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THE DESERT IN BIBLICAL RELIGION

by

Frederick E. Greenspahn

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

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DIGEST

This thesis attempts to resolve the role which the desert played in Biblical thought and religion, suggesting certain indications of its historical role in the process.

The first chapter treats the desert as a geo-physical phenomenon, examining the Bible's desert terminology as well as its context and use, which is elucidated by comparison with other ancient views. It is concluded that Israel saw the desert as threatening and equated it with death and destruction, chaos and punishment.

The second chapter delimits Israel's desert sojourn which is divided into four thematic categories. The rebellion theme includes many later conflicts which have been retrojected into the desert period and shows Israelite discomfort in the desert. Military confrontations during this time are best understood as extensions of exodus and conquest traditions with the exception of the Amalekite battle, itself possibly a retrojection. The Kenites are also discussed and the Kenite hypothesis rejected. In the section on revelation the covenant is considered to be the capstone of the exodus, while legal material is essentially preparation for the coming settlement. Of the texts purported to show Sinaitic origins for Yahweh and Yahwism, only a few seem truly significant. Finally, the theme of providence includes both divine guidance in the wilderness,

reflecting Israelite discomfort there, and more elaborate traditions derived by theological reflection on the rebellion theme. We find no evidence of a positive attitude towards the desert period; although Biblical authors did recognize positive aspects of the desert period, they did not idealize the desert itself.

The final chapter describes the hypothesis of a nomadic ideal and treats those elements of that theory which were not previously considered - the possibility of Israel's nomadic origin and its later idealization, the Rechabites, and the prophetic use of exodus and wandering imagery. No evidence of a nomadic or desert ideal is found although prophets use the desert as the inevitable antecedent of a return to the promised land, whether because of educational or geographical necessity.

במערבה - הים, בצפונה -
מעבר צר וקשה לסוריה,
ובכל שאר גבולותיו - המדבר.

אליהו אורכך

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PREFACE

The following abbreviations have been adopted to designate the books of the Bible and the various versions:

Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Dt, Josh, Jg, IS, IIS,
IK, IIK, Is, Jer, Ezk, Hos, Jl, Am, Ob,
Jon, Mic, Nah, Hab, Zph, Hag, Zch, Mal,
Ps, Prov, Job, SS, Ruth, Lam, Ecc, Esth,
Dnl, Ezr, Neh, ICh, IICh

LXX (Septuagint)
Sam (Samaritan)
Syr (Peshitta)

The numbering system used throughout is that of the Masoretic text. Translations are taken from the Revised Standard Version except where I have modified this to highlight a particular point in the text.

Special thanks are due Rabbi Herbert C. Brichto who provided direction when I felt lost and who questioned whenever I missed a significant point.

"DESERT" IN THE BIBLE

> the "Israelite conception of the universe is...the fight for life against death. The land of life lies at the center, on all hands surrounded by the land of death. The wilderness lies outside, the realm of death and the ocean below, but they send in their tentacles from all sides."*

In Biblical usage the term "wilderness" serves two distinct functions: it can either refer to a more or less specific geophysical phenomenon or become the term of reference for a particular period in the early history of the Israelites as described in the Torah. Both usages are significant for Biblical religion and, indeed, its later development. Inasmuch as these two applications cannot a priori be assumed to be related, although a certain

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* Johannes Pedersen, Israel, Its Life and Culture, I-II, p. 470.

ambiguity and perhaps overlap of usage is surely inevitable, we must investigate each separately in order to reach a more general understanding as to the place of the wilderness in the Bible.

It should be noted from the start that our primary concern is theological - the evolution of a religious concept. There is consequently no need to define the wilderness in a geographically rigorous way. Although probably not always completely accurate, the word "desert" adequately reflects the intended concept and is here used as an equivalent term.[1] Although we can expect certain objective characteristics to emerge from the analysis of attitudes toward the wilderness, using them to define the Hebrew terms involved will not be our primary goal. Instead we will explore the usage of the word-complex that centers on the term "מדבר" in order to assess its place in the Biblical outlook(s) on the world. Analogously in later discussion a determination of the historical wilderness experience itself will not be our aim; however, we can expect to discover what, if any, embellishments have been

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1. The English terms are as difficult to use with complete precision as their Hebrew equivalents. "Wilderness" has also been applied to the American frontier even though generally not a sandy waste, and the primary definition of "desert" itself is "an uncultivated region without inhabitants." (Webster's New World Dictionary, College Edition, 1959, p. 397)

added to this experience and thereby which elements in the wilderness traditions may accurately recall historical events.

In order to determine the Bible's attitude toward the wilderness, it is necessary first to examine the various terms used and the ways in which they are applied. References to the specific wilderness experience must be automatically excluded in order to avoid the possibility that the attitude toward this period rather than the desert itself might influence our findings although passages in which it is difficult to decide the intent will be noted when they are treated.

Although the terms relating to the desert are not all equally common, there is a fairly consistent group of words which tend to recur in similar contexts and often together.[2]

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2. The terms here treated are derived from the list in Armin Werner Schwarzenbach, Die Geographische Terminologie im Hebräischen des Alten Testamentes, pp. 93-112. ישימון has not been included because none of its appearances seem to have any definite relationship with the complex of meanings here designated as "wilderness." Schwarzenbach (p. 100) includes Is 44:3 in large part because the parallel ציה does belong to this group. However, as will be noted below, the application of ציה to the wilderness seems to be secondary, and in the Isaiah verse the meaning "dry land," i.e. lacking in water, seems perfectly adequate both to render ישימון and to provide a valid parallel for ציה. This is especially so inasmuch as a meaning related to "desert" is not to be found for any of its other sixteen appearances.

Among these, מדבר is the primary word for the wilderness.[3] Its root דבר signifies the place to which cattle are driven, and thus its etymological meaning would be "pasturage" or "steppe."[4] Talmon distinguishes three different applications of the term: agriculturally unexploited areas, thinly inhabited open spaces adjacent to settlements, and true deserts or wilderness.[5] To what extent these meanings were distinguished may be difficult to determine; indeed, the opposite would seem more likely given the use of a common term, but shared characteristics are not hard to find.

מדבר does appear in the Bible as a place of pasturing.[6]

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3. SS 4:3 is generally understood to refer to "speech," and Josh 8:24 often emended to במדבר in light of 7:5 and 8:14.

4. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 95; but cf. Ludwig Koehler and W. Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, p. 94, "follow behind back, push back, outrage." The use of etymology in this section is intended only to help come to an understanding as to the concepts which a certain word brings with it and not to define that word, for it would be a mistake to use a word's origin to define it given the flexibility of languages, especially over a protracted period of time. Still, the fact that a term developed from one root rather than another is certainly indicative to some degree of the way in which the concept it denotes was viewed by those among whom the language evolved.

5. Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in Biblical Motifs, Origins and Transformations, Alexander Altmann, ed., pp. 40-41.

6. Gen 37:22, Ex 3:1, IS 17:28 and possibly 25:4,21, but cf. 25:14.

It has a salty soil[7] and is not cultivatible.[8] It is a place of strong, hot winds.[9] Generally it seems to be poor in food and water,[10] a complaint heard often from the Israelites after the exodus.[11] Although it does contain some sort of routes,[12] it is a place in which one might easily go astray.[13] Its inhabitants range from the wild and threatening to the peculiar and demonic - קאת ,[14] פראים,[15] עקרב, שרף, נחש,[16] תנות,[17] and יענים,[18] as well as עזאזל.[19] It is no wonder that this is viewed as a fearful place.[20] The more inhabitable נאות which seem to be in the מדבר are clearly atypical and will be considered below.

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7. Jer 17:6.
8. Jer 2:2; Lam 5:9 need not contradict this and may have an entirely different meaning, cf. Delbert Hillers, Lamentations (Anchor Bible) ad loc.
9. Is 21:1, Jer 4:11, 13:24, Job 1:19.
10. Cf. IIS 17:16,29. Two possible references to its containing water are Gen 36:24 if ימים is understood to mean "hot springs" and Jer 31:1 reading חם with the Septuagint as "hot wells" with Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 94, but cf. Koehler, op. cit., p. 385.
11. E.g. Ex 14:22, 15:22, Num 21:5.
12. Cf. Ex 13:18, Josh 8:15, Jg 20:42, IIS 2:24, 15:23; note also Jer 4:11 and 12:12.
13. Gen 21:14, Is 16:8; cf. Ex 14:3, Num 32:13.
14. Ps 102:7.
15. Jer 2:24, Job 24:5.
16. Dt 8:15, a reflection on the wilderness sojourn.
17. Mal 1:3 if not emended to נוות
18. Lam 4:3 (the קרי reads תנים.)
19. Lev 16:10; the meaning is uncertain, perhaps it is a demon.
20. Is 21:1.

The מדבר is usually described as uninhabited[21] and lacking in travellers.[22] More significantly, those people who are said to live there are clearly foreign to Israel - Ishmael,[23] "Arab,"[24] Sabeans,[25] and others.[26] It is a place of wayfarers[27] and attackers.[28] When it does provide the setting for Israelite occupation,[29] the reference may be to a city which, though not itself wilderness, is surrounded by desert. Indeed, wilderness territory was often named after a specific place within it or the region in which it was contained.[30] However, the מדבר itself is consistently portrayed as being "away" from settlements, a place where God's protection is needed from the dangerous environment and to which one can run after defeat in battle.[31]

Perhaps the most telling evidence concerning the מדבר are those several instances in which it is described as having served as a place of expulsion or refuge. Under the

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21. Jer 2:6, 22:6, Job 38:26.
22. Jer 2:6, 9:11.
23. Gen 21:20-21.
24. Jer 3:2, 25:24.
25. Ezk 23:42.
26. Jer 9:25.
27. Jer 9:1.
28. Lam 5:9, cf. 4:19.
29. Dt 4:43, Josh 12:8, 15:1,61, 16:1, 20:8, Jg 1:16, IK 2:34, 9:18, IC 5:9, 6:63 - although some of these, particularly in Joshua, may have a strong utopian element.
30. Cf. Solomon Mandelkern, Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae, p. 1467 for a listing of such terms.
31. Gen 16:7, 37:22, Josh 8:15,20,24.

most varied circumstances and over an immense range of time individuals fled or were sent there when their presence "within" society was no longer desired or safe.[32] Hagar, David, Elijah, the scapegoat - for all of these "away" meant "מדבר." Perhaps here we have something of the reason that the Israelites are said to have fled into the wilderness after their Egyptian enslavement. It is "flight" par excellence.

A recurring theme in the references to the מדבר is that of devastation. There destruction[33] and punishment[34] will take place. The wilderness is to be the place of judgment.[35] It is no surprise, therefore, that eschatological visions portray the transformation of the מדבר which will be provided with water[36] until it blossoms like the Garden of Eden,[37] full of travellers[38] and rejoicing.[39]

There is one element in the conception of the מדבר

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32. Gen 16:7, 21:14, Lev 16:10,21-2, Josh 8:15,20(24), Jg 20:42,45,47, IS 23:14-15,24-5, 24:2, 25:1,4,14,21, 26:2-3, IIS 15:27-8, 17:16,29, IK 19:4, Jer 9:1, 31:1, 48:6, Ezk 29:5, Ps 55:8, ICh 12:8, and possibly Hos 2:5.
33. Is 14:17, 64:9-10, Jer 12:10.
34. Jer 50:12, Jl 4:19, Zph 2:13, Mal 1:3, also Num 14:29f. A similar, figurative implication can be found in Jg 8:7,16.
35. Ezk 20:35.
36. Is 35:6-7, 41:18, Ps 107:35.
37. Is 35:2, 41:19, 51:3.
38. Is 40:3, 43:19.
39. Is 35:1.

which does not seem to fit with the description above - that is the wilderness as a stage for theophany. Moses and Elijah saw God in the desert,[40] although it is possible in both cases to argue that they just happened to be there, Moses tending sheep and Elijah taking refuge, two functions already noted as typical of the wilderness. The fact that both of these occur near Sinai/Horeb would tend to support the contention that they each "stumbled" onto the divine abode, especially in light of God's request that Moses bring the people to worship Him at the same site.[41] Pharaoh was told that the Israelites wished to worship God in the desert,[42] but that could easily have been a ruse or based on the impossibility of worshipping Yahweh in an idolatrous land. Psalms 29:8 and 63:1 both suggest that God is present in the wilderness, but such a belief is hardly surprising for a monotheistic religion. Hosea 2:16, which seems clearly to refer to the wilderness as a place of a loving relationship with God, may be a reference to Israel's post-exodus experience and will be examined more closely later on;[43] in any event, it states only that God will bring Israel to the desert, not that He lives there. The only other possibility is in the Song of Songs which,

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40. Ex 3:1ff, IK 19:4ff.
41. Ex 3:12.
42. Ex 3:18, 5:1,3, 7:16, 8:23-4.
43. Cf. infra pp. 211-3.

if one accepts a cultic interpretation for that book, may contain a similar reference to the deity's desert origin;[44] but such a mythic allusion from neighboring cultures or Israel's distant past would be of little significance for normative Biblical religion, the view of which, at least as it relates to any particular geophysical region, is well summarized in the statement that "neither from east nor west nor from the desert comes uplifting - for God is judge..."[45] It is conceivable, no matter how unlikely, that once some of Israel's ancestors thought of the desert as their god's habitation; but with the development towards a universal monotheism such a limitation is entirely inappropriate. More significantly, it seems unlikely that a place which was viewed with such horror as the desert could also be God's dwelling although occasionally mythic reminiscences (not necessarily Israelite in origin) cannot be ruled out. From our present perspective it is clearly inaccurate to claim that the desert was viewed as God's home or the place to commune and communicate with Him; He appears frequently elsewhere. A more subtle analysis than is here possible would be essential to treat the so-called Sinaitic origin of Yahweh,[46] although the assertion that the wilderness is one place He appears must certainly

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44. SS 3:6 and 8:5.
45. Ps 75:7-8a.
46. Infra pp. 149-58.

not be denied.

נוה, which often occurs in context with מדבר, is worth mentioning for the limited light it can shed on these considerations as well as the opportunity to show how inappropriate it is to include it with the wilderness terminology given our present focus.[47] נוה seems to refer to pastureland or something of the sort and is clearly located within the מדבר.[48] It is a shepherd's stopping place[49] where sheep and camels can be found.[50] More important for our purposes is the fact that it is a significantly more pleasant place according to the Old Testament conception than the מדבר[51] with plants[52] and water,[53] though it can be dry and appear desolate.[54] This is highlighted by the fact that it is contrasted to terms in the desert vocabulary such as מדבר,[55] שמם,[56] and חרב,[57]

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47. IS 20:1 may be נות, and 19:18,19,22,23 should perhaps read נאיות; cf. Koehler, op. cit., p. 614. Also in Hos 9:13 and Ps 74:20 the text is uncertain, cf. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 96.

48. Jer 9:9, 23:10, Jl 1:19,20, 2:22, Ps 65:13; cf. Schwarzenbach, loc. cit.

49. Jer 33:12, Am 1:2, Zph 2:6; cf. Schwarzenbach, loc. cit.

50. IIS 7:8, Is 65:10, Jer 23:3, 33:12, Ezk 25:5, 34:14, Zph 2:6, ICh 17:7.

51. Cf. Is 32:18, 33:20, 65:10, Jer 50:19.

52. Hos 9:13, Jl 2:22, Ps 23:2.

53. Ps 65:13.

54. Jer 23:10, Am 1:2.

55. Is 27:10.

56. Jer 10:25, 49:20, 50:45, Ps 79:7.

57. Jer 33:12.

paralleled with far more appealing words such as בית,[58] אהל,[59] and כרם,[60] and occurs in compounds with terms like נרד,[61] and בית,[62] while said to be possessed by the wise and the righteous,[63] but cursed if belonging to a fool.[64] A punishment would be to have it destroyed[65] in which case it would be abandoned like a מדבר.[66] Indeed, it is a threat only when inhabited by תנים[67] and גמלים.[68]

The second major wilderness term is ערבה. It appears several times with מדבר,[69] as well as with ציה,[70] ארץ צלמות,[71] and שממה,[72] so that whether its connotation is derived from its being dry or remote is immaterial.[73] Like מדבר it is used for specific places and often included in place

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58. Prov 3:33.
59. Job 5:24, 18:15.
60. E.g. Prov 24:15.
61. Jer 31:22, 50:7 (a reference to God), and Job 8:6.
62. Ps 68:13
63. Prov 3:33, 21:20, 24:15.
64. Job 5:3.
65. Jer 10:25, 25:37.
66. Is 27:10.
67. Is 34:13, 35:7.
68. Ezk 25:5; Ps 74:20 suggests it to be a place of violence, but חמס there may be a mistake (cf. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 627). The opposite implication is evident in Jer 6:2.
69. IS 23:24, Is 35:1,6, 41:19, 51:3, Jer 5:6, 50:12, Job 24:5 and ערי IIS 15:28. In Josh 12:8 and IIS 17:16 ערבה seems to refer to someplace other than the מדבר although one of the two terms could easily be a proper noun or ערבה could there denote a plain, cf. infra.
70. Is 35:1, Jer 50:12, 51:43.
71. Jer 17:6, Job 39:6.
72. Jer 51:43.
73. Baentsch cited by Schwarzenbach (op. cit., p. 99) and Koehler, (op. cit., p. 733); opposing view from Schwarzenbach (loc. cit.) and Brown (op. cit., p. 787).

names.[74] Some occurences may refer to a "plain" rather than a desert, especially given its apparent "low-lying" quality.[75]

The ערבה has no water[76] or plant life.[77] It is inhabited by wolves,[78] wild asses,[79] and small shrubs.[80] Like the מדבר it seems to be conceived as outside of and away from the places usually treated.[81] Generally the ערבה appears to be uninhabited,[82] although it is included within Israelite territory[83] and on one occasion is ascribed inhabitants.[84] Like מדבר it is a designation for the state of destruction which will be brought about as a punishment[85] and eventually rectified with the addition of water and vegetation[86] so that it may become the garden of God, full of rejoicing in the eschatological future.[87]

The gentilic form ערבי may or may not be connected with ערבה. According to Brown, Driver, and Briggs it

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74. Dt 1:7, 2:8, 3:17, 4:49, Josh 4:13, 5:10, 12:3,8, IS 23:24, IIK 25:5, Jer 39:5, 52:8, Am 6:14.
75. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., pp. 98-9; cf. Zch 14:10.
76. Is 35:6, but cf. Am 6:14.
77. Is 41:19, but cf. Jer 17:6.
78. Jer 5:6; cf. Hab 1:8, Zph 3:3.
79. Job 24:5, 39:6.
80. Jer 17:6.
81. Josh 8:14, IIS 2:29, 4:7, IIK 25:4-5, Jer 39:4, 52:7; the last three of these are parallel accounts of the same event. Cf. also Josh 4:13 and 5:10. Among these it often seems to be the place to which one runs away.
82. IIS 17:16 in light of verses 8-9; Jer 17:6, 51:43.
83. Josh 11:16, 12:8.
84. Josh 11:2.
85. Is 33:9, Jer 50:12, 51:43.
86. Is 35:1,6, 41:19.
87. Is 35:1, 51:3; cf. 40:3.

referred to the steppe dweller of Northern Arabia and was later extended to apply to the inhabitants of the entire peninsula.[88] Jeffery claims that it means "nomad" in Isaiah 13:20, Jeremiah 3:2, and probably elsewhere as well.[89] The question becomes especially interesting in reference to Isaiah 21:13 which mentions a forest, something we would hardly expect in a place like that described above. In any event, this occurrence is relatively unique and permits of sufficient alternatives to avoid calling the aforementioned characteristics into question.

One final problematic and highly intriguing text is Psalms 68:5 which states that God rides in the ערבות. This may be emended to עבות,[90] it certainly seems more logical in this context to use a plural form for "clouds" than for "deserts." If this interpretation or some variant of it is adopted, the text may echo a Ugaritic name of the Canaanite storm god - rkb 'rpt.[91] Whatever solution one chooses for this particular verse, the Bible's attitude towards the ערבה fits remarkably well with that suggested for ערבר, and it is not a generally positive view.

The third wilderness term is ישימון, possibly related to

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88. Brown, op. cit., p. 787.
89. Arthur Jeffery, "Arabians," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, I, pp. 181-2; cf. II Macc 12:10-12.
90. Cf. verse 34 (but note also verses 6ff).
91. Mitchell Dahood, Psalms 51-100 (The Anchor Bible) ad loc.

the root שמם,[92] but here treated separately as one of the four dominant names for the desert. It appears in parallel with מדבר several times.[93] Like ערבה it can serve alone as a proper noun.[94] Typified by its lack of paths and, apparently, water,[95] it is described as a land full of lament.[96] It, too, serves as a refuge and hiding place for those who flee normally inhabited areas,[97] appearing most often as the land in which the Israelites wandered after the exodus.

The last major term applied to the wilderness is ציה, suggesting primarily a dry, waterless region.[98] It is used with מדבר,[99] ערבה,[100] צמא,[101] ארץ עיף,[102] שממה,[103] שמה,[104]

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92. As יסר is from שרר and יהם from חמם; cf. Brown, op. cit., p. 445, Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 112, and Koehler, op. cit., p. 411.

93. Is 43:19-20, Ps 78:40, 106:14, 107:4, also with ארץ מדבר in Dt 32:10 which introduces a new term (תהו) to this complex.

94. Num 21:20, 23:28, IS 23:19,24, 26:1,3; cf. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 112.

95. Is 43:19-20, Ps 107:4.

96. Dt 32:10.

97. IS 23:19,24, 26:1,3.

98. Koehler, op. cit., p. 802; Brown, op. cit., p. 851.

99. Is 35:1, 41:18, Jer 2:6, Ezk 19:13, Hos 2:5, Zph 2:13, Ps 63:1-2, 107:35.

100. Is 35:1, Jer 2:6, 50:12, 51:43.

101. Ezk 19:13, Hos 2:5, Ps 63:2.

102. Ps 63:2.

103. Jl 2:20. Zph 2:13.

104. Jer 51:43; Job 30:3 also suggests a negative connotation.

and in contrast to מדבר ים[105] Most intriguing is the one occurrence in which ציה appears to have some connection with שאול, the realm of the dead.[106]

A ציה has no water[107] and is uninhabited[108] except for shrub roots[109] and ציים - which we will soon discuss. Not unexpectedly, we find it used to describe future punishment[110] and as that place which will be made to blosson (i.e. it does not now) for the poor and/or the good.[111]

ציים are presumably those who live in a ציה; however, their exact nature is uncertain.[112] They seem to be feared,[113] and are possibly used to represent the desert's devouring of the Leviathan.[114] Clearly, however, they are found in places of destruction[115] and so fit in with the general description here presented.

Another term from the same root, ציון seems to have a

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105. Is 41:18, Ps 107:35.
106. Job 24:19, cf. Jer 2:6 and infra p. 27.
107. Is 41:18, Ps 63:2, 107:35; Job 24:19 may suggest that it is hot.
108. Jer 51:43.
109. Is 53:2, cf. John L. McKenzie, Second Isaiah (Anchor Bible), ad loc.
110. Jer 51:43, Ezk 19:13, Jl 2:20, Zph 2:13 and figuratively in Hos 2:5; to the extent that ציים are defined as those who live in a ציה, Is 13:21 and 34:14 could also be included.
111. Is 35:1, Ps 107:35.
112. Koehler (op. cit., p. 801) considers them to be demons, while the Revised Standard Version's "wild beasts" seems to be a more typical view.
113. Ps 72:9, but this may be a mistake for צרים
114. Ps 74:14; this is often emended to תנין
115. Is 13:21, 34:14.

similar meaning. It is lacking in water[116] and parallels the term ארץ ציה already found in the wilderness terminology.[117] Clearly it is not a good place.[118]

We turn now from the primary desert words to those which appear less often and generally serve adjectival functions, usually in context with one of the above terms.

צמא means thirsty and is a consistently negative term, reflecting punishment and suffering. It appears often with רעב[119] and עיף.[120] To be thirsty is the plight of the poor,[121] as well as of those in the desert.[122] Thus it is that the desert comes to be described as a thirsty place[123] and thereby conceived as a punishment.[124] צמא appears in parallel with ציה and מדבר.[125]

צמאון refers to being without water.[126] Parallel terms are שרב (parched heat)[127] and מדבר.[128] It is characteristic

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116. Is 32:2; the root ציה, signifying dryness, supports this contention.
117. Is 32:2.
118. Cf. the imagery in Is 25:4-5.
119. E.g. Dt 28:48, IIS 17:29, Is 29:8, 32:6, Ps 107:5, Prov 25:21.
120. E.g. IIS 17:29, Is 29:8.
121. Is 41:17.
122. IIS 17:29, Is 50:2; also Ex 17:3, Ps 107:4-5, Neh 9:15,20.
123. Dt 29:18, Is 44:3 according to Koehler, op. cit., p. 806.
124. Is 5:13, Ezk 19:13, Hos 2:5, and figuratively in Am 8:11-13.
125. Ezk 19:13, Hos 2:5.
126. Dt 8:15, Is 35:7, Ps 107:33.
127. Is 35:7.
128. Ps 107:33.

of wilderness land[129] and is in one passage clearly intended as a punishment.[130]

A similar term frequently applied to the desert is עיף.[131] It means to be tired and is often combined with other deficiencies such as hunger and thirst.[132] It frequently describes people when they are outside of Israel's normal settlements[133] and like יבש is apparently typical of desert living;[134] consequently, it is applied to Israel during the wilderness sojourn.[135]

Modifying the noun ארץ, עיף seems to designate the wilderness - a tired place or, in keeping with the above, a place in which people are tired.[136] It is apparently a hot place which longs for God.[137] It appears in parallel with ציה and ציון.[138]

The implications of other terms are not quite so self-evident. גזרה is used with מדבר[139] and so fits in with this group, clearly referring in its context to a place conceived of as "away." But its etymological meaning is uncertain.

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129. Dt 8:15.
130. Ps 107:33.
131. Cf. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 101.
132. Gen 25:30, Jg 8:4-5, Is 29:8, Job 22:7; note also Jg 8:15, Jer 31:24, Ps 63:2, Prov 25:25.
133. Gen 25:29-30, Jg 4:21, 8:4-5, IIS 16:14, 17:29 and possibly IS 14:28,31.
134. IIS 17:29.
135. Dt 25:18.
136. Is 32:2, Ps 143:6 and possibly Ps 63:2.
137. Ps 143:6.
138. Is 32:2, Ps 63:2.
139. Lev 16:22.

גזר means to cut off - from water[140] or from others?[141] חררים also refers back to the desert[142] and is a punishment, a bad thing one would not choose for himself. However, its definition, though clearly enough referring to heat, is also not completely certain.[143]

The derivation of מלחה is more obvious, suggesting as it does a salty region. This is clearly the desert,[144] an unfertile land[145] inhabited only by פראים,[146] a reference we have seen before. Of special interest is the connotation of "salt" which suggests destruction rather than mere desolation, especially in Old Testament usage elsewhere,[147] so that the claim that this is uninhabitable territory[142] may not refer to natural circumstances. Elsewhere it appears to be a punishment.[145]

ציה entails reference to a rocky terrain of some sort,[148] but comes to mean a scorched land.[149] In any

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140. Koehler, op. cit., p. 179, and Schwarzenbach, op. cit., pp. 103-4.
141. Brown, op. cit., p. 160.
142. Jer 17:6.
143. Koehler (op. cit., p. 337) suggests that it refers to lava-covered stretches while Schwarzenbach (op. cit., p. 104) and Brown (op. cit., p. 359) consider it to refer simply to a parched area.
144. Jer 17:6, Job 39:6.
145. Ps 107:34.
146. Job 39:5-6.
147. E.g. Dt 29:22, Jg 9:45; cf. Johannes Pedersen, Israel, Its Life and Culture, I-II, pp. 456 and 542.
148. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 104, but cf. Koehler, op. cit., p. 800.
149. Brown, op. cit., p. 850.

event living there is to be a punishment for the rebellious,[150] although the relationship there to Israel's desert wanderings as discussed in the following verses is difficult. צמאונות from the same root is clearly not a desireable environment;[151] the context suggests that God sustains someone there despite the place's apparent barrenness.

The final group of terms bring with them a new set of concepts and motifs which are extended to the desert by the use of these words. The root שמם suggests both horror and devastation (possibly the two are to be related). שממה is frequently joined with a variety of negative terms - קללה, שעורורה, שריקה, חרפה, יעוה[152] - as well as various destruction words - שאיה, חרבה, גלים[153] - and our standard desert vocabulary.[154] It is an undesireable place[155] where there are no houses or plants,[156] but only animals.[157] People do not live there,[158] and indeed its coming forces those already there to leave.[159] It is often presented in

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150. Ps 68:7; according to Schwarzenbach (op. cit., p. 105) this is reminiscent of Jer 17:6.
151. Is 58:11.
152. II K 22:19, Jer 5:30, 18:16, 19:8, 25:9,18, 29:18, 42:18, 44:12,22, 49:13, 51:37, Mic 6:16, IICh 29:8.
153. Is 24:12, Jer 25:11,18, 51:37.
154. Jer 51:43.
155. Zch 7:14.
156. Is 5:9, Jl 1:7.
157. Zph 2:15.
158. Jer 4:7, 46:19, 50:3, 51:29,37,43.
159. Jer 25:38.

the nature of a threat or punishment,[160] which is brought on by evil people.[161] The term clearly refers to destruction.[162]

שממה, a related word, also means devastation.[163] It, too, is used with a variety of "horror-provoking" terms[164] and in parallel with שממה.[165] It is uninhabited[166] and like most of the preceding terms is presented as a threat of punishment.[167]

The final member of this "destruction-oriented" group is שממה itself,[163] which means a desolate, waste area which may previously have been a city, field, or general region.[168] It appears with the standard desert terminology[169] as well as various indications of destruction.[170] It is undesireable[171] and uninhabited[172] - apparently as the

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160. Is 5:9, 13:9, 24:12, Jer 19:8, 25:9,11,18, 29:18, 42:18, 44:12,22, 46:19, 49:13, 49:13,17, 50:3, 51:29,37, Hos 5:9, Mic 6:16, Zph 2:15, Zch 7:14, Ps 73:19, IIC 29:8, 30:7.

161. Jer 18:16.

162. Jer 4:7, 50:23, 51:41-3.

163. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 110 and Koehler, op. cit., p. 577; ושממה in Ezk 23:33 and 35:7 may be better read as משמה; cf. also Ezk 7:27 and Mic 1:7.

164. E.g. Ezk 5:15 where its meaning may be "horror."

165. Ezk 6:14, 33:28-9, 35:3.

166. Ezk 33:28; Is 15:6 and Jer 48:34 may suggest its lack of water.

167. Is 15:6, Jer 48:34, Ezk 5:15, 6:14, 33:28-9.

168. References in Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 111.

169. Is 64:9, Jer 12:10, 50:12-13, Jl 2:3,20, 4:19, Zph 2:13, Mal 1:3.

170. חרבה Lev 26:33, Jer 44:6, Ezk 29:9-10, 35:4; שרופת אש Is 1:7; תל עולם Josh 8:28.

171. Ex 23:29, Is 6:11, 62:4, Ezk 7:27.

172. Jer 6:8, 9:10, 32:43, 34:22, 50:13, 51:62, Ezk 14:15, 29:10-12.

result of having been abandoned[173] - and is no longer farmed.[174] In it are found only תנים and wild and wicked animals.[175] It is contrasted to both a desirable plot[176] and the Garden of Eden.[177]

Apparently, שממה indicates the lack of population rather than any specific geophysical phenomenon. Thus it is applied often to cities which have been burned[178] and abandoned[179] as well as subjected to other kinds of destruction.[180] It appears frequently as a threat,[181] but may eventually be restored.[182]

The term חרבה seems to be a more straightforward reference to destruction (rather than natural desolation); however, it may come from a separate root referring to desolation.[183] Consequently it is difficult to be sure how to treat terms like חרב and ערר . חרב is used with other

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173. Is 17:9, Zph 2:4.
174. Ezk 36:34.
175. Ex 23:29, Jer 10:22 (cf. 9:10), 49:33, Ezk 14:15, Mal 1:3; according to Jer 32:43 and 51:62 no (domesticated?) animals live there.
176. Jer 12:10.
177. Jl 2:3.
178. Jer 8:28, Is 1:7, Jer 34:22, 49:2.
179. Is 6:11, 17:9, 62:4, Zph 2:4.
180. Ex 23:29, Ezk 29:8-9, Mic 1:7, Zph 1:13.
181. Lev 26:33, Is 17:9-10, Jer 25:12, 34:22, 44:6, 51:62, Ezk 12:20, 14:15-16, 15:8, 29:9, 32:15, 35:7,9,14-15, Jl 4:19, Mic 7:13, Zph 1:13, 2:4,9,13.
182. Ezk 36:34.
183. Cf. Brown, op. cit., p. 351. The following emendations have been proposed: Jer 25:9 חרפת, Zph 2:14 ערוד. In Ezk 29:10 several conjectures have been made, cf. Rudolf Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, ad loc.

terms we have noticed before.[184] It lacks water[185] and seems to require shade for protection.[186] It appears, predictably, as a threat.[187] Intriguingly this is also another name for Mount Sinai. חֹרֵב seems, in contrast, to apply to destruction pure and simple. It is the condition in which the Temple was found by those returning from the exile[188] and is used with the terms נשמה and בהרס.[189] It is an uninhabited area.[190]

Whatever the subtleties of derivation for the term חרבה, that it generally fits the group here treated is readily apparent; as such it adds to the probable element of destruction found with the desert concept. It appears in sequence with מדבר,[191] ערבה,[192] שממה,[193] and שממה,[194] and is contrasted with ערן[195] and a desirable thing.[196] It is uninhabited[197] except for foxes and בוס.[198] It is outside

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184. Jer 49:13, Ezk 29:10; note Is 25:5.
185. Jer 50:38.
186. Is 4:6, 25:4.
187. Jer 49:13, 50:38, Ezk 29:10, Zph 2:14, Hag 1:11.
188. Hag 1:4,9; cf. Neh 2:3,17.
189. Ezk 36:35.
190. Jer 33:10,12, Ezk 29:10-11.
191. Is 51:3, Ps 102:7.
192. Is 51:3.
193. Jer 25:9,11,18, 44:22.
194. Lev 26:33, Is 61:4, Jer 44:6, Ezk 29:9-10, 35:4; cf. also Is 49:19.
195. Is 51:3.
196. Is 64:10.
197. Jer 44:2,22, Ezk 25:13, but cf. Ezk 33:24, 38:12.
198. According to Is 5:17 it is the place where kids eat. The parallel term דבר may be related to מדבר, providing a further parallel, cf. George B. Gray, Isaiah (International Critical Commentary), ad loc.

of the "normal" areas,[199] but will eventually be rebuilt.[200] חרבה is used many times as a threat or punishment[201] and is presented as the setting for Gog's battle.[202] It is applied particularly often, though not exclusively, to cities.[203]

The final term in this complex brings with it an entirely new concept, for תהו provides a link to the chaos which is the opposite of creation and all the imagery that evokes.[204] Generally תהו has nothing to do with the desert, but is used for void and nothingness as well as "in vain," i.e. "for nought," a figurative extension of its primary meaning.[205] The word is most notably joined to desert

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199. Ezk 33:27, 36:4.
200. Is 51:3, 58:12, 61:4, Ezk 36:10,33, Ezr 9:9 (cf. Mal 1:4, Job 3:14).
201. Lev 26:31,33, Is 44:26, Jer 7:34, 22:5, 25:9, 44:2,6,22, 49:13, Ezk 5:14, 25:13, 29:9-10, 35:4, Dnl 9:2; cf. Is 51:3, 52:9, Jer 27:17, Ps 109:10, Ezr 9:9, Ezk 36:33.
202. Ezk 38:8.
203. Citations in Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 108.
204. The word תהו appears in the Bible only three times, always with תהו, and is consequently not treated separately here. Cf. Schwarzenbach (op. cit., p. 107) for a fuller treatment of its possibly meaning; he includes the possibility that it may have been used because of its rhyme with תהו although, however appealing such a possibility may be, one would have to show the awareness of rhyme among ancient Hebrew speakers before it can be accepted seriously although an onomatopoeic base - quite a different thing from rhyme - is still possible.
205. Cf. Schwarzenbach, op. cit., p. 106; Koehler (op. cit., p. 1019) connects it with the root תהה which, according to a Ugaritic parallel, would indicate its primary meaning to be a "waterless, impassable desert," leaving the creation connotation as secondary. Brown (op. cit., p. 1062) is aware of the possibility from Arabic, but considers it doubtful.

terminology in Deuteronomy 32:10 where it appears with מדבר and ישימון; elsewhere the definite article seems to designate the desert meaning. This is a place where people become lost and may perish.[206] It is a punishment[207] and suggests that the Day of Judgment will be a reversion to the pre-creative state.[208]

Having concluded this somewhat lengthy survey of the words which comprise the Bible's "desert vocabulary," we note that these terms and their usages suggest that although the desert was not necessarily viewed as a complete void (it might serve for pasturing, including נאות where people and animals might stop), it was not generally an inviting place. More typically, people did not live there, but rather wild animals and perhaps demons. Here there is a point of contact with other ancient Near Eastern cultures according to which the desert is the "natural habitat of noxious demons and jinns,"[209] euphemistically called

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206. Job 6:18, 12:24.
207. Is 34:11.
208. Jer 4:23.
209. Theodor H. Gaster, Thespis, p. 124. Cf. the Prayer (Against Evil Spirits) in Reginald C. Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, pp. 122-5: "O evil Spirit, get thee to the desert/O evil Demon, get thee to the desert/O evil Ghost, get thee to the desert/O evil Devil, get thee to the desert. ...Stand not in the vicinity/Sit not in the neighborhood of the man, the son of his god/In the city circle him not/Nor go about at his side/Get thee to the tomb...of earth to thy darkness! By the Great Gods I exorcise thee, that thou mayest depart." (From Utukki Limnuti, tablet A, column V)

"ashru ellu" - a clean place.[210] In the Poem of Baal it is presented as Mot's natural habitation, a view of some significance as we shall soon see.[211]

The general Biblical descriptions of the desert are not enticing. It is hot and dry, a place of thirst and tiredness. One goes there if he must escape or as a punishment. While there seem to be several references to peaceful relations with the inhabitants of this area, they are also frequently portrayed as threatening.[212] Over and over it is used as the image of what a place will look like after it has been destroyed. It is described in terms of the pre-creative chaos, but shall in the future be restored - which implies that it needs to be.

Is this the dwelling of God? We have seen occasional references which may support such a view, but they are few and relatively isolated. It is valid to state unequivocally at this point that if such is the case, it is as a very minor sub-motif, perhaps a remnant of some far-off time or tiny sect. The Israelite mindset was not at ease with the desert - whether in its stories, its poems, or the prophecies of those who warned of impending doom.

There is, besides the desert terminology, a surprisingly

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210. Alfred Jeremias, The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient Near East, p. 117.
211. Ibid.
212. Jeffery, op. cit., p. 183 (references included).

substantial collection of desert-related imagery.[213] These, however, prove little more than that the Israelites knew about the wilderness and wilderness life, hardly a startling discovery concerning a people surrounded by desert and who, living at a natural crossroads, could hardly avoid contact with others who had been there. It would seem generally fair if not completely accurate to accept the assertion that in Israel's eyes "the desert was the refuge of outlaws, the haunt of brigands, the home of demons and wild beasts," a notion shared in large part throughout the ancient Near East.[214]

Often other Near Eastern material can be of value in further exploring the Biblical concept of the desert as well as in determining the milieu in which it was set. Although no particular attention will be given to ascertaining the contemporaneity or chronological priority of this foreign material inasmuch as no causal relationship is being suggested, we can expect to gain insights from other literatures which may be used to support impressions and provide new keys in understanding the Old Testament material. Specifically, we can hope to use these to fill out and expand our awareness of tendencies which have already been noticed in passing.

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213. Cf. Talmon, op. cit., p. 44, and Jeffery, op. cit., p. 184.

214. Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, p. 4; cf. Alfred Haldar, The Notion of the Desert in Sumero-Accadian and West-Semitic Religions, p. 36.

The closeknit relationship between the desert and the Netherworld is not hard to understand, especially in light of the general attitude towards the desert of which our Bible is typical - as a "subterraneous, negative power, the world of death and chaos."[215] The origin of this conceptual equation may lie in the fact that burial took place outside of cities - i.e. in the desert - and that the Netherworld was conceived to be located in the west - i.e. the steppe vis a vis Babylon.[216] Darkness is an attribute of both the Netherworld[217] and the desert[218] which the Bible calls ארץ צלמות[219] and suggests as the origin of the mass murder foreseen for Samaria.[220] To the extent that one is willing to accept these hints, such images can support the view that the exodus into the desert be seen as a descensus ad inferno of sorts, especially in Psalm 68.[221] Clearly the desert is a land of death.[222]

The ocean depths have the potential to be viewed similarly. In Semitic literature there seem to be two contrasting views of the ocean - as either posing the threat of death or offering peace and rest. It has been

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215. Haldar, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
216. Ibid., p. 13; the thesis is derived from Tallquist.
217. Cf. Ps 49:20, Job 10:21, 12:22, 18:18.
218. Jer 2:31, Job 12:24-25.
219. Cf. Jer 2:6.
220. Hos 13:15 - 16:1 if these verses can be treated as a unit.
221. Haldar, op. cit., pp. 5 and 50.
222. Jer 2:6, Job 24:19.

suggested that the Bible's more mythic passages present the ocean as a challenge to the creating deity, while in the more monotheistic passages it serves as God's instrument or resting place.[223] Whatever the value and validity of this thesis, the Biblical view of the ocean is in several passages undeniably close to that of the Netherworld. It, too, is a place of darkness[224] and is at least by context equated with שאול[225] תהום seems quite clearly to be understood as a nether world.[226]

Possible additional connections between ocean and desert should also be cited. Isaiah's סדבר ים is intriguing, no matter how uncertain.[227] Of additional interest is the fact that in ancient times the name "Sealand" was apparently applied to what is today sandy, Arabian terrain.[228] If this connection between ocean and desert is correct, it is not hard to understand how the desert could come to be called תהו - chaos: for the pre-creative chaos which is so designated is represented by

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223. A.J. Wensinck, The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites, p. 40; cf. Is 27:1, Ps 74:13, 89:10, 104:5f, Prov 8:29 for the former and Gen 1 and Ps 29 as examples of the latter view.

224. Ps 88:6-7.

225. IIS 22:5-6, Ezk 26:19-21, Jon 2:3, Ps 40:3, 71:20.

226. Cf. Gen 49:25, Dt 33:13, Ps 68:21-23 (the image recalls the Egyptians' fate in the sea), and Job 26:5.

227. Raymond P. Dougherty, "The Sealand of Arabia," Journal of the American Oriental Society, L (1930), p. 23; cf. Is 21:1.

228. Dougherty, op. cit., p. 15.

the ocean which returns to dominance with the deluge as God re-creates the world through Noah, the new Adam.[229] The wind, often said to originate in the desert,[230] helps subdue the sea as well, a motif which may go back to the Enuma Elish in which Marduk slays Tiamat with fierce winds.[231] In any event, the desert represents destruction and punishment - the chaos of the historical scheme.[232] These motifs are all neatly combined by Deutero-Isaiah into what Wensinck presents as the equation

"cosmogony = deluge = exodus = exile."[233]

The primordial chaos is returned by an act of divine wrath[234] which is not to be repeated.[235]

Paradoxically the תהום, as already mentioned, has also a more positive connotation; it is both death and life, hell and paradise.[236] One thinks immediately of the above described contrast between מדבר and ארץ. This brings us to the Myth of Tammuz in which both of these elements are

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229. Wensinck, op. cit., pp. 13 and 50; the motif is extended to baptism and the passing through the Reed Sea in I Cor 10:1-2 and I Peter 3:20 and then to death, completing the cycle, in Rom 6:3. This view of the passage through the Reed Sea is foreshadowed by Deutero-Isaiah; cf. Aarre Lauha, "Das Schilfmeer Motiv im Alten Testament," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, IX (1963), p. 38.

230. E.g. Is 21:1.

231. Haldar, op. cit., p. 62; cf. Is 27.

232. Wensinck, op. cit., p. 53; hence the need to restore the desert, e.g. Is 43:19f, 51:3, 55:1.

233. Wensinck, op. cit., pp. 53-5.

234. Cf. exile as wilderness in Is 40:3-4, 41:18-19, 42:16, 43:19-20, Jer 31:2.

235. Is 43:16-18, 51:9-12, 54:7-9; cf. Gen 9:11.

236. Wensinck, op. cit., p. 65.

combined in a rather surprising way. The Sumero-Accadian form of the myth has been summarized in this way:

> At the beginning of the ritual it /the edin, a steppe/ is a beautiful place adorned with greenery, and is the resting-place of the cattle, and it is accordingly also rendered with tarbaṣu in Accadian. Then the enemies enter the edin, destroying it and carrying off the god to another place, also called edin, or edin a-ra-li . . . Consequently, there are one "upper" and one "nether" edin. Tammuz then goes to the Nether World, and the edin which was at the beginning adorned with verdure becomes a desert, where the enemies have their dwelling place. Then it is also a land of darkness and cold, whereas the sun is shining in the land of the dead. . . . This implies that the order of the cosmos is reversed. Then, Ishtar goes to seek for her dead son, or beloved, to bring him rich gifts, which are consecrated in the edin and then brought to Tammuz' dwelling in the edin = "the Nether World." Finally, when Tammuz returns in triumph, the enemies are driven back to their proper domicile, and his edin is restored, and becomes once more a place adorned with trees.[237]

It is not necessary to point out the numerous details in this myth which reinforce elements of the wilderness-concept already suggested; less evident contacts should, however, be noted. The view of demons as "hordes coming in from the desert, who enter the temple and carry off the young god,"[238] may suggest how the destruction of Judah or Israel was equated with the arrival of a wilderness state; in the ancient Near East when the pastures and fields become a desert, one could deduce that an enemy had made his way

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237. Haldar, op. cit., pp. 25-6.
238. Ibid, p. 34.

into the temple.[239] Also in the Tammuz rite the coming of sunset - in the west! - is associated with dark and cold, i.e. chaos, a possible support for motifs previously mentioned.[240] Finally, it is possible that some elements of this account derive from an historical experience such as the destruction of Ur;[241] regardless of its accuracy, this hypothesis does recall the combination of desert and destruction imagery we found in the Bible.

While it would obviously be folly to expect to find such a myth in the Bible itself, certain traces do occur. The cycle Eden-desert-Eden has already been noted, and the closeness of the term edin is too obvious to be ignored.[242] Some would argue that Isaiah 33:6-8 is a "typical description of the state obtaining when the god is in the Nether World," and that "קום" in verse 10 suggests His resurrection and the oncoming messianic era,[243] that Psalm 44:10ff assumes that God has abandoned the psalmist who prays that He awake, sleep being equated with death - i.e. God is in the Netherworld,[244] and that Psalm 79:1ff describes the sufferings which follow the destruction of the Temple, a situation previously considered with regard to Tammuz rites.[245]

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239. Haldar, op. cit., p. 24.
240. Ibid., p. 22.
241. Ibid., p. 35.
242. Cf. Ibid., p. 57.
243. Ibid., pp. 55-6.
244. Ibid., p. 54.
245. Ibid., p. 52.

Whatever the extent of the relationship to the Tammuz liturgy, whether or not Yahweh was ever conceived as a dying-and-rising deity,[246] and despite the possibly simplistic attitude of statements such as that the "universe, in the Semitic conception, consists of several parts analgous to one another,"[247] there is unquestionably a substantial measure of truth to the interrelation of Netherworld, ocean depth, and destruction imagery with that of the wilderness - presumably through the use of metaphor until proven otherwise. This is partially illustrated by Ezekiel:

> When I make you a city laid waste like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you, then I will thrust you down with those who descend into the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the nether world, among primeval ruins, with those who go down to the Pit, so that you will not be inhabited or have a place in the land of the living. I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more; though you be sought for, you will never be found again, says the Lord God.[248]

Such expressions, whether intended literally or figuratively, grew out of the way in which the ancient Hebrews looked at the desert. For our purposes there is no need to categorize each reference or separate the various images. The concept was fluid, containing the possibility for this entire range of attitudes and

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246. Cf. J. Philip Hyatt, "The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Interpretation of the Old Testament," The Journal of Bible and Religion, X:2 (May, 1942), pp. 74-5.
247. Wensinck, op. cit., p. 9.
248. Ezk 26:19-21.

presumably conjuring up these images in the minds of those who heard or used such words. The overridingly negative outlook on the desert will be important for us in assessing the Israelites' attitude toward the time their ancestors spent there on the way out of Egypt as well as in understanding any possible nostalgia which might have arisen in later periods.

THE DESERT PERIOD - INTRODUCTION

> "It is after all not what happens to an individual or a people but what it believes has happened that counts in its future, although always there must have been an initial basis for such belief."*

Much of the Biblical material about the desert actually deals with the so-called forty years the Israelites spent there en route to the Promised Land. For our purposes this subject must be approached in two distinct ways. Our ultimate goal will be to ascertain the attitude toward the desert which underlies these accounts. Obviously this will be largely implicit in the texts and must be separated from the events which are retold; it will be most easily perceived if we keep in mind the general attitude already described for purposes of comparison and contrast. Before that can be done, however,

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* James Alan Montgomery, Arabia and the Bible, p. 10.

we must turn to the Bible s attitude toward the desert period itselt, a task possibly more complex than elucidating the attitude towards the wilderness which it assumes.

According to the Hexateuchal narrative, which is the only account the Bible presents as a general and complete description for this period's history, the wilderness is a time of transition. God had made a promise to the patriarchs the fulfillment of which was rendered impossible by the Egyptian enslavement, or even Israel's continued presence in Egypt; therefore, He led Israel out of Egypt and on to conquer Canaan. The wilderness was the in-between space which had to be traversed before the conquest could begin.

Our concern is with neither the exodus nor the conquest, but it is difficult to find precise dividing lines which will enable us to determine the texts from which we should work. To some extent this is a result of the artificiality of the question we pose. Because of its transitional status, the wilderness can be viewed either as the culmination of the redemptive process whereby God led His people from slavery to the Promised Land or as a period of preparation for living in Canaan once Israel had been successfully extricated from Egypt and thus the beginning of conquest-and-settlement. But to state the problem in such terms ignores the very real fact that the desert

period has assumed proportions which belie its conceptually subordinate status. Contained in three and one half of the Torah's five books, the account of the wilderness period overshadows both the exodus and the occupation by sheer weight alone. To what extent it was actually viewed as an independent period we can ask ourselves later, but that it has come to appear as such is self-evident.

It is tempting to set the limits of the wilderness period with the miraculous crossing of two bodies of water the accounts of which seem related and therefore possibly conceived as the appropriately symmetrical limits for this lengthy narrative.[1] In the case of the Reed Sea[2] the problem results from the difficulty of defining that event's conceptual role within the overall narrative. Is it intended, at least literarily, to represent the border of Egypt, the point at which we are to consider Israel to have been once and for all removed from Egyptian power? Should it be viewed as a successful confrontation with a natural threat, the first of many the Israelites were to face during their wilderness sojourn? Or does this represent the defeat of a threatening enemy, again a

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1. Aarre Lauha, "Das Schilfmeermotiv im alten Testament," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, IX (1963), p. 44.

2. I use this term reluctantly as a conventional translation for יַם סוּף. Although I intend no definite body of water (hence the inappropriateness of "Red Sea"), some English term is necessary if only for stylistic reasons.

frequent problem for Israel that reached its climax during the period of the judges? Which is the essential element in this account - Israel's crossing, Egypt's drowning, or the passing of a natural boundary?

Though not particularly crucial for the ensuing analysis - the issue is merely to determine which material we must examine - this problem can shed light on the nature of some of the issues which will arise. It will become even more significant when we try to assess non-pentateuchal references to the wilderness period, many of which are ambiguous; the more clearly we can define our focus now, the more easily we can expect to understand poetic and elliptical texts later on.

Marton Noth equates the exodus, or better the divine extrication of Israel from Egypt, with the event at the Reed Sea:

> the activity of the divine subject mentioned in the confessional formula הוציאני...מארץ ממצרים originally seems to have referred to the "destruction of the Egyptians in the Sea." Presumably this is what is meant above all whenever the "signs and wonders," "the great and terrible acts" of God, and the like, are mentioned in this context. In contrast to Israel's sojourn in Egypt and the conscription to slave labor which, though implicitly presupposed in the confession of the "guide out of Egypt," were not in themselves particularly remarkable, the event at the Sea was so unique and extraordinary that it came to constitute the essence of the primary Israelite confession and was regarded as the real beginning of Israel's history and the act of God fundamental for Israel.[3]

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3. Martin Noth, History of Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 50.

This position is based on the equation of "signs and wonders" - as well as other, similar phrases - with the event at the sea. Childs argues that the phrase originally referred to the entire range of miracles to which Israel was exposed, both in Egypt and the wilderness, but was later narrowed by the insertion of the sea tradition.[4]

The problem is somewhat more complex than either of these positions suggest. The term אותות used alone is consistently applied to things done for Israel's benefit, generally with Moses' rod. Logically these can be anywhere Israel is - in Egypt or the desert.[5] Moses uses his rod to present signs for Israel's benefit, beginning with simple acts and proceeding to grow in magnitude, but always for the purpose of impressing Israel.[6] According to these texts the plagues and earlier miracles are all interconnected. In contrast, מופתים are performed for Egypt.[7] As such they obviously cannot include the miracles in the desert, and it is therefore no surprise that they are said to have been done in Egypt.[8]

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4. Brevard S. Childs, "Deuteronomic Formulae of the Exodus Traditions," Supplement to Vetus Testamentum, XVI (1967), pp. 33-6.
5. Num 14:22. Dt 11:3-5 explicitly includes events in Egypt (presumably the plagues), at the Reed Sea, and in the desert.
6. Cf. Ex 4:9,17,30, Num 14:11, Josh 24:17, and seemingly also Ex 10:1-2.
7. Ex 4:21.
8. Ex 11:9-10

Presumably these two different streams of thought were combined later into the standard, almost formulaic "אותות ומופתים."[9] The phrase incorporates certain elements from each of the two preceding views. It consistently denotes that which is done in Egypt, usually to Pharaoh.[10] Several of the usages imply not that it was for Pharaoh s benefit that these were performed, but as part of a concerted action against him. The referent seems, therefore, to be the process of extricating Israel from Egypt, i.e. that which is implied in the use of מופתים alone.[11] Judging from context, this would seem to be the plagues.[12] Significantly, the sea event is not mentioned in certain contexts where we would expect it, but is removed from those verses which deal explicitly with the exodus and is there described as a seemingly separate event, the downfall of an anonymous enemy.[13] The implication to be drawn from these considerations must be that the event

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9. The contexts in which this usage is encountered would suggest it to be the work of D.

10. Ex 7:3, Dt 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 29:2, 34:11. Several passages imply the importance of Israel's witnessing this event, e.g. Dt 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 29:2.

11. Cf. Dt 26:8, Jer 32:21.

12. Ps 78:43, 105:27, 135:9, Neh 9:10; Psalms 78 and 135 clearly suggest that this was in Egypt.

13. Ps 78:43,53, Neh 9:10-11; cf. George W. Coats, "The Traditio-historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif," Vetus Testamentum, XVII:3 (July, 1967), pp. 263-4. If Egypt is included among the anonymous enemies of Josh 21:43-5, the exodus itself is reduced to being part of the process whereby God gave Israel the Promised Land!

at the Reed Sea was conceived as something different from the exodus itself as can be clearly seen from the two very different threats facing Israel - in one case slavery, in the other military defeat. To be sure, the wilderness sojourn must be viewed as conceptually subordinate to the exodus and Promised Land themes.[14] It is not presented as a place of Israel's beginnings nor the goal of their flight from servitude; even the excuse Moses gave Pharaoh claimed they would spend but a short time there.[15] Only when uncertain of their ability to stay alive do the Israelites charge that Moses led them into the wilderness with no better goal in mind; and their position is generally that it would be better to return to Egypt[16] - they do not ask to remain in the desert.

The narrative which begins in Exodus 14:10 supports the argument that the event at the sea is part of the wanderings. Here we find all the elements which come to characterize the wilderness sojourn - the people's murmuring, asking to return to Egypt, guidance by an angel and a pillar of cloud. Certainly in some respects this

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14. Noth, op. cit., pp. 47 and 58. Ulrich W. Mauser (Christ in the Wilderness, p. 45) goes so far as to claim that the period of Egyptian slavery itself is considered part of the wilderness time in Hos 13:4-5 and Jer 2:2ff.

15. Noth, op. cit., p. 71.

16. In Num 14 this is considered preferable even to the conquest of Canaan.

event was considered part of the exodus. Most notably we find connections with the plagues which preceded - Pharaoh's heart is hardened,[17] God speaks of proving Himself,[18] and Moses is told to stretch out his hand.[19] However, the fact that in some respects it was viewed differently militates against excluding it from consideration here.

The determination of the exodus itself can be achieved simply by outlining the events described in Exodus 12 and 13. In 12:33-6 the people prepare to leave. Verse 37 traces their progress using the itinerary form and sequence which is typical of and unique to the wilderness period.[20] Immediately thereafter we find reference to the fact that they have now been brought out of Egypt (vs. 39), completed their time of dwelling there (vss. 40-1), and are now beginning to receive laws (vs. 43), an event deemed typical of the wilderness period although found elsewhere as well. In 12:17,41,42, and 51 the exodus is implied to have been a one-day event, and according to 13:3 that event

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17. Ex 14:4,8.
18. Ex 14:4,18; cf. 7:5.
19. Ex 14:16,21. According to Brevard S. Childs ("A Traditio-Historical Study of the Reed-Sea Tradition," Vetus Testamentum, XX:4 (October, 1970), p. 409) "the sea event in the P account is no longer understood as part of the wilderness wanderings, but brings to completion the plan of God in the exodus which had begun with the plagues (Ex 7:3f)." As such we may have a late return to the original (historical) state of affairs suggested by Noth, that the event at the sea was the exodus itself.
20. Cf. George W. Coats, "The Wilderness Itinerary," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly XXXIV:2 (April, 1972), p. 147: "The wilderness itinerary...functions as a structural framework that unifies originally distinct traditions into a meaningful whole."

had already been completed. By verse 5 their goal, Canaan, has been set. Verses 14-15 suggest that killing the Egyptian first-born was the act of strength with which God extricated Israel from Egypt - and that it was sufficient to do so. In verse 17 their route is determined, and by verse 20 they have already reached the edge of the wilderness. Clearly then in the Pentateuchal narrative taken as a whole the wilderness period begins in Exodus 12:37, and the story of the Reed Sea is considered to be part of that period.[21]

The conclusion of the wilderness period, although possibly less significant than its beginning, is more difficult to define. Already in Joshua 2, for example, the conquest plans are under way. Thus to argue that crossing the river (Josh 3) is the entrance into the Promised Land is akin to viewing the Reed Sea as the exit from Egypt. Although tantalizing - and most likely the view held by whoever it was that put the stories into their present structure - it is simplistic for our purposes. The dilemma, as has been stated repeatedly, is a result of our attempt to find what is really an artificial, conceptual

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21. Coats, "...the Reed Sea Motif," pp. 264-5. According to Volkmar Fritz (Israel in der Wüste, p. 38) the itinerary sequence conceives the wilderness to begin in Ex 15:22a (cf. LXX and Sam ad loc.), although Coats disagrees for good reason ("The Wilderness Itinerary," pp. 150-1).

dividing line.

Compounding the difficulty is the fact that the settlement does not begin in an easily defined way. The Transjordan tribes occupy land which was conquered by accident. However, to the extent that this represents an attempt to explain how certain Israelite tribes acquired their territories, these events fit the theme which underlies the conquest as a whole and as such can be ascribed to that tradition. We will, therefore, arbitrarily place the dividing line between wilderness and occupation somewhere between Numbers 32 (the occupation of Transjordan) and Joshua 2 (the implementation of actual conquest plans). Numbers 13-14, although part of the conquest process and possibly the remnants of an earlier conquest narrative, does not in its present form and location serve that purpose.[22] The actual settlement of the Israelite tribes begins with Numbers 32. The various speeches of Moses as well as the account of his death contained in Deuteronomy must, however, also be included in the wilderness period inasmuch as they presuppose a state of not-yet-having-arrived which is characteristic of that time.[23]

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22. Cf. infra pp. 71-2.

23. The itinerary framework seems to end with Num 22:1, suggesting that the events which follow (Balaam and Baal Peor) are the final events of that period for whoever was responsible for this structure. Coats, however, finds traces of it in the book of Joshua ("The Wilderness Itinerary," p.149).

According to the Torah, which is the most developed narrative that we have, the texts dealing with the desert period (Exodus 12:37 through Deuteronomy 34) can be grouped into the following categories:

a) Accounts of Israel's itinerary and procedure

Ex 12:37 (13:17-18) 13:20 (14:1) 15:22,27, 16:1, 17:1 19:1-2
Num 2-3, 10:11-28,33-36, 11:35, 12:16, 20:1a,22, 21:4a,10-16,18b-20, 31 (33:1-49)
Dt 1:1b-2

b) Speeches by God and Moses containing a large amount of law

Divine - Ex 15:25b-26, Lev 26:3-45, Num 33:50-34:12

Mosaic - Ex 15:1-18(20-21), Num 33:1-49, 36
Dt 1:1, 1:3-4:40, 4:44-26:19, 28-31:6, 32:1-43, 33:1-29

Law
General - Ex 12:43-13:16, 20:1-14, 20:20-23:33, 31:12-17, 34:10-27, 35:1-3
Lev 1-7, 11:1-26:2, 26:46, 27

Priestly - Ex 25:1-31:11, 35:4-40:33
Lev 8-10
Num 31:1-13, 4, 7:1-88
Dt 31:10-13

Census - Ex 30:11-16
Num 1, 3:14-4:49, 25:19-27:7, 34

Occupation - Num 32, Dt 4:1-43, 27 (36)

Sinai Theophany -
Ex 19:2b-25, 20:15-19, 24, 31:18 (32:1-33:6) 34
Lev 26:46

Tent and Revelation - Ex 33:7-11, 40:34-35
Num 7:89

c) Relations with other nations

Ex 13:17-18 (14:1-9) 17:8-18:27
Num 10:29-32, 20:14-21, 21:1-3, 21:21-24:25, 25:16-18, 31:1-54

d) Divine assistance and Israelite rebellion

Ex 13:17-18,21-22, 14:10-31, 15:19,23-26, 16:2-36, 17:2-7, 20:15-18, 32:1-33:6(12-23), 40:36-38
Lev 10:1-20
Num 11:1-34, 12:1-15, 13-14, 15:32-36, 16-17, 20:2-13, 21:4-9,16-18, 25:1-19

e) Succession

Num 20:1b,23-29, 27:12-23
Dt 31:7-9,14-30, 32:44-52, 34

f) Miscellaneous

Unleavened bread - Ex 12:38-42[24]
Joseph's bones - Ex 13:19[25]
Boothes - Lev 23:43[26]

Since our concern is not with different kinds of text included in the Torah between the exodus and the conquest, but rather with the types of events ascribed to that period (so that material outside of the Torah can be considered as well), we will utilize the above typology to examine those texts which fall into each category along with consideration of their roles within that category, but without a detailed analysis of each individual text.

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24. Although narrative, part of this material could be included in the category of law; from another perspective it could be said to deal with the exodus.

25. Martin Noth (Exodus, A Commentary, p. 108) considers this to be aetiological for the tomb of Joseph in Shechem; cf. Gen 50:25 and Josh 24:32.

26. Cf. Dov Ashbel, "כי בסכות ישבו אבותיכם בצאתם ממצרים (ויקרא כ"ג מב) /sic/," Beth Hamikra, XII:1 (November, 1966), pp. 100-104.

Aside from descriptions of the manner and route by which Israel traversed the desert between Egypt and Canaan and excluding the fact of leadership and preparation for the ensuing occupation, there are four primary types of events assigned to the wilderness period:

1. revelation (including law and cultic procedure)
2. divine assistance
3. rebellion or complaint
4. foreign relations

Although there are certain difficulties with this typology, it is useful in providing entree to the material. Interestingly, no where outside of the Torah account itself are all four types found together in reference to the wilderness period despite the vast number of texts dealing with various aspects.[27]

Before proceeding to the individual facets of the desert period, we must confront one remaining difficulty in classifying relevent texts - the tendency towards generalization. This becomes immediately apparent in the theme "divine assistance" (here called Providence) which could be viewed as the underlying theme of the entire exodus process. Thus wherever we find isolated the common

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27. Several times three of the four are presented together, usually excluding "foreign relations" (Dt 33:2-5,8-9, Ps 81, 106, and Neh 9:6-31) and once without "divine guidance," although it may be implied (Dt 1:6-3:29).

phrase that God הוציאנו ממצרים or a variant of it, the reference could be to the entire redemptive process.[28]

The fact that it often occurs in sequence with other elements of the wilderness sojourn would suggest that it is not to be viewed as more than the exodus itself, a position supported by its generally appearing with the specification מארץ מצרים or ממצרים and even מבית עבדים.[29] In other words, the extrication is not the general experience between slavery and settlement, but the very specific rescue from Egypt, an occasion limited to a particular day or month.[30] That this sentiment became a formula[31] does not prove that its connotation was thereby generalized to include the entire period. The available evidence simply will not support the hypothesis that it referred to more than the very specific and limited exodus event, although such a possibility cannot be totally ruled out. Rather, we must assume that it indicates the rescue from slavery and that when it appears alone, the remainder of the "forty years in the wilderness" is either ignored or unknown.

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28. This is especially so when the term העלה is used, implying according to Noth the entry into Canaan as well as the exodus (Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 52; cf. Joanne Wijngaards, The Formulas of the Deuteronomic Creed, pp. 24ff, and "הוציא and העלה, a Twofold Approach to the Exodus," Vetus Testamentum, XV:1 (January, 1965), pp. 98-102.

29. Ex 13:3,14, 20:2, Lev 26:13, Dt 5:6, 6:12, 13:6,11 (note also Dt 5:15) - although it is not always God who is said to have done this, but also Moses, an angel or messenger (Num 20:16), or even the golden calf (Ex 32:4).

30. Ex 12:17,41,42,51, 34:18, Dt 16:1,6.

31. Jer 16:14, 23:7.

WILDERNESS REBELLION

> "What are the trespasses of the Hebrews...? Are they not the ordinary misdeeds of ordinary people? Is it something so terrible to long for meat? Is there something so terrible to want water when you are thirsty? What was it that the Hebrews did that was wrong? The answer is that they did what ordinary people do. What the biblical author is telling us is that Moses was fashioning them into a kingdom of priests and a holy people and therefore ordinary conduct was not good enough."*

The theme of wilderness rebellion[1] comes to dominate the narratives of the desert period. Since it is composed of a series of seemingly independent stories of varying types, however, the term "theme" may be a misnomer much like "rebellion" which does not fit all of these. Rather we are dealing with a variety of incidents all of which

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* Samuel Sandmel, "The Enjoyment of Scripture" (unpublished lecture), p. 22.

1. For an explanation of this characterization cf. George W. Coats, Rebellion in the Wilderness, p. 249.

reflect negatively on the Israelites in one way or another.

Within the unfolding Torah narrative these stories are found largely in two places - Exodus 13-17 and Numbers 11-17 which continues in chapters 20 and 21. Because they are so numerous, they evince a sense of constantly recurring sin, taxing the reader's ability to delineate between individual instances. On closer examination the narratives reveal some striking similarities as well as illuminating differences.

The first such "rebellion" takes place at the Reed Sea and provides a major reason for thematically linking that account with the wilderness period. The Israelites argue that they had warned Moses of the dangers inherent in his plan while still in Egypt.[2] Although no text in the preceding narrative fits the complaint here voiced, it does serve to link this story with the period of Israel's Egyptian slavery, extending Israel's rebellion back into the previous period and reminding us once again that the wilderness period cannot be totally abstracted from that which preceded it.

The Israelites' complaint, which comprises an

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2. Rashi suggests the reference is to Ex 5:21 (ad Ex 14:12), while ibn Ezra more convincingly states that the incident alluded to is not recorded in the Bible. The author's point may well be that the Israelites here invent or exaggerate what had happened in Egypt, a recurring motif in these stories. Cf. also Coats, op. cit., pp. 255-6.

extremely small part of the Reed Sea narrative, is that the Egyptians will kill them.[3] There is no explicit concern about the sea, but instead precisely the problem which God had anticipated and to avoid which, ironically, He had led them in their present direction.[4]

The text contains an important redundancy. In 14:10 the Israelites cry to God, a reaction appropriate to the circumstances of the exodus and typical of various salvations, particularly during the period of the judges;[5] but in verse 11 a more specific complaint which expresses a fundamental opposition to the exodus is directed to Moses. Both of the two replies which follow - one from Moses and the other from God - ignore the second complaint. Moses ascribes responsibility for resolving the threat (and implicitly the dilemma itself) to God; God calls for action by both Moses and the people. Neither one responds to the thrust of the question, "What is this you have done, bringing us out of Egypt?" (v. 11) Possibly we have here the combination of two different problems, one of which has been placed around the other so as to bracket it. Whatever the evolution of the text, however, it is the Israelites' specific complaint which is of particular interest. Directed to Moses, it blames him for the present threat:

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3. Ex 14:11-12.
4. Cf. Ex 13:17b.
5. Cf. Jg 3:9,15, 4:3, 6:6, 10:10,12.

he took us out of Egypt to die here in the desert.[6] The rebels are unaware of a promised land beyond the desert towards which they are heading, and so to them the exodus was pointless. Better to live in Egypt as slaves than die in the desert as free men.

God's response is one of action. The complaint is ignored; there is no punishment nor even a reply.[7] The sea is parted in order to provide a sign of God's power for the Israelites and to kill the Egyptians.[8] Just as the sea in front of them did not seem to worry the Israelites earlier, so now their crossing is not in itself emphasized. In contrast to the exodus for which slavery was the status to be overcome, here it is an immediate military threat akin to that which typifies the judges' period; and the outcome here as in that later time is belief both in God and the leader He has provided.[9]

The second instance of "rebellion" follows immediately. The story of Marah (Ex 15:22-25a) includes an aetiological element; but that cannot be its purpose, since it is explicitly stated that the name Marah antedated the Israelites' arrival there.[10] Apparently the story is to

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6. The people's feeling that they are already in the desert is shared by Pharaoh; cf. Ex 14:3 although 14:5 suggests possibly different circumstances.

7. According to Noth (Exodus, p. 106) and Coats (Rebellion, p. 136) this suggests that the rebellion is a secondary element in the narrative.

8. Ex 14:13, cf. v. 18.

9. Ex 14:31.

10. Ex 15:23.

explain the discrepancy between the name and the sweet water which was found there. However, the impotability of the water at Marah is preceded by a far different complaint - that Israel could not find anything at all to drink in the desert.[11] This "overloading" can be understood either in sequence (that after not finding any water they came to Marah), or as the combination of two different stories, or finally as a revision of one simple story. Verse 24 which contains the people's murmuring seems almost unnecessary for the text except that it provides a subject for the verb in the following verse.[12] As was the case at the Reed Sea, the complaint is directed at Moses but does not deal with the difficulties of the desert in contrast to Egyptian life, perhaps because the people are too close to the servitude of that time.[13] As before, God's response to Israel's complaint is one of action. The story deals with Moses' sweetening the waters at Marah, a semi-practical resolution to an immediate dilemma; the only miracle is God's showing him a tree. As for the murmurings, they seem to have no effect and, as remarked above, are not at all in evidence

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11. Ex 15:22.
12. Verse 25 contains its own subject in LXX, Sam, and Syr. It is intriguing that the term מרה which would provide a possible aetiology for the place name is not used.
13. Although that did not prevent such a complaint earlier, cf. Ex 14:11. More likely this story is not of the same type, at least not completely so.

after verse 24.[14]

The element of disobedience in the story of the quail and the manna (Exodus 16) is highly complex. In fact, there are several sins (which need not mean that these are several combined stories). First God initiates a test comprised of two parts (both of which Israel fails). The first deals with general procedures concerning the collection of manna and entails the people's ignoring Moses.[15] Although they disobey Moses, their sin must be understood in terms of the divine test described in verse 4. The other element is the violation of God's Sabbath.[16] God's use of עד אנה (v. 28) points to the multiplicity of disobedience in this narrative.[17]

An additional sin is initiated by the Israelites and takes the form of complaint: Moses and Aaron brought them to the desert to die, but it would have been better to have died in Egypt.[18] Although the danger confronting them in

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14. נסה in verse 25b seems to belong with what follows rather than the story of Marah proper. Noth suggests that this is a play on Massah, the locale of another spring miracle (Exodus, p. 129).

15. Ex 16:15-20 (ascribed to P by Coats, Rebellion, pp. 83-7) actually contains two directions from Moses.

16. Ex 16:4bβ, 27-8 (ascribed to Dtr). According to Coats this may be contrived by P (vv. 14-26, 33-4) to explain the Sabbath although he is not convincing (Rebellion, p. 95).

17. Num 14:11 uses similar language to link a variety of narratives; the difference between God's complaint in the two verses points up the differing nature of Israel's "sin" - here the violation of a commandment, there the continued lack of belief as manifest in repeated murmuring.

18. Ex 16:2-3.

the wilderness here is different from that of Exodus 14, the complaint is identical and is met with two replies. Moses argues that it was not Aaron and he who brought them to the desert but God (v. 6) - the implication being that God can and will take care of their physical needs. In verse 8, however, Moses says angrily, "Your complaint is against God, not against us." The meaning of these two responses is similar, but the underlying moods are quite distinct. One represents an attempt to correct the people's misunderstanding of the divine character of the exodus, while the other raises the degree of sin from mere grumbling to virtual blasphemy, presumably in order to quell the discontent. Whether these are considered separate or related replies, this element of the story - unlike God's test - resembles the complaint at the sea and like it is met with divine action, although not without some anger.[19] The complaint actually succeeds, although it is limited both in time and quantity.

Like many of these narratives, the story of Massah and Meribah (Ex 17:1-7) is complex. The people's complaint is given in two different forms using various terms;[20] furthermore, the double place name seems unique. The fact that these two dichotomies do not correspond to one another

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19. Ex 16:11-12.
20. Ex 17:2 and 3 where ריב ,נסה and לון appear.

could imply that there may have been at least three different sources for this narrative.[21] The aetiological facet of the present story requires only the terms נסה and ריב. Verse 3, in which the word לון appears, seems relatively superfluous and given what we have seen in earlier stories may have been superimposed. There alone is the Israelites' concern phrased in the form of a nascent rebellion, there alone is Moses considered the single authority behind the exodus, and there alone do we find him accused of causing the people's death in the wilderness.[22] The lack of divine participation in the argument is easily understood if the rebellion motif has been added to earlier forms of these stories although we can hardly consider this possibility to have been proven.

Moses' reaction, a cry to God, is not a new element in this situation; but his fear is. Generally he cries to

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21. The names Massah and Meribah generally appear separately in the Bible. (E.g. Num 20:13, Dt 6:16, 9:22, Ezk 47:19, 48:28, but cf. Dt 33:8 and Ps 95:8-9.) For Coats this suggests that they were two different places (Rebellion, p. 62), but Ezra Zion Melamed disagrees ("Break-up of Stereotype Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry," Scripta Hierosolymitana, VIII (1961), p. 123). The testing is on occasion said to have been done by God to Israel and given a positive connotation (Dt 33:8-10, the contextual authenticity of which is doubted by Cross and Freedman ("The Blessing of Moses," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXVII (1948) pp. 203-4) and Ps 81:8.

22. Although the עם is speaking, the victim of Moses' act is in the singular: "... למה זה העליתנו ממצרים להמית אתי" Perhaps originally the "revolt" was more limited in scope than its present form would suggest.

God when confronted with a seemingly insoluble problem.[23] The threat of stoning which he faces here is new and heightens the danger as well as the importance of the rebellion. It is now clearly directed at Moses. The interweaving of such concepts, if such was the process whereby the story developed its present form, is visible in verse 2b where it appears that the people's ריב was with Moses, but they were trying (tempting) God.

Some brief notes in conclusion are appropriate to our examination of this particular text. The reference to Horeb in verse 6 is peculiar.[24] Significantly, the summary in verse 7b is not identical with the complaint as recorded anywhere in the preceding narrative although it may be theologically equivalent.

This story's complex character is readily apparent.[25] Of particular note is the fact that the murmuring motif seems not to be an essential (i.e. original?) element, a frequent impression one gets from these stories. This motif generally presents the entire people standing against Moses (and Aaron) whom they blame for the exodus with the argument, "We might as well have died in Egypt." The

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23. Cf. Ex 15:25, Num 11:2.
24. Noth regards it as a late addition (Exodus, p. 140). Given the word's etymology, one wonders if here it may simply mean "a rock" (cf. supra p. 21f).
25. Cf. Ibid., p. 139 and Coats, Rebellion, pp. 58-60.

narratives in which this feature appears include other complaints as well as elements of divine providence and aetiology although these three categories are themselves neither distinct nor mutually exclusive.

The story of the golden calf (Ex 32-3) is often considered to be the desert rebellion par excellence.[26] Physically isolated from narratives of this type, it is predictably unique - especially in light of the special polemic role generally ascribed to it; however, it does share some notable elements with these other stories. The narrative begins typically with the phrase וַיַּרְא הָעָם כִּי[27] and presents an instance of Israelite discontent in the midst of the fundamentally positive Sinaitic revelation. As in

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26. The transmission of the Ten Commandments is followed by a brief note which does not mention discontent but seems related to the concepts discussed here. Israel's response to the initial theophany at Sinai is fear, followed by a request that Moses mediate between them and God. In Ex 20:20 Moses replies that they should not fear, for God was merely "testing" them and teaching them to avoid sin. The exact nature of the test is obscure. (Noth suggests it was to see if they would stay at the proper distance, Exodus p. 168.) Moshe Greenberg's interpretation of נסה as "to give experience" is logical and leads to this passage's exclusion from treatment under the present heading. ("נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXIX:3 (September, 1960), p. 274) However, the fear of death expressed in verse 19 is a familiar one and recalls the basic volatility of the Israelite congregation in the wilderness as depicted by the Torah.

27. Cf. Num 16:3, 20:2 (also 16:19).

many other stories there is an inner tension concerning the agency responsible for the exodus.[28] This "revolt," however, does not represent a challenge to Moses' authority, but a reaction to his absence.[29] The real challenge is to God, for the calf - whatever historical circumstances may underlie its construction - is unambiguously interpreted as an idol. Furthermore, in contrast to the other stories, the negative element here seems "well-rooted," an admittedly subjective determination.

In addition to familiar motifs there are some significantly different and new elements in this story. Here the Israelites are depicted as suffering from no lack of food or drink.[30] Additionally, the various punishments mentioned recall the previous lack of direct divine reaction to Israel's seemingly incessant murmuring,[31] whereas now God threatens to destroy the entire people.[32] Moses' intercession reverses his more typical cry to the Lord under such circumstances, although here he has the luxury of being more of a spectator than victim of such a

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28. Ex 32:1bβ,7b,8b,11b,12a,23b, 33:1.
29. Contra Coats, Rebellion, p. 185 although the exodus is mentioned and ascribed to Moses and/or the calf.
30. Ex 32:6.
31. Cf. Ex 32:35; in Ex 16, for example, God is angry but acts only to assist Israel. Jay A. Wilcoxen notes that Sinai serves as the turning point in Israelite rebellion; previous to it there is no punishment, but afterwards the leader is usually put to death ("Some Anthropocentric Aspects of Israel's Sacred History," Journal of Religion, XLVIII:4 (October, 1968) pp. 344-5).
32. Ex 32:10; the intention to turn Moses into their replacement reappears in Num 14:12.

confrontation.[33]

This passage is generally considered to represent a polemic against the cult established by Jeroboam in Northern Israel; however, it is striking that here as in several of the other stories Moses seems to be challenged by the entire congregation rather than any special interest group. While this narrative surely has some connection with the Biblical description of Jeroboam's cult - and such a view accords nicely with the generally anti-Northern bias Coats suggests for the murmuring motif - the golden calf story requires a somewhat more subtle understanding.

The story of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2) is also located apart from the two major sections which deal with Israelite murmuring, fittingly since its sin is ascribed to only two individuals among the community. The actual nature of their misdeed is not clear. At first it is said to be the offering of "strange fire,"[34] while the second half of the verse mentions the performance of an uncommanded offering. This could be a totally different sin or an explanation as to why an אש זרה was inappropriate, or a later gloss defining that strange terminology. Other

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33. Moses' speech in Ex 33:12-13,15-16 seems close to that in Num 11:11-15, especially the repeated use of the idiom נתן את

34. Lev 10:1; Noth suggests that this may mean that they had not taken the fire from the altar or had made improper use of incense, cf. Ex 30:9 (Leviticus, a Commentary, pp. 84-5).

references to the incident are either based on this account or vague as to the specific sin involved.[35]

The narrative is generally understood as the retrojection of some priestly conflict.[36] It is brief and explicit - even if we cannot recover the reference - and seems to oppose either some group or practice. The first two verses bear an interesting relationship to part of the story dealing with Korah's revolt; the forms of death and part of the sacrificial technique in both stories are similar.[37] The differing contexts argue for diversity; however, the virtually identical language strongly suggests some close connection.

A second sin in this context is based on the preceding story and ascribed to Ithamar and Elazar (Lev 10:16-20); it, too, deals with details of priestly technique.[38] To the extent that the individuals in these narratives represent later priestly groups, the stories themselves must be interpreted as retrojections of later circumstances.[39]

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35. Cf. infra pp. 87-8.
36. Noth, Leviticus, p. 84.
37. Cf. Num 16:18,35; the intervening verses relate specifically to the topic there considered. Coats claims that these represent different developments of the same tradition for different purposes (Rebellion, pp. 257-60).
38. According to Noth this text represents an attempt to reconcile Lev 9:8-15 and 6:30 (Leviticus, p. 88).
39. The desert period attracts such accounts in a remarkable way. Was it viewed as the normative period in Israel's history, perhaps because it stood at the beginning, or a convenient catch-all, the space between the Reed Sea and the Jordan which needed filling with more than itineraries?

The incident described in Leviticus 24:10-23 bears no relationship to anything which precedes. Its function seems to be that of a legal precedent.[40] Of note is the fact that here laws come directly from God on an almost ad hoc basis. Although it would be foolish to claim that the story is not aware of any Sinaitic legislation, it does seem to presuppose an entirely different approach to law, based on judicial rather than legislative process. To attempt to determine the story's Sitz-im-Leben would require more conjecture than is appropriate here; most immediately one wonders whether it is based on real or hypothetical circumstances. In any event the account fits with the legal material (i.e. "Revelation") more easily than with rebellion, for the act described is limited and isolated, functioning in context as a crime rather than a sin. Its present position is presumably due to the legal weight carried by this period rather than its depiction of popular disobedience.[41]

The story of Taberah (Num 11:1-3) brings us to the second major collection dealing with Israel's wrongdoing in the desert and is of particular interest because it is so limited a narrative. Any connection with the other stories in this category is solely the result of the reader's

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40. Cf. Herbert C. Brichto, The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible pp. 143-7 and also Num 9:6-13, 15:32-6, 27:1-11.

41. Cf. Martin Noth, Numbers, A Commentary, pp. 179f.

perception, rather than owing to any intrinsic element shared with them. The story opens with a complaint, but uses the root]JK.[43] Here, the people's complaint is directed at or at least perceived directly by God; there is no statement concerning their resentment of the exodus nor any attempt to blame Moses and Aaron for it. God's reaction is immediate punishment; Moses intercedes only afterwards. Finally, the sole function of the narrative is aetiological; in no other way does the event influence the people's well-being during the remainder of their wandering. While the stories which we have previously examined seem to have developed out of the combination of various elements, this narrative is simple and straightforward. The narrative develops step by step through each succeeding statement. It has not been woven into the structure of repeated murmuring incidents which we have previously discerned.[44]

The three most fully developed narratives which use the "murmuring" format occur in close proximity to one another in the book of Numbers. The first is another narrative dealing with quail, here tied to the location

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43. Although the Septuagint and various cognate languages may equate this with]]? (Coats, Rebellion, pp. 124-5), it never appears in such a context in the Masoretic version.

44. According to Noth the narrative presupposes the sort of complaint found in other instances, but which is now missing (Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 124).

קברות התאוה (Num 11:4-34). The narrative is complex alth ugh we must not presume this to be an indication of late composition or composite character; Coats' and Noth's assumption of originally "simple" units must be proven. However, the story does include a variety of seemingly disparate elements including an aetiology, an account of divine providence, and a section dealing with prophecy. The sin is ascribed variously to the people and to אספסף, a term which does not appear elsewhere in the Bible. Furthermore, we find a unique prayer by Moses - although it does show certain similarities with that in the golden calf episode.[45]

It is not our purpose here to unravel this complexity; however, a close look at various components can help in understanding the rebellion narratives which have been ascribed to the period of Israel's wanderings. Whatever the specifics of this story's origin,[46] the narrative's compound

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45. E.g. the repeated use of נא and the request for death if God will not help.

46. Noth claims that in this account the murmuring is well-ro ted inasmuch as it builds on the earlier narrative dealing with the gift of manna; furthermore, he argues that the story is close to the following one since both deal with Moses as a prophetic figure. (Numbers, p. 83; Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 128) In contrast, Coats proposes spitting the aetiology from the rebellion inasmuch as the quail narrative in Exodus includes no aetiological element and 11:33 seems to be the only part of this text which knows of both components (Rebellion, p. 112). He then suggests that within the "rebellion" section the punishing aspect of the gift of quail is a later accretion since the surfeit of food is a beneficent punishment and Moses' reference to Israel as a sickly child suggests her absolute dependence rather than rebelliousness (Ibid., pp. 104-9).

character becomes most striking in verse 4. Here the אספסף long for something (providing the basis of the aetiology), and then Israel complains.[47] The complaint is not derived from anger for the exodus or a desire to return to Egypt; all they want is better food.[48] Indeed, there is no real rebellion; the people merely cry to Moses who, in turn, goes to God with their complaint.

God's response is typically one of action without anger. He responds to Moses' request for assistance (vv. 16-17) and the people's desire for better food (v. 18). The quail is provided not merely in acquiescence to their stated request but more specifically so that they will come to believe; perhaps this is an implicit response to the more typical complaint that Moses brought them to the desert to die. They ask "who will feed us," an appropriate

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47. If בני ישראל is the subject of וישובו, the implication would be that "once again Israel cried..."; if it is the אספסף which is returning, then we must note that both LXX and Syr read the following word as וישיבו, i.e. "they caused the Israelites to cry." With this interpretation, the composite appearance of the verse disappears and a logical progression of events can be traced. The notion of a small group inciting the entire congregation of Israel to complain is found also in the story of the twelve spies, cf. Num 13:32-14:2. (On the Septuagint's reading וישיבו cf. D. Beirne, "A Note on Numbers 11:4," Biblica XLIV (1963), pp. 201-3.)

48. The reason for this variation on a more familiar theme may be that there is presently no real threat of death given the regular supply of manna as described in Ex 16.

concern for those who believe it was Moses alone who brought them from Egypt.[49] The miraculous food is to convince them of the real character of the exodus as is confirmed by God's angry description of the quail as a punishment for Israel's having rejected Him (v. 20). Only if "Who will feed us meat?" (v. 4) suggests that the people had forgotten about God or if the dislike for manna (v. 6) implies ignorance of its source[50] is there evidence of such rejection. By the end of verse 20, however, we do find the typical rejection of the exodus; מאס and בכה both imply the customary form of that motif. Finally, there are two different punishments: in addition to the previously mentioned surplus of quail, we find a plague directed against the entire people (v. 33b) which results in the death of the העם המתאוים, i.e. the מתאוה[51] (as opposed to those who merely took advantage of the meat supply). Here again emerges the two-tiered focus of this story - those who incited and were killed and those who allowed themselves to participate once lured into this rebellion.

The "murmuring motif" is at least strongly implied in a somewhat limited form; however, this story also contains

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49. Num 11:4, cf. v. 18.

50. The description in verse 7-9 implies the possibility that the Exodus account was not known to the author who considered the regular occurrence of manna in the desert as a natural, albeit unpleasant mode of sustenance, cf. F.S. Bodenheimer, "The Manna of Sinai," The Biblical Archaeologist, X:1 (February, 1947), pp. 2-6.

51. Cf. Num 11:4.

a negative element entirely its own and appropriate to its particular character. Included in this latter are Moses' felt burden and the people's inflammatory request which clearly assumes a certain distaste for desert life but asks for neither death nor return to Egypt and may not even be directed against God as the giver of the despised manna. To this has apparently been added the more familiar murmuring elements,[52] but in a way that fits the present story and its place in the overall desert narrative. In other words, the so-called murmuring motif must not be viewed as the simple superimposition of stereotypical negative elements, but rather the impression of an ongoing rebellion by the juxtaposition of narratives plus relatively minimal additions within the outlines of basic stories, providing for a sense of repeated difficulties.

Numbers 12 is a totally unique narrative with none of those elements we have previously described as part of the repeating motif; the people as a whole are not involved, and the vocabulary is totally independent. That this chapter contains two stories seems possible, but beyond proof.[53] The narrative can be understood, with some admitted peculiarities though not contradictions, in its present

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52. Cf. infra pp. 56-7.
53. Martin Noth, Numbers, pp. 92-3.

form.[54] That it presents a conflict over leadership without focusing on the leader-follower relationship typical of the murmuring motif could support the contention that this is a late "attempt to give theological formulation to the uniqueness of the figure of Moses."[55] However, a focus on leadership can also be found in other stories, although there it is generally minimized as a result of the lack of any specific challenge.[56] We have elsewhere seen evidence of Moses' unique relationship with God, especially in light of his ability and willingness to intercede on the people's behalf;[57] the repeated resentment expressed by the widespread murmuring implies the extent of his authority, while ambiguity in Aaron's role is clear in the golden calf incident besides Leviticus' problems with other priestly figures.[58] Whatever the history of this particular passage, it includes tensions which are present elsewhere as well,

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54. E.g. if verse 2 is a result of the anger generated in verse 1 or vice versa; cf. Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Bible, pp. 423-4 for rabbinic interpretations which function in this way.

55. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 127. How the Cushite woman fits into all of this is rather difficult to discern. The rabbinic explanation that Miriam and Aaron spoke up "on her behalf" (v. 1) is homiletically pleasing whether or not it accurately represents the narrator's intent.

56. Usually it is the עדה, presumably the entire people, which confronts Moses; cf. ibid., p. 125.

57. E.g. at the Reed Sea, Mt. Sinai, and in resolving the problem of blasphemy in Leviticus 24:10f.

58. Leviticus 10.

although decidedly distinct from the generalized murmuring motif which appears to typify the desert rebellions.

The story of the spies (Num 13-14) is especially significant in its role as an apparent climax to the whole murmuring tradition; however, it too includes some notable complexities which provide insight into the structure of that theme. Moses' assignment to the spies prior to their mission explicitly permits them the option of bringing back either good or bad reports,[59] in marked contrast to the divine promise which stipulates that God is giving them that land and the spies are presumably just to look it over, the only explicit purpose being to include spies from each tribe.[60] In the course of the story there are several sins disclosed along with punishments appropriate for each.

The narrative proceeds smoothly and understandably until verse 13:32 in which the spies present a second report after having already voiced their opinion and then being challenged by Caleb. It is this דבה, which in context seems almost to be a "rumor," emphasizing if not exaggerating the problems they foresee in contrast to the earlier more favorable report, which is responsible for the plague by which they were punished (14:36-7). This plague is limited to the spies, or at least those responsible for

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59. Num 13:17-19.
60. Num 13:2a.

the rumor, while the forty years' wandering punishes the people as a whole.

The second sin - that of the entire congregation - typifies the murmuring motif's tendency to speak of generalized discontent.[61] They בכה and לון, preferring death in Egypt or the desert to an attempted conquest of the land (14:2). That they would be willing to die in the wilderness is a new extension of their previously stated desires,[62] suggesting that this motif does indeed apply to a series of incidents which progress perceptibly. Where once they would rather live as slaves in Egypt than die free in the wilderness, now they would prefer misery in the desert to the threats of an attempted conquest. Clearly we are being told more of human psychology than about the objective characteristics of certain environments, whether desert or promised land. Surprisingly it is God who is here credited with the exodus - and with trying to kill this people through His planned invasion of Canaan.

The divine reply to this challenge is unique: in His anger God threatens to kill them all and establish Moses in their stead.[63] His words עד אנה support the view of this as one in a series of incidents.[64] The sin is that lack of

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61. E.g. its use of terms such as העם and כל עדת בני ישראל
62. Cf. Ex 14:11-12.
63. Num 14:12, cf. Ex 32:10.
64. The term נשא also connects this with other passages.

belief which fails to appreciate the evidence with which the Israelites have been provided.

Moses defends the people theologically, incorporating an apparently formulaic reference to God (14:18); we are reminded of his similar reply to God's threat at the time of the golden calf. By verse 22 it is explicit that we are dealing with the climax to the entire tradition of desert rebellion.[65] The generation as a whole is to be kept from even seeing Canaan.[66] Everybody except Calab is to die.[67] In this instance it is not the wicked spies from which Caleb is excluded, but the entire people.

The punishment is that the people must return to the desert so as not to see the Promised Land (14:23). The wandering is not a punishment unto itself, but a means towards this end. The duration forty years is derived from

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65. The number "ten" is generally considered to be a round number; however, excluding the blasphemy narrative this is the tenth rebellion story. Not all of these constitute "murmuring" stories proper, but since some may be composite and still others subject to rearrangement within the Pentateuchal structure (as implied, though not proven by the existence of further discontent even after this climax has been reached), it is not impossible that at one time this figure was meant to be taken literally. (Cf. Noth, Numbers, p. 109, and Coats, Rebellion, p. 147.)

66. Moses seems to be included in the punishment here stated although the general polarization between him and the עדה could be taken to suggest the opposite. His inclusion may explain the complaint in Dt 1:37, 3:26, Ps 106:32-3. Cf. infra p. 94.

67. Neither Joshua nor Moses are excepted here although Joshua is added in 14:30-32 where the punishment is restricted to adults.

the forty days the spies spent in the land (14:34) although this would seem to be limited in relevence to the spies - who die almost immediately in a plague (14:37). In fact, the time is not the punishment, but a waiting period until all those born in Egypt (and over twenty years old?) can die (14:33), fulfilling their "hope": "If only we would have died in Egypt or in this desert..." (14:2).

The third sin in this passage results from an abortive attempt to conquer part of Canaan, begun to repent for their earlier lack of faith.[68] The failure is ascribed to God's absence (vv. 42-3) and seems to suffice as a punishment. Their sin is twofold: attempting to undo the divine decree and taking neither the ark nor Moses with them - although one might argue that in the long run these amount to the same thing.

A widespread interpretation of the spy narratives is that they are based on this last incident, the attempt to conquer the land which, it is claimed, originally told of a successful conquest that was turned into a failure and embellished with the punishment of an entire generation in order to allow for the unified invasion of the land from the east under Joshua.[69] There is, however, no textual

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68. Num 14:40ff, note particularly vv. 39b and 40b.

69. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 135 and Simon J. de Vries, "The Origin of the Murmuring Tradition," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXXVII:1 (1968), p. 57. Coats uses the story as evidence for the pro-Judean bias of the murmuring motif because of its pro-Caleb elements (Rebellion, p. 152; cf. Num 13:6).

support for this contention. Even without murmuring, the story is thoroughly negative. The people's sin is at best combined with or superimposed over that of the spies, quite apart from any question as to the original success of the conquest or the murmuring motif as a secondary addition to the text. As for the purportedly pro-Judean bias, Caleb is presented as the exception to both punishments - those of the spies and of the people. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the passing of an entire generation was necessary in order to account for a journey from the southern Negev to east of the Jordan. That the forty desert years begin at this point and not with the exodus means that the Torah makes only the most limited attempt to account for Israel's activities during that time. Verse 14:33 suggests it was to be a waiting period, introduced perhaps for theological reasons - that such a people could not be allowed into the Promised Land, in which case the generation time span is conceptually dependent on the desert disobedience, and the tradition's evolution must be understood in that way and not vice versa. In any event, the rebellion motif in this account fits with its usage elsewhere. While this is an especially significant account for that tradition, it must be understood as the climax rather than the origin of the entire tradition. The true period of wandering (whether forty or thirty-eight years,[70]

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70. Cf. Num 14:33 and Dt 2:14.

begins here. The spy story itself, even without the murmuring elements, is negative; the spies are punished for lying and inciting the people. Caleb is present in both elements of the tale.[71]

The story of the Sabbath breaker (Num 15:32-6) is of some interest although it does not fit within the stories of discontent for reasons similar to those outlined above concerning a different account.[72] The sinner is in no way identified, nor is the exact nature of his violation clear. The closest Pentateuchal regulation would be that which forbids lighting a fire on the Sabbath,[73] but one must infer from the man's action (gathering sticks) that he intended to light a fire on the same day. The narrative may presume a more complex concept of the Sabbath and its work restrictions than is explicit elsewhere although the Ten Commandments do prohibit any work whatsoever.[74] With other cases in the Torah it intends to show how law was determined or interpreted in addition to developing the specificities of one particular law.[75]

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71. As is Joshua - as an Ephraimite counterweight to Caleb?
72. Cf. supra, p. 61; it is instructive to note the people's cooperation with their leadership in handling this violation as well as the fact that they follow instructions for the punishment virtually to the letter (Num 15:35-6), a notable contrast to the overtones conveyed in the rebellion stories although both share the tendency to generalize and speak of the entire population acting as a unit vis a vis its leadership.
73. Ex 35:3.
74. Ex 20:10.
75. E.g. Lev 24:10ff, Num 9:6ff.

The story of Korah and his revolt (Num 16-17), like that of the twelve spies, plays a significant role in our understanding of the tradition of desert discontent. Like that earlier story it is clearly a complex account and likewise is followed by short extensions. We will accept the assumption that the Korah portion(s) of the story are late and represent a priestly conflict to which are ascribed roots in the wilderness period,[76] a position which accords well with that period's tendency to attract narratives which explain or justify later institutions.

The narrative dealing with Dathan and Abiram is unique among the rebellion tales in its lack of any external motive. It contains no aetiology[77] nor any gift from God. It may be a retrojection of some later historical rivalry as the Korah sections are generally understood, representing perhaps the Reubenite (first-born) claim of primacy either in general or against the Levite Moses.[78] Like the story of Miriam and Aaron's "revolt" it presents a challenge to Mosaic leadership from a limited group, but fits better with the characteristics we have

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76. Jacob Liver, "Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," Scripta Hierosolymitana, VIII (1961), pp. 210, 214-7.

77. Noth suggests there may once have been a crevice in the earth which this is supposed to explain although there is no evidence to support such a view (Pentateuchal Traditions, pp. 125-6, cf. also Greta Hort, "The Death of Korah," Australian Bible Review VII:1 (December, 1959), pp. 2-26).

78. Liver, op. cit., p. 205.

seen over and over again as constituting the so-called murmuring motif: Moses is accused of having led the exodus for his own selfish reasons,[79] leading Israel out of Egypt, a land of milk and honey, without bringing them to another land of milk and honey (16:13-14).[80] This is the totality of this particular story; there are no other elements with which it could have been combined. Hence the conclusion that the motif is original in this context.

A reasonable hypothesis suggests that originally this account came directly after the exodus, in which case the murmuring stories would have been neatly framed, beginning here and reaching the climax in the account of the spies.[81] According to this view the inclusion of Korah (grafted onto this tale because it arose too late to achieve independent status) necessitated the shift in position because it emphasizes Levites which would presuppose such texts as those dealing with the golden calf and the tabernacle.[82]

Moses' actions in this incident are typical: he

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79. This is both anti-Moses and anti-exodus (contra Coats, Rebellion, pp. 177-8).

80. The suggestion that there is no nearby land of milk and honey fits with neither the story's present location nor the punishment already received in the narrative of the spies.

81. Liver, op. cit., pp. 200-1; cf. the sequence in Dt 11:2-7 (although only this and the Reed Sea are listed) and Ps 106:7ff.

82. Ibid.; it must be mentioned, however, that the characteristic verb לקח appears within the Korah part of the narrative in verse 11.

interceedes on the rebels' behalf (16:20-22) and explains that the exodus was God's doing, not his (16:28); this is proven when he foretells the punishment of those who have rebelled (16:30).[83] Significantly, not all of Israel is involved in this particular incident; only a small faction is punished.[84]

The two extensions of this story have an interesting relation to the themes we have considered. Numbers 17:6-14 follows the murmuring motif fairly closely. The verb קהל and the challenge to Moses and Aaron are typical. But here it is in reaction to the punishment of Dathan and Abiram; there is no anti-exodus sentiment. Moses' reaction is instrumental in protecting the people, calling for a priestly act in order to stop a plague.[85]

The story of Aaron's rod (Num 17:16-28)[86] is intended to identify the true leader and stop further rebellions (i.e. avoid another Dathan and Abiram, called בני מרי in 17:25). That this does not succeed despite visible

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83. Note the use of נסה which we have seen elsewhere in the murmuring stories.

84. If this is taken as the basis or model for the murmuring traditions, then we have support for Coats' contention that as time went on a levelling and generalizing process took place in the telling of these stories.

85. Num 17:14 clearly shows that this is to be separated from the Korah incident. Cf. Lev 10:17, Num 17:11; in Num 25:7-11 another plague is stopped by a priest's non-cultic action.

evidence testifies to the composite or reordered character of the material or structure with which we are dealing as well as the intractability of Israelite rebelliousness.

Confronted with a lack of water, the people complain once again (Num 20:2-13), and blame Moses and Aaron for having brought them out into the desert (v. 5). This account bears a strong resemblance to that of Massah and Meribah, but with little verbal dependence.[86] The vocabulary is typical,[87] and the people's complaint is the same we have found before.[88] Moses and Aaron despair of being able to resolve this dilemma; and God, typically, provides the solution - Moses is to take his rod and sepak to the rock. A close comparison of verses 8 and 11, especially in light of Exodus 17:6 where he was told to hit the rock, makes it unarguably clear that Moses' sin is hitting the rock and nothing else. That he hit it twice serves only to emphasize this fact: he had failed to sanctify God (20:12). The narrative's sole purpose (in contrast to the story in

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86. Cf. Coats, Rebellion, pp. 71-2. Although remnants of various aetiologies can be found (vv. 12-13 - Noth believes these are later insertions, Numbers, p. 122), the story's function is not aetiological.

87. אח in verse 2b and מות in v. 3. The words "our brother's death" in verse 3 are unclear. (According to Noth verse 3b is a later editorial addition, Numbers, p. 145.) Although remarkably close to Num 17:27, they could equally suggest that we are now dealing with the young generation who are destined to enter the Promised Land, an interpretation which helps explain later views of this period, notably that of Ezekiel.

88. Verses 3 and 4 seem redundant.

Exodus 17) is to explain the deaths of Moses and Aaron, and hence its present location.[89]

The story of the bronze serpent (Num 21:4-9) whether aetiological in intent or not,[90] fits the murmuring motif in the nature of the people's complaint.[91] However, in this instance God is clearly included as an object of challenge and cannot easily be removed.[92] This would seem to be because Aaron was already said to have died;[93] perhaps originally he and Moses were challenged, but this had to be changed as a result of the present sequence of this and the account of Aaron's death. Verse 5 may include a reference to an earlier crisis if הלחם הזה refers to the manna, implying the accounts previously given.[94] In any case, to the extent that one can hazard a guess as to the sequence through which this story may have evolved, it would be through the addition of the following elements: 1) Israel in the desert; 2) the desert as a place of snakes; 3) Israel's confrontation with these as a result of sin; 4) divine protection from the snakes;[95] 5) by means of the

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89. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 116; cf. Num 20:10b. Contrast the explanations in Dt 1:37, 3:26, and Ps 106:32-3.

90. Coats (Rebellion, p. 118) suggests that it is; Noth (Numbers, pp. 156-7) seems to believe it was not.

91. Num 21:5; v. 4b presents such a notion using terminology not previously encountered.

92. Contra Coats, Rebellion, p. 120. In Syr and LXX the verb (in v. 5) is singular in form; however, God is "well-rooted" through His mention in verse 7.

93. Num 20:26b.

94. Coats, Rebellion, p. 120 contra Noth, Numbers, p. 156.

95. E.g. Dt 8:15 where there is no reference to the people's murmuring (Coats, Rebellion, p. 121).

bronze serpent.[96]

Noth claims that this story remains little more than a fragment since the Pentateuch ends with the conquest and not the establishment of the Jerusalem cult so that the serpent's place in that cult could not be fully developed.[97] Whatever the truth may be in this regard, the story clearly overloads the Torah's rebellion motif (unless events actually happened in the sequence told), coming as it does after the climax of rebellion has been reached and punishment given along with a means for avoiding future incidents. There is little reason for the Israelites still constantly to be grumbling in the desert after all which has gone before. This does, however, help to explain what happened during the thirty-eight year wait and, as such, extends the picture of an incessantly troublesome people previously presented.

With the story of Baal Peor (Num 25) we have arrived at the last of Israel's sins before entering Canaan. The immediate problem which confronts us is to determine whether to treat this account as part of the wilderness period or rather the beginning of the conquest in light of the fact that Israelites did occupy Transjordanian territory after the conquest had already begun, albeit unintentionally.

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96. Cf. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, pp. 121-2.
97. Ibid., p. 122.

Whether or not the story presupposes Moabites as (settled) Israel's neighbors and was placed here solely because of geographical considerations,[98] the setting at Shittim, the base from which the entry into Canaan and thus the conquest begin,[99] along with the probable location of בית פעור[100] supports the inclusion of this story with the occupation or even later narratives (although it should be noted that Mt. Nebo is nearby, reminding that we are still within the potential domain of wilderness stories).

The sin in this passage is that of intermarriage, or at least inter-ethnic sexual relations with the Moabites which leads to idolatry (vv. 1b-2). That this is the sin which concerns Deuteronomy with regard to Israel's dwelling in the Promised Land and that the deity so worshipped is called Baal lend a high degree of credence to the suggestion that this narrative should not be considered part of the wandering period.[101]

In sum, although a complex account which we have hardly begun to explore, this text seems well tied to Israel's life in the Promised Land rather than before the

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98. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions p. 74 and Numbers p. 196.

99. Cf. Josh 2:1 and 3:1.

100. Cf. Yohanan Aharoni, אשלם כרטא לתרפת המלרא, p. 111.

101. Cf. the use of the term זנה in v. 1, although זנותיכם does appear with reference to the murmurings in Num 14:33. The term בכה, found often in murmuring contexts, appears in verse 6 but with a blatantly different meaning - the people are crying out of concern for God's reaction to what is going on rather than at the fate Moses forced on them.

conquest. Its present position can probably be attributed to an attempt to date this event as having occurred "when all Israel was there." However, the event itself bears no relation to the murmuring motif nor any particularly close ties to the other incidents of discontent during the wilderness period.

Certain conclusions as to the themes and ideas involved in the Torah's description of desert discontent can now be drawn before moving on to other Biblical texts. First, it has been seen that the narratives are conspicuously grouped in two collections which for the most part bracket the Sinai account and fill the period from exodus to preparation for conquest although not entirely so and certainly not sufficiently to account for forty years' activity, although the opposite impression is easily received and possibly even intended.[102] Accounts which are located elsewhere tend to be of different types (e.g. Nadab and Abihu) or so placed for relatively obvious reasons (e.g. to explain Moses' and Aaron's deaths). We have also suggested that the story of Dathan and Abiram which may have served as a model for the murmuring motif was originally located immediately after the exodus, but later moved with the addition of Korah elements to that story,

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102. Talmon calls one of these sections the "Book of Israel's Failings" ("The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 46).

thereby providing the second locus around which other accounts could have gathered.

The basic form for many of these incidents is what has been called the murmuring motif in which all the people challenge Moses' authority, particularly with regard to the exodus event.[103] Possibly this represents a secondary addition in many of the stories, for it has little effect on later events although it is responsible in part for the sense of ongoing rebellion which these stories impart. We have often noted that God's response to such complaints (or is it to the immediate situation?) is action; He ignores the complaint and remedies the problem, usually without further reference to the specific challenge, although Moses does occasionally offer some remarks which suggest an awareness of the complaint's nature.

According to Coats who has explored this whole problem in some detail, the specific term לון על is with one exception found only in the Torah and limited to source P.[104] Its singular non-Pentateuchal appearance (Josh 9:18) is taken to confirm the existence of a standard form for the Gerichtsrede outside of the wilderness murmuring tradition.[105]

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103. Cf. Coats, Rebellion, pp. 250-1 for a description of J's form of this motif.

104. Ibid., p. 21; however, Ex 15:24 may be attributed to J (or L or N) and 17:3 to JE.

105. Ibid., pp. 35, 40, and 43.

While such conclusions go farther than the evidence truly permits, we have noticed that the murmuring motif is generally combined with and consequently unifies diverse traditions. These have in common the challenge to Moses either by the entire people, internal factions, or other potential leaders and the shared background of difficult conditions in the desert (which is generally assumed to have provided the basis for both accounts of divine providence as well as Israel's rebellion, whatever the specifics of such a development). Once the murmuring motif is removed, however, the problem becomes more rather than less complex. We are confronted with a mass of disparate materials composed of divergent elements. These include various instances of discontent, aetiologies, and accounts of divine assistance in the wilderness. Though the murmuring serves to generalize and unify, even without this element the discontent and challenges (we might hesitate to call it rebellion) still exist as a category of wilderness events.[106]

The desert was a difficult environment for the Israelites who did not enjoy being there. It fostered

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106. Chr. Barth, "Zur Bedeutung der Wüstentradition," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, XV (1966), pp. 21-3. Barth notes that the negative facet is to be found already in J and E. "Dieser negative Aspekt ist je und je in andere weise gesehen worden, aber eine Wüstentradition ohne negativen Aspekt hat es m.E. in Israel gar nie gegeben."

various forms of strife and discontent whose common denominator was their focus against Moses' (and Aaron's) leadership. Clearly also it served as a sort of watershed period into which various later conflicts seem to have been retrojected. The reasons for this are uncertain although several obvious possibilities can be proposed. First must be the fact that this represents the beginnings of the Israelite nation as a recognizable entity. The patriarchs may constitute Israel's biological origin, but those who emerged from Egyptian slavery are the first to have come under God's political (rather than personal) aegis. There was no earlier time to which Israel's internal conflicts could be ascribed. A second explanation may lie in the existence of a long period about which there was little to relate. Our author(s) might have wondered, "What happened during those forty years in the desert?" Since one of these stories serves to explain why they spent forty years there in the first place, it is possible that the fact of a prolonged wilderness period is subordinate to the stories themselves.[107] Furthermore, the events recounted hardly fill an entire generation, and of course there is no need to fill that period with narratives at all - the centuries of Egyptian slavery are dismissed in a few chapters.

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107. Although Amos 2:10 knows of forty years without any particular reason for that duration.

The logic which can explain these narratives must, therefore, constitute somewhat less cold-blooded invention than some theories would suggest. As is clearly apparent, the period assumes a normative status of sorts for reasons we have described above. It was Israel's beginnings as a people, preceded the settlement in Canaan, and constituted something of a mythical past. It was the archetypical period par excellence.- especially since later periods were too close in time to those describing them and thus less available for legendary accounts. There is also at work in these texts the question "How did our ancestors adapt to the desert when they were there?" with the implied query, "How faithful would we be if forced to live in those surroundings?" This has a more general focus, dealing as it does with the entire Israelite nation. And the answer "Not well at all" tells much of later Israelite feeling about the desert. Finally, there is a theological dimension which should not be ignored. It seems to be based, as are the other facets just described, in the attitude towards the desert as a normative, symbolic period. At issue is Israel's relationship to God, for we cannot forget that though this may provide the most ancient Israelite history Biblical authors could use, it also followed immediately after what became the archetype of salvation. Israel had just witnessed an event of immense

importance, and immediately thereafter in the middle of the desert under the influence of no other religions she lost faith.

WILDERNESS REBELLION (REMINISCENCES)

Before treating the various reflections on wilderness sin which can be found throughout the Bible, it is important to recognize those limitations which must govern our considerations. First, we cannot expect complete accounts of the events of that period. The Torah presents itself as a historical record; other texts do not. For them, brief allusions often suffice to recall incidents which the reader is expected to recognize. Even summaries of several events may serve merely to elaborate a particular theme without any claim of completeness. Arguments from silence - that just because a text doesn't mention a particular event the author was not aware of it - are particularly suspect.

There are two types of retrospective reference - first, the isolated allusion to a particular event, and

secondly, a more systematic presentation of the entire period in a certain light. Both of these can be compared with the Torah version in order to see how others understood the wilderness period as well as to discover what new or different meanings were attached to the events already discussed.

The limited number of allusions to the rebellion tradition, particularly outside the Torah, is striking given its dominance as a Pentateuchal motif. Often retrospective passages exclude or ignore it altogether, a fact generally considered to prove the late development of this theme as part of the wilderness tradition.[1]

The first non-narrative reference to one of the above-listed incidents is in Numbers 3:4 where Nadab and Abihu's sin is found within a list of priests. The passage is textually quite close to Leviticus 10:2 with modifications to fit its context, viz. the specification of the participants' names and place. Intriguingly, the verse does not include the phrase אשר לא צוה אתם which was perplexing in Leviticus, supporting the possibility that that phrase may be a later expansion and explanation of the

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1. The possibly secondary nature of the murmuring tradition within the Torah itself reinforces this impression although similar considerations with regard to the Sinai tradition are questionable (cf. infra p. 144f); also, this motif's generally accepted place within J and perhaps E would imply a (relatively) early date.

unclear term אש זרה.[2] This later reference also omits the dramatic form of Nadab and Abihu's death and the fact of their replacement.[3] Since it seems to assume that the reader does not know or remember the earlier Leviticus narrative, it may represent an earlier form of the tradition which is found expanded in Leviticus 10.

Numbers 26:61 contains a similar reference to Nadab and Abihu, here in a Levitical context.[4] As far as it goes, it is identical with Numbers 3:4, down to the singular verb with a plural subject in contrast to Leviticus 10:2.[5] The story is cited once more in I Chronicles 24:1-2; however, there the sin is not mentioned. Although conceivably it was irrelevent to the Chronicler, we should note that elsewhere he does mention the <u>fact</u> of sin, even if details are left out.[6] Given this text's close relationship to Numbers 3:4, we can only conclude that the omission must have been intentional.[7]

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2. Cf. supra p. 59
3. Cf. Lev 10:2a.
4. Noth suggests that this occurrence of the passage is secondary, based on various Old Testament traditions (<u>Numbers</u>, pp. 209-10).
5. The first "לפני יהוה" of the earlier appearance is omitted here, suggesting that its double appearance in Num 3:4 could be erroneous. Other differences are minor.
6. Cf. ICh 2:3,7 concerning Er and Achan; contra Jacob M. Myers, <u>I Chronicles</u> (The Anchor Bible), p. 164.
7. The use of לפני אבי‌הם instead of לפני יהוה (24:2) could have resulted from the sin's omission, but was more likely copied mistakenly from Num 3:4bβ.

In much the way that a brief explanation of the Nadab and Abihu incident was included when their names arose in lists, we find a similar digression occasioned by the mention of Dathan, Abiram, and Korah in Numbers 26:9-11. The text here is close to, but not identical with that in Numbers 16.[8] The inclusion of Korah indicates that the author of this passage knew that story with something like its present cast of characters. These verses are neither a variant nor an independent account of that event, but intended explain that Korah's sons had not been killed with him and the rest of his company (26:11).[9] Other notes in this geneological chapter serve a similar purpose. Verses 64-5 which provide justification for a second census presuppose an earlier census (Num 1), the punishment prescribed in Numbers 14:29,32, and the fact that both Joshua and Caleb are to be excepted from this penalty.[10]

The explanation by the daughters of Zelophehad,[11] though placed in the mouth of one of the characters, serves

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8. Cf. Num 26:10aα with 16:32a, and 26:10bα with 16:35bα.
9. In contrast to the suggested understanding of Num 3:4 supra, pp. 87-8.
10. Noth's position is that these verses were added specifically to correct the impression given in 26:4 that this is the original census (Numbers, p. 210). The language in the first three and one half verses of chapter 26 is remarkably similar to that in Num 1:1-3,18-19 although with modifications to make it fit the later situation.
11. Num 27:3.

a similar purpose - that of harmonizing an account which is not <u>necessarily</u> out of harmony with its context in order to avoid a possible misimpression. This note is acquainted with the story of Korah and possibly also the spies.[12]

We have already mentioned the fact that the spy story includes a reference, regarded as secondary by some, to previous instances of discontent.[13] The significance of this passage, however, deserves reiteration for as noted above it has the effect of turning that narrative from an isolated incident - even if not without precedent - into the final straw which led to Israel's punishment. Even without the specification that this is the "tenth" time, the very language implies such a sequence. It is worth noting the specific nature of the sin of which Israel is accused: ולא שמעו בקולי (Num 14:22); we shall meet this kind of language again.[14]

The spy story is also reflected in the request by certain tribes to settle on the Transjordanian land Israel has conquered (Num 32:5-15). The link comes in Moses' suspicion that these tribes might continue the type of tactic of which the spies were previously guilty.[15] That

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12. If בחטאו refers to that incident, although it need not.
13. Num 14:19,22-24; cf. Noth, <u>Numbers</u>, p. 109.
14. E.g. infra p. 101.
15. Num 32:7. According to Noth this proves that the passage is late (<u>Numbers</u>, p. 238); he suggests that it also knows Josh 14:6-14. Num 32:6-7 may include two distinct charges.

it is the Reubenites who receive this treatment even though other tribes also settled in the area calls to mind the fact that Dathan and Abiram were both from that tribe. Could this short passage contain some Reubenite reflections on that or a similar event? Could Moses' accusation be based on the knowledge of past behavior by members of that tribe?[16] Whatever the reason, this account is aware of the general nature of the spy story[17] as well as the story of Moses and Aaron's sin and impending death prior to entering the Promised Land.[18]

The reiteration of Moses' impending death (Num 27:13-14) is clearly based on the narrative in Numbers 20 describing events at Meribah.[19] One wonders whether only Moses ought to have been blamed for this action and why Aaron is also punished. In the original passage there are occasional singular usages[20] although the people blame both Moses and Aaron for the exodus.[21] The possibility that Aaron was at some stage added to all this, though hardly proven, should not be discounted. The end of 27:14 is quite close to Deuteronomy 32:51 which includes the

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16. Cf. supra p. 74.
17. Though, as Noth points out (Numbers, p. 237), it does not "slavishly" follow that account.
18. Cf. Num 32:28.
19. Cf. Num 20:12-13.
20. Cf. Num 20:8,11.
21. Num 20:4-5, but cf. 20:3a.

reason for Moses' punishment[22] with the qualification that he is to be allowed to see the Promised Land, in contrast to the other Israelites of that sinful generation.[23] Indeed, the entirety of both these passages is similar, although an analysis of their relationship falls outside of our present interests.

The account of Aaron's death (Num 20:23-9) obviously presupposes the incident at Meribah as told in Numbers 20:2-13.[24]

Within the sequence of the ongoing Pentateuchal narrative we have found limited allusions to those negative occurrences which were of particular significance - Nadab and Abihu, the story of the spies, Korah's revolt, Dathan and Abiram, and the background for the deaths of Aaron and Moses, itself possibly a reworked version of an earlier narrative. Of course, the Torah has no particular reason or need to restate what had already been told. Outside of the Tetrateuch, however, the entire period of wandering was reviewed and presented through various attempts to convey its essential character. This process of summary and encapsulization begins with the book of Deuteronomy.

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22. Dt 32:51b, cf. Num 20:12.
23. Cf. Num 14:23, Dt 34:4.
24. According to Noth these verses are special insertions, possibly based on the model of Moses' death (Numbers, p. 153).

Although the historical review in Deuteronomy 1:6-3:29 seems quite extensive, it knows of only one rebellion - that which occurred during the spies' report. Preceding and following that we must assume that God's leadership was beneficent and the people followed willingly. Even that one account seems to differ from the Numbers' version in certain significant respects.[25] Here we are to understand that the spies who were sent at the people's request (1:22) brought back a favorable report (1:25) and that it was the people's decision not to proceed; consequently, they remained in their tents.[26] Furthermore, their complaint is presented in a novel form: the exodus was God's work and intended to bring death to the people either from desert tribes or when they attempted to conquer Canaan (1:27). They blame the spies for discouraging them, although this text provides no support for that contention.[27] Significantly, Moses does not seem to mention any of the desert miracles.[28] The account goes on to describe God's angry retort (1:35) and its fulfillment by a wait of thirty-eight years (2:14-15), presumably intended to account for the full forty years elsewhere assigned to the period.

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25. Contra Coats, Rebellion, pp. 192f.
26. For the influence of this unique feature cf. Ps 106:25.
27. But cf. Num 13:28.
28. Dt 1:31 may include such a hint although it more likely refers only to divine guidance rather than any of the specific miracles elsewhere described; cf. Dt 1:33.

The narrative mentions that Caleb was excluded from the generation to be punished although the reason for such preferential treatment is not explained here.[29] According to this passage Moses is not allowed into the Promised Land on account of the people he leads (1:37). This reappears in 3:26 as Moses ascends Pisgah in an account similar to that of Numbers 27:12-14 although there we are told he climbed Mt. Abarim,[30] and that the sin was his own misdeed at Meribah. A similar explanation is given in 4:21a where בגללכם is represented by על דבריכם.[31] This is the only sin which Deuteronomy 1-3 ascribes to the wilderness period. 4:2-5 knows of Baal Peor which we have already suggested should not be included in the wilderness period proper; furthermore, it was not included in the preceding chapters although the author of these verses clearly regarded it as a proper topic of speech for Moses before his death.

Deuteronomy 6:16 mentions Massah; however, no other instances are available to clarify or support the intent of this brief mention.

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29. Dt 1:36, cf. Num 14:24.

30. Could the verb העבר in Dt 3:26 be a play on this? Cf. also Ps 78:21,59,62.

31. A reference to their deeds or their words? This kind of explanation may derive from the assumption that Moses was to be treated like everyone else of his generation, obviating the later Meribah story, or it could present an independent attempt to resolve the same problem confronted by the author of that story - why Moses died en route. Alternatively it can be understood as Moses' interpretation of events which would then harmonize with Num 20:12.

In Deuteronomy 8:2-5 the forty years are described as a period of testing and discipline[32] without reference to murmuring or rebellion.[33] That it might be implied in the verb נסה seems unlikely; given Deuteronomy's overall consistency and the picture which emerges from this passage - that God provided for and educated his people who we must assume were at the very least not utter failures as pupils - such a position is somewhat improbable. This is supported by verses 14-17.[34]

In marked contrast to the review which opens the book of Deuteronomy, chapter nine (through 10:11) does deal with the golden calf story. While 9:7 speaks of an incessantly troublesome period, the phrase עשה ערץ (v. 8) is particularly prominent in the story of the golden calf, an impression reinforced by the reference to Horeb in verse 8 and the inclusion of Aaron in verse 20. Indeed, verses 12-14 closely approximate Exodus 32:7-11. There is but one exception to the general principle of treating only that one incident - verses 22 through 24. These interrupt the surrounding material which immediately returns to the golden

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32. But probably not punishment, cf. להיטבך in Dt 8:16b.

33. Although one could argue that omission does not prove ignorance; cf. infra p. 86.

34. The mention of manna as something אשר לא ידעון אבתיך in verse 16 would imply either that the author knows only one desert generation whose parents lived and died in Egypt or that אבתיך is to be taken non-literally, meaning "ancestors," or finally that in his view the first desert generation didn't receive manna, a position so radically unique as to be almost impossible.

calf and are apparently intended to broaden the extent of Israel's rebelliousness,[35] a purpose shared with 9:6-7. Except for Massah, all the cited instances appear in Numbers 11-14. Whether this indicates that there was once a different tradition now lost or that the story of Massah has been moved or even that the intent is to the account of Meribah in Numbers need not be discussed here. Apart from this insert, however, the entire section from 9:6 to 10:11 deals with the golden calf. The impression of a constantly rebellious people is the result of the insertions and not the main force of the passage.

Continuing with our survey of historical allusions in Deuteronomy, 11:2-7 mentions Dathan and Abiram[36] although the context does not provide any particulars of their crime nor does it include any instance of generalized discontent.

In Deuteronomy 24:9 there is a brief mention of Miriam's punishment, presumably because of the preceding comments about leprosy; in light of the nature of this verse, it could be argued that what God did to Miriam was

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35. Von Rad states that these verses "have long been considered as a later insertion." (Gerhard von Rad, Deuteronomy, A Commentary, p.78.) The account of events dealing with the spies (9:23) does not seem to accord exactly with the story as we have it elsewhere, though the nature and cause of this uniqueness need not concern us here. Note the use of the phrase לֹא שְׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלִי to define the nature of Israel's sin with regard to the spies.

36. Note that they are included directly after the exodus; cf. supra p. 75 n. 81.

not to punish her for a sin, but rather command that her leprosy be handled in the proper manner.[37] The passage does not specify any misconduct on her part although it might have known of such.

The sin mentioned in Deuteronomy 32:5,15, and 21 clearly occurs after divine assistance has been provided in the desert (vv. 10-14) and would seem to be the result of the success and prosperity achieved after the conquest. From verse 16 it is clear that this is idolatry, the punishment for which is loss in war (vv. 19-25) a situation not generally applicable to the wilderness period.

Deuteronomy 33:8-9 provides a fascinating use of murmuring locations and vocabulary in a completely different story. Although we will not develop elaborate theories, some mention of the passage's general implications is quite in order. Whether Massah and Meribah are one or two places, narratives dealing with them and the background of their names are found in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. According to these narratives it is Israel which there tried and strove with God; here, it seems to be God who (successfully?) tried Levi at Massah (and) Meribah. Apparently this hints at some aetiology different from those considered earlier, one not found - at least recognizably - elsewhere in the Bible which presents

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37. Num 12:14-15.

positively events in marked contrast to the negative implications associated with the Biblical spring narratives we have seen. The conclusion which seems most likely, if beyond proof, would be that there were a variety of aetiological interpretations for place names in ancient times, presumably among different groups.

The incessant rebelliousness described in the Torah shrivels up into a few instances at best in Deuteronomy despite the relatively frequent references and importance attached to them. This process of limited awareness is even more noticeable further into the Old Testament.

Joshua, the only book among the Former Prophets to mention any sins during the desert period, seems to know only the story of the twelve spies. In chapter 5 there is mention of the fact that those children born in the desert had not been circumcised (5:5), but this is not described as a sin committed during the wanderings; in fact, in a rather enigmatic verse it is called חרפת מצרים (v. 9). Verse 6 describes the forty years period as a punishment for the adults' not having heeded God's word as a result of which they are not to be shown the Promised Land; the children are their replacement.[38] The other citation in Joshua is in chapter 14 when Caleb comes forth to claim

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38. These verses which are quite similar to Dt 2:14-16 are considered by some to be Deuteronomic additions.

what had been promised to him, but does not ascribe the forty-five year time lapse to any punishment (14:10). The sin cited is that of the spies who המסיו את לב העם,[39] an apparent reference to the דבה of Numbers 13:32-3 and not simply the negative report described in verses 27-31 of that chapter. Since the only sin was that of the spies, it is appropriate that in this context we do not hear of any punishment for the entire people, but merely a special reward for Caleb.

In Jeremiah despite an apparent plethora of references to desert disobedience we confront such ambiguity that it is often difficult to be sure exactly what the prophet had in mind. In 7:21-26 and 11:8, for example, there are not specific allusions although the language resembles that used for various events described in the Torah. The disobedience described in 7:24 is based on the premises of verse 23 which describe a covenant apparently made at the time of the exodus.[40] The content is simple: I am your God, you are My people, so listen to (i.e. obey) My word. This underlying notion of a covenant is found throughout the Torah narrative, notably in passages generally ascribed to D and P. "לא שמעו בקולי" as the people's sin, referring particularly to the incident of

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39. Josh 14:8, cf. Dt 1:28.
40. Cf. infra pp. 141-2.

the spies although also by extension to the entire period, can be found in Numbers 14:22 and Joshua 5:6.[41] Jeremiah here seems to view the rebellion as a violation of the covenant.[42] The remaining descriptions of the sin in verse 24 seem to be typical Jeremianic expressions rather than references to Pentateuchal traditions.[43] The reference to being stiff-necked (7:26) is, as we have seen, typical of the golden calf incident; however, the entire verse seems to refer to Jeremiah's own time.

Jeremiah 11:8 which mentions a broken covenant[44] is close enough to the passage just treated that we will consider it to fit within the general guidelines provided above. In 17:22-23 and 34:13-4, however, the nature of the violation is highly specific. The language used for both of these is suggestive of the wilderness sins; however, the commandment dealing with slavery[45] could have only been violated once Israel achieved a settled way of life, i.e. after the conquest; and although isolated instances of Sabbath violation can be found in the wilderness period[46]

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41. Cf. also Ps 81:12 where the sin's identity is unclear and Ex 19:5.
42. Although the golden calf is the only incident which stands in immediate contact with the Pentateuchal covenant narrative, there is no indication that this event is here intended.
43. Cf. Jer 7:26, 9:13, 11:8, 13:10, 16:12, 17:23, 18:12, 23:17, 34:14, 44:5, and also Dt 29:18 and Ps 81:13.
44. Cf. infra pp. 141-2, 147.
45. Cf. Dt. 15:1,12.
46. Cf. Ex 16, Num 15:32-6.

this too should probably be ascribed to the post-settlement period in light of Jeremiah's general focus on the sins of that time. Thus although we find possible allusions to wilderness sin, there is little conclusive proof that such was Jeremiah's specific intent.

The problem of vagueness becomes especially marked in Jeremiah's conception of Israelite origins. Typically, he says, "זה דרכך מנעוריך כי לא שמעת בקולי,"[47] and refers to Ephraim's mention of חרפת נעורי.[48] What was Israel's youth? Is this the wilderness period before she attained property and thus maturity? Or is it her process of growth on the land? Or some other period? The problem is significant because of Jeremiah's insistance:

כי היו בני ישראל ובני יהודה אך עושים הרע בעיני מנעוריהם.[49]

Reference to Israel's נעורים is found only in Jeremiah, Hosea, and Ezekiel.[50] Jeremiah speaks of Israel's youth as

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47. Jer 22:21, cf. 2:2.
48. Jer 31:18.
49. Jer 32:30.
50. In Is 47:12,15 it is applied to Babylon and in Ps 25:7, 71:5,17 it seems to refer to individuals. If Ps 129:1-2 refers to Israel, the period intended would appear to be that of Joshua and the judges. The view of Ezk 16 is difficult to unravel since the boundary between historical allusion and vague, poetic metaphor is hard to discern. If it refers to Israel as a whole (for another view cf. infra p. 153), birth would be the exodus (vv. 4-6) so marriage (v. 8) would indicate covenant, while be v. 15 Israel seems to be a full nation. Thus her youth (vv. 22,43) recalls Israel's helplessness and the divine help she received through the exodus and providence in the wilderness. In 23:3,8,19,21 "youth" is clearly Israel's time in Egypt. There her harlotry is not any particular religious revolt against God, but being in a

a period of love and חסד, the time of her marriage when she followed God in the desert;[51] but Israel has been sinful ever since. The reference to the נעורים of her youth may imply worship of the Canaanite god Baal,[52] in which case the intent must clearly be to the period after the settlement. What is the sin of her youth? It is idolatry[53] - hardly the same as the constant rebellion of the wilderness period. When Jeremiah says Israel was evil from her youth, his intent is that she has always been evil. The phrase is not that she had an evil youth or was evil after her youth. Jeremiah's historical understanding would appear to be that God led Israel out of Egypt, made a covenant with her and brought her to the Promised Land where she immediately began to violate the special nature of this relationship through idolatrous worship. Given his tendency to allow evil to permeate Israel's relationship with God from the start, it is remarkable that no where does Jeremiah speak unambiguously of a period of sin so pervasive as that described in the Torah concerning the

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political relationship with Egypt, a cause Ezekiel seems to have opposed in his own time and therefore utilized the earlier period as a precedent. In Hos 2:17 Israel's youth is explicitly said to be the time of the exodus.

51. Jer 2:2, also 3:4; cf. Is 54:6.

52. Jer 3:24-5, cf. John Bright, Jeremiah (The Anchor Bible), p. 23.

53. Jer 32:30; if v. 30b is a later expansion, the present argument would ve invalid (cf. Bright, op. cit., pp. 295-6).

wilderness period. The apparent conclusion would be that for Jeremiah that period was neither abnormally nor uniquely sinful. If he knew the traditions of discontent we have found in the Torah, they did not particularly interest him.[54]

With Ezekiel we begin a series of so-called "credos" in which the murmuring motif is fully recognized and incorporated into the outlook on the wilderness period. In chapter 20, however, it should be noted that the sin which is described is overwhelmingly the retrojection of later sins, presumably those of Ezekiel's time (e.g. idolatry) intended to "justify" the exile. There is no reference to the murmuring motif as we have seen it in the Torah.[55] The sins are idolatry (v. 16) and ignoring the laws previously received, notably the Sabbath (vv. 13,21). Although there is possible Pentateuchal support for such an account,[56] Ezekiel seems to have generalized for his own purposes, possibly on the basis of the murmuring stories we have already discussed inasmuch as the sin seems to be that of all the people. However, God's punishment is totally

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54. Because of the generally accepted dating of J, E, and D which include wilderness rebellion, it seems improbable that Jeremiah would not have known these traditions. More likely they were irrelevent to him - although reasons for this are difficult to imagine.

55. Contra Coats, Rebellion, p. 241.

56. E.g. Ex 16:27-30, Lev 10, Num 15:32, 32:14-15.

different from that described in those accounts - bad laws and future exile.[57] In addition, Ezekiel includes an element of the story which we have not elsewhere encountered - repeated sin by the second generation. Where he found this is difficult to explain.[58] Perhaps the intended reference is to an event which occurred in the Promised Land, or he may have regarded those rebellions which occurred after the spies' story as constituting such an event; alternatively, it may be an attempt to account for the magnitude of the exile. Ezekiel makes no mention of the forty years' wandering as a punishment. Taking all these factors into consideration, it is hard to agree with Coats' claim that this text represents simply a further and not a totally different form of the murmuring motif.

Hosea 9:10 does not refer to any of the topic we have considered here. It contains a clear reference to Baal Peor,[59] suggesting that sort of idolatry typical of the prophetic view of Israel's life once they settled in Canaan.[60] 13:4-6 would seem to support this view[61] that

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57. Ezk 20:25-6; cf. v. 26 with Ex 13:2,12, Lev 18:21, Dt 18:10 and Ezk 20:23,31,37-8.

58. Cf. supra, p. 79 ; also Num 32:14-15. Coats considers it an attempt to avoid having children suffer for sins they have not themselves done although the prophet does not seem to mind explaining the exile in terms of vicarious suffering; cf. Coats, Rebellion, p. 241. (On p. 237 Coats suggests the sin may have been idolatry rather than murmuring.

59. I.e. Num 25:1-5.

60. Cf. Hosea 11:1-5.

61. If Hos 13:6b is a later addition as proposed by Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, cf. Dt 8:14, 32:18.

the sin began after Israel had settled - that once Israel was able to take care of herself and no longer needed God for sustenance, she forgot Him.

Thus Ezekiel and Joshua contain the only explicit references to this entire tradition within the Prophets section of the Bible. In the Writings references are also few although that may in large part be attributed to the character of the books contained therein which do not readily lend themselves to reflections on Israel's past.

Psalm 78 is particularly significant when dealing with the notion of wilderness discontent, for in it we find a clearly polemical use of that theme and one which fully accords with Coats' analysis at that![62] Throughout a long enumeration of "rebellions," the blame is consistently placed on the Northern Kingdom,[63] leading to the conclusion which almost suggests itself - that this psalm originated within Judah[64] which is presented as the "New Israel," to borrow a theological concept from elsewhere. Specifically, Israel is accused of being a דור סורר ומורה, the penalty for which in its Deuteronomic context is death.[65]

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62. Cf. R.P. Carroll, "Psalm LXXVIII: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic," Vetus Testamentum, XXI:2 (April, 1971), p. 150: "Ps. lxxviii may be regarded as the charter myth explaining how Judah was the rightful heir of the exodus movement and therefore could claim the leadership of the people of Israel."

63. Ps 78:5,9-11,21,60,67-8. Coats supports a similar interpretation of Dt 32 (Rebellion, p. 211).

64. Ps 78:8, cf. Dt 21:18,20 and Jer 5:23. Note that Shiloh's fall is seen as a punishment for the North and a prototype for the fall of Samaria (Coats, Rebellion, p. 208).

Though not always explicit, it is relatively easy to discover the various allusions although some do not seem to be based on earlier narratives.[65] Of such a type is the statement in verse 19 that the people wondered whether God could set a table in the desert. This is illustrative of the fact that the people's sins are here described in terms of their requests for sustenance, rather than by the repeated challenges to Moses as found in the Torah.

The structure of the psalm is striking: it lists various instances of divine sustenance in sequence before mentioning rebelliousness (vv. 12-16). Although the sins then described are in large part only those of Numbers 11, the implication is clearly that there had been earlier such instances and would be more in the future (vv. 17,32-7,40). Furthermore, the rebellion continued within the Promised Land itself (vv. 55-8).

In considering how the rebellion tradition is used here, we must recall that according to the Torah it was frequently all of Israel which sinned and not usually any distinguishable segment.[66] Although the spies' story may be an exception, it is hardly clear that these incidents can be considered to comprise an anti-Northern polemic in that context.

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65. M. Dahood proposes that verses 30-31 refer to Num 11:31-3 (Psalms 51-100, p. 242) but this seems unlikely.

66. E.g. Ex 14:10-11, 15:24, 16:2-3, 17:2, Num 11:2, 20:2-3, 21:5.

It has been suggested that this psalm is close to the J account. In Coats' view, Jeroboam argued that only in the North could the God of the exodus be worshipped; the murmuring tradition was an attempt to show how that position had been forfeited long before.[67]

While such an interpretation undeniably applies to Psalm 78 and possibly to the story of the spies as well, this is not clearly the case with regard to the Pentateuchal narratives themselves. Evidence of such bias must be found in the "murmuring motif" itself and not some later version of it before such a polemic will be certain. Furthermore, we have already seen that many of the stories are inherently negative, a point to be treated in greater depth when we examine the providential facet of those accounts. It remains for someone to offer a convincing interpretation for the origin of the murmuring motif in the Torah. As for the view of this psalm, although it clearly includes a certain polemical facet, we would suggest that its origin may be more complex than is generally assumed.[68] If its present form was not the first use of various sections, the polemical presentation may

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67. Coats, Rebellion, p. 251. If this position is true, then the murmuring tradition (though not necessarily the stories onto which it has been grafted) represents another instance of retrojection, the polemical presentation of a contemporary conflict as set back in the wilderness period.

68. Cf. infra p. 167.

actually be a result of the juxtaposition of its component elements. Only this psalm's general context justifies the anti-Ephraimite interpretation of its description of the wilderness sins rather than any evidence intrinsic to that section of the psalm itself.

Psalm 81:8 may include a reference to Israel's trying God if the verb in that sentence is slightly changed[69] in which case it would refer to the event described in Ex 17:1-7 and Num 20:7-13. There is, however, precedent for considering the event at Massah-Meribah to have been a trial by God[70] so that the reference is problematic at best. Verse 12 may entail a further reference to the murmuring tradition, especially if 81:11b is understood as an instance of divine sustenance.[71] לא שמעו לקולי is a frequent term of Israel's discontent.[72] Strangely, the psalm mentions no punishment for those sins - except the possible withdrawal of military support (vv. 14-15) which seems directed towards the future. Israel received some military aid from God during the forty years,[73] but the tone of the entire psalm strongly suggests that the allusion is not to this period.

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69. Reading in the נסיתי, cf. Dahood, op. cit., p. 265.
70. Dt 33:8; on the combination of these names cf. supra p. 55, note 21.
71. Cf. Dahood, op. cit., p. 266.
72. Cf. supra pp. 90 and 107.
73. Cf. infra p. 116f, but note Num 14:40-45.

Psalm 95 cites the bad precedents of Massah and Meribah when Israel tried and tested God with the result that they were not allowed into the Promised Land.[74] The combination of this punishment with these two (or one) locales suggests the probability that the psalmist knew at least two of the murmuring stories, though not necessarily.

One of the most remarkable phenomena to be encountered in this study is the juxtaposition of Psalms 105 and 106, the former extolling God for His acts of sustenance during that wondrous period of wandering while the latter condemns Israel's obstinance during the same period, thus presenting strikingly different pictures of the same era. According to the available evidence Psalm 106 does not know the Pentateuchal narrative in its present form. Korah is not mentioned, and those incidents which are cited are in a different sequence from that of the Torah. Israel's wickedness is extended back into the period she spent in Egypt.[75] The text proceeds to describe the complaints and discontent voiced at the Reed Sea (v. 7b), Kibroth Hata'avah (vv. 14-15), Dathan and Abiram's rebellion (v. 16), the calf (v. 19), the spies (v. 24),[76] Baal Peor (v. 28), and

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74. Ps 95:11; מנוחה often has the significance of Promised Land, cf. Dt. 12:9, **Ps 95:11, 132:4,8 inter alia.**

75. Coats, Rebellion, p. 225, according to whom this represents the same broadening approach found in P.

76. Cf. Dt 1:27 for the origin of the phrase וירגנו באהליהם in v. 25; Coats (ibid., p. 230) considers this an indication that the psalm follows the Deuteronomic view.

Meribah (v. 32). This same lack of obedience is extended backward into Egypt[77] and forward into the conquest period when Israel did not destroy all the nations God had told her to (v. 34). Phineas' act of merit is praised (v. 30), and Moses' being kept out of the Promised Land is ascribed to his "rash words" (vv. 32-3), a seemingly new interpretation of events. The psalm's intent is clearly to show that the utter sinfulness of the earlier time serves as a precedent for Israel's contemporary sin (v. 6). Like Ezekiel's view, the accumulated guilt which began at this period is described as the cause of the exile.[78] Clearly the murmuring tradition could serve to explain a variety of catastrophes.[79]

Nehemiah 9 is often treated as the latest form of the murmuring motif.[80] That it is often considered to be a separate piece, inserted into its present location, would argue against facile assumptions in this regard.[81] In any event, it contains a wide knowledge of the various Torah traditions covered under this rubric, including the golden

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77. One can find a similar potential within the Torah, cf. Ex 5:21.
78. Ps 106:47, but cf. Artur Weiser, The Psalms, A Commentary, p. 682.
79. E.g. Ps 78.
80. Coats, Rebellion, p. 248.
81. Cf. David Noel Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXIII (1961), p. 440.

calf which is not usually included with the murmuring incidents. The formulation in v. 17aβ supports the contention that it is in fact based on the Pentateuchal version of these events.[82] It knows of a forty year desert sojourn (v. 21) and a disobedient second generation (vv. 23-6) although this is related with regard to the settlement in the Promised Land. The root נסה which is found occasionally with reference to the murmuring incidents appears in this connection, applied both to desert and later events,[83] while the climax of disobedience is in the "present" - i.e. the (post)exilic suffering. And yet in spite of this tremendous sweep of history and the detail of which the author is capable should he desire, at no point is there a hint of punishment. ולא עזבתם we hear again and again.[84] Surely this is not a result of the author's ignorance, but rather must be explained by the passage's theme: ואתה צדיק על כל הבא עלינו כי אמת עשית ואנחנו הרשענו (v. 33). It is a peculiar phenomenon. Perhaps the author felt bound by his knowledge of history and was unwilling to "invent" events, a warning for those who find no difficulty in the assumption that ancient theologians forced history to conform with their understanding, inventing where the facts did not fit.[85]

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82. Cf. Num 14:4.
83. Neh 9:18,26; cf. Jer 7:25-6 and Ezk 35:12.
84. Neh 9:17,19,31.
85. E.g. for Ezk 20, cf. supra p. 104.

One theory has it that this psalm (for so it seems) is evidence that the rebellion tradition was associated with the festival of Sukkot.[86] Whatever the truth in such assertions, the motif's flexibility must not be ignored although not explained by "invention." Its adaptability and frequent adaptation supports its significance as a tradition which lent itself well to polemical use.

Explanations for the overall phenomenon cover a wide range. Noth argues for a polemical interpretation, citing the repetitive language in contrast to the organic "rootedness" we would expect in a more popular context.[87] Talmon suggests that it presents the purging of sinners which was essential before Israel could enter the holy land.[88] Why such a purge was necessary and how there came to be this sinful element in Israel's midst he does not explain. For von Rad it is a simple theological reflext to the positive nature of God's actions: God was good, but how were we in the desert?[89] According to Coats, as we have already seen, it achieved its present form through use at the festival of election celebrated in Jerusalem from which it was later broadened to include an explanation of the exile and

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86. Coats, Rebellion, p. 248.
87. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 144.
88. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 54.
89. Gerhard von Rad cited in Coats, Rebellion, pp. 13-4 and in Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 122.

thereby extended throughout Israel's history.[90] We must, however, recall with deVries that "evidence that a tradition such as this was adaptable to a polemical purpose is no proof that it was created for this express purpose."[91] For him it arose as a theological embellishment for the combination of southern and eastern conquest traditions.[92] Surely that is more than enough theories.

Let it suffice here to note that the murmuring element is integral only to the story of Dathan and Abiram, while elsewhere it seems to be an imposed motif which unifies various accounts while maximizing the degree of sin. Within the Torah it is added to stories which are themselves often highly negative in character; elsewhere it is a highly limited tradition, found only in a few of the many places where the desert period is described. Surely this fact makes it probable, if not provable, that the tradition is secondary. Where it is mentioned, we find that it was not a static tradition but rather easily adaptable to fit any of a variety of purposes.

In summary, we have found that the element of discontent in the Torah is twofold: a series of stories

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90. Coats, Rebellion, pp. 251-3; consequently he dates it sometime near Rehoboam and Jeroboam (cf. ibid., p. 221).
91. Simon J. deVries, op. cit., p. 54; in fact Coats does not argue that it was, but that it was adapted, but that it was adapted from the story of Dathan and Abiram where it originated.
92. Ibid., p. 58.

with negative implications which now include elements that give the impression of a series of virtually identical incidents and thereby turn the period into one of apparently incessant rebellion. According to Noth the stereotyped form of this suggests we are dealing with a polemic, rather than a popular tradition.[93] Even without this stereotyped element, however, the very fact of sequential grouping provides the same impression.[94]

What does all this tell us about the Bible's view of the wilderness period? Certainly for those passages which know of this tradition it was not a good or a happy time; we shall see elsewhere a contrary opinion. The murmuring motif itself may in large part represent the polemical retrojection of some later conflict. Many of the fundamental stories to which it has been affixed show this trait as well. Clearly then the period possesses a normative quality which must be considered. It is the "once upon a time" when everything first happened. It is also a time when Israel traversed a difficult terrain, and her reaction was neither one of comfort nor absolute faith in God. Interestingly, the desert period does not attract "positive" stories about certain elements within Israel except for the priesthood. It was a difficult time and as a

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93. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 144.
94. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" pp. 46 and 54.

result of her disobedience Israel found herself condemned to spend still more time there before being allowed into God's holy sanctuary, the Promised Land.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

> "If the name of God was shared with the Kenites, the conception of the character could hardly have been shared, since the Israelite conception was born of her own experience in the deliverance from Egypt ...but etymology is not finally important here for Old Testament theology, since not etymology but experience filled the term with meaning."*

Israelite contact with other groups while in the desert is a minor element of the Pentateuchal narrative, a fact which may in itself be significant especially since that situation changes radically after Numbers 20.

Once the exodus itself has been completed, the first nation with which Israel must deal is Egypt.[1] Clearly the exodus and Reed Sea narratives have undergone rather complicated changes prior to achieving their present form, and it is not inconceivable that both were once more

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* H.H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel, p. 55.
1. Cf. supra pp. 36-41.

unified than we now find them. However, our concern must be with the narrative as presently extant and more specifically with the question of Israel's relationship to Egypt exclusive of the exodus itself - in other words, the confrontation at the sea according to the Torah's presentation.

The text in Exodus 14 describes Pharaoh's chase as either an unprompted attack (vv. 3-4) or the result of a change of heart following Israel's departure (vv. 5-6) thereby constituting the closing segment in the exodus story.[2] The divine salvation of Israel is ascribed to various acts - the interposition of a pillar of smoke between the Israelites and the Egyptians (vv. 19-20), God's "discomfiting" the Egyptians (v. 24), or actually drowning them (v. 26). Common to all these is the fact that the Egyptians chased Israel and in the process met their death in the sea.[3]

Psalm 106 presents this story as an instance of divine salvation.[4] Nehemiah 9 seems essentially similar

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2. Cf. Ex 14:8.

3. For Noth this represents the historical kernal of the exodus tradition (Exodus, p. 120). Biblical scholarship has generally minimized the historicity of this event, claiming that it is a tradition which developed under the influence of the Jordan story and with the addition of creation imagery; e.g. Lewis S. Hay, "What Really Happened at the Sea of Reeds," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXXIII:4 (December, 1964), pp. 397-403, but cf. Samuel E. Loewenstamm, [illegible] pp. 100-20 and A.R. Hulst, "Der Jordan in den alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen," Oudtestamentische Studiën, XIV (1965), pp. 179-84.

4. Cf. Neh 9:9-12 where Egypt is called בית עבדים but not named.

with its reference to the Egyptians' drowning ובמצולות;[5] interestingly this passage includes the Reed Sea among the only three or four major historical events on which it focuses.[6]

Psalm 78:12-13 stands in marked contrast to that approach which emphasizes the defeat of Egypt by excluding any reference to the Egyptians and suggesting that the event was for Israel's benefit, enabling her to cross;[7] however, verses 52-4 revert to the earlier type of description, albeit with modifications.[8] Since the plagues there result in Israel's freedom (vv. 51-2), the encounter with an anonymous enemy at the sea (v. 53) is implicitly part of the desert period. By the next verse, Israel has reached the Promised Land. The Egyptians of the exodus account have become a conceivably different group from an almost distinct, if adjoining period.

The Song at the Sea presents an intriguing variant on this view. Here, too, the drowned enemy is an anonymous group,[9] one whose fate frightened those living in Canaan. (Ex 15:14) In other words although the occurrence is

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5. Neh 9:11, cf. Ex 15:5.
6. All are presented as transitions - Abraham's journey from Ur to Canaan, the Israelites' successful escape from the Egyptians into the desert, and finally the conquest which enables them to settle in the Promised Land.
7. As such it must be categorized as an act of providence,
8. Cf. p. 167 where it is suggested that this psalm is composite.
9. Ex 15:1,21; cf. v. 12.

itself unique, it functions as a prototype for what can happen to other nations later on - and so it served for the Philistines.[10] Even if the Reed Sea is not the מכה in question, Egypt's defeat at the hands of Israel and/or her God assumed prototypical proportions. No longer was this simply an escape from slavery, the redemptive experience par excellence that it became in later times, but rather an event which illustrated principles that applied in the future and could be repeated in different surroundings.

The fate of the Egyptian army - not necessarily the event at the Reed Sea - thus serves as a prototype for that of other enemies who are to be encountered in the course of Israel's history - at the first stage of her habitation of the Promised Land,[11] during the period of the judges while she was engaged in establishing recognized borders,[12] and even beyond.[13]

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10. IS 4:8 if במדבר is not emended to בדרך. In Josh 9:9-10 it is linked to the defeat of Sihon and Og although the term במדרים may imply either that the Reed Sea is not the intended event or that it was then considered to have been the exodus itself as Noth suggests. Rahab's similar reference mentions the drying of the sea rather than the defeat of an enemy. Coats' attribution of this to the influence of the Jordan crossing ("Reed Sea Motif," p. 260) works for a text like Ps 114, but not so well for Josh 2:9f which is similar to 9:9f.

11. Dt 7:18-19, Jg 6:8-9.

12. Jg 10:10-12 (several manuscripts omit Egypt here), IS 10:17-19 (exodus and Reed Sea are distinct), IS 12:6-12.

13. Is 10:25-7; although similar to Ex 14:16,26, the reference is not clear. It does clearly refer to the defeat or destruction of enemies; both the allusion to עורב (10:26a, cf. Jg 7:24-5) and the Assyrian threat (v. 24) were of that type.

Another interpretation of the defeat of Egypt which should be noted stems from a tension apparent in the Exodus text - whether the miracles were to punish Pharaoh or to impress Israel.[14] According to the latter of these views, the event at the Reed Sea fits in with the "signs and wonders" which are to awe the Israelites. This is the view of Deuteronomy 11:2-7 where there is no mention of the sea splitting so that Israel could cross, but only the demise of the Egyptians which is listed with the divine acts of providence and the miraculous punishment of Dathan and Abiram. Deuteronomy 29:1-8, which may not refer to the Reed Sea at all, clearly sees the Egyptians' fate in this way - as constituting proof along with acts of providence and the giving of the land that the Lord is God. The picture in Joshua 24 is clearly related to the account in Exodus: Pharaoh was trying to stop the exodus which God had started (v. 6), Israel cried (v. 7), and God separated them from the Egyptians with darkness,[15] finally covering them with the sea. Egypt is guilty of trying to interrupt the divine process of extricating-Israel-from-slavery-in-order-to-bring-her-to-the-Promised Land.

The confrontation with Egypt serves various purposes depending on the narrator's point of view. Most notably,

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14. Cf. Lev 26:45, Dt 7:18-19, Josh 2:10-11, 5:1, 9:9-10, 11:20, IIS 7:23 and also supra pp. 38-9.

15. Cf. Ex 14:20.

however, it occurs as the first in a sequence of military operations culminating with the establishment of a viable nation, a process climaxed by either the conquest or the reign of David.[16] According to this view, the exodus - in the general sense we have preferred to avoid - is the conceptual beginning of the "birth of a nation" process and an integral part of it, rather than a totally distinct event to be understood through its isolated meaning.

The second foreign group which Israel encountered was the Amalekites who come to epitomize evil and against whom the Bible commands genocide.[17] There is relatively little Biblical material dealing with them; even in the Pentateuchal context their appearance is restricted to eight verses. It is presented as a simple battle; the only miracle occurs when Moses raises his hands. God does not appear until Exodus 17:14, and then only in an incidental account which includes an aetiology of sorts.[18] It is particularly significant that in verse 14 God is said to be the one who will מחה Amalek and verse 16 speaks of God's perpetual war with the Amalekites.

There is little reason for this animosity.[19] To be

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16. In the Torah this role is minimized by the sheer physical distance from Exodus 14 to Joshua, an interval filled largely with legal and rhetorical material.
17. Ex 17:14, Dt 25:19, IS 15:3.
18. Ex 17:15-16; cf. M. Noth, Exodus, pp. 143-4.
19. R.C. Brichto has suggested (verbally) this may be because Amalek was related to Israel although this may not explain the extent of the hatred (cf. Gen 36:15-16).

sure Amalek attacked Israel,[20] but one would assume that military defeat should suffice for a punishment. Why Amalek is God's enemy forever and why this tribe must be totally destroyed is not entirely clear. Deuteronomy clarifies this by describing an Amalekite atrocity - attacking from the rear where the weakest elements of the Israelites were to be found,[21] a tactic used by Israel on one occasion![22] In contrast to the Exodus version, it is Israel which Deuteronomy expects to wipe out the Amalekites after the conquest (25:19).

The Amalekites appear again in I Samuel 15. The description of their earlier attack on Israel (v. 2) fits both the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of that account - if, indeed, these are different versions.[23] Now it is Israel that is to smite Amalek[24] whose past behavior is contrasted with that of the Kenites (v. 6), leading to their designation as D'KDN(v. 18) which recalls Deuteronomy's narrative of the earlier desert event.[25] Despite a massive attack (vv. 3,4,7), Amalekites still pose a problem to

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20. Interestingly, without verse 8 the story reads just as well, but with Israel as the aggressor.
21. Dt 25:17-18; who it is that didn't fear God according to v. 18b is unclear from the text alone.
22. Josh 10:19.
23. Rabbinic commentators connect the Deuteronomy description with that in Exodus on the basis of Dt 25:18 in which קרך is considered equivalent to KDS in Ex 17:3; cf. Rashi and ibn Ezra ad loc.
24. Cf. Dt 25:19 although the verb מחה is used here instead of נתן.
25. Cf. IS 15:33; note also note 19 supra.

Israel in I Samuel 27:8 and 30:1.[26]

Whatever their origin and identity,[27] the Amalekites appear to have been a serious menace mainly during the period of the judges and early monarchy, often in connection with other local tribes and quite in contrast to their isolated appearance in the Torah. They existed during the time of Saul whose armor bearer was an Amalekite[28] and were subdued by David,[29] but seem to have continued for quite some time afterwards[30] in spite of the impression in I Samuel 15 that Agag was the only Amalekite Saul left alive.

The possibility that "Amalekite" was a generic term which could also be used quite specifically seems most probable, if not provable.[31] Significantly, when Amalek is cursed in Numbers 24:20, there is no mention of the desert sin which was to become so well known.[32] Herein lies the strength of the view that the Amalekites were "bedouin neighbors who threatened the southern Palestinian farmers

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26. In spite of ibn Ezra to Num 24:20.
27. Ibn Ezra believes they lived in the Negev (ad Ex 17:8); Noth places them in Sinai (Exodus, p. 141).
28. IIS 1:8.
29. IIS 8:12, ICh 18:11.
30. Cf. ICh 4:43.
31. Cf. M. Noth, Exodus, p. 141.
32. Contrast the Targum which translates רֵאשִׁית חַטָּאת as "the first of Israel's battles" although we have already suggested that the Biblical view would grant that honor to Egypt.

and breeders of small cattle,"[33] reflecting the conditions of the early monarchy in Judah, an attitude commonly held about many of the difficulties found in the wilderness period. Such a position is ultimately uncertain; however, we can agree that the story which is placed in the wilderness period seems easily understood as the retrojection of a later conflict with the legendary villification of a nation which was simply an enemy.[34] In other words, the desert period here again presents itself as the normative period to which later events might be traced in much the same way we might say, "Once upon a time..."

The Amalekite story represents the only real military conflict during the entire time of the wanderings - once Egypt is considered as an extension of the exodus and Sihon, Og, and the like as anticipations of the conquest. The element of "foreign relations" and particularly armed conflict during the desert period seems to be of less

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33. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 119; cf. Fritz op. cit., p. 98.

34. Yohanan Aharoni disagrees: "אין ספק, שהאיבה הגדולה בין ישראל לעמלק, מקורה בימי הנדודים במדבר" "עמלק", אנציקלופדיה מקראית, vol. VI, p. 291. A contrary view can be deduced using Gen 14:7 to infer Amalekite control over Kadesh which was challenged by Israel (or possibly that Israelite habitation there was unacceptable to Amalekites) although the date of Gen 14 is notoriously difficult; cf. Otto Eissfeldt, Palestine in the Time of the Nineteenth Dynasty, (a) The Exodus and Wanderings, p. 22 and G.M. Landes, "Amalek," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. I, p. 101.

significance than it originally appeared.

Before treating the Midianites, we must digress to mention one guideline which cannot be ignored. Although tempting to present hypotheses which help explain vexing questions, it is imperative that the Biblical text be the ultimate authority in the absence of external evidence. One cannot contradict or ignore the specific assertions of the text unless able to explain such a procedure or willing to concede its hypothetical nature. While we have proposed that some events recounted in the Bible may be largely fabricated, we have not yet contradicted any account - especially without cause. Although obvious, this proviso assumes great significance in dealing with the Midianite/ Kenites and must constantly be borne in mind.

The Torah is strangely ambivalent about the Midianites. In its first reference from the desert period we are told that Moses' in-laws came from this tribe.[35] Later, Jethro comes to Moses in the desert, acknowledges the supremacy of Yahweh,[36] and proposes a judicial system in what might

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35. Cf. Num 12 according to which he had a Cushite wife although this need not be the same woman; but neither must we assume it to be another wife. As far as historicity is concerned, it seems relatively well-attested that Moses did have a non-Israelite wife (Num 10:29, Jg 1:16, 4:11). For the link between Kenites and Midianites cf. Gen 4:17, 25:4 and Hartmut Schmökel, "Jahwe und die Keniter," Journal of Biblical Literature, LII (1933), p. 216.

36. According to Ex 18:1-3 he already knew of the exodus which seems to have played a major role in convincing him (contra Karl Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal in the Old Testament," The New World, IV:16 (December, 1895), p. 729).

be regarded as an aetiological narrative although it is difficult to determine who would have assumed Moses' role in later times.[37]

That all this takes place at the Mountain of God recalls Exodus 3 and has led to the Kenite hypothesis - that Israelite Yahwism is to be regarded as having its origin through Moses from Kenites with whom he was related by marriage.[38]

In fact, rather than Jethro's initiating Moses and Aaron into the worship of Yahweh, the opposite would seem to be the understanding of the Biblical text. It is Jethro who comes to Moses and not vice versa.[39] Surprised and impressed at God's power, he proclaims Yahweh's supremacy over other deities and enters into a covenant with the Israelites which is formalized by a shared meal.[40] His contribution is limited to some fatherly advice for Moses

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37. Dt 1:9-17 speaks of an apparently similar event without mentioning Jethro at all.

38. "Israel inherited and adopted from the wilderness tribe of the Kenites its God Yahweh and His religion which was to become the religion of mankind through Jesus Christ." Karl Budde, "The Sabbath and the Week," The Journal of Theological Studies, XXX:1 (October, 1928), p. 11. Does no one ever ask how the Kenites came to believe in Yahweh?

39. Chr. H.W. Brekelmans, "Exodus XVIII and the Origins of Yahwism in Israel," Oudtestamentische Studien, X (1954), p. 217.

40. Ibid., pp. 215,219. This covenant may lie behind Jael's assistance against Sisera (Jg 4:18-22, 5:24-7) and Saul's benevolence (1S 15:6), especially if חסד there applies particularly to such covenants; cf. F.Charles Fensham, "Did a Treaty Between the Israelites and the Kenites Exist?" Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 175 (October, 1964), p. 52 and Nelson Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, pp. 42, 46. There is no basis to the claim that the sacrifice

who seems to be having trouble dealing adequately with his people's needs. The problem is not specifically religious nor even really legal, but derives from human limitations;[41] and Jethro is able to show Moses a practical way to handle the people's problems without being tied down all the time.[42]

The general tenor of this passage is that the Kenites joined Israel, admiring if not adopting the Israelite God, a pattern found elsewhere in the Old Testament.[43] The text itself suggests that it was with Israel and not the Kenites that God had an already existing relationship.[44]

Moses' earlier flight to Midian (Ex 2:15ff) provides another basis for the theory of Yahwism's Kenite origins. It is asserted that while living with the family of Reuel into which he had married prior to the exodus,[45] Moses was introduced to the religion of Yahweh. The Biblical view, however, is clearly that Moses' relationship to Midian and his meeting with Yahweh (it is not described as an

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mentioned in Ex 18:12 is a Passover offering. Nor should too much be made of the title רעה יתרו which may denote simply a leader (Brekelmans, op. cit., p. 220).

41. Contra H.H. Rowley who points out that Moses was not a naive youngster at the time ("Moses and Monotheism," in From Moses to Qumran, p. 52).

42. Brekelmans, op. cit., pp. 223-4.

43. Cf. IIK 5:15, Jon 1:16, Dnl 2:47, 3:26-33, 4:31-4 (note also Ex 8:4,15, 9:20,27, 10:17, 12:32, 14:25).

44. Ex 18:1 עמו could be God's people as easily as Moses'; contra Julian Morgenstern, "The Oldest Document of the Hexateuch," Hebrew Union College Annual, IV (1927), p. 129.

45. W.F. Albright deals extensively with the relation between Jethro, Hobab, and Reuel in "Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Hebrew Tradition," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXV (1963), pp. 1-11.

introduction to Yahwism) were accidental.[46] He stumbles on the Mountain of God without Jethro's help (3:1); and the revelation there is of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with no need for mediation by someone more familiar with this "new" deity (3:6). Nor is this God limited to the holy mountain, but will be with Moses in Egypt (3:8).[47] Even the divine name here provided does not designate a new God, but rather the response Moses is to use if challenged by the Israelites in Egypt.[48]

Other references to the Kenites are hardly more helpful. We read that they were related to Moses[49] and seem to have supported Israel in its fight against Sisera.[50] At most, this could result from a covenant with Israel and hardly requires a shared religion, much less that that religion was originally Kenite. Later they were viewed favorably by David and Saul, but again this cannot be used to draw any certain conclusions about their religion or its origin.[51]

The remaining arguments are increasingly ambiguous,

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46. Contra Rowley, "Moses and Monotheism," pp. 56-7.
47. The expectation that Moses will return to the mountain is for his benefit, not God's (3:12); R.G. Brichto has privately suggested to me that the act of return itself will be the sign - i.e. only after Moses has completed the task will he be certain that God was with him.
48. Contra Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 729.
49. Jg 1:16, 4:11.
50. Jg 4:17, 5:24.
51. 1S 15:6, 27:10, 30:29.

relying largely on circumstantial evidence: for example, the Kenites seem to have had some relationship with the tribe of Judah;[52] and the J source which is often ascribed southern origins seems to hold that the name Yahweh has been in use since creation.[53]

A final consideration concerning the Kenites is their eponymous ancestor Cain, a name which may designate "smiths."[54] Cain himself is hardly an admirable character according to the Bible. It has been claimed that outside of Genesis 4 he is viewed more favorably as the founder of cities and the like.[55] But we should remember that the Kenites are supposedly those who disapprove of and stay away from cities where pure Yahwism could become polluted! In fact, Cain's forced wanderings are considered a curse from God.[56] Nomadism here, as throughout the Bible, is not a preferred form of existence. And Cain's mark is no where

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52. E.g. ICh 2:55 according to Rowley, "Moses and Monotheism," p. 53 and From Joseph to Joshua, pp. 153-4.

53. Rowley, "Moses to Monotheism," p. 54; Karl Budde, The Religion of Israel to the Exile, p. 21.

54. B.D. Eerdmans, "Have the Hebrews Been Nomads?" The Expositor (seventh series), VI, p. 129; Pensham, op. cit., p. 52. Budde derives the Sabbath from this group as an occupational necessity ("The Sabbath..." p. 14); cf. Yigal Allon, "Kenite," in Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. X, p. 906.

55. Cf. Schmökel, op. cit., p. 226. According to IS 30:29 some Kenites lived in cities; indeed, Gen 15:19 regards them as among the ancient inhabitants of Canaan.

56. Ibid., p. 227.

said to be an indication of his holiness, the remnant of the mark on a divine warrior.[57] Rather it is a sign intended to provide protection from those who might be tempted to abuse him, thinking God had abandoned him altogether.[58] We must, finally, be cautious with the claim that Cain was the first Yahwist.[59] According to Genesis both Cain and Abel as well as all who followed until the time of Babel had the same God. The presumably eponymous figure of Cain can provide no justification for the argument that there was an early and unique relationship between the Kenites and Yahwism.

This does not disprove the possibility of the Kenite hypothesis; rather we have endeavored to show the lack of evidence which can be adduced in its support.

Later references to Midian are less favorable. In Numbers 22 there are hints that Midianites are responsible along with the Moabites for hiring Balaam.[60] The focus of the story, however, is clearly the Moabites.

Numbers 25 appears to be a thoroughly anti-Midianite passage, although here too the completeness of their

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57. Ibid., p. 226. The mark is never explicitly called God's or even divine. Allon explains Cain's mark by the effort of primitive tribes to protect clans of smiths (op. cit., p. 906).

58. E.A. Speiser, Genesis (The Anchor Bible), p. 31; cf. Ex 13:16, Dt 6:8, 11:18, Ezk 9:4,6.

59. Schmökel, op. cit., p. 217 and Theophile James Meek, Hebrew Origins, p. 98.

60. Num 22:4,7; Noth contends that these are late additions along with 31:8,16, etc. (Numbers, pp. 175-6).

participation is uncertain. The text vascillates between an individual sin and group disloyalty. According to verse 6 the Midianite women are those with whom Israel is accused of intermarrying, a rather strange accusation in light of the fact that the Bible seems to find nothing wrong with Moses' Midianite wife! In verses 8-9 we read that twenty-four thousand died for what appears to have been one man's sin. Even if this number is understood as merely signifying "a large group," the punishment seems out of proportion. In verses 16ff all of Midian is to die for this crime (thereby freeing Israel from responsibility!). And when we wonder what sin could justify such an attitude, we read that it was for deception! For leading Israel into idolatry? What of Jethro who was a Midianite idolator at one time? And even if the charge is true, surely the major blame must be Israel's.

This negative attitude is continued in Numbers 31. Midian is to be avenged before Moses dies, and so all the males are killed.[61] In verse 16 the sin is "explained": the females enticed Israel at Baal Peor, leading them to sin, while the males were presumably those who hired Balaam. This combination is rather peculiar and, one suspects, owes much to the present juxtaposition of the two

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61. Num 31:7; v. 8b reflects the above-mentioned confusion between Midian and Moab in terms of the Balaam story.

stories.[62] Only the virgins from among Midian are left alive, and they are taken by Israel. Apparently Midian is no more. However, as with Amalek, here too the tribe remains after all its members have been killed; Israel's troubles with the Midianites continue during the period of the judges.[63]

A possible explanation of this peculiarity would be that the account in Numbers is exaggerated, that not all the Midianites were killed; however, this does not explain the Torah's strange ambivalence with regard to that tribe. The dilemma is resolved once we understand that the Baal Peor story is from the period of the judges or at least after the conquest. Here we are not dealing with a literary creation intended to explain a later event, but rather the actual re-location of a story into an historically inaccurate period for reasons we have suggested before.[64]

The Midianites were a semi-nomadic people,[65] with some of whom Moses had a relationship, although not necessarily one of religious inspiration. Whatever their activities might have been during Israel's desert period, the Torah's account of them is limited to Exodus 18. We can assume a positive relation with Moses although our information in this regard is highly limited. Speculation is intriguing,

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62. Cf. M. Noth, Numbers, p. 231.
63. Jg 6:1-7, 8:5.
64. Supra pp. 79-81.
65. Cf. Gen 25:1-6.

though no evidence would permit one to go so far as to endorse the Kenite hypothesis in its standard form. As for the negative relationship described in Numbers, we must conclude that this reflects various later problems and is presumably a straightforward account from a later time which has since been transposed.[66]

Texts dealing with the acquisition of the land upon which Israel settled are properly part of the conquest traditions and outside of our purview. However, we noted earlier that such distinctions tend to be artificial, and here that is clearly the case. We will focus largely on Sihon and Og, although there are other interesting accounts to be treated.

The conquest traditions could best be defined as those which serve to explain how Israel got to her own land, while for all intents and purposes the wilderness period should include that time Israel spent on the "other side of the Jordan." The overlap is readily apparent; appropriately, there is a qualitative difference between the means of acquiring land east of the Jordan from that for land to its west.

The situation is anticipated in the Song at the Sea which speaks of the nations' fear of Israel as a result of

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66. Note the very limited degree of reference to Moses in these latter passages.

Egypt's fate,[67] including among those concerned the Transjordanian nations of Edom and Moab. (Sihon and Og are not mentioned.) With regard to Edom, we read that Israel made a seemingly reasonable request, only to be met by a threat.[68] In other words, Israel was militarily stopped from travelling in that direction.[69]

The story of the king of Arad is considered late because it interrupts the conquest and is ultimately of little consequence, bearing perhaps some resemblance to the Amalekite story in this regard.[70] However, it does contribute to the picture of general resistance to Israel's progress and as such emphasizes the difficulty she encountered when trying to enter the Promised Land, a marked contrast to the apparent ease of movement typical of the wilderness period.[71] The story provides an aetiology for חרמה even though according to Numbers 14:45 it was already so named.[72] The term חרם suggests this brief notice would have been more appropriate among the Joshua narratives, and indeed there is no settlement associated with this particular site.

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67. Ex 15:14-16.
68. Num 20:17.
69. According to Noth it is at this point that the conquest theme begins, a remark justified by rough spots which can still be seen between the wilderness and conquest themes and discrepancies such as the implication that Kadesh is on Edom's border in Num 20:16b (Numbers, p. 148).
70. Num 21:1-3; M. Noth, Numbers, pp. 154-5.
71. Arad is actually in the Negev.
72. Cf. also Jg 1:17.

With the story of Sihon we move still closer to the occupation theme. The Israelite request (Num 21:22) is similar to that made of Edom - i.e. transit rights. The accidental nature of this conquest (vv. 24-5) stands in marked contrast to what happens once Israel is in Canaan itself as well as to the intentional conquest of Jazer (v. 32) and the defeat of Og which, although the results of an undesired attack, does yield land which had been promised by God (vv. 33-34a). That promise is extended to Sihon also (v. 34b) although it may be secondary if the story of Og was taken over from Deuteronomy.[73] The references to the Transjordanian settlement in Numbers 32:1-5 fit with the overall "accidental" character of that conquest as described earlier.

The story of Balaam (Num 22) presupposes a shared border with Israel according to some.[74] Verses 2-4 clearly show a military fear of the Israelites although this could be understood in its present context. In any event, Israel plays absolutely no role whatsoever in the entire narrative. The general effect is similar to that of the Sihon and Og stories, but this particular text is inconsequential for our purposes.

Deuteronomy 2 presents a somewhat different account

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73. M. Noth, Numbers, p. 166.
74. Ibid., p. 172.

of events from that contained in Numbers:[75] We are told that Edom and Moab were not attacked because they were entitled to their land. (Recall that in Numbers Israel had no intention of attacking Edom, but merely wanted transit rights which were denied by means of a military threat, while the Balaam story is the only one dealing with Moab.) There are certain interesting points of difference from the earlier account as far as Sihon and Og are concerned, too. According to verse 24 Sihon's territory was part of the Promised Land, the exact opposite of what Numbers implies. Israel's request (v. 28) fits its Deuteronomic context,[76] but has no corresponding element in the earlier version[77] where Israel promised not to eat anything at all. Verse 30 is clearly connected with the version in Numbers, but in light of verses 24 and 30b the accidental nature of the conquest is totally transformed. Indeed, 2:33-5 present the battle in terms which are remarkably similar to the general turn of events in the book of Joshua rather than the original(?) narrative in Numbers. The story of Og (Dt 3:1ff) is like that of Sihon, but without the earlier anticipation; it is equivalent to the Numbers version.

Dt 3:12ff refers to the distribution of the Transjordanian land. Interestingly, here Moses does not

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75. According to verse 4 Esau will fear Israel.
76. Cf. Dt 2:6.
77. Cf. Num 21:22.

mention that the Reubenites had asked for his permission and he replied with anger;[78] Moses merely distributes the land with a condition.

There are various references to these events throughout the Bible. Sihon and Og are often included where other wilderness events are not, presumably because they were seen as the beginning of the conquest at a time when the remainder of the "forty years" was either unknown or unimportant.[79] Dt 31:2-4 uses language generally applied to the conquest for the victories over Sihon and Og.[80] Joshua's closing speech explicitly includes these as part of the conquest[81] and speaks of Balaam in a way which must be closely related to Deuteronomy 23:6. The passage there[82] could fit Deuteronomy's account[83] and does not overtly contradict anything in Numbers - although it seems not to accord readily with Numbers 21. Balaam is also recalled in Micah 6:5.

Psalms 135 and 136 include Sihon and Og with the

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78. Num 32:1-15, cf. supra pp. 90-1.

79. Cf. Dt 1:4, 4:46 (note that the battles are said to have occurred בצאתם ממצרים), 29:6-7, Josh 2:9-10, 9:9-10, 12:2-6, 13, Jg 10:10-11 (Kaufmann claims אמורי refers to Sisera, ספר שופטים, p. 216), and IK 4:19. Ps 78:55 refers to an event after Israel was settled, especially if v. 54 signifies Zion.

80. E.g. [illegible] and [illegible].

81. Josh 24:8, contrast other Amorites in v. 11.

82. Dt 23:4-7 quoted in Neh 13:1-3 with some differences that are significant mostly for text study.

83. Cf. Dt 2:19,29 and S'forno ad loc.

occupation of the Promised Land. According to the former their territory was not in Canaan proper (135:11b) although it became part of Israel's heritage (v. 12). The latter psalm's text (excluding the antiphonal responses) follows closely to that in the previous psalm, but makes no mention of Canaan at all. In Nehemiah 9 Sihon and Og are excluded from the Promised Land (vv. 22-3), but their territory is considered to have been given to Israel by God rather than acquired as the unintended result of their own lack of hospitality.

Often the Israelites' wilderness period has been reconstructed almost solely in terms of their relationships with other groups.

> The impression given by the narratives is that the horde which left Egypt conquered the owners of this land [Qadesh], the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-13), took their place, stayed in that neighborhood a fairly long time, and came into touch there with related tribes which had previously pitched their tents there.[84]

However, we have tried to show that aside from the Amalekite account and a brief meeting with the family of Moses, neither of which exerts any great influence on Israel or her ensuing time in the desert, the so-called Foreign Relations of the wilderness must actually be re-allocated in terms of their conceptual content to other "periods." And so what we have seen is the gradual

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84. Klasfeldt, op. cit., p. 22.

disintegration of one of our original four elements comprising the wilderness period.

The history, or at least the recounting of the history of Israel's confrontations with other peoples begins conceptually with the exodus, proceeds immediately to the various Transjordanian people, and then on to the conquest itself. There is virtually no reflection whatsoever of the desert as a land of enemies in the way suggested to be characteristic of the Bible's general outlook on the desert. But then, within this category we have virtually no reflection on the desert period at all.

REVELATION AT SINAI

> ...the story of Sinai gave to the wilderness an historically and ethically positive meaning to accompany its natural negative meaning.*

Much as the desert period comes to dominate the Torah at least quantitatively, so the Sinai narrative dominates the wilderness period if not the entire Pentateuch. Stretching from Exodus 19 through Numbers 10, it contains the vast majority of material dealing with this time. Furthermore, references to revelation elsewhere in the Torah come inevitably to be subsumed under this heading (e.g. much of Deuteronomy), increasing its apparent scope still further.

The amount of material involved coupled with the attention it has received, the variety of theories porposed to deal with it, and the ensuing controversy makes this a most difficult category with which to deal adequately. Though lying somewhat beyond our immediate concern, it cannot be ignored altogether although we will not and

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* Paraphrased from George Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought, p. 5.

should not endeavor to explain all the relevent texts. The material is most easily approached from sources other than the Torah narrative itself though these cannot be completely trusted inasmuch as they make no claim to completeness.

References to the law of Moses are common outside of the Pentateuch, and some even ascribe a divine origin to that law. Usually these can be identified in terms of the Torah text to which they refer, generally in Numbers or Deuteronomy.[1] These laws are not always linked to Sinai in their present context; however, their occurrence in the Torah where Sinai clearly represents the major revelation could justify the interpretation that even those laws not explicitly ascribed to that place originated there as well. Even though Sinai is the occasion for this major revelation, the mountain itself is of minimal import in contrast to the divine origin and Mosaic transmission of the material.[2]

When mentioned by name, Sinai is explicitly linked to the notion of a covenant,[3] often with mention of the tablets and ark as well as various other "embellishments," i.e. non-essential elements of the story such as Moses' intervention. Numerous other references to a covenant made

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1. Cf. appendix, p. 221.
2. This fits well with the lack of evidence for a later Israelite cult site there.
3. E.g. Dt 4:10-15, IK 8:9-21, IICh 5:10.

at the time of the exodus imply that "when Israel left Egypt" God immediately made a covenant with them.[4] Perhaps the exodus itself was the sign of this divine contract. However, inasmuch as we have seen that the phrase בְּחֹרֵב בְּהַר elsewhere should not be taken too literally,[5] here also we might understand it more generally to signify Sinai or at least some part of what is presently included under that heading. In any event, the tradition of a covenant is intimately bound with the exodus rather than the wilderness traditions. The notion seems to be that after the exodus God made a covenant with Israel - and that's all. The exact contents of the covenant are not clear. Mention of two tablets in the ark suggests the Ten Commandments although that raises an exceedingly complex issue.[6] Sinai seems to have been just a convenient location where the exodus was concluded by a covenant between God and Israel.

Although we have stipulated from the start that texts outside of the "normative" Pentateuchal account would often be intentionally selective, the absence of Sinai from virtually all of the various historical reviews is rather strange. Psalm 106 which does mention many of the acts of

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4. Lev 26:45, Jer 7:21-8, 11:6-8, 31:32, 34:13-14 (the context there suggests Deuteronomy which, in turn, is considered to be Sinaitic), Hag 2:5, Ps 81:5-6.
5. Cf. supra p. 137 n. 79.
6. E.g. Dt 4:13, IK 8:9, IICh 5:10.

divine graciousness limits Horeb to the story of the golden calf and God's resulting anger, and so it continues in the majority of such reviews.

Ezekiel 20 clearly knows of the giving of the law.[7] His reference to a second revelation (vv. 18-20) is based on this prophet's unique scheme as to the history of the period and is difficult to trace.[8] We presume that he would not have invented an occurrence ex nihilo, although such an account could have been midrashically derived from the Torah text; there are certainly enough references to revelation between Exodus and Deuteronomy for one to be able to interpret events in this way if so inclined. Perhaps Ezekiel has Deuteronomy itself in mind, since he argues that this revelation was violated after the settlement (i.e. the judges period?). Ezekiel does not mention where any of these laws were revealed despite the fact that the standard view of Biblical history would suggest that he was well aware of much of the Torah as we have it.

Nehemiah 9 is the only historical survey to include Sinai with a relatively complete account of the wilderness period other than the Torah itself. Here Sinai is treated

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7. Ezk 20:11 is based on Lev 18:5 while 20:12 stems from Ex 31:13; both of these Torah verses are ascribed to P.
8. Cf. supra pp. 103-4.

as an act of providence:[9] God gave Israel laws, Sabbath, and Torah which are apparently to be construed as separate entities.

This passage is difficult to date.[10] It is usually regarded as relatively late and the first instance of Sinai's inclusion in what von Rad calls the "canonical history of redemption";[11] however, this same scholar considers the inclusion of the Sinai tradition to be the work of the anything-but-late J source![12]

Without delving into the history of the credo and covenant forms, we must be concerned with the originality of the Sinai event within the wilderness period, a very different question from that of the inclusion of the Sinai tradition in the Heilsgeschichte. Traditions may have been excluded either because of standardized forms or as a result of an individual author's disinterest rather than out of ignorance or because the events they describe did not actually transpire. In fact, the Sinai event (i.e. the covenant) is

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9. Neh 9:13; God came down and spoke from heaven. Here the golden calf is not immediately adjoined to the events at Sinai (v. 18) in contrast to Ps 106.

10. Cf. David Noel Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," p. 440, and Adam C. Welch, "The Source of Nehemiah IX," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, XLVII (1929), pp. 130-7.

11. Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays, p. 12 and M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 141.

12. von Rad, "The Problem..." p. 53; Samuel E. Loewenstamm argues that it is found already in E (op. cit., p. 10).

included in Biblical texts even if the place name is often not mentioned;[13] it is not, however, usually found in historical reviews of the period. Sinai was probably considered to be the conclusion of the exodus itself - the making of a covenant to formalize the relationship which had already been achieved. The objections to von Rad's view then become apparent: at a covenant ceremony where the Heilsgeschichte might have been recited, there was surely no need to include the covenant itself; other ancient Near Eastern documents clearly illustrate that the making of a treaty was not necessarily considered an act of benevolence to be included in the treaty's prologue.[14] The fact that Sinai is not mentioned in such texts, therefore, could easily be understood as a result of the nature of these particular texts.

To return to the original issue, namely what was believed to have happened at Sinai, it has become relatively clear that it was conceived as the place of covenant making, a conceptual halfway point between the exodus and the Promised Land whereby the relationship forged during the

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13. Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Exodus, Sinai, and the Credo," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXVII:2 (April, 1965), p. 107.

14. Ibid., pp. 107-8. As Huffmon puts it (p. 112), what needs an explanation is not why Sinai is usually omitted, but how it came to be included as a saving act. Loewenstamm argues that this resulted from the legalmindedness of a later period (e.g. op. cit., pp. 11-15).

exodus was formalized and consummated in preparation for the coming occupation.

The Pentateuchal material on Sinai, with which we have not yet dealt, is composed largely of revelation and law (and its execution). The general view with regard to this is that "the legal material forces its way into the narrative, and once there spreads itself and takes up more and more room."[15] Or to put it somewhat more mildly:

> the principal portion of the material contained in these chapters are demonstrably laws which are for the most part, at any rate as they stand now, of late date. They originated with periods just before, during, and just after the Exile, and have, of themselves, nothing to do with Sinai.[16]

In confronting this dominance of law (and its execution), we must wonder as to its origin and how it came to cast its legal shadow over the entire Sinai event. The answer lies in the view of the wilderness period as one of preparation for the conquest of Canaan. One of the fundamental needs for that time was a "constitution," and the legal material which is ascribed to Sinai fulfills that function. To be sure, it is not the only place deemed appropriate for the giving of law during the desert period.[17]

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15. Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel, p. 342.

16. O. Eissfeldt, op. cit., p. 20.

17. E.g. Ex 12:43-13:16, 15:25b-26 (cf. G. von Rad, "The Problem...," p. 15, Theophile James Meek, "Some Religious Origins of the Hebrews," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures XXXVII:2 (1921), p. 105, and M. Noth, Exodus, p. 129), Ex 18 (though no laws are mentioned), Num 15, 18-19, 25-30, and Deuteronomy.

Legal collections were put wherever they fit best: Passover laws are recited at the exodus,[18] while laws for the coming life in Canaan are given at Sinai amidst the covenant which was to govern the people's relationship with God once they conquered that land. The desert period was thus seen as the formative time for the Israelite state and possibly its cult as well.[19] This viewpoint was created by the accretion of texts, a process not limited to Sinai. The law which was to function after the occupation was considered the content of the covenant God made with Israel at the time of the exodus.

Once the legal material has been removed, there remains a small amount of revelation and the narrative(s) dealing with Sinai itself.[20] While we will not analyze this in detail, its core is clearly a theophany coupled with a covenant and various relatively vague revelations in contrast to the specific laws which have been removed. This fits the character of the event as we deduced it from the descriptions elsewhere in the Bible.

Why Sinai? And what actually happened there? One theory considers Sinai to have been a volcano in or near Midian;[21] however, the mountain of God is explicitly stated

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18. Or earlier, cf. Ex 12.
19. Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, p. 234.
20. Ex 19:25-6, 20:15-19, 24, 31:18, 32:1-33:11, 34, 40:34-5, Lev 26:46, Num 7:89.
21. W.J. Phythian-Adams, "The Mount of God," The Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement (1930), pp. 134-49, 192-209.

not to be in Midian.[22] It may be that the cloud and fire which led Israel have cultic interpretations[23] or are folk elements, possibly reflecting ancient custom.[24] The problem is ultimately which elements of the narrative are to be taken seriously and which are to be considered as embellishments. It is probably impossible to disentangle the historical facts, if any, underlying this account.

That Sinai is in some sense the aetiological antecedent of a covenant-renewal ceremony may make an attractive thesis[25] and there are undeniably cultic elements in our present text, but this fails to explain the core of the story. Even if Sinai was the first declaration of a covenant, just as the exodus may have been the first recognition of the Passover in a broad sense, this does not a priori show that it was the invented prototype for later cult observances; rather, things could easily and perhaps more logically have been the other way around. Sinai is not necessarily historical at all, but it is surely not impossible that sometime after the exodus a covenant was made with God.

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22. Ex 18:27, Num 10:29f. Yehezkel Kaufmann, תולדות האמונה הישראלית II, 340-1.

23. Cf. Walter Beyerlin, Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions, pp. 134-5; note also M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 204.

24. Driver quoted Phythian-Adams, op. cit., p. 137, and Theodor Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament, p. 257.

25. Cf. A.H.J. Gunneweg, "Sinaibund und Davidsbund," Vetus Testamentum, X (1960), p. 337.

This takes us somewhat far astray from our primary concern which is the role this material plays in the overall scheme of the forty desert years, for despite the size and complexity of the Sinai narratives, their impact is virtually nil. In contrast to Kadesh, virtually no time is spent there, and it seems to have practically no effect on the people's behavior.

Scattered throughout the Bible are hints that God actually dwelt at Sinai. These are those few impossible verses that provide the basis for a theory which, no matter how poorly it fits the overwhelming majority of citations, just cannot be explained away convincingly. While they do not prove that Sinai was once conceived as the divine abode, they do strongly favor such an implication.

Often included with these are several references which are not as strong as the defenders of this view would contend. The Kenite hypothesis need not concern us overmuch at this stage. We have suggested our approach above.[26] While its possibility cannot be denied and the return to Horeb anticipated in Exodus 3 is more than likely fulfilled by Exodus 18-19,[27] this does not turn the mountain into God's home. God appears to Moses who is tending Jethro's flock

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26. Supra pp. 125-30.

27. One would be well advised to exercise caution in treating these chapters. Although according to 18:5 Moses was at the mount, there is no mention of his going there; in 17:8 he is at Rephidim, while in v. 10 he is on a hill, and in chapter 19 the people travel further to reach Sinai.

(3:3-6) - that the ground was holy does not make it God's dwelling - and provides him with a series of signs to allay his concerns about the exodus. Among these are the mention of the divine name as a sign for Israel (v. 14) and the promise that they will return to the same mountain as a sign for Moses (v. 12).[28] Moses' later argument before Pharaoh that the people must worship God in the wilderness should, however, be understood as an excuse.- which Moses uses at God's suggestion.[29] Neither this ruse nor God's earlier promise that Moses would return to the mountain indicate a necessary relation between that place and Yahweh.

Continuing in sequence, it has been suggested that [illegible] (Ex 15:13) "strongly reflects the desert origin of Yahwism."[30] If this means Sinai, then it is surprising to find no indication of anything which happened there whether covenant, legislation, or even the making of the golden calf. From the descriptions of conquest in the following verses, it is apparent that the reference is actually to the Promised Land.[31]

Much is often made of Exodus 33:14 where God supposedly forces Israel to leave His abode accompanied

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28. Cf. supra p. 128 n. 47.
29. Ex 3:18, 5:1,3, 7:16, 8:23-4; cf. Kaufmann, תולדות II, p. 66 and M. Noth, Pentateuch Traditions, p. 71.
30. Frank M. Cross and David N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," Journal of Near Eastern Studies, XIV:4 (October, 1955), p. 248
31. Cf. Jer 25:30.

by the divine פנים.[32] The text, however, will simply not support such a view. God is angry, to be sure; but He clearly understands that His original promise was to bring Israel to the Promised Land - not Sinai (v. 1). Despite His displeasure, He expresses the intention of driving out the Canaanites Himself (v. 2). In other words an angel may accompany Israel, but God will not stay behind at Sinai. God's unwillingness to be with them is not for Israel's punishment, but her protection lest He destroy them in His anger (v. 3bβ). So it is that when He does go to the Promised Land it is not in Israel's midst. That God's פנים - whether His face or His presence[33] - will guide Israel (v. 14) is an expression of divine favor rather than punishment.

Another much touted narrative is that in I Kings 19 which is often interpreted to reflect the ancient custom of making pilgrimages to Sinai. Like the Kenite theory, this is pure hypothesis. If it cannot be denied, it seems equally unable to be proven and probably for the same reason - there is simply no evidence that such a custom ever existed. Noth himself while accepting the probability of such a rite outlines the objections without refutation.[34]

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32. Cf. H. Schmökel, "Jahwe und die Keniter," p. 216 and J. Morgenstern, "The Oldest Document," pp. 9-10,29.
33. Cf. Gen 33:10 and Ex 33:20.
34. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 60.

These are fundamentally one objection - the complete lack of Biblical evidence. Kaufmann rightly points to the temporary nature of the worship there and the fact that Israelites never returned;[35] indeed, direct statements from the prophets suggest that what little cult activity is said to have occurred at Sinai may have been a late addition.[36]

The only concrete example of a "return to Sinai," the story of Elijah, contains two sections the purpose of which is rather different from what this theory would suggest. The first section (19:1-6) relates to Elijah's flight from Jezebel. Appropriately he flees into the desert[37] where he seems to become lost, asks to die, and is miraculously fed by an angel (v. 6). It is this angel who then instructs him to proceed and guides him to Horeb. Elijah did not choose to go there nor does he seem aware of the mountain's exact location or its significance if any. That the journey took forty days is our first indication that this story is not to be taken literally.

Various elements of the ensuing narrative are reminiscent of the original Sinaitic theophany. The setting is obviously identical, and the forty day journey recalls Moses' forty days on the mountain top. The sacred cave,

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35. Y. Kaufmann, תולדות, II, p. 337.
36. Jer 7:22, Am 5:25 although Kaufmann (ibid.) is not justified in stating that there were no rites at the mount.
37. Cf. supra pp. 6-7, 14.

dramatic revelation, and inability to observe the deity all recall that earlier appearance of God. The spectacle which follows recalls the Sinai theophany as well as what may have been typical elements of the ancient Israelite cult.[38] But God, we are told, was not in any of these; rather, He is to be understood as the "still small voice" (v. 13). The meaning is obvious - despite respected Israelite traditions, Yahweh does not always require an overwhelming natural spectacle to communicate with man. The story has a moral. This plus the fact that this section is not essentially related to the ongoing account of Elijah's confrontation with Ahab and Jezebel and the apparently additional motive of tying Elijah to Elisha within the body of the revelation itself (vv. 15-17),[39] make the historicity of this section unreliable. The story has too many messages for us to accept its historical accuracy naively. It can therefore provide no substantiation for the hypothetical Sinai pilgrimages.

Several verses suggest the possibility that God's relationship with Israel began in the wilderness.[40] This

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38. J. Morgenstern, op. cit., p. 38 although these elements are not literally reproduced from Ex 19; cf. Ex 19:16,18,18, 24:17, and Ps 18:7-15.

39. John Gray, I & II Kings, A Commentary, p. 366.

40. E.g. Dt 32:10, Hos 11:1, Mal 2:14-15, cf. Ps 80:9f. Ezk 16 is explicitly addressed to the city Jerusalem; even when treating it as a national capital, the references seem to be political. V. 3 describes the baby's origin as from inhabited lands while v. 5 speaks of being cast into a field although this could be metaphorical.

does not, however, show that either of the two parties was originally a desert inhabitant. Whether deriving from some group which had no knowledge of the exodus at all or reflecting Israel's sense of having left Egypt on her own and then finding God or actually indicating the covenant at Sinai, these instances relate neither positively nor negatively to the theory of Yahweh's desert/Sinaitic origins.

Two final verses which do not support the contention that Yahweh's relationship with Mt. Sinai was more than we might otherwise suppose are found in the book of Psalms. Weiser believes that 29:8 reflects the Sinai theophany.[41] This psalm's theme, "divine power over nature," is exemplified in various ways - with regard to water (v. 3), fire (v. 7), living things (vv. 5-6,9), and so also the desert (v. 8). None of these entails specific historical allusions. The lack of Biblical support for the designation מדבר קדש with reference to Sinai[42] coupled with that term's use in Ugaritic literature for an area near Lebanon and Anti-Libanus[43] strengthens the contention that Sinai is not here intended.

Dahood translates מסתר רעם in Psalm 81:8 as "from secret thunder places," i.e. Sinai.[44] This hinges on

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41. Artur Weiser, The Psalms, A Commentary, p. 264.
42. But note Num 33:36 where such a term is possible.
43. Cf. M. Dahood, Psalms 1-50 (The Anchor Bible), p. 178.
44. M. Dahood, Psalms 51-100 (The Anchor Bible), p. 265.

translating "ב" as "from"[45] which seems unnecessary in this context. Such an interpretation assumes that the goal of the exodus was Sinai, the very issue at stake and for which there is relatively little evidence.

Turning now to the more difficult references, we find that although these can be individually disputed, their collective impact strongly supports an interpretation of Sinai somewhat different from its more general role as a convenient stopping place after the exodus.

The first convincing verse is Exodus 19:4: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I ... brought you to Me." Here, though we need not concede Sinai as God's permanent dwelling, it is clearly conceived as a special location. One could argue that God was not present in Egypt so that it was Israel s departure from slavery which brought them physically closer to God or we could accept the Targum's rendering of אליי as לגבאי which seems naive (or overly sophisticated). Ibn Ezra understands the reference to indicate Sinai in the same was as [illegible].[46] אליי does imply that God was located at Sinai, even if not permanently.

The several names "Sinai," "Horeb," and "mountain of God" suggest that we may be dealing with a conjoining of

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45. Cf. Dahood, Psalms 1-50, p. 319 and Psalms 51-100, p. 79.
46. Ex 15:13, cf. supra p. 150.

various traditions. The last of these, at the very least, would support the argument that there was a special relationship between God and a particular mountain - at least at some time and in the minds of some ancient Israelites.[47]

Albright's translation of Judges 5:5 as speaking of Yahweh as "the one of Sinai"[48] is metrically appealing and supports the identification of God and that mountain. Indeed, the progression of thought in that verse can be maintained only if we adopt this view or leave out the phrase altogether as a gloss.[49] The similar usage in Psalm 68:9 is striking. One can speculate that the meaning is "the One who appeared at Sinai" or the like,[50] but Albright's proposal has the attraction of simplicity.

Various "stray" verses assert that God "came" from Sinai which seems to have some connection with Seir, Paran, Teman, and possibly Meribat Kadesh.[51] To be sure, these do

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47. J. Morgenstern, "The Oldest Document," p. 27 and H. Schmökel, "Jahwe und die Keniter," p. 215.

48. William F. Albright, "The Song of Deborah in the Light of Archaeology," Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, LXII (1936), p. 30.

49. Kittel suggests עד סיני was a later addition to explain הרים נזלו and was later modified to זה סיני. Cf. also Alois Musil, The Northern Hegaz, p. 298 and Nelson Glueck, "The Theophany of the God of Sinai," Journal of the American Oriental Society, p. 463 (on p. 470 he suggests that this entire section may be a later insertion).

50. Yehezkel Kaufmann, [illegible], p. 133.

51. Dt 33:2-4 (cf. Biblia Hebraica ad loc), Hab 3:3,7, Zch 9:14, and LXX Ps 68:18. Cross and Freedman's translation of Dt 33:16 as "the favor of the One who tented on Sinai ("The Blessing of Moses," Journal of Biblical Literature,

not prove that Yahweh actually dwelt on Mt. Sinai which could have been but a temporary stopping place on His way elsewhere or they might be poetic descriptions of the historical progress of Yahwistic religion. Most likely, however, they are remnants of a tradition which did relate Yahweh with Sinai. This may be supported by the very paucity of similar material which we have previously used to defend the opposite conclusion.[52] According to the Biblical account Sinai was an exceedingly important location where a remarkably significant event occurred. Why was there no shrine there, and why do we find no real evidence that Israelites ever returned? Other holy places have not been similarly obscured. Considering the later importance which Zion assumed, it is not inconceivable that Sinai's importance was systematically removed at least in the traditions we possess.[53] Of course, other attempts to hide earlier traditions have not been so successful; but we do have these six or seven references, and their importance cannot be denied. Despite the pervasive view of Sinai or the anonymous mountain as but one stop on the way to Canaan while the theophany there is hardly surprising for

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LXVII [1948], p. 194) has as its only support the feebleness of other explanations (e.g. von Rad, Deuteronomy, p. 207), but relies on a radical change in the Masoretic text and begs the question of God's relationship to Sinai.

52. Supra p. 152.

53. O. Eissfeldt, op. cit., p. 21.

a God who "accomodates Himself to the actual habitat of the recipients of His revelation,"[54] there are occasional, isolated, and difficult verses which imply quite a bit more. Perhaps one reason these texts seem so difficult is our own reluctance to accept their clear implication.

Given the facts that Sinai as the divine abode is so highly limited, that as a place of worship it is not at all unique, and that as legislation it is cited almost completely apart from the events of the wilderness period and then generally without being ascribed to Sinai but only to Moses, it would seem that the likeliest core for the Sinai tradition would be the covenant following the exodus. Why this is ascribed to Sinai, much like the various attempts to discover Mount Sinai's location, seems beyond recovery. However, it does seem logical that at some time a covenant was viewed as the consummation of the exodus and that around this locus was gathered all the material which today comprises the Sinai tradition.

As presently constituted the Sinai material seems not quite to fit its context,[55] but it would be a grave mistake to consider the trip there as a mere "detour."[56] The itinerary in Exodus 19:1-2 describes it rather as a station on the way to the Promised Land. Israel was not brought out

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54. S. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 49; even Elijah had no difficulty communicating with God at Carmel (IK 18).
55. G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, p. 187.
56. J. Wellhausen, op. cit., p. 342; cf. G. Coats, "The Wilderness Itinerary," p. 149.

of Egypt to stay at "God's home"; they find Him elsewhere as well. Nor is this the sole spot where they receive legislation. But it is the setting at which the covenant was made. The present narrative seems to have been expanded as the covenant itself was expanded and grew in importance, eventually assuming the import of a rather detailed constitution for life in the Promised Land. Only late in the development of Israel's historiography was this event viewed as a saving act.

PROVIDENCE

> "The wilderness is the place that threatens the very existence of Yahweh's chosen people, but it is also the stage which brightly illumines God's power and readiness to dispel the threat."*

A widely shared view has it that the Bible preserves two fundamentally contradictory views of the wilderness period.[1] According to the first of these it was a time of uninterrupted bliss, Israel's honeymoon with God during which He provided for her every need. "Thus says the Lord: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.'"[2] In contrast are those passages which view the

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* Ulrich W. Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness, p. 21.
1. Cf. Coats, Rebellion, pp. 13ff.
2. Jer 2:2.

desert period as one of incessant Israelite rebelliousness. "How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested him again and again, and provoked the Holy One of Israel."[3] Using these seemingly contradictory descriptions, scholars have proceeded to develop various explanations for the history of the wilderness tradition.

The first view cited above is generally held to be the earlier. In fact, it could be said to offer a general outlook on all the themes now gathered into the desert period; uniquely able to subsume all the other categories we have outlined, it tends to lose its own value as a unique classification, functioning instead as a general heading by which the entire period could be described. Once the term "providence" is understood to denote divine assistance and/or guidance in the wilderness, however, it becomes readily apparent that the material associated with Sinai, whether classified as covenant or law, is entirely inappropriate for such a theme. We have already seen that this accords with the Bible's tendency to separate the two themes;[4] only in the presumably late and unquestionably unique Nehemiah 9 are theophany and legislation included among the recitation of God's saving acts. To include

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3. Ps 78:40-1.
4. Cf supra pp. 144-5.

Sinai, which was not usually deemed one of the desert period's characteristic acts of sustenance, would be to view the wilderness period as one of preparation for the coming life in Canaan rather than as an independent segment of time.

Various components of the category "foreign relations" do fit under this definition of "providence." God's protection against the Amalekites[5] and the kings Sihon and Og helps Israel succeed against the challenges she confronted in the desert. Even the story of Balaam, which has proven somewhat resistant to classification, can be understood in these terms although Israel is not an active participant in that account. Viewed in this way, even the exodus should be included although its present form reflects the blurring of events viewed from a distance. And surely this category leads logically into the conquest which is nothing but an instance of God helping Israel overcome "natural" obstacles. Thus the wilderness period, seen in terms of "providence" is fully subordinate to the other major Hexateuchal traditions; its essence is God leading Israel from slavery to the Promised Land with the assurance that all will be well along the way.

The first text to emerge specifically with this theme is Exodus 13:17-18. As soon as Israel emerges into the desert, we find God assuming leadership for the guidance

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5. Cf. supra pp. 121-5.

of His people.[6] Not until verse 21 are we told how such guidance was provided - a cloud during the day and fire by night, which then become hallmarks of the wilderness period (v. 22). Exactly how this particular tradition is to be explained need not overly concern us inasmuch as "historical reality" is not within our scope. Explanations vary. One view derives the tradition from the description of Sinai which speaks of smoke and fire,[7] while another hypothesis considers Sinai to have been a Midianite volcano whose eruption provided orientation for the Israelites in the desert.[8] This latter view can be extended to explain many of the miracles during this period[9] although it would seem wisest not to begin the search for explanations of Biblical phenomena in the geophysical realm.

At the close of Exodus we meet the pillar of cloud and fire once again, but with a new interpretation.[10] Here it is suggested that Israel would not travel while God's presence, symbolized by the pillar, filled the tabernacle. The Israelites waited not for divine leadership and guidance, but rather for the completion of revelation.

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6. This is implied earlier in Ex 12:51, 13:3,5, etc.
7. Ex 19:18, cf. M. Noth, Exodus, p. 109.
8. W.J. Phythian-Adams, "The Mount of God," The Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement (July and October, 1930), pp. 134-49, 192-209.
9. W.J. Phythian-Adams, "The Volcanic Phenomena of the Exodus," The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society, XI (1931), pp. 86-108.
10. Ex 40:34-8.

That cloud and fire are suggestive of Yahweh worship would support such a view.[11] This is in marked contrast to Numbers 9:15ff where the earlier description seems intended.[12]

The second instance of providence is also the first to include an "overlaid" element of rebellion - the crossing of the Reed Sea, or more properly perhaps the drowning of the Egyptians.[13]

Exodus presents the act of providence as a response to what Israel perceived as a threat (14:10). The fact of divine guidance, arranged quite independently from the people's felt need, has already been established and provides the means whereby God offers protection.[14] But it is Israel's cry which brings God's aid. That the threat is the Egyptian army and not the sea is maintained throughout the narrative.[15] God's response to the cry for help is in fact twofold: He first protects Israel from the immediate danger and then acts to destroy the pursuing army.[16]

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11. Cf. Walter Beyerlin, Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions, pp. 134-5 where this approach is applied to the Sinai theophany.
12. Especially in Num 9:18,20b,23 (according to Noth these are later additions, cf. Numbers, p. 75).
13. J. Pedersen writes that "the narrator means to convey that the Israelites faced a body of water that quite shut them off; from this position Yahweh saved them." (Israel, Its Life and Culture, vol. III-IV, p. 729) Of course, if the narrator had meant this, he probably would have said so. While such an implication may be present in the text to a limited degree, the clear concern is not the sea at all but the pursuing Egyptians (Noth, Exodus, pp. 112-3).
14. Ex 14:3-4, 15:19-20.
15. Cf. Ex 14:30.
16. Ex 15:19.

Exodus 15:19 is unique in emphasizing the fact that Israel had crossed a body of water,[17] recalling 14:16 which may suggest a similar interpretation but in context views Israel as bait to lure Egypt into the sea. This story contrasts with the earlier narrative of the cloud and fire. It implies divine suspension of and control over nature in response to an immediately dangerous situation. Furthermore, it is Israel rather than God which initiates the action. The cloud-and-fire tradition is rather simple by comparison, providing merely Israel's ability to get where she is going in a desert where it is difficult to find one's way.

We have already treated Egypt's defeat at the Reed Sea in some depth;[18] however, we must now note the various ways in which the providential (rather than military) aspects of that event are treated in the Bible. The story is not a simple, static tradition. Its appearances are surprisingly limited although it does appear pre-exilically in conjunction with other acts of providence.[19] It becomes a dominant motif, notably in the "New Exodus" theme although that is outside of our immediate interest in the desert period.[20]

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17. Noth ascribes this verse to P (Exodus, p. 126).
18. Supra pp. 116-21.
19. E.g. Ps 78:13,52-3, contra Coats ("The Reed Sea Motif," p. 262) and Lauha ("Das Schilfmeermotiv," pp. 42-6); possibly also Ps 106, 136 and Neh 9.
20. According to Lauha this position of importance is asserted from the time of the exile (op. cit., p. 36).

The majority view of the event as reflected in the Bible is clearly that it constituted the defeat and death of the Egyptians.[21] Some texts do highlight the fact of Israel's passage through the sea although these are fewer in number and seem to incline towards a more mythical view of the event, but not universally so. Joshua 2:9-10 speaks of the "drying" of the sea along with the defeat of Sihon and Og. It might seem more logical if the reference were to the defeat of Egypt[22] and indeed we could interpret the passage to mean "Who dried the Reed Sea so that Egypt would try to cross and thereby perish"; but it simply doesn't say that. Is 63:11 is the first indisputable reference to the miracle as being Israel's crossing.[23]

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21. Ex 15:1-18,21, 18:4, Dt 11:4, Josh 24:6-7, Is 10:25-7 (Cf. George Buchanan Gray, Isaiah I-XXVII /The International Critical Commentary/, p.204-5; the references to Ex 14:16 and עלה as well as Isaiah's intended message support the view that the reference is to a military defeat), Neh 9:11 (it is surprising to find this in a list supposedly dealing with an "early" stage of development, cf. supra P. 110).

22. Cf. Josh 9:9-10.

23. It is also unique in Deutero-Isaiah as an unambiguous reference to the "old" exodus; the so-called New Exodus theme describes coming events in terms which are strikingly similar to the exodus, but rarely comes out and says so. Other references to Israel's crossing are 1) Ps 66:6 which seems to know Ex 15. (Despite the plural in v. 5, the Reed Sea is the only event cited; this could indicate a missing text, the Reed Sea's status as archetype, or merely poetic license.) 2) Ps 77:17-21 uses the verb נחה which may reflect the cloud-and-fire type of guidance. Despite the fact that this approach is considered late, Dahood (op. cit., p. 224) dates these verses to the tenth century on totally independent grounds. 3) Ps 114 goes beyond anything described previously, ignoring even Israel and citing instead the impersonal cosmic reaction to the exodus quite apart from its historical components.

Having sketched those places where the two aspects of the event at the Reed Sea are mentioned separately, it is interesting to find evidence of passages which treat them together. Notable in this regard is the Pentateuch according to which it seems that Israel is taken through the sea in order to lure Egypt to follow.

Psalm 78 includes both aspects in a way which is particularly instructive. In verse 13 we understand that the sea was split specifically so Israel could cross.[24] The context of this verse, among other acts of divine providence, would have been perfectly suitable for such a remark as, "He drowned the Egyptians in the sea;" and we must conclude, therefore, that the content of his statement is a result of tradition rather than the necessary conclusion of his own ideology. In contrast, verses 51-4 which deal with another sequence of providential acts explicitly state the wondrous act at the sea to have been the drowning of the Egyptians. Even if this is a complex psalm which has been edited together, it is remarkable that one person could have included two different descriptions of the Reed Sea event in analogous contexts.

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24. The polemic character of this psalm has often led scholars to date it between 922 and 721. If so, this passage (like Ps 77) would be early testimony to the view that the event at the sea was Israel's crossing although even if this date is relatively certain, it need not apply to the entire psalm.

Psalm 106 combines both the notion of God leading Israel through the sea (v. 9) and drowning Egypt (v. 11) in the same sequence along with a rather full account of the period. The text seems to be based on the Pentateuchal account. However, Psalm 105 which is in many respects similar and which Fohrer says "presupposes the Pentateuch in its [the Pentateuch's] final form"[25] omits the Reed Sea altogether!

Psalm 136 also combines these two facets although a little more mabiguously than in Psalm 106. The sea is split (v. 13) both to lead Israel through (v. 14) and to bring about the end of Pharaoh's army (v. 15). It is entirely possible, though beyond proof, that this reflects the notion that Israel was led through the sea as a lure.

The Bible contains relatively limited emphasis on Israel's crossing the Reed Sea.[26] More remarkably, the Bible almost unanimously distinguishes between the two possible views of what happened there.[27] As far as the historical implications of these observations, it seems logical that some sort of military catastrophe which overtook Egypt at the Reed Sea served as the nucleus for this tradition.[28] We shall note in passing the assertion

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25. Georg Fohrer, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 291.
26. Cf. N.H. Snaith, "ים סוף The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea," Vetus Testamentum, XV:3 (July, 1965), p. 395.
27. With the exception of Ps 106 and perhaps also 136.
28. Cf. L.S. Hay, op. cit., and M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 50, and Coats, "The Reed Sea Motif," p. 253.

that it "has been increasingly clear from recent studies that the imagery of crossing through a path in the sea stems from the crossing of the Jordan in the conquest tradition."[29] Undoubtedly at some stage the two served as twin pillars on either end of the wilderness period. But it exists now as an instance of divine protection from Israel's enemies as well, and as such constitutes a striking example of the extent to which God is willing to go <u>once</u> Israel has asked for His assistance when in crisis.

The story of Marah illustrates the general form of "providence" stories outlined above. The people complain, and Moses cries to God whose response is limited to showing[30] Moses a tree. This is the same pattern of emergency and ad hoc solution described previously.

The manna story (Exodus 16) is unique. If the rebellion motif is removed, the granting of manna appears not as a response, but a divinely initiated act.[31] The story is unique in another way, for it is tied closely to the testing of Israel (v. 4b). Indeed, it contains two separate divine speeches (vv. 4-5, 11-12). The first act of providende in this sequence is actually rather

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29. Brevard S. Childs, "Reed Sea Tradition," p. 414; cf. Coats, <u>Rebellion</u>, p. 259.

30. Ex 15:25; or "instructing," cf. Kittel, <u>Biblia Hebraica</u> ad loc.

31. Although the absence of the typical verb נסה could be interpreted to mean that this element has been suppressed in the course of transmission and modification.

surprising, although it may be explained in terms of the development of the various food traditions, for God provides both manna and quail (v. 13). Given this seeming incongruity and the fact that God mentions the people's complaint(s) frequently in His speeches, we may safely conclude that this story is clearly tied to some complaint and Israel's disobedience. We should also note the less dramatic references as in verses 32 and 35 which are in their own way reminiscent of the pillar of cloud and fire in presenting manna as a necessary, though undramatic means whereby God assured Israel's success in her journey from Egypt to Canaan. We will return to this possibility when dealing with the food narrative in Numbers.

The story of Massah-Meribah has been subject to various interpretations.[32] No matter how it is explained, however, God's action is at best a response;[33] as at Marah, He simply provides instructions. We have previously argued that Numbers 20:2-13 is to be understood as a reworking of this narrative and thus need not be considered separately here.[34]

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32. Cf. Coats, Rebellion, pp. 58-60,67 where he claims that it originally was an aetiology, joined with an element of providence onto which the rebellion motif was grafted.

33. Cf. Ex 17:4 פעט.

34. It is interesting that in Lev 10:17 the priesthood is portrayed as an institution made available to the people out of divine concern for their wellbeing, although this certainly does not fit and was not intended to be part of the providence theme.

The story of quail in Numbers 11 is regarded by some as parallel to Exodus 16. Coats points to the beneficent side of the punishment of excessive quail and Moses' description of Israel as a suckling child which casts the people more in a role of absolute dependency than rebelliousness as evidence for its positive origin.[35] In fact, the story is thoroughly negative in its view of Israel; and its "positive" level is pure conjecture. It is built around two separate, but negative punishments: a plague and a surfeit of food which it presents as responses to Israelite outcries.[36] The story assumes the previous availability of manna, although not necessarily its divine origin (vv. 6,9) which may support the implication mentioned earlier that the manna, like the pillars of cloud and fire, was simply made available to Israel in the wilderness to ensure her survival in contrast to other responses to Israelite-perceived crises. The extent of the negative element here has already been assessed.[37] Moses' complaint (v. 11) along with verses 21-3 cast an especially negative light on the figure of Moses and not on the people.

The final narrative which might be interpreted to contain a positive kernel is that which deals with the

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35. Coats, Rebellion, pp. 104, 107-8.
36. Although excess food is threatened, in v. 33 the people are still eating when we hear of the plague and there is no later mention that they were eventually repulsed by the amount of quail.
37. Supra pp. 62-6.

serpent in Numbers 21. However, the text is unambiguous: God sent the serpents which caused the trouble just as much as He later helped to resolve the threat they posed (v. 6). If we retain the rebellion motif, the serpents can be interpreted as a punishment; but once it has been rejected as secondary, the serpents seem to have been sent by God for no apparent reason! God is benevolent only after Moses' prayer which must be read in the light of verse 6![38]

There are thus two distinct types of phenomena which can be included in this group. One is the rather simple view of divine provision for His people through guidance and possibly food, while the other is the divine response to Israelite need when initiated by the people. This is not to argue that the rebellion motif is necessarily original in these latter texts, a position generally negated above; but rather that even if this stereotyped element is removed, even rather crudely with no provision for its possibly having displaced other material and even if some of what remains should more properly be removed with it, there remain strong negative elements within the text, within the very situations they describe quite apart from the intricate interpretation of textual subtleties. The people are unhappy, Moses cries or prays, and God responds. The text always juxtaposes that unhappiness to

38. Num 21:7b, cf. Gen 20:7 and Job 42:10.

the fact that they never seem to lack a direction in which to move (although the murmuring motif suggests that they were not always entirely pleased with the direction provided).

These stories reflect the tension of wilderness life. Theirs is not a beneficent God who sees after His people's needs, but rather one who responds to their requests. These may reflect phenomena and locations typical of the South Judean wilderness[39] although not quite so obviously as to support Noth's contention that manifestly

> these things are seen through the eyes of the inhabitants of the arable land, who had not themselves lived under these conditions but who perceived in them something remarkably strange.[40]

They certainly do assume a certain more or less immediate knowledge of the desert;[41] but this could stem from the desert period itself rather than a later sense of strangeness concerning desert life, or even from exposure to the desert at some other time.

Having suggested that the "positive" view of the wilderness period exists only in the most restricted form in the Torah (i.e. the pillar of cloud and fire), we turn now to the non-narrative accounts of the period to see

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39. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, pp. 118-9,159; cf. also F.S. Bodenheimer, op. cit.
40. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 122.
41. Ibid.

whether they will bear out this contention.

The Song of the Sea almost ignores the wilderness period except for the Reed Sea itself. Providence is implied only in Exodus 15:13. There נחית may either be intended as paralled to גאלת or to imply "You have led those...whom You redeemed." The second half of the verse clearly refers to divine guidance in the wilderness, but lacking any specific events. The goal נוה קדשך would seem to be the Promised Land.[42] In any case, the providential element is limited to guidance in the most minimal sense at least insofar as it is explicitly stated.

The only other mention in Exodus is 18:8-10 where the denotation of תלאה is unclear. בדרך suggests that events in Egypt are not intended. The fact that this deals with what Jethro knew which appears to be similar to that which was known by other non-Israelites[43] and the use of הצילו (v. 9) make it likely that the intention is the Reed Sea.[44] Indeed, all other references to divine acts in that brief passage do refer to Egypt, and two other occurrences of תלאה apply to military adversaries.[45]

Numbers 14:13-14 speaks of the pillar of cloud and

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42. Frank M. Cross and David N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," Journal of Near Eastern Studies XIV:4 (October, 1955), p. 248.

43. Cf. Josh 2:10, 9:9-10, and IS 4:8.

44. But not necessarily, cf. Rashi and ibn Ezra ad loc.

45. Num 20:14 (cf. vv. 15-16) and Neh 9:32. Mal 1:13 is a totally different usage; Lam 3:5 is textually suspect (L. Koehler, op. cit., p. 1029), but probably also different.

fire, the simple form of divine leadership of which we have already spoken.

In Deuteronomy 8:2-5,14-17 we read that God led the people for forty years as a test, rather than in an attempt to provide for their needs. There it is suggested that the very shortages they suffered were divinely inspired (v. 3). God sustained them, but only as much as was necessary. The wilderness was a time of divine education.[46] In verses 14-17 specific instances are mentioned and included in this general approach, although possibly only the manna was to be considered a test (v. 16). This concept recurs in 29:1-8. There it is stated that God made them walk in the wilderness[47] and even preserved their clothes;[48] what seem to have been food shortages were intentional (v. 5) and not even shortages, but rather sustenance with special kinds of food. "You have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink..."[49] but you did eat manna and quail and drink water which had been brought forth out of rocks.

Deuteronomy 11:2-7 generalizes about the period as one of signs and deeds. The specific events are all awesome demonstrations of divine power. It would seem

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46. Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, p. 288.
47. Cf. Dt 8:14; note the use of הוליך rather than נחה.
48. Cf. Dt 8:4.
49. Dt 29:5. Interestingly Sihon and Og are not included here as examples of divine assistance. According to 29:6 the Israelites are (alone?) responsible for having taken their land.

unlikely in this context that the author refers to guidance in the wilderness in such a powerful way. He might have Sinai in mind or, more likely, certain of the previously described events. The phrase עד באכם עד המקום הזה (v. 5) led ibn Ezra to conclude that the reference was to manna. Possibly it intends the full sequence of events described or simply a generalized conception of divine sustenance in the wilderness. At best, however, the field of reference is limited and it seems unlikely that individual events stand out dramatically in our author's mind.

Finally among the Deuteronomy texts in the Song of Moses we find the rather poetic description that God found Israel in the wilderness and led and cared for her.[50] The entire period is glossed rather schematically as one of divine favor and protection. Again there is no effort to dramatize the effect by detailing specific instances.

Rahab's brief summary in Joshua 2:9-10 ignores the theme of providence altogether. God defeated Egypt at the Reed Sea, and you (Israel) defeated Sihon and Og. One could argue that this is not surprising given Rahab's perspective, but her mention of God (v. 9) would then be difficult to understand. The fuller description in Joshua 24 adds little more. According to verse 7b they spent quite a while in the desert and then God brought them to

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50. Dt 32:10ff.

the land of the Amorites (presumably Sihon). There is virtually no providence here. This is equally true of the people's response in which מעלה (v. 17) seems to imply the entire route to Transjordan during which time God protected them - presumably from nations such as Sihon and Og and maybe Amalek, a rather limited view of our theme.

In the book of Isaiah the theme of providence recurs in what becomes a rather significant form. According to 11:16 God led His people along a path. This clearly builds on the outlook of the desert as being a place which has no paths;[51] thus God made one to assist Israel, in contrast to the view that He guided her with cloud and fire.[52] Both suggest the generalized and less dramatic form of providence. As found in Isaiah, this passage bears a marked affinity to the New Exodus theme in Deutero-Isaiah.[53] Other New Exodus passages often seem to presuppose an idealized view of the exodus, but they generally leave out the phrase כאשר היתה לישראל ביום עלתו מארץ מצרים (11:16) which would permit us to use them in interpreting their author's view of the exodus.[54] Isaiah 48:20-1, for example, contains an almost explicit reference to the

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51. Cf. supra pp. 5 and 14.
52. Cf. Neh 9:12 etc.
53. These verses are widely considered secondary in their present context and seem to assume either diaspora or exile in addition to an eschatological idealism (Is 11:12-13); cf. Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, an Introduction, p. 317.
54.

striking of the rock for water, but speaks of the future without explicit comparison to the past. Isaiah 63:7-14 does speak of the past, but refers only to the Reed Sea which we have already considered.[55]

With Jeremiah we enter the realm of those widely reputed to hold a positive view of the wilderness period. In 2:2-3 we confront the previously discussed term נעוריך.[56] We might conclude that since we are dealing with the same author, we can assume the same intent. Although such an interpretation yields no contradiction, it doesn't sit well.[57] One is reminded that חסד in some contexts can imply "covenant."[58] The marriage imagery of verse 2 is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 32 and does indeed suggest the covenant of Sinai.[59] Thus Israel's sole act of obedience was in following God (v. 2b) without incident. Verse 6 does suggest rather a lack of awareness with the general rebellion motif. It is, of course, possible that Jeremiah like later writers glossed over this aspect of the

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55. Also the subject of המעלם in v. 11b could be either Moses or God.

56. Supra pp. 101-3.

57. Rashi seems unable to ignore the numerous instances of rebellion and suggests with the Targum: ומה הוא חסד נעוריך? לכתך אחרי שלוחי משה ואהרון. מארץ נושבת יצאתם ואין צדה לדרך כי האמנתם בי.

58. Cf. supra p. 126 n. 40.

59. This is the view of David ben Aryeh Lev Altshuler whose novel proposal is that the חסד and אהבה are God's מצודות דוד (ad loc); cf. J. Bright, op. cit., p. 14 and also Barth, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

wilderness period. Deuteronomy, from the same general period, does include such events[60] so Jeremiah could have known them; however, this hardly would be characterized as following God with love and devotion.[61] We can thus suggest that 7:25 ignores the wilderness period altogether; for Jeremiah the exodus includes out-of-Egypt-and-up-to-the-Promised-Land.[62]

Hosea is widely reputed to hold an equally positive view of the desert period as that ascribed to Jeremiah. In 11:1-5 he presents a limited view of that period. Though the exodus is the beginning of Israel's history within the context of this passage, in verse 1 God calls to Israel in Egypt out of love and by verse 2b Israel is already in the Promised Land as evidenced by the reference to Baalim. Similarly in 13:4-6 God first "meets" Israel in the desert, i.e. after the exodus and possibly at Sinai, but by verse 6 is in Canaan. For Hosea like Jeremiah the

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60. Recall how limited such references were, supra pp. 93-8.

61. Cf. אהבת נעורים; Jeremiah's tendency to generalize Israelite sin (supra p. 99ff, without itemizing any from the wilderness period makes it all the more likely that he did not know these traditions.

62. Jer 31:2 probably does not refer to this period at all; the prophet often speaks of destruction as coming with חרב. Interpreted with reference to this period, however, מן indicates escape from Egypt, not acts of divine providence - in other words, those fleeing the sword (cf. Ex 18:4 and Hay, op. cit., found rest (להרגיע) in the desert; verse 3 may even imply Sinai (cf. Jer 2:2). In other words, the desert was a place of flight and not a goal at all or even the location of divine grace. However, as mentioned above, this verse is easily and consistently interpreted as applying to Jeremiah's own time (cf. 9:15, 11:22, 13:2, 14:12, 15:3, 19:7, 20:4, 24:10, 27:8, 37:5, 42:16,22, 44:14, 46:2, 47:4, 49:33, 51:50, inter alia.)

the desert is the place of the covenant on the way to the Promised Land, and even that is given minimal emphasis.

Amos speaks of divine leadership for forty years (2:10) which is the "simple" providence we have noted elsewhere; however, he speaks of no other events during that period. Interestingly, he knows the figure "forty years" without any reference to the punishment which the Torah ascribes to it. Possibly that figure, signifying simply "one generation," existed before an account of its origin.[63]

Psalm 66:5-6 speaks only of the Reed Sea. Dahood's version of verses 11-12 according to which מצרוף is rendered "wilderness" would view that period as one during which the people were afflicted with ulcers, sickness, and limited resources.[64] God's providence is the act of having kept them alive and refined them. Whatever the likelihood of this interpretation, the view of the forty years as a time of refining the people is not widespread in the Bible.[65]

Psalm 68:8 mentions that God led the people in what seems to be a triumphant march, but with little specification. Psalm 71:5,17 speaks of youth as a time of divine education and leadership. If the "I" here can be understood as applying to the nation, this would fit with the preceding view.

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63. Contra S. de Vries, op. cit., p. 58.
64. M. Dahood, op. cit., pp. 118 and 122.
65. Cf. S. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif," p.112 and Dt 8 as described supra p. 95.

Psalm 77:21 may refer to the Reed Sea.[66] The context strongly supports the view that this is all that is intended; however, even if such is not the case, the description is totally vague and unspecific.

Psalm 78:12-16 lists several of the specific events which are generally considered to comprise the providence theme. However, in light of verse 11 it is clear that the two themes providence and rebellion are here in tension.[67] Thus this text constitutes no proof for the separateness of those themes. It is interesting that in the second list of mighty deeds or saving acts (vv. 42-55) the desert period is skipped altogether. In verse 53 we read of the Reed Sea and by verse 54 we are in the Promised Land in spite of the fact that the psalmist clearly knew of events during that period![68] Whatever this suggests about the origin of the psalm, it shows quite clearly that the period could be omitted altogether or with a brief remark such as "God led us in the wilderness."

Psalm 80:2-3 like others previously mentioned displays a vagueness which makes it impossible to draw any conclusions. 81:8 is clearly speaking of the wilderness period with a possible reference to some antecedent outcry, but is hardly sufficient to deduce the nature of the event.

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66. Cf. אתנו; according to Dahood it is imperative (op. cit., p. 233).
67. Cf. also vv. 23-4.
68. Cf. Ps 78:12ff.

We have already noted the peculiarity of v. 8b such that it probably refers to a unique event not known elsewhere.[69]

Psalm 105 includes the wandering years along with a long list of God's saving events. Its purpose is clearly to display the divine providence throughout history, and so it includes a limited number of events from the wilderness period. Does this mark the climax of a positive view of that period's history? In verse 40 the verb שאל appears where we might expect צעק as found in the Torah.[70] Even if emended to שאלו so as to refer to the people rather than to Moses, it would seem that this psalm is a reworking[71] of the Pentateuchal story and not at all an early stage of its development.[72]

Psalm 106 has a different purpose. Using the same basic "historical" information as the preceding psalm, an almost opposite narrative emerges. These works were not intended to provide definitive accounts or even biased histories. They are rather theological - polemical, if you will - poetry. They do not claim to be all-inclusive, and it would be a mistake to assume that they did not know whatever is left out.

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69. Cf. supra p. 108; also emendation by Dahood, op. cit., pp. 265-6.

70. Or some other "typical" verb; cf. Ex 16:2, Num 11:4.

71. And in v. 40 a toning down!

72. Contra Fohrer, op. cit., p. 291 (cf. supra p. 168).

Psalm 107:4 seems to refer to the exodus, although it might have the diaspora in mind and be utilizing a New Exodus sort of imagery. Verse 7 seems to refer to Jerusalem.[73] Its concept of providence is the divine response to an outcry(v. 6).

Psalm 135:8-12 moves from the Egyptian plagues (v. 9) directly to the defeated nations of Sihon and Og (vv. 10-11); that is, it includes no themeof providence at all. And Psalm 136 mentions only that Israel was led in the desert (v. 16) before continuing on to the defeat of those kingdoms. Such an approach, which is not uncommon, suggests that the stories of Sihon and Og belong more with the conquest tradition than with the providence theme although there are certain affinities.

Finally, in Nehemiah 9 the author's thesis determines his description of events (and also sets the structure - listing acts of providence followed by the fact of rebellion and continued providence). His point is that through it all [illegible]. Thus after mentioning earlier acts of providence and the people's complaints, we hear again of the divine guidance with the pillar of cloud and His spirit (military success?), and manna and water (vv. 19-22).

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73. Or Kadesh?

Can we conclude from this evidence that there were two outlooks on the period? In contrast to the rebellion theme which seems to have multiplied so as to fill virtually the entire Pentateuchal narrative sequence from exodus to conquest (excluding Sinai which also shows some effect from this trend as in the story of the golden calf), the theme of providence is highly limited. It can be divided into two types: guidance in the wilderness and divine response to the people's outcry (which serves as a focus for the murmuring motif). In this latter group God's action is just that - a response to Israel's outcry and not to the threat itself; were it the other way around, God could anticipate the various shortages rather than having to remedy them. Even without the influence of the murmuring motif, Israel's discontent is quite apparent (with the possible exception of the manna story) and indeed presupposed by God's beneficent reaction.

If one must construct a likely history of tradition, we might conjecture that once the juxtaposition of the exodus and conquest traditions had taken place the transition between them came to be filled with a remark such as "and God led them in the desert." How pillars of cloud and fire came to be used in this regard is a separate question and cannot be resolved here. However, after this sequence existed and the beginnings of a wilderness period had been posited, it was filled with the various events

which now occupy that space.

The positive attitudes towards this period can then be explained in two different ways. Either it stems from an early stage at which the wilderness period was composed of God's leadership through the desert and no more or it represents a later selective description of the period in much the same way as the negative view is selective as well. Von Rad notes that the providence theme and Israel's passivity also may be due to the confessional style "which only recapitulates the saving facts."[74] And should it seem strange for a later period to gloss over Israel's reaction to all this, we need only glance at the late "Dayenu" prayer which, were we not to know of its proper place, might seem quite unaware that there ever was a negative aspect to the desert period.[75] Only Deuteronomy conceives that time as one during which "Israel is not permitted to live in security lest she forget that she is utterly dependent on her God."[76] Otherwise the providence theme is God's reaction to incessant Israelite griping; and its isolation, the apparent result of later (theological) reflection.

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74. G. von Rad, op. cit., p. 281.
75. Cf. Louis Finkelstein, "Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah," The Harvard Theological Review, XXXVI:1 (January, 1943), pp. 3-7 and Daniel Goldschmidt, הגדה של פסח ותולדותיה, pp. 48-51.
76. Ulrich W. Mauser, op. cit., p. 22.

THE NOMADIC IDEAL

> "...like the frontier, the wilderness is not only geographical but psychological. It can be a state of mind as well as a state of nature. It can betoken alternatively either a state of bewilderment or a place of protective refuge and disciplined contemplation, as well as literally the wilderness."*

The theory that there is a nomadic ideal underlying much of Biblical literature results from an attempt to unite several, diverse phenomena under one rubric. In order to deal adequately with this theory, we must therefore examine each of the individual elements which compose it separately prior to considering the validity of their combination into a unified scheme.

The hypothesis is usually stated along these lines: The Bible expresses two opposite attitudes toward the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness. One is the well-known

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* George H. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought, p. 4.

view according to which Israel continually rebelled against God and had to be punished in various ways. A minority view, however, understands that time to have been one of bliss, Israel's honeymoon with God. This outlook, it is claimed, reflects the prophetic intolerance of the Canaanite (i.e. agricultural) influences which intruded themselves into what had heretofore been pristine desert Yahwism. To those prophets who retained this opposition to settled life long after most of Israel had become thoroughly acculturated, urban life and culture violated the basic tenets of (desert) Yahwism. As Jeremiah idealized the desert period, so he idealized the life of the desert, contrasting the Rechabites, a sect which preserved the nomadic way of life, to Israelite infidelity.

From the Rechabites this chain of reasoning can lead in two different directions with a common conclusion. The first emphasizes the Rechabite founder Jonadab as an accomplice of Jehu in the revolution which stood for pure Yahwism against the Omride dynasty's syncretistic ways. In addition to Jehu, so the theory holds, Elisha, who played an important part in this rebellion, and his teacher Elijah represent an earlier stratum of the prophetic movement's dedication to the purity of Yahwism as evidenced by Elijah's quest for God at Sinai when harassed by the political authorities. The other line of reasoning traces

the Rechabites to the Kenites by means of I Chronicles 2:55. The Kenites were headed by Moses' father-in-law Jethro the priest with whom Moses spent much time prior to the exodus and with whom he was briefly reunited at Mt. Sinai at which time Jethro supposedly brought Israel into the worship of Yahweh and officiated at the making of a covenant between Israel and Yahweh. Or so the theory holds.

Whatever specific details a particular view of this theory may propose, they all serve ultimately to give the nomadic ideal a putative historical base from which it is traced throughout Israelite history, usually through various peripheral movements such as the Rechabites. It is argued thereby that there was an ongoing, albeit small pro-nomadic movement throughout the period of Biblical Judaism which reached its poetic ideal in Deutero-Isaiah's conception of the return from exile as a reenactment of the exodus.[1]

The first question we must pose in order to deal with this collection of theories is that of origins: was Israel ever nomadic? If not, then any later nomadic ideal can be only a misrepresentation of earlier conditions, the nostalgic exaggeration or invention of a usable past. Consider the analogy of popular American ideology (e.g. the average elementary school history text) which could be taken

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1. Some formulations extend this "movement" to Jesus, the Essenes, and on; e.g. John W. Flight, "The Nomadic Idea and Ideal in the Old Testament," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLII (1923), p. 223.

to imply that all of our ancestors came to the New World on the Mayflower in order to escape the pressures of religious persecution. But the chances are good that most of our ancestors did not come to this country more than one century ago. The present ecology movement with its nostalgia for the past also appeals to an idealized picture of what this country was once like - not to what our ancestors experienced and possibly not to a condition which ever really existed. Biblical references could just as easily have romanticized a desert period and might even speak of a time which did not in fact ever exist for the ancestors of most or even all of those addressed.

The evidence from within the Israelite lifestyle itself is wholly circumstantial: The food, clothing, and use of tents are considered to be remnants of an earlier nomadic existence.[2] Other attributes which are "explained" by a nomadic past include tribal organization,[3] various linguistic usages,[4] and metaphors.[5] None of these "survivals" proves anything with regard to the probability of Israel's nomadic origins. The argument is based largely

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2. Ibid., pp. 170-80; Flight also cites the use of לחם for grain and meat as well as food in general.
3. Ibid., p. 185f.
4. A house is called a tent (Jg 19:9, IS 13:2, etc.), בן is used in names, and many poetic images such as references to the "flock" and its shepherd suggest a desert setting; ibid, p. 69, Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, p. 13, and James Alan Montgomery, Arabia and the Bible, pp. 12-13.
5. R. de Vaux, loc cit.

on the analogy with Bedouin lifestyle; and yet the Bedouin themselves were not originally nomads, but an agricultural people who "regressed" into a nomadic mode of existence.[6] Their lifestyle has therefore been subject to various other non-nomadic influences. Even the "facts" of this argument are dubious: food, clothing, and the use of the tent could have been borrowed from other desert peoples or may represent an Israelite adaptation to their own difficult, but not nomadic life. Meat and dairy foods could just as well be the lifestyle of seminomadic herdsmen; while unleavened bread presupposes some agriculture. As for social and cultural phenomena, these may derive from any of a variety of social origins or may actually reflect knowledge of desert life - which is not the same as desert life itself much less nomadism. Nomadic is a specific term and must not be equated with "primitive" or "simple." Various facets of Israel's culture such as the use of a portable ark are easily explained in any of a variety of different ways, including the history which the Bible desecribes.[7]

The theory of Israel's nomadic origin has also been used to explain a great variety of "Jewish" doctrines

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6. Cf. S. Carleton Coon, H. von Wissmann and F. Kussmaul, "Badw," The Encyclopedia of Islam, new edition, I, 872-80; S.D. Goitein, "המקור "הערבי" של ישראל ודתו מתולדותיה של בעלה מדעית אחת", ציון II:1 (1937), p. 67.

7. Contra M. Soloweitschik, "ה"מדבר" כתולדותיו והשלכות-עולמו של עם ישראל", דביר III (1923), pp. 20-1.

including beliefs in hell and monotheism, the lack of fertility elements, the deprecation of wealth, and even the absence of interest in a future life.[8] But surely this cannot be taken seriously. Many influences other than the desert had an impact on Judaism. If this view were to be accepted on face value, we should practically expect Judaism (as it emerged much later) to have sprung forth full grown from the desert some three millennia ago! To be sure these facets of Judaism may in part be outgrowths of a desert background (which is not the same thing as nomadism), but we shall have to prove that such a past existed before they can be so attributed. They are all too easily explained in any of a variety of other ways. It is important, therefore, that we begin our scrutiny not with later customs or ideology but an examination of what Israel's origins really were. Accepting the Biblical description in its general presentation, two periods suggest themselves as likely candidates for early Israelite nomadism - the time of the patriarchs and the period of wandering in the desert between Egypt and Canaan.

According to some, Israel thought of patriarchal

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8. Robert Anderson, "The Role of the Desert in Israelite Thought," The Journal of Bible and Religion, XXVII:1 (January, 1959), pp. 42-3 and George Adam Smith, "Have the Hebrews Been Nomads? A Reply to Professor Eerdmans," The Expositor (seventh series), VI (1908?), p. 271; on the deprecation of wealth cf. infra p. 207 on anti-urbanism.

nomadism as an early golden age[9] and their earliest ancestor as a desert sheik who travelled from oasis to oasis.[10] Before examining this conception more closely, it is imperative that we define our terms carefully. "Nomadism," a technical term to be carefully rather than romantically employed, means "roaming from place to place for pasture."[11] As such nomadic existence is actually later than some other forms of sustenance,[12] which is to say that we should not assume ab initio that a people's earliest forbearers had to have been nomadic. In point of fact when the people under discussion is Israel and the forebearers are the patriarchs, there are a variety of more likely alternative views (assuming, of course, that the patriarchal period did exist and did precede the rest of Israelite history). One view which accords with the Biblical description would characterize these individuals as pastoralists, following a way of life based on the care of domesticated livestock -[13] "a sophisticated system of exploiting land incapable of cultivation" which is later than agriculture.[14] Another view has it that Abraham was "the chief traditional

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9. Flight, op. cit., p. 213.
10. Montgomery, Arabia, pp. 6-10 contra Goitein, op. cit., p. 12.
11. H. von Wissman and F. Kussmaul, op. cit., p. 874.
12. Ibid.
13. Lawrence Krader, "Pastoralism," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XI, 453-61; cf. Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, p. 51.
14. S.C.Coon, op. cit., p. 872 (my underlining); Krader (op. cit.) argues that it is a symboitic relationship between man and animal rather than true domestication.

representative of the original donkey caravaneers of the nineteenth century B.C., when this profession reached the climax of its history."[15] For others the patriarchs were semi-nomads or ass-nomads of varying types.[16] Without engaging in the intricacies of these disputes and even accepting the Biblical description as it stands, to argue that the patriarchs were nomads is clearly a simplistic use of that word. They do not wander around in the middle of the desert in the manner one might conceive for a Bedouin sheik, but seem to live on the fringes if not the midst of settled societies. Given this Biblical description and the variety of possible designations for their life style, there is no convincing evidence that the patriarchs were truly nomadic (recall, this is a technical term to be applied with care) and much to suggest that they were not.

We are not, however, dealing simply with the reality of an early period, but also what was made of it in a later age and so must ask whether or not the nomadic aspects of patriarchal society are in fact idealized. Here the evidence is incontrovertible. The patriarchs are described as in the process of settling.[17] Uprooted from Mesopotamia,

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15. William Foxwell Albright, "Abram the Hebrew, A New Archaeological Interpretation," Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 163 (October, 1961), p. 53; cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," Journal of Near Eastern Studies, XVII (January, 1958), pp. 29-31.
16. B.D. Eerdmans, op. cit., pp. 121ff.
17. R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 4.

they are trying to become rooted once again. Even if they are a wandering people, they are grateful to God for redeeming them from this status through His promise of permanent settlement in Canaan.[18] This is hardly the basis for an idealization of desert life; it is not even from the desert that they came!

A second possible desert origin for Israel can be traced to what the Bible describes as forty years of wilderness wandering:

> It was probably from the desert that the early ancestors of the Israelites came (Dt 32:10). It was in the desert of Sinai that Israel had its initial experience with Yahweh and it was to the desert that later prophets looked for a normative criterion for the pure religion of Yahweh (Hos 2:14).[19]

The Bible hardly supports such a view. To be sure, some Biblical authors do trace Israel's relationship with Yahweh to the desert period,[20] but that is far different from assigning a desert origin to Israel herself. And in point of fact, there is a striking lack of evidence that Israel's existence during that period approached anything we could honestly consider nomadic.[21] In fact, the

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18. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 34; Kaufmann (תולדות II, p. 626) explains ארמי אבד (Dt 26:5): "שבטיו היו נודדים בארצות התרבות ללא נחלה לאומית אבל הוא מכרך את האלהים על שגאלו ממעמד זה".

19. Anderson, "The Role..," p. 41; cf. J. Wellhausen cited in B.D. Eerdmans, op. cit., p. 125.

20. E.g. Dt 32:10, Hos 11:1, Mal 2:14-5, cf. Ps 80:9f.

21. Nor could it have if the camel was not yet domesticated; cf. Frank M. Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle," The Biblical Archaeologist, X:3 (September, 1947), p.49f and Norman K. Gottwald, "Nomadism," Encyclopedia Judaica, XII, p. 1206.

"wandering" is generally asserted to have been almost completely at Kadesh.[22] At no point does the Bible portray the desert as a comfortable place for Israel. Whether emphasizing divine assistance or Israelite discontent, the Bible repeatedly and in diverse ways communicates Israel's inherent inability to subsist there.

Like the patriarchal period, the time of Israelite wanderings is presented as temporary with the ultimate goal of settlement in Canaan.[23] The stories describing this period reflect a distaste for desert life. Indeed,

> in the Pentateuchal portrayal of the Israelite society in the desert period, the reflection of phenomena which are characteristic of later sedentary social structure is much more accentuated than is the reverberation of presumed ancient desert ideals in the literature which mirrors Biblical sedentary society.[24]

Still, even if these narratives are complete fiction, the

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22. Contra Pedersen, op. cit., III-IV, p. 736. John Bright claims that "Israel's wanderings are those of ass nomads who cannot wander far from water - which explains the long stay at Kadesh." (A History of Israel, p. 117) But the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that it was God who sustained them rather than their own (nomadic) abilities. Talmon notes that typically nomadic traits such as tribal solidarity, hospitality, and blood vengeance are totally lacking ("The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 35).

23. Y. Kaufmann, תולדות, II, p. 65. "What ever may in reality have been the length of time which the Israelites spent in the desert, the ideological compression of the desert trek into one stereotyped (or schematic) generation, forty years . . . proves that it was considered to have been of minor impact on the sociohistorical development of Israel." (S. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 35.)

24. S. Talmon, ibid., p. 36.

longing for and movement towards the Promised Land is historical fact.[25]

In sum, there is no "indication that in the Biblical period the Israelite tribes proper ever passed through a stage of true nomadism."[26] Although it is conceivable that the desert was idealized whether or not Israelite tribes ever lived there as nomads - indeed, whether or not they ever lived (rather than traversed) there at all - this will not suffice to show that there was an ongoing minority who retained nomadic habits. The best we can expect to find is a nostalgic, rather than accurate yearning for conditions believed characteristic of desert life.

The evidence that there ever was such an idealization is also weak. According to Noth many of the stories about Israel's forty desert years reflect a Judean sense of strangeness toward desert life.[27] We have already seen that the wilderness was conceived to be a bad place where outlaws and refugees were sent.[28] With regard to Cain

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25. Cf. A. Reifenberg, The Struggle Between the Desert and the Sown, p. 84: "The rapid growth of numerous settlements shows that the Israelite conquerors were not true nomads, but had long been acquainted with agricultural life." This need not, however, to apply to all of Israelite society.

26. S. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 34; cf. Kaufmann, "לא היה ישראל מעולם עם מדברי ומעולם לא היה שום איריאל של חיי המדבר אלא של חיים נומדיים" (תולדות, II, p. 625).

27. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, p. 193.

28. Supra pp. 6-7, 14. This accords well with the nature of Israel's time in the desert following the exodus.

Pedersen writes that "with horror the Israelite thinks of the man who has been driven out of the country of blessing and how roams about in other places, where anyone can slay him..."[29] Prophets, including those most prominently identified with the desert ideal, threaten time and again that should punishment become necessary, the land will be turned into a desert. "Real Bedouin do not think desert-life a curse, but the supreme good."[30] It seems well beyond proof, and probably conjecture as well, that Israel had what could accurately be called a desert ideal or memory of desert origins.

Such a view can ultimately be supported only if one is willing to contradict the most explicit of Biblical texts. One scholar describes Moses' demise in the following manner:

> Uncorrupted by the ways of Canaan, he dies in full strength despite his age. Moses has perhaps been graciously dealt with by Yahweh, after all: he need not leave the "paradise" setting for that of Canaan.[31]

It may be poetic, but this certainly does not accord with any account provided in Numbers or Deuteronomy, our only

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29. Pedersen, op. cit., I-II, p. 454. Goitein uses that same story to point out that it was agriculture which God gave to man for work according to the Biblical view, while other occupations were believed to have been invented by man (op. cit., p. 11).

30. Ditlef Nielsen, "The Site of the Biblical Mount Sinai," The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society, VII (1927), p. 187.

31. Walter Harrelson, "Guidance in the Wilderness, The Theology of Numbers," Interpretation, XIII:1 (January, 1959), p. 35.

authorities on the death of Moses. His death is intentionally premature, and not achieving the Promised Land is explicitly a punishment no matter how uncertain the reasons may be.[32] If this act is gracious, Moses certainly did not see it that way (nor did Yahweh) as later midrashim rightly apprehended,[33] so much so that Moses' death has become something of an archetype for the leader who dies unable to witness the fulfillment of his life's work.

The wilderness sojourn was not an ideal period in Israel's history[34] nor is Israel's recollection of it idealistic although occasional "preachers" chose to emphasize its more positive lessons. The desert was a miserable place in which Israel was incessantly engaged in a struggle to maintain herself and her faith. Those passages which present a positive view of the period do so in one of two ways. Elaborating on the basic statement "we went from Egypt to Canaan," they explain that God led Israel through the desert which lies in between or they imply that God took care of Israel, sustaining her in spite of the difficult environment and Israel's never-ending discontent.[35]

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32. Cf. supra p. 94.
33. Cf. Deuteronomy Rabbah 9. (Ginzberg, op. cit., p. 496-8)
34. Contra Humbert as cited by Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 32.
35. "במדבר סיני קשורים זכרונותיו הדחיים הנשגבים ביותר של העם. אבל זכר עת לכתו במדבר נשתמר בלבו בזכר שעת צרה ומצוקה ומחוסר שרק בחסר אלהים עמר בהם" (Y. Kaufmann, תולדות, II, 65-6) De Vaux writes, "nomadism itself is not the ideal, rather it is that purity of religious life and faithfulness to the

The only "ideal" element in the desert period is the covenant with God which provides the basis for later marriage imagery. When treated, this element is often elaborated through the exercise of poetic license or emphasis on the relationship with God rather than life in the desert per se. It is similar in many respects to the popular idealization of being stranded on a desert island with a beautiful girl. It is hardly the island which makes such a vision so attractive.

Although the desert ideal is not found in "normative" Biblical religion,[36] the possibility remains that there was a sectarian position which treated the desert differently. Such a possibility is variously described as existing simultaneously and collaterally with the negative view,[37] as a special tradition among the ancient literati,[38] or among a particular sect.[39]

The most distinctive of these groups is the Rechabites. The information concerning them is highly limited. From Jeremiah 35, the only firm source we have, we can deduce that they lived in tents and did not drink wine, build houses, or plant seeds.[40] Exactly how one is

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36. Although we have not dissected the sources into separate strands, this is consistently true throughout.
37. E.g. A. Haldar, op. cit., p. 69.
38. Max Weber, op. cit., p. 285.
39. K. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 729; for consideration of the Kenites cf. supra pp. 125-30.
40. Weber equates these with a Bedouin lifestyle, op. cit., p. 38.

to interpret these is unclear. Despite frequent comparison, these are far different from the conditions surrounding the Nazirites who also avoided wine, but would also not cut their hair or approach corpses and whose status seems to have been based on a self-imposed and temporary vow rather than the inherited and presumably permanent status of the Rechabites.[41] That the Rechabite conditions are in opposition to settled life[42] does not necessarily follow from the conditions described. They seem to have lived away from Jerusalem - but close enough to return in times of danger (v. 11).[43] They may not have been nomadic at all;[44] indeed, there is no evidence that they resided in the wilderness.[45] Some have suggested they were smiths, possibly related to the Kenites.[46]

Significantly, all the Rechabite names which are

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41. Cf. Num 6:1-8.
42. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 728 and Montgomery, Arabia, p. 11.
43. Frank S. Frick, "The Rechabites Reconsidered," Journal of Biblical Literature, XC:3 (September, 1971), pp. 259,261.
44. Cf. supra n. 40 ; J. Bright translates גרים (v.7) as "wander as aliens," Jeremiah, (The Anchor Bible) p. 189.
45. S. Abramsky, "Wilderness," Encyclopedia Judaica, XVI, p. 513 and Frick, op. cit., p. 284.
46. "As metal-workers and artificers jealously guarding their trade secrets they refused to settle down to the sedentary life, where their craft might have been learnt by their clients. The ban on wine might have the same motive, since this is a notorious loosener of the tongue." (John Gray, I & II Kings, p. 505) Cf. Frick, op. cit., pp. 284-5; S. Abramsky thinks they may have raised cattle, "בית-הרכבים" ארץ ישראל, גיניאולוגיה וצכיון חברתי VIII (1967), pp. 260-1.

attested do contain theophoric elements.[47] Probably the group is to be considered reactionary rather than a survival from ancient times,[48] a late phenomenon which may have become typical in later periods. If we accept their description of Jonadab, Rechabite origins would go back to the year 840.[49] However, the ascription could be as fictitious as are many of the commandments attributed to Moses. In any event, Jonadab's command is explicitly limited to his own descendants and thus must be seen as geneological rather than religiously defined. The most likely clue to their character would seem to lie in verse 7b - "... in order that you may live many days on the land on which you are strangers," suggesting that they were not to be completely at ease in that land and perhaps supporting their own tribally unique background.

The Rechabite way of life was not an ideal to which all should strive nor even a purer form of Yahwism; it was one group's way of life, for whatever reasons, derived from the command of their ancestor and without any necessarily divine sanction. The group so designated was small - small enough to fit in one building (v. 2).[50] They are praised

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47. M.H. Pope, "Rechab," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, p. 16; cf. Jer 35:3, Neh 3:14 although the meaning of בֶּן רֵכָב there is not certain.
48. R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 15.
49. That they remained perfectly faithful to his ordained discipline for 250 years seems dubious or at least debateable.
50. J. Bright (Jeremiah, p. 189) understands בַּיִת as household.

by Jeremiah not for their way of life, but for living up to an earlier commandment. The implicit message for Israel becomes clear in the prophet's language: the Rechabites obeyed their ancestor (v. 14), but you did not obey Me (v.16). Indeed, in this very chapter Jeremiah asserts that Israel had the opportunity to repent in order to dwell on the land which God gave them. It is obedience, not nomadism, which is idealized; and as stated before, it is unclear that the Rechabites were actually nomadic.

The figure of Jonadab must of necessity remain somewhat vague. Assuming the account in II Kings 10 to be accurate, he can safely be assumed to have been a pro-Yahweh zealot of sorts. Although his meeting with Jehu seems informal, it is not likely to have been a chance meeting.[51] That description is better understood as a literary device; by verse 23 he is thoroughly trusted. Possibly he was not very well-known, in which case his presence with Jehu would not have aroused the suspicion of Baal worshippers.[52] We can deduce only that Jonadab supported Yahwism - no more and no less. Even his family ties are uncertain; the phrase יהונדב בן רכב could indicate his tribe, occupation, settlement, or ancestor as well as his father.[53]

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51. Contra Kaufmann, תולדות, II, p. 232.
52. Cf. J. Gray, Kings, p. 504.
53. Ibid., p. 505 and Brick, op. cit., p. 282. It is not likely that this term here indicates a "member, fellow of group, class, profession, etc." (Koehler, op. cit., p. 133) since it is always so used with plural nouns except for the much disputed Am 7:14; cf. Ecc 10:17, Neh 3:8.

This paucity of material leaves us with two very isolated phenomena: the Rechabites of Jeremiah's times and Jonadab of several centuries preceding. The later group ascribes a certain commandment to Jonadab, but we have no verification that he actually did so - which is hardly surprising given his secondary role in that text. Whatever else one may conjecture, the quantity of material itself clearly shows that the Rechabites were not important to the Biblical author.

There are two verses often used to link Jonadab and the Rechabites with an ongoing desert ideal. The first is the Septuagintal reading for I Chronicles 4:12 which implies that the Rechabites are to be related with the tribe of Caleb and thus, possibly, to the Kenites who at various times may have inhabited that area. Significantly, neither this nor the other frequently mentioned verse speaks of Jonadab, suggesting that the Chronicler may be using an (artificial) geneology to explain cultural or geographical similarities.[54] The reference to חרשי could imply that these people were smiths[55] which fits the general description of Kenites and Kenizzites as well as one hypothesis concerning the Rechabites.[56] Significantly,

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54. R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 15.
55. Cf. Jacob M. Myers, I Chronicles (Anchor Bible), p.26.
56. Cf. Nelson Glueck, "Kenites and Kenizzites," Palestine Exploration Quarterly (January, 1940), pp. 22-4 and Frick, op. cit. pp. 284-5 (cf. supra p. 200).

אנשי רכב which also appears in this passage does not signify descent, but often place as well as status or more general descriptions.[57]

In I Chronicles 2:55 we confront an exceedingly difficult verse[58] which may imply a relationship between Kenites and Rechabites by marriage rather than some shared (eponymous?) ancestor.[59]

In conclusion, the only true basis for any link between Rechabites and Kenites would have to be their supposedly analogous way of life.[60] Some also include Jonadab's appearance in the same general region as Deborah's battle at which we hear of the Kenite Jael.[61] In either case, the connection is highly speculative.[62] While the similarity of these two groups is appealing, a gap of centuries in a nomadic group which appears only once or twice in all of Israelite history is surely too vast to permit any probable connection between the Rechabites and the Kenites.

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57. Cf. Koehler, op. cit., pp. 40-1.
58. "...too obscure to be used for historical purposes" according to J.P. Hyatt, Exegesis to Jeremiah, The Interpreter's Bible, V, p. 1059.
59. S. Talmon, "עלמה הקינים הבאים מחמת אבי בית רכב", ארץ ישראל, V (1958), p. 113: "...belong to those Kenites who formed marriage ties with the Rechabites." Cf. also S. Abramsky, "בית הרכבים," p. 256.
60. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 728 and S Abramsky, "הקינים," ארץ ישראל, III (1954), p. 122.
61. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 728.
62. Although accepted by rabbinic sources, cf. David Kimchi's comment to I Ch 2:55.

It would seem likely that Jonadab was a Yahwist zealot who set the pattern for a marginal group in Israelite society.[63] They were possibly reactionary, but not necessarily nomadic. Their relationship to either Judaism or the Kenites is extremely tenuous.[64] Presumably they were Yahwists, but seem not to have engaged in any missionary work.[65] Jonadab alone among their ancestors was involved in Jehu's revolt. Jeremiah, who uses the Rechabites as an example of fidelity though not to any one thing in particular,[66] had no prior relationship with them. He was not a Rechabite and did not share their lifestyle. He lived in a house, presumably drank wine, and definitely owned land.[67] The ultimate link to the Kenites or a more generalized nomadic ideal is not supported by the available facts. That a desert ideal lay behind support for Yahwism and Yahwistic politics is pure hypothesis.[68]

Later "Rechabite" communities may conform to our expectations for a nomadic ideal far better than the one mentioned in the Bible, possibly even merging with other

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63. Although this does not enable us to explain the designation "Rechabite."
64. They could not have conformed to "normative" Biblical religion, e.g. various wine rituals (Abramsky, "בין הרכבים," p. 259).
65. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif,'" p. 37.
66. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 730 and Kaufmann, תולדות, II, p. 625.
67. J. Bright, Jeremiah, p. 191.
68. Contra Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 727 and Flight, op. cit., p. 214.

ascetic groups.[69] But here the historical gap is far too vast to permit any certain identification with the earlier Biblical group. It is a recurrence of the same problem we mentioned previously. The Rechabites are an isolated phenomenon for whom we can probably account from 840 to 600 during which time we can deduce that they were Yahwist, unsettled, and probably geneologically determined. Beyond that in either direction, back into history or ahead into the more recent past, we simply cannot proceed.

The supposed link from a peripheral group like the Rechabites to normative Judaism is provided by various prophets including Elijah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Deutero-Isaiah.

> Compared to the luxurious and therefore haughty present which was disobedient to Yahwe, the desert time remained to the prophets the truly pious epoch. In the end, Israel will again be reduced to a desert and the Messiah king as well as the survivors will eat the nourishment of the steppes: honey and cream.[70]

The link between prophets and Rechabites - that Elijah and Elisha were benind the same rebellion (Jehu's) in which Jonadab participated - is hardly a substantial basis from which to posit a shared ideology.[71] Indeed, this argument

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69. M. Pope, op. cit., p. 16 and K. Kohler, "The Essenes and the Apocalyptic Literature," The Jewish Quarterly Review, XI:2 (October, 1920), pp. 161-3. Abramsky lists the various references to later Rechabite groups (op. cit., p. 264).

70. M. Weber, op. cit., p. 285.

71. The other argument is based on Elijah's "flight to Sinai, cf. supra pp. 152-3.

as a whole assumes far more unity within (and beyond) the prophetic tradition than is justified by any of the available sources as well as being a highly speculative interpretation of that tradition.

There are a variety of viewpoints and arguments represented in discussing the prophetic version of the nomadic ideal, but they contain certain central and recurrent principles. A primary emphasis is the prophets' frequent use of "nomadic" figures of speech,[72] which we have already denied as being of any importance for deducing the speaker's ideological commitment.[73] A second focus is the anti-urban feeling the prophets are said to manifest.[74] In fact, however, they consistently denounce only specific practices which they found in cities rather than city life itself. They are upset by immorality, urban or otherwise, rather than complexity. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to assume that the rural background of some prophets lies behind such condemnations.[75] All prophets were not rural, and most condemn immorality wherever they find it. The third prophetic characteristic which is often singled out as nomadic is their anti-ritualism.[76] We have already

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72. Flight (op. cit., p. 220) cites Am 1:26, 3:12, Hos 5:6, 12:9, 13:6, Is 5:17a, 7:21-5, 13:20b, 14:9,30a,32, Jer 4:20, 10:20, 13:17, 23:2-4, 31:10, 33:12, 50:6, Zph 2:6, etc.

73. Cf. supra pp. 26 and 189.

74. E.g. Am 3:15, 6:8, etc.

75. Contra Theodore H. Robinson, Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten (Handbuch zum Alten Testament), p. 3.

76. Flight, op. cit., pp. 218-9.

mentioned the error of assuming that condemnation of urban sins entails condemnation of the city itself; likewise, just because the prophets disdain perversions of ritual practice, we should not presume that they opposed all ritual. More often they seem to feel that ritual is not the ultimate criterion - but is acceptable if various ethical or theological preconditions are met. They are not simply anti-cult although they do not evidence any great love for ritual; rather, they condemn the misuse and misinterpretation of the cult and its value.[77] When they do cite the period of desert wandering, it is not as an ideal time, but rather to serve for the purposes of logical deduction: "If you didn't need the cult then, they you should not need it now, either."[78] It is an historical example rather than a cultural ideal. Indeed, future destruction which will result in the return of desert land is prophesied with considerable reluctance.[79]

Budde's description of a "prophetic transformation of the nomadic ideal"[80] provides a significant modification of this view according to which the return to the desert was

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77. Cf. Robert T. Anderson, Attitudes of the Pre-exilic Canonical Prophets Towards the Cultus (unpublished thesis).

78. U.W. Mauser's argument that the prophets use שוב to signify "a return to the original relationship with Yahweh" in the historical sense is baseless. The word is used existentially and not historically at all. (op. cit., p. 47)

79. Eduard König, "Prophecy (Hebrew)" Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, X, p. 387.

80. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 744.

seen as a necessary stage in the people's purification. We must, however, understand that "the view of the wilderness as the scene of purification from sin does not mean that the prophets idealized the essential character of the wilderness or nomadic existence as a way of life."[81] Rather, the desert was punishment and purgation, and the ideal was to return from such a process to a better life in the Promised Land. The prophetic ideal is consistently agricultural;[82] but in the long run, the economics of that ideal are irrelevent - it was a religious ideal defined in terms of faith and fidelity rather than economic activity. "The real aim of the true Hebrew prophecy was to uphold the religion of Jahweh as the Eternal God, and to supply spiritual guidance to the nation which had been chosen to be the earliest focus of that religion."[83]

Turning now to specific instances, we have already seen that Elijah's flight to Sinai was really just that - flight. He knew that God could appear just as easily at Mt. Carmel and would have had no reason to look for Him in the desert. The passage is a relic based on the normal outlook on the desert as inhabited by fugitives as well as other details which have already been discussed. The link

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81. S. Abramsky, "Wilderness," p. 513.
82. Y. Kaufmann, תולדות, II, p. 626 and Frick, op. cit., pp. 344-5.
83. Eduard König, op. cit., p. 387.

to Elisha may be a later attempt to unite these two figures;[84] and the theophany serves a literary, rather than historical, purpose.[85]

That Elisha is only weakly tied to Elijah minimizes another connection within the prophetic tradition and lessens the probability that Jonadab and the Rechabites can be joined with that tradition. Elisha plays a minimal role in Jehu's rebellion, sending someone else to perform the anointment. It is impressive that the hope for vengeance against Jezebel is expressed by one of the sons of the prophets and not Elisha at all.[86]

Isaiah, like other prophets, sees a coming destruction at which time there will be a necessary return of the land itself to a nomadic state so that only (semi)nomads will be able to survive on it. For Budde this destruction is pedagogic: "You will learn best as nomads."[87] But there is no evidence for this conclusion; it is conceivable, but the texts cited fit the general prophetic tendency to foresee punishment in the form of destruction, usually military, far better. For example, 7:15 does not assert that the child will learn good and evil in a nomadic state, but that the destruction will occur while he is still a child learning good and evil.[88]

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84. Cf. J. Gray, Kings, p. 366.
85. Cf. supra pp. 192-3.
86. IIK 9:4-7.
87. Cf. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," pp. 736-42.
88. Note particularly v. 16.

Hosea seems to be the earliest prophet to introduce some theological significance to the desert period itself (which is not at all comparable to holding it up as a nomadic or desert ideal). He admits that the entire period in Canaan was not bad (2:9). This was a life of prosperity, bestowed by Yahweh (2:10); but after a period of faithfulness Israel ignored God, presumably in favor of Baal - thus the need to return to the wilderness under duress (2:16),[89] where there will be no possibility of confusion: Israel will see that her food comes from God, for there will be no where else from which it might derive (2:17). Meanwhile, the land which she inhabited will not become a wilderness, but a forest (2:14).[90] Here Yahweh is not seen as a desert God, for it was He who provided the grain and wine in the Promised Land (2:10-11),[91] but the people did not recognize His continuing role. Life became too easy so they must be reeducated in a land where there will be fewer distractions and less opportunity for confusion as the Source of their sustenance.[92] The time spent there is limited. "The land is not forsaken, but taken away so that Israel may receive it once again as the gift of Yahweh and

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89. James M. Ward translates פתה as "abduct" (Hosea, A Theological Commentary, p. 25).
90. Contra Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," pp. 734f.
91. Kaufmann, תולדות, II, p. 626.
92. Am 5:25 and Jer 7:22 also see the wilderness period as a time spent in a simple place where irrelevent and confusing factors did not interfere.

in its possession know the giver."[93] Paradoxically (for the proponents of the desert ideal), in the process of this the desert will bloom and "the wilderness shall again become a land of fruit and wine."[94] We might characterize the attitude which this passage reflects as a Second Exodus, or better Second Wandering in a slightly broader sense than that term is usually used. According to Hosea there must be another desert experience to re-enact what was accomplished in the first. For him this concept implies the need to renew a certain discipline; elsewhere, it will appear as a symbol for the joy of the exodus.

The generalized notion of a Second Exodus, if we may combine several prophets under one heading, is the future re-enactment of some part of the exodus-conquest pattern in order to evoke symbolically a certain theme from the original story. Whether it be discipline or freedom, the future is depicted in terms of the past.[95]

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93. James Luther Mays, Hosea, A Commentary, p. 45.

94. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal," p. 735. S. Talmon characterizes this passage in Hosea as a rite of passage which will serve to reestablish the wife-Israel in Canaan, and so constitutes the combination of what he calls the trek and love motifs ("The 'Desert Motif,'" pp. 50-2). In this vein, Mays (op. cit., p. 44) suggests the desert activity to be "make love." Cf. also SS 3:6, 8:5. Talmon views Hosea 2 as a covert refutation of the Canaanite fertility myth (op. cit., p. 52).

95. Cf. the later extension of this pattern in Jewish thought according to which the exodus is seen as the archetype for all redemption.

Elsewhere Hosea utilizes a similar notion when he describes future punishment as coming in the form of a return to Egyptian slavery.[96] It is a reversal of the exodus, though presumably only temporarily so, in which Egypt plays a radically different role from that of the desert in chapter 2. The desert was a place of education and meeting God (as it is throughout Hosea), whereas Egypt represents punishment. In either case God deems it necessary to begin again[97] - in one case as a threat, in the other as a hope. The underlying theme in either case is that history is repeatible. For Hosea the desert was a formative period for Israel.[98]

Deuteronomy also sees return to Egypt as a punishment.[99] The people spend additional time in slavery; there is no need nor any particular justification to the assumption that oppression will be permanent. A future redemption is not mentioned because of the author's message which is to be a warning, and so he speaks only to that point; we cannot

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96. Hos 8:13, 9:3, and possibly 11:5; cf. also 11:1, 13:4.
97. Cf. Noah as God's new Adam (also His intent for Moses in Ex 32:11 and Num 14:12).
98. Hos 13:5, but cf. possible emendations (Biblia Hebraica ad loc); v. 6 refers to the Promised Land and would be paralleled by v. 5 if it were emended in accord with the various versions. 12:10 describes the future in the land of Israel, not the desert; in other words, it is a description of punishment rather than the nomadic idea.
99. Dt 28:27,60,63,68.

know what his complete theological outlook may have been.

An interesting variation on this theme can be found in Ezekiel 29 where the prophet ascribes a wilderness period to Egypt as a punishment in terms which cannot be accidentally reminiscent of Israelite history. Egypt will be brought into the desert (v. 5) while her land is destroyed (v. 12); after forty years she will be restored from among the nations where she was scattered (vv. 13-14)! In 20:33-38 he uses similar imagery with regard to a future punishment for Israel according to which the desert period will serve as a time for purging the rebels from Israel's midst.

The exodus and wilderness themes become more hopeful when applied from the perspective of exile. Thus while Egypt implies slavery, the desert carries with it the notion of transition, i.e. ultimate return to Promised Land as is apparent both in Ezekiel 29 and Hosea 2. In this vein Ezekiel speaks of a redistribution of land after the exile, a concept familiar from the original conquest;[100] and Jeremiah suggests that the return from exile will be of such importance that it will eventually displace the exodus as the example for divine power and salvation.[101] But the best known use of this concept is that of the Second Isaiah.

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100. Ezk 47:13ff.
101. Jer 16:14-15, 23:7-8.

There we find the application of imagery familiar from the exodus and wanderings narratives to the return from exile. The theme is so well integrated that the prophet does not even explicitly state that the return will be analogous to the exodus; that purpose is accomplished literarily through the use of exodus symbolism. It is a highly developed literary expression, abounding with theological implications. That every element of divine protection can be traced to a parallel from the exodus is not self-evident, and so we have not deduced the nature of the exodus tradition which was known to the Second Isaiah.[102] However, some new elements (at least for us) can be cited. The prophet speaks of God's making a path and providing rivers in the desert (43:19-20). Quite possibly he has included the prophetic hope that God will turn the deserts into habitable land.[103] The description of this period is not always couched in miraculous terms.[104] The emphasis is on the exodus rather than the wandering through the desert although the Reed Sea is stressed and the miracles in the desert are hardly ignored. Once again the wilderness is but that place in between alienation and Promised Land.[105]

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102. Supra p. 177; at times the new exodus will surpass the old - "you will not leave in haste nor will you go in flight." (Is 52:12, cf. Dt 16:3)

103. Cf. Is 35 and supra pp. 7, 12, 15, 29-31.

104. E.g. Is 49:10 where God will guide them carefully.

105. For John McKenzie "The passage of the sea in the exodus is [here] represented as a reenactment of the cosmological myth of Yahweh's victory over the monster of the sea." (Second Isaiah, The Anchor Bible, p. 123), cf. U. Mauser, op. cit., p. 51 and S. Loewenstamm, op. cit., p.100f.

Two significant conclusions can be drawn from Deutero-Isaiah's use of exodus imagery which apply not merely to his writings, but to much that the Bible has to say about the desert and the desert period. First, his is clearly an idealized form of this tradition. The desert as he sees it symbolizes the transition to free autonomy. It is a difficult place in which God will ensure the safety of His people. This is especially significant since we can be reasonably sure that Deutero-Isaiah knew of negative aspects to Israel's earlier wilderness experience and so must have chosen to ignore them. As we have suggested before, when the wilderness stories are modified they are not infrequently changed in the direction of idealization - that is to say, the purely good outlook on that period is often (though not always) relatively late and therefore clearly selective. We can presume that Deutero-Isaiah like the author of the Dayenu[106] knew of Israelite discontent in the desert, but chose to ignore it apparently because it was not germane to the theological point he was trying to make. Secondly, for Deutero-Isaiah the desert itself was not the goal, but a transition on the way to freedom in Zion.[107] Thus in 51:11 he reduces the New Exodus desert period to the words, "and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and

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106. Cf. supra p. 185.
107. Is 49:8-12, 51:9-10, 52:11-12, 55:12-13.

come to Zion with singing." As in the abbreviated form of the credo, the desert period has disappeared altogether.[108]

The desert was not a goal, but an obstacle. That it later became an ideal we might leave open to speculation. Certainly if such was the case, we have little evidence during the Biblical period itself; even the Rechabites cannot definitely be ascribed to that locale. Possibly during the Second Kingdom the desert was used by those trying to escape a civilization of which they could not approve - for whatever reason. But that is a far cry from the idealization of either nomadism or desert life. Indeed, it fits best with the view of the desert as refuge which we have found to be typical of Biblical thought.

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108. Surely, then, brevity is not a guarantee of early origin.

CONCLUSION

As both a geographical phenomenon and an historical period, the desert played a major role in the life and thought of ancient Israel. It was not an ongoing ideal, but rather an eternal threat ever pressing from both Israel's surroundings and her past. Described as a place for those who had been expelled or forced to flee, the wilderness may not have been utterly barren, but it was certainly alien to the Israelite mind which described it as a thirsty, dry, and tired place. Related to the realm of death, the desert was the symbol for that destruction which will precede divine restoration even as chaos had come before creation.

An analysis of Israel's desert period includes two opposite processes. On the one hand we have seen the disintegration of its historical reality; the Biblical narrative has nothing to say about most of these years. Yet even those texts which are of dubious "authenticity" assume major importance in shedding light on the way in which that period was understood.

Originally it was a non-epoch, the conclusion of what had gone before or the introduction for what was to follow. So the covenant crowns the exodus even as the legislation and various military successes foreshadow the conquest. Once a desert period existed, however - even if only because of the geographical necessity of reaching Canaan from Egypt - God's help was necessary in order to traverse that distance, particularly for guidance. And once such a journey was accepted, there arose the question, "How did our ancestors adjust to their time in the desert?" The answer was contained in a description of their trials and discontent, often linked to specific locales. From this was abstracted an elaborate description of divine protection. The period is, therefore, primarily transitional - a time of testing, education, and purge. It attracted aetiologies, legal precedents, and the retrojections of various conflicts. As such, the wilderness became an archetype as both the beginning of national history and a forty year gap that had to be filled.

Seen as unnatural and forced, the period of desert wandering was less of a theological issue than an existential threat which had confronted Israel's ancestors. It was not merely "a foil showing off the greatness of God's actions on the one hand and the rebellion of the people on the other,"[1] but an active foe which they resisted at every

1. U. Mauser, op. cit., p. 36.

turn - or so they viewed it. The desert looms as the background of an unhappy people, crying to God who must come to their rescue. It is not a people which was born of the desert or at least which was aware of any such past nor of one which longed to return. This was a people who viewed the desert as a sort of no-where between slavery and conquest.

To the prophets the desert became a symbol from which could be abstracted positive elements - God's protection and covenantal love - which should remind Israel of the fundamentals needed for her existence. Should Israel not grasp the lesson, they taught, the desert would engulf them, confronting them with exile and education anew before they could return once again. As always, desert must be endured as the inevitable obstacle blocking Israel's way to a promised land.

APPENDIX

Biblical References to the Law

The following is a list of post-Pentateuchal references to Mosaic law (Torah) and their basis in the Pentateuch where such is discernible:

Josh	1:7	
	*1:12-18, 22:2,4-5,7,9	Dt 3:18-20, cf. Num 32
	8:31-3,35	Dt 27:5-7 (17:18) 31:9,24-6, 27:12-13
	*11:15,20,23	
	*14:1-5	Num 34:13-29
	*17:4	Num 27:5-6
	*20:2	Num 35:9-34
	*21:2,8	Num 35:1-8
	23:6	
Jg	1:20	Num 14:24, 13:22 (cf. Josh 14:6-14, 15:13)
	*3:4	
IK	2:3-5	

IIK	14:6 (IICh 25:4)	Dt 24:16
	21:8	
	23:25	
Jer	34:12-14	Dt 15:1,12
Mal	*3:22[1]	
Ps	99:6-8	Ex 40:34-8, Num 9:15-32
Dnl	9:11,13	Lev 26:14-39, Dt 28:15-68[2]
Ezr	3:2	building altar and sacrifices as in the Torah
	6:18	general priestly structure
	7:6	
Neh	1:7-10	possibly Dt 29:24
	*8:1	
	8:14	Lev 23:42-3
	*10:30	
	13:1-3	Dt 23:4-6
ICh	15:15	uncertain, contrast IIS 6:12[3]
	21:28-9	the tabernacle made under Moses
	*22:13	
	23:12-15	

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1. This passage may be secondary, cf. O. Eissfeldt, Introduction, p. 442.
2. Rashi (and possibly ibn Ezra) consider this to indicate Dt 11:13.
3. Cf. Jacob Myers, I Chronicles, ad loc. Note also that ICh 6:34 contains a general allusion to the cult of the wilderness period.

IICh 1:3	the tent of meeting made under Moses
8:13	Num 28-9[4]
23:18	sacrifices recorded in Torah
24:6,9	Ex 30:12f
30:16[5]	
*33:8	
*34:14[6]	
*35:6-12	

In Numbers 31:21-4 the Mosaic law is clearly normative without proof (unless part of the original text is missing). Deuteronomy 4:34-8 suggests a theophany which might be at Sinai, but includes no details concerning its content. According to Deuteronomy 4:44-9 Moses' Torah is located in Transjordan.[7] Deuteronomy 5:2-28, based on Exodus 19-20, views the Ten Commandments as a covenant.[8] Deuteronomy itself is presented as what Israel didn't want to hear, becoming a sort of proto-oral law. Deuteronomy 6:21-4 refers to commands generally, but without specifying Sinai. Joshua 4:10 has no analog in the Torah nor any hint of such a commandment and should probably be deleted with

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4. J. Myers, ibid., ad loc; this passage is not in IK 9:25ff.
5. Myers (ibid., ad loc) suggests this is based on a misunderstanding; cf. Ex 12:6 and Dt 16:6.
6. Not found in parallel IIK 22:8-13.
7. Note v. 45b implies it to be the first thing that happened since Egypt.
8. Cf. IK 8:9 and IICh 5:10.

the Septuagint.[9] Joshua 13 is based generally on the Mosaic alottments described in Numbers 32. According to Joshua 20:2 the people set up six cities of refuge, in apparent fulfillment of Numbers 35:9-34.[10] Psalm 99:9 refers to Zion;[11] vv. 6-7 mention laws, but give no description or explanation.

An asterisk in the above list indicates those places where the command is expressly stated to have come from God. From these citations it should become apparent that in the large majority of cases these laws are not arbitrarily said to have come from Moses. To what extent those for which no basis can be found were "authentic" we can only speculate; their small number would suggest that some basis for them also existed although it may not have come down to us.

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9. Cf. Y. Kaufmann, op. cit., ad loc.
10. Cf. ibid., ad loc, for linguistic relation. According to Noth (Numbers, ad loc.) Numbers passage is based on that in Joshua. Cf. Dt 19:1-13 which speaks of only 3 cities and an additional 3 when the nation expands (vv. 8-9) and Dt 4:41-3 according to which Moses set up 3 cities (a secondary passage according to von Rad, Deuteronomy, ad loc).
11. Cf. Ps 99:2 and 48:2f.

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