability to accomplish mighty works. The doubts are with reference to items like the wonder worker's motives, his source of power, and/or his adequacy to fulfil his commitments and promises. Such, it would appear, is the case in Num 16-17.

⁸¹ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 141.

⁸² HKB, 341.

⁸³ See footnotes 52 & 54 above for a discussion of the three reports of Moses or Moses and Aaron prostrating themselves in Num 16-17.

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does not begin by referring to any action on the part of the LORD or to an intercessory prayer from Moses or Aaron, instead Moses tells Aaron to use his censer—the censer revealed by 16:6-7, 16-18, 35 to be the censer chosen by the LORD—to make atonement for the people. In 17:12-15/16:47-50 Aaron does as Moses instructs and the desired effect is achieved, i.e., a divine plague—which still proves fatal for 14,700 people—is stopped from spreading further. This is an intriguing passage because it reveals that Moses knows what to do to neutralize a divinely generated plague even when there is no clear indication that the plague is something which the LORD wants to have stopped. This is similar to Moses knowing in advance that Dathan and Abiram would be swallowed up by the earth, and the effect of both of these items is to confirm and accentuate the close connection between Moses and the LORD. The actions narrated in 17:12-15/16:47-50 also demonstrate that Aaron's divinely ratified censer is indeed able to mediate between the LORD and the people. Surely such is intended to provide incontrovertible proof of the efficacy of both Aaron and his censer. As a result, two key goals of Num 16-17 are maintained—to confirm Aaron as the LORD's chosen high priest and to confirm that Moses is the one who best knows the mind and will of God.

Now we come to the story of Aaron's staff that budded (Num 17:16-26/1-11), and it is worth noting that the Hebrew Bible's division of this material has significance. By placing this story of Aaron's staff within the same chapter as the material concerning his censer, a clearer sense of thematic continuity is maintained which is somewhat blurred by the LXX/English arrangement of this material. This thematic continuity is built around the role of Aaron, and it is his role which ties all segments of Num 16-17

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together.⁸⁴

Milgrom's prefatory analysis of Num 17:16-26/1-11 is worth quoting at length because of its sensitivity to the point of this material from a canonical perspective.

Milgrom writes,

The principal instigators have died by earthquake and fire. Great numbers of the contentious people have been cut down by the plague. However, more persuasion is necessary if all are to be convinced that Aaron has been chosen above 'the LORD's people' (17:6), that is, the chieftains. The test of the staff is devised to settle this doubt once and for all.⁸⁵

Our purpose dictates that we focus primarily upon vv. 20/5 & 25/10 because they give the divine goal for the budding of Aaron's staff. The LORD says, in v. 20/5, that the goal was to "allay"⁸⁶ or "drain off"⁸⁷ (ַךְ־שׁ) from upon *me* the murmurings of the sons of Israel which they are murmuring against *you*" (the "you" are Moses and Aaron), but, in v. 25/10, the LORD's goal is "so that their murmuring against *me* might end and they shall not die." This seeming ambivalence concerning the real target of Israel's murmuring accords well with the previously analyzed material of both Exodus and Numbers (including Num 16:11) in which murmuring against Moses or Moses and Aaron is, in fact, mur-

⁸⁴ The reader may doubt that the role of Aaron is that which unites Num 16-17 due to the awareness that the rebellion led by Dathan and Abiram is primarily a rebellion against the leadership of Moses. However, one should remember that Dathan and Abiram are joined in the biblical narrative to Korah, and Korah's objective is to contend against the special status of Aaron. One should also note that Korah's rebellion is the primary rebellion of Num 16 (it receives the most space) and it is through Korah that the two groups of dissidents are joined.

⁸⁵ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 142.

⁸⁶ BDB, 1013.

⁸⁷ HKB, 369.

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murmuring against the LORD, although such is not the murmurers' intention.⁸⁸ Clearly such is the case here as well, because the murmurers have not been consciously murmuring against the LORD, but the words of the LORD express no doubt that the LORD is offended by their murmuring and, more significantly, that the LORD is certain that it is he against whom they have been murmuring.

Numbers 17:27-28/12-13 reveal that the Israelites have been sobered by all that has gone on, and that they are finally showing the kind of reverence which is appropriate to the tabernacle and the service of the LORD. However, on first sight, these two verses might seem to be out of place; it might seem that they would be more appropriate after the report of the deaths by divine fire of the 250 Levites (i.e., immediately after Num 16:35).⁸⁹ However, by placing them here the canonical text ties this material together and accentuates the fact that all that has gone on in these two chapters has directly related to the tabernacle and those who serve in it. The words of these two verses also provide some closure relative to the narration of the preceding events because they reveal that finally some of these events, in the end, had a significant effect upon the Israelites. By looking ahead, the reader realizes that the material contained in Num 17:27-28/12-13 leads naturally into Num 18 (a chapter outside the scope of the present study) which describes the duties of the Levites who are to serve in the tabernacle so that the people as a whole will not be harmed by the holy power of the presence of the LORD residing there.⁹⁰ This

⁸⁸ See Ex 16:2, 7-12; Num 11:4-20; 14:1-11, 26-27, 36-37 and related analysis above.

⁸⁹ Such appears to be suggested by Gray, 218.

⁹⁰ Gordon J. Wenham in "Aaron's Rod (Numbers 17:16-28)," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 280-81

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concludes our analysis of Num 16-17.⁹¹

The **object** of the complaints contained in these two chapters has been commented upon above relative to Num 16:11; 17:20/5 & 25/10, and it has been pointed out that these three verses reveal something that has been seen in preceding narratives, i.e., a complaint consciously directed against either Moses alone or Moses and Aaron alone is effectively a complaint against the LORD. Such is true in the earlier narratives because

makes a compelling case for the aptness of the placement of this story and the verses which conclude it. He says (p. 280) that the story of the deaths of the Levites "shows the special status of Aaron in a negative way, by relating what happens to those who usurp his prerogatives" and the story of Aaron saving the people with his censer "gives a positive demonstration of his effective mediation making atonement for the people's sin"; the story of Aaron's rod concludes this series because that story "is seen as reenacting and confirming the unique position of Aaron and the tribe of Levi" He points out that the rods other than Aaron's represented tribes other than the tribe of Levi. He then writes (p. 281), "When the rods are removed from the tent of meeting, they show no signs of life. Their deadness symbolizes the death that will overtake these tribes if they attempt to enter God's presence. Hence their outcry >Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Everyone who comes near . . . to the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?< (vv. 27-28)."

⁹¹ Due to the contorted nature of Num 16-17, the interpreter who is seeking to understand this material as both coherent and cohesive within the canon must resist with greater effort the temptation to pull this material apart in atomistic fashion without ever determining what its present shape effects. As a rationale for resisting this temptation it should be pointed out that atomistic approaches to the OT which do not include an eventual return to the text as it functions within the canon can only provide an atomized theology, and, although it is undeniable that any "theology" is, to some degree, a construct *from* the text rather than a purely objective description of the theology found *within* the text, to be satisfied with a disjointed theology based upon isolated fragments dissociated from the canon using critical techniques which are clearly not native to the mindset of the ancient world and are at variance with the purposes which the canon reveals from within, is to be satisfied with a theology that is even more a construct *from* the text than is necessary. Such should be avoided. The analysis of Num 16-17 above was constructed in an effort to demonstrate how to stay true to the search for the theology of the Bible while dealing with a passage that virtually entices the modern reader to be diverted from that search.

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the complaint relates to a work of the LORD (the exodus), or the food provided by the LORD (manna), or the purpose of the LORD (to give Israel the land of Canaan). In Num 16-17 the reader finds that the murmuring of Korah and company is seen, in 16:4-11, as a complaint effectively against the LORD because the dissidents are complaining about the LORD's decision to select Moses and Aaron for special roles among the people. In Num 17:20/5 & 25/10 the specific complaining to which the LORD refers is left unclear, indicating either that any and all of Israel's murmuring from Ex 15 through Num 17 is intended or that just the murmuring of Num 16-17 is intended. Whichever referent one chooses, it is important to note that there is a cause for murmuring reported in these two chapters which has not been found previously; that cause is the LORD's work of judgment (in context the judgment recorded in Num 16:31-35). The Israelites complain, in Num 17:6/16:41, concerning this judgment and, even though they blame it upon Moses and Aaron and appear to be intentionally murmuring against them alone, it is clear, from the LORD's response in the verses which follow, that he is very certain that they are murmuring against *him* and against *his* judgment. Their refusal or inability to recognize that such is the case would appear to be as indictable as is the murmuring itself.⁹²

The significant **similarities** between Num 16-17 and Ex 16 are as follows. First, both employ the murmuring motif and utilize מר (murmur) several times. Num 16-17 uses this root five times (16:11; 17:6/16:41; 17:20/5 [used twice]; 17:25/10), while Ex 16 uses it

⁹² For a recent but very different approach to this text from the perspective of Jewish thought, see J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Case of Korah Versus Moses Reviewed," *JSJ* 24 (June 1993): 59-78.

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eight times. Second, the narrator in both Num 16-17 and Ex 16 identifies Moses and Aaron as the target of Israel's murmuring, and yet both narratives also reveal that the LORD is the *effective* target of both complaints. Third, both narratives include a complaint which indicates the belief that responsibility for the exodus rests not with the LORD but with Moses (Num 16:12-14) or Moses and Aaron (Ex 16:3). Fourth, both narratives contain a complaint which expresses strong dissatisfaction with the exodus (Num 16:12-14 & Ex 16:3). Fifth, in both Num 16-17 and Ex 16 the complainers express nostalgia for Egypt. Sixth, Moses' statement, directed against Korah and the rebellious Levites in Num 16:11, which says, "Therefore, you and all your company are gathered against the LORD, and Aaron, what is he that you murmur against him?" is strikingly similar in both intent and wording to Moses' statements in Ex 16:7-8. Seventh, in both narratives it is reported that *all* of the Israelites complained (Ex 16:2 & Num 17:6/16:41). Eighth, in both narratives the "glory of the LORD" appears (Ex 16:10 & Num 16:19; 17:7/16:42). Ninth, in both narratives an object is placed "before the Testimony" (Ex 16:34 & Num 17:25/10).

The significant **dissimilarities** between Num 16-17 and Ex 16 are as follows.

First, unlike Ex 16, Num 16-17 does not employ $\pi\theta\eta$. Second, Num 16-17 reports a different first response to the murmuring of Israel than that reported in Ex 16. Third, the complaint in Num 16-17 is much more prolonged than is the complaint in Ex 16. Fourth, the LORD's reaction to the complaint in Num 16-17 is very different from that reported in Ex 16; the LORD's reaction in Ex 16 could be described as positive, even optimistic, while in Num 16-17 the LORD's active response to the various complaints of Israel is

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nothing short of cataclysmic (the earthquake in 16:31-32, the fire in 16:35, and the plague in 17:11-14/16:46-49); the LORD's verbal responses are very strong as well, and they initiate intercessory prayer from Moses and Aaron in 16:22 and intercessory action prescribed by Moses and performed by Aaron in 17:11-13/16:46-48. These intercessions by Moses and Aaron appear to be all that save the people from total destruction. Fifth, in Num 16-17 Moses and Aaron, as noted above, intercede for the people. No such intercession is required in Ex 16. Sixth, in Num 16-17 one finds a difference between the material here and that in Ex 16 that was also noted relative to Num 11:4-35. In both of these Numbers passages a smaller group of people within the nation as a whole initiates the complaining which follows. Even though it is only some among the people as a whole who break the commands in Ex 16 (see vv. 20 & 27), their actions do not appear to inspire others to rebel with them. Seventh, the material of Num 16-17 is, in comparison to Ex 16, highly contorted. The phrase, highly contorted, is used with reference to the two following characteristics of Num 16-17:⁹³ first, the indications that these chapters are a composite made up of previously independent narratives; second, "the tracks" which the construction of this composite has left. These contortions are due apparently to the sheer amount and diversity of material which has been brought together in these two chapters as well as the purpose to which this material has been put, a purpose which was more difficult to achieve than was the case with the other pentateuchal complaint

⁹³ These two characteristics are found in other complaint narratives but, in the view of this author, they are not as obvious in these other narratives as they are here.

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narratives, including Ex 16.⁹⁴ Eighth, Num 16-17 reports a complaint that was clearly generated by the desire for status and/or position, and, therefore, the complaint amounts to a struggle for power. Such is not the case in Ex 16. Ninth, in Num 17:6/16:41 the phrase כָּל־עֵדוּת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל occurs. This phrase occurs twice in Ex 16:1-2, but the difference between its use in Num 16-17 and Ex 16 is instructive. In Ex 16 the phrase occurs at the beginning of the narrative to report that “all the congregation of the sons of Israel” murmured (v. 2), but this phrase does not recur in Ex 16 after v. 2, and the later examples of un-faith are ascribed only to some of the Israelites. In Num 16-17 it is the reverse; some of the Israelites initiate the complaint; but it results in “all the congregation of the sons of Israel” complaining. Tenth, in Num 16-17 the role of Aaron is the uniting feature in each segment of this rather diverse narrative; such is not the case in Ex 16.

The effect of Num 16-17 on the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith is considerable, but it can be summarized under six points. First, its relative nearness to the murmuring narratives found in Num 11-14 heightens the reader's awareness of the dullness of Israel relative to spiritual insight and faith. Second, the fact that Moses com-

⁹⁴ My view of this material's nature is not dissimilar to the view expressed by Magonet, “The Korah Rebellion,” 22. He notes that “there are clearly many inconsistencies and problems within our chapter that remain to be tackled, and it would be a mistake to claim that all of them can be resolved. The point that I have tried to make is that by looking at the story of the rebellion within the context of the Book of Numbers, the issues that are raised can be seen to belong to the book as a whole and do not suddenly appear in the chapter before us. The questions of political and spiritual leadership are major ideas that the Book explores, and the Korah rebellion serves to dramatise them. Furthermore, it is possible to see within chapter 16 more of a unity of thought than merely the juxtaposition of two or three separate strands, and that some of the apparent ‘joins’ are less clumsy than first appears.”

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mands the rebellious Levites to hear/heed (שמעו) his words in Num 16:8 takes the reader's mind back to Ex 20:19 where the people say that they will heed (שמעו) what Moses says. Such a connection in a context in which some of Israel's prominent leaders show such little regard for Moses as the LORD's spokesman is another indication of the low value of this people's promises. Third, Num 16-17 reports a series of connected and interrelated complaints which seems to go on and on (a first time reader might wonder when it will ever end). For Israel to be able to sustain such a long and intense complaint and for it to require such diverse and awesome shows of divine power finally to silence, has the effect of portraying a people with an extremely hard heart. Third, by reporting such a prolonged and diverse set of events, all of which center around the role of Aaron, Num 16-17 reveals a focus for Israelite murmuring which is not reported elsewhere, and the divine support of Aaron in the face of this opposition likely served in later Israel to confirm the importance of the High Priest. Fourth, the pressure on both Moses and Aaron in this narrative is intense, and yet, they prove to be models of biblical leadership in that they constantly ascribe all the power and authority to the LORD (e.g., 16:4-11, 28-30) and they successfully intercede for the people (16:20-22; 17:8-13/16:43-48). However, the disastrous events relative to Moses and Aaron which are reported only three chapters later in Num 20:1-13, a passage with many links back to Num 16-17, may suggest that the toll on the spirits of Moses and Aaron through this difficult series of events is greater than these two chapters reveal. Fifth, Num 16-17's elevation of Aaron beyond that which is seen in previous complaint narratives is an important addition to the portrait

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under review. It is especially interesting due to the tragic demise of Aaron which results from the failure reported in Num 20. That demise is made more shocking by this presentation in Num 16-17.

We now turn to Num 20:1-13, a narrative which has been referred to as “one of the Gordian knots of the Bible”⁹⁵ due to the radical consequences which it recounts and the interpretive difficulties with which it confronts the modern reader. As a result, our analysis of Num 20:1-13 will be both careful and detailed.

The story opens with a travel itinerary (v. 1a-b). This is followed by the report of the death of Miriam⁹⁶ (v. 1c) which sets the stage for the remainder of this narrative with its information relevant to the deaths of Miriam’s two brothers.

Verses 2-3 appear, superficially, to be a very conventional opening for a divine provision narrative, because the people encounter and complain about a typical desert deprivation, the absence of water. However, in vv. 2b-3a, a unique feature relative to such complaints is reported; the Israelites “assembled (לָקַח) against Moses *and* Aaron” (v. 2b) but “contended” (בָּרַח, v. 3a) with Moses alone.⁹⁷ This split emphasis produces a

⁹⁵ Jacob Milgrom, “Magic, Monotheism and the Sin of Moses,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and R. W. Green (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 251.

⁹⁶ See Phyllis Trible, “Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows,” *BRev* 5 (Fall 1989): 14-25. In this article Trible makes a persuasive argument for a connection between the report of Miriam’s rebellion in Num 12 and her death notice here through the ritual prescriptions in Num 19.

⁹⁷ Gray, 260 views this unusual feature as an indication that here the canonical text moves from the P document to a JE source. Whatever one’s view of that source-critical evaluation the exegete should seek to determine the effect and the theological significance of such

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noteworthy effect. It presents Aaron as very much in the eye of the storm and yet, at the same time, presents Moses as pre-eminent in the events which follow.

Israel's complaint begins in v. 3b with the people's wish to have died with their "brothers who died before the LORD." The reference to those who died "before the LORD" (לְפָנֵי יְהוָה) could point to all or one of three groups of people. It could refer to Nadab and Abihu who, in Lev 10:1-3 and Num 3:4, died "before the LORD" because they "offered strange fire;" it could refer to the ten faithless spies who, in Num 14:37, died "before the LORD," or it could refer to those who died as participants in Korah's rebellion in Num 16 (Num 16:16-19 & 35 make clear that the group specifically associated with Korah died "before the LORD").

Most scholars connect the complaint in Num 20:3 to the rebellion of Num 16⁹⁸ and such a connection is to be favoured for at least two reasons. The first reason is the contextual proximity of Num 16 and Num 20:1-13. The second reason is that Korah and his fellow agitators are the only relevant group with which the Israelites were in such deep sympathy that they opposed Moses and Aaron on behalf of those rebels even after their deaths (17:6/16:41).⁹⁹ The indication, therefore, is that the rebellion in Num 16 is

an arrangement. Pages 199-200 below contain a discussion of the significance of the reference to Aaron in v. 2b as well as his significance in the narrative as a whole.

⁹⁸ E.g., Gray, 260-61; Ashley, 381; Milgrom, *Numbers*, 164; Budd, 218; Levine, 484; and Marsh, 2:238.

⁹⁹ It is also noteworthy that the rebellion of Num 16:1ff gives no indication that the Israelites ever conceded that the LORD was the one who engineered the deaths of any of those who rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron in Num 16-17. In Num 17:6/16:41 they clearly blame the deaths of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and company upon Moses and Aaron and not the LORD, and there is no suggestion anywhere in

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remembered by the people of Num 20 with a sufficient degree of approval to enable them to feel that to have died in that rebellion, a rebellion not intentionally against the LORD but against Moses and Aaron¹⁰⁰ (see Num 16:1-11 & 17:6/16:41), would have been preferable to dying of thirst in the desert of Sin.¹⁰¹ Such a sentiment would have been particularly galling to Moses and Aaron because it was due to their pleas in Num 16:22 that the LORD did not slay the entire congregation, and it was due to the priestly work of Aaron acting upon instructions from Moses that a divine plague was checked before it killed “all the congregation” in 17:6-15/16:41-50, a plague which resulted from the Israelites’ accusation in 17:6/16:41 that Moses and Aaron (and, quite clearly, not the LORD) were responsible for the deaths of “the LORD’s people” through the acts recorded in Num 16:31-35, acts which the narrative ascribes to the LORD (see vv. 30 & 35).

The people’s complaint in Num 20 continues in vv. 4-5 with two accusing questions. In v. 4 they ask why Moses and Aaron (the subjects of the second masculine plural verb, **מִיָּבִיִּי**) have brought “the assembly of the LORD” into the desert to die. In v. 5 they ask why Moses and Aaron (the subjects of the second masculine plural verb,

Num 16-17 that they ever repented for their support of this rebellion or their accusation against Moses and Aaron.

¹⁰⁰ Num 26:9-11 makes clear that the rebellion of Korah and company was, in fact, against the LORD. Such a description does not militate against the presentation in Num 16:1ff which reveals that this was not the conscious intention of those rebels.

¹⁰¹ The very negative canonical assessment of the sin of Korah and company is made clear by the reference to it in Num 27:1-11 (the reference to Korah’s rebellion is in v. 3).

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אָנְחָה לַיהוָה¹⁰² have brought them up from Egypt to “this evil place” with all the deficiencies which they list. The purpose, therefore, of Num 20:3b-5 is to recount another complaint which is consciously targeted only at Moses and Aaron, but a complaint that, if made at all, should have been targeted at the LORD because he was the one who determined their route (see Num 9:15-23 & 10:13) and was, therefore, responsible for the fact that they were in the desert of Sin, and he was the one who brought them up out of Egypt away from the foods available there.

Verse 6a-b reports that the reaction of Moses and Aaron to the complaint of the people was to fall “upon their faces.” We have seen this response to Israel’s rebellions before (Num 14:5; 16:4, 22, 17:10/16:45) but the incident in Num 20:6 is different because Moses and Aaron move to “the doorway of the tent of meeting” before falling on their faces. Exodus 29:11, 42-44; 33:7-11; Lev 1:3-5; Num 12:4-8; 16:18-19; & Dt 31:14-15 make clear that “the doorway of the tent of meeting” served as a place to come before the LORD and a place to communicate with him. Therefore, this particular instance of

¹⁰² M. Margalio, “The Transgression of Moses and Aaron: Num. 20:1-13,” *JQR* 74 (October 1983): 201-04 argues that these second masculine plural verbs apply to Moses and Yahweh and express the people’s displeasure with the LORD and with Moses but “much less against Aaron, who appears everywhere as a secondary figure” (p. 204). This proposal seems highly unlikely due to the people’s attachment to the rebels of Num 16:1ff who were not intentionally rebelling against the LORD but against their leaders and due to the people’s description of themselves as אֲנַחְנוּ לַיהוָה in Num 20:4. (The people are unlikely to refer to themselves as “the assembly of the LORD” at the same time that they are consciously rebelling against that same LORD in the manner required by Margalio’s proposed reading).

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falling on their faces is an effort to communicate with the LORD.¹⁰³ Num 20:6c-8 reveals that the effort was successful, because these verses report both that “the glory of the LORD” appeared to them at that place and that the LORD then spoke giving Moses instructions concerning how to respond to the people’s complaint.

In vv. 7-8 the LORD gives three instructions whereby the people can be provided with water. First, Moses is to “take the rod;” second, Moses and Aaron are to “assemble the congregation,” and third, Moses and Aaron are to “speak to the rock” before the people.

¹⁰³ However, Nathaniel Helfgot in “‘And Moses Struck the Rock’: Numbers 20 and the Leadership of Moses,” *Trad* 27 (Spring 1993): 52 writes, “The text in Numbers does not indicate that Moses turned to God for help in dealing with this crisis, as he did in Exodus.” He contends that Moses and Aaron’s act of going to the tent of meeting “indicates a retreat of some sort.” He then notes their act of falling face down and insists that this is a further example of Moses and Aaron withdrawing from the situation at hand; he refers to the example of Moses and Aaron falling face down in Num 14, which he interprets as an example of Moses and Aaron having “retreated from confronting the people, leaving that for others to do.” Such an interpretation is unconvincing due to the stated purpose of the doorway of the tent of meeting (as noted above) and the actual effect of Moses and Aaron falling face down at that place (i.e., the LORD speaking to them and giving them the requisite instructions).

Helfgot’s entire interpretation of this narrative is unconvincing. One of the reasons is that his interpretation is based firmly on the assumption that this narrative “is the first episode recorded after the generation of the Exodus has passed from the scene; it is the first narrative of the new generation” (Ibid., 54). Milgrom, *Numbers*, 164 provides an excellent summary of the chronological difficulties of this narrative and, thereby, reveals that the canonical form of this narrative does not appear to be interested in revealing which generation of Israelites is involved. Since the canonical form of the text is not clear on this matter it is difficult to believe that one must know that Moses is confronting a new generation of Israelites in Num 20:1-13 in order accurately to interpret that narrative. Surely it is more likely that the new generation begins sometime after the death of Aaron in Num 20:28 (see Num 33:8 for the chronological placement of Aaron’s death) or just prior to the second census in Num 26 (in support of this view see Milgrom, *Numbers*, xiii).

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In v. 9 Moses carries out the first of the LORD's instructions when he takes "the rod from before the LORD." Note that the text says that Moses did "just as (כַּאֲשֶׁר) he (i.e., the LORD) commanded him."

In v. 10a Moses and Aaron carry out the second of the LORD's instructions; "they assembled the assembly unto the mouth of the rock." Although this action appears to be in perfect conformity with the LORD's instructions, the narrator does not say, as he does in v. 9, that their action was just as the LORD had commanded. This difference suggests that the text is placing special emphasis upon the LORD's command concerning the rod and Moses' obedience to that command.

In vv. 10b-11a Moses deviates from strict adherence to the instructions given by the LORD.¹⁰⁴ He does not speak to the rock but addresses the people, and he, in advance of the water's appearance, ascribes credit for this divine provision to himself and Aaron.¹⁰⁵ Then he uses the rod to strike the rock twice when he has not been told to

¹⁰⁴ For a critical analysis of all the explanations put forward in an effort to determine what actually constituted the transgression of Moses and Aaron in vv. 9-11 see Milgrom, "Magic," 251-58. Although the conclusions of this paper differ greatly from those expressed by Milgrom, much of his critique of other conclusions is accepted as sound.

¹⁰⁵ Margaliot, 213-15 treats the second person plural verb here as a reference to Moses and the LORD and not to Moses and Aaron, but the base for such a viewpoint has already been shown to be untenable in footnote 102 above. Eugene Arden in "How Moses failed God," *JBL* 76 (March 1957): 50-52 also treats the second person plural verb here as a reference to Moses and the LORD. It is interesting to note, however, that his view of what constituted the transgression bears a few important similarities to the view of this thesis. He writes (p. 52), "Moses in his anger, takes it on himself to assume that God is exasperated too, that the two of them, Moses and God, are one in their response. The tone in which [Moses] addresses the people is that of annoyance and condescension; the 'we' is blasphemous." Then, in the final paragraph (p. 52), Arden writes, "[God] instructs his intermediary, Moses, to gather the congregation and to speak 'unto the rock

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strike it at all.¹⁰⁶ A reader familiar with the Pentateuch's portrait of Moses (and Aaron)

before their eyes.' The clear implication is that the people will rejoice at the sight of abundant water, and they will doubly and trebly rejoice at the knowledge that their God is with them and is showing himself by one of his happiest miracles. It is this circumstance which Moses, in a fit of indignation, turns into a bitter denunciation; he curses the people, and in smiting the magic rod against the rock, destroys the hallowed moment that God had so clearly intended."

Kathryn Doob Sakenfeld in her "Theological and Redactional Problems in Numbers 20:2-13," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger, JSOTSup, 37 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985): 148 is in agreement with the viewpoint of this thesis that the "we" in Num 20:10 refers to Moses and Aaron and not Moses and God. However, she suggests (pp. 150-51) that God is not angry at the people here for complaining, instead the LORD views this as an opportunity to show mercy to his people—an opportunity which Moses and Aaron negate. Therefore, she contends that the sin of Israel's leaders in Num 20 is primarily their attitude toward the people, an attitude not of mercy but of "harsh judgment," and in the final sentence of her article she writes, "Because God cares for the people, unfaithful leadership, especially any leadership which disclaims or disparages the flock, will not finally endure" (p. 151). This proposal is weak, from a canonical perspective for two reasons. First, Moses' angry words here are not nearly as strong as some of the LORD's reactions to complaining elsewhere (e.g., Num 11:1-3), so to build an interpretation on the view that Moses' words here are condemned because they are too harsh is weak. Second, Sakenfeld's proposal *requires* the assumption that the LORD is not angry in Num 20 with regard to the people's complaint, and that assumption is based entirely upon the fact that the text does not report that the LORD is angry. A reader that remembers what has been conveyed clearly in previous complaint narratives will know that at least since Num 11:1 the LORD has been displeased with the people's complaints, and the very fact that the LORD instructs Moses to take the rod which connects back to Num 16-17 indicates that he is making a connection between the complaints there and the complaint here, and it is clear that the LORD was not happy about the complaints in Num 16-17.

¹⁰⁶ At least two contemporary scholars argue that the striking of the rock was not a transgression on the part of Moses, e.g., Margaliot, 206-07; and Milgrom, "Magic," 256. Margaliot's view grows out of his flawed decision to make Moses and the LORD, and not Aaron, the subjects of several of the second person plural verbs in this narrative as well as his effort to ascribe a role "not smaller in any way than that of Moses" to Aaron in the transgression committed at this place (Margaliot, 220). As will be seen in the analysis which follows there is no need to deny that the striking of the rock was a part of this transgression to ascertain Aaron's part in it.

Milgrom's interpretation is based upon his view that the text is flawed and that the

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is surprised, because there is no other occasion where Moses' (and Aaron's) careful obedience of the LORD's instructions is not either recounted as a part of the narrative or clearly implied. For example, in the two other provision narratives in which Moses has an agency role (Ex 15:22-27 & 17:1-7)¹⁰⁷ the text leaves no doubt concerning Moses' adherence to the LORD's instructions. It is particularly noteworthy that in Ex 17:1-7's very similar narrative Moses is told what to do, and it is simply but unequivocally

narrative originally reported that the LORD had commanded Moses to strike the rock. To emend a text is an option that this author will take only when the text is incoherent as it stands. Even though the text of Num 20:1-13 is difficult it does not require emendation to impart a coherent and theologically significant message which is well suited to the desert period cycle of stories as a whole.

However, it is natural for a reader of Num 20:1-13 to wonder why the LORD told Moses to take the rod if he was not supposed to use it. One should remember that the rebellion in Num 20:1-13 has already been linked to and is very similar to the rebellion in Num 16:1ff, a rebellion which leads to the special designation of Aaron as the LORD's chosen High Priest through the miraculous budding of Aaron's rod (apparently the same rod with which Moses struck the rock in Num 20:11). Following the budding of Aaron's rod, Moses is instructed, in Num 17:25/10, to "put back Aaron's rod before the Testimony; you shall keep it as a sign for the sons of rebellion that their murmurings against me shall cease and they shall not die." That means that the rod represented the LORD's designation of Aaron and was to stop the type of murmuring reported in Num 16:1ff because the people were to look at it and remember that to murmur against Moses and Aaron was equivalent to murmuring directly against the LORD. The presence of the rod in Num 20 was to reveal a chain of command (from the LORD to his designated leaders). The rod, therefore, has an important role in the story even though it was not intended to be the means of providing the water. There is no canonical tension created by the very natural reading of this narrative which indicates that it was at least a part of the transgression of Num 20:1-13 for Moses to have used the rod to strike the rock when he was not instructed to do so. (The plausibility of such a reading was seen via William H. Propp's, "The Rod of Aaron and the Sin of Moses," *JBL* 107 [1988]: 22).

¹⁰⁷ Note that Moses is always given such a role when water is needed but never when the item to be provided is food. See Ex 15:25 & 17:5-6 and contrast with the food provision narratives of Ex 16 & Num 11:4-35. More will be said concerning this below in chapter seven.

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reported that he did as the LORD had instructed (וַיַּעַשׂ כַּכִּי הָאֱלֹהִים צִוְּתָהּ). Also relevant is the earlier material in the book of Exodus which consistently portrays the scrupulous obedience of Moses and Aaron to all of the LORD's instructions (e.g., Ex 7:6, 10, 20; 8:5-7, 16-17; 9:8-10, 22-23; 10:12-13, 21-22; 12:28, 50; 14:17 & 21, 26-27). Therefore, the transgression reported in Num 20:10b-11a should be understood as the departure from the LORD's instructions both by what Moses said ("Shall we bring forth water from this rock?") and by what he did (striking instead of speaking to the rock).¹⁰⁸

However, there are good reasons to argue that there is more to this transgression than the simple breaking of the divine instructions. If one makes the very natural assumption that the rod taken "from before the LORD" (v. 9) is the same rod that budded in Num 17, then this is the rod that symbolized the LORD's choice of Aaron (Num 17:20/5). It is also the rod that served "as a sign for the sons of rebellion that their murmurings against" the LORD "shall cease and they shall not die" (Num 17:25/10). These special functions were given to the rod just after the Israelites murmured against their leaders and accused them of making all the important decisions and producing all the powerful actions instead of the LORD (see Num 16:3, 11-14, 28-30; 17:6/16:41; 17:16-20/1-5). In Num 16-17 Moses and Aaron conduct themselves in such a way that the

¹⁰⁸ Finding a transgression here at all is a sharp contrast to the view of Elliott L. Binns, *The Book of Numbers*, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1927), 130 who writes, "The reason for the exclusion of Moses and Aaron from the land of promise is exceedingly obscure and from the present story no clue can be discovered: there is no lack of faith, no disobedience, or rebellion against Jehovah. It looks as if the sources, if they contained originally some sin of the two leaders, had been toned down and the real reason lost."

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people are presented with a clear alternative to their way of viewing the leadership of Israel, because Moses and Aaron speak and behave in a manner that consistently presents the LORD as the undisputed leader of Israel and Moses and Aaron as the LORD's chosen agents. Such is not the case in Num 20:1-13; here Moses speaks in a way that actually supports the Israelites' misguided notion that it is Moses and Aaron to whom they should look for powerful acts of provision and, concomitantly, in whom they should trust. In other words, Moses' words in Num 20:10 conform to the view for which the people are punished in Num 16 & 17.

Such an interpretation of the transgression of Moses and Aaron is additionally supported by the narrative in Num 11:4-35 which makes clear that at this earlier point in the desert period story cycle Moses' view of his role has been sufficiently corrupted that he feels that *he* must supply the people with the meat which they desire (Num 11:11-15). However, in Num 11:4-35 he does not make the mistake made here of communicating that viewpoint to the people.

However, to ensure that the reader is aware of how different Moses is in Num 11:4-35 and in Num 20:1-13 than in any of the other relevant narratives, it is useful to draw attention again to the words of Moses in some of the narratives previously analyzed and to notice an interesting similarity between the two narratives in which Moses' behaviour appears to be entirely out of character. First we go to previously analyzed narratives and note the ways in which Moses is so clear that the LORD is present and he is the one in charge. In Ex 14:13-14 Moses' words convey great confidence that it is the LORD who will deliver the Israelites from the Egyptian Army. In Ex 16:4-12 Moses and

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Aaron repetitively declare that the LORD is the real object of the people's murmuring because he is the one who "brought you out from the land of Egypt" (v. 6). In Ex 17:7 the name, Massah, which is chosen by Moses, reveals his disappointment that the people are still unsure of the LORD's presence among them. Notice especially that in all three of the divine provision narratives in Exodus (15:22-26; 16; 17:1-7), Moses does not complain about being responsible for the people's food or water needs and he does not do or say anything to indicate that he is the one doing the providing. When the reader comes to the book of Numbers all but two of the relevant narratives convey similar portrayals. Moses does not complain nor does he say or do anything inappropriate except in Num 11:4-35 and in Num 20:1-13; in fact, in Num 16-17, he and Aaron behave flawlessly in an extremely stressful situation. Numbers contains only two divine provision narratives, and they are the only two narratives which place Moses in a bad light. Is the material encouraging the reader to sense that there is something about responding to the people's complaining requests for food or water after Sinai that unsettles Moses? In Num 11:11-15, 21-22, the first of the two divine provision narratives in Numbers, Moses' words indicate that he feels like he has been given a responsibility impossible to fulfill; he becomes sarcastic and even doubts the power of God. In the second of these narratives, in Num 20:1-13, Moses appears to want the people to think that he and Aaron are the ones responsible for fulfilling their physical requirements. Is the intended effect of such a presentation to suggest that the physical requirements of this people weighed more heavily upon Moses (and Aaron?) than did the other burdens of leading this difficult people? This author finds such questions provocative. One thing is for sure,

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however, in Num 11:4-35 and in Num 20:1-13 the reader sees a very different Moses from the one found in any other desert period narrative. It is natural to ask why and to seek an answer. Since that provocative effect is present within all great literature, it is not unthinkable that the biblical literature has been shaped with the awareness that it would do the same.¹⁰⁹

To summarize the interpretation of Num 20:9-11 being advanced here, it is that this story is designed to teach that the LORD's appointed leaders are always to serve notice that it is the LORD who is the true leader of his people and it is he who powerfully acts to provide for and/or punish his people. Instead of conveying such a perspective Moses and Aaron's *speech* conveys that they are the responsible parties. In addition, Moses and Aaron's *actions* convey to the reader that Moses and Aaron are feeling some type of detachment from the LORD, because they have no qualms about deviating from his instructions to speak to rather than to strike the rock.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Questions remain for this author concerning why only in Numbers and why only when the issue is the provision of a physical necessity is Moses portrayed as guilty of something inappropriate. Are we to view Moses as somehow weaker after all that went on at Mt Sinai? Is it too far-fetched to connect it back to Ex 17:1-7, to the time when Moses was afraid of being stoned when the people were thirsty? Is it too far-fetched to suggest that every time the people complained about being hungry or thirsty the fear of being killed resurfaced? Such seems unlikely to this author, but what about the person or persons who framed this material? What was their intention? Is the fact that these two narratives both relate to the provision of a physical necessity simply accidental and intended to convey nothing at all? These questions cannot be answered with certainty, but hopefully the asking of them provokes the reader to search this material for more clues to its nature and the purpose it was intended to fulfill.

¹¹⁰ One could contend that the striking of the rock is no part of the transgression because an abundance of water (מים רבים) is made available as the result of that action. However, if an improper use of the rod should have negated this provision then the improper

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This interpretation of the transgression of Moses and Aaron in Num 20:1-13 is supported both by the way that the transgression is described in Num 20:12 and by the way that it is described elsewhere. In Num 20:12 the LORD says to Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not trusted in me to set me apart as holy (לְהַקְדִּישׁוּנִי) before the eyes of the sons of Israel, therefore you will not bring this assembly to the land which I have given them.” In Num 20:24 the LORD’s description simply refers to their transgression as rebellion, but in Num 27:14 it is once more described as a failure to consecrate the LORD as holy before the people (לְעֵינֵיהֶם בְּמִים לְהַקְדִּישׁוּנִי בְּמִים).¹¹¹ A similar description is found in Dt 32:51 which uses a piel form of שָׁדַשׁ to say that Moses and Aaron did not set the LORD apart as holy among the people (לֹא-קָדַשְׁתֶּם אוֹתִי בְּחֹדֶךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). The continued emphasis on setting apart the LORD as holy *before the people* favours the interpretation that their transgression had more to do with what was said rather than what was done because what was done, from a canonical perspective, would have not appeared to have been inappropriate due to the fact that Moses struck the rock when providing water in Ex 17:1ff and the people did not know how the LORD had told Moses to provide it on this occasion (note that Num 20:7 reports that the relevant instructions were

words should have had the same effect but obviously did not. The suggestion of this author is that the water came either because of the LORD’s loyalty to the people or because of the intrinsic/inherent power of “the rod from before the LORD.” Whatever the assumption, the water comes in spite of the transgression that was committed here, a transgression in both word and action.

¹¹¹ Num 27:14 contains the only other biblical usage of the hiphil infinitive construct of שָׁדַשׁ with a first person singular suffix.

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spoken only to Moses). In Ps 106:32-33 no form of שָׁדַק is employed, instead these verses refer to Moses, under the strain of the people's rebelliousness, speaking "rashly or unadvisedly (אֶטְדַּק)¹¹² with his lips."¹¹³ The pentateuchal descriptions of the transgression of Moses and Aaron indicate that the primary failing was the way that the LORD was portrayed by Moses and Aaron, i.e., he was not set apart as holy. The interpretation advanced in this paper is in harmony with such an understanding, but it goes further in that it suggests the way in which they failed to set the LORD apart as holy; they failed because Moses' *words* encouraged the people to believe that it was Moses and Aaron who were meeting their needs, and, by implication, not the LORD, or at least not the LORD alone. Psalm 106:33 fits in easily with such a reading because it focuses exclusively on Moses' *utterance* as that which was culpable.

It is appropriate to note that there is no reference to the striking of the rock by Moses at Meribah of Kadesh apart from Num 20:11. Although the interpretation advanced in this paper accepts the striking of the rock as a meaningful part of this narrative and as a part of the transgression,¹¹⁴ the primary focus is placed upon Moses' rash

¹¹² BDB, 104.

¹¹³ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 454 contends that "the text reads literally, 'he expressed with his lips,' that is, 'he blurted out,' indicating that his sin may not have been in what he said but in the bare fact that he spoke at all." However, the two other occurrences of the infrequently used verb אֶטְדַּק (Lev 5:4 & Prv 12:18) suggest that such a definition is somewhat forced, because in both of these other occurrences it appears that the verb is not just referring to the presence of speech where none would have been preferable but to a *quality* of speech concerning which silence is always preferable. (See BDB, 104; and HKB, 37 for recommended renderings which favour the understanding advanced above).

¹¹⁴ It should be noted that although no other biblical text refers to the striking of the rock

at Meribah of Kadesh, neither do any of the relevant texts contain any material which negates the possibility of it having taken place nor do they negate the possibility of it being a part of the transgression which took place there. The point to be emphasized is that the main emphasis of both the narrative in Num 20:1-13 and later references to the events recounted in that narrative is not upon some error of technique (striking instead of speaking) but upon something much bigger—an unacceptable presentation of the person and position of God, a presentation which has more to do with mouth than with arm. Remember that the people are not told *how* Moses and Aaron are to bring water from the rock. The reader is privy to information of which the people in Num 20 are unaware. The reader knows that something is wrong inside of Moses (and Aaron) when the rock is struck, but that is no part of the failure to set the LORD apart as holy, at least no part of it as it relates to “the eyes of the sons of Israel,” because “the sons of Israel” could not have known that anything was amiss in the technique employed here, especially from a canonical viewpoint from which many who were here would have also been at Massah/Meribah where Moses brought forth water by this very act of striking a rock.

The view that the striking of the rock was the transgression is favoured by Julius H. Greenstone in his *Numbers with Commentary*, *The Holy Scriptures with Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society: 1939), 214-15 (however, Greenstone presents other views as well and refers to this view as “not entirely satisfactory”); and by Alfred Jepsen in “אָמָן ׳אָמָן,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:292-323. Jepsen says (1:304) that Moses and Aaron here “did not believe that God was able to supply water without their help, without smiting the rock. But that which seems possible and necessary to men is sin for Moses and Aaron, since it has to do with their attitude toward God; sin, the consequence of which can only be punishment—premature death. . . . Anyone who is not prepared to take God’s promises seriously perishes.”

The view of Greenstone and Jepsen is more persuasive, although still problematic, if the reader only considers Num 20:12 on its own, but, for the person seeking to view these narratives from a canonical perspective, a fundamental weakness of this interpretation is that it cannot be incorporated with the reference to this event in Ps 106:33 which places all the emphasis upon the words spoken here and makes no reference to the actions and it is difficult to incorporate the references to setting the LORD apart as holy *before the people*. The use of אָמָן׃ by the LORD in Num 20:12 arguably is easier to interpret if the transgression here was striking rather than speaking to the rock (see Jepsen, *ibid.*). However, this author would suggest that the phrase, וַיִּצְחַקוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּאֵזְרֵי הַיָּם, in Jon 3:5 as interpreted by Jepsen (1:305) be taken as a model for how to understand the LORD’s words in Num 20:12. Jepsen says of this phrase in Jon 3:5 that “It would be better to paraphrase the idea this way: They took Jonah’s message seriously as a message which actually came from God.” Such a reading seems entirely appropriate, both to the word אָמָן and its context in Jon 3:5. That insight, when applied to Num 20:12, pro-

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words rather than upon his unexpected act, an interpretation which conforms easily with all of the other canonical references to this event. Such conformity to all of the relevant texts is an important reason for preferring the above interpretation to its known alternatives.

Numbers 20:12 not only recounts the LORD's view of the transgression of Moses and Aaron, it also recounts the LORD's words concerning their punishment. Moses and Aaron will not lead the people into the land of Canaan. The punishment is both severe and theologically significant. Its significance is related to its severity because it shows how important it is for a leader of God's people to remember always to exalt the LORD and never self and to focus the eyes of the people upon the LORD, upon the LORD alone.

The fact that Moses and Aaron receive the same punishment (with the exception that Aaron dies first) can seem unfair, because it is Moses who speaks the damning words, and he is the one portrayed as departing from the LORD's instructions. However, the text deliberately conveys that Moses *and Aaron* are together in the actions that relate to this transgression even while portraying Moses as the primary actor. This is made clear by a review of Num 20:1-13, which reveals that the people "assembled against Moses *and Aaron*" in v. 2b, that the people accused both Moses *and Aaron* in the com-

vides a meaning which is not unnatural to this verb and is suitable to the total canonical presentation. That meaning can be paraphrased as follows: And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not take seriously my instructions which were designed to set me apart as holy before the eyes of the sons of Israel, therefore, you will not bring this assembly to the land which I have given them."

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plaint of vv. 4-5 (note the second masculine plural verbs and footnote 105), that Moses *and Aaron* sought guidance from the LORD in v. 6, that Aaron is clearly included in the LORD's words in v. 8 (note that he is referred to by name, and, even more importantly, note the three second masculine plural verbs which make clear that Moses *and Aaron* are to be involved in the LORD's plan to provide water), that Aaron is equally involved in the gathering of the people in v. 10a, and that Moses uses the first plural of מִזֶּה in v. 10d ("Shall *we* from this rock bring forth water for you?") which makes clear that Aaron will share in the credit for the provision to follow. Therefore, even though the text gives no indication of the role of Aaron relative to the transgression, it is careful to tie Moses and Aaron closely together so that the reader is encouraged to assume that Aaron was a willing partner with Moses in the offence committed at the waters of Kadesh. Such an assumption is then driven home when the same punishment is assigned to both of these leaders.

In v. 13a-b the etiology for the name of this place (Meribah) is given. It is interesting that although the people, in v. 3, are said to contend (בָּרָא) with Moses, here the name Meribah is explained as the result of the people contending "with *the LORD*." This reveals the pentateuchal concern to clarify the real target of a complaint even when the people are unaware of the identity of that target, a pentateuchal concern which has been noted previously several times (cf., Ex 16:6-12 & Num 16:11).

The meaning of v. 13c is unclear. The niphal of שָׁדַק (שָׁדַקְתָּ) appears to be reflexive in voice and to convey the meaning that the LORD proved/showed himself to be holy

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or sacred.¹¹⁵ The question for the reader is how did he do such at the same time that Moses and Aaron are portrayed as standing in the way of the LORD being set apart as holy? Milgrom lists four possibilities,¹¹⁶ but rates as unlikely the possibility that seems the most likely to this author; i.e., by punishing Moses and Aaron for transgressing against the holy status of the LORD, the LORD is demonstrating that he is holy and that he must be treated as such. Milgrom's view that Moses and Aaron are too distant to be an antecedent of בְּיָמָם and therefore their punishment cannot be the way in which the LORD proved/showed himself to be holy or sacred is felt by this writer to be a false reading. It seems natural to read בְּיָמָם to mean "among" the people of Israel as a whole and that the way in which the LORD showed himself holy among the people was by his treatment of Moses and Aaron after their actions and words at the water-giving rock. Such a reading is suggested by the fact that it is that punishment which is the most striking element of this narrative and it is that punishment which would most powerfully confront a people

¹¹⁵ See BDB, 873; and HKB, 313.

¹¹⁶ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 167 focuses on the phrase $\text{בְּיָמָם שֶׁיִּקְרָא}$ and asks, "What is the antecedent of בְּיָמָם ? Does it mean 'through which' or 'through whom'? Three possibilities have been proposed. The first, Moses and Aaron, has the advantage of the nearest parallel, Nadab and Abihu, by whose death the Lord sanctified Himself (Lev 10:3). However, Moses and Aaron are mentioned only in the previous verse—a distant antecedent. The second, the waters, implies that although Moses and Aaron defied God, God continued to supply Israel with water and thereby caused his name to be sanctified in Israel. The third, Israel, avers that by means of God's deliverance of Israel, He sanctified, that is, exalted, His name in the world (e.g., see Ezk 20:41). A fourth interpretation is even possible: By God's punishment of Israel (the forty years of wandering attributed to this sin; Ps 95:7-11), the Lord sanctified his name (e.g., Ezk 28:22)." The author of this thesis, as revealed above, reads בְּיָמָם to mean "among them," meaning among the people of Israel.

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who had been led by the same two leaders for forty years. It is also that punishment which most powerfully confronts the reader after following the life and career of Moses from Ex 2 and that of Aaron from Ex 4.

The most important **similarities** between Num 20:1-13 and Ex 16 are as follows. First, both recount a complaint generated by the absence of a physical requirement which the LORD then provides (Num 20:2-5, 11 & Ex 16:2-3, 13-15). Second, in both narratives Moses and Aaron are said, by the narrator, to be objects of the complaint, and yet, the narrative also makes clear that the complaint was effectively against the LORD (Num 20:2-3, 13 & Ex 16:3, 7-8). Third, both complaints express the belief that responsibility for the exodus rests not with the LORD but with Moses and Aaron (Num 20:2-4 [notice the second person plural verb in v. 4] & Ex 16:2-3). Fourth, both complaints express strong dissatisfaction with the exodus (Num 20:4-5 & Ex 16:3). Fifth, the people's complaints in both narratives express nostalgia for Egypt (Num 20:5; Ex 16:3). Sixth, both complaints refer to dying (Num 20:3-4; Ex 16:3). Seventh, there is a verbal similarity between Num 20:4's "Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this desert to die here, us and our beasts" and Ex 16:3's "for you have brought us out to this desert to kill all of this congregation with hunger." Eighth, both narratives are influenced significantly by a previous complaint narrative (Num 20:1-13 by Num 16-17 and Ex 16 by Ex 15:22-27). Ninth, both give an important role to Moses *and Aaron*, although the primary focus is upon Moses. Tenth, both narratives report an appearance of the glory of the LORD (Num 20:6; Ex 16:10).

The **dissimilarities** are as follows. First, neither the verb נָדַן nor the testing

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motif are found in Num 20:1-13. Second, in Ex 16:2 the people's complaint is referred to as murmuring (לון) and that root is extensively used in Ex 16 (vv. 2, 7-9, 12); לון does not occur in Num 20:1-13, but the verb ריב (to contend) is employed instead (v. 3). Third, Moses and Aaron have an agency role relative to the divine provision in Num 20:1-13 (vv. 8 & 11); they do not have such a role in Ex 16. Fourth, in Ex 16:2-3 the people apparently direct their complaint equally at both Moses and Aaron; in Num 20:2-5 they appear to hold both Moses and Aaron accountable for their present state of affairs, but they specifically contend with Moses (v. 3). Fourth, the first response to the people's complaint is different from that found in Ex 16; in Ex 16 Moses and Aaron have no need to call on the LORD after the people's complaint because he responds to the complaint immediately, while in Num 20:6 they move to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fall on their faces. Fifth, in Num 20:3 the people clearly demonstrate a desire to have died prior to the events recounted in this narrative; Exodus 16:3 may reveal the same desire, but it does not do so as clearly as does Num 20:3. Sixth, in Ex 16:2 the people are in need of food, while in Num 20:1-3 the people are in need of water. Seventh, in Num 20:1-13 the water which is provided is not used by the LORD as a test of the people as is the manna in Ex 16:16-30. Eighth, in Num 20:1-13 only one item is provided, water; in Ex 16 two items are provided, manna & quail. Ninth, the etiology in Ex 16:15 & 31 explains the name given to the divinely provided bread; the etiology in Num 20:13 explains the place name, Meribah.

The effect of Num 20:1-13 on the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating

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faith is substantial. First, this narrative reveals that the people's insistent belief that Moses or Moses and Aaron are really in charge has not diminished even this late in their desert wanderings. Such reveals their inability (or unwillingness) to connect meaningfully with the LORD through trusting obedience. Second, the corrosive effect of Israel's attitude on Moses (an effect observed above in connection with Num 11:4-35) is evident again, and that effect appears to have infected Aaron.

Now we turn to the brief report in **Num 21:1-3** of Israel's confrontation with the king of Arad and his people. This story is more significant than its brevity suggests due to its relationship to Num 14:39-45. When the relationship between these two passages is noted and utilized it becomes clear that Num 21:1-3 marks a turnaround in Israel's fortunes.

Earlier, in Num 14:39-45, Israel had sought to conquer the inhabitants of this same region without the help of God and in contravention of the LORD's word (see Num 14:41); and they had suffered a devastating defeat. The name, Hormah, in that earlier narrative causes the reader to think of the destruction which *Israel* suffered.

Numbers 21:1-3 reports another battle between the same two peoples, but this battle occurs almost forty years later¹¹⁷ and is different in two important ways from that earlier battle. The first difference is that Israel is not the initial aggressor in Num 21 as it is in Num 14. The second difference is that Israel is the victor in Num 21, a difference which

¹¹⁷ See the preceding pericope, Num 20:22-29, which reports the death of Aaron, an event which Num 33:38-39 places "in the fortieth year after the Israelites had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month" [NRSV].

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affects the reader's understanding of the place name, Hormah; here Hormah causes the reader to think of the destruction which Israel delivered rather than received.¹¹⁸

From this time through the end of the book of Joshua victories come for Israel with relative ease, (only the special case of Ai is an exception, Josh 7:1-8:29), and the changed outcome at Hormah is the signal of that change. The LORD is now very much with his people whenever they confront the inhabitants of Canaan, and, upon seeing the turnaround at Hormah, the people should have responded with gratitude, obedience, and even joy; because forty years of exclusion from a settled life in Canaan were about to come to an end.

Such a response, however, is not forthcoming. In the very next narrative, **Num 21:4-9**,¹¹⁹ the Israelites again complain. This narrative provokes numerous questions many of which are irrelevant to the present goal; all which that goal requires is briefly to summarize Num 21:4-9 then to list its similarities and dissimilarities relative to Ex 16 and finally to determine its contribution to the portrait under consideration. Therefore, we turn first to a brief summary of Num 21:4-9.

¹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that Num 21:3 reports that the LORD heeded/listened to the voice of Israel (וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל) as he has done so many times in this material in spite of the fact that they rarely heed/listen to his voice.

¹¹⁹ The interpretation of this passage by the conservative scholar R. K. Harrison in his *Numbers*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 275-77 serves to reveal the significant difference between the "theological interpretation" of this thesis and the apologetic approach of Harrison and others. The two pages which Harrison devotes to this passage contain very little of religious, moral, or theological value. His discussion is almost entirely devoted to a discussion of the possible route of the people's journey here and the type of serpents or worms which are employed to punish the people.

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This narrative reports that the Israelites, immediately after the second battle at Hormah, set off on a rather long jaunt to prepare for entry into Canaan from the east side of the Jordan River. While on this journey they become impatient (תִּקְצָר) and voice what in many ways is a typical Israelite complaint, i.e., they complain about the deprivations of desert life (shortages of food and water¹²⁰); they complain about the manna (see Num 11:6),¹²¹ and they articulate nostalgic longings for Egypt. However, one element of this complaint is strikingly unique; the text explicitly reports that the Israelites spoke against *God* as well as Moses (וַיִּדְבֹר הָעָם בְּאֵלֹהִים וּבַמֹּשֶׁה). This is a bold complaint. In no other desert narrative do the Israelites complain so clearly and so directly against

¹²⁰ An interesting feature of this narrative is that the narrator says that the people complain because they became impatient during the journey around Edom, but when the people's complaint is reported they complain about two somewhat contradictory items, i.e., the *absence* of food and water and some detestable food which *is available*. The most natural reading of the text is that there is food available (this author thinks that it is the manna), but they do not like it, and, as a result, they refer to it as “no food.” However, the narrator's report makes clear that the food and water had little to do with the complaint by giving the real cause—the people were impatient. Such a reading is supported by the fact that the LORD provides them with no food and no water, while in all other cases of legitimate need, even when the people's attitude is objectionable, the LORD supplies what is needed. The absence of any food or water provision here suggests that the real cause of their complaint was impatience and that they were facing no life threatening deprivation.

¹²¹ Although Ashley, 404 leaves open the possibility that the Israelites' complaint about the existing food supply concerns something other than the manna, it is much more likely that Wenham, *Numbers*, 157 is correct in assuming that the Israelites are complaining about the manna, because the people say that there is *no* food and yet complain about some food item that they do have. The most likely reading is that there is no naturally occurring food (אֵין לָהֶם) at this place and they no longer care for nor appreciate the divinely provided food, i.e., the manna. Such a reading is also encouraged by Num 11:6 which reports the people complaining explicitly about the manna. Such reveals that the people were capable of growing tired of this daily provision.

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God himself.¹²² As Fretheim says,

Up to this point the people had complained against Moses (and Aaron); now their murmurings are also directed against God himself (cf., Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:23). The good intentions of God for his people are here called into question, both with respect to redemption and providence. Thus a high point in the murmuring has been reached. It is outright rebellion.¹²³

In v. 6 we encounter $\text{ויַּפְּרֹשֶׁהוּ אֱלֹהִים}$, a phrase which presents both translation and interpretation problems.¹²⁴ However, for our purposes the important points are that the LORD apparently punished the people so quickly with $\text{ויַּפְּרֹשֶׁהוּ אֱלֹהִים}$ that Moses did not have to deal in any way with their complaint,¹²⁵ and the result of the LORD's punishment is that many died.

¹²² It is because the Israelites here complain directly and clearly against God thereby effecting, to use Milgrom's words, "the last and most grievous of Israel's wilderness complaints" (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 173), and because they complain here for the last time against the manna (initially provided in Ex 16) that this pericope is such a natural place to conclude the portrait which this chapter seeks to discern and analyze.

¹²³ Terence F. Fretheim, "Life in the Wilderness," *Dialog* 17 (Autumn 1978): 269-70. It should be noted that Joshua and Caleb indicate that the people's response to the report of the ten faithless spies was rebellion (Num 14:9), therefore, it would be more accurate to say that what makes Num 21's complaint worse than others is that they so explicitly include God as a target for their complaint—something not done previously.

¹²⁴ See Ashley, 404-05; Budd, 234; Milgrom, 174; and Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 157 for various viewpoints of the meaning and interpretation of this phrase.

¹²⁵ This is not, strictly speaking, a divine provision narrative because God does not respond to the people's complaint by giving them anything but punishing serpents. However, it is noteworthy that this is the only time in Numbers that the people complain relative to a physical necessity and Moses does not respond in some way that appears to be out of character (be reminded of his frustration and sarcasm in Num 11:10ff and his transgression in Num 20:10ff). However, it is also only the second narrative in either Exodus or Numbers in which the LORD apparently responds to a complaint with regard to a physical necessity before Moses even has an opportunity to do so (the other is Ex 16).

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Verse 7 is especially relevant to the present project because it records another element which is both significant and unique in the desert period story cycle—the people confess that they have sinned and that they have done so by speaking against the LORD *and against Moses* (דַּבְּרֵנוּ בִּיהוָה וְבַדָּבָר). The only other desert period narrative which reports that Israel confessed that they had sinned is Num 14:40, but Num 21:7's confession is much more surprising because it articulates the realization that a treatment of or response to Moses was sinful. This confession is also very significant because it is the first time since Ex 14:31 that the Israelites have connected so closely the LORD to Moses and it is the only time they have done so in the context of a complaint narrative. Verse 7 ends with Moses interceding with God on behalf of the people.

Verse 8 reports the LORD's response to Moses' intercession; he tells Moses to make a אֲשֶׁרֶשׁ and place it on a pole and promises that those bitten would live if they looked at it. Verse 9 reports that Moses made a אֲשֶׁרֶשׁ אֲשֶׁרֶשׁ and placed it as instructed and that the effect of looking upon it was exactly as the LORD had said.¹²⁶

There are at least six significant **similarities** between Num 21:4-9 and Ex 16. First, both complaints are concerned about a physical necessity. Second, both complaints express strong dissatisfaction with the exodus (Num 21:5 & Ex 16:3). Third, there is a verbal similarity between Num 21:5's "Why have you brought us from Egypt to die in

¹²⁶ For a summary of the archaeological findings which relate to אֲשֶׁרֶשׁ אֲשֶׁרֶשׁ see Karen Randolph Joines' article, "The Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult," *JBL* 87 (September 1968): 245-56.

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the desert for there is no food/bread (לֶחֶם) and there is no water and our soul loathes this wretched food/bread (לֶחֶם)” and Ex 16:3’s “you have brought us out to this desert to kill all of this congregation with hunger.” Fourth, in both stories the narrator makes clear that the complaint is directed at a leader or leaders (Num 21:5 & Ex 16:2-3). Fifth, in both narratives Israel expresses nostalgic longing for Egypt (Num 21:5 & Ex 16:3). Sixth, both complaints refer to the Israelite belief that they are going to die in the desert (Num 21:5 & Ex 16:3).

There are eight significant **dissimilarities** between Num 21:4-9 and Ex 16. First, the testing motif, so important in Ex 16, is not employed in Num 21:4-9. Second, the first response to the complaint in Num 21 is very different from the first response reported in Ex 16; in Ex 16 the LORD responds immediately by telling Moses of the forthcoming supply of bread, while Num 21 does not report that the LORD responded by supplying either food or water (both of which are referred to in the people’s complaint in v. 5), but, instead, in Num 21 the LORD appears to respond immediately by sending מַשַׁחַת וְיָמָה causing many to die. Third, Num 21 does not employ לֹן but refers to “the people speaking against God and Moses” (וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בְּאֵלֵהִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה). Fourth, Moses intercedes for the people in Num 21:7, something not required in Ex 16. Fifth, in Num 21 one of the elements of the people’s complaint is the lack of food in the desert although it appears that they do have food—i.e., the manna—while in Ex 16 they have no food at all. Sixth, in Num 21 the people complain because they are dissatisfied with the manna (see footnote 121), while in Ex 16 their complaint results in them receiv-

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ing the manna for the first time. Seventh, a very important difference between the complaint narrative in Num 21 and all other pentateuchal complaint narratives is that the people's complaint in Num 21 is explicitly directed against both God and Moses; in every other complaint narrative in which the narrator gives the target of the complaint that target is either Moses or Moses and Aaron. Eighth, Num 21:4-9 is different from Ex 16 in that the people, when afflicted by the $\square\text{פִּי\text{רְשָׁה} \square\text{שִׁנְיָה}$, do confess that they had sinned by speaking against the LORD and Moses (v. 7); although a confession of disobedience in Ex 16 would have been appropriate, none is reported.

The effect of this narrative upon the pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith is difficult to assess, because it contains both a uniquely bold complaint and a uniquely enlightened confession. The reader wonders if explicitly complaining against the LORD means that Israel's faith problems have worsened or if their confession concerning speaking against the LORD and Moses means that their spiritual insights have deepened. The reader might also wonder if chronological considerations should play a role in relating this narrative to the total canonical presentation of Israel in the desert; i.e., are we to assume that the generation forming Israel at this time is primarily the generation which remained after the death of all of those from twenty years old and upward as foretold in Num 14:29, and, if so, should the complaint narrative in Num 21:4-9 be viewed as the first opportunity to discern any differences between this new generation and the one which preceded it? These questions are not easy to answer. However, it is possible that the reader is to view the new generation to have begun at the death of Aaron in Num 20:28 (see Num 33:8 for the chronological placement of Aaron's death). It could

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also be that the Pentateuch does not see the coming of age of that new generation until sometime just prior to the second census in Num 26.¹²⁷ Even if the reader decides that by Num 21 the new generation is the one comprising Israel, the following facts discourage the reader from assuming that a profound and positive faith change has taken place within this possibly new nation of Israel. First, the people complain after another demonstration of the LORD's power (i.e., the victory at Hormah) as they have done many times before.¹²⁸ Second, the LORD has again responded to un-faith with a killing punishment.¹²⁹ Third, Israel is led into sin only a few chapters later (Num 25:1ff). However, it is possible that the text is encouraging the reader to realize that Israel here is more aware of the connection between Moses and the LORD, but the benefit that such an awareness could deliver is lessened because they appear to be as capable of complaining against Moses and the LORD as in the past they have been able to complain against Moses alone or Moses and Aaron alone. Therefore, in this, the last Pentateuchal complaint narrative, we see some changes; but there is no indication that the heart of this people has changed. Wrath incurring complaint still comes far too easily; the pressure upon Moses has not diminished, and, maybe most significantly, they still have a nostalgic longing for Egypt.

¹²⁷ In support of this view see Milgrom, *Numbers*, xiii.

¹²⁸ Compare the complaint reported in Ex 15:22-26 so soon after their deliverance at the Red Sea, the complaint in Ex 16 so soon after the sweetening of the water in Ex 15:22-26, the complaint in Ex 17:1-7 so soon after the provision of manna and quail, the idolatrous behaviour of Ex 32 occurring so soon after all of the powerful effects of the LORD's presence upon Mt Sinai, the two complaints in Num 11 so soon after leaving Mt Sinai, and the complaint in Num 17:6/16:41 so soon after the ground had opened and swallowed one group of rebels and fire from the LORD had consumed another.

¹²⁹ Compare Ex 32:35; Num 11:33-34; 14:36-37; 16:31-35; 17:10-15/16:45-50.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EXODUS SIXTEEN AND ITS CONTEXT

As has already been stated in the introduction, the primary goal of this final chapter is to bring together elements from the preceding six chapters in order to conclude this thesis. However, these elements are brought together within this chapter in an order which is the reverse of that found in the preceding six chapters. The preceding chapters began with Ex 16 (chapters one through four) and then moved out into the wider context (chapters five and six). In contrast, chapter seven will begin with the wider context and then move back to Ex 16. The reason for such a procedure is that Ex 16 is much more richly impacted by its overall context when the portrait created by that context is both sharpened and more tightly connected with Ex 16. As a result, section one of this chapter will sharpen this pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith and connect it more closely to Ex 16's manna and quail narrative. The method for achieving section one's purpose will be as follows: first, the three motifs featured in chapters one through three above will be employed to sharpen this thesis's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith and to reveal, even more fully, its flow; second, Ex 16's role as a part of this portrait will be revealed more explicitly than was the case in chapter five. Section one will conclude with a summary of its findings followed by a brief comment of contemporary application which flows naturally from this pentateuchal portrait.

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It should be noted that although section one of this chapter is built upon chapters five and six, it will not be a shorter version of those chapters. There will be some unavoidable overlap due to the fact that the same narratives will be under review. However, additional analysis of these same narratives from the perspective of three of Ex 16's motifs enriches the reader's view of this context and causes that context to be even more effective in illuminating Ex 16. If the reader wonders why such a perspective was not included as a part of chapters five and six, there are many reasons; the most telling is that such would have created two even bulkier chapters which attempted to do so much that they did nothing well and attempted to make so many points that they made none.

This chapter's second section reveals the theological interpretation of Ex 16 which results from viewing it as a part of this pentateuchal narrative context. The reader will note that this section also affects one's understanding of that wider context. Such is due to the fact that this thesis's approach exerts a kind of "back and forth" pull; i.e., the reader's attention is pulled back and forth between the specific text and its context. What one learns about Ex 16 generates a desire to know how that impacts the context. What one learns about the wider context generates a desire to determine how that impacts Ex 16.¹ Since such a pull appears to be inherent to this thesis's approach, it is appropriate that this thesis's reader feel some of its force.

The final section of this chapter is brief but important. It summarily concludes this thesis.

¹ The reader may feel an equal amount of this type of pull in section one of this chapter.

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Section One: The Complaint, Testing, and Divine Provision Motifs and the Pentateuch's Portrait of Israel's Fluctuating Faith

The portrait of Israel in the desert is a portrait of a people whose understandings are very shallow and of a people whose faith has many more lows than highs. The motifs of complaint, testing, and divine provision are well suited to convey more concerning the nature of this pentateuchal portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith; because viewing the different ways these motifs are employed creates a progressive presentation of Israel's character as revealed by the canonical form and ordering of these narratives. Therefore, a study of pentateuchal narratives containing these motifs will be conducted in what follows in an effort to provide an enhanced impression of the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith.² These motifs will be employed below in the same order in which they are analyzed in the first three chapters of this thesis. The motif-based analyses will be followed by a summary of the findings gained from the use of these three motifs. This first section of chapter six will conclude with a brief comment of contemporary application which flows naturally from this pentateuchal portrait.

² The reader will notice that in this section the discussion of some narratives is given more space than others. The reason is that this section is not seeking to repeat what has been done above; instead it is seeking to expose the flow created by the canon's implementation of three important pentateuchal motifs and the meanings which that flow transmits to the reader. Such requires that some narratives receive a more extensive analysis than others.

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The Complaint Motif and Israel's Fluctuating Faith³

The first relevant complaint narrative is in **Ex 5:21**. Although the words spoken by the angry Israelite foremen are an appeal to the LORD to judge (and condemn) Moses and Aaron, they amount to a complaint concerning the result of the effort to free the people from Egyptian slavery. The weakness of Israel's faith is already being prefigured. To read of the people, in **Ex 4:31**, believing the message given to Moses and spoken to the people by Aaron and of them worshipping the LORD because the people are confident that the LORD has heard (עָנַשׁ) them⁴ and is going to free them from the Egyptians and then to read of their leaders complaining about the result of that effort in **Ex 5:21**, so soon after they had believed and worshipped, is a rapid fluctuation which proves to be not uncharacteristic of this difficult people.

The second relevant complaint narrative is in **Ex 14:10ff**. The deliverance so recently won by the power of the LORD has not produced within the people any faith in his ability to neutralize the power of the Egyptian army. The Israelites see that army approaching and immediately wish that they had never left Egypt and even claim that

³ It is appropriate for this study to begin with the complaint motif (which Marc Vervenne refers to as "the protest motif") because as Vervenne says in the very first line of "The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (Ex 14:11-12): Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern," *ETL* 63 (1987): 257-71; "With the exception of the Sinai pericope, the narratives of the Israelites' wilderness wandering (Ex 15:22-18:27; Num 10:11-20:13) are interconnected by several motifs, and *especially by the protest motif*" (emphasis mine).

⁴ To help fill out a picture begun in this thesis's previous chapter, the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that the LORD heard (עָנַשׁ) the people's groaning in Egypt according to **Ex 2:24** and heard (עָנַשׁ) their cry according to **Ex 3:7**.

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while they were still in Egypt they had told Moses that they did not want to leave. Of special importance for this portrait is the fact that when the people see the approaching Egyptian army they immediately long for the past.

Ex 15:22ff is the third relevant complaint narrative, but the first one after the people have crossed the Red Sea and entered a desert. Notice that the complaint in Ex 15:24 is elicited by the absence of drinkable water and that it is both brief and mild and includes no critique of the exodus nor nostalgic longing for Egypt.

The fourth Israelite complaint is due to the absence of food, and it is found in **Ex 16:2-3**. That complaint is longer and more intense than the one in Num 15:24. Notice that the people in Ex 16 both express the desire to have not participated in the exodus and nostalgically long for Egypt.

The fifth complaint is found in **Ex 17:2-3** and is due to the absence of water. This complaint is more intense than the previous two. Here the people *demand* that Moses give them water (תנונו מים), and they express disenchantment with the exodus and long for Egypt. In addition, they complain so aggressively that Moses fears for his life.

The sixth and seventh complaints are both reported in **Num 11 (vv. 1 & 4-6)**. These complaints add a new dimension to Israelite complaining, because there is no life-threatening deprivation which precipitates them. These complaints reveal a people who find it easy to complain randomly with little or no provocation.⁵

⁵ The complaint narrative in Num 11:4ff is more important to the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith than this brief paragraph indicates. That is why this narrative receives additional attention in the section below on the divine provision motif. The

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The sixth complaint is in **Num 12:1-2** and is from Miriam and Aaron. They are unhappy about Moses' Cushite wife and his special role of leadership. The fact that Moses' sister and brother—two Israelites with special status—also complain is typical of the Israelite character as revealed throughout this portrait. In addition, their complaining shows how thoroughly this tendency had infected the nation.

The seventh complaint is in **Num 14:1-4**, and it is much more intense than any previous complaint. This complaint is provoked by the report of the ten faithless spies, and in this complaint the people express the wish that they had died in Egypt or had died earlier in the desert because they are convinced they will die by the sword at the hands of the Canaanites—a death which they indicate would be more distasteful than any previous one could have been. They clearly wish that the exodus had never occurred, and even talk of selecting new leaders to take them back to Egypt. The aggressive nature of the people is demonstrated when they prepare to stone Joshua and Caleb who speak out in favor of taking Canaan.

The eighth complaint is in **Num 16:3** and is somewhat similar to the complaint of Miriam and Aaron in **Num 12:2** in that the complaint in **Num 16:3** is an expression of resentment by one group of leaders at the elevated status of Moses and Aaron. The uniqueness of this complaint is that it spawns two other complaints which extend into the next day. It spawns the ninth complaint which is found in **Num 16:12-14**—a com-

major portion of the discussion of this narrative is placed there rather than here because the divine provision motif is a more natural bridge into the *whole* of this narrative than is the complaint motif.

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plaint from Dathan and Abiram that expresses nostalgia for Egypt and dissatisfaction with the exodus. The tenth complaint is found in **Num 17:6/16:41**, and it also is spawned by the complaint in Num 16:3. No complaint has more impact upon this portrait of Israel in the desert, because this complaint reveals a deeper level of doubt concerning Moses and Aaron than is found anywhere else. Those who complain against Moses and Aaron in the eighth and ninth complaints are destroyed by two spectacular events which are ascribed to the LORD; but, in spite of those two demonstrations of divine power and anger at those who oppose God's chosen leaders, the people still complain on the very next day. The people's resistance to learning and changing could hardly be more deeply entrenched. Their hearts are hard and their eyes are dull. By placing all three of these complaints together in one extended narrative, the canon creates a powerful indictment of the people's spiritual torpidity.

The eleventh complaint is found in **Num 20:3-5** and it is provoked by the absence of water. This complaint is relatively long, and it expresses dissatisfaction with the exodus and nostalgia for Egypt. Unique to this complaint, as interpreted above, is its expression of the desire to have died with that previous group of complainers in Num 16. The reader who allows this material to live in his or her imagination likely comes to believe here, if not earlier, that this people's inability or unwillingness to learn anything with regard to the will and nature of their God is comparable to a profound level of retardation.⁶

⁶ It should be noted that it is the view of this thesis that something like this effect actually

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The twelfth and final complaint is in Num 21:5 and it is provoked by impatience and, according to the people's complaint, by an absence of both food and water even though there is some food source available which they loathe. Again the people express dissatisfaction with having been brought up out of Egypt. As noted in chapter five, the way in which this complaint is reported reveals that the people did have food and water; the real cause of their complaint was impatience. Unique to this complaint is the narrator explicitly reporting that the people spoke against *God* as well as Moses. This seems to indicate that the Israelites are now capable of complaining more brashly than they were at previous times. One positive element is the fact that the people do confess that they had sinned by speaking against the LORD and Moses (v. 7). It seems that there has been some improvement in the people's level of spiritual insight, but it has not been able to overcome their propensity for complaining, and their enhanced level of insight may be part of what caused them to complain directly against the LORD rather than, as earlier, to doubt his presence and involvement. To express this suggestion in another way, the Israelites' enhanced insight could have produced positive results; instead, however, it

is intended by the framer(s) of this material. The goal of this presentation, according to this thesis's view, is to establish an extremely stark contrast between the ongoing efforts of the LORD and the spiritual blindness of the people. The biblical intention certainly is not to convey an anti-Semitic sentiment and neither is that the case with regard to this thesis. This author's own efforts at following faithfully the will of God have far too many signs of "profound retardation" for a feeling of superiority with regard to the way that Israel is portrayed here. And the candid nature of the Pentateuch's presentation should cause the reader to be more honest about his or her own failings; it should not make anyone feel superior especially since, for those who read the Pentateuch as Christians, this story is a part of *our* story and *our* identity as a people seeking to be a people of God.

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caused them to complain against the LORD himself.

From the perspective of the complaint motif, this portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith reveals a propensity for complaint which progressively worsens. In fact, their complaints are the almost constant indicators that the Israelites have little if any faith that the LORD is caring for them as they make their way through the desert.

In addition, the people appear to be afflicted with very poor memories. Over and over again they remember their existence in Egypt as though it were a positive experience, and they always seem to view their current circumstances to be worse than anything encountered in the past (see Ex 16:3; 17:3; Num 11:5-6; 14:2-4; 16:12-14; 20:2-5; 21:5).

It is revealing to contrast their example of complaint to that of their father, Abraham. His long wait for a son is not attended by complaint. Instead—even though he has times of anxiety and even doubt about the fulfillment of the promise—he does not resort to complaint, and after he finally has a son, when he is asked to sacrifice him, he obeys without either question or complaint. The contrast is striking.

This concludes our analysis of the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith from the perspective of the complaint motif. We turn now to an analysis of that same portrait from the perspective of the testing motif.

The Testing Motif and Israel's Fluctuating Faith

The testing (נִסֵּי) motif is first encountered in **Gn 22:1** in the narrator's introduction to God's test of Abraham through the command to sacrifice his son Isaac. The pentateuchal presentation of Israel's response to divine testing could hardly be more different

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from the Pentateuch's portrait of Abraham's test, even though there are many similarities between Israel's life in the desert and the life of Abraham as a sojourner (גַּר) in the land of Canaan (e.g., it is the LORD who causes both Abraham and Israel to leave one place and go to another they had never seen; both are tested, and both receive a provision from the LORD). The severity of Abraham's test is much greater than any of the relevant tests of Israel in the desert, and, even though contemporary readers are horrified by Abraham coming so close to slaying his son, one of the effects produced by reporting that near slaying (an effect surely produced in the faithful Israelites of ancient times, given the OT commands against child sacrifice, no less than in readers today) is to sharpen the reader's awareness of the severity of Abraham's test. However, the differences between Abraham's test and Israel's tests are not confined to the fact that Abraham's test is more severe; another major difference is the way in which the two parties being tested responded and the way they are treated by God as a result. Abraham's "fear of the LORD" and the obedience which that produced,⁷ caused him to be blessed and honored by God; the Israelites' failure to learn to fear the LORD⁸ and failure to obey, result in the LORD's anger bursting out against them many times. When Abraham's story as a sojourner is read in tandem with Israel's, it becomes obvious that Israel's story could

⁷ Note that in Gn 22:18 the Lord reaffirms his promise to Abraham because, he says, "you have heeded/obeyed my voice" (עָקַב אֶשֶׁר שָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹלִי).

⁸ Be reminded of Ex 20:20 in which Moses says that one of the LORD's purposes for the happenings reported in Ex 19-20 was "in order that the fear of him might be upon your faces." Durham, 302 interprets the phrase "upon your faces" to mean, "be always before you, on your mind."

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have been markedly different; Israel also could have received great blessings had the people responded to similar circumstances as did their great patriarch—by fearing the LORD and by obeying (יִרְאוּ) his commandments.

The second occurrence of יִרְאוּ is in **Ex 15:25**. As noted above in chapter five this occurrence does not refer to an actual test conducted at the time of the events reported in **Ex 15:22-26** but to the fact that the LORD planned to use a combination of desert deprivations and commandments to test the people. That means that **Ex 15:25b-26** prepares for forthcoming tests of the people by God and that the people actually had prior notice of God's plan (see v. 26). Verse 26 even reveals that the people were told of the benefits that would follow if they responded obediently to God's plan. By contrast, Abraham experienced his test in ignorance of what was taking place; he was granted no insight in why God was asking him to sacrifice his son, and he had not been told of any potential benefits from obeying this divine commandment.

The third occurrence of יִרְאוּ is in **Ex 16:4**. This test is prepared for by vv. 4-5 and then conducted using both the manna and commandments. Israel did not pass the test and God was angry due to their failure (vv. 28-29).

The fourth and fifth occurrences of יִרְאוּ are found in **Ex 17:2 & 7**. These occurrences are extremely important to the pentateuchal portrait of desert Israel, because of the reversal of roles relative to this test. Here it is the people who “conduct” the test, and they test the LORD. By placing the test occurrences in **Ex 15, 16, & 17** so close together and in the present order, the pentateuchal portrait conveys a step-by-step digression that

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moves from a plan for a test positively revealed (Ex 15:25b-26) to a relatively mild test failed (Ex 16) and then to a testing experience turned into a test of the LORD precipitated by doubt relative to God's presence with his people (Ex 17:1-7).

The sixth occurrence of הָדָן is found in **Ex 20:20**. Here Moses reveals that the appearance of the LORD upon Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments were a test of the people by the LORD. This test appears to have been orchestrated to ensure that the desired goal's potential for success would be maximized. When this test is studied in light of the preceding test narratives and with sensitivity to the flow of the pentateuchal material it leads to a theologically rich conclusion. The test attempt prepared for in Ex 15:22ff and conducted in Ex 16 has not had positive results; that is unmistakably revealed in Ex 17:1-7. However, Ex 20:20 demonstrates that the LORD did not terminate his efforts. Instead he waited until the people arrived at Mount Sinai and there he put on a visual and aural display designed to reveal both his power and his purpose. The purpose was to determine if obedience could be established within this people. The result of this test can be seen through the last relevant test narrative. To it we now turn.

The sixth occurrence of הָדָן is found in **Num 14:22**. Numbers 14 is the report of the tragic consequences of the people accepting and reacting to the report of the ten faithless spies. In v. 22 the LORD speaks of the people having tested him "these ten times" ($\text{הָדָן עֲשָׂרָה פְּעָמִים}$) which the author of this thesis takes to mean "over and over again."⁹

⁹ See Budd, 158; and Ashley, 260-61 for longer discussions and references to secondary source material relative to the meaning of this phrase.

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Germane to the portrait being analyzed here is the fact that again the people have reversed the roles described in Ex 15:25b-26; again they are testing the LORD. Clearly the purpose of the LORD for the test in Ex 19-20 as described in Ex 20:20 has not been achieved. Obedience has not been established within the hearts of the people.

The contribution of the testing motif to the understanding of the portrait under review is easy to express. All of these test narratives which relate to a *divine* test of a person or persons (i.e., Gn 22:1ff; Ex 15:22ff; 16; 19-20) are to determine and inculcate obedience to his will. To assist the Israelites in responding well to divine testing, the LORD prepared them for it in Ex 15:25b-26. They still fail the tests in Ex 16, and in Ex 17:1ff they turn the whole process upside-down. The effort reported in Ex 19-20 to turn the process back around and accomplish the LORD's purpose for testing is also unsuccessful, and the people test the LORD again in Num 14. The message is clear. The people could not be habituated to obeying the commands of God, but that failure is in spite of an extreme effort on the part of Israel's God.

The Divine Provision Motif and Israel's Fluctuating Faith

The divine provision motif's first relevant occurrence is found in **Gn 22:13-14**, and, as a result, Israel's experience of divine provision in the desert connects their story to Abraham and the story of his offering of Isaac as did the testing motif. Again such a connection reveals the extreme dissimilarity between Israel and their great patriarch. Abraham sees the ram caught in the thicket and offers it in the place of Isaac. He automatically assumes that the LORD is the source of that provision and expresses confi-

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dence in the LORD's ongoing provision and involvement by naming the place **יְהִי הַמָּקוֹם**.

By contrast, none of the place names given to desert locations at which the LORD supplied food or water refer to the provision of the food or the water, instead the relevant desert place names refer either to the cause of an Israelite complaint (Ex 15:23) or, more frequently, to some inappropriate attitude or behaviour on the part of the people (Ex 17:1-7; Num 11:34; 20:13).

The second relevant occurrence of the divine provision motif is in **Ex 15:25a**.

Here the LORD does not provide water but reveals to Moses how to sweeten previously undrinkable water. Notice how detached the LORD is from the action required for this provision; i.e., he gives Moses instructions so that the water could be used, but an observer might not connect the sweetening of the water to any divine power. In fact, a reader is not sure whether to ascribe the sweetening of the water to properties inherent within the tree or to the LORD sweetening the water in conjunction with Moses' obeying his instructions; but, whichever way one understands this divine provision, Moses is the actor visible at the center of this event. His actions are crucial to the sweetening of the water. (It is interesting that in all three of the relevant water provision narratives Moses is given an active role relative to the provision, but is not given an active role in either of the two food provision narratives. This is a feature which will receive further comment).

The third relevant occurrence of the divine provision motif is reported in **Ex 16:13ff**, and much is said in the verses preceding v. 13 to prepare the people for this provision of quail and bread (vv. 4-11); i.e., they are encouraged to draw the correct conclusions from the provision of meat and bread even before the meat and bread are pro-

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vided. Those correct conclusions are that the LORD had brought them out of Egypt (v. 6) and that the LORD was their God (v. 12). In spite of the preparation reported in vv. 4-11, the people learn little if anything from this provision. The only hopeful glimmer within this divine provision narrative is the fact that the people scrupulously abide to the commandment to gather the correct amounts of manna according to the size of their households (vv. 16-18). However, that glimmer is greatly overshadowed by the failures of some of the people to demonstrate trust that the LORD would supply more bread on the following morning and the failure of some of the people to honour the sabbath. This is the only one of these divine provision narratives which uses an item divinely provided to test the people. Notice the contrast between the divine provision narrative in Ex 16 and the one in Ex 15:22ff. As noted above, in Ex 15 Moses is the visible actor relative to the divine provision; in Ex 16 Moses takes no action to provide either the meat or the bread. In Ex 16 Moses and Aaron are only spokesmen for the LORD. The LORD is the one who acts and who provides; there is no visible agent performing an act which precipitates the coming of either the quail or the manna. This divine provision comes from the LORD without the involvement any human agent.

The fourth relevant occurrence of the divine provision motif is in **Ex 17:5ff**. Here Moses is under much more severe duress prior to the divine provision than has been the case previously; the pressure is so great that he fears for his life. The canonical flow ensures that the reader realize that the Israelites have not learned from the previous provisions. They still panic when they encounter a deprivation, and, in Ex 17, that panic leads to angry aggression. The reader should notice that in Ex 17:5-6 Moses performs impor-

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tant actions relative to the provision of water from the rock on the basis of the LORD's instructions.

The fifth occurrence of the divine provision motif is found in **Num 11:31-35**, and this instance of divine provision is set within a narrative which is much more extreme than is the case with the previous divine provision narratives. Note the elements which reveal the extreme nature of this narrative. First, in earlier narratives the people have shown their inability or unwillingness to learn anything from the LORD's provision for them in the recent past, i.e., they do not trust the LORD to provide for them, but here their response to the LORD's provision is even more negative because they actually express disdain for a divine provision—the manna which the LORD provides on a daily basis. Second, the effect upon Moses of the people's weeping for meat is extreme. He complains (vv. 11-15) and he doubts the power of the LORD to provide the requested meat (vv. 21-22) even though, from the canon's perspective, he has witnessed the LORD feeding meat to all of the people before (Ex 16). As noted in chapter five above, this narrative “powerfully conveys the debilitating force of Israel's doubts and complaints” upon Moses. Third, the LORD's expression of anger while the people are eating the divinely provided quail is extreme relative to previous divine provision narratives. The greedy ones seemed to think that they could be happy if they had meat, but they were struck with a killing plague while the meat was still between their teeth (מִן־בֶּן־יִשְׂרָאֵל). The angry irony conveyed by that timing is unmistakable. These three extremes communicated by Num 11:4ff have a potent impact upon the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel in the desert, because they convey the following three items. One, they convey that the people are

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ungrateful for what God has given and are bold to complain about it. Two, they convey that the relationship between the three parties involved (i.e., the people, Moses, and the LORD) is highly strained. Three, they convey a radical change from Ex 16 for the provision of quail. That radical change is made easier to see by the fact that quail are used both here and in Ex 16. In Ex 16 the quail are so that the people “will know that the LORD brought you out from the land of Egypt” (v. 6) and the manna and quail together are so that the people “will know that I am the LORD your God.” For the LORD to strike the people with a killing plague in Num 11 while they are eating the same item which the LORD supplied for very positive and optimistic purposes in Ex 16 expresses the profoundly negative flow of the narratives comprising this pentateuchal portrait of Israel in the desert. It is appropriate at this point also to note one possible effect from reading the presentation of the divine provision of quail in Ex 16 and in Num 11 in light of one another; it is that the reader’s surprise at the minimal space given to the arrival of the quail in Ex 16:13a can arouse a question as to why the manna receives so much attention and the quail so little in Ex 16, a question which might cause the reader to suspect that the quail are de-emphasized in Ex 16 because they come to represent an inappropriate desire for non-essential food while the manna represents essential food which the LORD supplies on a daily basis. Before leaving this narrative it also should be noted that Moses has no agency role with regard to the provision of the quail in Num 11; God is the only one involved.

The sixth occurrence of the divine provision motif is in **Num 20:11** which is the narration of the second provision of water from a rock, but this time the result is that

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Moses and Aaron are prohibited from entering the land of Canaan. An advantage of moving through the portrait under review via the divine provision motif is that the changes that occur between one divine provision narrative and the next one are not dimmed by what lies between. Numbers 11:1ff reveals the level of Moses' frustration. Numbers 20:1ff portrays Moses venting that frustration at the people in a way that pushes the LORD out of the picture and causes Moses and Aaron to be punished in the same way as those who did not believe that the LORD could give them Canaan. It is appropriate in this discussion of Num 20:1ff to comment upon a feature which has been noted above several times. That feature is that the narratives which involve the divine provision of food report no active agency role for Moses or Moses and Aaron, whereas the water provision narratives always do as is the case with this final water provision narrative in Num 20:1ff. Could it be that the determining factor relative to this feature is not meat or water but purpose? In the first food provision narrative (Ex 16) an element of that food provision (the manna) is used to test the people in addition to feeding them. In the second food provision narrative the food is used to teach against greed. In none of the three water provision narratives is such the case; in all of them the LORD is meeting a physical need. Yes, the reader assumes that the LORD desires for lessons to be learned and for faith to be born due to the providing of water, but the fact that the goals of the two food provision narratives are much more narrowly focused is easy to see. It seems likely to this reader that the one or ones responsible for the final shaping of the Pentateuch believed that testing the people and punishing them for their sins (including greed) were two activities reserved exclusively for the LORD. And Num 20:1ff assists

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our understanding of the reason that Moses or Moses and Aaron always have an agency role when there is no testing agenda or punishing agenda by conveying that their failure here is due to the fact that they always are to give the glory to the LORD for what is provided for his people. The harshness of God's anger when they do not do so encourages the reader to realize that in the non-testing and non-punishing provision narratives the LORD gives such an active agency role to Moses or to Moses and Aaron because he wants to teach the people that there is a vital connection between their human leader(s) and the LORD. Since Moses' words are encouraging the people to break that connection in a situation especially designed to strengthen it, the level of God's anger is more explicable.¹⁰

As has been the case with the view of the Pentateuch's portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith from the perspective of the complaint and testing motif, this view from the perspective of the divine provision motif reveals the richness gained by reading narratives within their context and allowing their context to impart meaning and insight. The framer(s) of the canon did not arrange and shape according to a modern or post-modern mind-set, but what they created is sufficiently meritorious to be studied in the form which they worked to create.

¹⁰ This author realizes that these suggestions relative to divine provision agency are tentative, but he thinks them sufficiently strong to provoke further reflection on the purpose for these narratives as that purpose was conceived by the framer or framers of the Pentateuch.

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Summary

Now we can summarize the effects of analyzing the overall portrait of Israel's fluctuating faith from the perspective of the complaint, testing, and divine provision motifs. First, this portrait provides a coherent picture of Moses (and Aaron) as Israel's leaders and reveals that the leading of this people was an extremely trying enterprise with many more downs than ups. The people are delighted by and believe in the message of Moses and Aaron when they first hear it in Ex 4:31, but that belief is short-lived. The people believe in Moses and connect him in a positive way to the LORD after the crossing of the sea (Ex 14:31), but that also is short-lived. The people appear ready to connect the words of Moses with the will of the LORD in Ex 20:19, but that creates no dependable increase in the amount of respect which the people ascribe to Moses' role. In fact, the people do not clearly connect the LORD and Moses again until Num 21:4ff (when Aaron had already died) but even that late connection is in a context in which the people *complain* against both the LORD and Moses, so there is no reduction of stress and no elevation of respect as a result of being connected to the LORD here. It appears that Moses and Aaron derive no personal benefit nor anything resembling a perquisite from being leaders; and, in spite of that fact, they, when needed, always intercede for the people whenever the LORD strikes them or considers striking them with killing force (see Ex 32:7-14, 30-35; 33:12-17; Num 11:1-3; 12:10-15; 14:10b-25; 16:20-22; 17:6-15/16:41-50; 21:4-9). Moses and Aaron do, however, display signs of being adversely affected by the demands of their role. Those signs, as noted above, are reported in Num 11:4ff (only Moses) and Num 20:1ff (Moses and Aaron). What the reader sees is that even with

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divinely appointed leaders who willingly and frequently put the welfare of the people above their own welfare, Israel still was unwilling to be shaped into the “kingdom of priests” and the “holy nation” (Ex 19:6) the LORD desired them to be.

Second, this study causes the reader to keep waiting for Israel to learn from their previous experience of the LORD’s power as expressed in deliverance, punishment, and provision; but they never do. They never learn to respond to a desert deprivation with faith that the LORD will provide. They never respond to any negative experience with resolute obedience. If there is any growth (and this is questionable) it is the little glimmer in Num 21:4-9 that they had finally learned that Moses was to be paired with the LORD and was representative of the LORD’s will.

Third, the LORD’s responses to the people’s negative behaviour becomes much harsher as the story of Israel’s time in the desert progresses. The contrast between Ex 16 and Num 11:4ff makes that especially clear. The question for the reader is why is that the case. Is the increased harshness of the LORD due to growing frustration as a result of the people’s apparent inability to learn and grow? If the reader compares the three relevant narratives which precede the Mt Sinai material (i.e., Ex 15:22ff; 16; 17:1ff) with the three relevant narratives which immediately follow the people’s departure from that place (i.e., Num 11:1-3; 11:4ff; 12), the possibility is awakened that at least part of the difference in divine reaction is due to the fact that the material is encouraging the reader to realize that the LORD did expect and should have been able to expect more faith and trust from the people after Sinai and all that occurred there. However, instead of increased faith and trust, the people appear to complain more with less reason than they did prior

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to Mt Sinai. The reader must decide if the LORD's reactions to the people's negative behaviour intensify in harshness because of Mt Sinai or because the people's negative behaviour worsens. The author of this thesis believes that the pentateuchal material is framed to encourage the reader to see that both of these factors play a part in intensifying the LORD's reactions; however, the amount of space that the Pentateuch gives to the Mt Sinai material surely encourages the reader to see that the more important reason is that the people have learned little or nothing from all that took place at the Mountain of God.

Fourth, by including the material from chapter five not included in the motif sections above, the kind of faith for which Israel was prepared can be seen clearly. The Israelites could believe when victory seemed clear and certain. They could believe when Aaron was performing signs and speaking the divine words of promise (Ex 4:29-31). They could believe immediately after the sea had been crossed and the Egyptians had been drowned (Ex 14:31-15:21). They could make heartfelt promises when Moses was near to hand and the Mount of the LORD was on fire (Ex 19:8; 24:3 & 7). They could even be over-generous in supplying precious gifts for the construction of the LORD's tabernacle when there was no trial to disturb their peace-loving faith (Ex 36:3-7). They were not, however, prepared for the kind of faith which the LORD required, *a faith that grows through trials and becomes more obedient through tests*. Assuming (as does this author) that these pentateuchal narratives arrived at their present shape in the exilic or post-exilic period, it is hard to imagine a more relevant message.

Fifth, the reader is reminded of all that has been said above about the use of the Hebrew verbs שחט and שמר. The first of these two verbs is more important to this por-

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trait so its use within this portrait will be analyzed first. שמע is used to report two responses that are going on simultaneously. The first response is the LORD *heeding* the voice of his people, and it takes us back to Ex 2:24 and the report that the LORD heard the people's groaning in Egypt. That is the first of many reports of that response on the part of the LORD to the voice of his people. The LORD hears/heeds/listens to what they say in Ex 3:7; 6:5; 16:7-9, 12; Num 11:1; 12:2; 14:27. The second response is the one which the LORD works to generate within his people. The response which the LORD desires is that the people will heed his voice as he heeds theirs, but such a response is not established. In Ex 4:31 the people believe and hear/heed Moses' message from the LORD and respond appropriately to it (i.e., they bow down and worship); in Ex 20:19 they say that they will heed the words of Moses, and in Ex 24:7 they say that they will do and heed/obey "all that the LORD has spoken," but these hopeful indications are outweighed by the fact that in spite of the LORD's efforts to inculcate a hearing/heeding/obeying mind-set, such is never fixed within them. The LORD's efforts to create that response within his people are revealed in Ex 15:26; 19:5, 9; 23:21-22; 14:22-23 Num 12:6. The people's failures are explicitly noted in Ex 6:9, 12; 16:20; Num 14:22-23. The verb שמר is not used as extensively as is שמע, but is worthy of note because of its importance in Ex 16:28 and the relationship which that usage has with the previous one in Ex 15:26. In Ex 15:26 the LORD's words reveal his desire for the Israelites to keep (שמר) all of his statutes. In Ex 16:28 the LORD's words make clear that they have not done that, which leads to Ex 19:5 and the LORD's attempt to persuade Israel to "keep"

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his covenant by giving them the promise of being his chosen people. The stories that follow reveal the people's inability or unwillingness to respond to the LORD as he desires. Over and over again they fail to *heed* and to *keep* his commandments.

Fewell and Gunn's brief treatment of the impact of Moses' message in Deuteronomy is useful in concluding this section. They speak of how apt the message of Deuteronomy was for the exiles in Babylon (the "implied" audience of Deuteronomy). Its aptness is due to the fact that Moses' audience is "on 'the other side' of the river, in the wilderness, looking toward the promised land" and the exiles were also on 'the other side' and in their own wilderness looking back to the promised land. The point of Deuteronomy is to say that the exiles, using the words of Fewell and Gunn,

must take care not to forget their side of the promise—forget, that is, their sole allegiance to YHWH. "For YHWH your god is a devouring fire, a jealous god" (4:23-24) But if they seek YHWH with heart and soul, return to him, and obey his voice, then, says Moses to both audiences standing on the other side, both those within the story and those outside it, "YHWH will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them" (4:30-31). Read thus, the challenge of the story is to grasp the promise and live it again—but differently this time!

That last line also serves to express the point of the portrait traced out above. This pentateuchal material exhorts its readers, through narratives, "to grasp the promise and live it again—but differently this time!"¹¹

¹¹ Fewell and Gunn, 13.

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Contemporary Application

It is appropriate to conclude this section with a brief comment concerning one point of contemporary application. This comment relates to the portrait of Israel in the desert which this thesis has drawn, and it is firmly based on primary attributes of this biblical material and on perceived characteristics of contemporary persons seeking to be shaped by the biblical presentation.

Whatever else might be said about the quality of the canonical presentation of Israel in the desert, its portrait of human faith is very real. With its variety of source material it still works. It still accurately portrays people as they are. People want the same easy faith that Israel wanted; they become irritated and impatient; they complain, “Did the LORD really send us *here*?” Like Israel, they hoped for an easy road, a walk through life’s meadow. The desert was not expected. It is rarely embraced.

Section Two: Exodus Sixteen in Context

This section of chapter six looks at several effects which reading Ex 16 in the context of Israel’s fluctuating faith can have upon one’s understanding of that narrative. One effect produced when Ex 16 is read as a part of this context is that the easily ignored phrase, “between Elim and Sinai,” can be viewed as a note bearing more than geographical connotations. Elim represents an Israelite utopia because it possesses the exact number of springs needed to accommodate every Israelite tribe as well as seventy date palms.¹²

¹² See Num 33:9 where the description of Elim in the Hebrew text is exactly the same as that found in Num 15:27.

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The number seventy occurs fifty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible, and, due to its connection with seven (arguably the most important number in the Hebrew Bible),¹³ it fills out this portrait of an oasis containing a fullness of provision perfectly suited for the people of Israel. Sinai (not reached until Ex 19:1-2), on the other hand, is a place where the divine presence powerfully and even frighteningly confronts the people. It is a place of law-giving and covenant making. It is a place where God makes clear that he wants the people to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). The move from the idyllic oasis to the mountain of God is an extremely important transition. That transition is through a desert of thirst and hunger. In Ex 16, the reader sees the LORD employing desert realities as a means of making that transition a successful one. All that is needed is for them to respond obediently to יהוה. Unfortunately, they do not.

A second effect of reading Ex 16 from within this canonical context is the result of both the placement of this narrative and this narrative’s very different response to the people’s murmuring than that found anywhere else. One dissimilarity between Ex 16 and every other complaint narrative is the first response which the complaint in Ex 16 receives. In no other complaint narrative does the LORD respond immediately with a

¹³ B. C. Birch, “Number,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:559 notes, “The number seven is the most significant symbolic number in the Bible, appearing in some manner in almost six hundred passages. It was a sacred number in virtually all the ancient Semitic cultures.” M. H. Pope, “Seven, Seventh, Seventy” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4:295 adds that “[p]erhaps the simplest and most comprehensive generalization that can be made is that seven denotes completeness, perfection, consummation.”

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positive response to the complaint and with a plan already formulated. By placing a narrative in which the LORD does respond positively, even constructively (positively and constructively in that he is the first to respond to the murmur [v. 4] and provides *both* meat and bread [vv. 12-15] and sets up a test [v. 4] and does not punish at all) at this very early point in the desert period story cycle, creates an impression of the LORD as still tolerant and patient with the people. One could even say that the LORD in the early parts of Ex 16 appears to be optimistic about the people in that his primary concern is to prepare them through tests to be his people. As a result of the LORD's attitude, the murmur in Ex 16 is presented as playing a somewhat positive role in that it serves as a cue to begin a divine test, a test of the type already prepared for and described in Ex 15:25-26. In Ex 16 the LORD does not appear to be greatly irritated by their murmuring, and, in fact, the majority of Ex 16's account is used to report how the LORD used his response to the people's murmur as a means of testing their willingness to obey. When they fail the test, however, the LORD's attitude changes (vv. 28-29). The murmuring was not perceived as a clear sign of un-faith, but the failed test is. From this point the people's complaining does two things. First, it becomes an expression of deficient faith through its association with items like testing the LORD (Ex 17:1-7), rejection of the LORD (Num 11:20), outright rebellion (Num 14:4-45), extreme spiritual blindness (Num 17:6/16:41), the fall of Moses and Aaron (Num 20:2-5), and punishment by serpents (Num 21:6). Second, it escalates in intensity and, after the people depart Mt Sinai, is made to seem more frequent by the number of complaint narratives contained within a space of eleven chapters (the reader is reminded that the people depart Mt Sinai in

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Num 10:12 and that the most intense complaining in the Pentateuch is reported in Num 11-21). The fact that only Ex 16 reports such a positive response to Israelite murmuring sheds much light upon the role of this narrative within the pentateuchal presentation. This narrative reveals how God wanted to use the desert. The remainder of the complaint narratives reveal how the people negated that desire.

Another effect of reading Ex 16 in the context of Israel's fluctuating faith is produced by the fact that even though the response to Israel's murmuring in Ex 16 is milder than in *later* accounts, Ex 16's murmuring is treated as significant in that Ex 16's murmuring does not pass without critical comment concerning it as is the case in *earlier* reports of Israelite complaint.¹⁴ Exodus 16 preserves two forms of negative critique of the murmuring reported here. First, in vv. 7-8 the people are told twice that their murmuring is effectively against the LORD. Second, vv. 6, 8, & 12 reveal that the people's murmuring is attended by uncertainty concerning the LORD and his role in bringing them out of Egypt, and this is a critical uncertainty due to the LORD's early goal that the exodus is so "you will know that I am the LORD your God who brought you out from under the forced labour of Egypt" (Ex 6:7, cf., 7:5, 17; 14:4, 18; 10:2). For Israel the exodus has not been sufficient proof. The LORD's goal has not been achieved. This failure, first seen here, is frequently demonstrated in the narratives which follow, and the counterproductive effects of this failure are seen in all the later expressions of un-faith. When one

¹⁴ See Ex 5:19-20; 14:10-12; 15:22-24 for earlier complaints which receive no response that would indicate even mild critique of their complaint.

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reads Ex 16 from within this pentateuchal context, it is obvious that the narrative found here reports both the first effort to neutralize Israel's complaining tendencies as well as the first instance of Israelite complaining that is revealed to be an evidence of un-faith relative to a central purpose of the LORD, (i.e., so "you will know that I am the LORD your God who brought you out from under the forced labour of Egypt"). The reader may have wondered earlier whether Israel's complaining tendencies were indicative of doubt, but in Ex 16 such is established unmistakably and the clear portrayal of a downward cycle of doubt is begun,¹⁵ a downward cycle which proves resistant to any effort to neutralize or negate it.

A third effect of reading Ex 16 from within this pentateuchal context results from the fact that Ex 16 is the only *complaint* narrative that gives an account of the LORD testing Israel. In every other complaint narrative which reports testing, the testing is *by* Israel *of* the LORD and is denounced (Ex 17:1-7 & Num 14:22). Here, even though the people are murmuring, the LORD is clearly in charge and is seeking to mold Israel into a people who will obey his commands. Here *he* is conducting the test. Unfortunately, Ex 16 does

¹⁵ Even though Ex 15:22-26 recounts the first of Israel's complaints after the exodus and has claim to be the first in this downward cycle, it is very briefly reported (v. 24) and, as a result, appears to be much milder than even Ex 16's murmur. In addition, the murmuring of Ex 15:22-26 does not convey any of Ex 16's strong overtones that it is in effect a murmur against the LORD. The canonical presentation of Ex 15's murmur is especially useful because it starts the reader wondering why a people so newly delivered are already murmuring, but its relatively neutral quality does not permit the reader to do anything more than wonder. This effect and the LORD's words concerning a test artfully prepare the reader for Ex 16, the first narrative to convey clearly the existence of a downward cycle of Israelite doubt.

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not finish before the hope of an idyllic honeymoon in the desert is darkened. The people fail to honour the Sabbath, and they fail the test.

A fourth effect upon Ex 16 from reading it as a part of this wider context is to reveal that there is something momentous about Israel's failure in Ex 16:27. Israel had demonstrated lack of insight and lack of faith on previous occasions (i.e., the foremen in Ex 5:21 and all of the people in Ex 6:9; Ex 14:10-12; 15:24; & 16:2-3), but the example in Ex 16:27 is the first one which clearly disturbs the LORD and to which he reacts with angry verbiage. Why does the text wait until here to reveal any divine anger? Why would the text be so emphatic concerning the LORD's agitation at *some* of the people going out to gather manna on a day when there was none to collect and yet convey no indication of any kind of divine disturbance with regard to these earlier occurrences? At least part of the answer is to be found in Ex 15:25-26. Note the conditions which the LORD establishes in Ex 15:26 for the test which he conducts in Ex 16. Those instructions are that the people were to "heed earnestly the voice of the LORD your God, do the right in his eyes, give ear to his commands, and keep all his statutes." The murmuring in Ex 16:2-3 was not a failing of the test on the basis of those conditions, and, even if those earlier reported examples of inadequate faith and/or insight noted above had come after the establishment of Ex 15's test conditions, they would not have been a failing of this test either because they were not the breaking of a specific command or commands. The test prepared for by Ex 15:26 and conducted in Ex 16 was concerned with obedience to specific divine commands, and Israel failed because they were not obedient to a specific divine command. However, such an awareness is not the complete answer to the query concerning God's

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anger here; for, if it were, *divine* anger would have been expressed in v. 20 when some of the Israelites kept the remaining manna overnight, because that failure would have been sufficient to provoke something like the words which do not come until vv. 28-29. The failing of the test with regard to the sabbath is more significant, it seems, for one or both of the following reasons: (1) it was a *second* failure; (2) the sabbath was more important relative to God's plans for his people than was the throwing out of the manna every evening. Both or either of these reasons, however, lead back to the awareness that this lapse was more significant than any of those previously reported because of the breaking of a specific divine command. Reflection upon this conclusion leads the reader into the Pentateuch as a whole and to the realization of how important obedience to specific divine commands is in this material. Passage after passage extols the value of obedience and/or urges the people to be obedient to the express commands of the LORD,¹⁶ and Ex 16:1-17:7 plays an important role in demonstrating to the reader how much God desires obedience both by reporting the LORD's angry reaction in Ex 16:28-29 and by

¹⁶ See Gn 2:15-3:19; 18:17-19; 22:1-18; 26:1-5; Ex 12:24-28; 15:26; 16:28; 19:5; 20:4-6; 23:20-22; 31:12-17; 34:11; Lev 18:1-5; 26, 29-30; 19:2-3, 19, 30, 37; 20:8, 22; 22:31; 25:18; 26:1-46; Num 13-14; 15:30-41; Dt 1:41-45; 4:1-8, 23-24, 39-40; 5:1, 10, 29-33; 6:1-9, 17-19, 24-25; 7:9-16; 8:1, 6, 11; 9:22-24; 10:12-13; 11:1, 8-9, 13-32; 12:1, 28, 32; 13:4, 17-18; 15:4-5; 16:12; 17:2-7; 18:18-19; 19:8-9; 26:13, 16-17; 27:1-28:68; 29:9, 29; 30:1-20; 31:5, 9-13, 16-22; 32:44-47. It will surprise no one to read that this concern for obedience of commands is not exclusive to the Pentateuch, but the person wanting to observe this emphasis elsewhere in the OT can begin with Josh 22:1-6; Jdg 2:20-3:4; 1 Sa 12:14-15; 15:1-33; 28:17-19; 1 Kgs 2:1-4; 3:14; 6:11-13; 8:54-61; 9:1-9; 11:34, 38; 13:20-26; 14:6-20; 20:35-36; 2 Kgs 17:13-20; 18:1-12; 23:1-3; Isa 5:24; 24:1-6; 30:8-14; 42:21-25; Jer 6:16-19; 9:13-16; 16:10-13; 26:1-6; 32:21-24; 44:10-11, 23; Hos 4:6; 8:1-3; Amos 2:4-5; Zech 7:12; Mal 4:4; Pss 1:1-2; 19:8-11/7-10; 78:5-10; 89:31-33/30-32; 112; 119; Prv 29:18; Eccl 12:13; Dan 9:1-14; Neh 1:4-11; 9:26-37.

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presenting, in Ex 17:1-7, a much less proactive God when circumstances arise which are so similar to those in Ex 16. The text reveals God here as disturbed and possibly doubtful that the people will ever learn to obey his will. The people's disobedience in Ex 16:27 has had a significant impact upon their God. Clearly one of this narrative's primary purposes is to promote obedience to the will of God.

A fifth effect upon Ex 16 resulting from reading it within this context is to make it even more provocative. Questions remain like, "What more can be learned about Ex 16 from comparison with Num 11:4-35, a narrative which is so similar to Ex 16?" "What more can be learned by comparing Ex 16 with Num 14, a narrative which, after analysis, is found to be much more similar to Ex 16 than was immediately apparent?" The list could easily be extended. What is indicated is that much potential is tapped when a reader seeks to understand a narrative from within its canonical context in an effort to discover biblical theology. The same cannot be said of approaches which atomize the pentateuchal material due to a nearly exclusive allegiance to modern historical method(s).

Section Three: Conclusion

In this thesis's introduction it was stated that the goal of this thesis was to analyze the canonical form of Ex 16 in search of meanings which that chapter conveys for the purpose of creating a theological interpretation of Ex 16 which is shaped by that pentateuchal narrative's canonical context and with the hope that the resultant theological interpretation would provide some indication of Ex 16's significance when it is situated within the wider contexts of Jewish and Christian faith. That introduction also stated that this

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thesis was to relate to the current state of biblical studies in an indirect manner by seeking to demonstrate some of the meaning of the canonical form of Ex 16 and some of the significance of a canonical context that is appropriate to that narrative for the purpose of accomplishing two things: first, that there is support—from within the pentateuchal material—for those who contend that the canonical form of the text should be the primary target of interpretive analysis, a support supplied by the rich readings which such an approach generates; second, to qualify the significance of those approaches which encourage the atomization of the text on the basis of one theory of the Pentateuch's composition or another. The reader is now left to judge this thesis's efficacy in accomplishing the goals which it was designed to achieve.

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