

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

**A STUDY OF THE LITERARY ROLE AND FUNCTION OF
MOSES IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO "ISRAEL"
AS YAHWEH'S CHOSEN PEOPLE**

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to assess the literary role and function of Moses in the book of Numbers and its significance to "Israel" as Yahweh's chosen people.

Martin Noth

The tenor of Mosaic study has been set by Martin Noth in his seminal book, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*.¹ Noth tried to locate the original home of the Moses figure, which he believed to be the grave tradition within the "guidance into the arable land" theme.² In historical and more specifically, tradition-historical terms, "It is evident that outside of the evolving Pentateuchal tradition and the influences emanating from it, Moses plays a *negligible* role in Old Testament tradition. Above all, the assertions independent of the Pentateuchal tradition are far too few, and at the same time far too meager in content, to enable us to attempt to draw from them a solution to the problem of the original significance and the traditio-historical provenance of Moses. All that is clear is that in Israel Moses did not have in general and from the very beginning the encompassing historical significance which he came to acquire with the evolving Pentateuchal tradition."³

¹ ET. by B.W. Anderson Scholars Press, Chicago: 1981.

² 'In all probability...the more concrete information concerning the location of the grave site had priority over the general assertion that Moses did not enter into the promised land. ...Moses entered into this narrative [ie. 'guidance into arable land'] because his grave site lay on the path of the Israelites who were occupying the land. ...with this grave tradition in all probability we strike bedrock of a historical reality which is absolutely original. ...In saying this, to be sure, not much is gained for the determination of the historical role and significance of Moses. ...It must be assumed, on the basis of the establishment of the place of his historical appearance, that the figure of Moses belongs to the prehistory of the Israelite tribes that later became settled in central Palestine. ...It remains probable that in the circle of these tribes Moses once held a leading position, perhaps even in connection with the gradual transition to their later abodes in the arable land of West Jordan,... From this standpoint it would be quite understandable that Moses as a leader-figure initially gained entrance into the narrative elaboration of the theme "guidance in the wilderness," and then he came to assume this role in the remaining Pentateuchal themes as well, with the exception, of course, of the "patriarchal" theme.' P. 173.

³ *Ibid.*, p.159 (Italics mine).

It is in this light that the prevalent place Moses occupies in the Pentateuch can be explained of him as a literary device. Thus, "In view of all the above, is not the person of Moses to be regarded as *the great bracket* which binds together all of these Pentateuchal themes, perhaps in the sense that they reflect a connected course of events through which the historical deeds of Moses run, like a continuous thread, from his birth and naming in Egypt to his death and burial in a grave in the southern part of East Jordan?"⁴

Noth's Pentateuchal schema is composed of five autonomous independent themes that had been woven together to produce the Pentateuch. These themes were themselves based on the earlier cultic confessions or *credos* as proposed by von Rad that had been preserved and transmitted through generations. In the process, various local narratives came to be attracted to these individual themes in the process of transmission so that at the final compilation of the Pentateuch, large collections of narratives were added to expound and expand the five basic themes.

For Noth, Pentateuchal narratives are secondary literary works tradition-historically, in comparison to psalmic, poems and credal confessions which are thought to be short. Narrative inclusion into the Biblical tradition arose out of the need to embellish the ancient credos and themes⁵ for wider popular consumption of the successive generations of the Israelite community. One major evidence in support for the lateness of narrative materials is their reflection of the settled life in contrast to the earlier materials which reflect a pre-settlement situation.⁶ Since Moses is not to be found in the ancient credo confessions and only superficially

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161 (Italics mine).

⁵ "The great Pentateuchal themes arose on the soil of the cultic life as contents of confessions of faith which used to be recited in more or less fixed form on particular, recurring cultic occasions. Since these themes were in mutual agreement with reference to the prehistory of "Israel," they gravitated toward one another and were compiled into a culturally rooted "historical credo." This "credo" constituted the given framework of the Pentateuchal narrative.' (P. 190)

⁶ "It is ...sufficiently clear that the contemporary reality of the everyday life of the Israelite tribes *in* the arable land of Palestine—and manifestly in the period before statehood, generally speaking—provided the material for the narrative unfolding of the the Pentateuchal themes." (P. 195).

introduced in the themes with the introduction of narrative materials, he therefore belongs to the late stage where the *secondary* literary work⁷ of “bracketing” the five independent themes of the Pentateuch was taking place. Thus, Noth sees Moses as a secondary literary bracketing device. It must be noted that despite this, Noth does acknowledge the substantial presence of the figure in the Pentateuch,

“Indeed, with the possible exception of Jacob, who belongs to the ‘patriarchal’ theme which stands by itself, Moses traditio-historically would have been absolutely the oldest Israelite figure of the Pentateuchal narrative. It is no wonder, then, that as the Pentateuch narrative evolved he constantly grew in importance and finally came to be *the* overwhelmingly prominent human figure of the Pentateuchal narrative.”⁸

The effect of Noth’s assessment of Moses against the background of historical skepticism resulted in a general negative view of Moses as historically unreliable and thereby literarily insignificant. This is best exemplified by Gerhard von Rad in his monograph *Moses*,⁹ who wrote in his introduction,

“Not a single one of all these stories, in which Moses is the central figure, was really written about Moses. ... God’s words and God’s deeds, these are the things that the writers intend to set forth. ...in no single case is a man--be he the very greatest among the sons of men--the central figure.”¹⁰

For von Rad, the main intention of the Mosaic stories was to glorify and honour God. It follows then that God must be the main actor despite the central place the Moses figure occupies in the stories. Thus von Rad declares, “...Moses is not the

⁷ ‘In distinction to the “patriarchal” figures, Moses clearly does not belong to the main substance of one of the Pentateuchal themes but *only* to the narrative *elaboration*.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 174, Italics mine).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174 (Italics mine).

⁹ Lutterworth Press, London: 1967.

¹⁰ *Moses*, p.8-9.

principal actor in the Old Testament stories about him, we shall not make him the principal character in our book.”¹¹

Von Rad has confused the poetics of narrative with theology. Firstly, it is clear that von Rad does recognize Moses as a fully rounded character: “...here is the true and genuine figure of a man, a figure that has power to move us by its very humanity.”¹² But it is because of this kind of *realistic* portrayal that von Rad cautions the reader from being misled into taking these human characters as principal actors.¹³

If we accept von Rad’s theological assumption¹⁴ in addition to the historical skepticism ‘that we have no full biography of Moses; still less have we any account of him written in terms of “strict historical science”’, then it is no wonder that even significant human characters in the Bible have little literary significance. So even though he is able to draw four distinctive portraits of Moses according to the source traditions of the Pentateuch, von Rad maintains Noth’s position regarding the role of Moses tradition.

“We can no longer look on it as possible to write a history of the tradition attaching to Moses, and of where it was home. Not the least of the difficulties in this connection consists in the fact that the figure of Moses is only a secondary accretion in many of the traditions.”¹⁵

Thus according to Noth and his followers, Moses could not have played a primary rôle in all the parts that the Pentateuch attributes to him. Noth himself,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ “In other words, all the stories about Moses bear testimony to God. In them men are not presented in any ideal fashion; on the contrary they are *realistically* shown in every aspect of their human nature. ...If we realize this, we are less likely to make the *mistake* of imagining that the men about whom these stories were written were the really important actors in them.” *Ibid.*, p. 9 (Italics mine).

¹⁴ “The aim of all these stories is to render honour to God, to glorify His deeds, His patience, and the faithfulness that He has been pleased to reveal.” *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Old Testament Theology* vol. I, SCM, LONDON: 1975, p. 291.

locates the only historical residue of Moses to be his death and burial notice. From it, he suggests that the Conquest stories be the logical root of the Moses and his tradition. This then became the centre of the secondary rippling effect where the Mosaic figure grew as a unifying literary device for the rest of the traditions.

G. W. Coats

Recently G.W. Coats has attempted a fresh look at Moses in the Pentateuch. In his monograph, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*,¹⁶ he categorized the massive researches about the figure into three broad categories, Historical, Sociological, and Literary. In his view, both the Historical¹⁷ and Sociological¹⁸ studies on Moses

¹⁶ Published JSOTS 57 by JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1988.

¹⁷ For example, in his evaluation of the Historical investigations, Coats cautions that, "Historical reconstruction must depend on a careful evaluation of the literary shape in the sources. The prospects for developing any notion of the historical Moses, given the sources now available, must await a satisfactory evaluation of the traditions as literary art. ...Evaluation of the tradition as literary art may show that the style of the narrative calls for historical verisimilitude. That a story depicts the thirteenth century BC with historical and cultural precision does not prove that the story is accurate history. It proves only that historical and cultural background for the story is precise. That names and places in the story actually appeared in the thirteenth century BC does not prove that the persons in the story who carry those names actually did what the story attributes to them." (p. 14). Coats goes on to spell out the challenge for the Historical studies as such, "The issue, then, is whether those documents of faith can yield the *bruta facta* of history. ...And in the process, it will be necessary to recognize that the documents are not simplistic records of Israelite history, from which an accurate account of the life of Moses springs to life, ready for the television cameras. Rather, they are another way of looking at those *bruta facta* that composed Israel's past." (p. 16).

¹⁸ In the assessment of Sociological investigations, Coats interacts with Klaus Koch's study of Moses as Israel's *Religionsstifter* who had declared that "Die Vorstellung von Mose dem Religionsstifter ist tot und bleibt tot." ("Der Tod des Religionsstifters", *KuD* 8 (1962) 105. Criticised by Friedrich Baumgärtel, "Der Tod des Religionsstifters", *KuD* 9 (1963) 223-33; Siegfried Herrmann, "Moses", *EvT* 28 (1968) 301-28; Rolf Rendtorff, "Moses als Religionsstifter? Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über die Anfänge der Israelitischen Religion", in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (München: Kaiser, 1975) 152-71.)

Koch had based this on Noth's conclusion that Moses belonged originally in one theme only. If this were so, then, Moses could not have been significant in the rest. Thus the most probable origin of Israel's Religion must have originated in Kadesh where Israel was known to have dwelt for at least 38 years of their sojourn. Coats reply to this is that even if Koch's suggestion is valid, explanation is still needed to account for the present prominence of the Moses tradition in the narratives, "...that somewhere in the history of the Moses traditions Moses gained all-inclusive stature denied him by Koch? And would that not mean that, even though the idea of a *Religionsstifter* might have been dead at the beginning of Israel's religion, it gained new life at some later point?" (*Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*. p. 19).

have reached a kind of impasse and the key lies in the Literary studies of the biblical material. It is in this vein that Coats proceeds "to explore the biblical tradition about Moses means to clarify the patterns of images associated with this figure. Who, according to the tradition, was Moses?"¹⁹ A chief concern for Coats was to deal with the question, "Can the relationship among the themes be explained more adequately than would be the case on the basis of Noth's hypothesis? Is Moses simply a bracket that binds the themes together secondarily? Or can Moses be removed from the various themes only by doing violence to the traditions?"²⁰

For Coats, the Moses traditions eschew two basic elements of the traditions that have been carefully intertwined in the transmission and compilation process. First there is the confessional material that focuses on God's mighty acts on behalf of the Israelites which contains secondary narrative expansions incorporating the Mosaic figure. Then there is the complex of popular saga which depicts Moses as the hero in its earliest sources.²¹

Other sociological models have been discussed at length by scholars, including the intriguing Monarchy model propounded by J.R. Porter *Moses and the Monarchy. A Study in the Biblical Tradition of Moses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963); while the most extensive being the office of prophetic mediation (Cf. B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus. A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1974), pp. 351-360. James Muilenburg, "Intercession of the Covenant Mediator", in *word and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas* (Cambridge: CUP, 1968), pp. 159-83; 'The "Office" of the Prophet in Ancient Israel', in J.P. Hyatt, ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965).

Here the fundamental issue also turns out to be a literary one since the question revolves around whether the traditions conceive Moses as the founder of the faith.

¹⁹ *Heroic Man*, p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Coats states his goal being "...to determine how the traditions conceived Moses, how they put that image into literary form, and how that form communicated to Israel the importance of the man and his time. Moreover, I want to determine whether the literary construction of the traditions offers any way to account for the remarkably wide diversity of judgments about the image of Moses: prophet, priest, king, judge, covenant mediator, charismatic messenger, founder of the faith, leader of the people, inspired shepherd. And does it suggest anything about the literary locus for Moses: exodus theme, wilderness wandering, Sinai with its law and covenant, conquest at least in the Transjordan with the account of Moses' death and burial? Was the Moses tradition at home in only one of these themes? Or is the position of the tradition as the great bracket that binds them all together the original shape of the Moses story?" (p. 34).

²¹ This is significant since it recognizes that saga material, narrative traditions are not always late and that the growth of Moses stories could have paralleled the growth of the cultic.

Coats' thesis is that Moses' traditions, structured as a heroic saga, have been merged with narrative traditions concerning God's mighty actions structured around confessional themes to form the present biblical text. Most of the book is spent on fitting in the various traditions to belong to either the Heroic saga material or the cultic confessions that celebrate God's mighty works and Moses as a man of God.

Coats concludes that Moses did not originate with the Conquest as Noth suggested, and spread secondarily to the rest of Pentateuch. Rather, the original place for Coats is located at Sinai. Firstly because it was at Sinai that the giving of the law and covenant-making between God and Israel demanded a mediator. Secondly, the earliest Sinai poem in Deut. 33:2-5 describes God's theophany as a warrior to lead Israel even though Moses is not mentioned.²² Thus the figure is firmly fixed at Sinai. In addition, Coats denies that this figure later spread to other segments of the Pentateuch since all the themes were interconnected in the first place.

Coats' approach is form and tradition-history criticism. As such it is another exploration of the Moses figure behind and beyond the text. Coats' introduction of two broad traditions, heroic man and the cultic, man of God categories is useful as it helps to reclassify the generic materials in the text. It allows him to make a counter proposal to Noth's assertions with his own suggestions that Moses' home should be seen to be in Sinai and that the figure's role in the compilation of the themes were not as Noth suggested. What Coats does with Noth's poser is to suggest an alternative model.

²² This argues against the case of silence of Moses in early poems means dislocation. One must conceive the context in which the poem has been inserted. The fact is, if the poem celebrates the person of Yahweh and his activity, the need to have human figures is really logical. Further, given the theocentricity of Israelite faith and ideology, it is presumptuous to expect these poems to mention Moses, etc. One must study the Psalmic genre and other poems to see how these uses human heroic figures before making a judgement about the absence of heroes in early poems.

Herbert Schmid

In his survey of Mosaic study recently, Herbert Schmid²³ reiterates B.S. Childs' complaint that "it remains an unexplored challenge, whether or not one can speak meaningfully of a 'canonical Moses', by which one would mean a theological profile of Moses which would do justice to the canonical form of the literature which bore eloquent testimony to his place within the divine economy."²⁴ Schmid sees the need to do research into the "canonical Moses" to prevent "overinterpretations" and "fantastic speculations" by commentators.²⁵ The latter tends to be conditioned by the source critical approach which only allows portraits drawn along the source whose grounds are rather fluid these days. They prove to be inadequate for a complete portrait to be seen. Schmid himself illustrates this need particularly when his concluding chapter has merely one and a quarter pages for "Moses as Canonical Figure" compared to over ten pages for "Moses as Tradition-Historical Figure" and "Moses as Historical Figure".

From the above, there is a need to reappraise the literary role of Moses in the Pentateuch in the light of the current interest in Hebrew Narrative method of study. I have chosen to do this with one of the books of the Pentateuch instead of an extensive investigation of the Pentateuch as a whole. Numbers is conducive for us to test the extent of the literary role of Moses given its structural problem. Also, it provides an opportunity to examine the narrative quality of Numbers as part of the Pentateuch Narrative.²⁶ So the question that I have sought to come to grips with is,

²³ *Die Gestalt des Mose: Probleme alttestamentlicher Forschung unter Berücksichtigung der Pentateuchkrise*. WB 1986 Band 237.

²⁴ B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia: 1979, p. 178.

²⁵ "Bemühungen um einen kanonischen Mose können Kritiken gegen eine Überinterpretation und gegen phantastische Spekulationen an die Hand geben." *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁶ Cf. David Clines writes, 'The first way begins from the recognition that the Pentateuch is essentially a *narrative*. To suppose that because it is "torah" it is therefore "law" is a fatal mistake. ...The Pentateuch is, in fact, an outstanding example within world literature of the continually self-renewing function of religious story. As story, it could serve as the paradigm for the interpretation of the bulk of the Biblical material, story and not history being the primary mode of communication of religious truth, and story-telling about a God who is already revealed

What is the literary role of Moses in Numbers and its theological implications on the book?

In Chapter 1, I will try to identify the Structural Problem of Numbers and show why Numbers should be taken as a narrative work.

In Chapter 2, I will attempt use the Biblical Art of Narrative to draw out the Plot of the book in order to demonstrate the unity of the book as a valid narrative unit. The plot will show that Numbers is both about Journey and Succession. However, there is a third major element that surfaces which is the central characterization of Moses. It is also seen that the momentous account of the exclusion of Israel from ever entering the promised Land has been displaced from the centre of the book by the account of Moses' fall and exclusion which serves as a climax juxtaposed to Num 14. This illustrates the extent of the literary role, Moses' tradition plays in the book.

In Chapters 3 and 4, images of Moses are drawn in Numbers concentrating on key passages in the book. It is seen that the portrait that emerges is dynamic and complex. Moses is projected as *more than prophet* which is a move from the perception of him from Sinai so far. Invariably, we enter into a discussion of various images of Moses, as prince, priest and patriarch. At the end we find a 'pull' by Yahweh for Moses to be seen as a patriarch of sorts. Moses himself reflects this when he perceives his commission and leadership of Israel as that of a *nursing father*.

Chapter 5 tries to outline the Implications of the investigation. It is clear that whilst Numbers is comprised of the motifs of Journey/Pilgrimage and Succession, yet, the very substantial presence and role played by Moses in the book does affect the message of the book.

CHAPTER 1

NUMBERS AS A NARRATIVE WORK

1.1 To what extent can Numbers be treated as a coherent Narrative unit?

D. J. A. Clines has observed that

'the Pentateuch is essentially a *narrative*. To suppose that because it is "torah" it is therefore "law" is a fatal mistake. It is as much in its story-telling functions as in its explicitly directive commandments that it is "torah", "guidance". The patriarchal narratives are as much "torah" as are the Ten Commandments, the story of rebellion in the wilderness and the Blessing of Moses no less "torah" than the levitical sacrificial code. The Pentateuch is, in fact, an outstanding example within world literature of the continually self-renewing function of religious story.'¹

However, this narrative quality is not so apparent in the case of the book of Numbers, given the diversity of materials and their apparent poor integration in the present form. The trouble with Numbers is that its composition is so unsettling to the modern reader that it is difficult to treat it as a literary narrative unit by itself. The question under consideration is, therefore, whether Numbers be considered as primarily a narrative work?

Essentially, narratives are written stories. There are different kinds of narratives like history, fables, sagas, tales, novelle.² It is important to identify the kind of narrative one is dealing with at the outset of a study because it determines the attitude and approach the reader adopts with the text before him. As part of the Pentateuchal story of Israel's beginning, Numbers presents itself as part of the

¹ D.J.A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. JSOTS 10 JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1984, p. 102.

² Cf. G.W. Coats, *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative forms in Old Testament Literature*. JSOTS 35 Sheffield, JSOT Press: 1985.

Heilsgeschichte. It is in sequence to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and formation as Yahweh's chosen people at Sinai, that Numbers tells the story of how the community went on to cross the desert to occupy the promised Land of Canaan. In this connection, Clines' reminder that the Pentateuch as "torah" describes both laws and narratives serves to underline the fact that Israel's faith is derived from both law and story.

In the main, there are three objections to approaching Numbers as primarily a narrative unit in the Pentateuch. They are: a) the problematic beginning and ending of the book; b) the apparent irrational sprinkling of the law materials; and c) the apparent confusion arising from the lack of structure of the book.

1.1.1 The Problematic Beginning and Ending of Numbers

A crucial element of a narrative unit is its clear beginning and ending. There must be something at the beginning of the story that marks it out as the introduction of something *new* altogether. At the end, there must be the feeling of ending even if it is an "open" type, where the climactic conflict of the story is resolved even if the solution is not the final answer. The coherence of a narrative lies in the fact that it has a clear distinct head and tail to the body of the story. It is here that we meet the first obstacle to treating Numbers as a coherent narrative work.

In the first decades of this century, when the biblical scholarship was caught up in the grips of the Documentary Hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen, Source-Criticism was applied to Numbers that had its effects till today. A general consensus was arrived at that saw Numbers as basically composed of an earlier JE strand together with a late P providing the framework of the final product. These strands were to be the same as those found in Genesis and Exodus. However, any attempts at detailed descriptions of these sources quickly led to diverse variations of the traditions amongst scholars. (For example, while Gray

posits three layers of P sources³, Bæntsch⁴ identified at least, nine layers of P). Nonetheless, Source Criticism was instrumental in identifying the 'fragmentary' nature of Numbers.

a) G. B. Gray

In 1903, G. B. Gray published his commentary on Numbers in the ICC series where he perceived that Numbers "possesses no unity of subject."⁵ He saw that Numbers 1:1-10:10 more appropriately belongs to the books of Exodus and Leviticus since its narrative locus is situated in the Sinai region and continues the exodus-Sinai story with the organisation of the people in preparation for Yahweh's indwelling presence to march to the promised Land. Hence if this passage is disregarded, then the rest of Numbers can be treated as a literary unit focusing on the "fortunes" of Israel's trek from Sinai to Canaan.⁶

Gray also saw that Numbers 33:50-36:13 bears resemblance to the laws in Deuteronomy which anticipate the settlement conditions, even though he allowed that they do not belong to the Deuteronomic hand.⁷ The passage is a kind of

³ Gray, George B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*. ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903, pp. xxxiii ff. P^g, is the early basic priestly narrative tradition; P^x, is the early legal corpus, but not original to Numbers; finally, P^s, comprises of later legal and narrative materials.

⁴ Bæntsch's analysis (*Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903) was incredibly meticulous so that every verse and even parts in it were assigned a source. Not surprisingly, his source layers burgeoned to include redactors for each source and for their combinations, not less to say different layers of supplements. Holzinger, (*Numeri*. Tübingen & Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1903) found the division of source layers between J and E tenuous and much secondary P materials. As a result, his focus falls on the redactional layers comprising R^{je} = J+E, R^d = JE+D and R = JED+P. Paul Heinisch's analysis (*Das Buch Numeri, Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testament*. Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1936) is more elaborate with the addition of J¹, J² and a JE^s layers.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

⁶ "Unity of subject is only to be found when 1:1-10:10 is disregarded. The remainder of the book is the fortunes of the Israelites after leaving Sinai, where they had been duly organized as the people of Yahweh, up to the point at which they are ready to enter and conquer the Land of Promise. The Conquest itself forms the subject of the Book of Joshua. The subject of Numbers would have been fitly rounded off by the record of the Death of Moses (Deut. 34), but with the Book of Deuteronomy to follow this was impossible." *Numbers*, p. xxiv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xxxiii-xxiv.

appendix to the main body. In this way, Gray tried to make sense of Numbers as a literary work but does so as part of the Pentateuch. In his assessment, "...the Book of Numbers is a section somewhat *mechanically cut out* of the Pentateuch."⁸ This "mechanical" view of Numbers' origin serves to explain why in its canonical form, the book lacks coherence. Only when the large legal materials like Numbers 1:1-10:10 has been excised can the narrative thrust be detected clearly.

b) Martin Noth

A major significant study of Numbers came from Martin Noth whose five-fold thematic schema⁹ of the Pentateuch forms the framework for his commentary on Numbers. Noth begins by noting that the integrity of Numbers as a narrative unit is only in appearance since its content and structure shows otherwise.¹⁰ In his view Numbers is so fragmented in the compilation process that it was impossible to trace a significant continuous tradition of any of the sources identified in Genesis.¹¹ Nonetheless since Numbers was part of the Pentateuch, "It is, therefore, justifiable to approach the book of Numbers with the results of Pentateuchal analysis achieved elsewhere and to expect the continuing

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

⁹ *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*. E.T. by B.W. Anderson. Prentice-Hall, New York: 1972. Main criticisms focus on the weakness that Noth's five-fold scheme lack a historico-social verification and therefore seems contrived and idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, Noth's model continues to hold currency amongst scholars mainly because of its brilliance in conception.

¹⁰ "From the point of view of its contents, the book lacks unity, and it is difficult to see any pattern in its construction. Seen as a whole, it is a piece of narrative, but this narrative is interrupted again and again by the communication of more or less comprehensive regulations and lists which are loosely linked to the narrative thread by the short, stereotyped introductory formula, 'Yahweh said to Moses',..." *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ "If we were to take the book of Numbers on its own, then we would think not so much of 'continuous sources' as of an unsystematic collection of innumerable pieces of tradition of very varied content, age and character ('Fragment Hypothesis')." *Numbers, A Commentary*. OTL, ET. James D. Martin, London: SCM, 1968, p. 4.

Pentateuchal 'sources' here, too, even if, as we have said, the situation in Numbers, of itself, does not exactly lead us to these results."¹²

A notable contribution by Noth is his suggestion that Numbers 27:12-23 (P) is part of the the ending of the book which was originally connected to the now displaced conclusion of Deuteronomy 34:1, 7-9 (P). This is based on his theory of the Deuteronomistic history.¹³ In that case, Numbers 28-36 would then be late additions which now serves as an "appendix" to the book in its present form.

Noth concludes that based upon "the confusion and lack of order in its contents, we can scarcely speak of a specific significance peculiar to the book of Numbers".¹⁴ It is significant that Noth recognizes Numbers as "a piece of narrative", albeit "part of the total narrative of the Pentateuch".¹⁵ For him, the book is "indispensable"¹⁶ in the Pentateuch since it brings the central theme of the 'theophany at Sinai' to its conclusion. This is in terms of "the definitive constitution of the cult and life of Israel as this is presented by P."¹⁷ In addition, Numbers also explains why the wilderness sojourn took so long (cf. the 'spy' story) and introduces the Conquest theme in the Pentateuch.¹⁸ Nevertheless, these positive observations of the book do not lead him to consider the narrative of Numbers as significant. Instead he insisted that "We can scarcely speak of a specific significance peculiar to the book of Numbers. It has its significance—

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ "The remaining contents of the last eleven chapters of Numbers, apart from the above-mentioned four verses in chapter 32 (vv.1, 16-19), comprise material from a later period which is not susceptible of division among the sources, and this, again, is to be explained by the position of these chapters within the Pentateuch as a whole." (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11f.

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12. Noth is puzzled by P's silence over the conquest theme since he attributes most of the material to the Deuteronomic historian! Since 21:21-31 and 32:1ff. are deemed as preliminary accounts and "... the conquest narrative in the first half of the book of Joshua is, in all probability, not derived from the Pentateuchal 'sources'." (*Ibidem.*)

even more so than is the case with the other books of the Pentateuch—within the framework and context of the greater Pentateuchal whole.”¹⁹

c) Observations

It is clear from the above that in handling the problematic beginning and ending of Numbers, scholars have turned to the Pentateuchal framework to make sense of the difficulties before them. It cannot be denied that Numbers is part of the Pentateuch and that it is in continuum to Exodus and Leviticus. However, to assert this continuum at the expense of its distinctive literary integrity only reduces it to a product of accident. More significantly, Noth has deemed the narrative quality of Numbers to be secondary to the thematic agenda of the Pentateuch. So the question is, does Numbers possess a clear beginning and ending so that it can be considered a narrative work as a whole?

In reply to Gray’s assertion that Numbers has been “mechanically cut out” in the formation of the Pentateuch and therefore, is not cogent by itself, we can easily turn to Otto Eissfeldt for a different conclusion based on the same perception.

According to Otto Eissfeldt²⁰ the physical compilation of the Pentateuch has not been conducted capriciously. In the main, Eissfeldt believed that the tradent had to get the scrolls of the Pentateuch²¹ into a manageable size of equal length. Even though this may be an indication to see the formation of the Pentateuchal books as ‘arbitrary’, Eissfeldt insisted that it was carried out *meaningfully*, that is, the literary unity of each book in the Pentateuch may be

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁰ *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

²¹ At this stage, the Pentateuch had been more or less collected in the present form. “As far as the Pentateuch is concerned, it is in any case clear that its division into five books took place only when the whole of the material now united within it had already been incorporated, and the length, corresponding to the normal length of the scrolls of the time.”*Ibid.*, p.135.

'mechanically' ordered to length, but it was done with sensitivity to maintain the integrity of each book.

"The dividing lines between the individual books of the Pentateuch are in general *meaningful*. At the end of Gen. (ch. 1) there comes to an end the story which tells of the Patriarchs, i.e. the forefathers of the people, and with Exod. i there begins the history of the people itself (i, 7). The division between Exod. and Lev. is also justified in so far as the tent of meeting is completed with Exod. xl (v. 33), and from Lev. i onwards there are set out the regulations which apply to the cultus to be celebrated there—though admittedly together with other regulations....

...There is something *new* with the beginning of Numbers. For the reviewing and arrangements for marching and service related in i-iv may be considered as preparation for the departure from Sinai, and should indeed be so regarded. Admittedly in the directions given in v, 1-x, 10, there is to be found a great deal which has nothing to do with this departure, and which can hardly be related to it. But the period of time between i, 1 and x, 11, is only twenty days..., whereas Israel's sojourn at Sinai lasted more than three quarters of a year..., so that the twenty days of Num. i, 1-x, 10, may simply be regarded as leading up to the departure. Although there is no change of place, Deuteronomy stands out sharply from the end of Num. in that Deut. i, 1, begins the great speech of Moses which covers Chapters i-xxx. On the other hand, Deut. xxxi-xxxiv are clearly the direct continuation of Num. xxvii (xxxvi), in that here the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor, begun in Num. xxvii, is brought to a conclusion, and besides, these chapters are concerned with the last words and death of Moses. Thus it may be seen that the division is *meaningful*, but at the same time it clearly appears that it has been made

secondarily, and derives from the desire to divide into five approximately equal parts a complex which was felt to be too large."²²

Eissfeldt's demonstration of the meaningfulness of the present form of Numbers is irresistible. His argument anticipates the current recognition that the meaning of the a text need not be tied to authorial intention.²³ Thus even though the original authorial intention of Numbers may not be established, and the process of its production may be viewed as 'mechanical', yet, the resultant individual books of the Pentateuch, including Numbers, cannot be said to be void of meaning or integrity in themselves. Thus Eissfeldt saw a distinctive beginning and ending that envelopes Numbers enabling it to stand as a narrative piece by itself. Its separation from Leviticus and Deuteronomy is achieved by conventional devices and though it stands in continuum with these books, it retains its own narrative integrity at the same time, with a distinctive telling of Israel's trek across the desert to the promised Land.

²² *Ibid.*, p.156, 157 (all italics mine). Clearly, Eissfeldt emphasized the underlying priority in the mechanical division of the Pentateuch was that each resultant book was to be 'meaningful' in themselves. This means that each book of the Pentateuch was to have its own integrity.

²³ See for example, Edgar V. McKnight's attempt to argue for the meaning text from a reader-oriented approach in *The Bible and the Reader* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia: 1985). In his ontological definition, "The literary work is seen as existing within the triad of poet, text, and reader; the reality of a literary work is seen as essentially dependent upon its comprehension or realization by a reader. The inclusion of the reader in the work opens the text to a variety of values and meanings. ...In such an approach the model of interpretation would be changed from the quest for some meaning in the mind of the author to a meaning or a significance on this side of the text. Therefore, our goal is no longer a meaning *behind* the text which creates distance but rather a meaning *in front of* the text which demands involvement." (p. xviii). But "This does not mean that "anything goes," for systems of interpretation involve components that must be correlated with each other and with the reader—components that are dynamic in themselves as well as parts of a dynamic system. These components include a world view that constrains the sort of meaning desirable and possible; methods that are capable of discerning those sorts of meaning, and meanings and interpretations that are consistent with the world view and the methods employed which satisfy the reader." (p.133. Cf. also his article, "The Contours and Methods of Literary Criticism", *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism. In Honor of William A. Beardslee.*). Further discussions may be found in Charles E. Winquist (ed.) *Text and Textuality. Semeia 40* Scholars Press, Decatur GA: 1987; Stephen Prickett, *Words and The Words: Language, poetics and biblical interpretation.* CUP, Cambridge: 1986.

d) D. J. A. Clines

This "meaning" is reaffirmed in David Clines' investigation of the singular theme that threads the Pentateuch.²⁴ While he recognized the difficulty in trying to identify the organizing principle that undergirds the first third of Numbers in particular, yet, he found that "there runs this strong emphasis on the function of these last commands from Sinai for the journey toward the land. Leviticus has, ...largely envisaged a cult that could be carried out anywhere - even in the wilderness - indefinitely. Numbers, by contrast, *even in these early chapters (1:1-10:10), cannot be thought of as a mere appendage* to the revelation from Sinai; *movement* away from Sinai towards the promised Land accounts for almost all its material."²⁵

Clines suggested that this distinctive *movement* is so pronounced that it is detected right from the start of the book: "the beginning of Numbers signals a *shift of focus* to a new element²⁶ in the Pentateuchal theme changes one's attitude to the book entirely. Not only is the structure of the book itself illuminated, but also it becomes clear that it is by no means the conglomeration of unrelated matters that former commentators have thought it to be." This is in sharp contrast to the negativist assessment of Gray's view that coherence can only be seen after excising Num 1:1-10:10.

Admittedly, Clines' analysis of Numbers is very brief²⁷ being aimed at showing the consistency of the theme of partial fulfilment of the Promised Land as the common thread that flows through the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, it is

²⁴ D.J.A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. JSOTS 10, University of Sheffield, Sheffield: 1984.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54 (italics mine).

²⁶ This has been noted earlier by O. Eissfeldt, cf. *The Old Testament*, p. 156: "There is something new with the beginning of Numbers. For the reviewing and arrangements for marching and service related in i-iv may be considered as preparation for the departure from Sinai, and should indeed be so regarded." However, Clines' reiteration is fresh because Eissfeldt's earlier statement has been largely swamped by the negative views that surround Numbers.

²⁷ His treatment of Numbers as a book only covers five pages in his book (pp. 53-57).

striking that he avoids subsuming the literary entity of Numbers to the Pentateuch as many had done: "Numbers establishes from its very beginning the thematic element of the land as the end to which everything drives, and its matter and movement are consistently oriented toward that goal."²⁸ Thus at the end of the book, the community that began its journey at the Sinai region with a view to occupy Canaan arrives at the door-step of their objective, poised to settle in it.

1.1.2 The Legal Materials - R. C. Dentan

According to R. C. Dentan,²⁹ the legal and statistical materials in Numbers are so disruptive and awkward that they have obscured the story of the book as a whole: "...that the material in the book is of the most heterogeneous character and its arrangement, at least as respects the non-narrative elements, is *largely fortuitous*. ...Strung out upon this thread of narrative and geography, and interspersed often without apparent logic among its episodes, are the laws and statistical summaries which are likely to be so wearisome to the ordinary reader and which, by their profusion, tend to obscure the course of the story."³⁰

Even though Dentan perceived the integration of the legal and narrative materials in Numbers to be highly discordant, yet he is able to draw a narrative plot from the book as a whole. This shows that even such an overtly negative view of Numbers integrity cannot resist its narrative quality.³¹

The awkwardness of the combination of law and narrative materials in the whole of the Pentateuch has long been noted and critical scholars have generally attributed the inclusion of laws largely to the Priestly school. For example, Hillers remonstrated: "The reader who tries to read the Bible like other books is apt to be

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ "Numbers, Book of." *IDB* New York: Abingdon Press, 1962. Vol 3. Pp. 567-571.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

³¹ However Baruch Levine showed himself to be more consistent in his introductory article to Numbers in the *Supplementary Volume* of the IDB series, where he omitted an outline for the book altogether and discussed it in terms of 'Non-P' and 'P' materials. (cf. "Numbers, Book of," *IDB Supplementary volume*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1976. Pp. 631-635).

confused or annoyed at the interruption of the story by bodies of laws - indeed it would be abnormal not to feel something approaching a personal dislike for the author of Leviticus."³² On the other hand, von Rad overlooked it altogether in his summary of Pentateuchal narrative contents.³³ Sigmund Mowinckel³⁴ has even tried to argue that P's historical work was undertaken to provide the context for the law.

In de Vaulx's view,³⁵ the laws and narratives of Numbers share the common theme about the Community's journey to the promised Land. Thus laws and regulations of 1-10, 28-30, 34-36 prescribe how Israel organized as God's army is to journey to Canaan, while the narratives in 11-14, 20-21 describe what happened during the journey. Wenham concurs with de Vaulx and adds that laws play a *promissory role* in the book, since "The promulgation of a law carries with it the implication that God will put Israel into a situation where she can fulfill the law."³⁶ Certainly the anticipatory force of the law is sublimally felt by the audience, often with a part of the drama of the narrative.

Recently David Damrosch has drawn out the dramatic quality of the Pentateuchal law.³⁷ In a study of Leviticus, he observes that chapters 1-7 clearly link the logical sequence from the ending the book of Exodus, with the introduction of the rules and regulations concerning the finished Tabernacle. Analytical critics had tended to see the reason for this addition is the Priestly school's desire to legitimize their offertory rules in the Sinai milieu. It reflects priestly disputes that must have taken place in Jerusalem at the time. However, Damrosch suggests that this does not explain the literary function of laws in their present form and context.

³² *Covenant*, p. 87.

³³ *Form-Critical Problem*, p. 2.

³⁴ *Erwägungen zur Pentateuch Quellenfrage*.

³⁵ *Les Nombres*. 1972.

³⁶ *Numbers*, p. 15.

³⁷ *The Narrative Covenant*, San Francisco: Harper & Row: 1987, pp. 261-297.

More significantly, Damrosch argues that the laws in Leviticus 1-7 reveal a consistent pattern of triplicity which is reflected in its first three chapters: 'Three kinds of sacrifice are described (burnt offerings, cereal offerings and peace offerings). Each of these offerings is in turn divided into three variants, which describe different offerings that can be made to fulfill each type of sacrifice. This tripled threefold structure gives these chapters a certain lyrical aspect. Each subsection, a few verses in length, functions stanzaically, even ending with a refrain, some variation on the formulaic phrase "it is an offering by fire, of a sweet savor to the Lord."³⁸

Further, there is a clear *dramatic* presentation in these laws: "Rather than simply prescribing the necessary details, the text stages the event, showing us a little ritual drama of interaction between the person offering the sacrifice, the priest, and God."³⁹ Damrosch calls such accounts "ordered ritual narratives". These narratives are a result of P's compilation of law and narrative materials based on the received traditions that included the works of both the Yahwists and the Deuteronomists:

"Perhaps a schematic dialectic could be constructed as follows: in a first stage, the Yahwistic writers grounded their narrative in the past; secondly, the Deuteronomistic historian redirected the narrative emphasis into the future as communicated by the many prophetic figures who carry forward the meaning of events; finally, the Priestly writers took up both modes into a narrative grounded in the ritual present."⁴⁰

³⁸ *Narrative Covenant*, pp. 263-264.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 264, citing 1:10-13 as an example. 'The style, though simple, is unhurried, with occasional flourishes like "on the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar" that emphasizes the sense of ritual order and fill out the scene of ritual drama. ...Thus the text dramatizes the sense of orderly sequence at the heart of ritual. The singularity of the giving of the Law at Sinai is extended, through the rituals inaugurated at Sinai itself, to a narrative order of varied repetition. The emphasis on the different forms of sacrifice gives a place for narrative contingency within the ritual order.' (*Ibid.*, p. 265).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

Damrosch calls attention to the Semitic verb system to serve as model for understanding the process that emerged where “the perfective forms are used for singular, one-time actions; imperfective forms are used for ongoing or habitual activities, whether past, present or future.”⁴¹ These modes are combined: past-tense narration using a perfective form is followed by an imperfect, and with the imperfect coming first when the context is future or habitual.

‘On this analogy, the Yahwists concentrated their focus on perfective accounts of exemplary events, and the Deuteronomistic writers began to develop the perfective into a mixed mode with strong imperfective overtones. In the history of the monarchy, for example, the narrative is still structured around the perfective, singular, historically defined particularities of the individual monarchs, giving the dates and leading events of their reigns. At the same time, the events described are selectively chosen and developed to bring out the repetitive, “imperfective” patterns of apostasy, prophetic condemnation, punishment, and conditional restitution that the author sees as virtual constants over the whole course of the history of the monarchy.

The Priestly writers carry the mingling of perfective and imperfective a large step further. ...Thus, in the rituals of Leviticus 1-7, the iterative, imperfective regulations are not presented abstractly or as an exhaustive series. Rather, thanks to the fullness of scenic description, one envisions a specific, perfective scene that is then repeated with variations. Further, the perfective quality of the ritual repetitions is grounded in the frequent reminders that the ritual regulations are being delivered in a very singular manner in a very specific setting in time and space,...“The Lord called Moses, and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.”

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

If the presentation of the Law is given a perfective specificity, the historical narrative around the blocks of law is conversely characterized by a high degree of imperfective iteration.⁴²

Thus the difference between law and narrative is in mode, the former being 'imperfective' so that it stands as a constant call for observance. It stands as a distinct objective association to the audience. The 'I-It' relationship does not integrate. The law continues to be enshrined as a separate object even as the believer applies it in his/her life. Damrosch cites the example of Numbers 7, where the leaders of the twelve tribes bring their ritualistic offerings is narratively described in contrast to the description given in Judges 20:26. Another example is the formal schematic structuring of the ten plagues in Egypt which is paralleled by ten episodes of Israelite murmurings in the wilderness. Then there are the apostasy stories set around the giving of the Ten commandments in the book of Exodus.

In contrast, the narrative is perfective, where the audience is called upon to enter into a different world in a different time for reflection and association. Its invitation for subjective involvement moves the audience from within, moving the spirit and soul, a highly emotive experience. The value of narrative lies in not merely its entertainment or pedagogical potential but more important its identification factor. That the audience is challenged, persuaded, to see himself/herself as a participating member of story is a fundamental reason for the use of narrative in the Hebrew Bible. Thus Damrosch confirms his observation:

"Far from interrupting the narrative, the laws complete it, and the story exists for the sake of the laws that it frames. If the Yahwistic Moses was the giver of the Law, the Priestly Law is the giver of Moses, who becomes

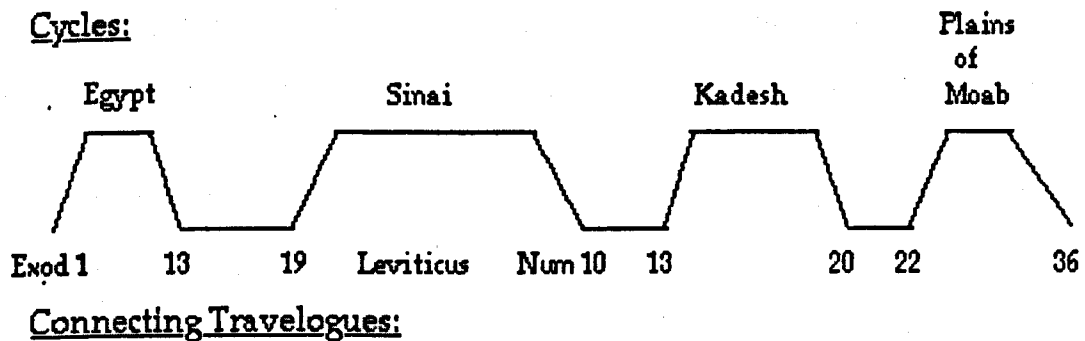
⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 282-83.

its embodiment. This new emphasis leads to a reciprocal influence between law and narrative,..."⁴³

Thus the objection that the narrative shape of Numbers has fundamentally been undermined by the *irrational* sprinkling of legal materials is seen to be refuted on two grounds. Firstly, Damrosch has shown that the significant number of law materials in the Pentateuch are set in "ritual dramatic" contexts like the Ten Commandments, Lev. 1-7 and Numbers 7 cautions us from being too quick to assess the disruptive quality of the laws in Numbers.

Secondly, Wenham has argued that the Pentateuch tends to follow a triadic pattern in structure. Damrosch's demonstration of such a pattern in Leviticus, particularly chapters 1-7 supports Wenham's view. Far from being irrational and incongruous, Wenham has shown that the organization of the book follows a standard triadic patterning found in the Pentateuch and used by Numbers.

Structurally, Wenham's scheme is graphically illustrated by his diagram,⁴⁴



Wenham's scheme has altogether three short travelogue linkages made up of Exodus 13-19, Numbers 10-13, and 20-22, marked by three chronological notices 1:1; 10:11; and 20:1 that provide the framework for the grouping of the law and

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴⁴ *Numbers*, pp.14-18.

narrative materials. They join four major transient locations of Israel's route to the promised Land of Canaan beginning in Egypt, three of which, Sinai, Kadesh and Moab, form the three significant events of divine revelation. Within this is a threefold grouping of laws 5:5-6:21; ch. 15; 33:50-36:12. Note that there is a six-fold, ie. 2x3 pattern of encampment in Num 33.⁴⁵ These are accompanied by threefold organization of the the murmuring narratives 11:1-12:16; 16:1-17:12; 22::2-24:25. At this point, it is sufficient to note that Wenham's structural scheme is valid even though he does not apply it consistently. For example, he has failed to take the rebellion stories in Num 20:1-13, and 21:4-9 into account. A more detailed discussion will be made later under the Plot of Numbers.

For the present, it is unfortunate that having perceived the triadic pattern of the book's structure, Wenham turns his attention away from the essential nature of its narrative distinctiveness. Instead he finds that narratives like the Balaam cycle and the spy stories "comprise a relatively small proportion of the whole book."⁴⁶ For him, "The material in Numbers cannot be understood apart from what precedes it in Exodus and Leviticus."⁴⁷ This leads Wenham to turn his focus to the ritual elements that pervade Numbers which have been long overlooked. Perhaps these rituals hold a vital key to the book's message. As a result, Wenham

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16. Thus he concludes: "It is *impossible* to discuss the theology of Numbers in isolation from the other books of the Pentateuch, particularly Exodus and Leviticus. The outward structural devices that link the three middle books of the Pentateuch point to an inner unity of theological theme that underlies them all. All are concerned with the outworking of the promises to Abraham and the moulding of Israel into the holy people of God. But the focus of interest in each book is different. Exodus concentrates on the deliverance from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai and the erection of the tabernacle. Leviticus highlights the nature of true worship and holiness. Numbers focuses on the land of promise and Israel's journey towards it. God's character and his reactions to Israel's behaviour are constant throughout these books, but different aspects come to the fore in different books. If Leviticus emphasizes the importance of holiness and uncleanness, Numbers reiterates the value of faith and obedience. Where Leviticus stresses the role of sacrifice in creating and maintaining right relations with God and man, Numbers accentuates the indispensability of the priesthood for preserving the nation's spiritual health.... The *theological emphases* of the different books do not contradict but complement one another." (*Ibid.*, p. 39, italics mine).

is drawn by the laws in Numbers to adopt a socio-anthropological approach in his commentary. It is then no wonder that in the end he fell into a “specialised” study⁴⁸ of Numbers.

1.1.3 The Lack of Structure

A third objection to Numbers’ literary integrity is its apparent lack of a clear literary structure. The problem is Numbers have too many literary markers so that there are just as many diverse opinions as to which are the key ones. The structure of a narrative work is usually indicated by spatial-temporal markers and other literary devices like census lists and toledot formulae.

So, even though Dentan was convinced of the incoherence of Numbers, yet he was still able to delineate a ‘narrative framework’ in the book. Based on the use of chronological and geographical notices, Dentan divided Numbers into three distinct time-periods in the narrative— a) Israel’s journey from Sinai to Canaan, culminating in the failure to conquer the land from the South (Numbers 1-14); b) the forty years of wilderness wandering (Numbers 15-19); and c) the final, triumphant march to the edge of Jordan opposite Jericho (Numbers 20-36). Alongside this, he also found corresponding threefold geographical structure which he believed to be the final framework of Numbers. Thus, Dentan⁴⁹ delineates Numbers into a threefold structure:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| a) 1:1-10:10 | events at Sinai; |
| b) 10:11-20:13 | events in the desert to the south of Palestine; |
| c) 20:14-36:13 | events in Edom and Moab. |

⁴⁸ Such specialised studies are not new to Numbers as the agenda has been set very early in the century by the work of Hugo Gressmann.

⁴⁹ Cf. Snaith’s structure: 1:1-10:10 What happened at Sinai; 11:1-20:13 What happened in the Wilderness; 20:14-36:13 What happened from Kadesh to the Plains of Moab.

Most commentators would agree with the broad structure above. However, disagreement would arise mainly centering on the beginning and end of the second section of the book. The first section is cogent enough being set in the Sinai Wilderness, the majority acknowledging its ending in 10:10.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, scholars usually range between ending section two in 22:1, 20:13 or 21:19. All are based on geographical notices. As for Chronological notices, they are infrequent and lack uniformity so that they are not sustained throughout the book. Notices like 1:1 in the context of the census; 9:1 and 5, the celebration of the Passover; 10:11, the inauguration of the march; 20:1, the arrival at Kadesh and death of Miriam; 33:3, remembering the first Passover; 33:38, the death of Aaron tends to highlight the events concerned than provide a systematic structural framework for the narrative.

Further, the chronological notices tend to be inconsistent. For example, Miriam's death notice in 20:1 mentions only "the first month" in comparison to 33:38 which gives the more precise date: first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt.

a) Use of Census Lists

Recently, Dennis T. Olson made a study of Numbers insisting that it is a literary unit structured around the two census lists of chapters 1 and 26.⁵¹ In support of this thesis, Olson calls upon the external witnesses of the canon and early Jewish literature and the internal witness of the Pentateuch and Numbers. He points to three external sources that support the recognition that Numbers is a separate literary unit: the rabbinic tradition,⁵² the Hebrew textual tradition⁵³ and

⁵⁰ Cf. Gray, supported by Wenham who introduces a travelogue link in 10:11-12:16. Even then variation can arise as seen in Noth, followed by Sturdy and Budd who suggest an ending in 9:14.

⁵¹ *Death of the Old and Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*. Brown Judaic Studies 71, Scholars Press, Chicago: 1985.

⁵² These include the Jerusalem Talmud (eg. Megilla 1:7; 70d; Sotah 5:8, 20d); Babylonian Talmud (eg. Sanhedrin 44a; Hagigah 14a) where the Torah is recognized as a five-fold

the Greek textual tradition.⁵⁴ All of these verify that the division of the Torah is ancient.⁵⁵ Hence Olson follows the view that the Pentateuchal canon was completed around the fourth century.⁵⁶

As evidence from the internal witnesses, Olson compares the opening verse and closing verse of each Pentateuchal book to show that they are a standard literary device. He then asserts that the collection of laws is firmly set in the Sinai nexus. In contrast, a different geographical location is given at the outset in Numbers 1:1 - 10:10 being set in the Wilderness of Sinai and not Mount Sinai.⁵⁷ Thus he claims,

“...every book of the Pentateuch provides its own internal evidence of an intentional editorial structure which provides each book with a clear introduction and conclusion. Each book is given a level of its own literary

division. Examples where Numbers is designated as the fourth book and with occasional accompanying titles like וידבר (“And he said”) במדבר (“In the Wilderness”) include references in the Mishnah (eg. Yoma 7:1; Sotah 7:9; Menahoth 4:3), Tosefta (Megillah 4:7) and early midrashic collections (Sifre II, 127; Sifra to 16:5; Sifra to 23:18). Then there is Josephus’ tract *Against Apion I* (para 38-39), where the canonized books were said to number twenty-two, of which “five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history of man down to the death of the law giver.” (Josephus. LCL vol 1. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1966. P. 179).

⁵³ Olson points to the Massoretic text and also to recent investigations on the Samaritan Pentateuch that affirms the identification of the five-fold Torah.

⁵⁴ Olson notes that for example, the facsimile of Codex Alexandrinus reproduces the clear division indicated by a blank page between each of the five books of the Pentateuch.

⁵⁵ Cf. Otto Eissfeldt’s judgment: ‘Admittedly the description corresponding to this five-fold division, “the five fifths of the Law,” is first to be found in the Talmudic times. **But it is clearly older** [my emphasis]. For the term *hé pentateuchos (biblos)*, “the book consisting of five books,” which is probably to be understood as a translation of the Hebrew name, already appears in the second century A.D., and its Latin form *pentateuchas (liber)* soon after. Our entitling of the five books of Moses as the Pentateuch corresponds to the Latin.’ (*Old Testament: An Introduction*, p. 156).

⁵⁶ Cf. Otto Kaiser: “At present the conclusion can be drawn on the basis of the general considerations about the earlier history of different forms of the text about the beginnings of the Septuagint translation, that the Pentateuch reached its position of special dignity at the latest in the fourth century.” (*Introduction to the Old Testament*. ET. J. Sturdy, Blackwell, Oxford: 1975, p. 408).

⁵⁷ Olson considered the problem of Leviticus 7:38, and rightly shows that although it mentions the wilderness of Sinai, yet the burnt offering law is traced to the revelation at Mount Sinai. Thus, “After the references in Exodus 19:1-2, all references to Sinai in Exodus and all through Leviticus are to the **mountain** of Sinai. Only at Num 1:1 and following do we again read of event and laws in the **wilderness of Sinai**,...” (*The Death of the Old...*, p. 49).

integrity apart from the other books of the Pentateuch which may precede or follow it. The significance for the interpretation of the book of Numbers is that, in its present form, it is intended to be read as a literary unit with its own integrity."⁵⁸

However, Olson is clear that recognition of literary unity does not mean that it was original to the literary pre-history of the Pentateuchal divisions. Rather, it was a later development in the compilation process. Olson wants to maintain that an earlier Priestly redaction layer was responsible for the creation of the Tetrateuch (cf. Noth,⁵⁹ Engnell,⁶⁰ F.M. Cross,⁶¹ R. Smend,⁶² and D. Kellermann⁶³).

The difficulties of the final concluding section of Numbers have been highlighted by Martin Noth who saw it as a loose collection of secondary traditions of unknown origin. These had been added only after the Deuteronomistic history had been joined to the Tetrateuch. Rolf Rendtorff,⁶⁴ however, argues that since these final chapters of Numbers were part of the Deuteronomistic history, it must, therefore, be the Deuteronomistic editor who was responsible for them as well as the other Pentateuchal connection from Genesis to Numbers. As a result, he rejected Noth's notion of a separate Tetrateuch.⁶⁵ In Graeme Auld's view⁶⁶ the predominance of the Priestly

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49 (my emphasis).

⁵⁹ *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*. Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen: 1957.

⁶⁰ Ivan Engnell, "The Pentateuch," *A Rigid Scrutiny*. ET. J. T. Willis. Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville: 1969, pp. 50-67.

⁶¹ *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, p. 317, where Cross attributes the introductory verses of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers to P.

⁶² *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments*. (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1978), P. 46. However, Smend prefers to see the concluding section of Numbers as belonging to the Deuteronomistic editor whose work was finally imbued with its Priestly flavour when the Pentateuch was shaped to its present form by the late P redactor.

⁶³ *Die Priesterschrift von Numeri 1,1 bis 10,10*. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1970), pp. 2-3, where Kellermann sees an extensive P handiwork on Numbers especially in its final form.

⁶⁴ *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, ET. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1985, pp. 147-50; and his discussion on Deuteronomic History in pp. 183-88.

⁶⁵ *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch*. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977, pp. 166-68.

handiwork as in the penultimate shaping of the traditions is not in any way diminished by the Deuteronomistic presence. Olson clearly favours the last of these three proposed explanations for the shape of the final chapters of Numbers. This is because it is the same P redactor who introduced the genealogical framework to the Pentateuch and the Census list for Numbers. This framework provided the definitive shaping of Numbers in the final form and its theology.

Olson asserts that the geographical (and chronological) notices have been superseded when the census list was added and made the structural framework of Numbers by P. Even though the structural frame based on the Census lists is 'secondary', as it was not introduced originally at the earliest stages of the compilation process yet, it had become the definitive framework in refocussing the book from Journey to Succession motif entitled, "The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New". The 'old generation' Israel identified in Numbers 1 included those who had experienced the deliverance from Egypt to become the Sinai covenant Community. The second part of their story is told in Numbers 1-25 about their tragic attempt to realize Yahweh's promise of Canaan to them. Their death outside the promised Land is thereby explained as a result of their rebellion and rejection of Yahweh and his servant Moses. However the situation was alleviated by the emergence of a 'new generation' within the Community to be Yahweh's chosen people and were brought to the very edge of the promised Land (cf. Numbers 26). At this point, the book recalls the warnings and promises of the past as it looks forward to its own destiny in the last chapters of the book (cf. Numbers 26-36). Critical to Olson's thesis is the nature and use of genealogical lists in the Pentateuch.

"In short, the later Priestly writers or redactors of Genesis through Numbers have followed a consistent strategy in providing for the material contained within those books. The toledot formulae and the genealogies

and tribal lists, including the census lists in Numbers 1 and 26, make up the major overarching framework for Genesis through Numbers in its present form. The editorial division of the Pentateuch into five books, at whatever later state it occurred, did not destroy but rather complemented this definitive generational framework."⁶⁷

Olson does not deny the structural role played by geographical notices in the Pentateuch but contends that they are not the primary literary markers. Olson points to the lack of consensus amongst scholars who adopt their structural outline for Numbers based on geographical and chronological notices as indicating their supersession by the census lists. The listings have precedence as the genealogical-type lists that provide the "definitive framework" in the organisation of the narrative books of Genesis, Exodus, and , by extension, Numbers.

The heart of Olson's thesis lies in his analysis of Numbers 3:1 against the background of considerable toledot debate.⁶⁸ Based on Kellermann's analysis⁶⁹ of the redactional layers of Numbers 1-4, Olson argues that the genealogical notice in 3:1 reflects the thematic layers of exclusivity of the Aaronid priesthood and the Levites and the inclusiveness of the twelve tribes of Israel.⁷⁰ He asserts that the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶⁸ Walter Eichrodt, *Die Quellen der Genesis von neuem untersucht*. (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1916); Josef Scharbert, "Der Sinn der Toledot-Formel in der Priesterschrift", *Wort-Gebot-Glaube, Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. H.J. Stoebe (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970); Otto Eissfeldt, "Biblos Geneseos", *Kleine Schriften, III*, eds. R. Sellheim and Fritz Maass (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1966); Peter Weimar, "Die Toledot-Formel in der priesterschriftlichen Geschichtsdarstellung", *BZ* 18 (1974); Sven Tenström, *Die Toledotformel und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch*. (Lund: GWK Gleerup, 1981); M. H. Woudstra, "The Toledot of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance", *Calvin Theological Journal* 5 (1970) 184-89.

⁶⁹ *Die Priesterschrift*, pp. 46-48.

⁷⁰ In explaining the awkward inclusion of Moses in the toledot formula, "These are the generations of Aaron and Moses...", Olson (*Ibid.*, pp.105ff.) tries to establish that it is not necessarily secondary since Exodus 6:20,26 and Numbers 26:59, where the combination reflects that Moses is the younger brother of Aaron. This is confirmed by Numbers 33:39 where upon his death, Aaron was said to be a hundred and twenty-three years old; and Deuteronomy 34:7, records that Moses was a hundred and twenty when he died. But Olson is willing to concede that "Moses" can very well be secondary.

formula "These are the generations of Aaron and Moses", is akin to the toledot superscriptions used in Genesis. Hence its employment in Numbers effectively bears with it all the theological implications analogous to God's organization of chaos in creation reflected in the formula, "These are the generations of heaven and earth" (Genesis 2:4). So it is that in Numbers, God was organizing a new people reflected by Numbers 3:1.⁷¹ Thus Olson concludes:

"These two transitions in Genesis and Numbers have striking formal and functional similarities in the present text. They provide further evidence of a conscious editorial connection between the structure of Genesis and the structure based on the census lists which we have described for the book of Numbers. ...The toledot formulae, then provide an overarching redactional structure for the Pentateuch which recounts the death of one generation and the birth of a new generation."⁷²

While the list in Numbers 1 signals an organised Israelite community ready to march to the Land, the second list in Numbers 26 indicates the death of that old generation with the birth of the new to replace it.

that Moses was a hundred and twenty when he died. But Olson is willing to concede that "Moses" can very well be secondary.

In that event, he switches his attention to the "effect" of using "Aaron and Moses" in the toledot formula. Based on the argument that the toledot formula functions as a superscription in other parts of the Pentateuch, he asserts a similar use in Numbers 3:1. Hence he is able to conclude, "...the toledot of Aaron and Moses refers not only to the genealogy of Aaron's sons but to all the events which happened to Israel under the leadership of Aaron and Moses. In the present shape of the text, this section would extend through Numbers to the end of Deuteronomy which concludes the Pentateuch and narrates the death of Moses, the last member of his generation." (*Ibid.*, p.106).

Olson is making gigantic claims based on very tenuous arguments and even if they are not convincing, he still asserts its validity..

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.110ff.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.113.

The significance of genealogical lists has been discussed extensively amongst scholars in recent years.⁷³ Attention has thus far tended to concentrate on their precise historical value,⁷⁴ but there is a growing interest in trying to assess their literary milieu recently.⁷⁵ To critique Olson's use of the census lists as structural markers, the literary uses of genealogies must first be discussed.

b) Genealogies and their Literary Uses

i) Marshall D. Johnson

R. R. Wilson⁷⁶ has acknowledged that up to the time of his publication, Marshall D. Johnson's study in Biblical genealogy⁷⁷ was the only significant monograph on the subject this century. In particular, Johnson was the first scholar to have concentrated on delineating the literary functions of Biblical genealogies.

Johnson divided his study into two parts: Old Testament genealogies and; later Jewish and Jesus genealogies. At the end of his investigation of the Old Testament materials, Johnson observed that just as post-Exilic histories of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah were concerned to establish the continuity of pre-Exilic Israel with the post-Exilic Judean community, so it was with P whose

"special concern to reveal the continuity of the cultus through the period of disruption is in harmony with the desire of the priestly narrative of the

⁷³ Cf. Robert R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* 94 (1975) 169-89; and *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*. New York and London: Yale University, 1977.

⁷⁴ While previously, the lists had been given little historical weight, the following works have a different assessment. R.R. Wilson's *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*. New York and London: Yale University, 1977; Terry J. Prewett, "Kinship Structure and the Genesis Genealogies?" *JNES* 20 (1981) 87-98; and W.E. Aufrecht, "Genealogy and History in Ancient Israel," in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and other studies in memory of Peter C. Craigie*. eds. L. Eslinger & Glen Taylor. JSOTS 67, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988. Pp. 205-235; R.S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1-11 and Comparative Literature", *Biblica* 70 (1989) 241-254.

⁷⁵ For example, R.B. Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 595-608; and Naomi Steinberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis," *Semeia* 46 (1989) 41-50.

⁷⁶ *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, p.4.

⁷⁷ *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*. SNTSMS 8; Cambridge: CUP, 1969.

Pentateuch to trace the origins of the sacerdotal cultus to Aaron and, in turn, to reveal Aaron as the culmination of a long genealogical process. Thus the genealogical form was well adapted to express the priestly concern for order and arrangement; for a genealogy is, by its very nature, entwined in history and the order of history. Beyond this, however, the priestly genealogies reveal the conviction that the course of history is governed and ordered according to a pre-arranged plan. So it becomes clear that in the OT the genealogical form was used in a variety of ways, but above all for apologetic purposes, both nationalistic and theological".⁷⁸

In Johnson's view, the literary function of Old Testament genealogies is minimalistic and deterministic, mainly as a device to connect narratives and draw attention to the legitimacy of the Aaronid priesthood and the succeeding Israelite communities as Yahweh's people. This is a similar view to that which Olson holds with regards to the Priestly use of the census list .

More recently, two articles which seek to draw out the literary function of the genealogies in Genesis continue the discussion of how such lists work in the Hebrew Bible. Both of them show a fine-tuning in the understanding of the genre and it would be relevant to observe their contribution at this point.

ii) R. B. Robinson

In his article, R. B. Robinson⁷⁹ succinctly points out the essential problem with the literary genre of genealogies in relation to Hebrew narratives is one of drama:

"Narrative is inherently more lively. Narrative treats the reader to dramatic complication, explores and develops nuances of individual character, and

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷⁹ "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 595-608.

pursues a perceptible *telos*, as the story moves, often fitfully, from initial tension to fitting denouement. The genealogies provide little in this vein. Dramatic tension is conspicuously lacking. ...No doubt stories are there to tell, but the genealogies do not tell them. Nor are the characters who appear in the genealogies fully drawn. Fundamental information on birth, death, and age at the crucial act of begetting the next generation appears, but no psychological depth, no character development, no *Bildung*. Moreover, although the genealogies have a beginning, in themselves they do not move toward a final conclusion, a *telos* whose achievement would create a sense of definitive and satisfying closure. ...With so little development, variation, or obviously purposeful movement, the genealogies seem thematically rather empty, especially in comparison with the richness of the narratives.”⁸⁰

Robinson concurs with Hayden White⁸¹ that the present trend in perceiving narratives as the ‘universal metacode’, ie. a common language that transcends cultural relativity, tends to demean non-narrative genres like genealogies. The problem, as White defines it, is “the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*...”⁸² To this, Robinson wants to add, that even though genealogies lack all the qualities of narrative in terms of development of character, plot, etc., yet the genre cannot be simply dismissed as incomplete or primitive narrative material. On the contrary, genealogies should be taken seriously on their own terms as vehicles that translate *knowing* to *telling*. He finds such a usage in the medieval annals⁸³ and observes,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 595.

⁸¹ “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” *On Narrative*. Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 596-7.

“As in the annals, the minimalism of the genealogies is not a failed effort to narrate the complexity and drama of existence. The genealogies are a fitting expression of the continuity of fundamental elements of human life—birth, death, the continuation of the family line. Even when the genealogies interact with the narratives, as they constantly do in Genesis, the genealogies maintain this sense of organic, elemental process.

...The basic orderliness of the genealogies often stands, therefore, in a profound and productive tension with the untidy economy of the narrative.”⁸⁴

Thus Robinson concludes that the ‘contingency’ of the narrative and ‘determinism’ of the genealogies complement each other, conspiring to reach the same point. He goes further in his concluding paragraph to urge that it is this whole interaction that effectively conveys realism to the audience/reader:

“The interplay of story and genealogy, narrative and non-narrative, is a literary strategy which, in a sense, defies the restrictions and reductions of the neat logical oppositions of free will versus determinism or contingency versus foreordination,...”⁸⁵

iii) Naomi Steinberg

The second article is written by Naomi Steinberg⁸⁶ who concentrates on applying her understanding of Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of plot as a five-fold schema, to the book of Genesis. She asserts that “Genesis is a book whose plot is genealogy. Through the interrelationship of narrative within a genealogical framework, a chronology is established which recounts the general ancestry of

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 598.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 608.

⁸⁶ Steinberg, Naomi. “The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis,” *Semeia* 46 (1989) 41-50.

3) to determine the meaning of the narrative within the given structure; and 4) to facilitate the transition between universal history and Israelite history. In her opinion, the structural function of genealogies in Genesis shows that the narrative is shaped by it. It is a redactional device (used, in this case, by P) to organize the family histories and as such, the narratives are therefore 'transitional devices' between the genealogies.

Olson like Steinberg wants to make genealogies including census lists the primary building block of a text in contrast to Robinson who opts for a dynamic interactive model. Steinberg's claims appear extreme because they ignore the limitations that Robinson has pointed out about genealogies. The 'movements' or 'stories' that are inherent in the genre are always truncated, economical and latent. This is far from saying that its deterministic character defines the narratives that surround it. It should be noted that the qualitative relevance of genealogies to the narrative context is necessary in so far as to provide summaries of information, linkages and literary pauses for the flow of the story. Hence Robinson is correct to see the relationship between narrative and non-narrative materials as interactive.

The review of the three genealogical studies by Johnson, Robinson and Steinberg, shows that Olson's use of the census lists of Numbers 1 and 26 as structural markers is clear. The three distinctive literary uses ranging from Johnson's minimalist view to Steinberg's full-blown theological encapsulation show that genealogies are complex. Nonetheless, the point is made that census lists like genealogies are important literary markers.

In addition, Numbers share with Genesis and Exodus, the plethora of geographical notices that connote movement in the Pentateuch.⁸⁹ Genesis, Exodus and Numbers share the movement to the promised Land theme. Hence the

⁸⁹ As Clines has pointed out in *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, the movement motif predominates in the Pentateuch in connection to the Land theme.

recognition that the census lists in Numbers as literary markers does lead to the perception that they are primary structural devices of Numbers in the final form.

The question then is whether this supersedes the role and function of the chrono-geographical notices that indicate the movement of the narrative? How significant is it that the book begins in the Sinai region to end on the plains of Moab? Would it be the same if suppose the ending is located in Sinai again? The census lists do not tell the story of what happened, where it happened, how it happened and why it happened. On the contrary it is by its combination with spatial-temporal indicators that the whole succession motif attains its significance. By themselves, the two lists, even in their present positions, only beg the story to be told. The literary gap between them is far from sequential merely by their juxtaposition. For there are numerous possible story lines between the lists. Only when the lists are combined with the geographical and chronological notices that a greater precision is made in filling of the gap between the two census lists. All these literary markers are precisely what they claim to be, "markers". Any theological meaning they carry can only be properly perceived from the narrative in which they have been found.⁹⁰

In Olson's case, since he has decided to ignore the narrative shape of the book, it therefore becomes necessary for him to posit an external 'mind', in this case the Priestly writer, to inject a specific meaning into the census lists which he sees as having the priority.⁹¹ In other words, the census lists themselves only gain theological significance by virtue of the Priestly intention. This is crucial for Olson's thesis to work to have a clear identity of the redactor, who, he insists,

⁹⁰ Here the focus is not on the historical information which can be gleaned from a chronological notice because this is not an annal or other such genres where the work can be completely composed of concise brief entries.

⁹¹ Thus Olson wants to assert right from the start that "that definitive theological shaping for the book of Numbers did not occur with the final stage of editing. Rather, the definitive shaping of the book's structure occurred earlier than the final form but was carried forward in its essentials and enriched by successive editings until the book reached its present shape." (*Ibid.*, p. 2).

theological significance by virtue of the Priestly intention. This is crucial for Olson's thesis to work to have a clear identity of the redactor, who, he insists, belongs to the Priestly school exiled in Babylon.⁹² It is the same group reckoned to be responsible for the formation of the Pentateuch.

Note that Philip Budd outlines the structure of Numbers on basis of the geographical notices. He sees the same exilic Priestly writer being responsible for the integrity of the book. In that case then, P is responsible for the use of both geographical notices and census lists, which is very plausible.

At this point, the question arises, is it not possible that they in fact complement each other? If this is true, then the charge that Numbers cannot be treated as a coherent unit is undermined.⁹³

shaping of the book's structure occurred earlier than the final form but was carried forward in its essentials and enriched by successive editings until the book reached its present shape." (*Ibid.*, p. 2).

⁹² Philip Budd (cf. *Numbers*, xxiv) also identifies the same group, as do most other scholars.

⁹³ Cf. Dentan: "Since the book has no real unity and was not composed in accordance with any logical, predetermined plan, whatever outline may be imposed upon it will have to be recognized as largely subjective and arbitrary. ... it is better not to think of it as a book so much as a more or less arbitrary division in the larger structure of the Pentateuch." (*Ibid.*, p. 567-8). Such skepticism is shared by Harvey Guthrie whose introductory words to Numbers include this: "Neither in its final form nor in any of the sources underlying it is Numbers a separate unit. It is part of a larger unit the division of which is largely arbitrary." (in "The Book of Numbers," *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Ed. Charles M. Laymon. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971. Pp. 85-99). Include also John Sturdy's remark that "The book is not much of a unity. This is because it is one part of a longer work, which has been arbitrarily divided up into books." (*Numbers*, Cambridge: CUP, 1976, p. 1); Walter Riggans "...there is only the poorest of literary or theological structure. The basis of the book is a loose narrative of the various trials of the newly-created people of God between the giving of God's *Torah* (his Direction and directions) at Sinai and the camping on the border of the Promised Land opposite Jericho. But from time to time large chunks of disjointed material become prominent—censuses, divine ordinances, cultic-ritual prescriptions, lists of gifts for the sanctuary, etc." (*Numbers*, DSB series Edinburgh, St. Andrews Press: 1983, p. 2); Barton and Seligsohn, "Numbers, Book of," 343-346.; Aaron Goldberg, *Das Buch Numeri*, 11-12.; F.L. Moriarty, "Numbers," *Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Ed. Raymond Brown, et. al. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968, p. 86.

1.2 Conclusion

In summary, all the three objections to the coherence of Numbers considered can be resolved. Numbers possesses a literary integrity of its own within the Pentateuch which is also meaningful. What emerges is that it is primarily a narrative unit since it has a clear beginning and ending, a twofold structure, and the laws materials incorporated are far from disruptive. Its story line is not overrun by the diversity of materials. In effect, we now can see that the spatial-temporal notices and the census lists combines to bring out the theme of Numbers *Fulfilment* through the motifs of *Movement* and *Succession*.

CHAPTER 2

THE NARRATIVE PLOT OF NUMBERS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the integrity of Numbers as a narrative, demonstrating that it has a distinct narrative structure and plot. This will provide the literary framework for an objective assessment of the role and function of Moses in Numbers.

2.2 Narrative Plot and Structure of Numbers

2.2.1 What is a Narrative Plot?

Narratives are stories in the written form. A Narrative is defined by a clear beginning followed by a climactic conflict which is resolved near the ending so that at the end of the story, the reader comes away with the feeling of a coherent entity experienced. The basic elements of a narrative comprise a plot, characters who enliven the story and different points of view that give it depth.¹

¹ A possible exception can be seen in Adele Berlin who does not treat plot at all in her book, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983). She deals exclusively with Character and Point of View.

Meir Sternberg in his provocative book, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) also does not deal with plot *per se* but discusses plot under other rubrics such as point of view and characterization. In addition, Sternberg lists eight literary features of biblical narratives: Temporal ordering; Analogical design; Point of view; Representational proportions (scene, summary, repetition); Informational gapping and ambiguity; Strategies of characterization and judgment; Modes of coherence ranging from verse to book; and Interplay of verbal and compositional pattern. It is sufficient for us to note that his list reflects the complexity in the study of Narrative and Biblical narrative.

Robert Alter, in his seminal book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Unwin & Allen, 1981), however, seems to treat Plot under a different heading in his chapter on "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Use of Conventions". His use of type-scenes is specific, involving 'literary fixed patterns' and that these scenes operate against backdrop of the community's cultural grids of conventions parallels Wesley Kort's definition of plot in *Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988. P.16):

"...we should recognize that plots can differ greatly from one another and that such differences are significant. This variety stems,...., from the storehouse of plot patterns that constitutes the heritage of the culture's narrative tradition."

According to Scholes and Kellogg, "Plot can be defined as the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature."² It describes the *event* of the narrative. Hence it is considered an "indispensable skeleton" of the narrative.³ Bar-Efrat formulates it as such: "If the characters are the soul of the narrative, the plot is the body."⁴

2.2.2 Characteristics of Narrative Plots

There are three basic characteristics of narrative plots. They are *telos*, tension and selectivity.

a) Telos

A primary feature of plot is *telos*.⁵ This is the sequential movement of the story towards an ending. This dynamic movement is linked by cause and effect. It often involves the interaction between characters acting and being acted upon. In this way, the action in the narrative becomes eventful seeking a resolution, a *telos*. This ending may be 'open' or 'closed'. As Bar-Efrat puts it,

"Incidents which are appropriate to serve as starting and finishing points, such as birth and death or the imposing of a task and the reward for its fulfilment, are chosen from the unlimited reservoir of events. Consequently, we do not feel that the story we are reading is unfinished or incomplete."⁶

² Scholes, R. & Kellogg, R. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966 p. 207.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴ Bar-Efrat, Shimon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. ET. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, JSOTS 70, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989, p. 93.

⁵ See Robinson, Robert B. "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 595-608.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94. Again this is comparable to Scholes and Kellogg who declare: "All plots depend on tension and resolution. In narrative the most common plots are the biographical (birth to death) and the romantic (desire to consummation), because these are the most obvious correlatives for the tension and resolution which plot demands. ... The reader of a narrative can expect to finish his reading having achieved a *state of equilibrium* — *something approaching calm of mind, all passion spent*. Insofar as the reader is left with *this feeling* by any narrative, that narrative can be said to have a plot." (Italics mine, p. 212).

This *telos* resonates with reality, precisely because it is not committed to a closed-ending such as “and they lived happily ever after” or “the end”. Endings, whether explicitly open or closed are ultimately temporal and are not exclusive to modern stories.⁷ Plots are therefore reflective, where its shape is only perceived having read the story from beginning to end. Their ‘patterns’ are discernible only when the flow of the Narrative is followed. Thus Bar-Efrat observes:

“Between the starting and finishing points the plot evolves along a line of development which creates a certain pattern. One can often discern a line which gradually ascends to a climax, and then descends to a state of relaxation. There are, however, other patterns of plot development, such as a sudden turn constituting an unexpected change in the line of development.”⁸

b) Organisation for Tension

A second feature of plot is the organization of material to produce a heightening of tension and conflict and its dénouement. This is where the story ‘make or break’, because it is where the reader gets most involved in.⁹ The beginning acts like a prelude while the ending functions as a postscript to this vital body part of the story. Both the beginning and ending of the story are stable platforms that are only linked and become meaningful as part of the story by the middle section of conflict or complication. It is this part of the plot, that provides

⁷ This open-endedness should not be confined to modern literature only. An open-ending is also present in the final-form of such biblical books as Mark’s Gospel in the New Testament and Numbers in the Hebrew Bible. A full literary reading of Mark has been done by Frank Kermode’s *Genesis of Secrecy*, exploring such Narrative features; and *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁹ Bar-Efrat observes, “At the centre of the plot there is almost always a conflict or collision between two forces, whether these be two individuals, a person and his or her inner self, a person and an institution, custom or outlook, or an individual and a superhuman force, such as God or fate.” *Op. cit.*

the definitive shape of the story. The beginning phase of a narrative does not merely introduce the world of the story to the reader but also lays down the elements for the conflict or complication phase to follow. Only when the reader enters the conflict phase does he/she discover the usefulness of the information afforded at the beginning or introductory stage. At the other end, when the conflict is resolved, a new equilibrium state is arrived at which forms the ending of the story. This stability is understood and perceived from the point of view of the conflict/resolution phase that precedes it. In other words, endings are definitively shaped by the middle of the story.

The classic pattern of the plot recognized in Biblical Narratives begins with the story line progressing from a stable and calm introduction to the point of departure, through the stage of involvement increasing in intensity up to the climax of conflict and tension. From there it encounters a counter-force that resolves the conflict and rapidly decreases the tension and intensity to the point where the tranquil description of an ending is given.¹⁰

c) Selectivity : No Excess Baggage

A third feature of narrative plot is that all the materials have been carefully selected and set in a narrative so that the plot is developed and enhanced simultaneously. There are no excess materials in a narrative. Every bit of information serves a purpose, be it to inform, as in characterization, backdrop, or to comment. There are various literary devices which are used to tell a story. They include the use of time- space notices, summary devices like etiology, narrator comments, genealogical, census lists, etc. Their use interrupts the flow of temporal action/event of the narrative plot. They may be used to set the mood of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

the narrative; to locate the condition in terms of time and place; to reinforce a particular viewpoint, etc. Thus, there are no 'excess or meaningless materials'.¹¹

d) How Narrative Books are Constructed

Narrative units which are brought together to build the plot vary in terms of sizes. Bar-Efrat defines the smallest narrative unit as "one which contains one incident, whether an action or an event."¹² These units are cemented together to form a large narrative plot. The principal relations between the various units are those of cause and effect, parallelism and contrast. Hence the construction of a plot is not merely juxtaposing a collection of literary units. Indeed, the energy of the narrative *flow* is inscribed by the dynamic correlations of these individual units. This is the same process that is used in the building up of larger narratives and eventually, Biblical books.

"Several narratives, each one a complete unit in its own right, combine with one another in the Bible to create an extensive block, and thus the single narrative becomes one component of a greater narrative whole. The unity of the greater narrative whole is determined by the ways in which the individual ones are connected and by the nature of the relations between them. The individual narrative usually acquires additional significance when it serves as a constituent element of the wider whole.

The extensive blocks combine to form books, and the books to constitute comprehensive compositions, bringing before us the vast canvas of history from the creation of the world to the Babylonian exile (from Genesis to 2 Kings, and from Adam to the period of restoration (Chronicles and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). Within these large

¹¹ "An isolated incident receives its significance from its position and role in the system as a whole. The incidences are like building blocks, each one contributing its part to the entire edifice, and hence their importance. In the building which is the plot there are no excess or meaningless blocks." *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

compositions, which partially overlap with one another, the individual narratives are embedded in more or less chronological order and in accordance with an overall historical and religio-ethical view. It is this view which grants these vast compositions their unity even though they are composed of many different elements.

Thus, units exist at various levels, starting with the smallest, containing one incident, and including the vast composition, which comprises several books. Each unit, at every level except for the last, serves as a component of the one above it and each plays a part and obtains significance in accordance with its position within the great hierarchical structure."¹³

It is clear that narrative plots are "not mere compilations of unconnected stories but... are made up of sequences of narratives, which combine to constitute wider structures."¹⁴ In other words, the structure of a narrative book does not hang on literary markers alone but has to take into account the knitting of individual units of actions which form the overall plot. In this way, plot is the "indispensable" skeletal element of a narrative. It is the combination of the literary indicators with the plot that gives the narrative work coherence and cogency. Plot is therefore not a secondary or ancillary feature of the Biblical narrative.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132. These narrative units combined to form the overall plot using a range of external and internal connective devices. The most familiar external device is the *waw* as either a conjunctive or consecutive device. Less frequent are formulae that include phrases like, "And it came to pass"; or "At that time"; "After the death of Moses" (Josh 1.1). However, in Bar-Efrat's view, "Many biblical narratives are contiguous but are not linked by any connective formula, so that when these are used they probably hint at a closer, more substantive association. The nature of this substantive link or what is expressed by it should be examined in each individual case."
Ibidem

cultural heritage of the Community.¹⁶ As such, plots reflect a particular “mode of perception” of the Community.¹⁷ Hence plots are fundamental to the interpretation of Biblical narratives both as a structural element and as a vehicle of meaning.

Although plot is seen to be an essential element of a Narrative, yet its status and role, especially as a vehicle of meaning in narrative is weighed differently by scholars. On the one hand, Aristotle saw the plot as “the first principle and as it were the soul of tragedy”¹⁸ for Greek tragic drama. On the other hand, the modern tendency reflected in Scholes and Kellogg, sees character as primary in contrast to plot which is seen to be comparatively insignificant since it is the “least variable” factor in the narrative.¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. Wesley Kort *Story, Text and Scripture*, 1988.

¹⁷ As Alter has urged: “Reading any body of literature involves a specialized mode of perception in which every culture trains its members from childhood. Modern readers of the Bible need to relearn something of this mode of perception that was second nature to the original audiences. Instead of relegating every perceived recurrence in the text to the limbo of duplicated sources or fixed folkloric archetypes, one must begin to see that the resurgence of certain pronounced patterns at certain narrative junctures was conventionally anticipated, even counted on, and that against that ground of anticipation the biblical authors set words, motifs, themes, personages, and actions into an elaborate dance of significant innovation.” (*Ibid.*, p. 62).

¹⁸ Aristotle. *The Poetics*, in *Aristotle XXIII*, Loeb Classical Library no. 199, London: Heinemann, 1927, p. 27. It must be noted that Aristotle is writing in the context of tragic drama, where he sees the central focus being the portrayal of actions or incidents rather than character. By “actions” he means life’s events. This would overlap with the modern notion of narrative, where life can be seen in the metaphor of story - biographical or autobiographical.

¹⁹ “Quality of mind (as expressed in the language of characterization, motivation, description, and commentary) not plot, is the soul of narrative. Plot is only the indispensable skeleton which, fleshed out with character and incident, provides the necessary clay into which life may be breathed.” Not only that, for them, the meaning of narrative is borne by Character: “...characters are the primary vehicles for meaning in a narrative. Objects and actions can also have illustrative or representative significance and can be presented symbolically or mimetically or in both fashions. But objects cannot act without becoming characters in a sense, and without character there can be no action.” (*Nature*, pp. 239 and 104, respectively). Thus the role of Plot is ‘skeletal’, essential but quite ‘lifeless’.

This is in comparable to Bar-Efrat whose analogy of plot to the ‘body’ and ‘soul’ to character shares the same view of plot with Scholes and Kellogg. Adele Berlin seems to accept this view since in her book, *Poetic and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), she deals mainly with characters and characterization and the narrator’s point of view. Plot is not dealt with at all.

This is largely the influence of Henry James, who, in his famous essay, *The Art of Fiction* (1884), summed up the relationship between action and character thus, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is not of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it?"

Still maintaining the anatomical analogy of the Narrative, an insightful criticism is offered by Stephen Crites who renounces this kind of separation based on the philosophical division made between "mind" and "body" used to interpret experience and narrative.²⁰ Tzvetan Todorov²¹ draws attention to the fact that this "psychologization" of narratives is not universal.²² He urges that character and action/event are integral in the narrative.²³ This position is also held by Wesley Kort who goes further in asserting that there is no fixed predominant narrative element since all of them form a system within which meaning is being mediated.²⁴ For him, plot is just as important and meaningful as character or point

²⁰ "The Narrative Quality of Experience", *JAAR* 39 (1971) 291-311. "We state the matter backwards if we say that something called *mind* abstracts from experience to produce generality, or if we say that "the body" has feelings and sensations. It is the activity of abstracting from the narrative concreteness of experience that leads us to posit the idea of mind as a distinct faculty. And it is the concentration of consciousness into feeling and sensation that gives rise to the idea of body. Both mind and body are reifications of particular functions that have been wrenched from the concrete temporality of the conscious self. The self is not a composite of mind and body. The self in its concreteness is indivisible, temporal, and whole, as it is revealed to be in the narrative quality of its experiences. Neither disembodied minds nor mindless bodies can appear in stories." (*Ibid.*, p. 309).

²¹ Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Poetics of Prose*. ET. Richard Howard, Oxford: Blackwell, 1977. Pp. 66-70.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 66ff. Todorov points to a large body of literature that is "a-psychological" (not anti-psychological) represented by such works as *Odyssey*, the *Decameron*, the *Arabian Nights*, and *The Saragossa Manuscript*.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Thus in a narrative, "All character traits are immediately causal; as soon as they appear, they provoke an action. Moreover the distance between the psychological trait and the action it provokes is minimal; rather than an opposition between quality and action, we are concerned with an opposition between two aspects of the action, durative and punctual or iterative. Sinbad likes to travel (character trait) → Sinbad takes a trip (action): the distance between the two tends toward a total reduction. ... [Hence] A character trait is not simply the cause of an action, nor simply its effect: it is both at once, just as action is."

²⁴ Kort, Wesley A. *Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative*. (The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania: 1988); also, *Narrative Elements and Religious Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). Kort argues that there are four basic elements

of view.²⁵ Thus the narrative plot of Numbers is a vital feature to be taken into account for its interpretation and is a vehicle conveying the meaning or theological message of the Book.

From the above, the study of Numbers in its primary narrative form needs to take the two narrative elements of plot and character into serious consideration because they both share in the conveying of the meaning of the book.

In the rest of this chapter, we shall delineate the narrative plot of Numbers, observing the structural patterns and literary devices used to knit the book together. Further observation will then be made on the interplay of the main characters, Yahweh, Moses and the Sinai Community and the role that Moses plays in the narrative.

2.3 The Structural Plot of Numbers

2.3.1 Plotline of Numbers

The narrative plot of Numbers can be stated as the story of how "Israel" as the covenant people of Yahweh survived the journey from the Sinai to the promised Land of Canaan. This statement seeks to express the two motifs of

in narrative—Character, Plot, Tone and Atmosphere. While the first two are familiar, Tone coincides with point of view but includes evaluative judgments and Atmosphere, refers to the setting of the narrative world in which the reader enters. These four are present in all narratives and at any one time, one of them may dominate a narrative but there is no one fixed element that predominates at all times in every narrative.

²⁵ In fact Kort is at pains to insist that plot is complex and variable contrary to the popular view represented by Scholes and Kellogg that plot is limited and stereotypical. He argues that this is because plots are drawn from the community's cultural heritage of narrative traditions that houses generations of plot patterns. Hence there is a danger of oversimplification in prejudging plots to be static and inflexible.

Kort proposes three kinds of plot patterns based on his formal study of fictional plots. Using musical terms, he calls them rhythmic, polyphonic and melodic. All of them are present in a narrative but one of them will figure more prominently than the rest. Once again, Kort's model is a dynamic system of correlates.

Although Kort's plot model tries to reflect the complex and variable nature of plots, in contrast to the stereotypical versions of Scholes and Kellogg and Bar-Efrat, yet it is clear that the *telos* element is common to all. The fact that Kort's dynamic model endorses *telos* shows how pervasive the concept is to plot.

promised Land of Canaan. This statement seeks to express the two motifs of *journey* and *succession* that the travelogue and census lists have indicated as the book's literary markers.

The structural outline of Numbers is as follows:

I ORIENTATION

PREPARATIONS AND DEPARTURE (1:1-10:36)

1. Preparations for the March (1:1-10:10)

- 1.1) 1:1-6:27 — Organising the Community
 - A) 1:1 - 2:34, Census and Ordering of Community
 - B) 3:1 - 4:49, Establishment of Priestly Hierarchy
 - C) 5:1 - 6:27, Laws to conserve Social/Spiritual Purity
 - X) 5:1 - 4, Expulsion of the Unclean
 - Y) 5:5 - 10, Restitution for Broken Vows
 - Z) 5:11 - 31, Ordeal of Jealousy
 - Y') 6:1 - 21, Nazirite Vow
 - X') 6:22 - 27, Priestly Blessings
- 1.2) 7:1-10:10 — Installation of the Community
 - A) 7:1-89, Dedication of Community
 - B) 8:1-22, Installation of Priestly Hierarchy
 - C) 9:1-10:10, Gifts of Divine Guidance
 - i) 9:1-14, Observance of the Passover
 - ii) 9:15-23, Divine Cloud
 - iii) 10:1-10, Silver Trumpets

2. Initial Success (10:11-36)

- 2.1) 10:11-28, Summary of Successful Departure from Sinai
- 2.2) 10:29-32, Account of Moses' Employment of a Human Guide
- 2.3) 10:33-36, Description of Divine Guidance through Moses and the Ark

III CONFLICT / RESOLUTION

FROM REBELLION TO RENEWED HOPE (11:1-25:18)

1. Descent to Chaos and Destruction (11:1-19: 22)

- 1.1) 11:1-12:16 — Rebellion stories leading to the Exaltation of Moses as prophet *par excellence*
- A) 11:1-3, *Taberah*
 - B) 11:4-34, *Kibroth-Hattaavah*
 - C) 11:35-12:16, Miriam's challenge in *Hazereth*
- 1.2) 13:1-20:21 — Rebellion stories leading to the Exclusion of the Original Covenanters from the Land
- A) 13:1-14:45, Community rebellion and their exclusion from the Land
 - X) 15:1-41, Laws for Offerings *in the Land* and for Purity
 - i) 15:1-21, Laws for Offerings in the Land
 - a) 15:1-16, Burnt Offerings
 - b) 15:17-21, Firstfruits
 - ii) 15:22-31, Expiation of Inadvertent sins
 - iii) 15:32-36, Sin of Sabbath-breaking
 - iv) 15:37-41, Tassels of Remembrance
 - B) 16:1-17:28, Levitical rebellion and breakdown of the Priestly Hierarchy
 - X') 18:1-19:22, Reestablishment of Priestly Hierarchy and Laws for Community Purification.
 - i) 18: 1-19, Dues of the Priesthood
 - ii) 18:20-32, Dues of the Levites
 - iii) 19:1-22, Laws for Purification
 - C) 20:1-21, Moses' and Aaron's rebellion followed by their exclusion from the Land.

2. Recovery from Defeat to Victory (20:22-25:18)

- 2.1) 20:22-29 — Aaron's Succession by Eleazer: *Turning-Point*
- 2.2) 21:1-25:18 — Recovery and Conquests in the Transjordan
- A) 21:1-9, Double recoveries of 'defeats' resulting from the sins of Israel and Moses
 - i) 21:1-3, Reversal of *Hormah* to mean Victory
 - ii) 21:4-9, Reversal of the effects of Edomite obstruction
 - B) 21:10-35, Conquests in the Transjordan
 - i) 21:10-20, Successes in the Transjordan
 - ii) 21:21-35, Double victories over Sihon and Og
 - C) 22:1-25:18, Emergence of the New Generation Israel
 - i) 22:1-24:25, Yahweh's victory over Balaam
 - ii) 25:1-18, Phinehas' atonement for Israel's apostasy

III NEW ORIENTATION

POISED FOR LAND OCCUPATION (26:1-36:13)

1. Listing of New Generation which Inherits Land Promise (26:1-65)

2. Preparations for imminent Land Occupation (27:1-36:13)

2.1) 27:1-32:42 — Preparations to Occupy the Land

A) 27:1-11, The Case of the Daughters of Zelophehad

B) 27:12-23, Joshua's Leadership Appointment

C) 28:1-30:16, List of Offerings and Rules for Vows

i) 28:1-29:39, List of Offerings

ii) 30:1-27, Provisions for Women's Vows

B') 31:1-54, Vengeance on Midianites.

A') 32:1-42, Concession to the Gadites and Reubenites

2.2) 33:1-36:1-13 — Projections of Land Habitation

1) 33:1-56, Review of Desert Trek and Instructions for Land Occupation

2) 34:1-36:13, Allocation of Land

A) 34:1-49, Boundaries marked and Land Allocated

B) 35:1-34, Levitical Cities and Cities of Refuge

C) 36:1-13, Reprise of Zelophehad's Daughters' case

2.3.2 Analysis of the Structure

The classical pattern of narrative plot is the tripartite formulation of Beginning, Complication/Resolution, and Ending, suitably applies to Numbers as *Orientation, Conflict/Resolution* and *New Orientation*.²⁶ The threefold patterning

²⁶ For example, Bar-Efrat's formulation: "The plot develops from an initial situation through a chain of events to a central occurrence, which is the prime factor of change, and thence by means of varying incidents to a final situation. If we were to sketch the line connecting these two situations, with its ups and downs, we would have a graphic depiction of the plot." (*Ibid.*, p. 121). Tzvetan Todorov offers a dynamic formulation of the basic tripartite plot appropriate to the analysis of Numbers: 'An "ideal" narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical. ...Consequently, there are two types of episodes in a narrative: those which describe a state (of equilibrium or disequilibrium) and those which describe the

of narrative and law materials in Numbers has been noted by Wenham.²⁷ However the use of this structural device can be seen to be more prevalent than anticipated as shown below.

I Orientation 1:1-10:36

The *Orientation* of Numbers consists of 1:1-10:36. This introduces the narrative world of Numbers to the reader. The atmosphere described is positive. The social/spiritual life of the Community is harmonious, constructive, and co-operative. This setting fulfills the stability expected of the normal beginning of a Hebrew narrative.

As a narrative unit, 1:1-10:36 describes the preparation of the Community for the march in two narrative phases: the organisation and ordering of the Community (1:1-6:27), and its dedication and installation (7:1-10:10). This climaxes with a third narrative cycle where the subsequent success of the march is depicted (10:11-36).

1. Preparations for the March 1:1-10:10

1.1) Organising the Community 1:1-6:27

First, the Community's armed forces are organised and numbered. Then the spiritual aspect is described with the institution of a priestly hierarchy. The organisation of the tribes around the Tent and Ark when the people camped and order of the march focuses on the protection of Yahweh's awesome Presence in their midst. Much emphasis is given describing the Levitical selection to serve

passage from one state to the other. The first type will be relatively static and, one might say, iterative; the same kind of action can be repeated indefinitely. The second, on the other hand, will be dynamic and in principle occurs only once.' (*The Poetics of Prose*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977, p. 111). Naomi Steinberg prefers to see this formulation as a five-stage plot but this is not necessary. Todorov's formulation of the plot for Numbers is preferred.

²⁷ See also earlier discussion in ch. 1.

Yahweh as assistants to the Aaronid priesthood, to shield the Community from Yahweh. The structure of the compilation reveals the following threefold pattern, focussing on the God-centredness of the Community and its accompanying motifs of harmony and purity, a spiritual orderliness:

- A) 1:1 - 2:34, Census and Ordering of Community
- B) 3:1 - 4:49, Establishment of Priestly Hierarchy
- C) 5:1 - 6:27, Guidance for Community harmony and purity

Of note is that the laws in 5:1-6:27, which share the theme of sanctity and social harmony, show a threefold concentric relationship:

- X) 5:1 - 4, Expulsion of the Unclean
 - Y) 5:5 - 10, Restitution for Broken Vows
 - Z) 5:11 - 31, Ordeal of Jealousy
 - Y') 6:1 - 21, Nazirite Vow
- X') 6:22 - 27, Priestly Blessings

In the first couplet, X - X', both the expulsion law and priestly blessings are immutable and unconditional. At the same time, they are contrasting as 5:1-4 demands the unclean to be removed from the camp which is negative while 6:22-27, is positive, with the priest invoking the holy Presence of God and his blessings to materialize in the people's midst.

This negative, positive pairing is observed again in the Y - Y' couplet. 5:5-10 deals with the restitution for broken vows, while 6:1-21 deals with a voluntary act of devotion to God through the Nazirite vow. 5:11-13, Z, is neither negative nor positive since it provides for the acquittal or conviction of a wife suspected of unfaithfulness.

1. 2) Installation of the Community 7:1-10:10

Second, 1:1-6:27 is followed by the dedication and installation of the Community and priestly hierarchy in 7:1-10:10. Both share the same sequential pattern of Community, priestly hierarchy and law.

A') 7:1-89, Dedication of Community

B') 8:1-22, Installation of Priestly hierarchy

C') 9:1-10:10, Gifts of Divine Guidance

The three cultic elements in 9:1-10:10 form a threefold indicator of divine deliverance and protection. In i) 9:1-14, the Passover reminds the Community of Israel's past deliverance from Egypt by God; ii) 9:15-23 is the concrete divine presence for the Community present; and iii) 10:1-10 is the gift of two trumpets for assembly, celebration and future victories.²⁸ These cultic elements fit the context of 7:1-8:26 since they anticipate the march with Israel needing divine guidance, protection and assured victories.

Observations

Of note is that this preparation of the Community focuses on the institution of the priestly hierarchy with Aaronid priesthood at the top and Moses' leadership above it. The able-bodied men of Israel are numbered and organised as a fighting force anticipating Land occupation. At the end of each cycle, the divine laws of guidance and cultic artifacts serve to reaffirm the people of God's support and protection to them. This is the basic function of the law materials in Numbers as we shall see further below. This fundamental structure is the framework for the organisation of the *Conflict* cycles and the *New Orientation*.

²⁸ A settled situation is anticipated in Numbers 10:9, "When in your country you go to war against an enemy who is oppressing you, you will sound trumpets with a battle cry, and Yahweh your God will remember you, and you will be delivered from your enemies."

2. Initial Success 10:11-36

The third and final part of *Orientation* is the initial success of the march. This ideal start again displays a threefold pattern of A) 10:11-28, where the initial success of the departure is summarized; B) 10:29-32; Moses employs a human guide which tacitly complements C) 10:33-36, the description of how Yahweh led Israel through Moses and the Ark.

2.1) Summary of Successful Departure from Sinai 10:11-28

10:11-28 is a summary of the initial journey focusing on how the Community had set out according to the theocratic formation. These descriptions assume a generalized character beginning with the chronological notice of the start of the journey in v.11. It is immediately followed by the notice of a successful stop led by the divine cloud in the wilderness of Paran in v. 12. Verse 13, "*So they set out initially*²⁹ *to the commandments of Yahweh and under the hand of Moses*",³⁰ is an effective bridge between the brief account of the departure in vv.11-12 and the descriptions about how the march was carried out (cf. vv. 4-36). More important is the projection of an imminent success in the journey ahead. There is not a single hint of doubt, hesitation nor reservation that anything can go wrong except for the seemingly innocent adverb, *בראשונה* in v.3, which has been skilfully positioned to hint of a possible disaster ahead.

²⁹ *בראשונה*, Gray (p. 92) lists the occurrences and notes that it is also frequently used adverbially in the sense of "first" eg. Deuteronomy. 17:7, 1 Kings 17:13.

³⁰ *על-פי יהוה ביד-משה* is a variation of the more usual *יהוה על-פי* especially in Numbers 1:1-10:10. Hence the occasion of its use is particularly meaningful. It always denotes the close partnership between Moses and Yahweh.

2.2) Account of Moses' Employment of a Human Guide 10:29-32³¹

10:29-32 describes Moses' personal initiative in enrolling Hobab his Midianite relative to be the human guide alongside to the divine guide represented by the Ark. There is no explicit or lengthy introduction except for the use of the *waw* with **ואמר**. But the expression is a commonly used scene-break like that of *Behold, הנה*.³²

2.3) Description of Divine Guidance through Moses and the Ark

10:33-36

This closes the *Orientation* stage of Numbers 1:1-10:36. It describes how the Ark as the instrument of Divine Guidance functions through the sole

³¹ Recently, James S. Ackerman, ("Numbers", *The Literary Guide to the Bible* Eds. R. Alter & F. Kermode. Collins, London: 1987, pp. 78-91) suggests that the appointment of Hobab by Moses as the community's guide in 10:29-32 is a negative element. By itself, the passage "sounds like wise policy", just like Moses' adoption of Jethro's advice in Exodus 18. But "The context here stresses absolute divine control and guidance, however, and forces us to see Moses' request as a breach of faith rather than an act of prudence." (*Ibid.*, p.80). To support his case, he asks two rhetorical question: "Who needs Hobab when Israel can follow the pillar of cloud?", and "How does YHWH reacts?"

For the first question, he presumes a negative answer. This is based on his assumption that if the Israelites, and for that matter, the narrator of Numbers, believed in the divine cloud, they would not be so pragmatic as to enrol human agency. This is more a reflection of Ackerman's personal view of faith than the text warrants. For the second, Ackerman directs us to 10:33-34 for the answer which, according to him, indicates a 'split' between ark and the cloud. Hence, it shows that YHWH no longer dwells in the midst of the camp. Again, Ackerman is reading into the passage.

Scholars have long noted that 10:33-34 is problematic. But essentially, Ackerman has confused the problem of the introduction of the "vanguard" motif in terms of the ark and the cloud to that of divine presence in the tabernacle. The problem is an awkward juxtaposition of two manifestations of divine guidance than a 'split' between divine guidance and divine presence. (See T.W. Mann's *Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977. esp. pp. 170-175, for a full discussion):

Furthermore, the narrative context of 10:29-32 as part of the narrative unit of 10:11-36 depicts the successful departure from Sinai. It has a threefold structure of 10:11-28, which summarizes the success of the journey's progress; verses 29-32, and 33-36, informs the reader the use of human and divine guides that were employed in the journey. The three cycles, together, reveals a progressive build-up of dramatic expectation which corresponds with the crescendo of activities. It begins with the ordering of the camp which leads to the excitement of the dedication of the community to Yahweh, to finally reach the climax with the initial success of the march.

Clearly, Ackerman's negative assessment of 10:29-32 is groundless.

³² Cf. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. BLS 9, Almond Press, Sheffield: 1983, pp. 62-63.

mediation of Moses. Significantly Moses invokes the Divine Presence symbolised through the movement of the Ark. Thus the movement closes with the anticipation of Yahweh's assured victory.³³

Significantly, the closing verses report the voice of Moses. Yahweh's leadership may be seen by the Ark but it is also only heard through Moses' voice. It is evident that the role of Moses' leadership in the first movement of the Narrative of Numbers is substantial.³⁴

Observations

From the above, Numbers 1:1-10:36, has a threefold narrative sequence. It begins with the organising and ordering of the Community for the march in 1:1-6:27, followed by their dedication and installation in 7:1-10:10. This then leads to the initial success of the march described in 10:11-36. This structure shows clear thematic development which demonstrates the literary coherence present in the *Orientation* of Numbers. The dominant mood of this narrative block is positive and enthusiastic over the imminent success of the journey to claim Yahweh's Promised Land to them. Most of all, they have the very Presence of Yahweh to accompany their desert-crossing which must guarantee against any possibility of failure.

³³ "And whenever the ark set out Moses said, 'Rise up O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered; and let those who hate you flee before you.' And when it rested he said, 'Return, O Lord, to the numberless thousands of Israel.'" (10:35-36). The whole projection is that as the Ark moves, Yahweh moves ahead of the people clearing away all the obstacles and barriers that blocks the march of Israel to the Land. When the community camps, the Ark settles, Yahweh is invited to return to his people.

³⁴ Moses' source of authority is consciously linked to the established relationship in Exodus 32-34, where the Covenant was renewed after the Golden Calf Apostasy. Even the laws are directly dependent on the Sinai revelation milieu where Moses' authority is confirmed over and over again. This Mosaic voice thus becomes a fitting representation of the confidence of the March. It is against this same voice that the rebellion stories will focus on in the *Conflict* Movement.

III. The Conflict/Resolution 11:1-25:18

At the heart of the narrative of Numbers is a compilation of six rebellion cycles followed by brief accounts of military and spiritual battles waged by the Community and Yahweh in the *Conflict/Resolution* phase of the book in 11:1-25:18. Again, a threefold cycle of narratives is evident. The two narrative blocks, 11:1-12:16; and 13:1-20:21 depict the *Conflict* movement in Numbers with Moses' exaltation followed by the triple progressive breakdown of Israel as God's people beginning with their rejection of the Land, to the Levitical revolt and finally, the climax of Mosaic sin.³⁵ These disasters are then resolved and reversed by a third narrative cycle in 20:22-25:18, beginning with Eleazer's succession of Aaron to Phinehas' expression of Yahweh's zeal against the apostates at Peor. The outline is thus:

11:1-12:16 - Rebellion stories leading to Moses' Exaltation

13:1-20:21 - Rebellion stories leading to Land Exclusion

20:22-25:18 - Reversal and Victories leading to Land Entry

1. Descent to Chaos and Destruction 11:1-19:2

Narrative Significance of 11:1-3

The rebellion of Israel is sudden and abrupt. The preceding texts do not prepare its reader for the *taberah* incident and subsequent rebellions that follow. Nonetheless, 11:1-3 functions as an introductory device for the whole *conflict* cycle by its conciseness.

The equilibrium in 1:1-10:36 is abruptly disrupted by the sudden destabilization of the people's murmuring which causes Yahweh to react

³⁵ Cf. N. Lohfink, "Die Ursünden in der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung", *Die Zeit Jesu: H. Schlier Festschrift*, eds. G. Bornkamm & K. Rahner. Freiburg: Herder, 1970., pp. 38-57.

violently. The people are punished with a deadly fire (v. 1). They appeal to Moses who intercedes on their behalf and Yahweh relents (v. 2). However, this is only the beginning of the series of rebellions stories that focuses on the Community's challenge against Moses' leadership and authority.

The people's murmuring has no object.³⁶ There is no explicit source of provocation mentioned either. The nature of their complaint is not mentioned too. The focus is on the people's complaint within "Yahweh's hearing".³⁷ Gray³⁸ had suggested that possibly the people's complaint must have been so "loud" that it reached Yahweh's ears. This is not necessary, since the depiction is that Yahweh was indeed dwelling in the people's midst but they have failed to appreciate its implications.³⁹

³⁶ The combination, *רע* *בְּמִתְאַנְנִים* *רע* conveys this sense. Gray (*Numbers*, 99) sees *רע* as an antithesis of *טוב* which he reckons to mean "good fortune" or "prosperity" as exemplified in 1 Kings 22:8 and Job 2:10.

The root *אנן* is taken to mean, "to complain" or "to murmur" by BDB, and likewise, KB suggests "to indulge in complaints". The LXX supports this with its use of *ὑποψαύω* which is used for *לון* "to murmur".

Snaith (*Numbers*, 226) suggests that the root of *רע* should be emended to *רעב* which is "hunger" and the root of *אנן* is the verb *אנה* which denotes "to seek a pretext" as in 2 Kings 5:7. Budd (*Numbers*, 119-20) rejects this on the grounds that Snaith's suggestions lack firm textual basis. At the same time he points out that the Akkadian *unninu* meaning "to sigh" may have relevance to the rare Hebrew word. Certainly Snaith's reading is attractive and not implausible given the ambiguity that surrounds the expression. In any case, the essential point is the depiction of the superficial nature of the people's discontent.

³⁷ MT has *בְּאֲנִי* while many other MSS use *בְּעִי*. There is no reason to think the latter is original since v.18 retains the former.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁹ Note that throughout Numbers 1-10, the "mouth" of Yahweh has dominated. He commands and Israel obeyed. When they asked for a concession, as seen in 9:7ff., God responded positively. This dialogic relationship portrayed involving the audio faculties which focuses on spoken words that express the complaining spirit of the people. This is confirmed by Yahweh's immediate reaction which also involves "hearing" ie., *וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה*.

The immediacy and vehemence of Yahweh's reaction is depicted by the succession of short verbal clauses:

<i>וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה</i>	<i>Yahweh heard,</i>
<i>וַיִּחַר אָפוֹ</i>	<i>his anger is kindled</i>
<i>וַתִּבְעַר־בָּם אֵשׁ יְהוָה</i>	<i>Yahweh's fire burned in their midst</i>
<i>וַתֹּאכַל בְּקִצָּה הַמַּחֲבֵה</i>	<i>and consumed the outskirts (or edges) of the</i>
	<i>camp.</i>

v. 1b

Three of the four clauses describes the burning anger of Yahweh so that the reader can sense the heat of the flame of Yahweh's anger.

Thus the succinct drama in 11:1-3 serves to introduce the ‘murmuring’ motif as the destabilizing force that disrupts the stability of the *Orientation* preceding it. Note that there is no recorded dialogue. Neither is there any attempt at explanations both explicitly or in detailed narration. The dramatic shock of this brief account introduces the *Conflict* movement of the plot with great effectiveness, catching the reader off-guard.

Observations

On the whole, the narrative mood is dark and chaotic. It is filled with rebellions, military defeat, delay in the March and death. Nevertheless, it is not total despair as each rebellion evokes a positive commitment to and from Yahweh mediated through Moses. Consequently, divine promises and cultic regulations or institutional structure is given after the rebellions. For example, the people’s refusal to enter the Land is countered by the promise of Yahweh to transfer the Covenant to the second generation, after Moses’ intercession.

The supernatural aspect of the fire is that whilst it burns “*in the midst ... of the camp*”, it is the edge or outskirts that is being consumed. Yahweh’s theophany associated with a fearful fire is familiar as seen in Exodus 3, 19, 24 and Leviticus 10:1-3. As the last reference shows, the divine fire is lethal. The present description is careful to preserve the notion that the fire that savaged the people originated from Yahweh who was dwelling in their midst. Thus in a single verse, the conflict between Israel and Yahweh is succinctly described.

The resolution of the conflict reflects the same energetic concentration:

וַיִּצְעַק הָעָם אֶל-מֹשֶׁה *The people cried to Moses*

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה
וַתִּשְׁקַע הָאֵשׁ *Moses prayed to Yahweh
and the fire abated.*

v. 2

The above shows the chiasmic arrangement where Moses occupies the central link between Yahweh and the people. At the same time the verbs are simple and poignant. The people’s desperation is channelled through Moses who prays on their behalf to Yahweh. The usual report that Yahweh hears, is dropped so that Yahweh’s positive response is immediate, thus portraying the efficacy of Mosiac mediation.

Verse 3 closes this episode with the etiological statement that the place was named “Taberah” ie., “burning” because of “the fire Yahweh burned among them.” The place-name is more striking for the vivid image it conjures than its exactitude of geographical location. It serves as a graphic warning that the divine Presence of Yahweh cannot be taken for granted. The power that leads and protects Israel can also turn against her.

1.1) Rebellion Stories Leading to the Exaltation of Moses as Prophet Par Excellence 11:1-12:16

Conflict: Issue of Moses' Leadership and Authority

Together with 11:1-3, 11:1-12:16 reflects a threefold pattern sharing the common use of place-names:

- A) 11:1-3, is an etiology of *Taberah*;
- B) 11:4-34, recounts the incident at *Kibroth-hattaavah*; and
- C) 11:35-12:16, the challenge by Miriam and Aaron took place in *Hazereth*.⁴⁰

A more detailed study will be made in the next chapter on these texts but for now, it is sufficient to note the following narrative sequence of this complex. After the introduction in 11:1-3, 11:4-35 paints a surprisingly detailed picture of Moses' personal struggle with his position as intermediary to the straining relationship of Yahweh and Israel, against the backdrop of Israel's complaint for meat to eat. Yahweh provides quail meat for the people and also inspires seventy elders to assist Moses in his leadership of the Community. The issue of Mosaic exclusive leadership leads to Moses' exaltation in 11:35-12:16.

Thus this threefold cycle clarifies the foundation of Moses' leadership and authority. Israel may have had doubts about his competence, and still others, his right to be exalted exclusively in his role as Israel's mediator. But Yahweh is consistently shown to vindicate Moses as His "trustworthy" Servant, with whom He maintained a unique intimate relationship that no one else was privileged to enjoy (cf. 12:6-8).

1.2) Rebellion Stories Leading to the Exclusion of the Original Covenanters from the Land 13:1-20:21

⁴⁰ Although there is no etiological statement to link *Hazereth* with Miriam's revolt, yet it is the revolt that led to the mention of this particular town in Israel's trek.

Conflict: Total Breakdown of Israel as God's Chosen People

13:1-20:21 is a threefold succession of rebellion stories that portrays the complete breakdown of Israel as God's chosen people and their right to possess the promised Land. This is set out in the narrative sequence that begins with the sin of the Community as a whole, rejecting the primary goal of their march, the Land (cf. 13:1-14:45). It is followed by the rejection of the priestly hierarchy led by Korah and supported by the Community (16:1-17:11).⁴¹ Wenham has shown that there is a threefold pattern establishing Aaron's priesthood: a) 16:1-35, Korah's rebellion; b) 16:36-50, Aaron's role in stopping the plague; and 17:1-13, Yahweh's confirmation through Aaron's rod.⁴² Significantly, each story takes up two days. The third and final rebellion is the account of the personal sin of Moses and Aaron in rebellion against Yahweh and his desire to provide water to the Israelites (cf. 20:1-21).

The significance of these complexes is that they correspond to the the fundamental elements concerned in the formation of the Community for the march to the promised Land that involved, Community, Priestly hierarchy (with Mosaic leadership at the zenith, the Community at the bottom and Levites in between), and the gift of divine laws and cultic artifacts as indicators of approval and assurance (cf. structure in 10:1-10:10). A fuller treatment of this cycle is found in the discussion on the Literary Pattern (3.2.1. a) in chapter 3.

Law Materials, 15:1-41

Of note is that interwoven between these three complexes are two collections of law materials comprise of 15:1-41 and 17:12-19:22. In the first, 15:1-41 consists of three categories of laws. 15:1-21 deals with the burnt offering and firstfruits to be sacrificed when the Israelites enter into the Land (cf. vv. 2 and

⁴¹ 16:41ff. shows the people accusing Moses' of murdering the rebel leaders and thereby their support for the latter.

⁴² *Numbers*, p. 134.

18). This reiterates God's promise to Israel that they will possess the land through their children (cf. 14:26ff.). 15:22-31 provides Israel with the means to expiate inadvertent sins committed as a Community or as individuals. But this provision has limits as vv. 30-31 points out that *deliberate*⁴³ sins have no recourse except to be expelled from the Community. Such a person has to "utterly cut off and bear his own guilt" (v. 31c). This provision is explicitly linked to all the laws given through Moses and made applicable to all generations (cf. vv. 22-23), but deliberately set in sequence to 15:1-21 to reaffirm the validity of the Land promise.

The final set of laws involves the case of the wood-gatherer who was judged to have broken the Sabbath (cf. vv. 32-36). Its juxtaposition to vv. 30 and 31 emphasizes the severity of failure to observe the Laws of God. Given this condition, the gift of the tassels of remembrance in vv. 37-41, serves as the best measure to take: remembrance to observe is better than seeking amends.

Thus the laws in 15:1-41 are highly relevant to the context following Numbers 13-14, in reaffirming that God's promise of Land to Israel is still valid while at the same time, warning the Community that His laws are to be observed, even in the Land.

Law Materials, 17:12-19:22

The second law collection in 17:12-19:22 also shows the same kind of topical relevance to the context of the rebellion in 16:1-17:11. Here, a threefold structure involving Aaron's priesthood, the Levitical and Community are dealt with, effectively restores the Priestly hierarchy so nearly destroyed by the Korah-led rebellion preceding it.

In the face of Israelites' despondent cries in 17:12-13, God re-establishes Aaron's priesthood (18:1-7) and reaffirms their dues in the sustaining of their

⁴³ Literally, "high-handed" (v. 30).

lineage (vv. 8-19). This is followed by the affirmation of the Levites as Aaronid assistants, with their respective dues and tithes (vv. 20-32). Thus the priestly “wall” is re-established to protect the Community from direct exposure to God and his awesome holiness.

A third element is given to preserve the sanctity of the Community with the provision of specially prepared purification water (19:1-22). This allows individual members to have a recourse when defiled as a result of contact with corpses (vv. 11-16).

Thus this law collection deals with the restoration of the Community’s sanctity which has been carefully ordered in 10:1-10:10 at the beginning of the march but suffered subversion internally with the Levitical revolt of Korah.

2. Recovery from Defeat to Victory 20:22-25:18

The *Conflict* movement of the plot is resolved by a third cycle, 22:22-25:18, where the impact of the exclusion of the Sinai Community including the Mosaic leadership from Land occupation is resolved.

2.1) Aaron’s Succession by Eleazer 20:22-29

Narrative Significance of 20:22-29

Significantly, the account of Aaron’s death and succession by Eleazer in 20:22-29 serves as the **turning-point** of *Conflict/Resolution* stage of Numbers and since it is in the heart of Narrative, the book as a whole.

At the narrative level, Aaron’s death is a consequence of the tragic rebellion committed by Moses and him (cf. 20:1-13). The proximity of Miriam’s death in 20:1 combines with Aaron’s death to effectively depict the shocking termination of Moses’ leadership outside the promised Land. In this context, the fact that Moses’ own death is delayed and continually postponed till the very end of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch as a whole makes this portrayal in 20:1-29 all the more significant as a literary thematic device.

Thematically, Eleazer's appointment simultaneously signals the emergence of the second generation to succeed their fathers as Yahweh's chosen people (cf. 14:26-35). In appointing Eleazer as the successor priest to Aaron, 20:22-29 now functions as a first instalment of the succession promise given by Yahweh in the wake of the original covenanters' exclusion from the promised Land in Numbers 13-14, in the partial replacement of the first generation's leadership.

2. 2) Recovery and Conquests in the Transjordan 21:1-25:18

It is followed by a threefold cycle of military and spiritual victories that marks the return of Israel to the proximity of the promised Land at the plains of Moab from Numbers 21:1-25:18.

21:1-9

In the first cycle of 21:1-9, two recovery stories are told. 21:1-3 reverses the defeat suffered by the Community as a result of the sin of land rejection, symbolized by *Hormah* cf. 14:45 and 21:3. This victory is a device to counter-balance the military defeat of 14:39-45. Significantly, in contrast to ignoring Yahweh's words through His servant Moses, the Israelites in 21:1-3, seek God's guarantee of victory. The note that "Yahweh listened to the voice of Israel" in v.3a is an irony given that in 14:28ff., where Yahweh promises to fulfill Israel's rejection of His promised Land.

21:4-9 tells the story of the bronze serpent that reverses the rebellion caused by the detour Israel had to make in the wake Edom's obstruction (20:14-21). This, in turn, is the result of Moses ineffectual word, resulting from the sin committed by Moses and Aaron when they disobeyed God (20:1-13). Like 21:1-3, 21:4-9 reverses the effects of the tragic rebellion of Moses.

The proximity of these two reversal stories draws attention to fact that the sins of both Israel as a Community in rejecting the Land and Moses and Aaron in

disobeying God yields the same judgment: Land exclusion. In both cases, the sin committed is classified as a refusal to trust in God (cpr. 14:11b and 20:12).

21:10-35

A second couplet follows with the depiction of Israel's conquest of the Transjordan from 21:10-35. 21:10-20 compiles in a summary form the victories the Community won while 21:11-35 provides a specific focus on their triumph over Og and Sihon.

The significance here is that whilst the Community has to adopt an eastern approach to the Land, instead of the more direct southern approach, this time, Israel's arrival is open, effective and victorious, compared to the hesitant, stealth and chaos characterized in chapters 13. More important, this prepares the grounds and basis for habitation of the Transjordan in 32:1-42. Once again it is clear that there is a deliberate separation of narratives sharing the same motif. This narrative sequence is picked up later to bind the different parts of the book together.

With the conquest of Transjordan, the 'beach-head' is prepared for Israel to enter the Land. However, the narrative switches focus to a more insidious attack by the enemies of Israel. Chapters 22-25 tells of the spiritual battle waged between the Israelites and Baalists. From 22-24, a supernatural perspective is given into Yahweh's personal battle with Balaam, the powerful shaman, commissioned by Balak representing a confederacy of the peoples of the Land to curse Israel. The portrayal of Yahweh in direct confrontation with Balaam first of all enhances the latter's prowess as a shaman. Secondly, it draws out the full commitment of Yahweh to protect Israel as His people. This divine commitment to the covenant finds an appropriate response in Phinehas' zeal in Numbers 25.

Wenham has drawn attention to the extensive use of the threefold pattern in this cycle.⁴⁴ He notes that just as the establishment of Aaron's priesthood is

⁴⁴ *Numbers*, pp. 165ff. gives a very detailed breakdown of the structural repetition.

framed in three cycles of two days in Numbers 16-17, so it is here that the Balaam cycle is structured in a threefold complex of 22:2-14, 22:15-35, and 22:36-24:25, each occupying two days of time. Significantly Balaam even strikes the ass three times (cf. 22:35). It is clear that Balaam's cycle resonates with the confirmation of Aaron's priesthood to balance the *Conflict* and *Resolution* blocks.

The coupling of 22-24, Balaam cycle and 25:1-18, a narrative complex about the apostasy at Baal-Peor presents itself as Israel's successful resistance against the spiritual attack by Baalism. The significance is that the narrative in 25:1-18 depicts the unfaithfulness of the original covenanters which is refuted by Phinehas who represents the new generation. This prepares the ground for the second census list taken in 26:1-65, where the registering of the new generation is said to replace their fathers.

Of note is the surprising absence of Moses to mediate God's power and word in the Balaam cycle and his passive presence in Numbers 25. From the narrative point of view, Moses' apparent absence and passivity can be seen to facilitate the shift of focus given to the emergence of the new generation Israel as a Community taking a stand in their commitment to Yahweh as their God through the idealised zeal of Phinehas in reaction to the syncretism characterized by Zimri and Cozbi.

Summary

Just as a threefold structure frames 1:1-10:36 with the narrative sequence of a twofold preparation and a final cycle for fulfilment, so a similar pattern is found in 11:1-25:18, where two cycles of *Conflict* are concluded by a third cycle, in this case, of *Resolution*. This once again reinforces the cogency of Numbers as a narrative work.

III. The New Orientation 26:1-36:13

1. Listing of the New Generation which Inherits Land Promise 26:1-65

Narrative Significance of 26:1-65

26:1-65 serves as a narrative marker by concluding the *Conflict/Resolution* movement of 20:22-25:18 with the taking of the census of the new generation Israel in 26:1-51. It is followed by an introduction to the Land Occupation in vv. 52-56 where the preceding registration also forms the basis for Land allocation to the tribes. The separate census of the Levites in vv. 57-62, reinforces the institution of priestly hierarchy established in the first census. It also echoes the narrative equilibrium of the formation of Israel as Yahweh's covenant people at the beginning of the march, and now, at the end of their desert crossing.

This is a significant literary marker since it provides a conclusion to the struggles of Israel's desert trek. It informs the reader through this census that Yahweh has fulfilled his promise to keep the covenant with Israel by passing it with the next generation (cf. vv. 63-65 cpr. 14:26-38, esp. v. 31). The disasters of Land rejection in chapters 13-14 and apostasy in chapter 25 are resolved once and for all with the deaths of the first generation Community (v. 65).

Thus 26:1-65 actually straddles the *Conflict/Resolution* and the *New Orientation* phases of the plot of Numbers. In other words, it is another turning-point of the book like 20:22-29, highly significant though not as centrally located as Aaron's death account. The decision to place it in the latter part of the framework is due to the pull factor of the *New Orientation* with which the rest of Numbers switches its focus from 27:1 to 36:13.

2. Preparations for Imminent Land Occupation 27:1-36:13

2.1) Preparations to Occupy the Land 27:1-32:42

This final narrative movement is arranged in two categories. Following the introduction in 26:52-65, 27:1-32:42 describes the preparation of the new

generation Israel to enter the Land. The materials are organized in a threefold concentric pattern.

The first consists of 27:1-11, the case of Zelophehad's daughters and 32:1-42, the request of the Gadites and Reubenites to inhabit the Transjordan both sharing the motif of concessions to Land occupation. The second comprises of Joshua's appointment as Israel's leader to bring the Community into the Land in 27:12-23; and the execution of *ban* against the Midianites in 31:1-54. The common motif is that both are classified as part of the final acts of Moses before his death (cf. 27:12ff. and 31:2). Here is another example of the interlocking device used to weave the narratives of Numbers.

In addition, Numbers 25, and 31 depicts the break of Israel's relationship with Midianites due to the latter's role in the Balaam conspiracy to entice the Israelites from faithful devotion to Yahweh. At the close of the apostasy story in 25:18, the *ban* against Midianites is given but its execution is pushed from the *Resolution* movement into being part of the *New Orientation* phase of the plot. The significance of this move may be appreciated because it functions as an apt expression of devotion to Yahweh by the new generation Israel after their registration in 26:1-65. In addition, it also prepares the ground for the climactic act of dedication in 31:25-54, especially when they realized that Yahweh had miraculously preserved them in war.⁴⁵ The voluntary offering by the officers, above that stipulated in 31:21ff., expresses the new generation's commitment to Yahweh and parallels the dedication offerings of the first generation in 7:1-89. In this way, 31:1-54 recalls not only Numbers 25, but also the ideal formation of the people in 1:1-10:10.

The central element consists of laws for sacrificial offerings observed during feast days in 28:1-29:39 and the making of vows in 30:1-17. These anticipate a settled condition with the priesthood implemented and presumably a

⁴⁵ Cf. 31:49ff.

central temple established. They describe expressions of loyal devotion and worship of the Community towards Yahweh. 28:1-29:40 provides the annual calendar of festal offerings that regulate the religious life of the people, giving them access to God.

2. 2) Projections of Land Habitation 33:1-36:13

The second half of the *New Resolution* begins with an introductory unit in 33:1-56 which summarizes the desert trek of the Community (vv. 1-49) and concludes with the reiteration of the divine mandate to occupy the Land (vv. 50-56). This is then followed by another threefold cycle of instructions that demarcates the Land and allocates its habitation by the Community as follows: 34:1-29 sets out the boundaries of the Land (vv. 1-15) and the tribal portions within it (vv. 16-29); 35:1-34 sets out two categories of special cities and towns to be provided for. First, the Levitical portion of 6 cities of refuge and 42 towns are identified (cf. vv. 1-8); followed by the provision of 6 cities of refuge, 3 in the Transjordan and 3 in Canaan in vv. 9-34 for fugitives in the Community.

An Appropriate Ending?

The final provision is a reprise of the case of Zelophehad's daughters' inheritance cf. 36:1-13. The significance of this passage as a fitting ending for the book of Numbers has been a subject of scholarly debate as discussed earlier. The problem is that most felt that 36:1-12 lacked a sort of "stature" since it is merely an addition to 27:1-11. Further verse 13 is simply too pedantic in comparison to the displaced in Deut 34:1-12 which is more appropriate.

As it stands, 36:1-12 functions as a *inclusio* device that envelops the final narrative movement of Numbers with its counterpart in 27:1-11. The significance is that the book ends in total harmony with Moses' authority unquestioned and effective and the Community in full submission to Yahweh's laws as mediated through his servant. In this way, the reprise of the case of Zelophehad's daughters

effectively conveys the notion that the new generation Israel is poised to enter the Land, free of internal strife and rebellion, wholly trusting their God and voluntarily submissive to Moses' leadership at last.

The conclusion of Numbers, therefore, is to be found in its *New Orientation*. It is this context that the undramatic closing statement in verse 13 is apt. It conveys stability and at the same time assured fulfillment of Israel's quest to occupy the promised Land and thereby consummate their calling as Yahweh's Covenant Community.

Summary

The above analysis has shown that Numbers is a coherent narrative. It has a distinctive plot of its own within the Pentateuch. There is no necessity to turn to the overarching Pentateuchal framework in order to read the book meaningfully. For its part, Numbers reveals itself to possess a sophisticated narrative twist against the background of the Pentateuch's story of Israel's origin.

2.4 Conclusion

The narrative plotline delineated shows that Numbers has a distinctive compositional integrity. Structurally, the use of inclusive parallel devices used to interlock the successive movements of the plot is combined with the deliberate juxtaposition of law materials to knit together a cogent narrative unit. Its narrative flow is consistently maintained as reflected in the singular storyline composed of two motifs: a) The Journey to the Promised Land, and b) The Succession by the descendents of the Sinai Community as Yahweh's chosen people in the desert.

Thus, Numbers is about how "Israel", the covenant people of Yahweh, survived the disastrous desert-crossing, even when the original covenanters failed to fulfill their calling to be succeeded by their children, to arrive at the very doorstep of the promised Land.

Structural markers like the census lists and the geographical and chronological notices do indicate time-spatial development of the plot. But by themselves, they would not tell the same story as Numbers does. Olson's identification of the structural significance of the census lists is confirmed by the analysis of the narrative structure above. However, this only allows Olson to draw a minimalist significance based on the census lists of "Death of the Old and Birth of the New". As we have seen, this is only part of the message of Numbers.

Olson sees Yahweh as the driving force that effects the Succession of the second generation to the first. But is this necessarily so? This is very much in line with von Rad's view that even in Mosaic traditions, Yahweh is the sole principal actor. This attitude needs a reassessment as we take the narrative quality of Numbers seriously.

Does the narrative of Numbers concentrate on Yahweh alone as the initiator or is there more to it? Does not Numbers portray Yahweh's activities towards Israel as largely mediated through Moses? And although there is no hint that Yahweh is dependent on Moses, yet despite Yahweh's sovereign action, Moses seems to be so integral and essential to the mediation of the Covenant promise.

Clearly Numbers depicts Moses as the one who prepares and leads the people out of the Sinai wilderness, faithfully mediating every Yahweh's instructions (Numbers 1-10). Significantly it was Moses who invited Hobab to be their guide into the desert. Again, it was Moses who persuaded Yahweh not to annihilate Israel but to keep the Covenant within the proto-Israel Exodus-Sinai Community which led to the formation of the Second generation (Numbers 14).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The significance of this should not be overlooked since there is an obvious paradox in the fact that while Moses rejected Yahweh's offer to create a new and greater nation through him, yet in the end, the whole development of Numbers and Deuteronomy shows the end result of an Israelite Community that finally submits to Mosaic authority. Why? It seems that here is an attempt to show that there was no break in the continuity between Moses and the Patriarchs. That the covenant of the two eras were borne out of the other. The suggestion of a greater nation may indicate the failure of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Whenever Yahweh's wrath threatened to destroy the Community, Moses comes to their rescue through his intercessory "office" (Numbers 14: 11-19). Finally, it is Moses who oversees the whole transition process from the old to the new, both in the appointment of the new leadership offices to be held by Eleazer and Joshua (20:22-29 and 27:12-23), and the exercise of mediation of Yahweh's words (including Land distribution) for the new generation (Numbers 26-36).

2.4.1 Literary Role of Moses

Some observations can now be made about the literary role of Moses in the narrative plot of Numbers.

As noted above, both plot and character share in the bearing of the meaning and significance of narratives.

The traditional role of Mosaic mediation of Intercession and Law-Giver and Teacher begun in the book of Exodus is sustained in Numbers. As we have seen, the interactions of Yahweh, Israel and Moses particularly in the *Conflict/Resolution* and the first part of the *New Orientation* movements of Numbers focus on the nature of Mosaic leadership and authority. Two Mosaic roles of intercession and Divine mediation stand out.

I) Numbers 1:1-10:10 and 26:1-36:13, the role of Mosaic mediation as the Law-Giver has a high profile:

a) Numbers 1:1-10:10, Moses mediates the laws of Yahweh faithfully so that the Community is perfectly prepared to receive Yahweh's indwelling Presence into their midst. This is seen as crucial to the success for the task ahead, that is, the occupation of the promised Land (cf. Exodus 33:15-16).

b) Numbers 26:1-36:13, Moses necessarily remains in the leadership helm to ensure continuity in the transfer of both the Covenant and the promise of Land to the second generation. Again the mediation and implementation of Yahweh's law-guidance remains firmly in the Mosaic figure.

II) In the heart of the book, where the crucial Conflict takes place, Moses' role as intercessor comes to the fore:

a) Numbers 14 is the key chapter of the book where the theme of the demise of the Sinai Community and its preservation in the form of a new generation is depicted.

b) The other instance of similar importance is the appointment of Joshua as the new leader to bring Israel into the Land in Numbers 27:1-12.

c) In fact, Moses saves the Community from annihilation through his intercessory intervention in Numbers 11:1-3; 16-17 and individually in Numbers 11:26-30 (case of Eldad and Medad) and Numbers 12, where Miriam is concerned.

d) However in Numbers 20, only Yahweh's direct intervention saved Moses and Aaron from immediate death and disgrace. This story has a twofold purpose to explain the tragedy of the failure of Moses and Aaron to fulfil their divine vocation in terms similar to the rest of the first generation, and to explain why Moses and Aaron did not lose their unique status as Yahweh's representatives (in the account of their sin separated from that committed by Israel).

Thus Numbers is about how the Covenant was saved in fact within the same Israelite Community, through a new generation, as they crossed the desert to the Yahweh's promised Land. In sum, there are many perceptions about the nature of the Pentateuch and Moses' place in it. There is therefore a need to clear the ground for a constructive way ahead in the study of the Pentateuch. For this purpose, the nature of the role and function of Moses in the books of the Pentateuch needs to be reassessed. This is because, as will be demonstrated, the excision of the Mosaic figure from scholastic formulation of the Pentateuch's theology tends towards theological abstraction and a reading of the post-Exilic situation into the situation.

Nevertheless, the Narrative is not finished as the Pentateuchal Plot requires that Israel realizes Yahweh's promise to Israel through Moses. Thus in the final section of the book, since Moses himself has been disqualified from entering the Land, and Yahweh cannot be seen to have failed to keep his promises to both Israel and Moses, there is the portrait of Moses distributing to and adjudicating in the tribes of Israel, the Land promised to them.

CHAPTER 3

THE PORTRAIT OF MOSES - PART I

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The book of Numbers tells of Israel's struggles in their attempt to appropriate the promised Land of Yahweh as His chosen people. Usually, much of the interpretation of this story concentrates on Yahweh on the presumption that since this is part of the *Heilsgeschichte* of the Community, human actors do not have major significances in it. This has resulted in the view that though Moses may feature prominently in the text, yet he is of little literary and theological significance. This chapter attempts to show that the characterization and portrait of Moses in Numbers play a critical role in the literary and theological shape of the book.

In the Orientation Stage, 1:1-10:36, the image of Moses is predominantly as the Mediator / Lawgiver faithfully mediating all of Yahweh's instructions for Israel to prepare themselves for the March across the wilderness to the promised Land. This is in continuity with the image established on Sinai (cf. Exodus 19-40 and Leviticus), where he played a major role as Yahweh's mouth-piece, with the agreement from the Community (cf. Exodus 19:9 and 20:18-21). The emphasis of 1:1-10:36 is the meticulous application of Yahweh's instructions given to the Community through Moses. The refrains together with their variations, "The Lord spoke to Moses..." and "The Israelites did just as Yahweh commanded Moses" are prevalent throughout the cycle. Thus, Moses is depicted as faithfully conveying Yahweh's instructions and with the Community, implementing them. In this way, a harmonious relationship between Yahweh, His people and their mediator Moses

is sustained. Stability is the keynote in the first movement and the portrait of Moses shares the same overtone.¹

In contrast, the portrait of Moses comes alive in the *Conflict / Resolution* movement of the plot (11:1-25:18). The Rebellion stories against Moses' leadership and authority are treated in dramatic descriptions, beginning at a camp-site now known as *Taberah* (11:3). This introduces a series of rebellion stories that first exalts Moses to be *the* unique Servant of Yahweh (12:1-16) and then climaxes with Moses' own sin against Yahweh in 20:1-21. The whole *Conflict* cycle in 11:1-20:21 focusses on Moses and his authority portraying him to be above the offices prophet, priest and prince. Moses is to be perceived as the unique Servant of God to whom "Israel", His chosen people, His household, has been given as his charge.

In the *Resolution* phase of the Narrative (22:22-25:18), Moses does not feature prominently in the foreground. While this is especially pronounced in the Balaam cycle of 22:1-24:25, yet, his presence is undiminished when he emerges as the end of the struggle against the apostasy at Peor (25:1-18). Yahweh speaks the word of forgiveness and blessing to the Community through Moses (cf. 25:10ff.), thus affirming his indispensable Servant role even when he does nothing directly to save the Community.

The *New Orientation* of the plot (26:1-36:13) confirms the exaltation of Moses and his leadership as the new generation "Israel" that emerges is seen to be wholly submissive to Moses in their assumption as God's chosen people. This radical change of attitude toward Moses is demonstrated in four significant stories of: a) the case of Zelophehad's daughters (27:1-11 and 36:1-13); b) the appointment of Joshua as leader to bring the Community into Canaan (27:12-23);

¹ Moses is established as the authoritative leader of the community and the Priestly hierarchy instituted by God to organise the people and prepare them for the march. He presides at the dedication of the Tabernacle, accepts the offerings of the Community and speaks to God in the Tent of Meeting (cf. 7:89). He invokes the Presence of the Lord in the journey at the end of the Orientation Stage in 10:35-36.

c) the conduct of vengeance against the Midianites and the subsequent concession to absorb Midianite virgins (31:1-27); and d) the Transjordan occupation by the Gadites and the Reubenites (32:1-42).

Moses is seen to be laying down the agenda for the new generation and its newly appointed leaders to execute as Yahweh's chosen people. It will also be seen that Moses not only mediates Yahweh's laws for situations that arise but also takes it upon himself to interpret and thereby introduce laws for the Community's settlement in the promised Land. The Community is thereby portrayed as a *Mosaic Community* in the final movement of the Narrative.

It is my aim to show that the *Conflict* stories which are the heart of the narrative plot of Numbers have been worked in such a way as to make Moses the key factor that provides the distinctive literary and theological significances of the book as a whole. The portrait of Moses undergoes a development to emerge as *the* Servant of Yahweh from whom the Community conceives their distinctive identity as "Israel", the chosen people of Yahweh.

3.2 THE IMAGES OF MOSES IN THE *CONFLICT* MOVEMENT 11- 20

3.2.1 Moses the Exalted Servant of Yahweh 11:1-12:16

a) Literary Pattern

The rebellion stories in 11:1-20:21 reveal a highly complex structural pattern. Firstly, it can be seen as being composed two narrative cycles of 11:1-12:16 and 13:1-20:21. Both share a threefold complex of stories. 11:1-12:16 being composed of three stories identified by place-names:- a) *Taberah* (11:1-3); b) *Kibroth-Hattaavah* (11:4-34); and c) *Hazereth* (11:35-12:16). These deal with the exaltation of Mosaic leadership and provides the setting for the narrative cycle that follows in 13:1-20:21. This cycle is composed of three rebellion stories: a) the Community's rejection of the promised Land (13:1-14:45); b) the rejection of the Priestly hierarchy (16:1-17:28); c) and the sin of the Mosaic leadership (20:1-21). N. Lohfink has shown that these three stories effectively portray a

progressive destruction of the Sinai Community beginning with their rejection of the promised Land to the breakdown of the Priestly hierarchy which constitutes the integrity of the Community as Yahweh's people in the march to climax with the sin and exclusion of the Mosaic leadership from the Land. Taken altogether, these stories depict the complete demise of the original Sinai covenanters outside the Land as they failed to be God's chosen people.² P. Budd goes further in suggesting a chiasmic structure provided by the Yahwist that ranges from the disaffection in Sinai to the Jordan:

Apostasy—the golden calf (Exod 32:1-35)

Discontent—Taberah/Quail (Num 11:1-35)

Insubordination—Individuals (Num 12:1-16)

Insubordination—Israel (Num 13:1-14:45)

Insubordination—Individuals (Num 16:1-35)

Discontent—serpents (Num 21:4-9)

Apostasy—Baal-Peor (Num 25:1-5)³

Note that Budd's suggestion shows the centrality of Num 13:1-14:45, where Israel's first attempt to occupy the Land proves to be disastrous. But taking Numbers by as a whole, together with Lohfink's Priestly structure, the striking result of the present juxtaposition of this central event is its displacement by the sin and exclusion of the Mosaic leadership from the Land.

The Land exclusion theme is as expected a significant element in this narrative cycle, since it is connected to goal of Israel's march across the desert. In addition, it is also expected to take a prominent place in the *Conflict* phase of the

² "Die Ursünden in der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung", in *Die Zeit Jesu* (H. Schlier Festschr. ed. G. Bornkamm & K. Rahner). Herder, Freiburg: 1970, pp. 38-57. Reprinted in *Studien zum Pentateuch* SBAB, AT 4. Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stuttgart: 1988, pp. 169-189. Lohfink sees this as the work of the Priestly writer.

³ *Numbers*, p. 162ff.

plot. However, its predominance is seen to be displaced by the juxtaposition of the Mosaic leadership motif. Five out of the six rebellion complexes, focus on the challenges against Mosaic leadership and authority. Only 11:1-3 is ambiguous but Moses' intercession is crucial in saving the Community from total destruction by Yahweh's fiery anger. 11:4-34, 11:35-12:16, 13:1-14:45, 16:1-17:28, and 20:1-21 deal with the nature and place of Moses' leadership in the Community. Significantly, 13:1-14:45 is supposed to deal with the Land exclusion theme in the main, yet this narrative complex ends with the story of Israel's rejection of Moses' word of warning as the cause for their failure to capture the Land (cf. 14:39-45, especially v. 44). Hence it is clear that the nature of Mosaic leadership has become the dominant issue, alongside the Land theme. Hence 11:1-20:21 reveals a deeper pattern where the Moses figure is given the major focus in the present form, as follows,

- A Exaltation of Moses (11:1-12:16)
- B Israel's sin and ignoring of Moses' warning leading to their Exclusion from the Land (13:1-14:45)
- A' Rejection of Exalted Moses (16:1-17:28)
- B' Moses' sin and Exclusion from the Land (20:1-21)

The first parallel couplet A//A', shares the motif of Moses' exaltation as Yahweh's chosen servant to lead Israel. 11:1-12:16 (A) deals with a series of stories that progressively reveals that Moses' mediatorship is based on a unique relationship with God (12:6-8). The fact that the final challenge came from Miriam and Aaron, that is, people within his inner circle based on blood relations and their spiritual status in the Community heightens the elevation of Moses. In a sense, the hierarchy established for the Community at large in 1:1-10:10 is being fine-tuned to show that within the Mosaic leadership, there is no ambiguity. God

is establishing the notion that Moses was a leader amongst leaders, prophet amongst prophets.

The divine elevation of Moses draws a reaction which is only reported in (A') 16:1-17:28, where a Levitical revolt is led by Korah. His accusation is straightforwardly directed at Moses and his exalted status. He charges him to *have gone too far* רַב-לְכֶם, literally, "to have too much" (16:3), probably indicating prestige and power, since Moses, and his brother have effectively been placed at the top of the hierarchy of the Community. His basic argument is that *the whole congregation is holy and Yahweh is in their midst* (16:3), which echoes 11:29, where Moses expressed his wish that every member of the Community could be prophets. However the outcome of that story complex is that God is seen to insist on separating Moses from the rest of the Community (12:6-8). However, at least some members of the Community did not see it as God's act but a selfish act on the part of Moses himself.⁴

There is also the feature where in both parallel complexes stories of opposition by two identified persons have been incorporated.⁵ In both cases, the pair of men had been mentioned because for one reason or another, they did not present themselves to Moses when they were expected to. Although in the case of Eldad and Medad, there is nothing explicitly stated that they had refused to assemble with the seventy elders at the Tent of Meeting, yet the *threat* and *alarm* reflected in Joshua and the young messenger who reported the case share similarity of mood and concern in the Dathan and Abiram episode. Hence 16:1-17:28 (A') is a sequence to 11:1-12:16 (A), dealing with Moses' exaltation and his authoritative status.

The second couplet of B//B', share a common Land exclusion motif involving Israel and its Mosaic leadership. The critical story recounting how the

⁴ 16:3c, *Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Yahweh?*

⁵ Cf. 11:26-30, the unexpected inspiration of Eldad and Medad; and 16:12-15, the opposition of Dathan and Abiram.

original covenanters excluded from entering the Land in 13:1-14:45 (B) has an accompanying story of how Moses and Aaron were themselves similarly excluded from the Land in 20:1-12 (B'). Both stories recount how God's provisions and word were being disregarded and His will disobeyed. Both are characterized by the failure on the part of the human partner of God to trust Him completely. In both cases, an external obstacle effectively delays the Community's trek. In 14:39-45, they suffer a disastrous defeat to earn the place-name *Hormah* when they persisted against Moses' warning to try to enter the Land without God's approval. In 20:14-21, Moses' word to the Edomites proves ineffective and Israel was forced to make a detour to the east to get near the Land.

This juxtaposition of the story of how Israel was disqualified from entering the promised Land with a series of stories about Moses' exclusive authority in the Community effectively displaced it from the very centre of Numbers. The story itself reveals Moses as the key figure whose intercession staved off total catastrophe for the Community. In addition, the story now has an ending that heightens the failure of first Land entry as resulting from the Community's willful disregard for Moses' words of warning. Thus, it ends with the damning description,

“But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the Ark of the covenant of Yahweh nor Moses stirred from the camp. Thus the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and dealt them a shattering blow, pursuing them as far as *Hormah*.” (vv. 44-45).

However, the vital significance of Israel's Land exclusion is retained by being coupled to the stunning story of Moses' own exclusion from the Land. The servant of Yahweh who proved steadfast and faithful in 13:1-14:45, reveals himself to be fallible, so badly as to meet the same fate of not realizing his vocation as the original covenanters had. In this way, the story of Israel's Land

exclusion has been extended with Moses' sin story in 20:1-21 now occupying the centre-stage of Numbers.

b) The Images of Moses

i) Moses the Nursing Parent of Israel 11:1-34

The literary unity of Numbers 11-12 has been asserted by Noth⁶ but is demonstrated in detail by J. Milgrom and D. Jobling. The unity is found in the stylistic and thematic interrelation resulting in shared topical progression.

As Milgrom points out, Numbers 11-12 is composed of three complaint stories, all given geographical locations, I. Taberah (11:1-3), II. Kibroth-hattaavah (4-35), and III. Hazereth (12:1-15).⁷ Milgrom argues that the March was delayed in 11:1-3 because there is no mention of geographical progress and the name *Taberah*, like *Kibroth-ha-Taavah*, indicates the same site as far as the Narrator is concerned.

In between I and III, is the complaint story of *Kibroth-ha-Taavah* (II. 11:4-35). This comprises of two conflated complaints about meat by Israel and Moses about his own leadership. Clearly, the figure of Moses dominates the

⁶ "...it is necessary to take the chapters Numbers 11 and 12 together in their entirety when making an analysis." (*Numbers* p. 128).

⁷ Jacob Milgrom, "The Structure of Numbers: Chapters 11-12 and 13-14 and their Redaction. Preliminary Gropings", in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* eds. J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, E. S. Frerichs. Fortress, Philadelphia: 1987, pp. 49-61. Both the I. Taberah and III. Hazereth stories share a common pattern shown below as follows:

Complaint I. Taberah (11:1-13)	Complaint III. Hazereth (12:1-15)
a. People complain	a'. Miriam and Aaron complain
1a	1-2a
b. God hears, fumes, punishes	b'. God hears, fumes, punishes
1b	2b, 4-5, 9-10
c. People appeal to Moses	c'. Aaron appeals to Moses
2a	11-12
d. Moses intercedes	d'. Moses intercedes
2ba	13
e. Appeal answered	e'. Appeal answered
2bb	14
f. March delayed	f. March delayed
—	15.

incidents, and a symmetrical pattern can be traced from his actions . In the beginning and at the end, he appeals to God, that is, he performs his “prophetic” function (11:1, I; and 12:13, III). In the interim, as if encouraged by the people, Moses himself complains (11:11-15, II). He is rebuked by challenges to his leadership (11:25-29, II; 12:2-3, III). In Milgrom’s view, Moses meets these tests, demonstrating his humility and his sincere desire to share his power (11:29, II; and 12:3, III), and thereupon, God declares him the unique prophetic leader (12:6-8, III).

According to Milgrom, Moses had failed to “stand in the breach” when he joined the Community with his own complaint (cf. Ezekiel 22:30; Psalms 106:23). As a result Yahweh had to punish him. This He did by diffusing Moses’ spiritual powers to the seventy elders.⁸ Thus, Milgrom sees the Kibroth-hattaavah story portraying a negative image of Moses. To support his reading, Milgrom draws a chiasmic pattern for 11:4-35, with the central axis in verses 16-24a, where God answers the complaints of the Community and of Moses.

The punishment of Moses is to be found in the fulfilment section where the unexpected inspiration of Eldad and Medad. This is where Moses’ power has been diffused. He argues, “Eldad and Medad receive the prophetic gift directly from God and not from Moses (26). Moreover, they continue to prophesy. Their gift, then, is permanent, not transient like that of the elders (25).”⁹ This perception is reflected by Joshua who urged Moses to take immediate action to stop the two men from prophesying (cf. 11:28). Moses’ reaction to Joshua in 11:29, explains that Joshua had perceived here a “qualified rivalry” to Moses’ powers. Moses, however, is not upset by it. This demonstrates his humility and greatness, so as to be rewarded by being elevated as prophet par excellence in 12:3ff.

⁸ “Evidently, the fusion of these two stories is an attempt to demonstrate that Moses was punished by the diminution of his spiritual powers (the story of the elders) for failing to intercede for the Israelites when they craved meat (the story of the quail) and for failing to believe that God could provide it.” *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Milgrom suggests that there is a punitive diffusion of Moses' authority in the text. Moses may be seen to take the inspiration of Eldad and Medad to be Yahweh's answer to his complaint. But the surprise is that he even wished that Yahweh would go one step further, that is, to bestow His spirit to every member of the Community. In verse 30, Moses and the seventy elders returned to the Camp, indicating that Moses has accepted Yahweh's provisions.

Further this acquiescence to Yahweh's will is reaffirmed in 12:1-16, when Moses does not speak to defend himself against Miriam's challenge. Instead it is Yahweh who intervenes to set him apart from all others, calling him "my Servant" (12:8).

In addition, there is no real conflict between Moses' complaint that the Community was 'too heavy' for him to bear alone and his expressed wish that everyone should receive Yahweh's spirit. If there is any hint of negativism, it is in the subtle hint of complaint by Moses that is portrayed here because his burden will not be so heavy if everyone received Yahweh's spirit.

Finally, it is the Narrator who adds the positive note in 12: 3 that Moses is deemed the "humblest man on earth". This is then reinforced by Yahweh's affirmation that Moses has been entrusted with His whole house, thereby elevating him to the status of prophet *par excellence* or more specifically, "Servant of Yahweh".

Thus Moses' stubborn stance towards Yahweh in 11:4ff., may have deepened to a semblance of cynical skepticism in 11:21-23, giving rise to the perception that Yahweh had to act in punitive measures to correct his servant.¹⁰ It would seem that Milgrom is correct. However, the wider context of 11:1-12:16 reveals a different assessment. Instead of castigating Moses, the Narrative, interprets Moses' passivity in the elders story to be a manifestation of Moses'

¹⁰ Cf. 11:23, Yahweh declares that he would demonstrate that his "hand is not short", where the NRSV translates "power".

unusual humility. He is seen not to desire to monopolize the intimate relationship he has with God. This leads the Narrator to exalt Moses as "the humblest man on earth".

David Jobling's analysis of Numbers 11-12¹¹ yields the same conclusion about the literary unity of Numbers 11-12 as Milgrom's. However, he is able to make some insightful observations.¹² He employs the structural method of Greimas to bring out the narrative nuances of the text.¹³ He argues that the treatment of Moses' leadership motif has overtaken the *provision* motif with the interweaving of the Quail story with the Elders-cum-Miriam's challenge stories. Thus "...we have determined a symmetrical system among the four stories,

¹¹ David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative I*. JSOTS 7, second edition, JSOT Press, Sheffield:1986, pp. 31-65.

¹² He comes to the fore particularly in his preliminary observations in his sections on *Coded Message of Numbers 11-12* and *Extension Analysis*. In particular he is able to demonstrate that the *separation* of Moses from the people is not only conveyed through the prophet motif but also through Moses' *foreign marriage*.

There is also the implication drawn from the provision of manna which Jobling sees as sharing common elements with Moses. "Both the manna and Moses represent the *unity* of Yahweh's MP against the *diversity* of the CPs (Counter Programmes). Both are congruent with the *desert*, and both will 'cease' precisely at the end of the desert period. Just as the manna is Yahweh's *secret*, so the blessing on Israel through Moses is constantly *unrecognized* (cf. frequently in the desert tradition; also, cf. Miriam's and Aaron's failure to recognize Moses' role, and his "meekness" in 12:3). Finally, just as the renewable sparseness (reliable) of the manna is contrasted with the once-for-all plenty (deceitful) of the quails, so the 'once-for-all plenty' of the prophecy of the 70—their large number and the insistence that they prophesied only once—points to the 'renewable sparseness' of the leadership of Moses alone." *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹³ From the *paradigmatic* analysis, Jobling draws out the surface logic of the four complaint stories, *Taberah*, *Meat provision*, *Elders story* and *Numbers 12*. He demonstrates that the Main Programme (MP) of these stories is the March to occupy the Land. The rebellions are called Counter-Programmes as they deviate from the MP. These then require Yahweh to respond with Counter Counter-Programmes (CCP) in order to re-establish the *status quo*. Jobling draws two observations on the phenomena of *instigation* which predominates in the Meat and the Numbers 12 stories; and Yahweh's apparent *cooperation* which includes an element of punishment in it (cf. the quail and the Elders stories).

From the *syntagmatic* analysis, Jobling argues that in the Elders story, "... Moses the seduced, is *threatened* with a permanent diminishing, but ultimately sustains none, while his seducers, the people, sustain real loss in the course of the unified narrative (delay, the burning of the camp, the humiliation of their leaders)."

whereby *together* they tell of the breakdown and re-establishment of a *status quo*, namely, the proper role of Moses".¹⁴

Both Milgrom and Jobling see Moses and his leadership dominating Numbers 11-12. In fact, it is central to the text. According to Milgrom's schema, the centre of Numbers 11-12 is the dialogue between Moses and Yahweh. In fact, according to Jobling, it is this dialogue that prepares the ground for the Elders story. Thus Moses' confrontation with Yahweh is critical in the understanding of Numbers 11-12, and in particular, it is the issue of Moses' authority that sets him apart from the prophetic mediators of Israel. Moses' dialogue with Yahweh, and the light it sheds on the nature of Mosaic leadership needs to be examined.

Moses' Perspective 11: 10 - 15

The treatment of Moses begins in Numbers 11 with the Israelites instigated by "rabblies" who wailed and complained,¹⁵

מִי יֹאכֵלנוּ בָּשָׂר

Who will give us meat to eat?

v. 4c

There are two different reactions from Yahweh and his servant Moses. The sequence of this is important to follow. According to verse 10, it is Moses who *hears שמע* the people's *weeping בכה*.¹⁶ While it is Moses who hears and

¹⁴ This is reinforced by his semantic analysis which reveals two sets of ideas, that is, a distinction between the *mixed and the unmixed, of pure and unclean*; and the communication of knowledge. Jobling concludes, "The threat to Moses' position of leadership does not attack MP (Main Programme) merely in one detail; it threatens the entire basis of MP, the established mode of communication between Yahweh and Israel. So Moses must not merely be restored, he must be seen, by all parties, to be restored, and the significance of his restoration understood." *Ibid.*, pp.45 and 51.

¹⁵ It is clear that the complaint was for a variety of food since the next verse lists fish and vegetables of cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. This list conjures up colourful images of fresh and fragrant food that contrast sharply with the expression *filled to the eye-balls with manna* accompanied by a bland description (verses 6b - 7).

¹⁶ That the weeping was taking place in every family, *at the door of their tent*, depicts the extent of the grumbling and at the same time their refusal to approach Moses and Yahweh.

takes notice of this Community's distress, yet before he could react, Yahweh reacts with the typical fury that 11:1-3 describes. Yahweh *fumes with anger* וַיִּחַר-אַף (v. 10b), ready to inflict punishment. The juxtaposition of the perspectives of Moses and Yahweh to Israel's murmuring are in tandem, bringing out the complex tension between Israel, Moses and Yahweh. However, Yahweh's angry reaction stirs Moses' personal negative reaction towards God instead of Israel, as usually the case. We read, ובעיני משה רע *And in Moses' eyes [it was] evil* (v. 10c). But Moses then goes on to confront Yahweh with his own complaint (cf. vv. 11-15).

Normally, Biblical drama takes place only between two protagonists. The "fleshing-in" of a third person in the drama signals a substantive change in the direction of the narrative. The conflict between Yahweh and Israel is interrupted by the unexpected switch to Moses' perspective of things. A normal depiction of Moses in many of these rebellion stories is that he is seen to either side with Yahweh, when he speaks Yahweh's instructions, or with Israel, in his intercession.¹⁷ But here, is a detailed description of the complaints Moses has against Yahweh as a *personal* response to the situation. In view of the רע that fills his eyes, Moses lashes out at God,

לָמָּה הֲרַעַתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ

"Why have you done ill (רע) to your servant ?

וְלָמָּה לֹא-מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

Why have I not found favour in your sight,

לְשׂוֹם אֶת-מִשָּׁא כָּל-הָעָם הַזֶּה עָלַי

that you lay the burden of all this people upon me?

v. 11

Instead, they preferred to think of Egypt. Thus their *who* is actually a reference to Egypt, looking backward rather than to the present or forward to the future.

¹⁷ In Numbers 13-14 and 16-17, Moses' point of view is largely subsumed. He is either shown to be aligned with Yahweh's viewpoint or Israel's. In this way, his mediatorship is being portrayed in terms of which interests he is seeking to represent, never his own.

The ער that fills Moses' eyes is that of being made to bear with *the burden* אַת־כֹּשֶׁא of *all this people*. However, it is not the *burden* that is the object of his complaint, but Yahweh whom he views as being responsible for the *ill-deed* הִרְעָה. Thus Moses concludes that as Yahweh's *servant*, he has obviously fallen out of his master's *favour* חֵן. In this way, the *evil* (ער) that Moses sees is identified as his personal perception of the *ill* (ער) God has inflicted on him. Thus he concludes that he has lost God's *favour*.

This *favour* recalls the promise God made to him personally at Sinai (cf. Exodus 33:22-34:28). There Yahweh had given in to Moses' insistence that Yahweh himself must go with Israel to the Land in order to preserve the distinctiveness of *Israel's* identity (33:12-17). It is then followed up with the personal gift of self-revelation, unique to Moses' alone (33:18-34:9) before the Covenant was remade and renewed (34:10:28). Thus the divine *favour* which Moses now sees missing in his life in the wake of the present crisis leads him to perceive that he has been made to bear *the burden* of the Community all by himself.

The expression of this *burden* borne by Moses is spelt out in parenting terms:

הֲאֵנֹכִי הִרִיתִי אֶת כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה

Did I conceive all this people?

אִם־אֵנֹכִי יִלְדֵתִיהֶוּ

Did I bring them forth,

כִּי־תֹאמַר אֵלַי שְׂאֵהוּ בְחִיקְךָ כְּאִשָּׁר יִשָּׂא הָאִמּוֹן אֶת־הַיֶּנֶק

that you should say to me 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse

carries a sucking infant

עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר גִּשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתָיו

to the land you promised on oath to their fathers?

v. 12

Moses clearly reminds Yahweh that he is not fundamentally responsible for the Community since he did not father them. Therefore, Yahweh's demand for him to *carry* the people in his bosom like a maternal nurse or mother all the way *to the Land that Yahweh had promised to their fathers* draws a picture of unbearable demand.¹⁸

This metaphor of a *nursing parent* defines Moses' self-perception as Yahweh's *servant* as being more intimate and dependent since it connotes a maternal relationship between Israel and himself. He is now more than a prophet, a mouth-piece of Yahweh, to mediate divine guidance and revelation to the Community. Rather, Moses sees himself having to provide love, food and protection from his very own being. The image of Israel as *sucking infant* is apt since it describes the constant demands of a seemingly helpless infant, even though in this case, excessive demands on the part of the people to have meat instead of manna, more so, in view of the *weeping* and *wailing* that the camp now indulges in.

According to David Jobling,¹⁹ Moses has failed to fathom Israel's actual demand having been "seduced" by them. In contrast, Yahweh whose response shows that He had seen through the people's ploy. The "seduction" of Moses reinforces the dominant idea of him having to carry Israel in his *bosom*. Moses

¹⁸ Noth suggests that Moses' use of אִמִּי which implies that Yahweh is Israel's mother, (cf. Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1) since in 12c, their *fathers* are explicitly named. This is supported by P.A.H. de Boer (*Fatherhood and Motherhood in Israelite and Judean Piety* E.J. Brill, Leiden: 1974, pp. 5 and 35) who suggests that the rendering of אִמִּי , read as אִמִּי , a hypocoristic form for אִמִּי . Hence he sees here Moses' expression denoting himself as a "beloved little mother" to which God's maternal love and care he finds himself unable to fulfill.

P. Budd (*Numbers*, p. 128) prefers the more technical understanding on this term, to note that it is in the masculine form. Thus turning to 2 Kings 10:1, 5, אִמִּי refers to wealthy Hebrew men who took in noble infants to protect and bring them up in the face of a national crisis situation. In Isaiah 49:22,23, the picture of Israel's restoration is painted graphically with Yahweh's draft of kings and princesses to bring and carry them as *nursing parents* would.

Notwithstanding Budd's point, Moses' self-depiction of having to carry Israel *in his bosom* draws a maternal metaphor and therefore a stress on the intimate physical dependency which is all the more demanding than just a male nurse picture.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-45.

complains against Yahweh like a protective mother. So instead of *leading* he is *carrying* them. What he is upset about is his own inadequacy for this task. This shows how committed Moses was to Israel. He is seen to be conscious that he was not their *Patriarchal father* but his commitment to the Community is also more than that of a mere prophet.

Subsequently, Moses as the nursing parent of Israel, whose task is to provide food, says,

מֵאִין לִי בָשָׂר לְתַת לְכָל־הָעָם הַזֶּה

How am I to give meat to all this people?

In response to Israel's cry,

כִּי־יִבְכוּ עָלַי לֵאמֹר

For they weep before me and say,

תְּנֵה־לָנוּ בָשָׂר וְנֹאכְלָהּ

'Give us meat, that we may eat.'

v. 13

Instead of the simple food of manna provided by Yahweh, Israel, the *suckling infant*, demands to eat meat, a complex food. Their *wailing* is consistent to the picture of a baby's incessant cry. In Jobling's words, "Both the manna and Moses represent the *unity* of Yahweh's MP [Main Programme] against the *diversity* of the CPs [Counter-Programmes]. ... Just as the manna is Yahweh's *secret*, so the blessing of Israel through Moses is constantly *unrecognized*..."²⁰

Moses now responds personally declaring his inability to cope with the demands of both Yahweh and Israel. כִּי קָבַד מִמֶּנִּי refers to the burden of the people and Yahweh's insistence. It is not to show his reluctance as a leader but an inability to cope *alone, all by himself*.

לֹא־אוּכַל אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְשַׂאת אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה

By myself, I am not able to carry all this people

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

כִּי כִבֵּר מִמֶּנִּי

for it is too heavy for me.

v. 14

Moses drives his point to the ultimate by laying down his life,

וְאִם־כָּכָה אֶת־עֲשֵׂה לִּי

So if you make it such for me,

הַרְגֵנִי גַּם הַרְגֵנִי

kill me at once

v. 15a

While this may seem rather extreme, and well nigh over dramatic, the intensity of Moses' anguish as a forsaken servant of God is aptly drawn in view of the next line,

אִם־מָצָתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

If I have found favour in your eyes,

וְאַל־אַרְאֶה בְּרַעְתִּי

then do not let my eyes dwell upon my wretchedness.

v. 15b

It is not that Moses wanted to die. On, the contrary, Moses is appealing for Yahweh to restore to him His חֵן.²¹ Or else, all that he could see with his eyes is

²¹ Freedman, D.N., Lundbom, J.R., Fabry, H-J. "חֵן", TDOT vol V, eds. G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, ET. David Green. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1986. 22-36. Pp 24-5 deals with the noun *hen* declaring that it appears most frequently with the idiom "find favour in someone's eyes". "This is a favourite expression of the Yahwist. ...This idiom is more than a mere figure of speech; it describes very concretely what in fact was taken for granted in ancient Israel, as in the rest of ancient Near East: that favour is shown on the face. ...Ancient people tended to measure *hen* more precisely by the look in someone's eye. Modern people look instead to the smile." The analysis goes on to compare *hen* with *hesed* which is a loaded covenantal term. "...*hen* is not mutually practiced by both parties. It is given by one to the other, and sustains the relationship only so long as the giver so desires. It can be given for a specific situation only. If it is given and sustained over a longer period of time, there is always the possibility that it may be withdrawn unilaterally. Unlike *hesed*, *hen* can be withdrawn without consequence, since it is given freely."

Under concrete Usages, the discussion moves to favour as something being sought after. "Favour is sought and found, and because it can be withheld, it demands a peculiar kind of stance from the seeker, namely subordination. The ancient oriental world was a world of kings and lords, and consequently it was deemed proper to use language of deference. Typical is the expression *masati hen beeneyka*, not uncommonly accompanied by bowing and prostration (Genesis 33:3ff,;

his own wretched condition (עָרָב). Moses clearly puts the onus on God to do something to change his situation. In his view, it is God's fault that the wretched situation arose in the first place (cf. v. 11). It is therefore shrewd reasoning that only God can take him out of this, even if it means death.

James Milgrom argues that this passage is "an outpouring of Moses' self-pity".²² But it should be noted that this is a display of Moses' personal belief in Yahweh and His sovereignty over him. Hence, this outburst is more of a

2 Samuel 14:22; 16:4; Ruth 2:10; Psalms 31:109)." (27) There are two levels: "The first is the level of formality. In a specific context, *hen* is sought as a preamble to a request. " The expression is therefore an elaborate way of saying "please". The suppliant is not out to find favour *per se* ; his main concern is having his request granted. The second is favour for a longer period.

Theological Use: Divine Favour (30ff.) "After the apostasy of the golden calf, and in response to Moses' specific request, Yahweh reveals his essential qualities and character: he is first of all *raham wehannun* (Exodus 34:6). The sequence is crucial. Grace comes after confession of sin even as it came before the giving of the law. Law is delicately balanced against grace, and in fact the entire conversation between Moses and Yahweh in Exodus 32-34 focuses on this subject."

J.R. Lundbom's "God's Use of the *Idem per Idem* to Terminate Debate", *HTR* 71 (1978) 193-201, has established that the *idem per idem* construction in Exodus 33:19 functions as a rhetorical device to terminate debate by God with Moses, as in Exodus 3:14. Nonetheless, Freedman still maintains that it also serves to emphasize Yahweh's nature to be merciful and gracious (cf. Exodus 34:6). In other words, Yahweh is saying: "I will surely be gracious, I will surely be merciful"; just as in Exodus 3:14: "I am the gracious one, I am the compassionate one" (cf. D.N. Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses", *JBL* 79 (1960) 154.

In Genesis, the stories concentrate on individuals seeking Yahweh's favour. After Exodus, Moses consistently claimed to be the man who had the favour of Yahweh. Yet having this favour did not mean that Yahweh will grant Moses his every wish. Thus Yahweh does not kill him when he asked for it (Numbers 11:15), nor did Yahweh allow Moses to enter the Land (Deuteronomy 3:23).

Towards Israel, Yahweh introduced himself as the God of grace at Sinai (34:6). At the same time it seems that this revelation is a duality since Yahweh is also revealed to be a demanding God who would punish the guilt of the fathers upon their descendants (24:7). "This dual nature of Yahweh as God of grace and God of judgment finds expression throughout the OT, where grace or favour to Israel is always seen vis-à-vis judgment." (33).

The article is useful in dealing with the noun *hen* in the expression, *find favour in your eyes*. It is used by someone in self-abasement in approach to another for his/her blessing. In a survey of Pentateuchal passages, and in particular, connected with Moses and Israel, the expression is often connected with prayer, significantly to Moses' intercessions in Exodus 33-34 and Numbers 11. It is also used to signify God's favour to Israel in Exodus 3, 11 and 12 with regards to Israel's exodus from Egypt. This experience of the miraculous deliverance, turning the enemy, Egypt, into a benevolent sending off party to Israel, is contrasted with the murmuring of the Community, where Yahweh and Moses are accused of deception. Finally, when the Community had crossed the wilderness and once more stood in front of the Promised land, there is a change of heart and attitude towards Moses. It is only here that this expression is used in context with *my lord* by Israelites towards Moses.

²² *Numbers Commentary*. JPS, Philadelphia: 1990, p. 86.

petitionary prayer than a complaint or an exercise in self-pity. This is more apparent when we compare the excuse-complaint of the people stirred by the “riff-raffs” to Moses who confronts God for not being more forthcoming in showing his *favour* towards him. This is not a portrait of self-pity as much as a person who feels let down or betrayed by his/her superior because he/she has been given the responsibility without the necessary support. Thus Moses’ insistence that God is the true parent of Israel.

Moses’ personal petition has momentarily usurped the focus from Israel’s food complaint to Moses’ relationship with Yahweh and His guidance in the desert. Moses has placed himself directly in the path of confrontation between Israel and Yahweh. Significantly, he is seen to be so committed to Israel that he is willing to lay his life down the line, consistent with the maternal metaphor to protect her young.

This compares well with Moses’ initial failure to deliver Israel from Pharaoh very early in his vocation in Exodus 5:1ff. This resulted in increased oppression upon the Community. Consequently, when Israel cursed him saying “May the Lord see and punish you for making us obnoxious before Pharaoh and his subjects — putting a sword in their hands to kill us’ (Exodus 5:21), Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord, why have you brought *evil* on this people? Why did you ever send me?’ ...” (Exodus 5:22). Moses is not afraid to confront Yahweh when he is rejected by Israel. The word “evil” is used here and in Numbers 11:10c and 11a. Here, Moses’ commitment is not obvious and he is confounded by his failure. In response, Yahweh tells Moses that He has a purpose for this failure. He intends to multiply his miracles against an ever increasing hardening of Pharaoh’s heart so that everyone will see His glory (Exodus 6:1ff).

Thus this portrait is distinct from the other rebellion stories found in Numbers 13-14 and 16-17, where Moses’ personal views are withheld. In these accounts where he is seen to be rejected by the Community, he is on Yahweh’s side as the faithful mediator. When Yahweh punishes, Moses is aligned with the

people, to intercede for them. In this way, Moses is the mediator who represents the interests of either Yahweh or Israel. But in 11:4-35, Moses places his own interests right in the melee of Yahweh's quarrel with Israel. Thus we are presented a very distinctive portrait of Moses' self-perception as Yahweh's servant-leader to the chosen Community.

Yahweh's Perspective 11: 16 - 20

Yahweh sees and spells out the implication of Israel's request as a preference for Egypt and a rejection of Him in 11:18 - 20. Here, we are finally given what Yahweh *hears* (בְּאִזְנוֹי יְהוָה , *in the hearing of Yahweh*, 18bα) recalling what Moses had heard. Essentially both Yahweh and Moses heard the same thing where the expression, בֶּשֶׂר כִּי־טוֹב , *meat that was so good* , (11:18bβ) sums up the colourful description recounted in 11:4-6. Yahweh is offended by the recollection of these "goodies" as part of the life in Egypt which He had rescued them from. Combine this with the question form, asking *who would give*, Yahweh takes it that the people were complaining against him. Note that the people's complaint is not formally presented to God nor to Moses directly. In response, God volunteers himself as the provider:

וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם בֶּשֶׂר וְאָכַלְתֶּם

Yahweh will give meat to them and they shall eat

v. 18c

But this divine provision will also be punitive cf. v.20a. The reason given is that their wailing is a harking back to Egypt, to the point that they even question their rescue in the first place (cf. 11:20c):

לְמָה זֶה יֵצְאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם

Is it for this that we have come out of Egypt?

In this way, the Community has *rejected* (מֵאַסְתָּם) Yahweh. The phrase, *Yahweh in your midst* בְּקִרְבְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה , accuses Israel of having

forgotten that God now lives in their midst, so able to *hear* their weepings. The rebuke is that Israel has behaved impudently, without proper regard to Yahweh's holy Presence amongst them. This Presence has not really been appreciated by Israel, since they did not bother even to ask of Him but instead they ask, "*Who will give...*", as if Yahweh is absent. In this way, the reference to Egypt is not merely of a piece of real estate but of the "power" that Egypt has in providing such a *good* life for them.

Moses' Incredulity 11: 21-22

Moses reacts quite incredulously to Yahweh's meat provision proposal. He seems oblivious or content with Yahweh's solution for his personal petition but not as certainly unimpressed with God's solution for Israel's food problem. Quite unexpectedly, Moses retorts to Yahweh,

שֶׁשֶׁ-מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רִגְלֵי הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי בְקִרְבּוֹ

I am amongst the people which are six hundred thousand footmen

וְאַתָּה אֹמֵרָה בָּשָׂר אֶתֶּן לָהֶם

and you, you say, I shall give to them meat

וְאָכְלוּ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים

and they shall eat a whole month

v. 21

Moses numbers himself amongst the people and emphasizes his incredulity and scepticism at Yahweh's offer of meat provision.²³ The question arises: how can the man who has been instrumental in execution of so many miracles in his career express such skeptical incredulity at his God's design of a

²³ The evidence for Moses' seeming scepticism is the emphasis on the number of mouths that needs to be fed, *six hundred thousand men alone* שֶׁשֶׁ-מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רִגְלֵי הָעָם, not counting the families, for *every day for a month*, חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים. For this to happen, not even all the accompanying livestock will suffice. Moses seems to have numbered himself amongst them, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי בְקִרְבּוֹ, and thrown in his lot with the people, who desire meat.

miracle? The answer lies in the whole portrayal of Moses' self-perception as Israel's *nursing parent*. Note also that Moses persists in his perception of the meat problem, not accepting Yahweh's perspective at all.

The key lies in 11: 21 b, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲמַרְתָּ, followed by his quote of Yahweh's promise, אֲנִי, *I shall give*. The question is, who is the "I" mentioned here? I would like to suggest that in this dramatization, Moses' quote refers to *himself* as the "I", instead of Yahweh.

It is usual to take it to be Yahweh especially since verse 18 expressly states that Yahweh will provide the meat. However, it should be noted that Yahweh's speech uses the third person, "Yahweh" instead of the personal first person pronoun "I" to denote his intended action. This unusual syntax indicates that there is an attempt to ensure that there is no ambiguity as to **who** was going to provide the meat.

However, this emphasis does not mean that God does it directly. Throughout the partnership of Yahweh and Moses in the book of Exodus for example, while God may be said to perform a miracle, yet it is done often through Moses. So for example, while it is stated that God is responsible in delivering Israel from Egypt, yet it is also true that the act of deliverance was done through Moses. In Numbers, such juxtaposition of human and divine partnership is seen again in the assertion that Yahweh is Israel guide through the desert trek. Yet Moses enrolls Hobab's help without any hint of faithlessness. The complementary view of divine and human in the work of Moses is regularly depicted without hesitation. Hence, while v. 18 shows that Yahweh would provide the meat for Israel, yet if the question of "how" arises, it would involve Moses since He has chosen to work through him.

From this framework, it is noted that Moses first identifies himself with the six hundred thousand men on foot of Israel. This identification sets the reader's eyes on Moses taking his stand with the people. He is a member of the Community, his humanity being stressed. Then he quotes Yahweh: *you, you say,*

“I will give them enough meat...” (v. 21ab), that is to say, that Moses was expressing his incredulity that Yahweh still insists on **him** providing the food. This reinforces Moses’ self-perception that he was Israel’s nursing parent but unable to cope with having to provide meat for them. Moses persists that he was having to bear the burden of meat provision as he looks to the practical aspects of having to slaughter the herds and catch the fish from the sea (cf. v. 22).

Thus, Moses’ expression of incredulity in 11:21-22, is not against Yahweh’s ability but against Yahweh’s insistence that Moses would continue to carry the burden of Israel but with His help. While Moses has preferred death, if his *wretchedness* continues, yet God answers his need by standing by him to provide meat against the earlier intent to afflict them with his anger, though without changing his role and function. He remains Israel’s *nursing parent*.

Yahweh’s Response 11: 23

It is in this light Yahweh challenges Moses to see for himself his demonstration of support for him:

הַיָּד יְהוָה תִּקְצֵר

Is the hand of Yahweh short?

עַתָּה תִּרְאֶה הַיְקֻרְךָ דְּבַרִי אִם־לֹא

Now you shall see whether my word will fall to you or not? v. 23

Yahweh does not castigate his servant for being obstinate. It is significant that neither the Narrator nor Yahweh express a negative perception to Moses’ outburst, which as is apparent in Numbers, they are not shy to do. Thus any negative connotations that commentators see tend to isolation of the text and fail to take the narrative context and structure of the book as a whole.

Inspiration of the Seventy Elders 11: 24-25

The description that Yahweh took a portion of the spirit of Moses and bestowed it upon the seventy elders shows that they were subordinated to him. Moses is seen to be their source of authority (cf. v. 25). This is confirmed with the report of their spontaneous prophetic utterance at the point of anointing. However, the Narrative stresses that it was a “once-off” phenomenon.²⁴ In other words, the seventy elders did not exhibit supernatural powers after that time. Obviously, the Narrator wants to make sure that there should be no confusion of the significance of the inspiration, which is the appointment of assistance to Moses. They were not seen to have direct access to Yahweh being given Yahweh’s spirit. This is where I find the suggestions of Milgrom and Jobling that this endowment reflects a diffusion and diminishing of Moses’ authority and leadership is quite unfounded. If it were so, God would have given direct access to the seventy elders. As it is, we find Moses at the head of the seventy elders because it is his spirit that they received from God. In other words, **delegation** is suggested rather than diffusion. This is supported by the parallel episode in Exodus 18, when Jethro suggested Moses should set up a judicial hierarchy.

The Problem of Eldad and Medad 11:26-30

The next incident that follows confirms our reading of 11:24-25 because it is precisely here that a potential threat to Moses’ authority has arisen. Two *men* who did not go out to the Tent for the anointing, nonetheless received the spirit and began to prophesy. It is not explicit that they were members of the chosen seventy except that they were “registered”. It is more probable that the term refers to their leadership status, given that the spiritual filling was for elders only.

²⁴ Cf. GKS §120d2 cf. BDB pp. 414-415, point out that the use of the verb, **יָצַד**, with a negative emphasizes the non-recurrence of the action.

It is a moot point whether they had remained behind in protest against Moses just as Dathan and Abiram did in 16:12ff., but the resonance of the two stories is haunting. If Eldad and Medad did remain in camp in defiance of Moses, then the perceived threat seen by both the “young” messenger and Joshua is justified.

Joshua was in no doubt, without hesitation, he beseeched Moses to stop them. His words are reported in direct speech with a sense of urgency: “My lord Moses, shut them up!” (11:28b) אֲדָנָי מֹשֶׁה כְּלָאֵם). Note that the seventy elders were “shut up” after they exhibited prophetic signs of their spiritual filling. Eldad and Medad too, needed to be stopped, not necessarily because they were unauthorized but because Moses needed to assert his control over them. Many commentators interpret that Moses’ reaction indicates that Joshua’s *jealous* concern was misplaced and was even a rebuke to Joshua. If it is so, it is only because Moses expresses his personal wish that all of Yahweh’s people were prophets, endowed with Yahweh’s own spirit instead of his. Moses’ response to Joshua’s outburst is surprising only because his perception of the situation like the quail problem continues to be unconventional.

He questions Joshua instead of commending him,

הֲמִקְנָא אַתָּה לִי

Are you jealous for me?

וּמִי יִתֵּן כָּל־עַם יְהוָה גְּבוֹיִּים

*I wish that all of Yahweh’s
people were prophets²⁵*

כִּי־יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם

*and that Yahweh would give
His spirit upon them. v. 29*

Moses queries Joshua’s *passionate concern* קִנְיָא. Moses did not question Joshua’s personal loyalty to him but the concern that Moses was in danger of

²⁵ G-K §151 b.

losing his control over the Community. This is a trivial matter since much of the controversy in Numbers revolves around Moses' leadership, in particular, the Korathite rebellion in 16:1-17:28.

Moses' expressed his wish that Yahweh would 'inspire' the whole Community with His spirit. That would surely remove the murmuring of the people since they would then have direct access to Yahweh instead of having to go through him? Here, in a deeper level, is an irony where if Moses' wish was answered, then his unique authority and leadership would be at an end since it would be diffused then.

Moses shows himself unmoved by the potential threat that Eldad and Medad posed. Instead he wished that every member of the Community could receive Yahweh's spirit and so have access individually to Yahweh. This would then make his role and function unnecessary. This is consistent with the whole portrayal of Moses in the preceding passage where Moses finds the job of being Israel's *nursing father*, too heavy a burden for him to bear *all by himself*. Yahweh's provision of the seventy and Eldad and Medad does not diffuse Moses' authority. That Moses preferred Yahweh's unexplained inspiration of Eldad and Medad to be made available for everyone would appear to undermine his own authority. Miriam and Aaron pick this up in 12:2 when they said, "Is Moses the only one through whom Yahweh has spoken? Has he not spoken through us too?"

ii) Moses the Faithful Servant of Yahweh 11:35 - 12:16

Miriam's challenge to Moses' exclusive mediatorial authority is bridged by the geographical notice in 11:35, with the mention that Israel's arrival in *Hazereth*. This notice brings the two stories of *Kibroth-hattaavah* and *Hazereth* in as close proximity as possible.

The challenge in 12:1-16 is initially introduced as a domestic affair within the inner circle of Moses' leadership. As it stands, the text reflects a complex

process of compilation. Coats²⁶ sees three layers of traditions beginning with a domestic squabble as reflected in v. 1, against Moses' marriage to a *Cushite* woman. This is then taken over by the tradition that concerns mainly the issue of Moses' prophetic mediation. Finally the story is taken over by the concern of the tradition that wanted to project the *heroic* quality of the *man* Moses. In spite of this, Coats holds to the unity of this passage.

From the Narrative, the three disparate elements of domestic conflict, prophetic mediation and nature of Mosaic authority reflect a skilful presentation that in the main elevates Moses to be *the faithful* Servant of Yahweh, above and beyond the prophetic office.

Firstly, it should be noted that the three elements are all given from three different perspectives of the Narrator, the protagonists Miriam and Aaron, and Yahweh. The domestic discontent is explicitly attributed to Miriam and Aaron by the Narrator. In contrast, v. 2 sets the challenge in the direct speech of the duo. This is then followed by another comment made by the Narrator who again intervenes to describe Moses as the "most *humble* man on earth" in v. 3.

The immediate effect of this arrangement is the subversion of the truthfulness of the characters of the antagonists in the story. The impression is given that Miriam and Aaron had borne such an intense personal disapproval of Moses' foreign marriage that they now challenge his leadership authority instead of confronting him with their real concern. Both Miriam and Aaron therefore lost the sympathy or support from the reader even before they utter a single word.

²⁶ G. W. Coats, "Humility and Honour: A Moses Legend in Numbers 12", in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*. Eds D.J.A. Clines *et al.* JSOTS 19, JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1982., pp. 97-107.

The Narrator's Perspective: Moses the most Honourable Man on Earth

After quoting the duo's complaint in v.2, the Narrator quickly interjects with another comment in verse 3, to tell the reader that,

"Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than any other man on the face of the earth."

The key word is **יָדָבַר** which is often rendered "humble",²⁷ "honourable"²⁸ or "miserable".²⁹ It is clear that Moses' own reaction is withheld by the Narrator. Instead, the Narrator himself intervenes as an observer present describing Moses' silence as humility *par excellence*. In fact Moses only speaks in v. 13, to intercede for Miriam upon Aaron's request. By then, the whole conflict has been resolved. He is required to rescue the antagonists instead. Thus, Moses is seen to be an

²⁷ Gray (*Number*, p. 123ff.) points out that this quality does not connote patient tolerance of wrongdoings afflicted upon them, but describes persons who are submissive to God (cf. Psalms 22:27 [26]; Zephaniah 2:3).

²⁸ G. W. Coats ("Humility and Honor: A Moses Legend in Numbers 12", *Art and Meaning* JSOTSupp 19, JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1982, pp. 97-107) has the most convincing argument in his suggestion that **יָדָבַר** in this context should be rendered "honourable" in the sense of being a man of integrity.

Philip Budd (*Numbers*, p. 136) prefers "a trustful attitude" as seen in Psalms 25:9; 37:11. Also James Milgrom (*Numbers*, p. 94) and rejects the translation of "meek" for the word.

²⁹ As suggested by Cleon Rogers "Moses: Meek or Miserable", *JETS* 29 (1986) 257-263. He bases his argument basically on the root of **יָדָבַר** being **יָדַבַּר**, which means "to be bowed down, afflicted", is connected with the word **יָדָבַר**, which also means "humble, afflicted and poor" (cf. BDB 776-777). Rogers argues that "miserable" suits the translation in this context because in the narrative context, the rebellion of the people has reached even his own sister and brother. Further the use of the word **יָדָבַר**, i.e. "exceedingly" is inappropriate with "humble" since it seeks to describe Moses' state of mind in the superlative. Thus "In the complaining of the people heightened by the complaining of his own sister and brother it would be the most natural thing in the world for someone to describe himself as the most miserable person on earth" (*Ibid*, pp. 262-263).

Rogers' suggestion rests mainly on his reading of the narrative context, to which he has overlooked the fact that the passage is about Moses' steadfastness in the Lord. Further the Narrator's comment should complement Yahweh's declaration of Moses' faithfulness than be something aside. Finally, "miserable" is not the natural connotation of the word and Rogers has to impute this from the narrative which is not apparent. When attacked, Moses does not indulge in self-pity as we have seen in his earlier exchange with God. Rather, Moses bursts out in anger (cf. Exodus 32:22, when Aaron replies to Moses' affront, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn...").

observer himself. He does not participate in the argument or discussion although he is the object of it.

At the same time, this interjection by the Narrator serves to enhance the moral uprightness of the Mosaic character. Moses does not speak and does not need to speak because as the most humble person "on the face of the earth", he did not need to say anything since everyone recognises this of him. The whole earth is being brought in as witness to Moses' virtue, while being accorded the superlative comparison. Because it is the Narrator who states it, the accolade comes across as a statement of "fact".

Thus the Narrator prejudges the conflict for his audience by diffusing any tension conjured by the challenge of Miriam and Aaron with the revelation of his judgment of Moses. This is the power of what is known as Narrator Omnipotence. The Narrator has absolute control of the use and presentation of the information that determines how a story shapes up for the reader or audience.

In summary, the Narrator has exalted Moses as a man with a deep sense of honour and integrity, even before Yahweh speaks. What is significant is that Moses is given human affirmation as a great man. This concurs with true greatness in the Hebrew Bible where the great man is one who is "in favour with man and with God". The value of human recognition and acceptance of a man's stature as a person of integrity cannot be undervalued. The emphasis here is that Moses' personal character is being appreciated and extolled.

Yahweh's Perspective: Moses, no mere Prophetic Mediator

Yahweh now intervenes and his action is described as *suddenly*.³⁰ He summons them to the Tent of Meeting, the regular place where Yahweh conducts his businesses with Israel through Moses.³¹ In verse 5, "Yahweh descended in the

³⁰ Special Waw.

³¹ Cf. J. Milgrom *Numbers*, pp. 386-387; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 294-296.

pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the Tent." Aaron and Miriam were called to step forward to hear Yahweh's word of argument. From verses 6-8, Yahweh speaks in direct speech expressing his own view about the matter. Yahweh interjects that Moses was above the prophetic mould.

(6)Hear now my words!

When a prophet comes forth from among you,

I Yahweh make Myself known to him in a vision.

I speak with him in a dream.

(7)Not so with My servant Moses:

he is entrusted with my whole household.

(8)I speak with him mouth to mouth,

Plainly, and not in riddles,

he sees the form of Yahweh.

Why then were you not afraid,

To speak against My servant Moses. (12:6-8)

Yahweh expressly calls Moses "My servant" twice in verses 7 and 8. In between these two are the descriptions of Moses' servanthood. This is in contradistinction to the preceding passage of verse 6 that describes the normal course of prophetic mediation. This is declared inapplicable for Moses (cf. v 7 a), "Not so with My servant Moses".

Moses is referred to as "my servant" (עֶבְדִּי מֹשֶׁה) by Yahweh. The term "servant" is used to distinguish personalities in Israel's history (cf. Exodus 14:31; Deuteronomy 34:5³²; Joshua 1:1, 2, 7. Cpr. Genesis 26:24, for Abraham; Numbers 14:24, for Caleb; Job 1:8, for Job; and most regularly for David).

³² G. W. Coats see these references including Numbers 12:7, and 8 as "a pre-deuteronomic allusion to Moses as servant of God. It is the key element in the death report. ...The title appears most frequently as an epithet for Moses in the book of Joshua....But its most common function is to validate the authority of Moses to require obedience from his people or to establish the order of life in which the people must live (Joshua 1:7, 13, 15; 8:31, 33; 9:24; 11:12,

According to Coats, the expression “servant of God”, עֶבֶד אֱלֹהִים and its variance עֶבֶד הָאֱלֹהִים (cf. Daniel 9:11; Nehemiah 10:30; 1 Chronicles 6:34) “refers primarily to the relationship between the subject and God, not to the work which the principal will accomplish as the servant of God.”³³ In other words, the title does not allude to a specific office. Coats further rejects any inference to kingship or any overtones of polite, courtly speech despite its frequent reference to King David. Instead, its applications to varied personages as Ahijah (cf. 1 Kings 14:18 and 15:29), Jonah (2 Kings 14:25) and Job (Job 1:8; 2:3; 19:16 and 43:7, 8) show that it “is a general epithet available for describing traditionally famous and pious persons of the past.”³⁴

Coats is right in pointing out that the term “Servant of God” frequently described famous and pious personalities of Israel’s past.³⁵ Yet it is too sweeping to rule out any “kingly” connections the term may embrace for Moses. Certainly the title does describe persons referred to as God’s own personal “servant”, God being the Master and Lord. Nonetheless, it should be observed that often the person so ascribed possesses a significant leadership stature and authority amongst his Community even when they are not regal figures. David, aside, its application to personages like Abraham, Jonah, and even Job reflects persons of some social standing and having authority over people around them. Coats himself acknowledges this when, observing the Servant title applied to Moses as

15; 12:6; 13:8; 14:7; 22:2, 4, 5. Cf. also Malachi 3:22.” (*Moses—Heroic Man, Man of God*, pp.183-4).

P.D. Miller in his recent article, “‘Moses My Servant’: The Deuteronomic Portrait of Moses”, (*Interpretation* 41/3 (1987) 245-255) draws attention to the Moses’ servanthood primarily in terms of teaching and intercession as God’s prophet - servant. It is through this that “The words of Moses embodied in Deuteronomy gave Israel all that was needed for its life as a community under God, guided and blessed by him.” (p. 245).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁵ He based his observations of this expression on Zimmerli’s study in “*The Servant of God*”, SBT 20 (London: SCM, 1952).

the *heroic man*, he comments that the focus is on Moses' authority as "the great leader" of Israel.³⁶

Thus, Coats understands 12:7, 8, to be Yahweh's confirmation of Moses' position as leader of the Community in reply to the challenge of Miriam and Aaron. Consequently, he mused, "To refer to this leadership of the people as servant of the Lord is to recognize the validation of his (that is, Moses') authority in God."³⁷ If the issue of the conflict in Numbers 12 is about leadership status, then why rule out the nuance of "polite, courtly speech" and kingly overtones? Moses may have never been portrayed explicitly as a monarch, yet his leadership over a Community composed of at least twelve tribes and their respective chiefs is often portrayed as absolute in the Pentateuch.

The problem with Coats' category of "hero" is that it is too broad since it includes every category of persons: Patriarchs (Abraham), Prophets (Jonah) and Wiseman (Job).³⁸ To this end, J. R. Porter's suggestion that Moses is being portrayed in a Monarchical model cannot be ruled out *per se*.³⁹

A positive description follows beginning with statement that Moses "*is entrusted with my whole household*". Moses is not an ordinary prophet because he has been entrusted with all of Yahweh's "house". But what is the meaning of "faithful"? Coats argues that it means "integrity", a person who has proved himself to be responsible in obedience to his or her master's trust.

³⁶ "Thus, ..., the title identifies the great leader, who dies according to the word of the Lord and, appropriately, in the presence of the Lord, as the servant of the Lord." (*Ibid.*, p. 184).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁸ Coats' conclusion is interesting. "The epithets in the Moses tradition appear, therefore, to support the contention in the working hypothesis for this project that the tradition depicts Moses, not in terms of prophet, priest, or king portraits drawn from institutional offices operative in the time of the storyteller, but as the hero of the story, Israel's story. And as hero, Moses casts an image that embraces many offices, many forms, many responsibilities." (*Ibid.*, p. 185, emphasis mine).

³⁹ Cf. J. R. Porter. *Moses and the Monarchy. A Study in the Biblical Tradition of Moses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

Verse 8a,b describes the exclusive intimate relationship that Yahweh has with Moses, where they communicate **plainly** and Moses sees Yahweh's "form" (or Gk and Syr, "glory"). These convey the concrete form in which Moses relates to Yahweh, which is unique even for prophets. It is clear that the description is based on Moses' Sinai mediation, particularly Exodus 33 where Moses gained a special personal favour from Yahweh to see **Him face-to-face**.

Even though the reference does not point to Moses holding an institutional office, yet the description does not exclude a formal leadership "office" in the Community. This is because, Moses had an official role and function in the Community and its leadership. He was not a peripheral figure nor an itinerant charismatic figure like that of Elijah.

Here then is Yahweh's personal endorsement of His chosen servant, who has shown himself to be trustworthy. It is a character reference this time by Yahweh, reinforcing that of the Narrator in v. 3. The quality of this endorsement is premium because it is from Yahweh, the God of Israel who himself stands on Moses' side viz-a-vis Miriam and Aaron who professed their prophetic standing before Yahweh. Yahweh does not deny the validity of the duo's representation, but points out that Moses' case is unique from theirs. Thus Moses receives vindication from both human and divine.

Clearly, Yahweh has exalted Moses above any ordinary prophetic mediation known to the Community thus far. This exaltation is evidenced by the kind of communication that Moses enjoys with Him, described as direct, face-to-face and plainly. Moses has been "entrusted"⁴⁰ with Yahweh's whole household, referring to Israel (12:7). Thus Moses is no mere prophet but God's very own personal servant, chosen to lead Israel.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 96, suggested the idea of personal "reliability" is necessary here. Porter sees the object of trust to refer to the Temple of Jerusalem, seeing that Moses is depicted as an antitype of David (*Ibid.*, p. 13ff.).

In sum, between the Narrator and Yahweh, Moses is twice exalted! He is firstly a man of great integrity and honour, to be considered the greatest on all the earth. Then in Yahweh's eyes, he is special because he is the one with whom He meets face-to-face and converses in dialogue, not dreams and visions. Thus Moses is more than a prophet. He was "Yahweh's servant", a man described to be "in favour with man and with God", the perfect man who deserves the entrusting of Yahweh's "whole household".

Aaron's Perspective: Moses, "my lord"

A third perspective is that of Aaron, as seen in his response when he begs Moses to intercede for Miriam,

O my lord

do not lay sin upon which we have acted foolishly and have sinned.

O do not let her be like a stillborn, as one whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb.

vv. 11-12

The significance is Aaron's opening address to Moses. Where before, Miriam and Aaron claim equality with Moses because of their possession of Yahweh's prophetic spirit, now from Aaron's mouth, is a self-submission to Moses' authority. It is true that **אֲדֹנָי** is used to indicate the **subordination** of the speaker in relation to the addressed, acknowledging the latter as "master" or "lord", having authority over the addressee. It is clear the term can be used to address both men and God in general.

In the human context, it may not refer to a specific public office like king or chieftain but can be that of a servant to his master as in the case of Abraham and his manservant in Genesis 24. Hence the precise meaning and significance of **אֲדֹנָי** can only be determined by the context of its individual use.

In Numbers, there are altogether only five occurrences of this term used to address Moses. They are in 11:28, 12:11, 32:25, 27, and 36:2.⁴¹ It is significant that the first two references are found in the first half of Numbers, spoken by Moses' personal assistants, Joshua and Aaron. The rest appear in the second half of the book, in the context of Land distribution, and are spoken by representatives of the wider Community. The point is that Aaron's recognition of Moses as "my lord" expresses his (and Miriam's) acceptance of Moses' supremacy in the face of God's vindication. Note that this same self-abasement is reflected in Exodus 32:32 where Aaron submits himself to Moses and his rebuke for the golden calf apostasy.

Significantly, it can be observed that both addresses by Joshua and Aaron to Moses as "my lord" are accepted as a proper approach towards Moses in the narrative. The full implication of this can be seen in the wider circle of such self-abasement in approach to Moses in the second half of the book, in the mouths of members of the new generation "Israel". That is where a new harmony and equilibrium is depicted after the debacle of the first generation and the succeeding generation prepares to take on the mantle as God's chosen people.⁴²

c) Summary of Numbers 11:1-12:16

From the above, we can see that Numbers 11-12 portrays Moses being acutely aware of his role and responsibility as Yahweh's chosen Servant to "Israel", primarily in the model of a *nursing parent to his/her suckling infant*. This image predominates in his thinking and comes through in his dialogues with

⁴¹ Passages like 31:49; 32:4, 5, 25, 27, 31 can be included, where the protagonists towards Moses adopt a subordinate stance using the self-reference, "your servants" when addressing themselves to him.

⁴² The occurrences of אֲדֹנָי in the second half of Numbers are spoken by leaders representing the interests of the Community reflecting a change of attitude and perception towards Moses similar to Aaron's change of perception in Numbers 12. A fuller discussion will be made in the next chapter.

Yahweh. It is in this capacity that Moses finds himself *unable* to bear the *burden* of the Community which was too heavy for him, as a mere human.

In answering Moses' complaint (cf. 11:11), the Narrator was careful to portray delegation and not diffusion of Moses' authority in the inspiration of the seventy elders. Moses' response to this divine gift was to desire that God's spirit be made available to everyone of the Community, giving the consistent impression that he was not one who revelled in the exclusivity of his vocation.

This portrait is further enhanced by the challenge posed by his very own sister and brother who were supposedly part of his inner leadership circle. This threat to undermine Moses' authority is decisively dealt with by the Narrator who first of all confers the accolade of 'the most *honourable* (i.e. integrity) man on earth' (cf. 12:3) to Moses without the latter even uttering a word beforehand. To dispel all doubts on the authority of Moses, the Narrator then records Yahweh's personal vindication of Moses, who also exalts him to be above all normal prophetic mediators. In this way, Moses is seen to be *the* Servant of God, a man whose faithfulness won him a unique relationship with Yahweh where they speak to each other in a face-to-face exchange. Thus Moses is elevated above every member of the Israelite Community.

3.2.2 Moses the Intercessor-Saviour of Israel 13:1 - 14:45

As we have seen discussed earlier, Numbers 13-14 purports to recount the story of why the original covenanters failed to enter the promised Land. Essentially, even though the spies had seen for themselves the truth of Yahweh's promise of the Land intended for them, only two of them held firmly to their faith in Yahweh who alone can guarantee that the Community can successfully occupy Canaan.

The build up for the narrative sequence of the Community's Land rejection story begins with the return of the spies burgeoning with a sample of the Land's fruitfulness (13:28, 29). So bountiful was the Land that the narrative takes

the trouble to portray the fact that they needed to carry a cluster of grapes on one pole by two men (cf. 13:23f.)! Thus they were able to confirm that Yahweh's promised Land was flowing with milk and honey (cf. vv. 26, 27). However, the majority of the spies were also quick to exaggerate the fortifications and warring prowess of the inhabitants of the Land.⁴³ As a result, while the spies confirmed the riches of God's promise, they projected the obstacle to their goal as impossible to overcome.

Caleb, quickly responded by urging the leaders to go forward in faith, to trust God for the Land. Seeing that God is true to his promise that the Land was indeed abundant and rich, he had no hesitation to assert that God will surely be able to give the Land to them despite the strong fortifications and warriors they would come up against. Caleb saw the overwhelming might of Yahweh. Thus he insists, *indeed we are certainly able*, בִּי־יָכוֹל נוֹכַל לָהּ (v.30).

But ten of the spies insisted otherwise, being able only to compare their ability to that of the Canaanites: *we are not able*, (לֹא נוֹכַל v. 31b),⁴⁴ because the inhabitants of the Land were *stronger than we*, (כִּי־הָזֶק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ), v. 31c). Typical of basic human nature which welcomes pessimism more readily than optimism and good news, the Israelite Community found themselves in a crisis out of a sudden, instead of celebrating in confirming the abundance of the Land promised to them. The negative sentiments won the people's hearts as the

⁴³ דַּמָּן, *but*, effectively counters the initial positive report (v.28ff.). They reported that *the inhabitants of the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very great* (v.28). In order to help the people to visualize the greatness of the enemies, they tell them they saw the Anakims, reputed giants, there. Then comes a list of other reputable fierce and numerous inhabitants in the form of Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites and Canaanites (v.29).

This is just like 11:4ff., where the reminiscence to food in Egypt is given in full rich colours that fill the senses. Here, again the same technique is used to bring across the *strength* of opposition that stands in the way of Israel's goal. Like Numbers 11:4ff., the Narrator, here, also gives a hint that it is all in the instigators' mind. Just as they raised the food above the oppression in Egypt, they now raise the strength of opposition above that of the richness of Yahweh's provision of the Land.

⁴⁴ This resonates with 11:14, where Moses declares *I am not able ... for it is too heavy*. Both Moses and Israel share the same outlook when they lost sight of Yahweh's ability to provide.

next verse records that the ten spies went on to disseminate an *evil report about the Land*, דַּבַּת הָאֲרֶץ (v. 32a).

An even larger exaggeration of the strength of the obstacle in the land is fabricated to the people as the instigators speak of a land that consumed its inhabitants (v. 32). In addition, the giant inhabitants whom the spies saw reduced them to mere *grasshoppers* (vv. 32c, 33), and conjures a picture of Canaan as indeed an extremely hostile place to live. Thus the giant grapes that the spies brought now serve to confirm the image of giant hostility that awaits them. Hence the people now becomes greatly distressed (cf. 14:1ff.). They turned against Moses and Aaron wailing ,

Oh that we had died in the Land of Egypt,

or in the wilderness

*Oh that we had died*⁴⁵

Why has Yahweh brought us into this land, to fall by the sword?

Our wives and little ones will become a prey.

Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?

vv. 2-3

Again Israel looks to Egypt and this time their thought becomes clear intent, instead of mere wishful thinking since they had decided to act to *appoint a leader and return to Egypt* (13:4). What is important here is that the Community's rejection is focused on Moses their leader שָׂרָא.⁴⁶ They perceived that it is the leadership of Moses that was at fault. Caleb and Joshua stepped forward to defend Moses by urging the people to continue to place their trust in Yahweh so that if His *pleasure* יְצִיחַ falls on them, they will surely succeed.

⁴⁵ Note that Moses too had preferred death in his complaint (cf. 11:15), after complaining that he was *not able* to do Yahweh's task.

⁴⁶ In J. R. Barlett's view ("The Use of the Word שָׂרָא as a Title in the Old Testament", VT 19 (1969) 1-10), it is a title of the tribal leader who oversees the military and judicial matter of his community.

The following verse, v.9, is significant because the duo continues to argue that the Community should not *rebel against Yahweh*. This causes the reader to understand that preferring to return to Egypt which presumes an intention to appoint another leader to lead the Community, is a rebellion against Yahweh.

For Caleb and Joshua, they perceived that the *protection*⁴⁷ of the Canaanites had already been rendered powerless in the advent of Yahweh's accompanying Presence with Israel.⁴⁸ אֶל־תִּירָאֵם occurs twice to emphasize the call for the Community to put their trust in Yahweh. On both occasions it is preceded by the need to recognize Yahweh's presence in their midst.⁴⁹ Their plea for the Community to keep faith with Yahweh draws a violent reaction. They were about to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua when Yahweh breaks in to intervene (v. 10, 11).

The question arises, why was Moses silent in the face of such an upheaval? It is not a case of anti-Moses tradition or a diminution of the figure as a coward or fickle-minded person. Rather, it is appropriate that the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, who witnessed the Land first-hand do the talking. Furthermore, as we shall see, they would be the only survivors of the first generation to see and occupy the Land.

a) Moses the Intercessor-Saviour of Israel 14:10-35

Numbers 14:10b-35 consists of a threefold cycle of dialogue between Yahweh and Moses wherein Yahweh's threat to annihilate the Community is

⁴⁷ אֶל־תִּירָאֵם, *their protection has ceased from them* - cf. Gray (*Numbers*, p. 154) a supernatural presence that protects the Canaanites like that of Yahweh, for Israel is powerless. This compares with the resounding victory that Yahweh has over Balaam who was reputed to be able to manipulate the supernatural forces but is overpowered by Yahweh. It is significant that this victory precedes the Community's own faithlessness but is atoned by the passionate commitment of Phinehas (22:1-25:18).

⁴⁸ וַיִּהְיוּ אֲתַנּוּ.

⁴⁹ v. 9א, בִּיהוָה, implies Yahweh's nearness.

averted by Moses' intercession. This is sandwiched between Yahweh's two speeches in the dialogue reported in 14: 11-35 as follows:-

- 1) Yahweh's Intervention 14:11-12;
- 2) Moses' Intercession 14:13-19;
- 3) Yahweh's Assent 14:20-25, 26-35.

The key element in this intercessory dialogue is found in 14:20 where Yahweh accedes to Moses' request with these opening lines:

סְלַחְתִּי כְּדַבְרְךָ *I forgive, as you say*

This clearly indicates that Yahweh has heard Moses' prayer and intends to accede to Moses' request. It tells us that whatever action Yahweh intends to take, he is doing in accession to his servant's intercession.

First, it is important to note that Yahweh's intervention comes at the climactic moment as the people were poised to stone Joshua and Caleb (and presumably Moses and Aaron too). Yahweh has intervened right at the height of this confrontation not only to protect his followers but also to verify his power and presence to the people.

i) Yahweh's Intervention 14:11-12

The intervention begins as a direct complaint by Yahweh to Moses of the distress that Yahweh feels about the crisis. This takes the form of a double lament introduced by , למה "How long...?". James Barr⁵⁰ has suggested that the expression is often used to raise points of injustice or unfairness in the Hebrew Bible. It fits in with the present context with Yahweh being the aggrieved party. Yahweh accuses His chosen Community of stubborn unreasonableness in rejecting the Land since the spy mission had confirmed that His Land is indeed

⁵⁰ Cf. J. Barr's detailed discussion in "Why? in Biblical Hebrew", *JTS* 36 (1985) 1-33.

fertile as promised. The focus is on the “unfairness” shown by Israel’s ‘unreasonable stubbornness’ in rejecting Yahweh’s provision of the fertile Land. This is confirmed by the use of the two verbs, “despise” (יִנְאָצֵנִי) and “not believe” (לֹא־אֲמַיִן) in the twofold accusation that follows. The verbal expression, “not believe” (לֹא־אֲמַיִן) is a dominant motif in the Exodus-Sinai corpus (cf Exodus 1-14 and 19-24).⁵¹

Coats draws attention to יִנְאָצֵנִי as the expression of rejection or renunciation (cf. Isaiah 1:4; 5:24).⁵² P. Budd⁵³ observes that the sense of distaste (i.e. ‘spurning’) or ridicule should not be overlooked. This is particularly sharp when in 11:20, a different verb, סָרַף, is used to convey the idea of rejection. This latter emphasis is in line with the fact that the Community had completely ignored that Yahweh had kept his promise and the Land before them was desirable as promised. Thus the use of these two verbal expressions by Yahweh indicate the propensity of the Community to withdraw their exclusive reliance in him.⁵⁴

⁵¹ W. Schmidt has written extensively to show that the *belief* motif is a major factor in the book of Exodus. See also Durham’s comments in his commentary on Exodus, pp. 225-226.

In Exodus 1-14, an impasse is caused when Israel rejects Moses’ leadership to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. Subsequently this led to the Plague cycle where Yahweh’s might is displayed. The climax is reached, with the drowning of the Egyptians at the Sea Crossing, to which the conclusion was, “*And they saw... and they believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses.*” (Exodus 14:31).

In Exodus 19-24, where the making of the Covenant is recorded, 19:6 begins with the intention of the encounter between Yahweh and the people. “*That they will believe in you*”. Then, in Exodus 24, upon meeting Yahweh, the people became so intimidated that they chose Moses to represent them to Yahweh. These accounts point to the need to counter the Community’s persistent refusal to entrust themselves to Yahweh and his servant Moses.

⁵² *Rebellion*, pp. 146-7.

⁵³ *Numbers*, p.157.

⁵⁴ Their tendency to despise and disbelieve His will and provision is a recurrent motif in Exodus and Numbers. Unbelief describes the constant struggle between Israel and Yahweh from Egypt to the door-step of the Promised Land. In other words, here is an echo of Exodus 33 where Yahweh is seen to pronounce the label that the original covenant community was a *stiff-necked* people.

The deliberative nature of the dialogue is self-evident in the personal address specifically mentioned as *to Moses* (v.11, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה).⁵⁵ This contrasts sharply with public-orientated speeches which normally would be expressed in the form, *to Moses and to Aaron* (e.g. 14:26). This is consistent with the role of Aaron and Moses as the *mouth-piece* of Yahweh (cf. Exodus 3:14-16). Hence it is clear that 14:11-25 is a private conversation between Moses and Yahweh comparable to that in Exodus 33 and 34. However, the speech implies more than just an invitation from Yahweh to Moses to intercede for the people, because Yahweh offers Moses a new status of Patriarch. The crisis is not the same, as Coats had already pointed out that this rebellion is decisive in character, in the rejection of Yahweh's Land and leader.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Edward Newing ("The Rhetoric of Altercation in Numbers 14", in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays in Honor of Francis I. Anderson, 60th Birthday*. Eds. Edgar W. Conrad & Edward G. Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake: 1987, pp. 211-228) cites other occurrences including Abraham's intercession for Lot in Genesis 18:17, 23-32 and Abimelek (Genesis 20). See also Amos 7:1-6; Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 15:1 (cf. pp. 213-4). Newing argues that v. 12 should be translated in a triple cohortative case, since there is no difference between the imperfect and cohortative case in the verb. He further insists that the Hebrew depiction of the role of the Covenant or Prophetic Mediator as intercessor demands it. Basically, Newing wants this speech to be Yahweh's invitation to Moses to stop Him from doing what He intends as part of the deliberative process which parallels Sinai (cf. Exodus 32:10).

⁵⁶ In comparison, the Apostasy of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32 is not a rejection of Moses nor of the Covenant promise but a *misrepresentation* of Yahweh. (See discussions by H.C. Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry", *HUCA* 54 (1984) 1-44; R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*. JSOTSupp 22, JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1983; Dale R. Davis, "Rebellion, Presence and Covenant: A Study in Exodus 32 - 34", *WTJ* 44 (1982) 71-87; Jack M. Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative", *VT* 18 (1968) 380 - 387).

However, the linguistic connection between the complaints of Yahweh here and that in Exodus only shows the sharp difference in the absence of the invitation to Moses to stand aside. In other words, it is only conjectural to suggest that the Narrator of Numbers for whatever reason decided to leave out the invitation for intercession. Finally, Newing's introduction of the office of Covenant Prophetic Mediator to function as intercessor is far from established because there is no need to posit a mediatory office for the intercessory function as in the case of Abraham in Genesis 18.

Nonetheless, Newing's suggestion that the verb form is consistent with the cohortatives is inviting, especially in view of Davidson's observation that "It is not unnatural that the cohortative or intentional should be used to express an action which one resigns himself to do, though under external pressure in a subjective 'I must'". (*Syntax*, p.92 §65 Rem 5).

The crisis of the Community's revolt has been presented as being not only against the leadership, but against Yahweh himself. For, the clear rejection of the Land-Promise "forces" Yahweh to not only punish the people, but to "dispossess" them.⁵⁷ This is a revoking of the Covenant. "Israel" as God's chosen is withdrawn. The offer of "God's chosen" is focused on Moses. The people's rejection of the Land-Promise is treated as decisive.⁵⁸

Yahweh proposes to *smite* Israel with pestilence and to *dispossess* ⁵⁹ them. In their place, He intended to create a greater and better nation from Moses (v.12). The accent is on the second intention. This shows that Moses is seen to be indispensable to the continuity of "Israel" even when the original Sinai covenanters have displaced themselves from it. They are seen to be mistaken to think that they could dispense with Moses and choose another "leader" in order to bring them back to Egypt.

Plagues are normal in the punishment of sin in the wilderness narratives. Sakenfeld⁶⁰ pointed to P. Bird's dissertation on שרף to argue that the verb has to do with the idea of ownership of property. Notably, this is a renunciation of Yahweh's concession to Moses in Exodus 34:9,⁶¹ where Yahweh had made Israel his "inheritance" or "possession". The significance is that only as "God's chosen

⁵⁷ If this is so, then the absence of Yahweh's feint asking Moses to "Let me alone...". (cf. Exodus 34:10) is all the more significant.

⁵⁸ Yahweh's complaint is provoked by the fact that Israel had previewed the rich and good blessings of the Land and had rejected it out of their failure to entrust themselves to Yahweh. The spying of the Land was to confirm the truth of Yahweh's Land-Promise. Yet Israel focused instead on the difficulty of conquest and by that, was willing to forego Yahweh's promise. This is disastrous since it is a blatant spurning of Yahweh's purposes for them. Hence, Yahweh's judgment to destroy Israel corresponds to Israel's treachery. Herein lies a subtle play on the irony of the situation.

⁵⁹ וְאַרְשָׁנוּ, Hiphil 1st pers. sing. with 3rd pers. sing. masc. A unique combination with כְּדַבֵּר אֶכְנֶה, corresponding to Yahweh's rejection of the Community. A number of commentators like L.E. Bins, McNeile, and de Vaulx translate the verb as "disinherit" or "dispossess". Gray (*Numbers*, p. 156) sees the possibility of the meaning of "destruction" here in view of Exodus 15:9.

⁶⁰ "Theological and Redactional Problems in Numbers 20 : 2 - 13" in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*. Eds. J. T. Butler, et. al. JSOTSupp 37. JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1985, p. 326.

⁶¹ However, the verbal root, נָחַל, is used instead.

people” can Israel “inherit” the Land. In view of Exodus 34:9, it may be inferred that this verb is chosen precisely to convey Yahweh’s rejection of the people and their doom by implication. Certainly the force of annihilation comes from the combination of the three verbs, *smite*, *dispossess*, and *make*. These verbs imply the destruction of Israel and the making of a wholly New people in their place.

The introduction of the final verb **וַעֲשֶׂה** is significant as Yahweh informs Moses, *I will make of or from you a greater and mightier nation in their place.* **וַעֲשֶׂה אֶתְךָ** indicates a new creative act which Yahweh is contemplating. The pronominal object **אֶתְךָ** emphasizes the recipient status of Moses. In effect, Yahweh is seen to be offering to make Moses a Patriarch of “Israel”, supposedly to join the ranks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What emerges from this is that whilst the Community is being rejected, the hope for the continuity of the Sinai covenant lies in Moses. Yahweh is not abandoning the Sinai Covenant, nor his promise to the Patriarchs of Israel. At this point it should be noted that a crucial element of that Covenant-making process was Moses.⁶²

This continuity between the Moses and the Patriarchs is carefully maintained in Exodus 13:19 where Moses is said to have taken Joseph’s bones in fulfillment of the oath that the latter had made his brothers to undertake in Genesis 50:25-26. Later, Joshua was to complete Moses’ task of bringing Israel into God’s Land with the burial of Joseph’s bones in Shechem, in the family plot bought by Jacob (cf. Joshua 24:32). In other words, Moses, the nursing parent is given a chance to be elevated to full Patriarchy. If he were to accept God’s offer, he would be partner in the conception of the new “Israel” as Isaac and Jacob had with Abraham. Moses’ own connection with Joseph’s bones and his Levitical lineage fixes him firmly in the Abraham’s covenant. The demise of the Jacob’s

⁶² Significantly, he was credited for persuading Yahweh to make the Community his *inheritance* (cf. Exodus 34:9). All this, in spite of Moses’ acknowledgment that the people were *stiff-necked*. Yet Moses was successful in his petition based upon the personal *favour* he had gained from Yahweh.

descendants would not terminate Abraham's covenant since Moses now stands as a possible candidate for a new dependency to emerge.

ii) Moses' Intercession 14:13-19

The text is not explicit in the portrayal of Moses' rejection of Yahweh's offer to make him the head of a new greater and mightier nation. First, Moses is seen to argue that the annihilation of the Community will undermine Yahweh's integrity before the Egyptians⁶³ and the other nations. The focus is not just on the ability of Yahweh as such. Moses' first point in his argument is that the "external witnesses" headed by Egypt⁶⁴ and the nations who clearly acknowledge the might of Yahweh, will construe the death of the Community as Yahweh's treachery. This is because it will be seen as a cover-up for Yahweh's personal failure to bring the people into the Land. This is the first argument in Moses' intercession in 14: 13-16.

The nuance of the word "swore" נִשְׁבַּע refers to Yahweh's oath to the people to give them the Land is noted by James Milgrom, "In the Exodus narratives only the oath to the fathers is mentioned (Exod. 6:8...) However, the oath must be alluded to in God's promises of fulfillment (Exod. 3:8, 17), and God's promise is equivalent to an oath (cf. Deut. 19:8, where *nishba'* "swear,"

⁶³ Egypt is singled out as the main and leading witness because Israel had been snatched out of Egypt by Yahweh. That Yahweh humiliated the great might of Egypt with multiple miracles performed *inside* the very Court and Temple of Pharaoh who is none other than the son of god, demonstrates the **irresistible** nature of Yahweh's power. Thus Egypt is a first-hand witness to Yahweh's might and will. But this witness can be **for** or **against** Yahweh.

⁶⁴ The hermeneutical use of Egypt has been examined by L. Muntingh, "Egypt as a Hermeneutical Principle in the Theology Behind the Plagues of Egypt", *Old Testament Society of South Africa, 29th Annual Congress*. Ed. J.J. Burden, *OTWSA/OTSSA* 29 (1986) 113-46. Helpful also is Gunn's article on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The spectre of Egypt, Israel's former master/owner is never far from the consciousness of the first community, throughout the Wilderness Narratives. They were seen to be 'murmuring' against Moses and Yahweh, by comparing their circumstances to that which they 'enjoyed' in Egypt. In the Wilderness cycle, Egypt has become a paradoxical symbol. For the first community, it represented **security**. While for Moses and Yahweh, it represented oppression and suffering. Herein lies the use of irony of perspective by the Narrator of Numbers.

and *dibber* “promise,” are equivalent).” This speaks of the covenant that Yahweh has made with Israel himself at Sinai. He has become their God and they have become his people. The bond is the oath Yahweh has given. Should God go back on his word? Worse still, can God fail to keep his oath? This is followed by the verb *to slaughter* (שׁחַטַּם), which has its root שׁחַט and its cognate in Assyrian equivalent *to butcher*. This is rarely used in application to killing people (for example, Judges 12:6, 1 Kings 18:40, 2 Kings 10:7, Jeremiah. 39:6, 41:7, 52:10). Gray feels that *slaughter* is an adequate enough translation but notes that the verbal form is used for describing child sacrifice (cf. Genesis 22:10, Isaiah 57:5).⁶⁵ If Yahweh cannot keep this oath but worse to cover it up by annihilating them, it only shows that Yahweh is a malicious God, contrary to the loving, caring, merciful God that He is revealed as to Moses.

Second, in his speech in 14:17-19 which takes the form of an appeal (אָנִי), Moses is seen to make a passionate plea for Yahweh to “pardon this people”⁶⁶ so that Yahweh’s greatness or might is acknowledge universally.

Fundamentally, Moses’ appeal is based on Yahweh’s personal self-revelation at Sinai, where for the first time, Yahweh is known to be a merciful, gracious, faithful but holy God (cf. Exodus 32-34). Again the emphasis is on the integrity of Yahweh, in this case, on his personal self-disclosure to Moses. It is the whole experience at Sinai recounted in Exodus 32 - 34 that Moses points to when he says “כִּי אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ” in 14:17. He is referring to the very special self-revelation made to him as proof of his favour (indicated by the word יָדָע). Given Moses’ Sinai experience, it is hardly the case that he was only praying in general vague terms as Gray proposed.

Moses’ intercession recognizes that God does punish the guilty. Moses’ intercession moves the discussion to a ‘World’-stage. In 14:15 - 19, Moses is in

⁶⁵ *Numbers*, p. 159.

⁶⁶ James Milgrom (*Numbers*, pp. 392-396) has suggested that סָלַח be rendered as “pardon” with a sense of being reconciled with Israel, rather than “to forgive”.

fact “bargaining”⁶⁷ for the sparing of some. Moses is appealing to Yahweh's self-revelation. Moses is not pleading for a new act that is uncharacteristic of Yahweh. Rather he pleads for the extension of Yahweh's patience with this people. But this patience is known to Moses alone! This intimate relationship between Yahweh and Moses was established in Exodus 32-34. Moses was not only Israel's choice of Mediator but in a real sense, after Exodus 32, Moses represented the True Israel.

At issue is the role and function of Moses' intercession. Was it crucial? Would Yahweh have relented without Moses' pleading, and pleading based on the special self--revelation that was privy to Moses alone?

Moses is urging Yahweh to demonstrate his awesome power revealed to him at Sinai (cf. Exodus 34:5-8) by forgiving Israel on the basis of his **לֶחֶם** *loyal commitment* which is behind his forgiving spirit (verses 17-19). It is obvious that Moses is interceding on the basis of the self-revelation that was given to him alone in Exodus 34, when he had asked for a sign of Yahweh's special favour upon him. That Yahweh allows Moses to know him so intimately in the Ancient Near East world meant that Yahweh allowed a mortal man to gain special access to His very personhood.

There does not seem to be a direct connection between what Moses prays for and Yahweh's response. Thus Yahweh's declaration to have “*forgiven, as you have said*”⁶⁸ which was followed by “*As surely as I live,...*” is understood as Yahweh's self-assertion viz-a-viz Moses' intercession. This amounts to a partial

⁶⁷ This recalls the bargaining conducted by Abraham to save Lot and his family in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁶⁸ In Moses' intercession in Numbers 14:17-19, the accent is on Yahweh's self-declaration, **כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לֵאמֹר**, *as you have promised, saying*. (According to Budd's translation on p.148). Built into the dialogue are hints to the alternative which Moses is steering Yahweh to, so that in the end, when Yahweh finally agrees, he is to say “**כַּדְבַרְתָּ**, *as you have said*”. A similar expression is found in the opening of Yahweh's second speech **כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם** in 14:28. This clearly shows the expression is being used as a structural *inclusio* device to integrate the speech-dialogue.

concession to Moses' prayer, and the phrase *as you have said* is understood as a general term. To further harmonize this reading, the suggestion is also made that Moses' petition in v.19 only carries a generalized notion of asking Yahweh to 'forgive'.

It is contended that Moses' prayer acknowledged the gravity of the sin of the Community's rejection of the Land, which cannot be overlooked. For this reason, Moses' argument and prayer seeks to persuade Yahweh to limit the punishment of their sin.⁶⁹

The force of Moses' argument is skilfully presented with the emphatic expression, וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם (v. 13) with an appeal to external witnesses. Budd's rendering "If the Egyptians hear of it", fails to bring across the urgency and gravity perceived by Moses. It is more accurate to translate it, "*But the Egyptians will hear!*" This is the keynote of Moses' first argument. Notably מִצְרַיִם structurally binds the whole prayer since it appears in Moses' final appeal in v.19, "*you have borne with this people from Egypt until now*". Thus an *inclusio* structure is formed in Moses' speech, with the Exodus-Deliverance motif as its content.

Two sets of sequential arguments provide the framework of Moses' argument, projected by two sets of the verb-pairing of שָׁמַע, with אָמַר⁷⁰. The

⁶⁹ Moses' petition proper opens with, וְיִצְהַר יְהוָה. Gray (*Numbers*, p.157) suggests that the idea here is for Yahweh to exert his power in some other way than he had proposed, so that the nations and Israel may realise his might, citing Joshua 7:8ff. as support. Alternatively, if v.19 is taken into account with כָּחַד to denote *moral power or control*, Yahweh is then urged to exercise it and pardon the people. Greenstone supports the latter interpretation, pointing to Psalms 130:4 where, "The power of complete forgiveness is peculiar to God alone..." (*Numbers*, p.142) Noth (p. 109) thinks that the clause reflects Moses' request for forgiveness as an appeal to Yahweh's mighty power. Noordtzijs (p.125) tries to be more specific, "that the Lord may show His power in such a way that both the nations and Israel may be deeply impressed by His divine power."

This evocation sets the goal for Moses' petition. The emphasis is clearly not on the need to demonstrate Yahweh's might but the need to preserve Yahweh's 'reputation' from being destroyed by accusations of treachery. The introduction of moral categories by commentators can be misleading, as there is no suggestion that Yahweh's threat is in anyway unjust or immoral in Moses' argument. Rather the issue revolves around the impression to the world at large.

⁷⁰ אָמַר can mean "testify".

first set is found in v.13, Egypt's שָׁמַע with its accompanying אָמַר in v. 14. The object of the Egyptian's testimony (past) is "the inhabitants of this land" (future)⁷¹. Between this combination is the reminder of the exodus where Egypt was the victim of Yahweh's כָּח. In this way, Egypt serves as an 'external witness' to testify to Yahweh's might and ability.

The second verbal pairing, שָׁמַע (v.14 b) and אָמַר (v.15 b), frames the main contention of Moses. In addition, it broadens the identity of the 'teller' at the end of v.15. While the 'hearer' still remains as Egypt, the 'teller' has been widened to include both the Egyptians and *the inhabitants* with the use of 'the nations' (הַגּוֹיִם). As a result, the climactic accusation is made by *the nations* and not just Egypt alone.

Thus these combined 'testimonies' of Yahweh's might form the 'reputation' Yahweh has achieved among the nations. Notably, the word for "reputation" shares the root שָׁמַע. The frequent occurrence of this verb is not accidental. It reflects the primary focus of Moses' argument as being primarily concerned for Yahweh's established reputation.

b) Yahweh's Assent 14:20-25; 26-35

i) 14:20-25

Yahweh begins his reply in v.21, "As I live, and as the glory of the Lord shall fill all the earth..."⁷²

⁷¹ Newing follows Frank Anderson and Norman Gottwald in identifying יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ to be "the petty kings of Canaan" (p. 215), in trying to be more precise in view of Numbers 13:18,19. This is not necessary and since no argument is given, highly conjectural. In particular, Newing has not given an account of the use of "the nations" in v. 15, which continues the generalisation. The picture that is being projected is one of Egypt, as a nation testifying to all the nations in the region about the greatness of Yahweh. Any specification to petty kings should involve a corresponding use of Egypt's Pharaoh, more so, since as the rest of Numbers shows, the names of the petty kings are not unknown to the traditions.

⁷² The content of what Egypt has heard and tells to others is spelt out in 'liturgical' terms normally used to describe the divine Presence. The Community sees Yahweh literally *eye-to-eye*. (Verse 14, עֵין בְּעֵין) Yahweh protects them with the pillar of cloud in the day and of fire by night (v.14). Yahweh's abiding Presence and the deliverance from Egypt combine to paint an

Yahweh's reply is abrupt, giving the impression that He finds Moses' petition irresistible. Yahweh, as it were, breaks into Moses' intercession, to say "*I have forgiven them, as you asked* (כָּדָבַרְתָּ) (v. 20). Yahweh's response is based on Moses' words, just as Moses' intercession is based on Yahweh's self-revelation to him in Exodus 33. This is achieved structurally with the use of כ + דָּבַר at the beginning of the two respective speeches. This expression is used a third time in Yahweh's announcement of his judgment to the people (14:28). Hence, just as Moses puts forward his petition based on Yahweh's personal revelation to him at Sinai as 'proof' of his special favour, so Yahweh's answer is a direct response to Moses' personal appeal.

As far as Yahweh is concerned, Moses' intercession is persuasive. Thus critically, Yahweh accedes to Moses' request that the Community be forgiven.

סָלַחְתִּי כְדָבַרְךָ *I forgive, as you have requested* v.20 b.

Moses' intercession is not based on the Community's merit but upon Yahweh's integrity. Israel sinned *despising* Yahweh and deserved to be annihilated. But because Moses' knows Yahweh as merciful and just, he is able to reason with Him.

Forgiveness does not mean that Israel will go unpunished for their rejection of the Land and their failure to trust Yahweh. What follows is Yahweh's oath that he will see to it that the Community will not enter the Land but die outside it, in the Wilderness (verses 21-23). Caleb is singled out for commendation and is given Yahweh's promise that he and his family and descendants will enter and inherit the Land (v.24). Verse 25 is interesting because with this word of judgment, the presence of the Amalekites and Canaanites have

awesome reputation of Yahweh's greatness that has been spread from the Egyptians to the nations of the region. Thus Egypt bears testimony to the two motifs of Yahweh's awesome כָּח and בְּקִרְבּוֹ. The intention is to confirm that Yahweh's plan to bring the covenant people into the Promised Land will not be thwarted.

to be avoided by the Community. Hence the Community is ordered to turn back into the wilderness.

Yahweh's oath is prefaced with the conjunction אָיִן אֲנִי , which is usually translated "nevertheless, but" (v. 21). This is normally taken to convey the adversative where what follows is seen as Yahweh asserting his own conditions to Moses' request for forgiveness. But other occurrences especially in the context of an oath formula convey the emphatic affirmation "Indeed". Thus it serves to intensify Yahweh's wish to confirm Moses' petition.

The oath formula, "as I live", occurs only twice in the Pentateuch even though it is a common oath form in the Hebrew Bible.⁷³ It is necessary to emphasize the weight of Yahweh's decision, as a new oath, since there is no desire to abrogate the existing covenant. The annunciation that Yahweh's glory is to fill the earth, is not insignificant. It underlines explicitly the motif of Yahweh's universal reputation. Yahweh is seeking to be the God of the earth, not a minor god. Egypt's testimony as a superpower in its time contributes to Yahweh's universal reputation. This international testimony is very important so that Israel will not turn to other gods nor confuse Yahweh with other gods.⁷⁴

An irony is introduced with the technical expression for Israel's disobedience, לֹא שָׁמַע (v.22). As such, the verb shows the sharp contrast between the affirmation of Yahweh's might by the nations, particularly Egypt, and that of the Covenant Community.⁷⁵

⁷³ J. Milgrom *Numbers*, p. 111. Cf. also White, Hugh C. "The Divine Oath in Genesis", *JBL* 92 (1973) 165-78.

⁷⁴ See discussions on Yahwistic religion in Bernhard Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic minority*, Almond Press, Sheffield:1983; E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*. Clarendon, Oxford: 1986.

⁷⁵ Even the mighty Egyptians who opposed and resisted Yahweh now becomes the leader in attesting to Yahweh's ability. Thus, if Yahweh slaughters (וַיִּמָּחֶה) Moses interprets Yahweh's threat as as annihilation), a complete slaughter this people as one man (Cpr. Judges 6:16, *without exception, completely*), then , the nations who have heard ($\text{וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ$) of your reputation ($\text{וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ$) will say that Yahweh is not able to bring this people into the country which he had sworn to give them (v.15). It is from this statement that implies that annihilation of the Community is being contemplated.

ii) 14:26-35

Verses 26-35, records a second word of judgment from Yahweh. Again the expression, "As I live" in the beginning of the judgment in v. 28, indicates the speech as a divine oath. What is startling is that Yahweh decides to punish the Community according to the very words of complaint that He heard from them in 14:2 and 37⁶.

What emerges is that Moses draws Yahweh's attention to the fact that from the exodus and wilderness sojourn thus far, Yahweh is known to be Mighty and Present. These two motifs are supposed to guarantee Israel's success to occupy the Land. The word-play between the nations' testimony and Yahweh's reputation is purposely couched in the same root, emphasizing Yahweh's integrity, not credibility, that is at stake. The focus on this integrity is expressed in the next verse, where the nations will put all the blame for Israel's demise on Yahweh.

The nations' accusation turns on the divine promise made specifically to the Community, *to the Land which He swore to them* (v.16) (אֱלֹהֵי אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם). Here the focus is precisely on the Covenant made at Sinai, when Moses had successfully persuaded Yahweh to dwell in the Community's midst (cf. Exodus 33). The Patriarchal promise upon which the exodus experience is based had been superseded by the Sinai covenant. They have claimed their 'inheritance' promised to them through their fathers. Now the Community that was poised to enter the Land is Yahweh's People in their own right.

The accent, then, is not on Yahweh's 'ability' since Egypt and the nations have no problem acknowledging it. Moses himself at no time questions Yahweh's ability too. On the contrary, v. 16, shows that he is well-aware that Yahweh is able to annihilate the Community 'at one go'. It is precisely from this perspective that Yahweh's expressed intention to "strike... and dispossess" the Community cannot be entertained. Israel's rejection of Yahweh's Land may imply an underestimation of His ability by the people. But to others like Egypt and the nations and Moses, who recognize and acknowledge Yahweh's might, the emphasis shifts to Yahweh's integrity.

It should be pointed out that the Community's rejection is not completely based on doubts about Yahweh's ability too. This is evidenced in 14:3, where they explicitly question Yahweh's motive for bringing them to face such an indomitable enemy in the Land and believed they will be slaughtered. This is reminiscent of Exodus 13:17, where Yahweh instructed Moses to take an alternative route to the Land "Lest the people turn back at the sight of war to return to Egypt."

⁷⁶ The use of word-plays and irony here is interesting. This is observed by D. T. Olson in *Death of the Old*, pp.129-152 who listed the following:

a) the irony of the people seeing God's glory in terms of presence and affliction and not seeing the land.

b) the people's excuse of the safety of their offspring in 14:2 and the preservation of the next generation by Yahweh himself in 14:31.

c) their fear of death by the sword in 14:2 is fulfilled, later at their own hands in 14:32,33.

d) the fact that they had expressed the wish to either die in the wilderness or back in Egypt in 14:2 is fulfilled in terms of their dying in the desert under the judgment of God in 14:35.

Yahweh's second declaration in vv. 26-35 is not mere repetition. Rather it is directed to the Community with the addition of Aaron alongside Moses as addressees.

Those who are to be punished and those who are to be spared are identified. Those who are to be punished are :-

i) those who have seen my glory and signs in Egypt and in the Wilderness and have tried (וַיִּנְסוּ) me these ten times; to amount to being disobedient (cf. the expression וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי (v. 22c). The punishment for these people is that *they shall not see the Land which I have sworn to their fathers* (v. 23);

ii) *those who despise me* (כָּל־מִנְאֲצֵי). *These too will not see it;*

iii) *those numbered... from twenty years old and upward who* (אֲשֶׁר) *have murmured against me* (v. 29). These, declares Yahweh, *will not enter the Land* which (אֲשֶׁר) Yahweh had decided for the Community to live in (v. 30).

Those to be spared were Caleb and Joshua (24, 30 b). In addition, Yahweh freely decides to spare *their little ones* טַפְכֶּם, that is, those below twenty years old, whom they accuse Yahweh of allowing them to become booty for the enemies when they go into the Land (v.31). This is to prove to Israel that they were wrong, and at the same time keep Yahweh's integrity before the watching world.

Though spared from death, their children will suffer the wandering outside the Land because of their fathers' *unfaithfulness* (v. 33, אֶת־זְנוּתֵיכֶם),⁷⁷ the forty years of wandering in the Land is a sentence corresponding to the forty days spent spying of the Land. The Wandering is for the children, the Death is for the adults. The Community is to suffer to know what Yahweh's "alienation" or "enmity" is like (v.34, אֶת־תְּנוּאָתִי)⁷⁸.

Verse 35 is important in the *swearing* of a new oath by Yahweh. Israel has failed to trust in Yahweh's word. (cf. verses 28,30 and in v. 35) Yahweh swears to fulfil Israel's wish "I will do the very thing which you have spoken in my hearing". This balances Yahweh's response to Moses' intercession in v.20.

⁷⁷ It clearly anticipates the apostasy in Numbers 25.

⁷⁸ The LXX has it as "the anger of my wrath", while the Vg. translates it as "my vengeance". Budd sees these as paraphrases. Loewe's article.

Yahweh's judgment and grace is shown by His acceding to his people's desires. Yahweh's judgment is not malicious but a withdrawal of his grace and protection. It is a question of extent. The blame is placed squarely on the people's distrust and rejection of their God.

iii) 14:36-38

The Narrator then gives us an immediate instalment of the fulfillment of Yahweh's judgment in verses 36-38. The ten spies died in the "plague before the Lord" (v. 37, **לפני יהוה**)⁷⁹. This expression is a confirmation that Yahweh has released the plague on the men. The 'Plague' is usually the tool of Yahweh's judgment. Again, care is given to mention that Caleb and Joshua are spared.

iv) 14:39-45

The story of Israel's exclusion of the Land is given a final twist at the close from verses 39-45. When Moses relayed Yahweh's judgment to the Community, they were so grieved that they rose early the next day and ascended to the heights of the hill country. Their intention was clear from what they explicitly said beginning with **הננו** *Behold, here we are*. **הנה** often indicates a change of scene. In this case, it indicates a self-realization on the part of the Community that they have sinned (cf. v. 41c, **כי הטאנו**). But ironically, their realization that they have sinned caused them to make amends by deciding *to go up to the place which Yahweh promised*, **המקום אשר אמר יהוה**.⁸⁰ This is however, clearly contrary to what Yahweh ordered through Moses in 14:25. Their recognition of the Land as Yahweh's promise for them comes at a time when it no longer applied to them.

⁷⁹ Does this denote the physical location of the Tent of Meeting?

⁸⁰ The use of **מקום**, instead of **ארץ** which is more usual for the Promised Land may be the Narrator's choosing, deliberately to indicate that the people's repentance without Moses and the Ark is pointless.

Moses tries to stop them, informing them that they will not succeed since it is a *transgression against Yahweh's command*. Yahweh was *no longer with them* (vv. 41,42) in the venture. It is worth noting that Yahweh's command, פִּי־יְהוָה is the same term used to describe Moses' unique mediatorial relationship as פֶּה אֶל־פֶּה, *mouth-to-mouth* in Numbers 12:8.⁸¹ Thus there is a double meaning that the expression does not only indicate the instructions given but also the messenger of Yahweh, that is, Moses whom the Community is once again rejecting.

In addition, the people do not approach Moses to inquire of their decision. They decide to go up the hill country without even seeking Yahweh's approval. Though they have come to recognize their sin, yet, they persisted in rejecting Moses' mediatorship. This sets up the story to follow, where the defeat of Israel's army by the Amalekites and Canaanites, is seen as a deliberate 'transgression of Yahweh's command' (v. 41, אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה). The reasons for this defeat are listed:

- i) because "*Yahweh is not with you*" (v. 42);
- ii) because "*you have turned away /back from following the Lord*" (v. 43, כִּי־עָלְכֶם מֵאַחֲרַי יְהוָה).

iii) neither the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh nor Moses went with them. The Ark of the Covenant and Moses were the instruments of Yahweh's presence. Yahweh was now *not in their midst*. The technical term used is בְּקִרְבְּכֶם in v.42 and repeated in the prosaic form, וְלֹא־יְהִי יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם in v. 43c. Significantly, Yahweh's absence from the midst of the people is equated with the remaining presence of both Moses and the Ark of the Covenant that did not leave *the midst*, מִקִּרְבֵּי of the camp (v. 44c).

⁸¹ See also Exodus 4:10-17 where Moses gives his final and supposedly real reason for turning down Yahweh's call as being one who cannot speak. In reply Yahweh promises first, to *be with* his mouth Exodus 4:12b. Second, He appoints and sends Aaron to be his mouth (4:16b). Verse 15 sums up the relationship best, *You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth.*

It should be noted that the Ark was critical for the success of the march and signified Yahweh's Guiding Presence. The mention of Moses' absence alongside with that of the Ark as contributive to Israel's defeat by the Amalekites and Canaanites verifies the critical position Moses holds in the fundamental goal of Israel to occupy the Promised Land. It reinforces the symbiotic relationship that Moses himself has with the cultic artefact of Yahweh's Presence in all of Israel's movements as reflected in Numbers 10:33-36. Notwithstanding this, the people arrogantly *וַיַּעֲפְלוּ*, disregard Moses' warning and went up the highlands, without the accompaniment of the Ark of Yahweh's Covenant and Moses (v.44) and suffered a humiliating defeat to be pursued to a distant place called *Hormah*, which literally means "complete destruction".⁸²

Thus the story of Israel's failure to occupy Canaan is attributed to their rejection of Moses, his mediation of Yahweh's guidance and his leadership. Again and again, the people adamantly refused to submit themselves to Moses as Yahweh's servant. In contrast, the Narrator and Yahweh project the uniqueness and excellence of Mosaic mediation and leadership.

c) Summary of 13:1- 14:45

From the above analysis, Moses is seen to be the Heroic Intercessor, the faithful selfless leader whose function as intercessor saves Israel. He succeeds in averting Yahweh's wrath and saved Israel from total annihilation on the basis of Yahweh's self revelation to him at Sinai. He played a key role in the passing of the Covenant into the hands of the second generation because he limits God's judgment by his intercession. His 'rejection' of Yahweh's offer to make him a Patriarch of a new Community is implicit in his intercession when he posed to

⁸² The exact site of the place is variously located by Gray as Sebaita, 25 miles N.N.E. of Kadesh or Budd, at Tell el-Mishash, just east of Beersheba. The literary significance is more important as seen later in Numbers 21:3, where Hormah is the first victory Israel won over the Canannites, redefining the meaning of the name for the Community to be one of literary rather than geographical significance.

Yahweh the implications of his impending judgment on His own reputation⁸³. Moses saved the Community by persuading Yahweh to pass on the Covenant to their descendants.

The portrait of the intimate nature of the relationship between Yahweh and Moses and its influence in the final outcome of Yahweh's judgment should not be passed over. It is fallacious to conceive the shift in Yahweh's judgment as self-initiated, ultimately unaffected by people nor Moses as Sakenfeld suggests.⁸⁴ However Sakenfeld is right that this answer preserves God's sovereignty. While Moses closed the option of the annihilation of Israel, Yahweh is free to exact the same severe punishment yet giving grace. Ultimately, Moses' prayer that Yahweh's כח be exercised is interpreted as justice and mercy.

Instead it has been shown that Moses' petition in 14:18-19 is specific, calling upon Yahweh to 'forgive', to be merciful, as he had revealed himself to be

⁸³ Balentine's appeal to exilic perspectives to focus on Yahweh's reputation as exclusively distinct in the Deuteronomistic exilic context is unconvincing. Yahweh's drive for 'international recognition' can be found very early, for example, in Elijah's battle with Baal. Since this status is tied to Yahweh's claim to being powerful and mighty over other gods, it is a mistake to restrict such assertions to the exilic situation, unless Yahwism can be shown to emerge in the time of the exile.

⁸⁴ K. Sakenfeld, "The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14," *CBQ* 37 (1975) 317-30. She accepts the source division of chapter with an early JE which has late P editing. Essentially the early layer espouse the theology of an unconditional occupation of the Land while P and D injects a strong conditional element.

In Sakenfeld's paper she argues that "the real content of God's forgiveness here is in the non-destruction of the people; in the very continuation of his relationship to the community as his community; in the decision not to create a new nation of Moses or of anyone else and not to disinherit the presently constituted Community of God. Yahweh's willingness to maintain the Covenant relationship is based solely in his great *hesed*, just as it has been from the time of the initiation of the relationship with the people in the Exodus. **Thus in appealing to God's hesed Moses both appeals to God's faithfulness to his people and in the same word recognizes Yahweh's sovereign, with complete freedom to maintain or to break off his relationship with the people, as he chooses.**" Hence, "Forgiveness is understood basically as preservation of the community, and this preservation need not be precluded or even be cheapened by punishment of the community while the relationship is being continued." (327).

Although Sakenfeld's observation is agreed to, her analysis is open to question. Her emphasis that Yahweh's sovereignty involved His freedom to maintain the Community, is not borne out in this context. Moses is acknowledging Yahweh's sovereignty but the 'freedom' concept is to be alien. In the context, even Yahweh's threat is counter-balanced by His offer to create a new nation in place of Israel. This shows that He acted out of necessity than freedom, since, if anything, it shows that Yahweh is bound by His Patriarchal promise.

and to forego punishing the descendants with death. It is true to say that Yahweh, then, had answered Moses' prayer in accordance to Moses' petition.

This intercessory role of Moses is crucial to his ministry and position as *servant of Yahweh* and leader of Israel since the Community can only depend on Yahweh's power to protect and provide for them in the desert.

The failure of Israel's entry into the Land and their subsequent defeat in Hormah in Numbers 14:39-45, is not only attributable to their rejection of Yahweh. There is another reason which runs alongside this, which is the rejection of Moses. Significantly, it is because they transgressed פִּי-יְהוָה and went forth *arrogantly* disregarding Moses' warning that they suffered a humiliating defeat. Thus Moses' leadership and mediation is the only truthful word from Yahweh which the people must obey if they want to succeed. His symbiotic relationship with the cultic artefact of Yahweh's presence, the Ark is again seen in 14:39-45. (cf. 10:33-36) Why Israel failed was because they consistently rejected Moses' mediation of Yahweh's word, which is distinct from believing in Yahweh.

3.2.3 Moses the Exalted Servant of God Challenged 16:1 - 17:28

Numbers 16-17 is the second of three rebellion stories in the narrative cycle from Numbers 13-20. Numbers 16-18 tells of the rebellion headed by Korah, Dathan and Abiram with the support of two hundred and fifty reputed leaders of the Community.

Korah accuses Moses,

אלהם רב-לכם

You have gone too far

כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כָּל־מִי וּבְתוֹכָם⁸⁵ יְהוָה

for all of the congregation is holy and Yahweh is in their midst⁸⁶

וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְׂאוּ עַל־קֹהֵל יְהוָה

Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of Yahweh?

16:3

Moses' reaction is typical. He falls on his face which is usually an indication of an encounter with Yahweh (v.4). Yahweh's word to Moses is not reported. In the next instance, Moses gives Yahweh's word to Korah and his company. Yahweh will choose from the censers⁸⁷ that they will put before the Lord in the morrow. The question is "who are the holy ones chosen to approach Yahweh?" (v. 5ff.). Moses closes the first speech by a counter accusation "You Levites have gone too far!" (v. 7).⁸⁸ This is an interplay of words showing who has gone too far.

Significantly, in his speech, Moses confronts Korah and company directly and personally. He does not bother to reveal whether his words are Yahweh's word of revelation. This reveals Moses' personal aggression and impatience towards the instigators for the first time in Numbers. This contrasts sharply with Moses' reaction to the challenges against his authority in 11-12.

A second speech follows, from verses 8-11, where Moses lashes out in a counter-charge against the Korathite band. He accuses them of being unappreciative of their privileges in being specially called to serve Yahweh and his people through the Tabernacle duties. Instead they now seek the priesthood for themselves in place of Aaron. Moses ends with the declaration that the Korathite

⁸⁵ The root תוך refers to the middle of something cf. Exodus 3:4, the theophany of the burning bush. It is a technical term for Yahweh presence for example, Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46; Leviticus 15:31; 16:16 Numbers 5:3; 18:20; 35:34; Joshua 22:31).

⁸⁶ This is a reference to the Tent in their midst.(cf.the organisation of the camp)

⁸⁷ This may indicate a priestly service.

⁸⁸ רב־לְכֶם בְּנִי לוֹי corresponds to Korah's opening line of accusation in 16:3.

rebels are actually going against Yahweh and not Aaron, as they seem to think (v.11).

Here is a clear indication of conflict of perspectives. Korah and company see themselves as fit to represent Yahweh as priests and not just Levitical assistants. But Moses indicates that this is a rebellion similar to the Community's despising of Yahweh's gift of Land earlier because they were in effect *belittling*⁸⁹ their special election.

The attention abruptly switches to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab and descendants of Reuben in verse 12-15. Moses summons them.⁹⁰ They refuse to appear before Moses. Instead they accuse Moses of being a tyrant, who seeks to cover up his incompetence in failing to bring the Community into the promised Land by threatening violence. Significantly here is another word-play, where Moses' accusation of the rebels' **מַעַט** is countered with Dathan and Abiram's accusation that Moses is the one who is **מַעַט**, seeking to *belittle* them by his self-exaltation. They challenge Moses' exercise of *dominion over* them⁹¹ (v. 13b). Their accusation is framed by **לֹא יָעֲלֶה** at the beginning and the end in verses 12 c and 14 c, emphasizing that they will *not come up* to Moses, again indicating the exalted status of Moses. It is worth noting that Dathan and Abiram claim to be saying the truth as indicated by their question to Moses,

וְהִנֵּקְרָה הָאֵינִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָהֵם תִּנְקֶר *Will you put out the eyes of these men?* v. 14b.

From the above it is clear that the weaving of the Korah rebellion and that of Dathan and Abiram is fixed so that the latter's resistance of Moses extends the issue of Mosaic exaltation. As far as they were concerned, Moses had imposed the hierarchy upon them quite arbitrarily for selfish gains. It is not Yahweh's doing.

⁸⁹ Verse 9, **הַמַּעַט מִכֶּם**, *Is it too little to you*, emphasizes the rebels' failure to weigh their privilege correctly.

⁹⁰ Verse 12a, the **קרא שלח** combination emphasizes direct urgent call to present themselves to Moses.

⁹¹ **כִּי־תִשְׁתַּרְר עָלֵינוּ גַם־הִשְׁתַּרְר**.

Thus it is not surprising that in v. 15ff., Moses became very angry. It is this anger that provokes him to call upon Yahweh *not to give heed to their offerings* ⁹² אֶל-תִּפְּן אֶל-מִנְחָתָם (v. 15a), that is to withhold his favour from them. Hence Moses actually prays a “prayer against Dathan and Abiram.”⁹³ Rarely does Moses pray against his accusers. He goes on to defend his integrity declaring that he had not taken one donkey from them much less to say cause them harm (cf. vv. 15bff.). This seems to indicate that Moses was not motivated by self-interest. This picture is consistent with 12:6-8.

Then Moses turns to Korah again, (vv. 16-17), essentially repeating verses 6 and 7. The two cycles of speeches essentially identify the charges against Moses by Korah and Dathan/Abiram. These do not really contradict but reinforce each other as Korah represents the religious group while Dathan/Abiram represent the civil.

At the assembly, the next day, Yahweh appears (v. 19). First he speaks to Moses and Aaron. He tells them to *separate themselves* from the assembly as Yahweh prepares to *consume them in one instant*⁹⁴ (v. 21), a variation of the expression for annihilation found in Numbers 14:15. This causes Moses and Aaron to fall on their faces again (cpr. 16:4) but this time in intercession imploring Yahweh not to *rage*⁹⁵ because of *one man's sin* (v. 22). Their words inform the reader that Yahweh is enraged. Their plea is based on Yahweh as

⁹² Literally means *their offerings*, which Gray points out cannot refer to incense in v. 7 because having attributed this passage to P, he finds that this redactor uses this term in the specific sense only for meal-offering (*Numbers*, p. 201). Budd, on the other hand, thinks it is “probably a conventional way of talking about acceptance or nonacceptance in the presence of God (cf. Genesis 4:4-5).” (*Numbers*, p. 187).

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ וְאָכְלָה אֶתְּכֶם כְּרִנֵּעַ is graphic and dramatic, recalls the deep fear of the Community to being *eaten up* by the Land in Numbers 14. Another link in continuity between Numbers 14 and 16.

⁹⁵ קִצַּף

*God*⁹⁶ of the spirits of all flesh, that is, the source and ruler of life. This is supposed by scholars to be late theology.

In reply, Yahweh tells Moses to instruct the congregation to separate themselves from Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their tents (v. 24). Moses then goes to Dathan and Abiram, since they had refused to come to him. The “*elders of Israel followed him*” (v. 25c), indicating that Moses had the support of the other leaders of the Community. On hearing Moses’ instructions, some of the people moved away from the rebels who came out to confront Moses’ party.

Next Moses speaks and tells everyone the need for a spectacular punishment in order that the Community would *know that Yahweh has sent me...; it has not been of my own accord* (v. 28); *you shall know that these men have despised*⁹⁷ *Yahweh* (v. 30c). Thus rejecting Moses and Aaronid priesthood is equivalent not just to disobeying Yahweh but *despising* him since the Mosaic leadership is Yahweh’s gift to His people.

The execution of Moses’ judgement is immediate and dramatic, *It was just as he was finishing speaking*, וַיְהִי כִּבְלָתוֹ לְרֹבֵר (v. 31a), that the earth opened up and swallowed the rebels. This gives an impression of Moses’ efficacious word. The people’s reaction at the sight of this is also dramatic, crying out in fear for their lives and acknowledging Moses’ power (v. 34). For the two hundred and fifty supporters of the rebels, they died the usual way, consumed by Yahweh’s fire (v. 35).

Numbers 17:1-5 (Hebrew reference) concludes this section with Yahweh’s instruction to Moses instructing Eleazer to recast the censers of the rebels to panel the altar so that it would serve as a reminder for the Community

⁹⁶ *O God*, אֱלֹהִים is used as in 12:13 but in 27:16, Yahweh is used with the same description *God of the spirit of all flesh*. In all cases, it is used in the context of Moses exercising his leadership quality in intercession for a favour.

⁹⁷ נִאָּץ cf. 14:11, 23. It is the same kind of sin as rejecting the Land. This emphasizes the severity and therefore corresponding necessity of a horrific death for the rebels.

that only the Aaronid house can serve as Priests of Yahweh. This is a symbol of the legitimisation of the Mosaic institution of the Israelite Priesthood.

As in the other rebellion stories, there is a twist to the ending of the story. Another complication surfaces in reaction to the whole episode. From Numbers 17:6 to 18:32, there follow two portrayals of the Community's refusal to accept the outcome of the preceding test as a vindication of Yahweh. In the first portrayal, verses 6-26, the people accused Moses and Aaron of *having killed the people of Yahweh* (v. 41c). The pronoun אֲנִי is emphatic as well as accusatory. They are in essence agreeing with the charge of Dathan and Abiram that Moses was acting like a tyrant (cf. 16:13). In response, the two turned to the Tent and once again. Yahweh responds to call them to *Get away*⁹⁸ *from this congregation*⁹⁹ *so that I may consume them instantly*¹⁰⁰ (v. 10).

The two leaders again interceded (v. 10c). Significantly, the prayer dialogue is not reported. From v.46, the impression is given that Moses took it upon himself to instruct Aaron to act to stop the plague that Yahweh had sent. This plague is unexpected since *consume* usually means the devouring fire of Yahweh. The incense used is Aaron's and by implication of the earlier trial, it is holy enough to make atonement for the people. Aaron does as he is told and he saves the Community from total annihilation, though some fourteen thousand were killed. Aaron's role reaffirms his priestly appointment as under Moses' authority.

Here is a picture of Moses and Aaron acting, without Yahweh's explicit word of instruction to stop his wrath. The basis of the efficacy of their act was that Yahweh had committed himself to honour the censer of Aaron. While it is true that Aaron was being vindicated, it is more accurate to see the central point of this

⁹⁸ הִרְבֵּנוּ in the sense of "separating themselves apart" cf. Gen 18:20-32 where there is a need to separate the innocent from the guilty.

⁹⁹ The people has become a congregation of rebels (cf. בְּהַקְהֵל הָעֵדָה v.7.)

¹⁰⁰ Cf. 16:21, which has the same formula indicating the same kind of rebellion being committed.

passage as a reflection of the intimate understanding Moses has of Yahweh. Moses' instruction to Aaron in 17:11 shows the speed with which things were happening. Immediately after Yahweh says that He was going to annihilate the people, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces. There is no space or time to report their prayers. The next thing recorded is not Moses' prayer, but Moses' instructions to Aaron. It is not reported that it is Yahweh's word. Moses saw that Yahweh's wrath has already been unleashed. So he told Aaron to act quickly. He saves Israel once again. Four imperatives reinforce the urgency in Moses' speech. *Take* his censer, *give to it* the altar's fire, *lay* incense in it, *carry it quickly* to the congregation and *atone* for the people.¹⁰¹ While the first two verbs focus on the object of the censer fire, the last two homes in on the congregation so that **מִקְהָלָהּ**, qualifies both *bringing* the censer to the people and *making atonement* for them in the same instance.

Numbers 17:12 describes the execution with the same breathless speed. Aaron "*took... ran... lay* (the incense)... *and made atonement*" for the people. In this breathless pace, it is interesting to see the clause which the Narrator places in between the action verbs. First, and foremost, he stresses that Aaron's action is done *according to what Moses said* **כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה**. This recalls 14:20, where Yahweh forgives Israel's sin, **כִּדְבַרְךָ**, showing that Moses is effective in his intercession. Once again on the basis of the intimate relationship of Moses with Yahweh . More important, Moses takes the initiative to avert Yahweh's wrath, seemingly independent of Yahweh's usual provision of a solution to appease His ravaging wrath. Aaron's role here in this salvific episode demonstrates the underlying authority of Moses who instructs him. Moses acts as the Servant to whom Yahweh had entrusted his household.

In the second note, the Narrator uses the device **וַהֲנִיחַ** to verify the rising crisis in the camp through the eyes of Aaron as he rushes into their midst. This

101 v.11. קח ... ותן ... ושים ... וקפר 101

depiction points to the perception Moses had which Aaron only came to realise upon carrying out Moses' instructions.¹⁰²

Thus Moses and Aaron saved the Community from annihilation and a restoration of harmony results with the mention of Aaron's return to Moses at the Tent of Meeting in v. 20. However, this sets the scene for the theophany in which Yahweh initiates a final solution to stop the constant rejection that Moses faces from the Community in 17:16-26 [EVV 17:1-11]. He instructs Moses to tell the Israelites to place twelve staffs in the Tent before the Testimony or Covenant, where Yahweh meets with Moses. Each staff is to represent the head of their respective tribe. The staff that blossoms is the one whom Yahweh has chosen, supposedly to lead and represent the whole Community, since all the staffs represent heads of the tribes. In this way, Yahweh proposes, *I will remove from me*¹⁰³ *the murmurings of the Israelites which they*¹⁰⁴ *keep murmuring*¹⁰⁵ *against you.* Thus, Yahweh offers to put an end for himself and Moses/Aaron the harassment that the Community has regularly confronted them with.

Again it must be pointed out that the overarching prominence of Moses' role in this episode in the confirmation of Aaron's priesthood is startling. The trial is designed to demonstrate to the whole Community who is the head amongst the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel has been chosen by Yahweh. Verse 20 is key. *"the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout."* The question is, was it a

¹⁰² Verses 43 and 50 seems to indicate that the Tent was outside the Camp.

¹⁰³ וַיִּשְׁכַּח, according to Gray, it is the hiphil, literally "to cause to cease" (*Numbers*, p. 218) and the dual preposition מֵעָלַי from upon me expressly projects a siege mentality (cf. BDB 758b). Holladay (*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, p. 369) suggests the graphic rendering, *to drain off*, seeing that its cognates are used with water e.g. Genesis 8:1 and angry emotions, e.g. Esther 2:1 and 7:10.

¹⁰⁴ The pronoun הֵן emphatically points out that the source of the problem rests solely on the Community as far as Yahweh is concerned. This is in contrast to Moses' perspective as the mediator between two conflicting parties as seen in Numbers 11.

¹⁰⁵ מְלִינָם the Hiphil Participle emphasizes its frequency, which when combined with עָלַי, denotes constant harassment.

election of the Priestly office? Or Was it to priesthood alone or did it include being a leader amongst the leaders of Israel?

The context of Numbers 16-18 indicates the struggle between Moses and the Levites as to who had the right to approach Yahweh, cf. 16:3-5. The Korathite rebellion is focused upon Aaron's Priesthood by Moses' speech (cf. 16:8-11). But Korah's own accusation sets his rebellion against the elevation of Moses (cf. Numbers 12). This is clearly reflected in Dathan/Abiram's charge against Moses specifically in 16:12-14. However, in Moses' eyes Korah was coveting the Priesthood. Yet this does not negate the perspectives of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Further, the intense personal reaction of Moses where he confronted and even prayed against his accusers shows that Moses perceived that he was being personally attacked. Thus with this background in mind, the present trial of staffs does not merely confirm Aaron's priesthood but reestablishes Moses as the overall leader and representative of Yahweh and the Community. The trial of staffs also show that this leadership status is not one of personal choice but of Yahweh's appointment.

At the ending of the story Moses is directed to place the staff of Aaron before the Testimony in the Tent,¹⁰⁶ *so that you may cause the cessation*¹⁰⁷ *of their murmurings from upon me.*¹⁰⁸ The execution note is emphatic, v. 11, *So Moses did, as Yahweh had commanded him*¹⁰⁹ *so he did.*¹¹⁰ Thus Moses is in central focus overseeing the whole trial and confirmation of Aaron's election as

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Gordon J Wenham, "Aaron's Rod (Numbers 17:16-28)", ZAW 93 (1981) 280-1.

¹⁰⁷ The Piel second pers. sing. masc. וַתִּקַּח, which the BHS suggests should be Qal imp. third pers. sing. fem. וַתִּקַּח supported by LXX rendering, καὶ παύσασθω which is the Qal third pers. sing. fem. וַתִּקַּח that the murmuring may cease. Nonetheless, commentators and English translators like Gray, Budd and NRSV prefers the MT version.

¹⁰⁸ See significance in footnote 16, a reference to harassment.

¹⁰⁹ BHS indicates that the textus Graecus originalis of LXX had the variation, τω Μωυση explicitly and therefore emphatically.

¹¹⁰ The verb וַעֲשֶׂה occurs twice at the beginning and end of the statement.

Yahweh's chosen, but at the same time, the image of Moses as the elevated *trustworthy Servant of Yahweh*, is confirmed.

At this point, the Narrative equilibrium is achieved and one would expect that, all the tumultuous reaction of the Community should be resolved once and for all as Yahweh promised, through this trial of staffs. But this is not so, as the Narrator reveals the people's subsequent reaction in vv. 27, 28 (17:12,13). These verses seem more appropriate at the end of Numbers 16 than at the end of Numbers 17.

Here is a cry of desperation by the Israelites as they find themselves exposed to Yahweh's wrath for supposedly supporting Korah's rebellion (16:3-5). *Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish*, where the verbs are what Gray calls, "perfects of certainty."¹¹¹ As far as the people are concerned, they were so convinced of their doom, that it was imminent and unstoppable.¹¹² The next verse identifies what their fear was. *Everyone who approaches the Tabernacle of Yahweh will die. Are we to perish totally?*¹¹³ It is startling that despite Yahweh's measure to stop the murmurings and re-establish Moses' leadership authority, the Community's response continues to reflect insecurity and rejection of Moses. Gray renders this difficult expression literally, "Shall we ever finish dying?"¹¹⁴

But are the people fearing for their lives because Korah's rebellion had somehow broken down the sanctity of the cultus that protects them from Yahweh as most commentators have suggested?¹¹⁵ This seems to find support in the

¹¹¹ *Numbers*, p.217.

¹¹² GKC § 106n where the prophetic overtone is noted.

¹¹³ Gray (*Numbers*, p.218) points out that $\square\aleph\aleph$ is "a strengthened interrogative" cf. BDB 50b.

¹¹⁴ *Numbers*, p.218.

¹¹⁵ Korah's rebellion may be presumed to be so massive that the whole Levitical and Priestly hierarchy was severely disrupted so much so that the Trial of Staffs in chapter 18 is a re-confirmation of Aaronid Priesthood. Thus the people find themselves afraid to *approach* the Tent and the Priest in it as they were conscious of their sinfulness before Yahweh. This bears cognizance with the election of Moses as Mediator by the Community in Exodus 20:19, where fear of standing before the deity is only natural for the ordinary folk. Prophets, seers, and such extra-ordinary people were needed to mediate the word and will of the gods in the Ancient Near

material that follows in 18:1-32, where instructions are given by Yahweh to Moses regarding Aaron's priesthood and the place and role of the Levites.

18:1-32 may be seen to be a cultic restoration of the hierarchy which the Korathite rebellion sought to overthrow.¹¹⁶ If this is the confirmation of a Priestly hierarchy by Moses, then it means that the Community was resisting Mosaic rulership despite the staff test. The intensity of 17:27, 28 can be appreciated as the people's continued rejection of Moses and Aaron.

Yahweh is seeking in 18:1-32, to put an end once and for all, the murmuring rejections of the Community. Time and time again He had been so infuriated by these people to the point of intending to annihilate them. Each time, Moses had successfully intervened by his intercession and saved the people. Now, just as Yahweh's solution to remove the murmurings by confirming once and for all the Mosaic leadership was successfully executed, the absolute authority of Moses over the people was vindicated and the exclusivity of Aaron's Priesthood was sealed.

Summary of 16:1 - 17:28

The portrait of Moses in 16:1-17:28 contrasts sharply with that of 11:1-12:16. Moses demanded that the Korathite rebels be swallowed up by the earth. He did not wait passively for Yahweh to vindicate him but on hearing the accusation from Korah, Dathan and Abiram, counter-charged them and even prayed against them, asking Yahweh to ignore their offerings. This differs from the earlier portrayal in Numbers 11-12 where Moses was seen to be silent in the face of a challenge to his authority. Even in intercession, Moses acted on his own initiative. He saved the Community from Yahweh's ravaging plague through the

East. Thus 17:27, 28 is a recognition on the Community's part that they need a hierarchy of specially chosen people to serve in Yahweh's presence. Hence the giving of the hierarchy in 18:1-32, expanded in 19:1-25, is for the preservation of the holiness of the Community boundaries.

¹¹⁶ Some commentators continue to find the juxtaposition of 18:1-32 an awkward fit leaving the intense desperation unanswered on the narrative level.

use of Aaron's censer. Yahweh did not instruct the use of Aaron's censer as atonement. Moses said it was to be and it was.¹¹⁷

Thus Moses behaves in the manner of a leader who was aware of his elevated status as *Servant of Yahweh*. He took the initiative. He equated the challenge to his authority to be a challenge against Yahweh.

3.2.4 The Fall of Moses 20:1 - 13

Numbers 20 : 1 - 13 stands at the end of a series of rebellion stories as the climax of the failure of the whole Exodus-Sinai Community to realise Yahweh's Land-promise to them. The sin of Israel has been progressively depicted. In Numbers 13-14, the Community sinned. In Numbers 16-17, the Levites sinned. Now, in 20:1-13, the Mosaic leadership sins.¹¹⁸ The sin of the first generation is now total, pervading all the Community.

The sin of Moses does not merely recount the exclusion of Moses from the Land. It deliberately moves the story towards the climactic *turning-point* of the book as well. There is no attempt, to 'flesh out' Moses' character in Numbers 20. In fact the parallel account in Exodus 17 has more details of Moses' reactions and dialogue than Numbers 20. Surprisingly, a fuller characterization is found in the rebellion stories of Numbers 11 and 16. This shocking paucity of description has led A. Kapelrud to observe that the *ambiguity* must be deliberate on the part of the Narrator.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Contrast this with 25:1-18 where Yahweh explains how He accepts the unpremeditated act of Phinehas in killing Cozbi and Zimri as an act of atonement for the people under divine judgment. This shows that Yahweh is open to human initiative.

¹¹⁸ The Exodus-Sinai Covenant Community were denied entry into the Promised Land because they consistently showed their *unbelief* in Yahweh and His servant Moses. But for Moses, as Yahweh's personally approved "faithful" servant (cf. Numbers 12 and 17), to be denied entry raised critical questions. Thus far, Israel's survival and progress has been credited to the faithful mediatorship of Moses so that it is expected that he would play a critical role in realising the goal of Land occupation.

¹¹⁹ A.S. Kapelrud, "How Tradition Failed Moses", *JBL* 76 (1957) 242.

a) The Sin of Moses

In the present form, Numbers 20:1¹²⁰ is more than a mere secondary spatio-temporal notice.¹²¹ Noticeably, the account of Moses' fall is introduced by the dramatic announcement that upon the Community's arrival in the Zin region, Miriam dies and is buried in Kadesh¹²² in v. 1.¹²³ Although the notice is brief, yet it is poignant. Miriam's death notice is shocking because there is nothing from the incidents from Numbers 12 to 20 that forewarns her death. It generates tension in the Narrative. It also critically introduces the proleptic thought that Mosaic leadership is vulnerable. Clearly then, Numbers 20:1 sets a foreboding mood of ambivalence over the ensuing story in Numbers 20:2-13, with its short but poignant announcement of Miriam's death.

There has been much discussion by scholars about the nature of Moses' sin because of the brevity of the account.¹²⁴ The re-examination of the passage

¹²⁰ Analytical scholars often see 20:1 as belonging to another literary source, (most favour the Elohist). As a result, it is excised from the rest of the account in Numbers 20:2-13. But this is only true in the agenda of analytical scholars.

¹²¹ Here is one of the rare literary markers using a combination of geographical and chronological elements in the notice. Most scholars agree that the missing notation of the year is probably the "fortieth" year (eg. Gray, 259; Wenham, 149).

¹²² J. Greenstone (*Numbers*, 210) suggests that the problem of double citations (cf. 13:26) can be explained that Kadesh is situated in the wilderness of Zin which is the northern part of the larger Paran Wilderness region. After the community's condemnation in Numbers 13-14, they wandered in the southern area of Paran to return to Kadesh later. Gray, approaching the issue from source analysis, suggests that P^g sees Kadesh as a short stop at the *end* of the journey; while JE sees it as a place of a prolonged stay, thus the verb בָּשָׁב is used. This is seemingly supported by Deuteronomy 10:1 which notes that Kadesh is the Community's "abode" at the early stages of Israel's sojourn. Thus there was a general consensus that Kadesh was a site connected to Israel's origin. (Note the Kenite theory as propounded by H. H. Rowley in *From Moses to Qumran*; J. A. Thompson's article, *Kenites* in *ISBE Revised* Ed. G.W. Bromiley, Eerdmans, Michigan: 1986. Pp. 6-7).

Nonetheless, the notice of Meribah-Kadesh has the significance of the word-play on the holiness motif. Numbers 20:1-13 tells the story of how Yahweh acted in order to sanctify himself before Israel in the face of His servant, Moses' sin. This seems to be the predominant motif of the account here.

¹²³ J. Sturdy (*Numbers*, 139) notes that although the final redactor (P) does not mention Miriam, yet he attributes this insertion to him because he thinks it is his intention to present the deaths of Miriam and Aaron in succession, to precede that of Moses' which appropriately comes at the climactic end of the Pentateuchal story.

¹²⁴ Cf. J. Milgrom, "Magic, Monotheism and the sin of Moses", in *Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honour of George E. Mendenhall*, H.B. Huffmon *et.al.*(ed)

here, with an eye to its Narrative characteristics will re-focus the issue and emphasizes instead the impact of Moses' sin on the significance of the Mosaic figure in Numbers. This would be consistent to Kapelrud's observation that the account was probably kept brief deliberately. This paucity of details in such an important account of the sin of the leader of the Community must have been intended for literary impact as an anti-climax to the series of rebellion stories in the Conflict Stage of the narrative.

The cause of the conflict is introduced in v.2a. "*There was no water for the congregation*". This comment made by the Narrator, indicates that the Community's complaint is genuine in contrast to their fault-finding in the Rebellion stories,¹²⁵ and more particularly to its parallel account in Exodus 17:1-7.

Thereon, from verses 2b to 5, a report of the complaint made by the people against Moses is set in the direct speech. Taken altogether, it is clear that the Community's charge is aimed directly at Moses. Verse 3b: "*If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord!*" refers to the death of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. This is consistent with the people's rejection of Moses' action against the trio in Numbers 16:41ff. where, "*the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron saying 'You are the ones*

Pp251-265 lists three categories (mostly drawn from rabbinic traditions) over the centuries to identify the sin of Moses and Aaron. They are :-

a) Moses' act of striking the rock - instead of speaking, or striking the rock twice instead of once;

b) his character displayed by - his blazing temper, cowardice or callousness;

c) his words - set as a question implies his doubts about God, his condemnation of Israel as "rebels" and נ'צ'נ' "shall we draw forth..."(pp.251-252) His own solution focuses on the very act of speaking *during* the execution of the miracle. In so doing, Moses is seen to have deliberately failed to demonstrate the crucial distinction of Yahweh's miracle from the pagan magic of the Ancient Near East which is characterized by a combination of incantations and gesticulations. Milgrom cites examples that include the Plague tradition where Yahweh's miracles are consistently executed in silence through the human agent, thereby distinguishing them instantly from pagan magic. Thus, when Moses spoke and struck the rock simultaneously, Yahweh was de-sanctified in the sight of the people by Moses' paganistic act.

¹²⁵ See B.S. Childs, *Exodus*. pp. 254-264.

who have caused the death of the Lord's people.'" It would seem that as far as the Community was concerned, the death of Korah and company did not vindicate Moses' leadership authority but confirms the Korathite accusation that Moses had elevated himself above the Community to *lord* over the people as Dathan and Abiram had said.¹²⁶ It is clear that the people held a grudge against Moses for what happened to Korah, Abiram and Dathan and their supporters notwithstanding that Moses' intercession had stopped Yahweh from annihilating the Community in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:41-50).

Yahweh had reconfirmed the Priesthood of Aaron so as to reinstate the hierarchy of priests and Levitical helpers after the Korathite rebellion in Numbers 17:17-26. Yet the response of the people to this vindication was utter despondency instead of complete reassurance.¹²⁷ The tension here continues from that of the Korathite rebellion. Moses' angry response in Numbers 20:10b can also be traced from the build-up in the narrative of the preceding rebellion stories in Numbers 11-17.

From Moses' perspective, he feels trapped by the strained relationship of the two Covenantal parties. On the one hand, there was Israel's continued rejection of his representation and leadership. On the other, Yahweh, whose provision in 17:25, 26 was also to have stopped the Community's "muttering for good, without their incurring death" seemed to have failed to stop their complaints. Moses' dissatisfaction in Numbers 11:30 of Yahweh's provision of the seventy elders must also be recalled here. Thus, the backdrop of the Narrative provides the necessary framework upon which to grasp the suddenness of Moses'

¹²⁶ In verses 4 and 5 the congregation identifies itself as "Yahweh's assembly" (יהוה' קהלה), and echoes the charges that Dathan and Abiram had made against Moses in 16:13 and 14.

¹²⁷ They were seen to be desperately wailing:

"Behold, we perish, we are dying, we are dying!"

Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the Lord, must die.

Are we to perish completely?" vv. 27,28

outbreak against Israel and Yahweh. The fact that Numbers 20:1-13 relates the Sin story as part of the Rebellion cycle gives a better understanding of Moses' sin and its significance.

The verses that focuses on Moses' sin concern the instructions Yahweh gives to Moses and Aaron to resolve the crisis (v.8).

- a) קח אֶת־הַמֶּטֶה Take (singular, imperative, v.8) the rod ;
- b) וַתִּקְהַל אֶת־הָעֵדָה and assemble (sing.) the congregation
- c) אַתָּה וְאַחֶיךָ you and your brother ;
- d) וְדַבַּרְתֶּם אֶל־הַסֵּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם Speak (pl.) to the rock before their eyes ;
- e) וְנָתַן מִמֵּיו And it will give water ;
- f) וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן־הַסֵּלַע So you will bring water to them from the
rock
- g) וְהִשְׁקִית אֶת־הָעֵדָה וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם and the congregation and beasts shall drink.

Yahweh instructs Moses with three imperatives: *Take...Assemble...Speak*. These form a clear unambiguous three-fold action for Moses to obey. First, Moses was told to *Take the rod*.¹²⁸ The rod had been connected with two stunning water miracles prior to Numbers 20:1-13. Notwithstanding that the historical site of the place was Rephidim, in the parallel account in Exodus 17, the rod of Moses was once again called into action. It enters into the drama with a reputation as an

¹²⁸ William Propp has suggested that the rod was a concrete symbol of Moses' authority. Others think that this is a remnant of an earlier tradition found in the Exodus 17:1-7 account, where the rod was used to strike the rock to get the water for the people. Exod 17:5 deliberately recalls the miracle worked in Egypt where Moses used the rod to turn the Nile water into blood, i.e., into *undrinkable* water.

What is significant in Exodus 17:1-7 is that the rod is put into contact with "a rock", a wholly different matter resulting in the production of water. It was a miraculous display of the defeat of Egypt and at the same time, a demonstration of the awesome power of Yahweh to provide drinking water from a wholly unexpected source. Where the rod of Yahweh had been used earlier in Egypt, to turn water into undrinkable liquid, it now was used in reverse, to provide water from the solid rock!

awesome instrument of Moses. The rod in Numbers 20 is now expected to perform the miracle.

But this rod had also become a sign of Moses' authority, if it is the same rod as Aaron's in Numbers 17 as Propp has suggested.¹²⁹ The rod's presence now serves to demonstrate that the rod is nothing without Yahweh's instructions. The same water miracle can be performed without the use of the rod as instrument for the miracle.¹³⁰

Secondly, the element of *assembly* is significant when compared with Exodus 17:1-7, where Moses walked through a threatening mob and took some elders with him to the miracle rock which is presumably outside the camp. In other words, the main body of the camp did not see the miracle. Only the elders witnessed it and thereby confirmed the portrayal of the incident as a *test*, rather than rebellion. These privileged elders were then to convince the rest of the Community of Yahweh's presence and His endorsement of Moses' representation. This contrasts sharply with the portrayal in Numbers 20 where the *whole assembly* of the Community is brought together to witness the miracle of Yahweh's generous provisions for themselves.

Finally, the instruction to "*Speak to the rock before their eyes*" coming at the end of a series of rebellions that had wreaked destruction and chaos in the Community, is a climatic effort to dispel doubts about Yahweh and His servant Moses. This is all the more significant when seen in the light of Yahweh's efforts to quell all grumbling once and for all in the Trial of Staffs in Numbers 17.

¹²⁹ W. H. Propp, "Did Moses have Horns?", BR 4 (1988) 30-37, and "Water from the Mountain" in *Water in the Wilderness: A Biblical Motif and Its Mythological Background*. HSM 40, Scholars' Press, Atlanta: 1987, pp. 21-129.

¹³⁰ This variation seeks to show that no one can claim to possess magic or to have the powers via the rod apart from Yahweh's abiding Presence. In effect, the performance of the miracle of water provision by mere spoken words, as Yahweh has instructed Moses, verifies the predominant motif of Numbers 11-20, that His servant is His "mouth-piece". Thus the Narrator has subtly suggested that the rod, the instrument of Yahweh's miracles, was called for in order to show that Yahweh's might was so awesome that the same miracle of providing water from the rock can be done directly with Moses' words.

Moses was told to *speak to the rock*. The intimate quality of the miracle to be performed should not be overlooked. It is Moses who was to speak to the rock, according to Yahweh's instructions. Water will then issue forth. There is no need to posit anything else.¹³¹ Even the question of the rod's presence should not overshadow this final instruction. It was not *to the people*, because the next clause rules this out as this deed was to be done *before their eyes*. Moses' status as Yahweh's servant was meant to be reaffirmed before the Community.

Moses' actions will now be examined against Yahweh's instructions to determine what Moses' sin against Yahweh was. Verses 9 and 10a explicitly speaks of Moses' obedience of Yahweh's instructions. He takes the rod, gathers the people *before the rock* according to Yahweh's instructions in v. 8 a,b. But Moses fails to obey Yahweh's third and final part of the instruction. Moses did not turn to speak to the rock. Instead, he turned and spoke against the people assembled before him.¹³²

שמעו־נא¹³³ הַמְרִים
הַמֶּן־הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נּוֹצִיא לְכֶם מִים

The narration of Moses' sin is not explicitly obvious.¹³⁴ The opening first words of Moses is explosive. He accused the people with an accusation calling

¹³¹ The focus is on the word of Moses as efficacious is preceded by Num 16-17. The exalted Moses needs no dramatic actions. He merely speaks. This picture is a progression from Exodus 17. Moses no longer needed a rod. He speaks and things happen. He instructed Aaron and the plagues ceased.

¹³² The Moses figure moved from a passive mediator in 11-12 to an involved leader who takes accusations personally and reacts aggressively in the face of the Korathite rebellion in 16-17. Moses' anger with Israel which resulted in his sin follows the aggression of Moses in 16-17.

¹³³ GKC §110d, the particle נא intensifies the exhortation as a "rebuke or threat". LXX reads *Listen to me*, שמעוני.

¹³⁴ Moses' brashness and violent characteristics are portrayed in the stories of his early years at Pharaoh's court where he struck and killed an Egyptian (cf. Exodus 2), at Sinai over the Golden Calf incident (Exodus 32), and not least in Numbers 16 where he stood firm in the destruction of Korah and company. Thus Moses is a man familiar with violence. Yet he was also Yahweh's chosen and be called the "faithful" servant and "most humble man on earth" (Numbers 12).

them *rebels* הַמְרִים.¹³⁵ Yahweh pronounced that Moses had committed the sin of *unbelief*, by *not sanctifying* Him in the eyes of Israel. It is too naive to interpret לֹא־הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם as pointing to Moses' lack of faith in Yahweh's ability to work the miracle, since he himself had been instrumental in their execution. לֹא־הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם can only be perceived in its combined use with *sanctification*.

The tempo of the narrative in 20:6ff. uses a series of three verbs to convey the spatial movement. The leaders leave the people and present themselves *prostrate*¹³⁶ at the entrance of the Tent of meeting. This depiction is awkward given Numbers 7:89, where Moses was seen to receive Yahweh's word inside the tent, from above the Ark of Testimony. But it makes dramatic sense to situate the duo's distress call to Yahweh outside the Tent so as to be vindicated publicly. Hence, Moses was not conducting the customary inquiry of Yahweh for a word of guidance at this point. The act of prostration dramatizes their urgency for Yahweh to intervene on their behalf. Hence it is set *at the entrance* rather than *inside* the Tent of meeting. In this way, Yahweh became the final arbiter of the dispute between Israel and Moses. Yahweh responded swiftly with the almost

In addition, the reader, is encouraged to sympathize with the man as he continued to fulfil his calling as mediator between Israel and Yahweh, both as reluctant servant of Yahweh (cf. Exodus 3, 6, cpr. Numbers 11:12) and harassed and rejected leader (for example, "Why do you murmur against me, don't you know that you are murmuring against Yahweh?"). Hence the reader is lulled into familiarity with the tumultuous relationship of the Covenant parties. This climactic story, then becomes a device for the Narrator to jolt the reader with Yahweh's shocking announcement that Moses had sinned.

¹³⁵ Gray misses the imputed irony when he notes that this address is "not suitable... for they had murmured, but not rebelled" since Moses and Aaron are the ones who were called rebels (p. 263). See also, Numbers 20, 27. The latter has led some scholars to think that these words were addressed by Yahweh to Moses and Aaron in the original story. Gray goes on in view of Psalms 106:32ff. to understand that the outburst is "best understood as an expression of ill-temper." (p. 263). This is misleading.

¹³⁶ The expression, *they fell on their faces* is one of the common expressions for prayer. In Numbers, a theophany is regularly shown to have this human response (for example, 14:5, 10; 16:4, 19, 22). Some commentators think that Moses and Aaron were in fear for their lives at this point, but this is not necessary in the present context, especially since there is a distinct absence of any description of the people getting physically aggressive as seen for example in 14:10. Further, if the legal perception is sustained, it is consistent to see the leaders in need of Yahweh to vindicate their decisions thus far.

instantaneous appearance of כְּבוֹד-יְהוָה (v. 6c) usually associated with divine wrath.¹³⁷

At this point, the theophany is seen by the whole Community. But Yahweh speaks only to Moses (v.7). This confirms his mediatorship. Attention is then concentrated on Yahweh's instructions that follow, as the Narrator allows his audience to "eavesdrop" into the private dialogue. Significantly, there is no direct word to be announced to the people. Instead, Moses is instructed to carry out a series of actions.¹³⁸

Moses struck the rock with the sacred rod twice in anger which is expressed through his words against the Community. Yahweh's command emphasizes the *speaking of his word* to be the means to work the miracle.

The instruction to speak to the rock *before the people's eyes* is consistent to the public legal setting to which the Community has brought their complaints against the duo. In addition, the Narrator has not reported any verbal responses

¹³⁷ Cf. 14:10; 16:19.

¹³⁸ First, there is the problem raised by the mixing of the singular and plural in the verbs קָדַד (singular, imperative, v. 8) and וְדָבַרְתֶּם (Plural). According to G. B. Gray, for example, it shows that "the story is mutilated; and as any attempt to reconstruct it must be tentative, the exact nature of the sin of the leaders must remain doubtful." (p. 261) He goes on to see that "subsequent allusions favour the view that it was an act of open rebellion, rather than of simple unbelief" (p. 262) on the part of Moses and Aaron.

K. Sakenfeld has shown that the mixing of singular and plural verbs is not insurmountable, especially since the awkward plural וְדָבַרְתֶּם is clearly preceded by the mention of "and Aaron". This is consistent with the view that Aaron is Moses' assistant, his "mouth-piece". Hence the shift from singular to plural verbal action is a device to include Aaron's participation in the carrying out of the divine instructions.

Secondly, there is the seeming contradiction between the instruction for Moses to speak to the rock and the need to bring the rod along. Wenham in "Aaron's Rod (Numbers 17:16-28)", ZAW 93 (1981) 280-281, has shown that the rod is a symbol of authority after Numbers 17. Although the "rod" is frequently linked to water miracles in the desert (cf. Exodus 17:1-7, cpr. 15:23-26 and Numbers 21:16-18) yet its disuse is not a contradiction. (W.H. Propp, *Water in the Wilderness*. pp.51ff. and "The Rod of Aaron and the Sin of Moses", JBL 107 (1988) 19-26.) Too much weight has been given to the Exodus accounts without giving due attention to the fact that in Exodus, the rod's history as an instrument of miracle works are all set in the Deliverance and journey to Sinai context. In Numbers, the rod does not have such uses and instead become a symbol of divine appointment. In addition, the focus of the rod's power has consistently been Yahweh's word of empowerment. In other words, care is given to ensure that the rod does not have a power independent of Yahweh.

This does not mean that a "word" takes precedence over an act with a cultic object.

from Moses and Aaron. The test of leadership lies in the ability of the leader to provide for his people. Hence, Moses and Aaron went to the Tent to cast themselves before Yahweh for His vindication. This aptly sets up the divine proposal of the audio-visual display of the validity of the leadership.

Nothing in the words and actions of Moses can give a decisive view of the sin they committed. However, there are external texts that bear witness to the sin. Psalms 106:32-33 locates the sin in the "rash words" that Moses uttered. Numbers 20:24 and 27:14 only states that Moses and Aaron had committed "rebellion" (מַרְדָּה) whose root is consistently used in the Pentateuch to describe defiance against Yahweh.

Clearly references to the sin of Moses outside of Numbers 20 have reached a certain impasse. There seems to be no way to determine the nature of the sinful act. There is no obvious indication in the Narrative to suggest when the act of Moses' "sin" took place even if his display of fiery anger is considered because portrayals of Moses' fits of "anger" are familiar in both the Numbers,¹³⁹ and Exodus narratives.¹⁴⁰ The impression given is ambiguous. The Narrator has chosen to be opaque at this juncture. It is difficult to decide whether Moses and Aaron sinned deliberately or not, seeing that there are other occasions like Numbers 11, where Moses was angry and cynical against Yahweh. Also, Aaron's actions in Exodus 32 and Numbers 12 are more likely to be judged as sin than this present account. The association of Aaron with Moses is sealed in Numbers 16-17.

Further, the desert Community does not seem to be conscious that Moses and Aaron had done anything untoward, in spite of the vehement outburst of their

¹³⁹ E.g. against Yahweh in Numbers 11 and 31, 32.

¹⁴⁰ E.g. against Israelites in the Golden Calf incident, in destroying the tablets and killing the rebels.

leader. Instead, they are portrayed in the end as being wholly satisfied by the miraculous provision. The people and their livestock drank the *many waters*.¹⁴¹

For all intents and purposes, Moses' sin is only revealed in the final part of the pericope in verses 12 and 13. This is where the reader is given Yahweh's judgment upon the duo. This is then reinforced by the Narrator's final comment in v.13. These closing statements draw attention to the severity of the behaviour of Moses as sinful rebellion against Yahweh. Hence, on the literary level, only the Narrator and Yahweh know when the sin was committed. The readers only come to share this privileged knowledge in the final verses. There is no mention that the Community ever came to know this.

T.W. Mann,¹⁴² points out that P's use of הָאָזְמִין is unique compared to its use by JE (Numbers 14:11) and D (cf. Deuteronomy 1:34-39; 2:14-16; 3:23-28; and 4:21-22).¹⁴³ It has been chosen precisely for its negative overtones to describe Moses' sin, since it is characteristically applied by JE and D to the Community's sin of rejection of Yahweh (as in Numbers 14:11, and in Deuteronomy, cf. 1:32; 9:23). Coupled with the same exclusive use of מָרָה by P, Mann concludes that this selectivity

“suggests a surprisingly unsympathetic, even hostile attitude toward the figure of Moses, who here seems to incorporate the most negative traits of a recalcitrant people. ...Moreover, one wonders if the priestly author was not only aware of the use of these words in the spy accounts of Numbers and Deuteronomy, but also knew of the addition of Moses' denial in Deuteronomy 1, and was thus deliberately countering that explanation

¹⁴¹ See W. Propp, *Water in the Wilderness: A Biblical Motif and Its Mythological Background*. 1987, pp. 21-129.

¹⁴² “Theological Reflections in the Denial of Moses”, *JBL* 94 (1979) 481-494.

¹⁴³ Mann assumes that Numbers 14:11 which belongs to JE is the *Vorlage* for D. This helps to isolate P from using הָאָזְמִין outside of 20:1-13.

with an opposing view. ...that Moses' denial was not on account of the people's unfaithfulness and rebellion, but due to his own."¹⁴⁴

In Exodus 4:1, 5, 8, 9, 31; 14:31 and 19:9, יהאמין is a major motif where the portrayal of the intimate relationship between Yahweh and Moses has raised the seminal issue about the role of Moses in the founding of Yahwism in Israel.¹⁴⁵ It is sufficient to note that the verses in Exodus in connection to יהאמין has to do with rejection or submission to Yahweh's leadership through Moses (cf. esp. 14:31 and 19:3).

Consequently, יהאמיןלא in Exodus-Deuteronomy focuses on Israel's wilful rejection of Yahweh's promises of provisions, including the Land (cf. Numbers 14).¹⁴⁶ But this is also bound up with the leadership of Moses, his

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.484-485.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Werner H. Schmidt, *Exodus, Sinai und Mose*. EdF 191, 1983, esp. pp 45-48. He suggests that till today the debate thrown up by the older critical view is still unresolved. This view is represented by Holzinger's statement quoted by Schmidt: "daß Mose der Stifter des Israelitischen Jahwismus sei, jucht nur in dem Sinn, daß durch ihn die Anschauung von Jahwe einen neuen Inhalt bekam, sondern auch so, daß der Name Jahwe con ihm erst eingeführt wurde, Freilich muß man fragen, ob diese ... Ansicht eigentlich historische Erinnerung und nicht vielmehr theologische Konstruktion ist". (*Ibid.* , p.45). See also Herbert Schmidt has also contributed a very helpful survey recently in *Die Gestalt des Mose*. EdF 237, 1986 esp. pp.79-83.

¹⁴⁶ In his treatment of Genesis 15:6, von Rad in "Faith Reckoned as Righteousness", *The Problem of the Hexateuch*. ET. Dicken, London, SCM: 1984, pp. 125-130 pointed out that the "reckoning" of Abraham's faith as "righteous" was based on the whole concept of cultic "reckoning". But for von Rad, Genesis 15:6 reflects the Elohist's deliberate transfer of this process of "reckoning" from the cultic to "the sphere of a free and wholly personal relationship between God and Abraham". (p.129) Von Rad's perception of Elohist as a "reactionary" to the cultus is tenuous. The narrative context does not presume a Yahwistic cultus for Abraham to be declared "righteous" by a Yahwistic priest. Given this situation, does not Yahweh's declaration perform the priestly role? Further, the whole tenor of the story focuses on the personal relationship between Yahweh and Israel's Patriarch, before the founding of the Community. It is also a consistent portrayal focusing on Israel's Patriarchs and heroes as having a direct personal contact with Yahweh (cf. Adam, Noah, even Elijah, Elisha). It is dangerous to separate the element of personal faith from the cultus, especially when it sounds like a modern distinction. Most of all, the relational emphasis of "faith" cannot be overstressed at the expense of obedient actions. Abraham's "faith" is recognized because he acted upon Yahweh's promises, not merely because he talked with God.

Nevertheless, the link von Rad makes between "faith" and "the cultic process of reckoning" of someone or something as acceptable to God cannot be disregarded altogether. The cultus strictly adheres to Yahweh's words of command, be they regulatory, legal or promissory. Along with the communal observance, the individual embrace of God would include our modern

servant (eg., Exodus 14:31; Exodus 19:9) so that the literary thematic distinction of the latter cannot lead to an easy separation of its biographical nature of Moses from Israel's. Thus both Moses and Aaron commit the same sin of *rejection* which involves the notions of *disobedience* and *unfaithfulness*.¹⁴⁷

The sin of *disobedience* committed by Moses and Aaron is explicitly linked to the de-sanctification of Yahweh *in the sight of His people*. The matter is not crucially tied to whether the duo had enough faith or not (cf. Numbers 11 where Moses expressed doubts and reservations about Yahweh's promise to bless). Rather, the element of the root "to believe in" (אמן ב) has been subsumed by the whole public procedure of "treating Yahweh with honour". In other words, in view of Genesis 15:6, there is a clear perception that whatever the personal "faith in Yahweh" is meant, the crux of Moses' and Aaron's sin lies in their wilful disobedience to Yahweh's word which threatened to de-sanctify Yahweh before the people.

However, the people do not experience this de-sanctification because Yahweh then provided the water "in abundance" despite Moses' sin. That is why although the people's impression is constantly a major consideration in the interaction of Moses and Yahweh, yet, they recede to the background after the complaint of the narrative. Their apparent ignorance effects Yahweh's intervention that prevented a loss of Moses' and Aaron's authority before the people. The people showed no knowledge at all of the altercation between Moses and Yahweh. Instead, they are seen to be totally overwhelmed by the generosity of Yahweh's provision of water flowing out "in abundance" (v. 11).

definition of "belief", but our knowledge of the Israelites is too inadequate for us to make judgments like that of von Rad's.

¹⁴⁷ Of the two, *disobedience* is preferable because of sense which our contemporary usage conveys compared with *unfaithfulness*, which tends to be too vague. This can be seen in Margalio's attempt to sharpen the meaning of the statement with his rendering: "to trust My faithfulness to you as My messenger to the people" is unnecessarily convoluted and fudges the line between Moses' *faithfulness* to Yahweh's.

Thus, as the Narrator explains, Yahweh “sanctified himself in their midst” (וַיִּקְדָּשׁ בָּם, v. 13c). Furthermore, the Narrator classifies this as part of the rebellion story of the “waters of Meribah, where the Israelites contended with Yahweh.” (הָמָּה מִי מֵרִיבָהָאֲשֶׁר־רָבּוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה, v. 13).

Notwithstanding the problems associated with the location of Meribah-Kadesh from that of Massah and Rephidim in Exodus 17, the point that is often overlooked is that the Narrator has expressly classified the leaders' sin on the same level as that of the Community in general.

b) Summary of 20:1-13

Moses' Fall story is important because of its literary interests as the catalyst for the turning-point of the Narrative plot and being the only Narrative account of the sin of Moses in the Pentateuch and the Bible. The narrative plot is developed in the Conflict Stage not only in terms of the rebellions and sin of the Community, Levites and the Mosaic leadership and their consequent exclusion from the promised Land. The dramatic tension built-up in terms of the challenge to Mosaic leadership leading towards a climax, explodes instead with an anti-climax in Numbers 20:1-13. The exalted “servant” of Yahweh with whom He speaks face to face in 12:6-8 becomes the heroic intercessor who saves his people from total destruction in Numbers 13-14 and 16-17. The “meekest man on the face of the earth” in 12:3 becomes the angry leader who prays against his enemies in the Korathite rebellion. The story which anticipates a climax at this point, crashes instead with the sin of Moses. The dramatic impact is so shocking that it pulls the thematic centre of the plot from the exclusion of the Community from the promised Land in chapters 13-14 to the Mosaic figure in 20:1-3. The equally surprising paucity of description of the sin of Moses then powerfully captures the attention of the reader and compels a reading of the Conflict Stage of the narrative, which is the heart of the whole narrative of Numbers as well, with

the Mosaic figure at the centre. The theme of Numbers is seen therefore not only to be about the journey of the Community or about the demise of the Sinai covenanters and the succession of the new generation. It is about the establishment of the Community as a Mosaic Community as the first generation failed because they rejected Moses. Mosaic leadership and authority is therefore central to the plot of Numbers as demonstrated in the literary reading of the text as a narrative. It is the focal point around which the whole narrative of Numbers must be interpreted. Just as the shocking climax in 20:1-13 compels a reading of the rebellion stories in the Conflict Stage of the narrative with Moses at the centre. The Narrator had shaped the whole narrative to be read with the Mosaic figure as the focal point. The literary significance of Moses is not only substantial but integral in the narrative of Numbers. He should be considered the very 'soul' of the book as much as Yahweh and Israel are.¹⁴⁸

In the sin account, there is a deliberate perception of the sin of Moses as the same as that of the Community. However, it was Moses' personal sin for which he was judged by God in his being excluded from the promised Land. In chapters 13-14, Yahweh wanted to annihilate the Community and was only stopped when Moses interceded for the Community. Except for Moses' exclusion from the promised Land, his authority as the leader of the Community was not undermined. He continued to lead the Community. Even though he suffered a setback in the next incident when the Edomites refused the Community passage

¹⁴⁸ The pluralistic setting of the early Israelite society was such that from the very formation of Israel, the tensions of disparate elements in the unification process was far from harmonious. This is seen in the repetitious nature of the murmuring traditions and the pre-occupation of the Exodus-Deuteronomy Narrative to defend the legitimacy of Mosaic authority. Outside of the Pentateuch, and for that matter, Hexateuch, the book of Judges, concur that the Israelite "nation" was highly disparate. Thus Israel had a very long and complex history in its struggle with the perception of its origin in terms of Moses and his traditions. It is safe to say that in the present form, Numbers, and the Pentateuch, shows that Moses' traditions had gained the central ground in the texts, but not without the consistent apologetic overtones that prevail in them. As a result, the audience is given a permanent reminder that it is through Moses that Israel and Yahweh were able to seal their Covenant and realise it through the initial difficulties of a perilous birth in the desert.

through their land, the incidents in the next phase, the *Conflict* Stage of the narrative show Moses in leadership still. It was not till 27:12ff., that a successor was named for Moses.

CHAPTER 4

THE PORTRAIT OF MOSES - PART II

4.1 The Portrait of Moses in the Resolution Phase

After the turning point of the Narrative in 20:23-29, the plot moves into a Resolution phase of the Conflict Stage from 21:1 to 25:18 with the appointment of Eleazar as Aaron's successor. The restoration of the Community and the efficacy of Mosaic leadership as well as Yahweh's initiative in defeating Israel's enemies is traced. 21:1-3 traces the recovery of the Community's defeat at Hormah in 14:39-45; 21:4-9 sees the success of Moses' again to save the people; 21:10-35 sees progress of the journey when there was failure and delays in the rebellion cycles. In Numbers 22-24, Yahweh himself acts to defeat Baal without the Mosaic mediator. Moses is mentioned only at the end of this phase in the story of the Apostasy at Baal-Peor. Let us examine this account now.

It will be shown that the main focus of the story of the Apostasy of Baal-Peor in Numbers 25 is not the legitimation of Phinehas' priestly house; nor the prohibition of foreign marriages. Rather, it is to idealize Phinehas as the model believer of Yahweh from Israel's second generation. The purpose of this is to signal the emergence of the new generation of the Sinai Community to take over the mantle from the first generation through the atoning zeal **קנא** of Phinehas. It was in the context of this chapter that the *ban* against the Midianites was commanded of Moses (25:16-18). This raises the question whether Moses will obey Yahweh in spite of his personal connections with the Midianites. This is particularly so when Moses' execution of Yahweh's judgment in 25:5 is not exactly that commanded by Yahweh in 25:4. That Moses was seen by commentators to be overshadowed by Phinehas in this account further raises the issue of Moses' standing just before the New Orientation Movement from Chapters 26 - 36.

The history of this passage is highly complex. Whilst the difficulties of Numbers 25¹ should not be minimised, the passage read as a literary work reveals coherence.

The story opens with the geographical location of the Community as having stopped at "Shittim"² which was set in the vicinity from which Israel

¹ Numbers 25 is perhaps one of the most intriguing passages in the Hebrew Bible since it contains numerous obscure words, idiomatic word-plays and abrupt sentences. Martin Noth has the following to say: "This chapter contains elements of traditions, of varied content and varied age, in a juxtaposition which is difficult to disentangle and in a presentation which is remarkably inconsequential and fragmentary." *Numbers, A Commentary*. OTL. ET. J. D. Martin, SCM, London: 1968, p.195.

Examples of sequential disparities include the sudden intrusion of "Baal of Peor" (v.5) in relation to the general mention of Moabite gods in v.3, the "unconnectedness" between Yahweh's instructions and Moses' execution of Yahweh's instructions (cf. vv.4,5), the awkward juxtaposition of the reference to the Moabitess with Cozbi the Midianitess, and the tension created by the apostasy story just after Yahweh had just defeated Balaam.

These anomalies are further accentuated by textual obscurities as Noth notes, "The understanding of the whole is made more difficult by the occurrence of many very unusual, even unique words and expressions whose exact meaning and field of reference can only be guessed." (p.196) However, these disparate elements do not lead to their perception as independent sources because as Noth confesses, "There is...a lack of any convincing indication which would enable us to divide the narrative into various 'sources'. Noth found the chapter rather incoherent and perhaps that is why his comments are concentrated in the main on textual notes.

In his recent commentary on the book, Philip Budd subscribes to the fragmentary nature of the chapter and concentrates on reconstructing the history of the tradition in order to draw out a coherent interpretation of the chapter. He maintains that there are basically two traditions that make up the chapter, the Yahwist (vv. 1-5) and the Priestly (vv. 6-18). The Yahwistic tradition recalls a popular cult at the period of the united monarchy as reflected by Hosea 9:10. It tells the story of a Levitical 'judge', Phinehas who earned himself a lasting reputation as a righteous man. This earlier version is truncated by the later Priestly writer who was concerned to vindicate the Phinehas' priestly house at a time when this was doubted. Based on this hypothetical historical setting, Budd concludes, "...the author's chief interest in the story is not the sin of Zimri and Cozbi... but the vindication of Phinehas in his priesthood, and the Midianite dimension to the Baal-Peor episode."

This reconstruction is not new since others before him have posited some historical priestly rivalry, of the Zadokite house (eg., de Vaulx in *Les Nombres* SB. Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972 (p. 300) and in *The Early History of Israel*, Tr., D. Smith, DLT, London: 1978, pp. 568-70 and Gray in *Numbers*, ICC, 1906: pp.385-6) or Elide priesthood (cf. Cross in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Harvard:1973 pp. 201-3), behind the commendation of Phinehas. Noth (pp. 195-99) however simply sees this as a legitimisation of the Phinehas lineage to the High Priestly office. However, Budd himself cautions against making these reconstructions, "Absence of evidence tends to make speculation about a long tradition hazardous." (p.278) It seems that Budd found himself drawn to this reconstruction in order to make sense of the narrative. But being an analytical critic, he could not but resort to such a reconstruction to explain the text. In doing so, he seems to have read into the text.

² This is often thought of as the short form of *Abel Shittim* "Acacia Meadows" from where the Israelites crossed the Jordan to enter Canaan (Joshua 2:1; 3:1). Chronologically,

crossed into Canaan (cf. Joshua 2:1; 3:1). The Community is once again poised at the 'door' of the Promised Land.

The apostasy is described to have begun with Israelite men who entered into immoral sexual intercourse with Moabite women.³ This led to a full embrace of the Moabite cult by the Israelites, as described in v.2, where the Israelites joined in the sacrifices and celebrations of that cult, even to bow in worship to the gods. This depiction draws the sarcastic comment, "So Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor".

The verb **יָצַד**, "to yoke himself" only occurs in Psalms 106:28 describing the same event. This rare expression causes uncertainty of meaning amongst analysts. J. Sturdy thinks it indicates sexual rites.⁴ The reference to "Baal of Peor" has led commentators to perceive the verb to connote rivalry with known fertility cult connected with the worship of Kemosh.⁵ Clearly, although one cannot be certain about the precise nature of the cult of "Baal-Peor", yet the Narrator's thrust is unmistakable. The description is that Israel's adherence to an alien god beginning with the sexual union with these women.

Crucially, the issue here is not primarily sexual immorality. Rather the emphasis is shifted to Israel's *embrace* of the Moabite gods and "Baal of Peor".

Numbers 25 fits in with the three preceding chapters, where the Community was thought to be wandering in the plains of Moab, across from Jericho. Hence the location is placed in continuity with the Balaam story.

³ LXX interprets **לִחַל** as "profaned themselves", which denotes religious implications rather than mere frivolous orgy (cf Hosea 4:10,18 and 5:3 cpr. Leviticus 19:29; 21:9) Sturdy (p. 184) interprets this as "sexual intercourse", while others like Wenham (pp. 187-8) sees both the physical and spiritual implied.

⁴ Numbers, p. 184.

⁵ Gray (p. 279); Noordtjiz. pp.239 argues that v. 2 refers to "sexual deviation,... an almost natural outgrowth of the worship of the love goddess Baalat, Astarte, or Ashera, or by whatever other name she was known, since sexual immorality was an integral part of that worship." This 'goddess' is the "love goddess, who in verse 3 recedes behind her 'husband', Baal Peor.... young men and women who in honour of their god gave their bodies over to all kinds of immoral acts and became 'temple prostitutes'". The worship takes place "usually under open sky (for example, 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:20; Jeremiah 17:2, "on every high hill and under every spreading tree,"), consisted of cultic dances, performed by naked men and women, followed by drinking and sexual debauchery.

The sexual content of the pericope is superseded by the detailed depiction of Israelites participating fully in the Baalist cult.⁶ This is particularly sharp if the LXX's rendering of לִחַלְלֵם as "profaned themselves" is accepted.

Yahweh's 'fierce anger' (v 3) is aroused. Although what this 'burning anger' of Yahweh means is uncertain, it caused a severe crisis in the Community as suggested by Yahweh's solution to placate his anger and the assembly of Community in lament (cf. verses 5ff.).⁷ This anticipates 25:9, when the word 'plague' is suddenly introduced.

The significance of verses 4 and 5 is that the solution to placate the divine anger is proposed by Yahweh himself. It asserts his lordship over the Community, even as the latter is perceived to be defecting from him. This is consistent with the demonstration of Yahweh's commitment to Israel by freely overcoming Balaam's efforts to curse Israel earlier (cf. Numbers 22-24). Yahweh's solution for Israel involves a public execution⁸ of the leaders,⁹ which could well have cultic connotations as Mendenhall has suggested.¹⁰

⁶ This movement becomes the backdrop for the ensuing story of the Phinehas narrative. Traditional critics tend to highlight the awkwardness of the fit between the two episodes. However, the use of "behold" (וַיַּרְא, in v.6) at the scene-break is vital for the connection of the two stories in the final form of the text.

⁷ The expression, אֲנִי יְהוָה, often presupposes a 'plague' as a divine affliction. For example, Numbers 21:4-8, where Yahweh punishes Israel with a 'plague' of snakes for their grumbings; and Exodus 15:26, where Yahweh declares himself to be the Afflicter and Healer. (Cf. B.S. Childs, *Exodus*, pp. 265-70; J.I. Durham, *Exodus*, pp. 210-215).

⁸ The meaning of the Hi. יָקַע is uncertain though it is used in 2 Samuel 21:6,9. The LXX adopts "expose" (also Dillman). Some form of "hanging" is preferred by the Vulgate and Targum. WR Smith, Snaith and the NEB, with reference to Arabic and Aramaic parallels, to suggest casting the victim over a cliff of sorts.

The main focus is that these people were to die a tortuous, public death as a warning against the apostasy, as inferred to by the combined expression, "before Yahweh" (לִפְנֵי יְהוָה) and "in the sun" (בְּיָמֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ).

⁹ The difficulties of the verse is well-known. BHS has preferred the root רָשָׁע "wicked" than רָשָׁע head. Gray (p. 383) suggests that it most probably was a scribal slip. Dillman argues it could refer to selected representatives. However, it should be noted that 2 Samuel 21:1-4 shows that early Hebrew morality did not require actual offenders to expiate a crime.

¹⁰ Cf. "The Incident at Beth Baal Peor", in *The Tenth Generation: Origins of the Biblical Traditions*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 1973, pp. 105-212.

In the next verse, Moses' implementation is recorded (v. 5). At this point, the problem arises that Moses' instructions do not follow Yahweh's instruction. The discrepancy focuses on the instruction to his "judges" ¹¹ to kill ¹² only those who had committed the apostasy. This conflict of identities between "those who of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor," and the "leaders" of the Community reflects a tension to locate the burden of responsibility.¹³

Nevertheless, Moses did not question Yahweh nor had any reservation. He was not part of the apostasy. He calls for his appointed "judges", men whom he had confidence in. (cf Exod 18) The use of **הָרַג**, indicates definiteness of stance and action. The issue of who were to be killed must be seen in the light of the rest of Moses' action. He was implementing the divine mandate.

At this point, the whole narrative is interrupted by the switch of focus to Zimri's entrance with the introduction of "And behold" (**וַהֲנִיחַ**).¹⁴ The immediate consequence is that Moses' execution of Yahweh's proposal is abruptly interrupted. The tension of the drama should not be lost at this point. This interruption is traditionally seen as ill-fittingly disruptive. However, this is only so when seen through the eyes of the analytical critic. Rather, this is a device used to heighten the ensuing drama in continuity of the story. This switch of focus effectively shifts the centre of the story to the drama about to be unfolded.

In other words, there is no change of scene nor mood. This is vital to understanding and interpreting the story because it provides the proper context for it. In 25:6, it was recorded that 'someone from amongst the sons of Israel came,

¹¹ **שֹׁפְטִים** recalls Exodus 18 in which they have been personally chosen and taught by Moses so that they are actually his assistants.

¹² The verb used is the generic: **הָרַג**.

¹³ Some traditions have tried to solve this by understanding **זָרִים** as leaders of the apostates. Wenham prefers to think that Moses had indeed "toned down" Yahweh's judgment.

¹⁴ Cf. Adele Berlin, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. It is important to note that this does not imply a switch of scene. Already it may be presumed that the Community had gathered at the Tent of Meeting in v. 5 when Yahweh's anger erupted. In Numbers 11:1-3, Yahweh's burning was a consuming fire which destroyed a significant number of people in the Community.

bringing the ¹⁵ Midianite woman to his brothers ¹⁶ Everything so far continues to take place in full public view, before the Tent. The apostates were to be executed *before the Lord*, לַיהוָה. The man who brought the Midianite woman into the camp did it *before Moses and before the whole Community*. The Narrator even provides the information of what the whole camp was doing, that is, *weeping in front* of the Tent of Meeting. This confirms that the Community was in a crisis from the *anger of Yahweh*. The withholding of the names at this point introduces an element of suspense which builds up the tension of the narrative.

In terms of the narrative, the activities portrayed from v.2 onwards were taking place at the vicinity of the Tent which is the Holy place of the Camp.¹⁷ Furthermore, the expression, כָּל־עַדַּת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, that is, *everyone of the Community of Israel* was assembled at the Tent involved in the act of corporate lament. There is no reason to think the man's family was somewhere else. It was a time of severe crisis with the whole camp being under threat of annihilation from Yahweh's anger. So even if the man brought the woman to his family he would have to go to the lamenting assembly.

The whole scene is preoccupied with the lifting of the dreaded plague. The whole Community was "weeping" as they are afflicted with Yahweh's fierce anger. Yahweh had spoken and given his solution for the plague. Moses has also spoken to execute this solution. The congregation has gathered in front of the Tent. Everything was focused on lifting the plague.

¹⁵ אֶת־הַמְדַּיִנִּית, denotes a well-known person. The question is, known for what? Was he like Balaam, known throughout the region as a shaman? This stress is usually taken to indicate the status of the woman who is later revealed to be Cozbi the daughter of the Midianite chieftain Zur, with no particular explicit support. It is just as valid to suggest that this definite article is a stress of repugnance on the Narrator's part because of what this particular woman sought to do.

¹⁶ While the LXX understands this to mean that the man brought his brother to the Midianite woman.

¹⁷ For this reason, אֶחָיו should not be understood in the narrow sense to refer to "family" or "relatives" if it means moving away to their own personal tent. Rather, it should be translated "his brothers" in the sense of fellow countrymen.

What follows then must be Zimri's attempt to end the plague too. He leaves (נצ) the assembly and brings back the Midianitess, Cozbi, with him to offer an alternative way to lift the plague and turn Yahweh's anger. After all, at least some of the Israelite men had been exposed to a different religion. Pluralism and syncretism are not uncommon. Thus the crime of apostasy on Zimri's part was not that he brought a Midianitess into the camp but that they offered to lift Yahweh's fierce anger by another cultic practice.¹⁸

¹⁸ There are two main interpretations of the crime of Zimri and Cozbi: one is that of sexual immorality and the other of cultic breach. The first explanation continues to be the most popular and finds support amongst many modern commentators. Scholars like Gray (p. 384-5), McNiele (p. 144), Noth (p. 198), Sturdy (p. 184), Noordtzijs (p. 241), Budd (p. 280), and Maarsingh (p. 92) find support for suggesting that a marriage is implied by insisting that יחא be translated as "family" or "relatives" and that קבה is a private bedroom of sorts. While Noth acknowledges the difficulties, he finally decides it to be a marriage by preferring קבה to denote a "wedding room". Budd favours Reif's suggestion but is cautious about subscribing to the cultic model. Instead he tries to have the best of both models, deciding, "It seems more likely that the sin is ... the Israelite has married the Midianite, ... The marriage does of course lead on to cultic sin as v. 8 implies" adopting a view supported by B. Baentsch (pp. 624-25); L. E. Binns 178; J. G. Vink, *Priestly Code*, 123. Thus the description that Zimri had brought the Midianitess before Moses and the assembly implied a marital context.

The second explanation is to see the crime of Zimri and Cozbi as pertaining to cultic prostitution. Even so, it is possible to hold on to the crime as largely one of sexual immorality as in the case of Snaith (p. 302), Greenstone (p. 276), and Wenham (p. 187) do not see it as a marriage. The primary perception of these scholars is that Zimri's crime is of sexual indulgence in defiance of Yahweh. The emphasis is clearly upon sexual deviance.

Sexual immorality is seen to be the primary cause of the apostasy (cf. v. 1). The Zimri and Cozbi incident is a second account of apostasy even after Yahweh had pronounced judgment on the people in 25: 4, 5. This reinforces the gravity of the breach against Yahweh's covenant.

Zimri went from the assembly of cultic lament involving *the whole community of Israel* which would have included his tribe and family; comes back with a Midianite woman; parades her in front of the *assembly at the entrance of the Tent*, all for the sake of marrying or else, to announce that he was to have sex with her! This is necessary since the text is emphatic that the whole action takes place *before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly*, לעיני, is used twice emphasizing that they all saw this, even when their focus is clearly oriented to the Lord *at the entrance of the Tent*. This, is in defiance of and in blatant disregard for Yahweh and Moses and the Community. Some even suggests that Zimri had boastfully showing the others his new sexual "prize" or conquest. Most of the commentators introduce a totally alien and irrelevant ethic into the text.

The marriage model is clearly untenable. Firstly, The Hebrew is יחא and to render it as "family" or "relatives" is too restrictive and inappropriate in this context. Ringgren points out that the word can be used to denote the Community of Israel, especially here, since it appears in apposition to the whole Community of Israel.

Secondly, the expression, "*before the eyes of Moses and before the whole assembly of the Israelites*," does not imply marriage contrary to Noordtzijs's insistence. He understand קבה as indicating "the women's section of the tent in which, ..., no other man was allowed to enter (cf.

Judges 4:18)", based on the Arabic *al-kobbat*. The problem with this is that he has to impute that Zimri's entry into the restricted female quarters as the crime since he died there. Thus the extent of the commentator's imagination is seen, though much of it finds no textual support explicit or otherwise.

Finally, that קִבְּהָ denotes a bedroom of sorts is a matter of personal preference since all admits the word is ambiguous. Mainly because this view tends to concentrate on the sexual aspects of the story do the commentators find themselves attracted to translate the word accordingly.

There is another explanation that the crime centres on the attempt of Zimri and Cozbi to save the Community from Yahweh's wrath outside of Yahweh's instructions. This suggestion is not altogether new as de Vaulx (p. 209), F.M. Cross (pp. 201-3); C.F. Reif ("What Enraged Phinehas? - A Study of Numbers 25:8", *JBL* 90 (1971) 100-6) and Mendenhall had already proposed. De Vaulx suggests that here is an attempt to introduce something of a male cult prostitution into the Tent of Meeting and cites evidences in 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; Hosea 4:14, that such struggles did take place in the Community. He further finds other parallels of rejections such syncretistic moves in Deuteronomy 23:18ff; 1 Kings 22:47; 2 Kings 23:7 (p. 300). Cross in *Canaanite Myth* does not discuss the matter in any great extent. In any case, he is more concerned to paint the picture of the relationships between priestly houses of ancient Israel in the article. Nonetheless, his suggestion that the couple "were engaged in the rites of ritual prostitution," (p. 202) inside the Tent of Meeting itself, is attractive. This, he argues, is the "appalling sacrilege in orthodox Israelite eyes" (p. 202), which instantly lessens the seriousness of Cross' suggestion because his interest lies outside the literary text. Still Cross suggests that here is an anti-Moses tradition because he is seen negatively, by virtue of his lack of response to the situation.

Of the three, Reif's proposal is the most extensive and sustained, concentrating on the study of the word קִבְּהָ. (The word קִבְּהָ is rare and so a range of translations has been attempted. They include the following: "vat" (Driver), "tent" (AV), "chamber" (JPS), "alcove" (JB), "pavilion" (RV), "inner room" (RSV), "the domed tent-shrine" (Cross, 18). While קִבְּתָה cf Deuteronomy 18:3, has been translated in terms of part of the female anatomy, "belly" (AV, JPS, RV), or "groin" (JB), or just "body" (RSV) He points out that his survey of modern commentators saw in Numbers 25:6-8 that "...the reason for Phinehas' indignation and subsequent action was his disgust with Zimri who had the audacity to indulge in relations with a foreign woman in spite of the dire consequences of the Israelites' previous acts (verses 1-2)." (p. 201). His survey of early and medieval rabbinic literature also finds much the same preoccupation with sexual immorality. For example, Targum Onqelos, the LXX, and the Peshitta translates קִבְּתָה with various equivalents meaning "womb". Also, in medieval Rabbinic literature, Zimri is perceived to have brought the Midianitess into the camp and set her up in a tent-brothel for his brothers' and his own sexual gratification. Chaim Rabin, follows Qimhi's suggestion that the noun comes from a Hebrew origin, now lost, parallels the Egyptian word for "breast". To these, Reif finds them unconvincing. He is convinced that "the solution...lies in the explanation of the events described in 25: 6-8 which relates them not to an infringement of the code of sexual morality with regard to foreign women but to a departure from strict adherence to the cult of Yahweh." (p. 204).

Reif essentially sets out a very convincing philological case that the noun קִבְּהָ "...in fact refers to a very early tent-shrine...used only here as a special term describing a Midianite tent-shrine", following the model that Morgenstern and Cross have drawn. In particular, Reif draws attention to Morgenstern's theory where the קִבְּהָ was attended by a female priest; occupied by women from the noblest family of the tribe; set up next to the tribal chieftain's tent; used for divination in times of crisis. Thus he concludes that Zimri's "...crime was not that he had sexual relations with her, although this is by no means excluded, but that he installed her in a *qubba* next to his tent, possibly engaging her as a diviner in an attempt to find the means of placating the deity responsible for the plague, or simply to receive the advice of the oracle in this time of crisis, that is, to engage in some forbidden cultic activity." (p. 205). This compares well to Cross'

The next movement in the narrative is provided from a new character who suddenly springs to action from the assembly at the Tent. Phinehas was spurred to action. The narrative vividly describes this, carefully projecting the effort and force of conviction involved. The verbs are compressed, imbued with the force of dynamism. So much so, that everyone else is seen to be left standing in the face of Phinehas' violent reaction.¹⁹ He "*saw...arose...took...and went after...pierced...*"

It is worth pointing out that throughout v. 7, the Assembly at the Tent was still the scene in view. The only hint of movement outside this frame is that of Phinehas possibly leaving the stage to take the spear. In v.8 it was stated that the couple had gone out of sight, as Phinehas "*went in after the Israelite to the (הַקְּבֵה)...*". There, he speared them both, "the Israelite and the woman²⁰ through her belly, קִבְתָּהּ. There is a play on words which indicates the cultic significance of temple prostitution.²¹

The view that it was the marriage to the Midianitess which was Zimri's crime is a reading in by scholars of a late setting attributed to either the Deuteronomist or the post-Exilic priestly writer. However in Numbers 25:1-3, it

suggestion that the couple tried to perform an alien rite in the Tabernacle itself and to de Vaulx's suggestion of the couple attempting to set up a male temple prostitution cult.

The exact detail of the crime of the couple is difficult but the primary cultic nature as the main focus of the narrative is compelling. Nonetheless, most recent commentators have not used Reif's explanation, choosing instead to retain the sexual / marriage defilement explanation, as exemplified by Noordtzij, Riggan and Budd.

Mendenhall's reconstruction also takes the cultic explanation. He argues that the origin of the story is found in the rise of a plague that ravaged the Community. He suggests that this plague is none other than the bubonic plague which occurred quite frequently in the Bible. Zimri's crime, he insists was an attempt to reintroduce an old cultic practice which is traced to Moabite/Midianite root, to try to lift the plague. In the event, he was stopped by Phinehas who represented, not the older ancient Israelite tradition but the newly established Yahwistic cult with its new priestly officialdom.

Of the three explanations set out above, the cultic explanation is the most plausible. It's failure to attract a greater consensus is probably due to a lack of a coherent literary explanation. Noth's difficulties with chapter 25 and his conclusion that it is inconsequential and fragmentary is unwarranted.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, this dynamic language has led Butler to construe that here is an anti-Moses tradition, since Moses makes no attempt to do anything.

²⁰ הַשֵּׁהָאָה, does not require "and the wife".

²¹ James Milgrom, *Numbers: A Commentary*. JPS, Philadelphia:1990, p. 215.

was not the marriage to Moabite women which incurred God's wrath, but that the people gave themselves over to prostitution with Moabite women. This in turn led to their apostasy. Later in Numbers 31, the Israelites were allowed to keep the young Midianite girls as companions, be they slaves or wives. If the Midianite males were killed so that they would not grow up to be threats to the Community, how much more the virgins who are a potential threat to seduce the Israelite men once again.

Clearly the problem was not the marriage or the sexual union with foreign women. Rather it is the cultic activity which Zimri and Cozbi were engaged in. Given the setting, Reif's suggestion that קִבֵּה should be translated "shrine" is most plausible, although it is not necessary to think of the shrine as a separate tent structure which de Vaulx also favours. All the attempts to explicate קִבֵּה seem to overlook or give less weight to the irony of the word-play that serves to sum up the incident.

The speed of movement of the narrative suggests that the emphasis is not on the erection of a shrine but the lifting of the plague through other means outside of Yahweh's instructions. Thus Cozbi's inadvertent offer of an alternative solution to Yahweh's anger by her shrine of her body is in a sense accepted by Yahweh. But not the way that Zimri and Cozbi had proffered. This irony is quite apparent and perhaps that is why the enigmatic קִבֵּה is used. This itself hints at the sudden realization that the plague has been lifted.²²

Bearing in mind that Yahweh had already declared the solution to placate his anger in 25:4, Phinehas' deed was not motivated by an attempt to lift the plague. It was portrayed as a "gut" reaction. Thus the lifting of the plague in 25:8c

²² Greenstone noted that the Rabbis found difficulty with Phinehas' action since Zimri was executed without any formal trial. However, they resolved this moral issue by referring to an emergency law where intercourse with a Gentile woman was immediately punishable with death at the zealot's hand who witnessed it, without trial (Sanh. 82a). *Numbers*, p. 278-9.

was totally unexpected. Yahweh's command remains unexecuted and yet Yahweh's judgment was withdrawn.

Phinehas' action is given the stamp of enthusiastic approval by Yahweh. "Enthusiastic" because of the extended word-play in 25:11 and a further repeat is made to the nature of the central word, "zeal" (קנא) in 25:13.

In 25:11, Phinehas had *turned* (השיב) Yahweh's anger²³, that is, the afore-mentioned *plague* in 25:9. How? "by his zeal [matched] to (את) my zeal from amongst them."²⁴ Some commentators like L.E. Binns prefer to render this, "zeal for my sake"; others "zeal with my zeal". The basic notion is that Phinehas has matched Yahweh's zeal or jealous anger by his own manifest passion for the purity of the Yahwistic cult.

In this chapter, three words are used to denote Yahweh's passionate jealousy anger: אף, המה and קנא. The choice of the last in these explanatory verses emphasizes the internal spirit that was at work, hidden from the external view. Thus Phinehas has expressed the hidden passion of God. The thrust is that Yahweh himself sanctions Phinehas' 'zeal' (קנא) as having expressed his own קנא for Israel. This 'passionate jealousy'²⁵ has led him to punish Israel in anger with a plague. This passionate jealousy has been matched by Phinehas' zeal.

Scholars have been preoccupied with the location of the history of the Phinehas' commendation tradition as an exercise to legitimize his priesthood. This is at the expense of the other elements of the chapter as a whole. However a careful reading of the final-form of the chapter now shows that Phinehas' commendation fits the literary movement of the narrative. It serves to highlight the readiness of the new generation to assume the mantle as "Yahweh's people" in

²³ The word used is המה, different from the earlier אף in vv 3 and 4.

²⁴ בתוכם, is used to comparatively, not only to highlight Phinehas but also to idealize him to be the model believer of the second generation.

²⁵ Cf., v.11b בקנאתי. Verse 13 - Again, the reason is reiterated but expanded. Here that Phinehas' action shows "his zeal for his God" (אקנא לאלהיו) and had atoned (ie. saved them by the 'sacrifices' of the couple) for the Israelites". That which was personal has been accepted by Yahweh and made public for the benefit of Israel.

that even Phinehas, a Levitical priest belonging to the new generation possessed the passionate jealousy of God.

Only in 25:14-18 were the identities of the couple identified. The effect of postponing the identification firstly is not to distract the full impact of Phinehas' action. Secondly, it dramatically introduces the ban against the Midianites. The two involved were children of prominent²⁶ leaders of their respective tribes. Significantly this note resonates with the background introduction given to Phinehas, as son of Eleazer and grandson of Aaron (v. 7). The characters involved were not the first generation of the Wilderness Community. All belong to the second generation.

Yahweh interjects in 25:16-17 to pronounce to Moses the *ban* against the Midianites. The imperative "*Harass the Midianites, and smite them...*", can be seen as being personally directed to Moses as well as to Israel.²⁷

Phinehas is held up as the ideal exemplary Yahwist of the succeeding generation. The stress that Phinehas has personified the divine jealousy as a believer is set up as a model for the Community. It signals the readiness of the second generation to assume the place of their fathers as Yahweh's people.

Trent Butler has suggested that Numbers 25 reflects an element of an anti-Moses tradition.²⁸ This is seen in the description of the whole episode where the

²⁶ It is not accurate to refer to Zimri as son of a minor chief. Greenstone, follows Rashi's observation to (p. 280) understand the revealing of the names "...to enhance the heroism of Phinehas, who was not afraid to to attack two such prominent persons."

²⁷ Traditionally, Source- and Form-critics have viewed this distinction as reflective of different sources and editorial glosses. From there they posit different original settings and motivations for them individually. However, these conjectures miss the overall thrust of the chapter. Often, because critics tended to put as priority the identification of the sources, the unity of the passage is overlooked, as Berlin has pointed out. The procedure should be the comprehension of the overall text as a unit before looking for sources to interpret the text (cf. *Poetics*).

²⁸ Trent Butler in "An Anti-Moses Tradition", *JSOT* 12 (1979) 9 - 15, proposed that there is an anti-Moses tradition reflected in the the Pentateuch, of which Numbers 25 is a linch-pin for his thesis. Butler analyses Exodus 2:11-15, 16-24; 4:24-26; 18:1-27; Numbers 12 and 25 to conclude that these passages were from an anti-Moses tradition which "...pictured Moses as a man who assumes authority presumptuously, is willing to kill anyone to protect himself, is willing to live with and even marry the enemies of Israel while himself being recognized as an Egyptian, is

Mosaic figure does not react at all to Zimri's affront (cf. *before the eyes of Moses* v. 6). However, this fails to appreciate the focus of the story as a whole. On the contrary, the Mosaic figure is far from reduced, much less to say negated in this passage. When the narrative switches scenes in 25:6, Moses' command in 25:5 is left ringing in the audience's ears. They become the backdrop for Phinehas' deed. In addition, Phinehas' commendation is spoken by Moses. Finally, there is no explicitly negative connotation to the Mosaic figure in the expression **מִשֵּׁנֵי לְעֵינַי**, if simply because it reflects Zimri's defiance and/or Moses' inactivity. As pointed out above, the narrative at that point focuses on the passionate jealousy which led Phinehas to act in the full force of the speed of his anger at the sight of apostasy. As a result, everyone was left standing. All the more it emphasizes the concern of the narrative as a whole, to show the emergence of the readiness of the second generation to take over the mantle of their fathers as Yahweh's people, which Moses has so effectively obtained from Yahweh.

4.1.1 Summary

Zimri's crime was one of apostasy, a resorting to another cultic practice to stay the effects of God's wrath in the plague. Phinehas' exaltation was not *prima*

saved from divine anger by the intervention of his foreign wife, is not even the leader of his own family, paying allegiance instead to the Midianite priest, and is even in debt to the Midianite for the administrative system which he sets up over Israel." (p. 13).

Thus "It sought to show the true Moses as unqualified for any of Israel's positions of leadership. In the end the movement failed. Mosaic authority dominated the field. The anti-Moses tradition did have its accomplishments. It prevented the Moses tradition from dominating Israel's tradition completely. It provoked the opposition to reflect upon the significance of the man Moses, a reflection whose impact was felt upon some of the central materials in the Pentateuch. It resulted in the subordination of other significant figures and probably the loss of traditions concerning them. It also produced a counter-offensive from the pro-Mosaic forces, who subtly adopted and adapted the traditions of their opponents, utilizing them to build up an even more heroic picture of Moses. ... Moses, the legend grew because Moses the man and Moses the tradition had evoked wide-ranging reactions and opinion." (p. 14).

Butler's thesis is relevant to the discussion because he is suggesting that the Midianite elements based on Numbers 25 points to an anti-Moses tradition. In his view, Numbers 25 is "polemizing against marriage with Midianites, the arch-enemies of Israel..." (p. 11). This is supported by Miriam's complaint against Moses for his foreign marriage in Numbers 12.

facie for the purpose of legitimizing his priesthood. Rather, it was to signal the emergence of the second generation zealous with the zeal for God as opposed to the rebellious first generation. The sexual *passion* of Israel's men reflected Israel's loss of passion for Yahweh. But Yahweh's *passion* for Israel remained unmoved. This Divine *passion* was to find a corresponding *passion* expressed by Phinehas. The dynamic interactions of these *passions* are reflected in the words, צמר, קבה, and קנא. Through them, various facades of *passion* are interwoven to centre on Israel's loss of love for Yahweh and its recovery through Phinehas.

The exaltation of Phinehas signals a recovery. This is clear from the sudden introduction of כפר by Yahweh, which instantly imputes Phinehas' action of killing as an expression of the rightful passion that Yahweh so desires from Israel. This act of atonement is "free" or "voluntary" (as in the case of the offering in Numbers 31 from the army officers). So perfect is this expression that Yahweh claims that he himself was behind Phinehas' action. Thus Phinehas has acted "zeal to my zeal" and "for my sake", completely crediting Phinehas but at the same time projecting His absolute Sovereignty over Israel.

Moses' standing in the Community was not reduced in the *Resolution* phase of the narrative, notwithstanding the fact that the central figure here was Phinehas. This has the effect of emphasising the theme of the final Movement of New Orientation in Numbers, signalling the emergence of the succeeding generations of Israel. Moses still retains his role as the one through whom God speaks. God's pronouncement of judgment on the Midianites was given to Moses in 25:16-18.²⁹ Moses' apparent inactivity in the Resolution phase does not signify his diminishing significance. Rather it is to shift the focus to the second generation. This can be seen in that Moses is the authority through which the establishment of the second generation is approved.

²⁹ The question whether Moses will obey Yahweh in the execution of the ban against the Midianites is skilfully raised in 25:4, 5 when Moses' execution of Yahweh's judgment on the Israelites seem to fall short of Yahweh's commands in chapter 31.

4.2 The Portrait of Moses in the New Orientation Stage 26-36

In the final movement from Numbers 26-36, God's instructions for the allocation and distribution of the promised Land are given through Moses notwithstanding Joshua's commissioning in 27:12-22. The uniqueness of Moses' standing before God as God's servant is borne out even though he shares the fate with his people of not being allowed to enter the Promised Land.

The Succession theme developed in this final movement of Numbers echoes Moses' life in the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor. However, Moses' literary significance in this final movement is observed to extend beyond merely being the embodiment of the larger paradigmatic story of his Community. He is exalted by Yahweh as His servant, prophet *par excellence*, Law-giver, Interpreter, and even addressed as 'lord' by his people. His prominence continues till the end of Numbers where he continues to decide and remains the Law-giver on Land distribution laws in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. He did not only provide the continuity in the succession of the second generation of Israel but continued to be of central literary significance.

In the New Orientation Movement of the book, Moses is finally being recognized by the Community. He is "believed in" as opposed to **לֹא הֵאֱמַן**. In this Movement, there is a new mood which is presented. Instead of Yahweh speaking and the people obeying or rebelling, the Community is seen to bring their requests to Yahweh through Moses in new situations in which existing laws are silent. New laws were promulgated.

In 27:1-11, and 36:1-13, Moses introduces a new law where heiresses were recognized under certain conditions for the first time. This is radical in a patriarchal society.³⁰ Moses' permission was sought for the Gadites and Reubenites to occupy the Transjordan. Negotiations are carried out between

³⁰ Katherine Sakenfeld in her article "In the Wilderness, Awaiting the Land: The Daughters of Zelophehad and Feminist Interpretation", *PSB* 9(1988) 179-96.

Moses and the Gadites and Reubenites. Moses is also seen to allow a concession in the case of the Midianites in chapter 31 when Moses permitted the Israelite men to take Midianite virgins into their homes as part of their booty, despite the dangers of seduction into foreign religion as seen in Numbers 25.

All these concessions are **radical** and indicative of the new regard for Moses and his authority amongst the new generation. They define the internal make-up of the new generation and the shape of the Community in the conception of a second generation. This speaks of the Community's adjustments in their dynamic shaping as Yahweh's people. Mosaic authorization was depicted as foundational even for the new generation. This authority had been consistently upheld as the norm throughout Numbers. Significantly, Moses' death notice had been given as early as in Numbers 20 whereupon immediately Aaron's death was recorded. In Moses' case his death notice is repeated in 27:1-11 and 31:1-13. Immediately after, Joshua was appointed as Moses' successor. Yet, Moses' role is not reduced even after Eleazar was handed the responsibility of consulting Yahweh with the *urim*. He continued to be the *de facto leader* of Yahweh's people right to the end of Numbers. In the end the Mosaic figure is raised to the uniqueness of the Lawgiver who leaves a legacy of 'Torah' to guide Israel in faithfulness in their shaping of the Community.³¹

The beginning of the New Orientation movement is marked by the second census listing as an indication of a new beginning reminiscent of Numbers 1-3. The second census listing concludes with instructions to Moses on the allocation of the promised Land in 26:52-56. This introduces the concluding movement as one of preparation in anticipation of Land entry and occupation. The narrative cycle in this final movement is patterned as a concentric circle. It begins and ends

³¹ Scholars tend to attribute this 'dynamism' to the post-Exilic period. However, this is subjective since the formation of the Israelite Community, whether it was by conquest, or immigration or a mixture, bears a distinct ideology which is far from static right from the beginning.

with cases concerning Zelophehad's daughters in 27:1-11; 36:1-13. The middle ring comprises chapters 31-32 which deal with the execution of the Midianite ban and the occupation of the Transjordan, both of which involve concessions; and chapters 34-35 which provides for the allocation of the promised Land. At the centre is in chapter 33 where a summary account of the journey across the desert in the past which concludes with instructions to "drive out the inhabitants" from the Land, to "take possession" of the Land and "share it out by lot".

The summary looks back to the past as well as provides for the future. In 27:12-23, there is the account of the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor which is introduced by a notice by Yahweh to Moses that he was to die. Together with 31:2, the second notice by Yahweh of Moses' death, Joshua's appointment forms an interlocking device which connects the New Orientation part of the narrative to Moses' sin and exclusion from the promised Land in 20:1-13. The effect of 27:12-23 is to complete the succession of the new generation. The second census list shows a new generation poised to enter the promised Land. Aaron's succession was placed immediately after the sin account in 20:14ff. Moses' death notices and Joshua's appointment completes the succession of the new generation. Before examining the parts of the narrative cycle in the New *Orientation* Stage, the succession of Joshua must first be looked at and the impact on Mosaic leadership analysed.

4.2.1 The Appointment of Joshua 27:12-23

In Numbers 27:12, 13, Moses was told to go up to Mount Abarim.³² The reason why Moses could not enter the land is given in 27:14. It is because he had

³² In Deuteronomy 32:49, the mountain mentioned was Mount Nebo. Budd says the former refers to the mountain range while the latter is specific, which Plaut proposes to be Jebel en-Neba (2740 ft.).

Going up the mountain serves two purposes:

a. that Moses is to see that land which is the goal of his life vocation but to which he cannot now enter.

committed the sin of *rebellion* during the strife at Meribah by the congregation. Moses had failed *to sanctify me at the waters before their eyes*. Gray points out that *לְהַקְרִישׁוֹ ... פִּי* must be closely connected even though there is no explicit negative.³³ The conjunction *כִּאֲשֶׁר* at the start of this clause is important as it indicates the same reason for Aaron's death too. "These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin" gives the geographical local of the incident at the same time the meaning of the etiology.

Then in Numbers 27:15-17, Moses spoke. Surprisingly, he asks God to appoint a leader to lead the Community: "for their coming in and going out," so that Yahweh's congregation would not be as sheep without a shepherd." This is the same kind of argument that Moses had used in Numbers 14. It is Moses who initiates the idea that Yahweh needs to appoint a leader to oversee the Community after he is gone. Moses precedes his request with "God of all spirits of all flesh".³⁴ This expression also occurs in 16:22 where instead of *Yahweh* as found here, *El* is used. In 16:22, Moses and Aaron were interceding for Yahweh not to annihilate the Community on account of one man's sin, presumably referring to Korah. Here, in 27:16, the same expression is used and therefore, by implication, Moses here is in intercession. If so, then, the appointment of Joshua is Moses' idea, or at least, initiated by him. But more important, the 'office' of leader, different from

b. that Moses may die an honourable death. Sinners' death are consumption by fire or by earth and never up in the heady heights of the mountain where the gods dwell. On the mountain, Moses will be *gathered to his fathers' kinsmen*. This is idiomatic of honourable death. This contrasts sharply with the death of rebels where, they are consumed and nothing is said of their being gathered to be with their loved ones.

The specific mention of joining Aaron is indicative of the that which awaits Moses on the other side of this life. At the same time there is a confirmation that Aaron has been honoured in his death.

³³ Numbers, p. 400.

³⁴ *נִשְׁחַח*, includes both men and animals, therefore all creatures. Budd (p. 188) points out that since the expression is well represented in post-Biblical literature (for example, Jub 10:3; 2 Macc 3:24; 14:46), it must be a late form of prayer. Gray (p. 203) sees these two occurrences in Numbers as peculiar to the Priestly writer whose theological perspective is clearly manifest: "Yahweh is to him far more than the God of Israel; He is the one and only author of all human life, and, as its author, capable of destroying it...".

his own function belongs to him. The debate on the Mosaic 'office' and succession has now shifted to the perception that one cannot really speak of a Mosaic 'office'. Joshua in this passage, clearly does not succeed Moses as a Mosaic leader-mediator. Rather, his function is less extensive than Moses'. Nevertheless, Joshua's 'office' is a Mosaic legacy according to this passage. At no time did Yahweh indicate his intention to appoint a successor. Instead, Yahweh's concentration is on the preparation for Moses' death.

The dramatic address made to Yahweh in 16:22 is repeated here in the context of Moses' intercession on behalf of the Community for Israel without a leader, is like a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Moses interjects once again as in 10:29-33 in Hobab's case with a pragmatic prognosis.

It should be noted that commentators attempt to draw negative nuances on account of Moses' independent actions. This is unfounded, even if they can show in books like Joshua or Judges that the decision of allowing the Gadites and Reubenites to settle in Transjordan caused problems later. However, the Narrator does not make any judgment. On the contrary, there is tacit approval for what happened.

Moses wanted to ensure that there is one man to lead the Community.³⁵ Yahweh's reply to Moses in 27:18 - 21 was to choose Joshua.³⁶ However, one

³⁵ Budd (p. 306) favours the idiom *going out... coming in* and the shepherd imagery as denoting military function, even attributing the former as 'technical terminology'. However, Gray (p. 401) has pointed out that the idiom is used for functionaries alongside military (for example, 2 Kings 11:9, 1 Chronicles 27:1), and concludes, "...but nothing in the present context suggests any such limitation...". In fact Joshua 14:11, Deuteronomy 31:2f., 1 Kings 3:7, 2 Chronicles 1:10 all denotes 'leadership' in the general sense, rather than merely military or war contexts. Given these texts, it may be seen as characteristic of kingly leadership that the King needs to know how to lead the people in the way of Yahweh.

³⁶ Budd (pp. 307-8) sees that the author of Numbers links the death of Moses as closely as possible with that of Aaron (Numbers 20:22-29) and introduces Joshua at a reasonably early stage as the successor of Moses, specifically in the matter of military leadership. "The particular reason for making the choice of Joshua clear at this point is that this choice signals God's commitment to the leadership, despite the disasters of the wilderness journey." This is not specific enough. Why was Joshua's appointment so late, after Eleazer's? 1. Because Moses' imminent death creates the need just as Eleazer's appointment is the result of Aaron's death. 2. Joshua's

must note that Yahweh's action is upon Moses' invitation as an answer to Moses' prayer request.

Thus Joshua's appointment is given Moses' authorization.³⁷ Moses is instructed to *invest him with some of your "authority"*.³⁸ The emphasis is that Joshua's rule will be in accordance with Mosaic legacy. Therefore, a Mosaic legacy is seen to be necessary to establish or appoint the leadership of the Community. Moses is the one in whom Yahweh has vested His authority.

4.2.2 Summary

Moses remains very much the leader even after the commissioning of Joshua. Subsequent events show that Moses was still the one through whom Yahweh spoke and gave His laws in chapters 28 - 30. The Midianite incident in Chapter 31 shows that Moses still retained his authority as he rebuked the people for the partial execution of the Midianite *ban* and allowed them to keep the Midianite virgins as booty. Moses also spoke on Yahweh's behalf in matters of Land allocation in the *New Orientation* movement and decided on matters relating to the inheritance of Land in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. He also gave permission to the Gadites and the Reubenites to settle in the Transjordan on condition that they helped the other tribes take possession of the promised Land.

appointment is not supreme. He is under Eleazar's office which is responsible for seeking divine guidance through the *Urim* and *Thumim*

³⁷ Joshua's authority is not as extensive as Moses' authority. His authority was derived from Moses' authority. In 27:20, Yahweh instructs Moses to "*confer some of your own authority*" on Joshua, indicating a partial investment of Mosaic authority. Joshua's appointment was initiated by Moses who requested Yahweh to appoint a successor. Moses' appointment was by Yahweh Himself (27:15) Also Eleazar was to consult Yahweh on Joshua's behalf by means of the *Urim*. Moses consulted Yahweh directly. In 32 : 28, Joshua is named after Eleazar in protocol whereas Moses was named before Aaron. In 32 : 28, Moses remained very much in control and gave the orders to Eleazar and Joshua concerning the Gadites and Reubenites occupation of the Transjordan.

³⁸ G,V, and Syr use "glory".

4.2.3 Moses and Land Allocation

The notices of the impending death of Moses in chapter 27:13 and 31:2, and Joshua's appointment in chapter 27:12-23 did not lead to Moses' role being reduced. He was given the privilege to convey the order of Yahweh in chapter 33:50-56 to Israel to take possession of the promised Land and to drive out all the local inhabitants before them. In chapters 34 and 35, the word of Yahweh concerning the allocation of the Land was given again through Moses. He retains his role as the one through whom Yahweh speaks and maintains his position as Israel's leader even after Joshua's appointment as his successor. He does not merely convey Yahweh's orders, but discerns the divine guidance and interprets the law in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad in chapters 27:1-11; 36:1-13 where the law was silent³⁹ in prescribing for a case when there was no male heir. He rules that the daughters may inherit and that they must marry within their own clan of their own paternal tribe.

The Gadites' and Reubenites' request to occupy the Transjordan involved a new situation which was not anticipated before. Israel had always anticipated that Canaan will be their inheritance. However with the conquest of the Transjordan, the issue was whether it became a part of the inheritance of Israel. In this situation, Moses is portrayed as the one to whom the request was made

³⁹ Snaith, p. 309ff: "If this story of the daughters of Zelophehad has really to do with inheritance, then a new law which abrogates the levirate marriage is promulgated. The law is: in default of a son, the daughter inherits; in default of a daughter, the deceased's brother inherits; failing him, the heir is the next male kin." This is wrong when compared with Ruth 4:4ff. "Our suggestion is that it is really a story told to account for the tribe of Manasseh possessing territory to the west of the Jordan (Joshua 17:1-6). The territory allotted to Manasseh lay east of the Jordan. They did not receive the ten portions until four generations from Machir, who was one of the three clans that conquered the eastern lands (32:39 and 27:1). They receive an inheritance 'among their father's brethren' (verse 7), which is taken to mean to the west of the Jordan." (pp. 309-310).

To this Budd, is right to point out that this explanation fails to account for the odd choice of 'daughters' instead of 'sons' if it's main intention is to tell how Manassites occupied the land west of Jordan. Connected to this, the theory that this story abrogates the levirate marriage found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 is therefore unfounded. Instead Budd suggests that here is a story about the rights of daughters where "the author's objective is to fill in legal gaps, not to abrogate" the deuteronomic laws (p. 301).

and with whom the Gadites and the Reubenites negotiated for permission to occupy the Transjordan.

Moses is addressed as “*my lord*” and the Gadites and the Reubenites address themselves as “*your servants*”. In 32: 31, the Gadites and the Reubenites pledged to do what Moses ordered and recognised God’s authority behind Moses when they said, “*what Yahweh has said to your servants, we shall do*”. Moses is thus portrayed as one recognised by the Community to be so faithfully representing God that his consultation with God need not even be mentioned. This is in great contrast to the Conflict Movement in Chapters 11 - 20 when Moses’ authority was challenged time and again.

4.2.4 The Daughters of Zelophehad 27:1-11; 36:1-13

The *literary* role of these two cases and their reflection on the key role of Moses in this Movement of the narrative will now be examined.

a) 27:1-11

In 27:1, Zelophehad is traced to the tribe of Manasseh and its patriarch, Joseph. ‘Joseph’ was last mentioned in Exodus 13:19 where Moses was said to have brought the bones of Joseph with him when Israel escaped from Egypt. This was to fulfil the prophecy that Joseph was to be buried in the promised Land (Gen 50:25-26). It serves to link Moses to the Patriarchs. If Joseph’s bones were honoured by the Community so that they were locatable after so many years, the entrusting of or at least by allowing Moses to carry them symbolized the Community’s acceptance of Moses as deliverer. Hence, the mention of ‘Joseph’ is significant in pointing out that this family had pedigree in the Community.

The beginning of the story is energetic, urgent and straightforward. There is no usual scene opening, “And it came about”. Rather, an abrupt confrontation with the active, even threatening, וַתִּקַּר בְּנֵהּ is used. This verb is followed by a lengthy introduction of names that identifies the important lineage of Zelophehad.

At the same time, the specific mention of the five daughters' names brings the family into immediate focus.⁴⁰

The issue relates to the rights of women to inheritance in the event that there is no male heir in the family. This incident poses a potential to destabilize the new equilibrium of a new generation. Earlier in the narrative, the female elements of Miriam in chapter 12 and the Moabite women in chapter 25 had been seen to provide the destabilizing element. In fact, one may point to the law material in Numbers 5 of the trial of the wife suspected of adultery as an attempt to exercise control over a particular problem involving women. Given this largely threatening portrait of women in Numbers, the appearance of Zelophehad's daughters coming so suddenly after the success in the taking of the Second Census now raises the tension in the narrative. This is particularly the case when it comes so quickly after the trial the Community went through in Numbers 25 and 31. An element of surprise however, is in store.

⁴⁰ Many commentators including Sturdy point to these names as being used for towns too: Tirzah was at one time a capital of the northern kingdom. Gray (p. 398) notes that based on Numbers 26:33, 36:11 and Joshua 17:3, Zelophehad's daughters' names are towns or clans: "Mahlah is parallel to the clan name Abi'ezer in 1 Chronicles 7:18; Tirzah is the name of one of the capitals of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 15:21, Joshua 12:24); Hoglah, cp. Beth-Hoglah (Joshua 15:6); Milcah is, strictly speaking, a divine name, but may, like the last be an abbreviation, and stand for Beth-Milcah; No'ah (נֹחַ; G *Nova*) is distinguished from the Zebulonite town of Ne'ah... merely by an absence of the article and the vocalisation." (p. 392). This is followed by Budd (p. 300). "The names of his daughters (26:33n.) are names of clans or places, a fact which in itself is sufficient to show that this story is not a historical account of certain individuals, but a mode of raising a legal point." But the strain of argument in the last two names by Gray and assumed by Budd is indication that these names are not simply lifted from towns. It does show that Zelophehad did not merely name his daughters according to towns but had used a divine name and virtue for two of his daughters. Riggan, for example sees the names as reflecting virtues in four out of five: "gentleness, flattery, magpie, counsel, delight" (p. 199). This is amazing as it assumes knowledge of how the Israelites in pre-settlement gave names to their children. It is clear that some had their names based on their gods, others, upon their experiences and still others, upon occupation, character and towns? It is extraordinary to rule out historicity merely on the basis that here is a name that is also a towns' name.

McNeile (p. 152) thinks that "all names taken from smaller divisions or clans, settled in particular towns in Gilead. ... But the incident here related is regarded as a historical occurrence in the life of individuals. Its purpose is to introduce the law of inheritance."

The tacit threat of a crisis looming is further intensified with the deliberate listing of the names of the daughters thus prolonging the suspense of the story. The effect is one which raises the tension in the passage.

In 27:2, וְהֵעֲמִדְנָה introduces the second clause which details a threefold genitive לְפָנָי to the leadership of the Community, Moses, Eleazer and the leaders. This takes place at *the door of the Tent of Meeting*, the place where the 'council' meets. Their case as set out in 27:3 is that their father, Zelophehad, had died not because of his connections with Korathite rebellion, but *for his own sins*, (כִּי־בַחֲטָאוֹ). The significance is that on the one hand, here is a specific reference to the Korathite rebellion as deserving death. On the other hand, to die outside the Land is to show that Yahweh had failed in his promise to bring the exodus Community into the Land.

The case is accentuated by the fact that Zelophehad had nothing to do with Korah's rebellion. His death was *on account his own sins* (כִּי־בַחֲטָאוֹ). This expression does not mean that Zelophehad's death was a direct result of divine wrath. If it were so, the extent of material and the prominence of the family would have necessitated a 'sin account', like that of Nadab and Abihu, or even Dathan and Abiram. Instead, the narrative has largely passed over the nature of the death and more important, has no hint of negativism in its reporting. Further the expression bears an idiomatic reflex emphasizing the daughters' care and non-aggression in their urgent approach. Thus the approach is one of urgency and yet in a conciliatory attitude towards Moses.

Such deaths would certainly justify the kind of accusations the Community charged against Moses in the Conflict Movement in 20:4, "*Why have you brought us into the desert to kill us?*" Obviously, there were innocent deaths, sudden, unexpected and unconnected to divine wrath, like that of Miriam.

Another such case was that of Zelophehad, whose death was seen by Riggan as a “natural death”. Zelophehad was “a sinner, but not an apostate or a rebel”.⁴¹

There is no disputing that Zelophehad had died even though he was not part of the Korah rebels. Here the focus is set upon the issue of Yahweh’s faithfulness. To die outside the Land raises the issue whether Yahweh can be trusted to keep His promises to Israel since He is *Israel’s healer and afflicter* (cf. Exodus 15:26). Zelophehad’s family did not question Yahweh’s sovereignty. Instead, they readily blamed it on their own father’s *sins*. Thus Yahweh was not perceived to be at fault. This is a change of attitude from the rebels of the first generation who readily questioned Yahweh and Moses.

Most commentators take the view that the *sins* refer to the Community’s general revolt in Numbers 14. R. Aqiba identifies Numbers 14:32 as specifically pointing to Zelophehad though that is unlikely. Perhaps his sin was to have no sons! For a male dominant society, this is a valid attitude. More so when rights of inheritance were passed along male lines only. Childlessness is known to be seen as a curse (cf. Hannah etc.), while sons are seen as divine blessings.⁴² It is this family crisis that brings the daughters to Moses in 27:4. Their concern was that Zelophehad’s name was in danger of being *erased* or *lost* (עָרַבָה) from its clan due to the lack of an heir. This dire situation arose, as far as the daughters were concerned, not because of sin of rebellion, that is, in rejecting Yahweh. Rather, it was a “misfortune” of having no son. The expressed motivation was filial piety. The daughters want to preserve their father’s name and interests within the clan. Thus they put their demand across with the imperative: *Give!* There is a careful balance between demand and request here. Moses is firmly approached by the

⁴¹ *Number*, p. 199. Useful to note also that Riggans points out that while the first census is set in the context of the military march, the second is for settlement.

⁴² Sakenfeld, Katherine [“In the Wilderness, Awaiting the Land: The Daughters of Zelophehad and Feminist Interpretation”, *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 9 (1988) 179-196; “Zelophehad’s Daughters”, *Presbyterion* 15/4 (1988) 37-47] has pointed to the ancient perception that having to no sons in the Ancient Near East culture amounted to being cursed.

women. They set out their case logically and demanded justice in view of their situation. They did not attack or accuse Moses of incompetence or maliciousness. Instead, they showed respect and submission to the social structure/milieu that they were in. Their approach was in an appropriate manner. This incident, therefore presents a new climate or attitude. It is a case where people were approaching God through Moses for redress rather than murmuring and rebelling.

Moses' response in 27:5 was typical: *he brought* (וַיִּקְרַב) *the case before Yahweh* (לְפָנֵי-יְהוָה), an expression recalling Exodus 18, where Moses' judicial role was seen as the "begetter of Yahweh's word" for Israel. He was still the enquirer on behalf of the people to Yahweh. Why is this important? Because Yahweh now dwells in their midst once more. An appropriate way of resolving problems and issues in the Community, between the people and Yahweh as represented by Moses was reaffirmed. This, of course, is a crucial literary function in the follow-up of the two previous Movements since it indicates a sharp change of atmosphere in the camp where a new submissive attitude to Yahweh's rule through Moses is being reflected. It is likely that this verse describes the mediation work of Moses even though he has already passed the *Urim* to Eleazer. The focus is sustained on Moses. Moses was being conciliatory too. He did not get angry with God as in Numbers 11 nor with the approach of the daughters.

Yahweh's reply to the case was immediate. There are two parts. In the first, 27:7, is Yahweh's personal word to Moses. In the second, 27:8ff., are the instructions, set in legal language, given to Moses to say to the Israelite Community. This twofold repetition of Yahweh's reply underlines the *rightness* (כֵּן) of the daughters' case. In the first, the emphasis is made by the classic expression, וְנָתַן תָּתֵן, which is *indeed you must give*. This is then substantiated with the appositioned clause beginning with the waw consecutive verb, וְהָעֵבֶרֶת, *you are to turn over*, their father's inheritance to them. A new law is set for the Community. It symbolises the passing on of the promise of Land to the new generation "Israel".

Moses' death is postponed so that new "guidance" would have the highest authorization traceable to Moses, so as to rule out any challenge that such "laws" were not initiated in the wilderness by the mediator, Moses. Thus, the image of Moses as the sole Lawgiver for Yahweh's Community was conserved.

Numbers 27:8-11 expresses the divine decision for the women in a legal form, thereby enacting it into the statutes rule-book of the Community . Thus the pericope ends with the standard legal enforcement, "*This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites (לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), as Yahweh commanded Moses.*" (v. 11). A. H. McNeile points out that *a statute of judgment* recurs only in 35:29.⁴³ It means a statute embodied a fixed and authoritative custom. Sturdy calls it 'a technical term typical of "legal narrative"'⁴⁴. It is clearly a law for successive generations to observe.

There is no fulfilment or execution report in this account until it was raised again in 36:12. From the literary point of view, here is a classic example of the legal form set within the narrative milieu. It demonstrates the style of the narrative, where the tension between law and narrative is held in a fine balance so that overall, the law does not disfigure the narrative as a whole.⁴⁵

b) 36:1-13

The response of the elders of the clan of Gilead in the tribe of Manasseh to which the daughters of Zelophehad belong has been delayed to this point for literary reasons. Here, the interest of the tribe was being expressed. The elders do not dispute or reject the judgment in 27:1-11. Rather they saw a gap in the law that needs to be covered.

⁴³ *The Book of Numbers*, p. 153

⁴⁴ *Numbers*, p.195 (cpr. 35:29).

⁴⁵ See Damrosch, David. *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

The formal description of the elders of Gilead in 36:1 suggests the convening of a formal assembly, like that in 27:1-11. This sets the scene for debate and discussion rather than conflict. In 36:2, they addressed Moses as *lord* (אֲדוֹנָי) showing respect and exaltation. Gray⁴⁶ points out that this is a periphrastic use for *you* which never occurs in P^s. JE, on the other hand, uses the term at least 24 times. The term occurs twice in P^s (cf. 32:25, 27). He goes on to note the 'strangeness' of the clause as a whole, "the prefixing of the object in the first clause and the change to the passive in the second are both strange." Geiger had argued that "the present text originated in a desire to avoid the appearance that Moses gave commands on his own account."⁴⁷ This is one of the main indicators for Gray and others, including Budd, to favour the theory that this is a late supplement.

The use of אֲדוֹנָי should draw attention to the fact that here is a change of attitude towards Moses. Interestingly enough, the same address is made by Gad, Reuben and Manassites in 32:25, 27 (P^s) when they approach Moses and the Community for permission to settle east of Jordan! In JE passages, it occurs in 11:28, where Joshua warns Moses of the unsanctioned ecstatic prophecy of Eldad and Medad; and also in 12:11 (cf. also Exodus 32:22), where Aaron addressed Moses in this manner.

According to Eissfeldt, "In the OT, '*adhon*' is used in reference to an earthly lord over 300 times and to a divine lord about 30 times, if '*adhonai*' is left out of consideration."⁴⁸ In Genesis 42:10, Joseph was addressed as *lord* by his brothers who referred to themselves as "your servants". In much the same way Joseph's "lordship" was rejected by his brothers which constituted Israel. They sold him into slavery and exile in Egypt. He rose to be the Prime Minister in the

⁴⁶ Numbers, p. 477.

⁴⁷ As reported by Gray in pp. 477-8.

⁴⁸ Eissfeldt, Otto. אֲדוֹנָי, TDOT vol I, ed. G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, ET. J.T. Willis. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1977, rev. ed. pp. 61ff.

Egyptian court in the end to save Jacob and his sons, and be accepted as their "lord". In comparison, Moses' princely lordship was rejected by the Israelites in Egypt, and only found acceptance in the Negev as the Servant of God.

Eissfeldt further points out that the Old Testament speaks of the earthly lords over such things as wives (eg. Genesis 18:12), lands (Genesis 42:30), houses (Genesis 45:8),⁴⁹ districts (1 Kings 16:24), and many similar things. Frequently the king is called '*adhon*';... Generally speaking, '*adhon*' seems to mean 'the lord as the master,'... When 'my lord' ('*adhoni*', occasionally '*adhonai*') is said to or about a man, frequently it is merely an expression of courtesy, viz., a substitution for the 'You' of an address, or for a reference to a person as 'He', in the third personal pronoun. These comments apply to the passage in question most aptly. The respectful, self-effacing approach of the inquirers towards Moses now contrasts sharply with the haughty disdain, the preceding murmuring generation had consistently expressed towards Moses in the rebellion stories of Numbers.

In Exodus 4, 7, 14 and 19, Moses had a hard time convincing Israel of his mediatorship. Repeatedly, Yahweh sought to convince the Community that Moses was his chosen servant. In Numbers, this motif is accentuated in Moses' exaltation to be *the humblest man on earth*, being the man whom Yahweh speaks to face to face alone, cf 12:1-16. Yet, the rejection continued. Now in the new generation, Moses finally earns the Community's acceptance and honour. It is as if the complaints have been tied to the fact that Moses had yet to prove himself worthy of honour since they had not occupied at the Land, nor seen Yahweh's promise fulfilled. Now, having crossed the desert successfully, and being at the 'door' of the promised Land, Moses finally earned personal acceptance by Israel.

It can be observed that though chapters 27 and 36 are stories that concentrate on the allocation of the Land, their focus is on Moses. The strain is

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62. Eg. Genesis 31:35, Rachel addresses her father, pleading him not to be angry. Genesis 24:47ff., Abraham's servant utters a prayer.

heard in 27:12ff. since it follows 27:1-11, that Moses' death is at hand. Yet, his death is delayed in order to carry on distributing the Land. To have Moses underwrite the successful occupation of the Land reflects that the Community standing at the door of fulfillment of occupying the Promised Land is assured of success. Wenham: "These laws reassert very plainly that the LORD will bring his people into Canaan".⁵⁰ Moses may not be the one to lead Israel into the Land but the Narrator takes pains to ensure that land occupation is part of the Mosaic legacy.

In addition, this new Community is seen to be legitimized as true followers of Sinai-Yahwism because they were borne out of Moses' intercession - led by him and now sent by him. Their survival from annihilation from Yahweh's wrath is owed to him repeatedly, once in Exodus 32ff. and then in Numbers 14. and 16 - 17. Scholars have tried to explain how this relates to the Deuteronomic levirate laws.⁵¹ Certainly even if this is only an ideal law, its revolutionary implication is dramatic! Finally, the stories end with Moses being exalted by his Community, when the elders came to him and addressed him as *lord* before the whole assembly .

The problem as clearly set out in 36:3 is that the marriage by daughters who inherit their father's heritage into other tribes of Israel would lead to a loss of the allotted inheritance for their tribe. The Jubilee⁵² laws mentioned in 36:4 seem to indicate that such a thing would happen. Jubilee is a festival held every fifty years, when slaves are released and property restored to its original owners (cf. Leviticus 25:8-34). Sturdy writes, "This verse refers to a further rule not there

⁵⁰ Numbers, p.127.

⁵¹ See discussion by N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, pp. 308 - 310; James Milgrom *Numbers*, pp. 482 - 484.

⁵² הַיְבִיֵל , a ram's horn trumpet, thus the jubilee was ushered in with the blowing of trumpets. Little is known about its applications and this deficiency of information has led many to believe the jubilee principle to be wholly idealistic.

stated, that a transfer of ownership through marriage is confirmed in the jubilee year."⁵³

There is no report of Moses bringing the case before Yahweh, and it is assumed and implied when it is recorded that "At Yahweh's bidding, Moses gave... this order" in 36:5. There is therefore no report of any private conversation between Yahweh and Moses. This process is presumed and the narrative goes straight into the public judgment. This is a case where narration saves space and no useless repetition is entertained. Further, the case here is not an introduction of a radical law, but an amendment. "What the sons of Joseph say is right." Instead of Gilead or Manasseh, the importance of the representation is boosted by direct mention of their prestigious ancestor, Joseph. The order given in 36:6 is that the daughters of Zelophehad may marry anyone they like provided they marry within their father's tribal clan. The law in 36:7 indicates that the inheritance cannot be passed from tribe to tribe. This in effect keeps the tribes from having any designs over each other's inheritance and prevents internecine strife. Numbers 36:8, 9 repeats the above rule and sets it in a more general tone. Thus every daughter who inherits her father's inheritance must marry within her father's tribe. The case ends with a note in 36:10-12 that Zelophehad's daughters did as Yahweh had ordered Moses.⁵⁴ More significantly this is the only report of the observance even though this case had first been mentioned in chapter 27. It shows that 27:1-11 and 36:1-12 is a literary unit. Its split is therefore a deliberate literary device,⁵⁵ intending to draw out the law through legal narration.⁵⁶

⁵³ Numbers, 244.

⁵⁴ Compare 1 Chronicles 23:22, "When Eleazer died, he left daughters but no sons, and their cousins, the sons of Kish, married them".

⁵⁵ In Olson's analysis of chapter 27, 36 is under his 8th chapter titled, "Selected Legal Materials". In it, he deals with the Wood gatherers Law in Numbers 15. He observes that Numbers 15 functions as a note of promise after the debacle of the spy story. This serves the same function as Zelophehad's daughters' case.

First he notes that it is an *inclusio* that envelopes the events and organizations of the newly emerged generation signalled by the second census list. Thus "They frame the material associated with the new generation and define the theological perspective which is assigned to the

The difference between legal form and legal narrative form in the traditions must be noted. Damrosch's argument for legal narrative form is certainly persuasive.⁵⁷ If his criteria are acceptable, then Numbers is not a clear cut mix of two kinds of literary forms, Narrative and Law but comprises Narrative, Legal Narratives and some Laws. If this is true, then the whole perception of the literary tension in the book of Numbers is cast in a different light. If the emphasis is Narration and the Legal material is clearly written in narrative mode, then it is possible to think in terms of a single authorship and assume that the legal narratives were not haphazardly sprinkled into the Narrative as a whole.

Olson draws out three theological functions for chapters 27, 36 :-

Firstly, they serve to reaffirm the Land Promise to a new generation who look for its fulfilment. "Scholars who interpret the case of Zelophehad's daughters either as actual legal procedure in ancient Israel after its settlement in the land (Weingreen) or as a literary device by which to identify the daughters with east Jordan (Jobling) fail to discern the present viewpoint of the material which is located outside the land of Canaan but directed toward a future entrance into the promised land."⁵⁸

new generation of God's people. It is this theological function within the structure of Numbers which scholars have generally not considered in their interpretation of Numbers 27 and 36. ...It's concern and perspective are dominated by the prospect of God's fulfilment of long awaited promises. It is this concern which is depicted in the two episodes of the daughters of Zelophehad which act as keynotes for the new generation. ...Moreover, the subject of most of the material between the two accounts involving Zelophehad's daughters (Numbers 28-35) either deals directly with the inheritance of the land (boundaries of the land, supervision of its allocation) or presupposes a stable life in the land (cultic and sacrificial regulations)." (p. 175). Thus chapters 27, 36 are part of the materials concerned with re-affirmation of the Land Promise. (*Death on the Old...*, pp. 165-77).

⁵⁶ For example, J. Sturdy comments, "This question is not covered by the traditional legal material handed down and preserved elsewhere in the Pentateuch, and is settled by the (late) new style of legal narrative which we have already met in 9:6-14 and 15:32-6." (*Numbers*, p. 193). The style may be late but this does not rule out the possibility that the regulation in vv. 8-11 could be ancient.

⁵⁷ Cf. *The Narrative Covenant*.

⁵⁸ *Death of the Old...*, p.176. See also J. Weingreen, "Case of the Daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11)." *VT* 16 (1966) 518-22; D. Jobling, "The Jordan a Boundary: A

Secondly, they are concerned to maintain the inclusiveness of the promised inheritance to all tribes. Land inheritance is not transferable even, and especially amongst Israel's tribes.

Thirdly, they affirm the 'flexibility' of the tradition which thereby warrants re-interpretation of the past for the sake of the new. "Herein lies an implicit acknowledgment that all the issues which may conceivably arise in the life of the new generation may not find a direct answer in the traditions given at Sinai. ...Indeed much of the legal material throughout the book of Numbers consists of what may be called "case law" which by its very nature suggests a realistic and dynamic stance in the application of God's will for his people."⁵⁹ This observation is based on Plaut's comment that, "The law given (in Numbers) is usually case law, arising from the specific circumstances in the narrative. For instance, telling the story of the dedication of the Tabernacle occasions the statement of priestly obligations and privileges in general. From the law applicable to a particular event told in the book, the Torah proceeds to state the broader law valid for all time."⁶⁰ Olson further notes that the other laws are supplementary to earlier laws given in Exodus or Leviticus, for example, Numbers 3 - 4, the substitution of the Levites for the first-born of Israel. Olson sees a parallel paradigm in the change of Yahweh's abode. In the beginning of Numbers, the locus of God's definitive revelation of his will was set at Sinai, but now moved to the portable tent of meeting. "The tent of meeting thus functions in some ways as a symbol of flexibility and openness of God's revelation".⁶¹

Reading of Numbers 32 and Joshua 22." *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, JSOTSupp 39, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986. Pp. 88-134.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁶⁰ *Numbers, The Torah, A Modern Commentary*, p.1011.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.177. Olson stretches the point here. This does not give credence to the human agents involved. Instead, they depersonalize the text and favours the non-human elements as the reliable core for interpretation. The tent is meaningless if Moses is not around to operate it!

4.2.5 Summary

Numbers 27:1-11, 36:1-13 reflect a new climate and attitude of the new Community in contrast to the first generation. They approach Moses to make known their concerns for redress instead of murmuring and grumbling against him as their fathers had done. More significantly, here, we find a Moses who is approachable, available to women's needs in his Community. While it is usual to see the case of Zelophehad's daughters as reflecting a male dominated social condition, it must be noted that the case does reflect a grappling with women's rights in the vital issue of Land inheritance. To this end, Moses can be seen to be "liberating" the Community's laws to make provisions for the women folk rather than an exercise in consolidating male domination.

Thus, at the end of the book, Moses is not only seen as a central authoritative figure by the new generation *Israel*, but progressively, as a *de facto* caring *patriarchal* figure too.

4.3 The Concessions of Moses 31:1 - 32:42

4.3.1 31:1-54

The Midianite ban ordered by Yahweh is directed to Moses in chapter 25. In 25:1, "*Moabite women*" who seduced the Israelites whereas only one woman, *Cozbi*, is singled out and identified explicitly as Midianite. Why then does 31:15ff. insist that all the Midianite women had to be killed because they were responsible for seducing the Israelites into religious apostasy? Further, the *ban* on the Midianites in Numbers 25:16ff. seems to be based on Cozbi's treachery, while 31:8 and 16 indicates a wider conspiratorial context.

Also, why was the execution of the 'ban' by the Mosaic figure postponed to Chapter 31 so much so, that as a result, the final act of Moses, in the book of Numbers, does not focus on the appointment of Joshua as successor but the exacting of vengeance against the Midianites .

Numbers 31:1 comprises a rather astounding statement that the ban against the Midianites was personally directed to Moses. It states that the execution of the ban was to be Moses' final act before his death: "after that you shall be gathered to your people" (Numbers 31:2). Numbers 20:12 contains the first hint of Moses' death outside the promised Land. This is later confirmed by the notices given in the contexts of Joshua's appointment (Numbers 27:12-23) and here in the execution of the ban against the Midianites.⁶²

While the "Succession" motif stands out in the present passage since Moses' impending death leaves a gap to be filled, the execution of the ban against the Midianites provokes the question: "Why has this been made part of Moses' final legacy?" The Narrator's selectivity in singling out the Midianite connection in chapters 25 and 31 raises the issue of Moses' personal connections with the Midianites. The notice of Moses' death links this account to the sin of Moses in 20:1-13. This has the effect of rendering the execution of the Midianite ban, which has been addressed to Moses personally, as a final test of Moses' loyalty as Yahweh's servant.

First, the Midianite elements in Moses' life must be traced to show why this incident is to be seen as a test of Moses' loyalty. In his book, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, G.W. Coats finds that the anti-Midianite tradition of Numbers 25, 31 was never connected to Jethro nor any of the positive Midianite traditions found in Exodus 2 and 18. Instead, Numbers 25, 31 are explicitly linked to Balaam. Outside the Pentateuch, passages like Judges 6-8 continue the hostile stance to the Midianites. This shows a remarkable positive handling of the Midianite materials in Moses' life by the later tradents of the Old Testament. How should this tension be assessed? Why were such positive elements allowed to

⁶² There are numerous literary 'pulls' to extend Moses' final legacy in terms of the Laws and even in Numbers, the distribution of the Land (cf. Chapters 32ff.).

remain in the Moses traditions when Israel was evidently hostile to the Midianites during the periods of the Judges and the Monarchy ?

The so-called positive Midianites traditions in the Moses traditions , do maintain their “distance” by not being included in the Community. Also, these traditions are all personal, in nature, to the Mosaic figure, in contrast to the public and formal picture of the negative Midianite traditions. Nonetheless, the connections and therefore the tension are acknowledged by the Pentateuch to co-exist. Thus in the Apostasy of Baal-Peor, it became crucial that Moses himself is personally seen to be in the forefront in the execution of the ban against the Midianites.

The Pentateuch records the positive contributions the Midianites played in the life of Moses even before he was commissioned to be Israel’s deliverer. These positive contributions however, remained personal to Moses. The Midianites were never included in the Community of Yahweh’s people but were deliberately “distanced” from Israel.

Moses’ first connection with the Midianites was in Exodus 2 when Moses fled Egypt for fear of his own life, met Jethro’s daughters at a well, rescued them from harassment and ended up marrying into the family. This suggests that the Midianite connection was vital to Moses’ survival in the desert. However, the thrust of the story is not merely about how Moses came to find refuge in the desert. What has been often overlooked has been the etiological significance of the name, “Gershom” which Moses gave to his son.⁶³

⁶³ There is no doubt that Exodus 2 serves as a prelude to the Call Cycle in Exodus 3 and 4 as many scholars acknowledges, for example, Childs (Exodus, OTL, SCM, London: 1974, p.32) and Isbell. What is not clear is the significance of the etiology used here and in Exodus 18.

Burke Long (*The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament*. BZAW 108, Berlin, Töpelmann: 1968) sees 2:22 as “only a highly generalized link with the preceding material”, and therefore having “no assonance between name and narrative”. This is because “...the speech-motivation is a comment on Moses’ situation in Midian”. Thus Long gives little literary significance to the etiology. In contrast, B.Childs assesses it as an “essential conclusion” to the episode as a whole. Nevertheless, Childs shares Long’s view that it reflects Moses’ perception of his alien state in Midian, “The name indicates that Moses still remembers that he is a sojourner in a foreign land. He belongs to another people, in another land”.

The root word for Gershom is גר, which denotes a person without blood claim to the land he lives in. It is often translated as stranger, sojourner, or alien. For example, in Genesis 15:13, God tells Abraham that “*your seed will be strangers (גרִים) in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.*” Later, when Joseph’s brothers arrived in Egypt in Genesis 47:4, they told Pharaoh that, “*We have come to sojourn (גר) in the land, ...now, therefore, please let your servants live (ישבו) in the land of Goshen.*”

Thus, Moses’ profession of being an alien “there” (גרשום), is not meant to be a mere statement of description but a declaration of self-awareness. To understand this verse as merely indicating Moses’ self-assessment in the Midianite situation is saying the obvious and misses the thrust of the etiology and to that extent of the whole of Exodus 2. In placing the etiology here, the narrative is not merely indicating the present mood of the speaker but the sum of his experience .

In other words, it is not just an acknowledgment of his status in Midian but the new attitude toward his Egyptian heritage. Although the narrative projects a thoroughly Hebraic heritage upon the Mosaic figure, yet the Egyptian elements were strong. This is evident firstly in Moses’ own name and secondly, Jethro’s daughters recognized him as being Egyptian (cf. Exodus 2:19). These elements inject a tension which is delicately sustained within the character to climax with the etiological statement. The literary effect achieved is similar to that of a conversion experience. Moses is seen to have experienced a traumatic radical change from prince to fugitive, almost overnight.

Thus Moshe Greenberg ⁶⁴ perceptively observes in his commentary on this verse that, “Home for him meant Egypt, and Midian was ‘a foreign land’. Without the long exile in Midian he would not have experienced even a semblance of being alien that was his people’s lot in Egypt.” The only problem with

⁶⁴ *Understanding Exodus*. New York: Behrman House, 1969. P.49.

Greenberg's observation is that he seems to root the etiology in the Midian experience rather than Egypt which is a common oversight. A better statement would be that for Moses, "Home for him meant Egypt but is now shown to be actually a foreign land."⁶⁵

John Durham argues that "*Gershom*" is a pun based on the assonance between the verb **גָּרַשׁ** (to drive out, cast out cf. BDB 176-77) and the compound **גַּר + שׁוֹ** (there) to assert the theological undertone of Moses' assimilation into the Midianite setting. In addition, Durham notes that **הָיִיתִי** which is literally, "*I have been*", is a deliberately choice on the part of the Narrator and therefore should not be amended to **הָיִיתִי אֲנִי**, which then lead to the translation, *a stranger I am*. Hence Durham concludes, "Egypt, the place of Moses' birth has never been his home, any more than it has been the home of any of the Israelites."⁶⁶

The second Midianite element in Moses' life is Moses' wife Zipporah. In Exodus 4:24-26 when Yahweh attacked him and threatened to kill him, it was only by Zipporah's action, to circumcise him, that he was saved. The point of the circumcision firstly was to identify Moses as a descendant of Abraham and mark him out to be the first of the Sinai Community who were later to be similarly

⁶⁵ Charles Isbell ("Exodus 1-2 in the Context of Exodus 1-14", in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, eds DJA Clines, DM Gunn and AJ Hauser. JSOTS 19, JSOT Press, Sheffield: 1982, p.43) also draws attention to the fact that the literary drama found in Exodus 1 and 2 progressively heightens to climax in 2:22. Thus for him, Gershom "...means something symbolic to Moses - the beginning of a new era, a new life, a life of safety and comfort, a life removed from the sights and sounds of injustice and suffering happening in Egypt." Isbell does seem to get carried away in the latter portion but he is right in the general significance of the etiology. It signifies a new life in so far as putting the old one in a new perspective is concerned. In a way, it is even inaccurate to say that here is an indication of a new life. Rather it is a re-interpretation of the 'old life' in Egypt.

According to Dumbrell ("The Midianites League or Nation") and others, the Midianites were a nomadic type of people who ranged widely in the region. Further, they were less a nation and more a league of people who shared the same life-style. Thus Moses is seen to have become a wanderer like the Midianites, landless, or more accurately stateless. In this way, the etiology serves to demonstrate effectively that Moses now saw that he was also a wanderer, sojourner, alien, in Egypt.

⁶⁶ *Exodus*, WBC vol 3, Word Publishers, Texas:1987, pp. 23-24.

circumcised in Joshua 5. Parallels can be seen with the use of “flint knives” in both cases.

Zipporah’s role in this is crucial because she is seen to be instrumental in saving his life. Nonetheless, the “distancing” element is maintained by the minimal description. It is not known whether Zipporah did it out of her background as daughter of a Midianite priest and therefore of a Midianite religious background or whether she was instructed by Moses to do it.

The third In the narrative in Exodus 18:1-27, a “distance” is maintained between Jethro vis-a-vis Moses and the Community. First, the narrative highlights Jethro’s motivation as one of curiosity (cf. 18:1-4). Jethro *heard* (שָׁמַע) ⁶⁷ about all the exploits of Yahweh in relation to Moses and the Israelite Community, especially the spectacular manner in which they were delivered from Egypt. Verses 2-4 indicate that Jethro heard about Yahweh’s exploits through Zipporah, and through the names of Moses two sons, “Gershom” and “Eliezer”.⁶⁸ Crucially then, Jethro’s contact is through his personal relationship rather than any formal official corporate contact .

This arouses Jethro’s curiosity to see for himself the new wonder. He comes accompanying Moses’ family announcing his visit as primarily personal: “*I, your father-in-law, Jethro, have come...*”. What follows is a deliberate description of the cordiality with which Moses responds towards his father-in-law’s visit. The private nature of the visit is emphatic. Jethro is brought into Moses’ tent and told of how Yahweh delivered Moses and Israel from Pharaoh’s sword before he is allowed to meet the elders. In the end, Jethro bursts out with

⁶⁷ This is a special *waw* which draws attention to the new scene. NIV’s translation, “now”, is accurate and preferable to “and”.

⁶⁸ The juxtaposition of the two names confirm our interpretation of “Gershom” as Moses’ self-reflection of his Egyptian experience. Whilst “Gershom” serves to mark Moses’ experience up to the point of his assimilation into Midianite setting, “Eliezer” serves to index Moses’ experience of his call, and his confrontation with Pharaoh to arrive now at the foot of the Mountain of God in anticipation to meeting Him. Thus “Eliezer” which literally means “My God is help” is meant to reflect that “The God of my father as my help saved me from Pharaoh’s sword” (v. 4). This was a definite reference to the Exodus.

praise and acknowledges the might of Yahweh. Only after that did Moses invite Aaron and the rest of the eldership to meet Jethro for a feast.

This sequence of the narration shows that Jethro's visit was primarily personal and that he was not allowed to take control of the situation at any time of the aforesaid proceedings. Durham's translation of v. 11 is of interest because it points out Jethro's recognition of Yahweh's might over other gods.⁶⁹

The debate whether Jethro officiated the worship service or not continues. The ambiguity over קָבַץ is hardly solved by Durham who prefers to translate it as "receive" than "brought" or "take" in order to bring out the full flavour of Jethro's presiding over the service as priest and therefore receives portions of the offerings presented.

The problem with this is that it ignores the setting of narrative context. It is only after the sacrifices were offered that Aaron and the elders enter the scene. In other words, up to this point, the whole visit was personal and private. Jethro's reception is only heard by Moses and the audience very much in the nature of a private sharing. Since the "tent" may signify Moses' personal tent and/or the Tent of Meeting⁷⁰, the sacrificial offering did not need a public audience. Given that Jethro was still with Moses in the personal private capacity, there is no reason to read into קָבַץ any overtones of his taking control. That Jethro gave offering does not mean that he took control, but that he acknowledged Yahweh.⁷¹ This is confirmed by the fact that only in 18:12b is Jethro exposed to the leadership of the camp. Further, nowhere is he seen to be addressing anybody else. He only addressed Moses.

⁶⁹ "Now I know for certain that Yahweh is greater than all the gods, for in this thing they have acted rebelliously against them." *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁷⁰ The problem of the Pentateuch's failure to distinguish between Moses' personal "tent" and the Tent of Meeting is widely acknowledged. Some have presumed that Moses lived in the Tent of Meeting or at least next to it.

⁷¹ Cf. J. Durham, *Exodus*, pp. 238-246.

In the second half of Exodus 18, a similar portrayal is seen. In 18:13, Moses is actively involved in administering to the people, that is, he was in control, when Jethro finds cause to speak (v. 14). He addresses Moses personally and does not complain to others. In 18:17ff., Jethro's advice is couched in very courteous tones. He gives his advice for Moses' own sake, in a personal capacity. Significantly, he qualifies his advice with an all encompassing condition: "*as God commands you*" (v. 23), that is, if God approves. In other words, Jethro's advice is carefully depicted as subject to Yahweh's approval. Again, Jethro is nowhere allowed to take charge in the scene. He enters onto stage as a guest, a personal guest, albeit a highly esteemed personality, yet he was never allowed to upstage Moses at any time. One final note is the the curious ending of Jethro's whole visit in 18:23. Moses פלש his father-in-law "*and he went on his way to his own homeland.*" There are various renderings but for our purpose it clearly reinforces the narrative's strenuous efforts to ensure that Jethro is never seen to have the initiative. Moses personally "sent off" (piel) Jethro.

Immediately after Moses sent him off, he was on his way to his own homeland. It clearly depicts a man who had come to see for himself what he has heard. He liked what he heard. He was convinced of it. He believed in it. And he even tried to contribute something to it. But he never became part of it. He never saw himself as one of Israel. He never wanted to join in too. This is clear from the narrative. The distance is consistently maintained.

Therefore Exodus 18 as a whole serves as an external human witness to the authenticity of Moses' mediatorship. Jethro's acknowledgment and celebration of Yahweh's status as a God mightier than the Egyptians gods anticipates the similar revelation to come at Sinai. Jethro's recognition of the nature of Moses' role and authority as Yahweh's mediator prepares for the same purpose of the theophany as spelt out in Exodus 19:6.

In the context of Exodus as a whole, this pattern of external witness is found in Pharaoh. Moses' question in 6:12 upon rejection by both Egypt and more

important, Israel, is answered by Yahweh's triumphant self-manifestation of his might through plagues upon the Egyptians. These serve as instruments through whom the Israelites were to learn to entrust themselves to Yahweh and his servant Moses. Thus at the end of the Plague cycle, culminating in the Sea Crossing is the note, "Thus did Yahweh rescue Israel that day from the grip of the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the edge of the sea, and Israel saw the great power that Yahweh unleashed against the Egyptians. So the people were in awe of Yahweh and in consequence, they put their trust in Yahweh and in Moses, his servant." (Exodus 14:31).

In Numbers 10:29-36, Moses persuaded Hobab to be their guide from Sinai to Canaan with an offer of a share of Yahweh's blessings which were presumably supposed to be exclusively promised to the Community. This was done solely on Moses' own initiative. There are no divine instructions, nor approval given to this at any time. There are also no negative undertones at all. In fact, there is indication of tacit approval as this 'external' human guide is immediately followed by the supernatural divine leading in the form of the ark and pillar of cloud (cf. Numbers 10:33-36).

Therefore, the question is: Did Moses' offer and Hobab's assent indicate his entry into the Community? Did Hobab become an Israelite? Was Moses offering him to membership in the Community?

Secondly, Moses asks Hobab to be "*our eyes*" (וְהָיִיתָ לָנוּ לְעֵינַיִם). The LXX renders this as *elder* πρεσβυτης which presumes that Hobab is asked to join the Community as a full member, while the Vulgate employs a *ductor*, ie. guide.

The answer is negative. Firstly, Moses' offer to Hobab is that in return for his services, he will be "paid" with a share of Yahweh's "goodness" meant for the Community. Secondly, Hobab's initial refusal recalls Jethro's 'pull' to his homeland. The emphasis is that Hobab is firmly rooted elsewhere, outside the Community. He acknowledges this himself, quite emphatically: "... I wish to

return to my own homeland, to my own relatives/people", indicating a note of urgency and conscious distance in contradistinction to his status as Moses' חותן.⁷² McNeile (p.55), Gray (p.94), Maarsingh (p.37) think that this implies that location of Sinai is Midian or at least Hobab's home is a different route to that of Canaan. Budd⁷³ counters that Hobab is not saying that his destination lies in a different direction, but that he does not intend to settle in the same place as Israel. The two views are not exclusive of each other. The thrust centres on Hobab's conscious rootage as distinct from Israel's.

Judges 1:16 and 4:11 may indicate that Hobab did assent to it but this does not mean he assimilated into the Community. Rather they continued to sustain a separate identity. The mention of other tribes living alongside the Israelites does not mean their integration as the case of the Gibeonites show. 1 Samuel 15 : 6 records that the Kenites did settle amongst the Amalekites south of Judah .

The next key word is *good* טוב in verses 29 and 32 which is the basis of the offer of Moses' to Hobab on behalf of the Community as reward with the use of the participle, *doing good* והטבנו vv. 29, 32. Here is a clear indication of sharing a portion of the blessings Yahweh has promised, to Hobab, rather than inviting him to join into the Community as a full member and therefore being entitled to Yahweh's blessings. In other words, Hobab is treated as an "outsider" throughout.

The final indicator to the distancing of the Hobab figure is the abrupt ending of the exchange. Hobab's acceptance is presumed. There is no attempt to dwell upon it nor to explain it.

⁷² Most scholars now accept that the word is best rendered "relative by marriage". See for example, Mitchell, T. C. "The Meaning of the Noun HTN in the Old Testament", VT 19 (1969) 93-112.

⁷³ Numbers, p. 115.

4.3.2 Summary

The above examination of the Midianite elements in Moses' life show clear deliberateness on the part of the narrative traditions to keep them a distance to the Mosaic authority and the Community. Their accounts are kept to the personal. Even in the Hobab account, where it is nearest to inviting a Midianite to participate in the Community, the tradition is presented in such a way that Hobab remains the "outsider" to the Community.

This shows that there is a conscious awareness of the tension between the two Communities which emerges in Numbers 25, 31 and outside the Pentateuch (cf. Judges 6-8, and 1 Kings 11:18). For this reason, it is vital that the Mosaic figure is perceived to be personally involved in carrying out the ban against the Midianites. His personal connections are too thick to be left unsaid. Moses' personal connections with Midianites give cause for doubt about his faithfulness to Yahweh.

In other words, the issue of the Midianite involvement in the Baal apostasy at Peor raises a problem of Moses' own connections with these people. However in Numbers 31 Moses is seen to have the same commitment to God as before. In 31:2, Moses is told to "conscript" an army from the Community to conduct the "vengeance of Yahweh" (v. 3) for the Israelites. The syntax clearly shows that Moses is still in control. Thus "Moses sent..." (v. 6). In Numbers 31:13, Moses, Eleazer and the priesthood went out of the camp to meet the victorious army. Whether this reflects the primary concern to keep the camp pure from members who have come into contact with dead bodies or out of sheer enthusiasm, to welcome their own army home is a moot point. The latter is preferred as it is consistent with the portrayal of the whole atmosphere of enthusiastic holy warfare being waged.

It is important to note that Moses was at the head of this delegation. Verse 14 tells of Moses' first reaction as one of "anger" (אִקְצַר) when he saw that the *officers/commanders* of the thousands and hundreds of the army (פְּקוּדֵי,

יִשְׂרָאֵל) had not killed all the Midianites. Instead, they had brought back with them Midianite women and children. Moses then orders only the sparing of virgin girls while all adult women were to be massacred with all the male children (cf. 31 : 17-18).

This demonstrated the depth of Moses' perception of the wrong that the Midianites have done to Israel. Yet he spares the virgin Midianite women upon the soldier's request. It is normal to assume that these virgins were thus seen to pose no threats to Israelite purity as compared to the male children! This kind of understanding presumes a high degree of naivete on the part of Ancient people, if not on the Biblical writers. That these Ancients knew the threats of young girls is not the point here. Rather, what is at issue is that Moses thinks that the officers had not kept this command in the exacting of vengeance against the Midianites! Hence Moses does not let the Midianites off!

The account in chapter 31 concentrates on the aftermath of the success of the Community's army in carrying out Yahweh's vengeance upon the Midianites. There is no battle account, except for 31 : 7 and 8 which sum up the victory with the report of the killing of the leaders in the enemy camp. These include the five kings of Midian, and Balaam, son of Beor who was killed *with the sword*, a possible reference to the mode of execution.

The rest of the account describes the abundance of the booty, the reception of the victorious army and the distribution of the booty. What is central in this drama is the shock the audience receives, when the narrative suddenly tells of Moses' anger against the returning army.

The drama reaches a climax when the account switches from the perspective of the battle-field to the anxious camp in v. 13. Moses, Eleazer and the leaders of the Community set out of the camp to meet the returning army, probably having been told by fore-runners of their imminent return. However, this warm welcome is short-circuited by the sudden injection of the description, *But*

Moses was angry with the commanders of the army in their thousands, etc. (v.14).

The occurrences of Moses' anger are always significant. The reason for his anger here is given in v.15 - 18. *Have you let all the women live?*

V. 16 *Behold these caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against Yahweh in the affair at Baal-Peor, through the counsel of Balaam, as a result, there was the plague among the congregation of Yahweh.*

V.17 *Now therefore kill every male among the children and kill every woman who has had intercourse with a man.*

V.18 *But all the young women who had not had intercourse with a man keep alive for yourselves.*

It is significant that Moses seems to have given this concession without first consulting Yahweh. When Yahweh later speaks to Moses, in verses 25ff., he does not mention the issue at all.

The reply of the officers is found in verses 48-50, which is set in the wider context of the distribution of the booty. Numbers 31: 35 lists the number of virgins as 32,000. This shows that Yahweh's command had been carried out so that only the virgins are accounted for in the booty.

Characteristically, the officers refer to themselves as *your (Moses) servants*, coupled with the introductory formula of Moses' address. They are seen to be respectfully approaching the Moses. The counting of the army is reported matter of factly. This exercise is vital for the discovery that a miracle has taken place: *not one man has been found missing* in the action.

As a result, the men responded with the bringing of additional gifts to Yahweh *to make atonement for ourselves before Yahweh* (v.50). It is a mistake to interpret this as atonement for taking the census of the returned army or for innocent killing during battle. There is no account for such sensitivities in the Ancient Near East. What is more probable is that the anger of Moses was provoked by their incomplete execution of the *ban* against the Midianites and the

gifts were for the atonement of their sin of incomplete execution of the Midianite *ban*. There was definitely a hint of their not appreciating the meaning of the *ban* when they spared the women and children. Here, they had transgressed God's command by not wholeheartedly obeying Yahweh's commands to the letter.

Hence the atonement offering is made as an act of voluntary response, firstly because of the realisation that they were fighting Yahweh's war and secondly and perhaps what is more important, because they realised that Yahweh was fighting alongside them. This is particularly poignant with their realization that they had not lost a single man. By implication, the war they have fought was divine-led. Thus Moses' anger at their hesitation now becomes striking. They realise for the first time, that Yahweh was with them but they have not been faithful. Thus the atonement offering is crucial to remove their sin of hesitation.

The story may have been to defend the remnant of Midianite elements within the Community as a concession from Moses himself. Yahweh seems to have accepted the offering of atonement in the end. The ending of the story is not to be overlooked. It is a celebration of the work of Yahweh by the new generation. The memorial is a reminder of this battle and victory.

There is no negative tone at all from the Narrator in this story. Instead, this portrays their realization of Yahweh's Presence in their midst in the battle. This military victory functions significantly as a literary signal, as in all military victories or defeat in the book of Numbers. Here it signals for the new generation, their personal contact with the presence of Yahweh and their obedience to him. The distance of Yahweh vis-a-vis the highlighting of Moses is consistent with the portrayal of the whole relationship of the new generation with Yahweh, that is, through Moses. The Israelite Community is now seen to be wholly submissive to Moses as Yahweh's chosen servant.

4.3.3 Conclusion

Numbers 25 and 31 show the emergence of the second generation as being ready to take over the mantle of their fathers as Yahweh's people. The effects of the radical change of Israel's relationship with the Midianites from one of friendship and co-operation as seen largely in the life of Moses to one of enmity tacitly threatens to undermine the Moses' authority due to his links with them. This threat had to be clarified for the continuity of the legitimacy of the second generation "Israel" which is firmly grounded on the legacy of Moses and all his human connections as a man. In responding in anger to the partial execution of the *ban*, Moses exhibits his faithfulness and obedience to God as God's servant. Moses' initiative in granting a concession to the Israelite men's desire to keep the virgins in their midst indicates that Moses himself was involved in redefining Israel's relationship with the Midianites. While Moses personally reflected God's anger in the face of Israel's partial execution of the ban against the Midianites, reprimanding them for their oversight, he also took the responsibility in granting them their request before prescribing the purification of Israel.

Thus Numbers 31 ends with Yahweh's acceptance of the offerings of gold from the commanders through Moses and Eleazar, showing that Yahweh too approves. This is confirmed by the absence of negative comments from the Narrator. All this shows that Yahweh accepts Moses' concession. This therefore portrays Moses as Yahweh's chosen leader for His people, no longer just as a prophetic *mouthpiece*, an *instrument* albeit human, whose personal involvement is by implication insignificant. Rather, Moses is now portrayed as Yahweh's *Servant-Partner*, a man who has been proven worthy to be *entrusted* with the charge over His whole household, which is *Israel*. Moses is no longer seen as a conduit to facilitate the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. He is now given a personal interest. Like the Patriarch Abraham, Moses is now personally involved.

4.4 The Transjordan Occupation by the Gadites and Reubenites 32 :1 -42

In Numbers 32 :1 the motive for the request by the Gadites and the Reubenites to settle in the Transjordan is attributed to their large herds of cattle and their recognition that the territories conquered by Yahweh in the Transjordan were ideal for the raising of stock. Interestingly, this comes after the notes on the booty which Israel's army received and a percentage of which was the portion offered to Yahweh after the end of the war against the Midianites. The impression is one of increased wealth so that the Community's offering had not impoverished them. Here, in Gad's and Reuben's case, they had large flocks and 'accidentally' found the *land of Jaser and Gilead* attractive for their livestock.

The reference to 'livestock' is repeated first as an exceedingly great possession⁷⁴ and a second time in the assessment of the land as suitable.⁷⁵ The combination of *וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּבְּאוּ*, *They saw... and indeed!..* typically emphasizes the dramatic discovery. This sight of discovery leads to action in 32:2 when *they came...and said*.⁷⁶

The *land* identified specifically by the Gadites and the Reubenites in Numbers 32:4 was supposed to be the land that the Israelites had conquered earlier in Numbers 21:10-35. Numbers 32:4 is revealing in this connection, since they recognised it as "*the land which Yahweh smote*⁷⁷ *before the congregation of Israel, ...*". The conquered *land* was therefore spiritually acceptable since it was conquered by Yahweh and His to give. This means that the Gadites and Reubenites were aware of the implications of their requests upon the whole idea of Land Occupation and their identity as Yahweh's people.

⁷⁴ *עצום מאד* exceedingly large.

⁷⁵ *המקום מקום* .

⁷⁶ *וַיִּבְּאוּ ... וַיִּאמְרוּ* is a combination that heightens the action dramatically. The approach sets the scene, ie. Moses, Eleazer and the elders of Israel. The verb on speaking is significant because it is not a murmuring, but a forceful laying down of a legal case.

⁷⁷ The Targum adds "its inhabitants". The verb is *הִקְדָּה*. This spiritualizes the battle and confers Yahweh's approval of Israel's venture. Yahweh is given the credit. Israel has witnessed a miracle through it.

The basis for their request was that the land was ideal for raising their livestock. Their desire to improve their husbandry conditions is appreciated when set against their hitherto Wilderness environment. Significantly, their request is made in a very subdued tone in 32:5, "If we have found favour in your sight"⁷⁸ reinforced by their self-reference as "your servants". The Hophil of verbal root *give* conveys the whole tone of a humble request being made, in contrast to the possible demand of *give us*. It has been carefully phrased as *please let it* (the land) *be given* combined with *to your servants* exhibits submissiveness. Interestingly Plaut translates לְאַחֲרָיִךְ , as a holding⁷⁹ which affirms the Lordship of Yahweh over the conquered land. More important, it shows that in their request, they were not excluding themselves from being members of Yahweh's Community.

⁷⁸ Note that בְּעֵינֶיךָ is masculine singular, denoting the assembly as a corporate unit but it also focus on Moses as its leader. The whole expression, $\text{אִם־קָצַחְנוּ לְךָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ}$ is typical. Gray (429), for example, notes that it occurs 21 times in JE materials, once in D and none in Pg. The expression is found two other times in Numbers. In Numbers 11:11, a rephrase of the question that Moses searches Yahweh for the situation he has found himself in. Although the *if* is absent, yet the other elements are present. In Numbers 11:15, the exact formula appears, with the verb *found* in first person. Both are addressed to Yahweh and are set in prose prayer.

In Exodus, the formula appears in Moses' intercession in Exodus 33:12, 13(2x), 16, 17 in the exchange between Moses and Yahweh where the latter was persuaded to accompany the Community to the Promised Land. In Exodus 34:9, Moses asks Yahweh for a personal encounter as a sign of special *favour*.

In Exodus 11:3 and 12:36, Yahweh made the Egyptians to look favourably upon the Israelites. Here is the tremendous miracle of Yahweh turning the anger and potential hatred of the Egyptians to *favour* so that in the end the Israelites were showered with gifts on their departure. Here is the repeated picture of a mighty victory, a victor's parade being hinted at upon the account of the Exodus in the two verses. Remarkably this is 'foretold' in Exodus 3:21 as part of Moses' call and commission.

Deuteronomy's sole entry of this expression is in relation to laws for marital breakdown.

It also appears in Genesis 6:8; 18:3. Similarly in Genesis 19:19, where Lot express gratitude to his saviours and at the same time asks for further favour.

Finally in Genesis 30:27, it is expressed by Laban to Jacob as a recognition of Yahweh's blessing on him on account of Jacob. Hence the humility expressed toward Jacob is actually a recognition of the divine favour. (Cf Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 481: 'In the first part he wants only to curry favour with Jacob by means of the standard formula of homage (or request for indulgence, eg., Genesis. 39:21; H.J. Stoebe [BHH I 587-597]: "The person in whose eyes one finds *hen* is always in a superior position"); it is not in place here.'). The point is, it is standard formula of homage, or request for indulgence and often denotes the one who seeks favour from someone considered superior in the eyes of the one sought..

⁷⁹ Numbers: Torah, p.1227.

Basically, the narrative purports to give a positive picture to this request. There is no hint of deviousness of the inquirers in the eyes of the Narrator. The Gadites and the Reubenites did not hope to get extra benefits at the expense of the other tribes. The Narrator's eye in the literary approach is the ultimate judge.

Some commentators fail to seriously take into account the pronounced motive for the request and read a negative message into it. For example: Maarsingh writes, "Now the tribes of Gad and Reuben were in effect saying that God's promise concerning Canaan was *unimportant*, that they would be satisfied with the land of Gilead."⁸⁰

In the same tone, then they ask *not to be brought across the Jordan*. The Hiphil verb, *תעברנו* is composite with the suffix plural, emphasizing the passivity of the inquirers, at the same time the exalted status of Moses.

Moses' reply was set in the interrogative in 32:6, 7. There is dramatic involvement of the audience. "*Shall your brothers (countrymen) go to war while you sit*⁸¹ *here?*" Numbers 14 is echoed. Indeed, one of the restraints that held the Community back from the first entry into the Land was fear for safety of their own women and children.

Moses' first question addresses their fears. "Are you cowards, or merely selfish?" There is no refuting of their claim that Transjordan is habitable, precisely because it has been conquered by Yahweh. Moses seems to accept this. The second question in 32:7 was, "*And Why do you discourage the sons of Israel from going over into the land that Yahweh is giving to them? Your fathers did this when I sent them to spy the Land from Kadesh Barnea.*" It is significant to note that Moses' initial response was against the potential discouragement of the sons of Israel from going over into Canaan rather than that the Transjordan was not to

⁸⁰ Numbers, p.111 (my emphasis). Maarsingh clearly misses the heart of the matter here. The fact is, since Yahweh has conquered the Transjordanian through Israel, it is then Yahweh's to give to His people if He so wishes. To be permitted live in this land, conquered by Yahweh, does not diminish the value of the promised Land *per se*.

⁸¹ This is a literary translation which can also connote safety.

be a part of the land of their inheritance. Yahweh seems to have accepted that the Transjordan formed part of the inheritance of his people by implication. An elaborate answer follows from 32:8-15 recounting how the first attempt at entry failed, wholly due to the 'discouragement' by the spies on the Community.

Moses now sees a potential repeat of the disaster in his statement from 32:12-15. He sternly warns the group, calling them "a breed of sinful men"⁸² who are behaving like their fathers.

The second part of verse 12 warns that the Community still lives under the judgment of Numbers 14. In other words, the continuity of this present generation to the last must not be lost. This is the vital link of Moses' intercession. Moses did not create a wholly new Community. This present Community stems from the last but must be renewed in the sense of a new attitude and heart towards Yahweh.

Moses' criticism turns on the "discouragement" of the Israelites from entering the Land which is equated with the "wholehearted following" of Yahweh. The request of the Gadites and Reubenites posed a potential threat to the Community's taking possession of the Promised Land. This story functions as a parallel in the Community's life to chapter 14 - to enter or not to enter the Land, an issue which confronted each generation.

Surprisingly Moses does not pronounce a definite negative. Instead, he poses the problem of effect to Gad and Reuben in 32:15 with the conditional use of כִּי translated *if*. By this, the narrative steers clear of outright rejection of the proposal as being opposed to Yahweh's plan. Instead, the attention is skewed to the 'effect' of this new proposal. In particular, there is no rejection of the Transjordan as being part of the inheritance of Israel. The perception is that Yahweh had conquered a new land which is suitable for rearing livestock. Here

⁸² Targum: "the disciples of sinful men" (comp. *Biur*). Leeser, "a new race of sinful men"; R.V. "an increase of sinful men". The difference in rendering results from the unique תרבות from the root, רבה, which is used with the expression "be fruitful and multiply".

was a subtle redefinition of the Land boundary. The significance is that this was a request.

Noordtzij points out two striking features about Moses' reply. Firstly, that he failed to inform the Gadites and the Reubenites that the Promised Land was clearly *west* of Jordan. Instead, Moses "is only disturbed by the possibility that the other tribes will be discouraged from entering Canaan, which would result in the Lord's anger against Israel. Moses is therefore forced to give in when Gad and Reuben can show that Moses' fear is groundless."⁸³

Secondly, Moses failed to consult God as he usually does in difficult cases and instead puts himself in direct negotiation with Gad and Reuben. In effect "Moses clearly shows how he *will* be able to grant their request."⁸⁴

From his perception, Noordtzij suggests that Moses has made a mistake here: "I have therefore the strong impression that we are faced here with a weak moment in Moses' life."⁸⁵ This is not borne out by the text as the Narrator does not portray Moses in this incident in a negative light.

The Narrator is silent about whether Moses should have consulted Yahweh first as in the reporting of the incident of the recruiting of Hobab by Moses in Numbers 10:29-32. However in the present context, what is explicit is the Narrator's positive portrayal of the Moses' dialogue.

Moses' near condemnation of the inquirers as a "*brood of sinners*" was severe enough. The subtle difference is that the request did not hark back to Egypt nor was it a rejection of the Land. Rather the requesters acknowledged that Yahweh had conquered the land for His people. Moses' first question was important, "*Should your brothers go to war while you sit/settle here safely?*" The

⁸³ Numbers, p. 279.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 280.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

security of both parties depended on unity to accomplish the original goal of the trek.

The climax and primary focus of Moses' speech can be found in verses 4-15. If the Gadites and the Reubenites did not cross over with the rest of Israel and conquer the Land, they would invariably incur Yahweh's anger upon the Community leading all to their demise. The situation did not merely pose a potential of discouragement upon the Community but Moses pushed the logic further to say that a repeat of the first failure will lead to total destruction.

Gad and Reuben answer in 32:16-19, expressing their commitment to going with the rest of Israel to take the Land. They promised to complete this task before returning to the Transjordan to occupy it as their *inheritance* (נַחֲלָה). They asked to stay and build fortified places for their families and livestock before going.

Moses' reply in 32:20-24 introduces a binding oath upon the Gadites and Reubenites. He calls on them to pledge themselves to the conquest of the Land and only after that were they freed from their obligation to Yahweh and to Israel to return to their own inheritance. This oath is reflected in the repetition, "before Yahweh", in addition to the expression that you will be free from *obligation*.⁸⁶ Numbers 32:23, "If...then", is characteristic of oaths which is positively stated in 32:22. Where a curse is included, it is typical of treaties, not unlike that given by a lord to his vassal. The reply from the Gadites and Reubenites in 32:25 is a pledge to do as Moses directs in response to Moses giving them permission to settle in the Transjordan in 32:24, conditional upon their fighting alongside the rest of Israel to the complete conquest of the promised Land.

Gad and Reuben used the expression "your servant" five times (32:4, 5, 25, 27, 31) in reference to themselves and addressed Moses as "my lord". This

⁸⁶ Budd (*Numbers*, p.344) finds Sturdy's suggestion that this refers to military service may be supported in Deuteronomy 24:5 where other public forms of service is involved.

seems to blur the distinction between Yahweh and Moses. However, Gad's and Reuben's final response to Moses' public commendation of the scheme in 32:31 - "As Yahweh has said to your servants, so will we do", corrects the impression that Moses was acting on his own authority. The phrase יהוה יברך in 32:31 shows that, contrary to Noordtzij's negative assessment, the Community recognised Moses' words to be Yahweh's instructions. They recognised Moses as correctly representing the authority of Yahweh. The Narrator had omitted the usual depiction of Moses' mediation, sometimes in detailed dialogue form and other times in reported summary form. In this final movement, Moses' authority is so completely accepted by Israel that the Narrator did not have to record the usual Moses-Yahweh consultation surrounding the request of the Gadites and the Reubenites. Moses' standing before Israel is clearly raised here.

The public pronouncement of the decision about the Gad and Reuben request is declared in 32:28-29 but the responsibility of overseer is specifically handed over to Joshua and Eleazer. Thus without using the death notice found in chapters 27 and 31, there is a prosaic description of Moses' self-awareness that he is laying down a rule for the future, that is, a legacy. Thus the reference, *to them*, necessarily refers to Joshua and Eleazer, and not to Gad and Reuben. But this does not mean that it was spoken in private. It was a public declaration, most poignantly made at least in the hearing of the two tribes concerned. Their presence is indicated through the declaration immediately following their pledge to do all they had promised to Moses (32:31-32). It is directly made to Yahweh showing the awareness by Gad and Reuben of the dangers their request posed.

The fulfillment record in 32:33-41 is vital in the narrative style of Numbers. "Fulfillment" determines the tone and perspective of the episode assessed as either good or evil. Here, the focus is significant. Moses *gave...* and again in v.40, *he gave* the land to the Gadites and Reubenites. This is in spite of the acknowledged future anticipation charged to Joshua and Eleazer in v.29, that

only after they had fulfilled their pledge that the duo *would give them* the land of Gilead for them to possess.

4.4.1 Summary

In this way, the occupation of the Land is portrayed as a Mosaic legacy. Furthermore, Moses is exalted in almost interchanging positions with Yahweh, not in terms of deification but rather, as the servant of Yahweh entrusted with his household. Consequently Yahweh's gift of the Land is described as Moses' *giving* too.

Thus this episode is dominated by Moses. He takes the initiative or more accurately, the narrative has deliberately focused on the interactions between the Gadites and Reubenites and Moses. This portrayal does not mean that Moses did not consult Yahweh as some commentators like Noordtzijs proposes. It does however mean that Moses had "arrived" as Yahweh's representative. In the eyes of Israel, he is now seen to be so faithfully and accurately representing Yahweh that the Narrator did not need to record his consultation with Yahweh. The people did not question Moses' authority as in the Conflict Movement but accepted what Moses had said to be God's word. The climate of the new Community continues to be portrayed as conciliatory when the Gadites and Reubenites approached Moses with a request and entered into a constructive dialogue with Moses instead of complaining against him. That the provision for cities of refuge in Numbers 35:14 included the Transjordan hints that Yahweh had accepted the concession given by Moses.

The case of the Gadites and the Reubenites do not record Moses' dialogue with Yahweh before the giving of concessions by Moses. There is a deliberate withholding of the portrayal of the consultation between Moses and Yahweh. The Gadites and Reubenites in 32:31 recognised Moses' command in 32:28 as Yahweh's instructions. "As the Lord has spoken to your servants, so we will do."

Mosaic authority and leadership is thus seen to be accepted by the Community so that there is no need to report the dialogue between Yahweh and Moses.

4.5 Concluding Summary:

The Portrait of Moses in the Book of Numbers

Our study of the role of Moses in the critical passages of Numbers in chapters 3 and 4 have shown the figure to highly developed. Far from being stereotyped, Moses emerges as a character in development.

At the Orientation stage of Numbers 1-10, we see a Moses very much in line with the prophetic mediator of Sinai. Little or no details are given about Moses except his faithful mediation of Yahweh's word of instructions for the Community to prepare themselves for the March.

It is when we enter into the Conflict stage in 11:1-20:21 that we are presented with the most detailed portrayal of Moses. Crucially, we are given access to his inner life in Numbers 11:1ff and a highly emotional character in the rest of the block up to 20:21. The portrait that emerges is complex.

On the one hand, we are shown that Moses is *more than a prophet* in Num 11-12. In effect, Moses is Israel's *nursing father*. This is certainly more than the image of him as Israel's prophetic mediator at Sinai. As mediator, Moses was the middleman, whose job is to facilitate between the two Covenant party members, Yahweh and Israel. But with the introduction of Moses' self-perception as Israel's *nursing father*, he in fact, emphasized the depth of personal care, concern and responsibility that being a mediator on the journey has become. For it is during the trek in the desert and the context of food provision, that Moses' complaint to Yahweh of his burden of leadership is expressed. A mediator

facilitates but a foster parent is committed to provide all the needs of those under his care.

Yahweh confirms Moses' *near* Patriarchal status when he distributes the latter's spirit upon the seventy elders seemingly in answer to his complaint.⁸⁷ His unique appointment and relationship with Yahweh and Israel is not allowed to be dissipated when the Narrator declares Moses to be "the humblest man on earth." Yahweh exalts him as his "trustworthy, Servant."

The discussion is further developed in Num 13-14 when Israel rejected the promised Land. That the whole Community decided to choose another leader to take them back to Egypt, expressed the intention to kill Moses and his supporters. Finally to disobey his word of warning to venture to conquer the Land without Yahweh's sanction was a disregard of Moses' words and instructions. Moses' symbiotic relationship with the cultic artifacts of Yahweh's presence has the effect of a deliberate refocussing of the story with Moses in the centre of the controversy.

The long discourse on Moses' intercession in Num 14 whereby Yahweh offered to create a new people from Moses to replace Israel would have made Moses the *father* of Yahweh's chosen people. As it turns out, while the Sinai covenanters were not spared the death sentence, Yahweh graciously transferred his promise to their progeny so that "Israel", the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were allowed to continue their commission as Yahweh's chosen people. At this point, it should be re-called that Moses' Intercession plays the key role in gaining this act of grace and mercy from Yahweh as the latter declares in 14:20, "I forgive, according to your word". It is clear that the text strains with

⁸⁷ It has been pointed out that Numbers does not clearly indicate how the inspiration of the seventy elders solves Moses' problem. However, this may be seen as a *spiritual* presentation so written in view of the narrative context while the related tradition in Exodus 18 gives the *human* and functional description. Certainly the Numbers account assume that the seventy elders went to show their support for Moses subsequently. This reinforces our view that here is a discussion of the developing status and role of Moses in the Community.

Yahweh's desire to make Moses *the head* and Patriarch of His Community be it the descendants of Abraham or not. As a result, they reinforced the notion that rejecting Moses and his word is a major mistake as they suffered defeat at the hands of the Canaanites at the close of Num 14, a humiliation to be known as *Hormah*.

In the follow up story, we find the rebellion led by Korah, with special mention of Dathan and Abiram continues to deal with the leadership image of Moses. Here, the accusations of Korah and that of Dathan and Abiram that Moses had elevated himself above the Community as someone special to Yahweh must be viewed against the background of Num 12. The observation that Korah's accusation is priestly while that of Dathan's and Abiram's is secular is useful.

In response to Korah's challenge, we find Moses further elevates himself by distancing himself away as the direct object of Korah's accusation, which is the priesthood of Aaron. Thus he is seen to be the priest-maker. This is where the focus of the accusation by Dathan and Abiram is set. Moses becomes a *lord* or *prince* over the Community. As such their refusal to obey Moses' summons is a clear rejection of his *lordship* or *rule* over them. In other words, through Dathan and Abiram, we see a struggle of some groups in the Community who refused to accept Moses' *de facto* leadership rule. This would mean that despite the reticence in Num 11-14, Moses had achieved or had been given much authority in the Community.

Perhaps the most surprising thing is that in Num 16-17 is the sharp contrast where instead of the "humble", trusting, Moses we have come to be so used to earlier, here we come face-to-face with a vehement and vengeful Moses. One can feel his rage as demanded that a hideous death be meted out to Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families in order that Yahweh confirm his special appointment as God's servant.

What is striking is that here we see a Moses who does not passively wait for Yahweh to intervene and vindicate him, even though we do have Moses

interceding for Israel when Yahweh expresses his desire to annihilate the people. Yet the violent aggressiveness of the character is a stark contrast to the depiction prior to his exaltation. Perhaps the most stunning act of Moses was his prayer in 16:15, telling Yahweh to ignore the prayers of these accusers. At this point, Moses had brought the quarrel to the very courts of heaven and denied his attackers any hope of redress. In other words, for the first time Moses prayed **against** his accusers. This depiction is therefore totally unexpected of the humble, tolerant and patient man that we have seen thus far.

In addition, when we take into account that at this stage, we are confronted with an *exalted* Moses, called the “humblest man on earth”, the man whom God approves and has entrusted his whole household to—the nursing parent confirmed and authorized by the Parent, we are led to ask the question what happened? Why is there this drastic change of image presented before us? So much affirmation has been given to him that it is amazing why all the members of the Israelite Community did not see him as the Narrator and Yahweh did? On the other hand, does Num 16-17 indicate that the exalted status given to him has finally gone to his head? We cannot help but recall the early incident in Exodus 2 when Moses tried to intervene in the quarrels of two hebrews. One of them had then turned to him and questioned, “Who made you a prince (רֶשֶׁת) and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”⁸⁸ The force of meaning of the first question is found in the question that follows it. The exercise of power and control is over life and death of the subject is in view here. Thus the Hebrew man was querying Moses’ right and authority to decide the matters of his life. Does Moses have that authority over his life in the first place to undergird his right to interfere? In pointing out to Moses that he had committed murder, his accuser had focussed on the fact that Moses had no real authority for his actions. He could not call on his Egyptian status since he is only adopted. Further he

⁸⁸ Exodus 2:14.

renounced his Egyptian status by killing an Egyptian in his intervening to protect a Hebrew slave. Moses' attempt to identify with Hebrews is presented as a failure. This is the same accusation that Dathan and Abiram make of Moses. Accusations of murder and incompetent leadership sandwich the parallel confrontation, "that you must also *act like a prince*⁸⁹ over us?" (Numbers 16:13). However, here, Moses turns to God. His intervention and authority is now commissioned by God who replies on Moses' behalf (cf. 12:6-8).

Inevitably we are attracted to the idea that things have come full circle. The humble fugitive babe that was saved by an Egyptian princess and brought up in the princely environment, albeit a foreigner, was forced to become a fugitive shepherd in the desert. He is then called to be a divine servant. With the sealing of the covenant, he is accorded recognition as the humblest man on earth and trustworthy servant of God. Now his exaltation is seen by some as a self-delusion for him to act like a prince once more. Is he or is he not self-deluded?

This image stays as we move on to the climax of 20:1-21, where Moses sins and is himself excluded from the promised Land. At this point, we can see that the frustratingly meager details afforded to us in the text have provided the opportunity for the reader to reflect upon the contrasting images that precede this outburst in order to make sense of what Moses had done. It is here that we find some clues to understanding Moses' sudden violent anger towards the people despite Yahweh's display of patience and grace in providing water in answer to their request. Did Moses breakdown because of the people's incessant complaints so much so that he could not care less whether it was a genuine cry or a fault-finding one? Certainly there are references in the Old Testament to suggest that it was the Community's fault that Moses sinned. (eg., Deut. 4:21ff. and Psalm 106:32, 33.) They maintain the positive image of Num 11-14, where Moses was

⁸⁹ Gray points out that the Hithp. תִּשְׂתַּרֵּר literally means "to play the prince". cf. G-K. 54e, "to make oneself a prince".

faultless and next to being perfect. But Numbers does not seem to hold this view. It is clear that Moses had to be responsible for his own sin, since the Community is depicted as genuinely in need of water as confirmed by Yahweh and the Narrator in 20:1-13.

In the end, it is a moot point that Numbers is daring in the way it has handled Moses' sin account portrayed in 11:1-20:13. While fully accepting the fixed perception that he was indeed a veritable Servant of God, yet, at the same time, able to explore the very humanity of the man in the face of his sin and exclusion. Thus Numbers presents Moses as a tragic figure who ultimately finds himself unable to realize his life's vocation, to lead Israel into the promised Land.⁹⁰

It is noteworthy that though Moses' sin is climactic personally but also to the book's plot as a whole, yet he is saved from total disqualification and suffers the fate reserved for rebels and agitators. This is attributed to Yahweh's steadfast graciousness to provide the water even as his servant withholds his mediatorship. As we have seen earlier, the provision of water was to confirm Moses' authority to the Community. In the end, Moses' sin has an emphatically personal effect that does not shake in any way or shatter the faith and confidence of the people. The status quo was in the main sustained, by the grace of God. Of course, there was the aftermath effect particularly, the ineffectiveness of Moses' words to the Edomites resulting in Israel having to make a huge detour in their journey and in the process giving rise to yet another complaint situation (Numbers 21). Notwithstanding this, Moses' authority and reputation in the Community did not suffer any diffusion as far as Numbers is concerned.

It is in this mood that we enter the *Resolution* phase of the book and its subsequent *New Orientation* stage. As we have point out in this chapter, it is

⁹⁰ Cf. Barzel, Hillel. "Moses: Tragedy and Sublimity" in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*. eds. K.R.R. Gros Louis, J.S. Ackerman and T.S. Walshaw. Abingdon, Nashville: 1974, pp. 120-140.

striking that in the second half of Numbers, particularly with the emergence of the new generation to take over the mantle to be Yahweh's chosen people, the predominant attitude toward Moses was one of respect and submission. It is clear that as Moses stepped forward in the *New Orientation* stage of the plot to give instructions about occupation and life in the Land, he spoke not merely as a prophetic mediator. The images of Moses projected through his interaction with his inquirers in various situations that include the taking of Midianite virgins (Num. 31), the case of Zelophehad's daughters (Num. 27, 36), even his request for Joshua to succeed him (Num. 27) and the concession made for the settling of the Transjordan (Num. 32), reveals his exalted status as Servant of God, venerated Leader of Israel. They approach him in dialogue with their requests and concerns in contrast to their fathers who murmured and grumbled and accused with confrontation at the foremost of their minds. Here we find a wholly new attitude of the Community towards Moses. They willingly submit themselves to him as their "lord". Even though it may not be a reference to a formal office yet, it all the more so significant that without the institution and wholly dependent on the relationship between them, the new generation Israel willingly recognizes the status of Moses as God's Servant to lead them. In this way, we find that the story of Numbers ends with "Israel" accepting and submitting to Moses, the servant of Yahweh who was entrusted with His whole household.

Thus we can see that the portrait of Moses in Numbers is not a static stereotyped figure. On the contrary, we find Numbers bold and sophisticated in the manner of exploring the figure of Moses between being the Servant of Yahweh *par excellence* and yet the same servant who fell and sinned the prevalent transgression that inflicted most the first generation Israel, that is, to be found לֹא הֵאֱמָן towards Yahweh. The tension achieved by the paradox of the figure is indelible. His relationship as servant-leader for Yahweh and Israel is complex and complicated. We are given glimpses of his personal struggles in his service to both of them.

In terms of office and institution, it is clear that Numbers sees Moses as being *more than a prophet*. He was more than a priest since he was the one who installed Aaron as priest as well as the priestly hierarchy of the Community. Through the eyes of his detractors, he is seen as a self-acclaimed (even tyrannical) prince. On the other hand, the new Israel was to embrace him as their venerable leader, if not "lord" in the princely sense. From God's view, Moses was a man worthy to be His Servant, so trustworthy was he that he could be a Patriarch of His chosen people if not for his humility. It is left to the Narrator to keep Moses human even though he was responsible for including the statement of Moses' superlative humility, as he was also responsible to portray his stubborn willfulness against Yahweh (cf. Numbers 11) and his violent aggression. Finally, perhaps the most intriguing portrait revealed is Moses' self-awareness of his role as Israel *nursing father*. It speaks of both tenderness and commitment on the one hand, and depth of personal struggle with self-inadequacy on the other.

If pressed to give a single description of the portrait of Moses in Numbers, I think the fatherly model of the patriarch is the most pronounced in the book. If this is so, then once again, we see that Numbers manifests a highly distinctive view of Moses that develops the character seen in the book of Exodus from prophetic deliverer and mediator to that of an image of Patriarch and Servant of God.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The Theology of Numbers

We began our study of the literary role of Moses in Numbers by examining the structural problem that commentators have with the book. The structure an interpreter gives the book provides the framework from which he or she understands the theological message.¹ E. E. Carpenter however sees the reverse.² Perhaps it is much better to say that structure and theology have a symbiotic relationship.

5.1.1 The Journey/Pilgrimage Paradigm

Since the narrative of Numbers is set in the context of Israel's journey across the Wilderness to the promised Land of Canaan, it is logical that the pilgrimage paradigm predominates amongst commentators.³

¹ "The manner in which one understands the editorial structure of the book not only affects how one interprets specific passages but also how one interprets the theology of the entire book. Thus, the detection of the proper structure is crucial to the task of properly interpreting the purpose of the book." *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New* Scholars Press, California: 1985, p. 179.

² Cf. p. 563, "The structure of Numbers is subordinated to the requirements of the theological-historical message, with the author's theological concern giving the book its structural continuity." ("Numbers, Book of." *ISBE* Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 561-567).

³ For example E. E. Carpenter's emphasis on travel convinces him that Numbers is meaningful in its contribution to the Pentateuchal story in terms of Israel's journey to occupy the Land: "Numbers is a dynamic book permeated by a sense of movement. ... Because the major concern of the book is to trace the theological significance of the journey of Israel as it moved toward the promised inheritance of Canaan, Israel is pictured on the go, or preparing to go, throughout the various sections of the book. Appropriate events and legal material punctuate the book whenever they are related to: (1) danger of Israel's failure to receive the promises and hence forfeit its place as God's people, or (2) further development of Israel's preparedness to receive the promises. The content of the book is shaped to serve the above goals and purposes. ... The story is not consummated, however, finding its immediate denouement in the book of Deuteronomy and ultimately in Joshua-Judges. The content of Numbers is fully coherent and cogent **only** when its place in the broader theological, historical, and literary context of the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) is recognized." (*Ibid.*, p. 561-62, emphasis mine).

a) Shemaryahu Talmon

As Shemaryahu Talmon has pointed out, the *Desert*, *מדבר*,⁴ is not an idealized nor idolized⁵ concept in the Old Testament. It is consistently seen as hostile, desolate and treacherous rather than being seen as “homely” where warmth and safety abounds. In fact, drawing from the biblical attitude towards Esau and Ishmael, Talmon suggests that the writer of Genesis was far from idealizing the early Israelites who preferred the nomadic life.⁶ So the story of Cain shows, that “Nomadism is a punishment, the wilderness the refuge of the outlaw.”⁷ Thus Talmon concludes, “The desert and the desert period are conceived in the Bible not as intrinsically valuable, but originally and basically as a punishment and a necessary transitory stage in the restoration of Israel to its ideal setting, which is an organized, fully developed society, with a deep appreciation of civilization, settled in the cultivated Land of Israel.”⁸ Thus in his view, the “desert motif” is based on the theme of “disobedience and punishment” in Biblical texts than the idea of the place as the site of Yahweh’s revelation and love for Israel.⁹ Furthermore, Yahweh is seen to be an omnipresent deity, a historical deity, rather than a geographically circumscribed deity, whose home was fixed in the desert mountains.¹⁰ The book of Hosea shows that the “desert motif” is a fusion of two earlier motifs of “trek motif”

⁴ Shemaryahu Talmon, ‘The “Desert Motif” in the Bible and in Qumran Literature’, in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*. ed. Alexander Altman. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts: 1966, pp. 31-63. Talmon categorizes the term to denote two main classes of meaning: 1) spatial-geographical; 2) temporal-historical. Under the Spatial-geographical connotation, he further subdivides the term in (a) the agriculturally unexploited foothills of southern Palestine; (b) the borderland between cultivated land and desert; (c) the true desert. It is in the “wilderness” that outlaws and fugitives take refuge. In the Temporal-historical connotation, two main themes emerge: (a) the Sinai theophany; and (b) Yahweh’s Providential care.

⁵ As R. de Vaux puts it, “Nowhere in the Bible are we given a perfect picture of tribal life on the full scale.” (*Ancient Israel*, p. 12). In his assessment, “our oldest Biblical texts show little admiration for nomadic life...that nomadism itself is not the ideal.” (*Ibid.*, p. 14).

⁶ “Nomadism is conceived of as a regression from a higher state of society, not as a desirable goal toward which to progress.” *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

and "love motif". It is the latter motif that depicts God's steadfast love for Israel in spite of their unfaithfulness. This love had originally been revealed in the setting of the 'desert trek,' where it was coupled with the 'expurgatory transition' motif. The same elements can be observed in Jeremiah. Jeremiah 2:2 describes in tender words, the love affair that Israel had with Yahweh in the desert.

In Talmon's view this positive views of the desert by the prophets may contrast sharply with that of the Pentateuch, but is only "a literary variation rather than as a case of a deliberate reassessment of history".¹¹ He further suggests that in post-Exilic writings, the purification element, the original *rite de passage*, of the desert motif has been subsumed by the "divine benevolence" theme. Hence Deutero-Isaiah looks to a new Exodus and a new settlement in Canaan.¹² The desert is but "a mere transition stage".¹³ Ezekiel, for his part, looks for the coming of "a revitalized and purified monarchical regime, based on a 'new covenant'"¹⁴ Finally for the Qumran sect, the desert "became the locale of a period of purification and preparation for the achievement of a new goal."¹⁵ Hence, Talmon points out that the Hebrew Bible does not see the desert as a "home" to be longed for, rather it is a place of purification and preparation.

b) Robert Cohn

This view is further explored by Robert Cohn¹⁶ using the socio-anthropological model from Victor Turner's study of socio-religious rites of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹² Cf. Isa 43:16-19; cpr. Jer. 16:14ff.; 23:7ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁶ Chapter two, "Liminality in the Wilderness", in *The Shape of Sacred Space*. Scholars Press, California: 1981. Basically, there are three stages in these rites: 1) separation, where the subject is isolated from his community structure; 2) transition, or *limen*; 3) re-incorporation, where subject re-enters community with his new role. Cohn applies them to the Israel's wilderness experience thus: 1) separation, the exodus from Egypt; 2) *limen* stage, the forty years wandering; 3) re-incorporation, conquest and settlement of Canaan. From this Cohn draws out three liminal elements: a) an ambiguous setting, where divine protection and favour is juxtaposed with the

transitions. he too observes that "The Pentateuchal vision of the wilderness period is not one of nostalgia for a liminal time to be recaptured but one of hope for its termination. ...Although the wilderness period historically may have been the time when liberation from Egypt gave rise to creative communitas and covenant, it is remembered as the time of disorder which the law redeemed."¹⁷ Thus "By rooting the law in Israel's beginnings in the wilderness, the authors claim that the structured society is the ideal."¹⁸

From the above examples, the theological interpretations of the Wilderness, and of Numbers tend to concentrate on the Journey paradigm, often called pilgrimage, in terms of Testing, Purification, Promise/Hope and the Faithful providence of Yahweh. J. de Vaulx, for example, interprets Numbers as spiritual journey based on the structural pattern of the geographical notices of the book. To him, the desert sojourn charts the progress and growth of Israel's faith relationship with God. It was a place where Israel came to be wholly converted to Yahweh. However the problem with this is that it is too programmed. It is often forgotten that Israel made the desert trek not for religious purification as Robert Cohn and S. Talmon would have us believe. The journey was necessary as they sought to claim the Land as promised by Yahweh. The Land was necessary for Israel to be a nation as opposed to being a Community.

5.1.2 The Succession Theme

D.T. Olson¹⁹ has drawn attention to the structure of Numbers as being based on the two census lists, which overrides the journey structure.²⁰ In his

community's incessant 'murmurings'; b) trial, where obedience and humility are taught as necessary for survival as God's people; c) covenant ethic, where the definitive shape of the new community is given. Cohn notes that his model needs qualifications.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New*. Scholars Press, California: 1985.

²⁰ Olson notes that although Giuseppe Bernini in his commentary, *Il Libro dei Numeri*. (Marietti, Rome: 1972) had pointed out the vital role the two census lists plays in the structure of

reading, "Numbers presents a radical and decisive distinction between the old rebellious generation of death and the new generation of hope. God condemns the old to death in the desert but gives birth to a new generation whom he leads again to the doorstep of the promised land. ... the focus is on the activity of God who, though intolerant of rebellion, remains faithful to his promise."²¹ The contrast is made between the two generations, the first was a generation of despair and death, while the second represents a generation of hope and life. The message of hope is highlighted by the fact that "At the end of Numbers, the new generation has returned to the edge of the promised land but it too has gone no further (Num 36:13). Its ultimate destiny remains in question."²² Olson stresses that it is this new generation that functions as a paradigm for the successive generation of God's people. "God calls a new generation of his people into being and actualizes for them the warnings and promises of the past."²³

Olson's Succession motif is a valid one. However, his suggestion that this takes primacy over the Journey motif depends on the hypothesis that the census framework subsumed the itinerary notices. This is open to question. From our study of Number's plot, it is clear that both the Journey and Succession motifs complement each other in the narrative.

5.1.3 The Survival Theme

There is a third dominant element that has yet to be taken into account by commentators. This is the role the Moses figure plays in the book. Even with the current interest in Narrative Theology, there is a tendency to overlook the contribution a central human character plays in biblical narratives. Theological

Numbers, yet the latter fails to see the theological significance of this because he was committed to the tripartite tradition-historical thematic division of the book in terms of Num 1:1-10:10, 10:11-25:18, and 25:19-36:13. For Bernini this separation only allowed him to understand the book as comprised of three separate theological message.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.180.

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

messages often focus on God and Israel as paradigms. But what of the individual character, like Moses?

Critics agree that stories are theologically meaningful.²⁴ According to Scholes and Kellogg, characters in a narrative are the “primary vehicles for

²⁴ For example, John Navone in his book, *Towards a Theology of Story* (St. Paul Publications, Slough, England: 1977, p. 18) declares, “Without stories there is no knowledge of the world, of ourselves, of others, and of God. Our narrative consciousness is our power for comprehending ourselves in our coherence with the world and other selves; it expresses our existential reality as storytelling and storylistening animals, acting and reacting within our particular world context, overcoming the incoherence of the unexamined life. One man’s story is another man’s point of departure. We live on stories; we shape our lives through stories,... Every story is a story of faith if we imagine faith as the most primary and elemental force in human nature, a force which precedes what we ordinarily call knowledge and all the forms of specific knowledge.”

In *A Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative*. (The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania: 1988), Wesley Kort, for the very fundamental status, nature and function of Narrative, stating thus, “A person’s or people’s ongoing life rests on a structure of beliefs that narratives articulate, beliefs concerning the possibilities or conditions of life, the moral and spiritual constitution of human nature, the processes in which both individuals and societies are involved, and the relationships as well as the values by which a person or a people live. ...Narratives are, consequently, indispensable because they arise from or address the belief structure of an individual or community’s life, and, conversely, that structure of coherence has narrative potential, even, perhaps, an incipient narrative form.” (*Ibid.*, p. 21). But the definitive statement is made by Stephen Crites who argues that “the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative.” [“The Narrative Quality of Experience”, *JAAR* 39 (1971) 291-311, esp. 291].

According to Michael Goldberg, “...the primary claim of a ‘narrative theologian’ is that in order to justifiably elucidate, examine, and transform those deeply held religious beliefs that make a community what it is, one must necessarily show regard for and give heed to those linguistic structures which, through their portrayal of the contingent interaction between persons and events, constitute the source and ground of such beliefs. In short, the fundamental contention is that an adequate theology must attend to narrative. ...It is not, for instance, the assertion that the systematic theological task must itself be done in story form, as though discursive reasoning and expository writing were now to be abandoned. Rather, it is the claim that a theologian, regardless of the propositional statements he or she may have to make about a community’s convictions, must consciously and continuously strive to keep those statements in intimate contact with the narratives which gave rise to those convictions, within which they gain their sense and meaning, and from which they have been abstracted.” (*Theology and Narrative*. Abingdon, Nashville: 1982, p. 35). In other words, narratives should not be used as merely the raw material for theological abstractions, to be discarded once the latter activity has been done. Rather, “They are stories intended to be truthful accounts of ‘the activity of a self in time’—God. ...in depicting the story of God and man, the religious narratives also claim to have something to say about the story of the one who hears or reads them. They claim to have something to say *about* and *for* the truth of his existence as well. For this reason, ...although propositional theology may abstract from and reflect on the ‘data’ provided by life stories in order to gain greater clarity or precision, propositional theology cannot become a substitute for such stories nor can it afford to ignore them altogether.” (*Ibid.*, p. 64).

meaning.”²⁵ In fact, the attraction of a narrative is in the identifiability and accessibility of the characters to the reader: “By awakening complex correspondences between the psyches of character and reader, such characterization provides a rich and intense “experience” for the reader — an experience which may not only move him but also exercise his perception and sensibility, ultimately assisting him to perceive and comprehend the world of reality more sharply and more sensitively than he otherwise might.”²⁶

The importance of character is further argued for by James McClendon in his book *Biography as Theology*,²⁷ where he tries to introduce the term “theology of character” or “ethics of character-in-Community”²⁸ since “Christianity turns upon the character of Christ. But that character must continually find fresh exemplars if it is not to be consigned to the realm of mere antiquarian lore.”²⁹ For McClendon, “the best way to understand theology is to see it, not as the study about God (for there are godless theologies as well as godly ones), but as the investigation of the convictions of a convictional Community, discovering its convictions, interpreting them, criticizing them in the light of all that we can know, and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible. ... Theologians, then, are concerned with convictions, not merely in themselves, but in relation to the persons and communities which embrace these convictions, and they are interested in what those convictions are about.”³⁰

²⁵ Robert Scholes & R. Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966. “Objects and actions can also have illustrative or representative significance and can be presented symbolically or mimetically or in both fashions. But objects cannot act without becoming characters in a sense, and without character there can be no action.” (p. 104).

It should be noted that Wesley Kort has rejected this emphasis on character and meaning, performing a fourfold elemental matrix of character, plot, tone and atmosphere that works together to give meaning in a narrative. The important thing is that Kort does not deny the vitality of characterization but only disagree on extent of role.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁷ Abingdon, Nashville: 1974.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

The centrality of Moses in Numbers cannot be passed over so lightly as von Rad had done in his monograph on the grounds that the texts are focussed on glorifying God alone. The prominence of Moses in the narrative of Numbers is not the result of its use as a “secondary bracketing device” as Noth suggested. If we accept von Rad’s suggestion, there will be no interaction of characters. Then God’s story will not take the form as it does. In Numbers, Moses is presented as one of the three principal actors of the book. The narrative focuses on the interactions and implications God, Israel and Moses had together. Of the three, Moses is the most accessible and identifiable for the reader, so that he or she can participate in the story to make it “*my story*”. The Israelite Community is too general and being a group reference, gives room for the reader to distance himself or herself. This does not mean that the Community “figure” lack paradigmatic value but since it is easier to enter into and identify with a character, Moses easily serves as the readers’ entry into the story of Numbers than the ‘figure’ of Israel. Thus even von Rad testifies to the irresistible attraction of Moses “here is the true and genuine figure of a man, a figure that has power to move us by its very humanity.”³¹ The question, then, is what contributions, if any, does Moses makes to the theology of Numbers?

5.2 The Literary Significance of Moses to the Theology of Numbers

Many commentators are quick to point out that the contribution of Moses in Number’s theology is that of Yahweh’s providential grace and unrelenting steadfastness. This is particularly so with regard to Num 14. Walter Riggans, for example, lists four lessons to be drawn from Numbers about God: *God is always close and caring; God will always discipline; God's purpose will always prevail; God's love, discipline and purpose are always holy.*³² He then concludes, “It can

³¹ *Moses*, p. 8.

³² Walter Riggans, *Numbers*. pp. 2-3.

be safely said that the experience and lessons of Israel in her pilgrimage in the book of Numbers parallel those of all the Lord's people everywhere and in every age as they make their pilgrimage to God's own heart."³³

R.K. Harrison in his recent commentary sums up Numbers theology as "a study in the contrast between God's faithfulness and human disobedience. The subject of divine fidelity naturally involves a consideration of His attributes, which were revealed to Moses in a consummate example of propositional revelation."³⁴ Given this propositional agenda, it is not surprising that Harrison does not have much to offer except a Christian theology reading off the book of Numbers.

This study has attempted to show that the figure of Moses has a significant literary and theological impact on the Journey / Pilgrimage, and Succession themes of Numbers. In particular, the prevailing presence of Moses' Exaltation motif in these themes provides the distinctive theological message of Numbers as a literary unit. This can be stated thus: Numbers is about the *survival* and *emergence* of "Israel"—*the Sinai Community of Yahweh*—through the Desert Crossing to be, "Israel"—*the Mosaic Community of Yahweh*.

The word "survival" aptly describes the central message of the book since Israel suffered and survived a succession of conflicts that often centred around the question of Mosaic authority and its legitimacy. These conflicts consistently point direct accusations at Moses for his incompetence and ineffectiveness. Often it is Moses, Yahweh and the Narrator who inform the reader that these accusations were actually rejections of Yahweh, which the Israelites constantly failed to see. As a result a gap persists between the two perspectives: Israel, on the one side and Moses, the Narrator and Yahweh on the other. Israel persisted in their perception that their quarrels with Moses were not necessarily having quarrels with Yahweh!

³³ *Ibid.* p. 3.

³⁴ *Numbers*. WEC series Moody Press, Chicago: 1990, p. 25.

In other words, the problem the Israelites had was with Moses and his brand of Yahwism.

The case of the golden calf reflects this. The ease with which Aaron designate the calves as the "gods" who led Israel out of Egypt reflects that Israel's problem is not one of unbelief in Yahweh but which cultic faith represents Yahweh for them. This problem is not new. The god of the patriarchs is known with a variety of names though as a single entity. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew God as El- Shaddai, etc..., all having different names and personal meanings to each.

Further, in Exodus 6, God reveals himself as Yahweh for the first time, not that it is the first time that God revealed himself to people. Such a background really means that the Pentateuchal world is rather fluid and ambiguous. Gods have a variety of names and from the human perspective the search is for the most powerful and therefore approved mediator.

Hence through the conflicts in Numbers 11-25, the controlling thought is the survival of "Israel" as Yahweh's chosen people. The word "Survival" suitably sums up the struggle which the Sinai Community had with the leadership of Moses during the desert trek. It describes the near catastrophe when the Sinai Community was disqualified from entering the promised Land of God. It effectively meant the termination of the Sinai covenant. However, Moses' intervention led to Yahweh's promise to transfer the Land-promise to the offsprings of the Community even as the original covenantors were condemned to die outside it. In this way, God answered Moses' intercession and preserved the covenant with Israel as "His people".

The literary role of Moses in Numbers thus shapes the theological message of Numbers and cannot be ignored. This study has shown that the exaltation of Moses is one of the principal motifs in Numbers. In the assessment of the image of Moses in the Old Testament, two views are held in tension, his heroism and the apparent restraint imposed in the accounts in order to keep God in the central focus of the text.

5.2.1 Jeremy Silver

Recently, Jeremy Silver proposed that Moses was portrayed as a “diminished hero” in the Pentateuch.³⁵ He asserts that the historical Moses cannot be denied. In fact in his view, Moses was a man of such stature as Mao Zedong of Modern China who led the historic Long March.³⁶ The Moses figure cannot be pure invention. If so, the Israelite/Judaean kings would have claimed dependency upon it in order to bolster their own legitimacy just as the Davidic dynasty had done with their claims to a unique monarchical covenant with Yahweh through David.³⁷ Further Moses has not been *idealized*, since numerous opportunities for heroic embellishment in the Torah has been by-passed and deliberately underplayed by the tradents. For example, there are no heroic battles conducted by Moses; no ivory throne nor special robes; no private bodyguards; no promulgation of laws but only the recording of the dictates of God; no mausoleum for Moses (cf. Deut 34:6 - he simply disappears); no choice over his successor (cf.. Num 27:15-17). In fact, his children is largely passed over save a brief mention in Judges 18:30, about Gershon. Of his early years, outside of Exodus, no biographical material of Moses exist. He even commits murder. Finally even his name “Moses” is not a Hebrew derivative but a transliteration of the formal Egyptian name meaning *son of or born of as* in the name *Thutmose*, a combination of *Thoth* and *Ramses*, literally, son of Ra. Thus the biographical materials in the Torah in effect presents “a hero without a

³⁵ Jeremy D. Silver, *Images of Moses*. New York: Basic Books, 1982; “The Moses Narratives”, *Journal of Reform Judaism* Spring (1982) 23-34.

³⁶ “I believe there was a Moses, that he played a central role in the life of the tribes who escaped from Egypt, and that his major achievement was not so much getting them out but the far more difficult task of welding a disparate group of tribes, a motley riff-raff by the Torah’s own account, into a community over the course of a long, punishing wilderness trek—one that, symbolically and in the event remarkably, resembles Mao Zedung’s Long March.” (*Images of Moses*, p. 16).

³⁷ Cf. the widely accepted source-critical study by Leonard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, (Sheffield, 1982), that identified the “Succession Narrative” materials in the books of Samuel and Kings. This is followed by R. N. Whybray’s *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kings 1 and 2* (London, 1968). See also David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (Sheffield, 1978) for a more recent treatment.

proper name or definable physical characteristics".³⁸ On the other hand, the Torah specifically calls Moses, *ish-elohim*, God's man (cf. Deut 34:5), which reveals the intended model of its depiction of the figure.

Silver points out that the above shows that the editors of the Torah have deliberately phrased the narratives in such a way as to minimalise Moses' responsibility for all that had happened to Israel while he was Israel's acknowledged leader.³⁹ The consistent picture of Moses presented is as God's agent and not hero at all. This is primarily tied to the intended use of the Torah in the first place, which is to evoke God's redemptive powers through its recitation by Israel.⁴⁰ Silver argues that the Torah is essentially not about history but of "messianic" application. He also observes that, "Given the Torah's underlying purpose, to summon God's redemptive powers, it is not surprising that the Moses who appears on its pages is someone who is a diminished measure of the actual historical figure."⁴¹ For this reason Silver has entitled his chapter on the portrait of Moses in the Pentateuch as "The Diminished Hero".

Silver's portrait of Moses is only a variation of Gerhard von Rad's portrait. Both share the view that God is the principal focus and actor in the Pentateuch. Moses is but a supporting cast. This assessment of Moses as a secondary actor to God is not a new thought. A. M. Vater and Schnutenhaus have earlier proposed that Moses is portrayed as "God's messenger"⁴² and "puppet"⁴³ respectively.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹ According to Silver, "Successive editors seem to have struggled against Moses' reputation rather than to have elaborated it." (*Ibid.*, p. 17) and later, "The Torah editors took every possible precaution to drive home the point that power and authority belong to God and that the community must be conscious always that Moses is *simply God's agent*. God is the Master." (*Ibid.*, p. 21, my italics)

⁴⁰ "The consistent presentation of Moses as agent, not hero, reflects one of the significant but often overlooked formal aspects of the torah literature, its intended use as a recital evoking God's redemptive power." (*Ibid.*, p. 28).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴² A.M. Vater, 'The Communication of Messages and Oracles as a Narration Medium in the Old Testament' New Haven: Unpublished dissertation, 1976); "Narrative Patterns for the Story of Commissioned Communication in the Old Testament", *JBL* 99 (1980) 365-382. Vater points to

Where these literary assessments of Moses have gone awry is their concentration on the Pentateuch's focus on God and Moses' relationship to Him. There is no denying that Moses' portrayal is intimately linked to his service to God, be it as *ish elohim*, or God's *mouth-piece*, the emphasis being Moses' role as God's agent. It is clear that the Torah, and for that matter, the Hebrew Bible as a whole seeks to glorify God and is not a book about heroic endeavours of the Israelite believers. But it is all the more significant then that in the portrayal of Moses, far from minimalizing him, we find that at critical points of the narrative, Moses is given substantial room to develop as a human actor in the stories, giving the impression that he is not merely God's agent but a partner with God. This is clearly demonstrated by the exaltation of Moses motif in both Exodus and Numbers.

The *exaltation* of Moses in the book of Exodus has been examined by Thomas W. Mann⁴⁴ and Heinrich Gross.⁴⁵ The two studies have effectively shown that the *belief* motif is a major thread that runs through Exodus. It is highly significant that God's presence in the Israelite Community has integrally tied Israel's acceptance of Moses' divine commission as deliverer and covenant-mediator. It is unmistakable that the stories of Exodus 1-15 and 19-24 are explicitly drawn to win Israel's trust and acceptance of Moses as Yahweh's chosen servant for Israel.

the picture that Moses functions mainly as Yahweh's "mouth-piece", an instrument whose significance is wholly dependent and subjugated to God.

⁴³ F. Schnutenhaus, "Die Entstehung der Mosestraditionen" (Heidelberg: Unpublished dissertation, 1958), points to the relationship of God and Moses like that of a Puppet-master and his puppet, much as a ventriloquist to his dummy to describe God's partnership with Moses.

⁴⁴ T.W. Mann, *Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation*. Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press: 1977, esp. pp. 120-175. Mann sees the exaltation a major thread running through Exod 1-20, focusing primarily on Moses and Yahweh, proposing that this is the most appropriate context to understanding Moses' birth narrative.

⁴⁵ "Der Glaube an Mose nach Exodus (4.14.19)", in *Wort-Gebor-Glaube*. Ed. J. J. Stamm, et. al. Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970, pp. 57-65.

For example, Mann points out that "a primary purpose of the Sinai theophany in Exodus 19 (20.18-21) is the legitimation of Moses as the leader of the people and the recognition of Yahweh as their sovereign. The motifs of divine presence play a major role in this dual exaltation, and present a balanced emphasis on both visual and auditory aspects".⁴⁶

More important, in the portrayal of Moses' role in the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 32-34, we find Moses coming to the fore, not only in interceding for Israel's life but also in asking for *the* most intimate relationship a man has ever asked of God. The point is not that God agreed, but on the literary level, Moses did this out of his personal desire and for himself. This is a far cry from those who would suggest that the portrait of Moses in the Pentateuch is minimalistic. Not only does Moses show himself to be intelligent and capable in *reasoning* with God in Exodus 32,⁴⁷ but he is brave in pushing his close relationship with God to the very extreme of face-to-face contact. This is the personal element that the Pentateuch wants its readers to know about Moses. Not that he was an agent or ambassador of God but *the* servant of God because he was given access to God that no man has ever enjoyed by knowing God as "Yahweh" and being given a face-to-face meeting with God.

On the other hand, G.W. Coats has recently pointed to the existence of a heroic tradition that had been knitted with traditions focussed on God's mighty works to produce the Pentateuch. Dozeman has adopted Coat's category in his exposition of Moses as God's heroic servant in his study of Exodus 32-34.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138. Mann sees an irony of Moses' call being introduced in view of Exodus 2:14. "It is clear that with Exodus 19... the cloud does not go in front of the people on the march, but comes down so that Yahweh may speak with Moses. This other function of the cloud—divine communication and the legitimation of Moses—is central to Exod 33.7-11 and Num 11-12...." *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ See Thomas B. Dozeman, "Moses: Divine Servant and Israelite Hero (Exo. 32)" in *HAR* 8 (1984) 45-61; and R. W. L. Moberly, *At The Mountain of God*. JSOTSupp. 22, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983.

Dozeman demonstrated that it is by his bold self-sacrificial intercession that persuaded Yahweh to change his mind from annihilating Israel.

From the above we can see that the two contrasting portraits of Moses show the differing weight given to various aspects of the figure's portrayal. There is no denial that the materials present are far from biographical. Neither do they present a consistent picture of a heroic portrait. But at the same time sufficient dynamics are built into the stories concerning Moses that one cannot see him as merely a "puppet" or "agent" of God. Substantially, he is presented as God's servant and agent. But not in a robotic sense.

Clearly Moses is portrayed as a figure to be *venerated* though not to be hero-worshipped. He is seen to be exalted by Yahweh and even by his Egyptian enemies because of his integrity and faithfulness to God (Numbers 12:3), than because of his warring prowess or rulership. To this end, Moses can be said to be heroic since he walks with the fearsome Almighty God. The stress in the Pentateuch is Moses' representation of God being brought as close as possible to be the bosom friend and servant of Yahweh.⁴⁸

To this extent, Moses may be said to be "a model of fidelity"⁴⁹ but he is no paragon of virtue since even he commits a sin so serious that he is himself disqualified from fulfilling his divine commission to lead Israel into the promised Land. In fact, the Pentateuch seeks to uphold Moses as a person so *unique*, that no one can be like him.⁵⁰ He is separated from his own contemporaries and has no

⁴⁸ It is useful to note the contrast made by Jeremy Silver on the Biblical portrayal of David and Moses to show how different the two are.

⁴⁹ Dean McBride Jr., "Transcendent Authority: The Role of Moses in Old Testament Traditions", *Interpretations* 94 (1990) 229-239.

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 34:10-12 notes that no one like Moses has arisen yet, even though it is pointed out that successive legitimate prophets were to be like him (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15,18). It is possible to harmonise the apparent contradiction between the two passages in Deuteronomy for the word "like" to not to mean an attempt to duplicate him but to mediate God's dynamic word as Moses had done.

successors, that includes his children.⁵¹ No one succeeds him, not even Joshua, whose office is clearly different from Moses as he does not mediate God's words and guidance to Israel. Instead he is to do what God had already commanded Israel through Moses. Thus he is told to meditate on revelation of God through Moses to obey and implement them without any deviation whatsoever. Hence there is a Mosaic office (cf. Childs) instituted to carry on his work like that of Apostolic Succession. Consequently we see Moses as the person who institutes religious and civil hierarchies and offices in the desert that become the infra-structure of Israel's development into a full-fledged nation.

Thus the Moses figure stands at the pinnacle of Israelite Community as a man exalted above all his peers and the socio-religious hierarchies of "Israel". This is because he was perceived by the Pentateuch to have been set apart by God in a unique partnership with Him in the birth of "Israel", God's Covenant Community.

In Numbers, Moses was portrayed as a man who possessed the stature of Israel's Patriarchs. He was portrayed as Israel's "nursing father", indispensable to the survival of Israel in the desert and in their emergence as God's Chosen People. As such, Moses was portrayed as a man whom God exalted above his peers, forever esteemed by future generations alongside the Patriarchs of Israel.

5.2.2 "Israel" as the Mosaic Community

We have seen that the motif of Moses' exaltation is prevalent in the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. What then is the purpose of this depiction? The answer lies in the Pentateuch's desire to emphasize that "Israel" is first and foremost a Mosaic Community. Note that in Exodus 32-34, the renewed covenant is made with Moses. In Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell speech reflects his standing as *pater familias* of Israel. The whole depiction of Moses is geared

⁵¹ Except for the mention of *Gershom* in Judges 18:30 cpr. 1Chronicles 23:15, his sons do not feature significantly at all in the texts.

towards showing that Moses played a decisive role in the making of the nation during its birth and infancy.

Because

a) Yahweh = God of Israel's Patriarchs

b) Yahweh called and commissioned Moses to rescue them from Egyptian bondage;

c) Moses played the key role in the formal institution of the people as "Israel" the chosen people of Yahweh at Sinai Covenant ceremony:

i) first, Israel chose Moses to be their representative;

ii) second, Yahweh renews His Covenant with Israel adding a special relationship with Moses

iii) third, Yahweh makes the covenant with Moses recognising and confirming his status.⁵²

5.3 Conclusion

Why is the Pentateuch so emphatic of Moses' central role? Because the traditions want to show that the true religion inherited by Israel is that which originated from their patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and was mediated through Moses. For this continuity to be established it necessitated a spiritual linkage of the patriarchs to a man of the same stature. Moses, the servant of Yahweh was the man who bridged the patriarchs of Israel. He was thus portrayed as the exalted Servant of a standing of a nursing father who because of his special relationship with God successfully mediates between Israel and Yahweh and successfully averted the wrath of God and procured the survival of the the future generations of Israel as Yahweh's chosen people.

⁵² At this point it must be noted that Moses' as representative of Israel and mediator of Yahweh is given a third perspective, Moses' own self-awareness to desire a personal intimacy with God. Such relationships are hinted at in the lives of the patriarchs of Abraham and Jacob (who wrestled with God's angel at the river Jabbok).

In her study of Numbers 14, Katherine Sakenfeld⁵³ points out that the key to Moses appeal for Yahweh to 'forgive' lies in Yahweh's רָצַח which Moses had gained from the intimate self-revelation in Sinai at the wake of the remaking of the covenant (cf. Exodus 34).

Sakenfeld argues that רָצַח, '...in a human context refers most often to a concrete action, one taken on behalf of another person with whom one is in relationship. The action is done in a spirit of faithfulness to the other person....[and] never refers to a special, "extra" material blessing. ...In every respect the recipient is the situational inferior of the actor, and this leads to the important observation that the actor is always completely free (humanly speaking) in his decision whether or not to fulfill the recipient's need.'⁵⁴ She also notes that there is no text to indicate forgiveness with רָצַח in the human realm.

"...Since Yahweh alone is bringing smiting and disinheritance, he alone can set the punishment aside, give deliverance, grant forgiveness. Yahweh alone is in control and he is free to act or not to act. Moses' intercession is not a mechanical device by which God can be forced to respond favorably."⁵⁵ Therefore, 'It is essential to recognize that the real content of God's forgiveness here is in the non-destruction of the people, in the very continuation of his relationship to the Community as his Community, in the decision not to create a new nation of Moses or of anyone else and not to disinherit⁵⁶ the presently constituted Community of

⁵³ K. D. Sakenfeld, "The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14," *CBQ* 37 (1975) 317-30. See also Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh's Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* 108 (1989) 207-223. F. I. Anderson's treatment in "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God", in *God Who is Rich in Mercy. Essay presented to D.B. Knox.* (Eds. P. T. O'Brien & D. G. Peterson, Lancer Books, Australia, NSW: 1986, pp. 41-88), where he argues for an attributive nuance in the revelation of his רָצַח and not merely the relational.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323-24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁵⁶ Phyllis Bird in her dissertation, *YRS and the Deuteronomic Theology of the Conquest* (unpub. Th.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1971) 283, argues that the vb שָׁרַח has to do with succession to property = land promise is at stake. Hiphil, = "dispossess" ie. "annihilate, destroy", but the basic idea is that of taking over the property of the dispossessed.

God. Yahweh's willingness to maintain the covenant relationship is based solely in his great *hesed*, just as it has been from the time of the initiation of the relationship with the people in the Exodus. Thus in appealing to God's *hesed*, Moses both appeals to God's faithfulness to his people and in the same word recognizes Yahweh's sovereign, complete freedom to maintain or to break off his relationship with the people, as he chooses. ... Israel either exists in relationship to God or does not exist at all. But within the framework of continued existence, understood as forgiveness based in *hesed*, there is still room for punishment, for carrying out forward God's justice in response to the Community which "despised" him. ... This judgment cannot be rescinded even in the face of the people's eventual repentance. Yet the punishment does not mean that forgiveness has not already occurred, even before the people's repentance, nor that forgiveness understood as preservation of the Community's relationship to God is any less real.⁵⁷

However, in her footnote 22, Sakenfeld discusses the issue of the granting of forgiveness apart from repentance in the context of Moses' mediatorial role seen in Exodus 32:11-14, 30-34; 234:9-10 and Deuteronomy 9:6,19. She observes that,

"The tradition of effective intercession perhaps emerged in part as a way of enhancing the role of the covenant mediator. But it also provides a unique context for emphasizing God's freedom and his graciousness to his people. He maintains or breaks off the covenant relationship of his own free will; he is not cornered or coerced by the prayers of the mediator; further, he is not even coerced by the attitude of the people toward him, whether repentant or not. The maintenance of the covenant is based on his *hesed* alone; ..."⁵⁸

This is really straining her interpretation over the text. By it, she tries to have a God totally free both from his covenant pledge and from his personally commissioned

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

servant. If God freely chooses, the question is how can man 'reason' with him? What is the nature of intercessory prayer? What is the nature of Divine free will in the light of concession made to human intercessions? Sakenfeld concludes, "Here in Numbers 14 God freely chooses to maintain the relationship and this choice is the content of his forgiveness." This reflects Sakenfeld's precarious balance between grace and judgment.

The point of the story is that in the face of Moses' seeming rejection of His offer to make a new Community, God has decided to fulfill Moses' vision. Indeed, just as Israel's existence is wholly dependent on God, it is also intended that the Community be wholly dependent on Moses! For God had chosen him to be his exclusive mediator to "Israel" as His Covenant people. Thus, the Israelite Community that emerges at the end of Numbers is definitively portrayed as the *Mosaic Community* to whom Yahweh is steadfastly faithful.

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