

Who is to Blame for God's Prohibition against Moses Entering the Promised Land?

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Abstract

Proponents of higher criticism have fallen short in offering a convincing and satisfactory explanation for three interrelated, unsolved issues in the Pentateuch, as follows: (1) the precise nature of Moses's transgression of the Lord's command; (2) whom to hold most responsible for the infraction; and, (3) the juridical basis for God's resultant prohibition against the lawgiver entering the promised land. Three biblical texts, specifically, Deuteronomy 1:37–40, 3:23–29, and 4:21–24, present Moses's claim that it was the Israelites' fault. Oppositely, three other passages, namely, Numbers 20:1–13, 27:12–14, and Deuteronomy 32:48–52, put forward God's assertion that his bondservant shouldered most of the liability for his iniquity. This essay addresses the preceding interpretive issues and articulates a workable solution to each one, affirming the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Keywords

Numbers, Deuteronomy, Moses's disobedience, Moses's ban from the promised land, higher critical method, historicity of the Pentateuch

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1. Introduction

The laws, purposes, and character of God are intriguingly portrayed in Numbers and Deuteronomy. Throughout the discourse of these two books, readers learn how the Lord blessed and admonished those whom he had chosen to be his representatives to the surrounding nations. Numbers and Deuteronomy, along with the rest of the Pentateuch, show that for the Creator it was not enough to deliver the Israelites out of the oppressive hands of their Egyptian taskmasters. God also wanted his chosen people to thrive under his rule in the promised land.¹

The Israelites' freedom did not mean they could do whatever they wanted, regardless of the consequences; instead, the Lord was summoning them to covenantal faithfulness. His will for them included following his sacred laws, serving his divine purposes, and reflecting his holy character to their pagan neighbors. For his part, the Creator pledged to protect his people as long as they remained loyal to him. By living as his consecrated people, the Israelites would be prepared to flourish in Canaan.

The historical accounts recorded in Numbers and Deuteronomy reveal the many ways the Israelites tested God's patience, broke his laws, and violated his covenant with them. In concert with the narration appearing in Exodus and Leviticus, Numbers 13–14 and Deuteronomy 1:19–46 reiterate how, despite the Lord's directives, the first generation of Israelites who left Egypt refused to enter and subdue Canaan. For their insubordination, the Lord condemned them to live out the rest of their lives in the desert of Sinai. Only when all of them (except for Joshua and Caleb) had perished in the wilderness did the Creator permit their children, the second Exodus generation of Israelites, to return to the eastern border of the promised land.

God even banned Israel's esteemed lawgiver, Moses,² from entering Canaan; yet, there seems to be a lack of clarity within the Pentateuchal narratives about three interrelated, unsolved issues, as follows: (1) the precise nature of Moses's transgression; (2) whom to hold most responsible for the infraction; and, (3) the juridical basis for the Lord's resultant prohibition against the lawgiver entering the promised land. In particular, Moses claimed it was the people's fault, something he repeated three times in Deuteronomy 1–4 (1:37–40; 3:23–29; 4:21–24).³ In contrast, the narrator of Numbers 20:1–13,⁴ as well as God in Numbers 27:12–14 and Deuteronomy 32:48–52, indicated that the infraction was Moses's fault.

The preceding dissimilarity affirmed in this essay is contra Block (2012, 780), who thinks the "contradictions in attribution of blame for Moses not being able to enter the promised land" are "more apparent than real." Also, while it is valid for Block to maintain that the sets of passages in question present "Yahweh's point of view" (on the one hand) and Moses's "own negative disposition toward his people" (on the other), it is dubious to assert that both perspectives are simultaneously "true." Even a critical scholar such as Kissling (1996, 67) maintains that within Deuteronomy, "Moses is in clear conflict with the narrator over the reason for Moses's exclusion from Canaan."⁵ Equally, Lee (2003, 218) asserts that one should "neither choose one tradition at the expense of the other, nor harmonize or collapse the two into one."

1 It is beyond the scope of this essay to undertake a detailed analysis of foundational background issues related to the literary origin, structure, flow, and themes found within the Pentateuch. For an incisive treatment of these and other related topics, see Allis (2001); Blenkinsopp (1992); Fretheim (1996); Hamilton (2015); Sailhamer (1995).

2 Arden (1957, 50) refers to Moses as a "model theocrat."

3 Mann (1979, 481) describes these three passages as "retrospective, autobiographical statements" made personally by Moses.

4 Kok (1997, 1) labels Num 20:1–13 as the "locus classicus concerning the transgression of Moses."

5 For Kissling, the "narrator" is an all-inclusive reference to the presumed redactor(s), editor(s), and so on, of the Deuteronomic text.

The above three issues within the Pentateuch have been adjudicated in academic literature primarily through the postmodern, skeptical lens of higher criticism. Propp (1998, 36) explains that contemporary “scholarship detects in the Torah multiple literary strata,” which were “composed in different social and historic situations,” as well as “joined together in stages.” Likewise, Ska (2009, 226) claims that “it is difficult to maintain that the Pentateuch or the Deuteronomistic History were written at one go by one author.” Reputedly, “several hands were at work and we have enough proof of this.” According to Chavalas (2003), some specialists think that either “searching for the historical Moses is an exercise in futility” or that the “Moses of the OT is confined to folk tales.”

In its most extreme forms, the critical approach is best described as methodological atheism. Allegedly, factual, stylistic, and theological contradictions found between competing narratives within the Pentateuch are due to numerous scribal redactors who operated independently of one another.⁶ Noteworthy in this regard is Mann (1979, 483), who draws attention to the supposed, “sharp theological distinction between the priestly and deuteronomic explanations of Moses’s denial.” The reason for this, Cairns (1992) submits, is that the “Priestly (P) writing” was “compiled more than a hundred years after the Deuteronomic history.” Similarly, Man (2017, 3) attempts to “explain” Moses’s exclusion from Canaan by examining the presumed series of layered, embellished, and “complex redactions of Deuteronomy.”

While the tools of higher criticism are appreciated for their potential usefulness in clarifying the erudition and complexity of Scripture, the main objective of the current essay is not to ferret out, often in a subjective manner, the presumed sources (whether oral or written) and redactions of biblical texts under consideration; instead, the goal is to exegete the final canonical form of God’s Word.⁷ In this essay, the divine inspiration, veracity, and authority of God’s Word are acknowledged. Also, rather than adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion, in which the above Old Testament passages are regarded as filled with fabrications and contradictions, the interpretive approach to Scripture adopted here is affirmatory in disposition, in which the antiquity, coherence, and lucidity of God’s Word are recognized.

The preceding theological stance is best described as being evangelical, creedal, and sacramental. Moreover, it is within the context of the above hermeneutical approach that the present essay sets out to explore and attempt to resolve the above three matters. To that end, the second section provides a descriptive analysis of Numbers 20:1–13, 27:12–14, and Deuteronomy 32:48–52 (in which the Lord placed the culpability on Moses), while the third section shifts the focus to Deuteronomy 1:37–40, 3:23–29, and 4:21–24 (in which Moses blamed his fellow Israelites). The fourth section undertakes an objective deliberation of the biblical data. The fifth and final section puts forward a salient wrap-up of the essay’s major findings, including the articulation of a workable solution to the three issues in question, while at the same time affirming the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

6 For an assessment of divergent, irreconcilable attempts within critical scholarship to interpret the passages explored in this essay, see Lim (2003); Man (2017).

7 In Lee’s deliberation of Moses’s “exclusion from the promised land” (2003, 239), the author makes use of “conceptual analysis,” which is defined as an “exegetical approach to explain the text on its own terms and in its own right.”

2. A descriptive analysis of Numbers 20:1-13, 27:12-14, and Deuteronomy 32:48-52

As noted in section one, Numbers 20:1–13, 27:12–14, and Deuteronomy 32:48–52 leave readers with the impression that Moses was at fault for his infraction of God’s directive. The following three subsections deal, respectively, with each of these passages.

2.1. A descriptive analysis of Numbers 20:1–13

Numbers gives the historical account⁸ of the Israelites’ breaking camp at the foot of Mount Sinai and renewing their wandering in the wilderness.⁹ The book closes at a point about thirty-eight years later, with the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River poised to enter the promised land. Woven into the narrative of the Israelites’ wanderings are God’s laws for both the priests and the people in general (1:1–10:10). Also braided into this account are the ways in which the Israelites tested and broke those laws and their covenant with God (10:11–25:18).

Milgrom (1990, 164) surmises that the reference to the “first month” (20:1)¹⁰ is in relation to the spring of the fortieth year of the Israelites’ wanderings in the wilderness.¹¹ It was at that time that Aaron died (20:22–29; 33:38–39). Also, by then most of the Hebrews who were at least twenty years old when the Lord freed them from Egypt, had died (14:20–25). They were replaced by a new generation of God’s people to begin the next stage of his plan for the covenant community,¹² namely, the conquest and settlement of Canaan.

Numbers 32:10–13 recounts the tragic episode that resulted in the Lord’s judgment decades earlier. Moses reminded a new generation that the Creator would not be silent concerning the tribes’ disobedience. Moses described to the tribal leaders God’s reaction when their parents had refused to enter Canaan. Then, the lawgiver explained how the Lord had grown angry and had vowed that the Exodus generation would not see the land he had promised to the nation’s patriarchs (vv. 10–11). The only exceptions to God’s vow were Caleb and Joshua, because they “wholeheartedly followed” (v. 12) the Creator and spoke against the rebellion. The Lord kept his oath, for during the forty years of wandering in the desert, all the insurrectionists perished (v. 13).

Much of what took place during those dreary decades is passed over without comment in the biblical record. Undoubtedly, there was not much of significance that occurred in relation to the advancement of God’s redemptive program. The Hebrews would have traveled from one place to the next. They also established camp wherever they found adequate amounts of water and possibly meager amounts of vegetation. Of course, the Lord kept the people alive by his generous provision of manna. Perhaps now and then over those long years, the covenant community would circle its way back to Kadesh Barnea, the spot where they first rebelled against the Creator (Deut 2:14).

8 Even a critical scholar such as Beegle (1972, 300) concedes that there is “no reason to doubt the essential historicity of the event” narrated in Num 20:1–13.

9 The Hebrew noun, *miqbār* (Num 20:1), is variously rendered as either “wilderness” or “desert.” According to Thompson (2015), the term denotes an “arid land” having “little or no vegetation” along with being “wild and uninhabited.”

10 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are the author’s personal translation of the respective biblical texts being cited.

11 For differing interpretive views regarding the chronological and geographical referents in Num 20:1, see Allen (1990, 665–6); Ashley (1993, 375–6); Dozeman (1998, 158–9); Levine (1993, 483); Wenham (1981, 16–17, 148).

12 Num 20:1 literally refers to the “sons of Israel,” as well as the “whole congregation.” Both phrases are in apposition (grammatically parallel) to one another, as conveyed by the EHV: “the people of Israel, the entire community.”

According to Numbers 20:1, the new generation of Israelites established camp one final time at Kadesh.¹³ This oasis of several springs in the Desert of Zin was located south of Canaan and within relatively close proximity to the river of Egypt.¹⁴ The Desert of Zin was situated on the western fringe of the Sinai Plateau, as well as adjacent to and north of the Desert of Paran. The entire region was a dry and inhospitable place. The topography included barren mountain cliffs, rock-covered valleys, and sandy dunes. Aside from the infrequent wadi, the region had little water and vegetation. Only the hardiest of desert plants survived the arid climate (for example, salt-loving bushes and acacia trees found in the beds of the wadis).

Numbers 20:1 notes that while the second generation of Israelites was encamped at Kadesh (possibly for several months), Miriam, the older sister of Moses,¹⁵ passed away and was buried there. Miriam is first mentioned in Scripture in the episode involving the infant Moses and the daughter of Pharaoh (Exod 2:1–10). Moses's Levite parents, Amram and Jochebed, had at least two children—Miriam and Aaron—when they became parents of Moses (6:20; 15:20). Miriam is also mentioned in the celebration that occurred after the Lord safely brought the Israelites through the Red Sea (15:20–21). At this time, Miriam must have been in her nineties, since she was a young girl when Moses was born (and Moses was then in his eighties).

Numbers 12 recounts the challenge to Moses's leadership from Aaron and Miriam (Deut 24:9). Moses's siblings opposed him because he had married a Cushite (Nubian), but jealousy over his leadership was probably what motivated their criticism. God warned them against opposing his bondservant and struck Miriam with leprosy. Then, for seven days, Miriam was shut out of the Israelite camp. After God healed Miriam's leprosy, the first generation of Israelites continued their journey toward Canaan. Despite Miriam's shortcomings, she played a constructive and influential role in the formative years leading up to the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Nearly forty years later, while the second generation of Israelites were encamped at Kadesh, their supply of water ran out. Like their renegade parents, the "community" (Num 20:2),¹⁶ feeling unsettled, "assembled,"¹⁷ which means they rebelled against Moses and Aaron; however, the explicit reference to Moses in verse 3 indicates that he was the primary target of the people's grievance, which they framed as a legal complaint or lawsuit against him.¹⁸ The agitators quipped that it would have been better¹⁹ for them to die²⁰ in front of the tabernacle,²¹ forty years earlier, with the original cohort of Israelites who left Egypt (v. 3), and whom God previously had struck down in judgment.²²

13 Ashley (1993, 386–387) draws attention to the "play on the place-name Kadesh" in Num 20:1, which shares the same Hebrew root as the "word holy in vv. 12 and 13," namely, "qādēš, from qdš, the same root as haqdīš, to hold as holy." As the narrative reveals, the Israelites and their leaders, including Moses and Aaron, failed to uphold "Yahweh as holy."

14 That is, the Wadi el-Arish; cf. Num 34:4–5; Ezek 47:19; 48:28.

15 Cf. Num 26:59; 1 Chr 6:3.

16 In Num 20:2, the Hebrew noun, 'ēdā(h)', can also be rendered as "congregation" or "assembly," though "community" best fits the setting in which an ill-defined "group of people ... collected together" (Thompson 2015).

17 In Num 20:2, the usage of the Hebrew verb, qhl, does not point to a benign or innocuous gathering or assembly of people; instead, the double usage of the preposition, 'āl, signals that it was more of an enraged, mob formation.

18 The juridical sense is conveyed by the presence of the Hebrew verb, ryb (Num 20:3), which in this context denotes the presence of quarreling or contending that is deliberate, focused, and unrelenting in disposition; cf. Limburg (1969, 291–292 (inclusive numbering)); De Regt and Wendland (2016).

19 In Num 20:3, the rendering of the Hebrew adverbial conjunction, lū, as "if only" conveys the sense of "oh that" or "would that." It points to the presence of an underlying intense desire for a real or imagined outcome, which in this case was death.

20 Num 20:3 twice uses the Hebrew verb, gw', which is rendered as "died" or "perished."

21 Num 20:3 is literally translated, "in the presence of the LORD."

22 Cf. Num 14:22; 16:31–35.

The present generation of ingrates asked why²³ Moses led the entire covenant “community” (v. 4) into the “wilderness.” Was it, as the riffraff suggested, so that they would perish in the desert, along with their “livestock?”²⁴ More generally, the malcontents asked why²⁵ Moses would bring them out of Egypt to such a dreadful place²⁶ where virtually nothing grew. Indeed, in the absence of water, the region was barren of such produce as grain, figs, grapes, and pomegranates (v. 5).

It is noteworthy that almost four decades earlier, the previous generation of Israelites also complained to Moses about the lack of water at Repidim (Exod 17:1–2).²⁷ The lawgiver, being frustrated by the people’s lack of faith, responded by asking the Israelites why they constantly wanted to test the Lord. In response, the people of that doomed cohort turned their complaint back to Moses, apparently refusing to concede that their quarrel was actually with the Lord. Once more, they demanded to know why Moses had led them into the wilderness to perish from extreme and prolonged dehydration (v. 3).

Moses, though perplexed by the short memory of the antagonists, cried out to the Lord (v.4). God told Moses to take some of Israel’s elders with him and leave the crowds behind. Moses was to walk to nearby Horeb, where he had earlier encountered the burning bush, and strike a particular rock with his staff. God promised that when Moses did so, enough water for all the people would come out of the rock (vv. 5–6). As the elders watched, Moses struck the rock, and water began gushing out of it. Because the people argued with Moses and tested God at that place, Moses called the site Massah, which means “testing,” and Meribah, which means “quarreling” (v. 7).

As noted earlier, like the first generation of Israelites the Lord led out of Egypt, the second generation pummeled Moses with a litany of peevish, heated complaints (Num 20:4–5). Moses, along with Aaron, responded by turning away from the agitators. Next, the two walked toward the “entrance” (v. 6)²⁸ of the tabernacle.²⁹ Then, the two threw themselves down with their faces to the

23 In Num 20:4, the Hebrew interrogative, *mā(h)ʿ*, coupled with the preposition, *lā*, carries the sense of “to what end” or “for what purpose.”

24 The Hebrew noun, *be’îr* (Num 20:4), is variously rendered as “beasts” (NASB), “animals” (NKJV), “cattle” (KJV, ESV, NET), or “livestock” (NRSV, NIV, CSB, Lexham, EHV, NLT).

25 See fn 23 regarding the use of the Hebrew interrogative, *mā(h)ʿ*, coupled with the preposition, *lā*, which appears in Num 20:5.

26 In Num 20:5, the Hebrew adjective, *rāʿ*, modifies and describes the noun, *māqôm*. The portrayal is of a detestable locale without any redeeming qualities. The Israelites’ indictment, which they hurled at Moses, ultimately was a formal charge against the Creator, whom the lawgiver represented and served.

27 Wenham (1981) draws attention to the view espoused by Noth (1968, 144) and other critical scholars that “Exodus and Numbers accounts are really duplicate versions of the same incident” (Wenham 1981, 149); however, as Ashley (1993, 378) surmises, a “detailed comparison of the stories indicates that the similarities between the two” are mainly superficial, whereas the “differences” are “more striking.” For a granular demarcation of the major and minor anomalies between the two accounts, see Kok (1997, 90–105). On the one hand, the author affirms that “both texts share formal and thematic features”; yet, on the other hand, it is the “dissimilarities rather than the affinities that stand out predominantly.”

28 In Num 20:6, the Hebrew noun, *pēʿtāh*, is variously rendered as “door” (KJV, NKJV), “doorway” (NASB, CSB, Lexham), and “entrance” (NRSV, ESV, NET, NIV, EHV, NLT).

29 Num 20:6 uses the Hebrew noun, *ʿōhēl*, which is literally rendered as “tent.” The Israelites carried this portable structure during their wilderness wanderings. The term is coupled with another noun, *mōʿēd*, to designate a sacred gathering place.

ground in what Cole (2000) describes as a “position of entreaty and intercession.” There the Lord’s glorious³⁰ presence was manifested before them.³¹

In verses 7–8, God commanded Moses to pick up his “staff,”³² which Wildavsky (2015, 175) identifies as a culturally recognizable “symbol of power.” Then Moses and Aaron were to assemble the covenant community. Next, in the sight of the entire gathering, Moses was to speak to a nearby “rock.”³³ When the lawgiver did so, the Lord promised that water would gush out³⁴ of the rock. In fact, so much water would be produced³⁵ that it would supply enough to satisfy the drinking needs of the entire community and their livestock.³⁶

First Corinthians 10:1–5 refers to this and other episodes from Israel’s years of wandering in the desert to depict the Messiah as the spiritual “rock” of God’s people. Previously in Paul’s letter, he warned the Corinthians not to engage in idolatry. Specifically, he discussed eating food sacrificed to idols.³⁷ In chapter 10, the apostle used illustrations from Israel’s exodus from Egypt and wandering in the Sinai wilderness to show what overtakes people who reject God by succumbing to idolatry. The first generation of Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt had unparalleled opportunities to witness the majesty of God and grow strong in their faith.

In an extraordinary act of deliverance, the Lord led all his people through the Red Sea.³⁸ Each day they received divine guidance from the “cloud” (v. 1) that went before them. The abiding presence of the “cloud” (v. 2) indicated that the Hebrews were under the Creator’s leadership and guidance.³⁹ Through those events, that Exodus generation became identified with Moses. Being in a sense “baptized into Moses,” the Israelites were under the submission of this aged leader in a way similar to the manner in which believers are submitted to the Messiah through baptism.

Furthermore, God miraculously fed the Israelites every day with manna (v. 3).⁴⁰ On more than one occasion, he caused water to gush from rocky formations to satisfy the multitude and their livestock.⁴¹ The people understood that they were eating and drinking out of God’s merciful and loving hand (so to speak). The manna and gushing rock represented the grace that would appear fully and personally in Jesus of Nazareth, the Rock (v. 4). Put another way, the crucified and risen Savior was the one who provided deliverance for the Israelites.

Regrettably, though, the Exodus generation did not live up to its venerable heritage. Most of these Hebrews died in the “wilderness” (v. 5) because they rebelled against God, which provoked

30 *Kāḇôd* is the Hebrew noun rendered “glory” (Num 20:6). When applied to God in Scripture, “glory” refers to the luminous manifestation of his being; put differently, it is the brilliant revelation of himself to humanity. This definition is borne out by the many ways the term is used in the Bible. For example, “glory” is often linked with verbs of seeing (Exod 16:7; 33:18; Isa 40:5) and of appearing (Exod 16:10; Deut 5:24), both of which emphasize the visible nature of God’s glory.

31 Cf. Exod 19:9, 16; 33:9–10; Num 9:15.

32 The Hebrew noun, *māṭṭē(h)* (Num 20:8), is variously rendered as either “staff” (NET, ESV, NIV, Lexham, CSB, EHV, NLT) or “rod” (KJV, NKJV, NASB).

33 “Rock” (Num 20:8) translates the Hebrew noun, *sē’ā’*, which can also be rendered “crag,” especially to denote a rugged or steep formation.

34 In Num 20:8, the Hebrew verb, *ntn*, is literally translated “give” (cf. Lexham). In this context, the term is variously rendered as “give forth” (KJV), “pour forth” (NEB), “pour out” (NIV, EHV, NLT), and “yield” (NKJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, CSB).

35 The Hebrew verb, *ys’* (Num 20:8), which is the Hif’il, second person, masculine, singular form, has Moses as its subject. The implication is that it would be through him that an abundance of “water” would originate (literally, “come or go out”) from the rock formation.

36 Cf. Pss 114:8.

37 Cf. 1 Cor 8.

38 Or “Sea of Reeds”; cf. Exod 14:16, 22, 29; Num 33:8; Josh 24:6; Ps 66:6; Isa 43:16; 63:11.

39 Cf. Exod 13:17–14:31.

40 Cf. Exod 16.

41 Cf. the discourse in this essay concerning Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:1–13.

his displeasure and judgment against them. Possibly some Corinthian believers assumed they could get away with certain sins, such as “idolatry” (v. 14), because they had been baptized and were participating in the Lord’s Supper (vv. 16–17). That would explain why Paul wrote as he did, describing long-ago events in terms of the two Christian sacraments.

The apostle was warning his readers that baptism and holy communion would not automatically protect the Corinthians from God’s judgment, just as the miracles he performed at the Red Sea and in the Sinai wilderness did not shield the Israelites from destruction (v. 21–22). If the believers at Corinth were astute, they would “flee from idolatry” (v. 14). It was not enough for Paul’s readers to know that the veneration of idols was wrong. They had to intentionally abhor the practice in all its forms.⁴² The apostle was urging not only Christians with weak scruples to abandon this sin, but also believers with strong consciences whose actions might cause their more self-doubting peers to spiritually stumble.

Returning once more to the main narrative recorded in Numbers 20, just as the Lord directed,⁴³ Moses went and picked up his “staff” (v. 9). It was stored at the tabernacle, where the Lord manifested his sacred “presence.” Based on the preceding information, one option is that the staff was the budding and blossoming rod of Aaron that produced almonds.⁴⁴ A second option is that the item was Moses’s personal rod, which he previously used to strike the waters of the Nile,⁴⁵ as well as to strike a rock in a previous complaint episode involving the first generation of Israelites.⁴⁶ In any case, Moses and his brother, Aaron, summoned the second generation of Israelites to gather around the designated “rock” (v. 10). What followed deviated significantly from God’s original command recorded in verse 8.

Sailhamer (1995, 396) asserts a prominent view that the “author has deliberately withheld the details” of how Moses failed, which supposedly creates uncertainty about the precise nature of his infraction; yet, the present essay’s “careful reading of the text” indicates that it is possible to discern “what Moses and Aaron did to warrant God’s displeasure.” In contrast to Sailhamer, Burnside (2017, 113) observes that the “specificity of the text” implies Moses’s conduct was not “intended to be obscure.” Indeed, a thoughtful and substantive analysis indicates that Moses and Aaron committed an “act of open rebellion against” (2017, 111) the Lord. Cole (2009, 371) equates the lawgiver’s “actions” to those of an “idolatrous pagan magician,” wherein Moses attributed “miraculous, almost god-like powers to himself and Aaron.”

Allen (1990, 867) notes that Moses allowed four decades of pent up “anger and frustration” to prompt him to speak rashly.⁴⁷ Fernando (2012, 672) assesses that the lawgiver “took matters into his own hands and did things his way.” Arden (1957, 52) goes further in labeling Moses’s conduct as a display of “astonishing egoism.” Specifically, he urged those present to “listen”(v. 10)

42 Cf. 1 Thess 1:9; 1 John 5:21.

43 “Commanded” (Num 20:9) renders the Hebrew verb, *ṣwh*, which has the sense of charging “someone to do something” (Thompson 2015) specific. In this case, every aspect of the Lord’s directive to Moses was mandatory, not optional.

44 Cf. Num 17:6–13.

45 Cf. Exod 7:19–20.

46 Cf. Exod 17:1–7, which is recounted above.

47 Cf. Pss 106:32–33. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore the preceding passage in detail. It reiterates the episode at the “waters of Meribah” involving Moses and the Israelites. The psalmist articulated the view that God’s people “provoked” or “angered” him and consequently Moses “suffered” (or experienced “harm”). Furthermore, the Masoretic text reads, “they rebelled against his spirit,” while two other Hebrew manuscripts (along with the LXX, Syriac, and Jerome translations) read, “made his spirit bitter.” In either case, the outcome for Moses was the same, namely, that his “lips” uttered “words” that were “rash” or “reckless.”

carefully,⁴⁸ or pay close attention, to his words; yet, in doing so, he failed to heed the Creator's original directive. Furthermore, the lawgiver chided this new cohort of God's people, in a tone filled with "condescension" (Arden 1957, 52), for being a group of "rebels";⁴⁹ yet, as Emmrich (2003, 57) indicates, the deep "irony" is that Moses's own speech and conduct were laced with sedition.⁵⁰

Next, Moses upstaged God—who alone has the right to act as Judge over his people⁵¹—by asking whether it was necessary for the lawgiver and his brother to somehow get "water" (v. 10) to come out of the "rock" in front of the assembly.⁵² Milgrom (1990, 165) observes that there is no mention of the Creator bringing about the miracle through his emissaries. Lim (1997, 85) adds that Moses's declaration and conduct were "tantamount to a serious desecration" of the Lord's "name." Of particular interest is that, in a violent act of indiscretion, Moses lifted up his staff⁵³ and, instead of just speaking to the "rock" (v. 11),⁵⁴ he used his rod to pound the craggy formation twice. Despite Moses's flagrant transgression of God's instructions,⁵⁵ a large stream of water came out abundantly from the rock, enabling all the people and their livestock to drink.

Instead⁵⁶ of trusting⁵⁷ that the Lord's will was appropriate and good, Moses openly violated it. Lim (1997, 155) argues that the lawgiver was also guilty of "exceeding the divine mandate." In doing so, Moses, in partnership with Aaron, had offended the Lord, debased his holiness, and failed to credit to him the miracle that had occurred.⁵⁸ The Hebrew verb, *qdš*, which is rendered "holy" (v. 12), means "to be separate," "to be distinct," or "to set apart."⁵⁹ As Leviticus 11:44 reveals, God is incomparable in his majesty and absolutely pure in his moral virtue; yet, tragically, when

48 Num 20:10 uses the imperative form of the Hebrew verb, *šm'* (to "listen" or "hear"), along with the emphatic particle, *nā'()* ("surely"), to intensify the all-important nature of what Moses articulated.

49 The underlying Hebrew verb in Num 20:10 is *mrh* and points to a "recalcitrant" (Thompson 2015) spirit that defies "authority."

50 Cf. Num 20:24.

51 Cf. Matt 7:1–5; Jas 4:11–12.

52 Num 20:10 is literally translated, "out of this rock must we bring for you water." The placement of the Hebrew noun, *sē'ā'*, at the beginning of Moses's question draws attention to the craggy formation in front of the group. On the one hand, the verb, *ys'*, could be rendered with the future modal sense of "shall we" (NASB, NRSV, ESV); yet, on the other hand, the verb most likely has a compulsory shade of meaning, as seen in the rendering, "must we" (KJV, NKJV, Lexham, CSB, NET, NIV, EHV, NLT).

53 Num 20:11 is literally rendered, "Then Moses raised his hand." As he did so, the lawgiver acted against the Lord in a manner filled with presumption, contempt, and defiance. Specifically, it was "with a high hand" (15:30) that Moses intentionally violated God's clear directive. Along the same lines, Burnside (2017, 131) states that the uplifted, "clenched fist" is a "stock image for public acts of aggression in the Hebrew Bible."

54 Cf. Num 20:8.

55 As noted earlier, Paul revealed in 1 Cor 10:4 that "Christ" was the "rock" that "accompanied" the Israelites in the wilderness (cf. Pss 18:2, 31; 31:3; 42:9). This being the case, Moses's offense was ultimately against the Messiah, about whom the lawgiver prophetically wrote (John 5:45–47).

56 In Num 20:12, the Hebrew noun, *yā'ān*, is used adverbially to signal the underlying reason for the Lord's prohibition, and so is rendered, "because."

57 In Num 20:12, the underlying Hebrew verb, *'mn*, conveys the sense of believing or trusting (Thompson 2015). From the Creator's perspective, Moses and Aaron failed to demonstrate sufficient faith, as seen in the renderings, "trust me enough" (NIV, EHV, NLT), "trust in me enough" (NEB), and "had not enough faith in me" (BBE).

58 Kok (1997, v) broaches the question, "what is the transgression which Moses is supposed to have committed?" Kok then candidly acknowledges that this "Pentateuchal puzzle has elicited considerable scholarly discussion," yet it has "resulted in nothing close to a consensus." For a spectrum of differing explanations, see Allen (1990, 868); Anisfeld (2011, 219–220); Ashley (1993, 383–384); Baker (2008); Brueggemann (1994); Budd (1984, 218–219); Bush (1981, 291–292); Cole (2000); De Regt and Wendland (2016); Dozeman (1998, 159–160); Emmrich (2003, 53–55); Gray (1986); Kahn (2007, 88–89); Kalland (1992, 217–218); Keil and Delitzsch (1981, 130–131); Lee (2003, 222–223); Levine (1993, 490); Milgrom (1983, 251–252, 264–265); Noth (1968, 146–147); Olson (1996); Propp (1988, 26); Sakenfeld (1995); Wenham (1981, 150–151); Wildavsky (2015, 175–177, 186–188).

59 In Num 20:12, various English translations nuance the rendering of the Hebrew verb, *qdš*, differently to articulate its notional sense, as follows: "to show" (NRSV, NEB); "to treat" (NASB); "to uphold" (ESV); "to regard" (Lexham); "to honor" (NIV, EHV); "to keep" (BBE); "to demonstrate" (CSB, NLT).

Moses acted in a rash and violent manner, he left the covenant community with the false notion that God is temperamental, fickle, and pugnacious—in other words, as emotionally flawed as human beings.

Moses and Aaron, by not displaying sufficient reverence for God in the presence of the second generation of “Israelites” (Num 20:12), were forbidden⁶⁰ from leading the covenant community into Canaan. This outcome serves as reminder that not even persons as great as either Moses or Aaron were exempt from the Lord’s discipline. As noted earlier, among the original cohort of Hebrews who had experienced the exodus from Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb were permitted to enter the land the Creator had promised to give to the descendants of the patriarchs.

The “waters of Meribah” (v. 13) became the name of the place where the Israelites argued⁶¹ with the Lord, and where his holiness was demonstrated and maintained among the people by judging Moses and Aaron.⁶² As noted earlier, the Hebrew noun rendered “Meribah,” which is used in both Exodus 17:7 and Numbers 20:13, means “quarreling.” It can also convey the notions of complaining, strife, and contention. In reflecting on this historic incident, Psalm 95:8 exhorted later generations of God’s people not to harden their hearts as the second Exodus generation did “at Meribah.” Even in such a regrettable situation as this, the Lord proved himself to be holy and maintained his honor in the presence of the entire covenant community (Lev 10:3).

2.2 A descriptive analysis of Numbers 27:12–14

The first twenty-five chapters of Numbers deals with the initial generation of Israelites who departed from Egypt. Despite their preparations to enter Canaan (1:1–10:10), this privileged cohort rebelled against the Creator and perished in the wilderness for their insurrection (10:11–25:18). Chapters 26:1–36:13 spotlight the following generation of Israelites and the events leading up to their conquest of the promised land. The narrative includes the second census of the Israelites recorded in chapter 26, which parallels the first census detailed in chapters 1–4. Beginning in chapter 27, the historical account shifts the focus to the preparations the new cohort of God’s people undertook as they made their way to Canaan. Part of getting ready included passing the baton of leadership from Moses to Joshua.

Verses 12–14 offer the Lord’s explanation concerning why he commissioned Joshua to replace Moses. The rendition is prefaced by God’s command to Moses to journey up a “mountain” located with the “Abarim” range. An examination of Numbers 34:47 and Deuteronomy 32:49⁶³ indicates that “Nebo” was the specific mountain the Creator referred to in Numbers 27:12.⁶⁴ Abarim was located east of the Jordan River in the Transjordan region. The range extended from the heights of Mount Nebo in the north to the much lower elevation northeast of the Dead Sea in the south.

Mount Nebo rose about 4,000 feet above the Dead Sea and sat approximately 2,700 above sea level. On a cloudless day, a person could view much of the promised “land” (Deut 34:4), which the Lord had pledged to give to the patriarchs and their descendants, the Israelites, as their

60 In Num 20:12, the Hebrew adverb, *lākēn*, is used to indicate the consequence resulting from Moses and Aaron’s insubordination and so is rendered “therefore.”

61 The same Hebrew verb, *ryb*, is used in both Num 20:3 and 13.

62 Both Num 20:3 and 13 state that the Israelites took it upon themselves to quarrel, first with Moses (v. 3) and second with the Lord (v. 13). Since Moses served as God’s spokesperson, to contend with the lawgiver was tantamount to being argumentative with the Creator. In a similar vein, when Moses transgressed the Lord’s command, it became imperative for him to adjudicate and judge Moses (along with Aaron) in the eyes of the Israelites.

63 Deut 32:48–52 is covered in the next section of this essay.

64 The LXX version of Num 27:12 adds, *τοῦτο τὸ ὄρος Ναβαύ* (“which is Mount Nebo”).

inheritance. According to verse 1, Nebo was identified with “Pisgah.” Either Nebo and Pisgah referred to the same peak or to two different mountains within proximity to one another. Regardless of which option is preferred, Nebo/Pisgah provided a vista that extended from Gilead to the town of Dan in the north, included all of Naphtali, the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh, the land of Judah extending west to the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev, and the Jordan Valley up to Zoar (vv. 2–3).

The Creator stated in Numbers 27:13 that after Moses had an opportunity to gaze at a distance upon the entirety of Canaan, he would literally be “gathered”⁶⁵ to his “people.” Cornelius, Hill, and Rogers (1997) explain that this idiomatic expression broadly referred to a person’s physical death, in which one joined other deceased family members and peers, whether in the grave or Sheol.⁶⁶ As stated in 20:22–29, this is the same fate that Aaron, Moses’s older brother, previously experienced somewhere on Mount Hor.⁶⁷ God explained that because both Moses and Aaron defied the Lord’s authority⁶⁸ at the “waters of Meribah,” he would not permit either of the brothers to enter Canaan. As noted in 27:14, this was a time of acute strife⁶⁹ involving the entire covenant community; nonetheless, God singled out Moses and Aaron for failing to uphold the Lord’s holiness⁷⁰ in the presence of their Israelite peers.

2.3. A descriptive analysis of Deuteronomy 32:48–52

In Deuteronomy, Moses recorded his final words to a new generation of Israelites. He delivered these oracles while God’s chosen people camped on the plains of Moab and prior to their invasion of Canaan. The famed lawgiver sought to prepare the Israelites for the upcoming challenge facing them. He urged them to recall the laws and experiences of their forebearers. Moses also emphasized those ordinances that were especially needed for the people to make a successful entrance into Canaan.

Beginning in Deuteronomy 31, Moses told the Israelites that he was no longer capable of leading them. He urged them to be strong and courageous, especially as they advanced into the promised land. Then, after instructing them to submit to Joshua’s leadership, Moses presented the written law to the priests and told them to read it regularly to the Israelites. Moses also foretold that, soon after his death, God’s people would rebel against him (vv. 1–29). Next, all the Israelites were summoned to hear Moses⁷¹ recite the words of a song, which praised the Lord and warned the people to remain faithful to him (31:30–32:47).

As noted in Liroy (2013, 4), there is no scholarly consensus concerning the organizational scheme of the Song of Moses. One proposed option is that the passage opens with a Prologue (31:30) and closes with an Epilogue (32:44). In this arrangement, God’s summoning of witnesses (32:1–3) is paralleled by his call for songs of praise (v. 43). Within the main portion of the ode, God’s accusation of Israel’s disloyalty, loving actions on Israel’s behalf, indictment of Israel’s rebellion, and decision to punish Israel (vv. 4–25) are paralleled by God’s censure and punishment of Israel’s foes, his vindication of Israel, and his execution of justice (vv. 26–42).

65 “Gathered” (Num 27:13) renders the Hebrew verb, *’āsap*.

66 In ancient Israel, Sheol (Hebrew, *še’ōl*) denoted the underworld or realm of the dead (Swanson 2001).

67 While Num 20:23 states that “Mount Hor” was near the Edomite border, the exact location remains disputed among specialists.

68 As in Num 20:10, the underlying Hebrew verb in v. 24 is *mrh*.

69 *Merībā(h)* is the underlying Hebrew noun in Num 27:14 and indicates the presence of intense quarreling and contention.

70 As in Num 20:12, the underlying Hebrew verb in 27:14 is *qdš*. The form is second masculine plural.

71 Deut 32:44 indicates that Joshua (literally, Hoshea) was with Moses as he recited the Song to the Israelites; cf. Num 13:8.

The Song of Moses is followed by a narrative interlude in verses 45–47. The lawgiver exhorted the second generation of Israelites to scrupulously heed “all the words” recorded in the Mosaic Law. Furthermore, they were to teach their children to adhere just as conscientiously to these same commands.⁷² After all, none of what Moses recited in the Song, along with all that he reiterated in Deuteronomy, was either “idle” or “empty” statements; instead, what was recorded in the Torah occupied the nexus of the Israelites’ corporate and individual existence.⁷³ Accordingly, for upcoming generations of God’s chosen people to flourish in the promised land, it was imperative for them to remain faithful to his covenant stipulations.⁷⁴

What follows in verses 48–52 is a record of the Lord’s final words to his bondservant, Moses.⁷⁵ Christensen (2015, 827) surmises that the Hebrew phrase rendered, “that same day” (v. 48) “looks back to 1:3,” namely, the “first day of the eleventh month”⁷⁶ of the “fortieth year” following the Israelites’ “exodus from Egypt.”⁷⁷ This observation indicates that after Moses finished addressing the Israelites, on exactly that same day, his life came to an end.

The Commander of heaven’s armies directed Moses to ascend “Mount Nebo” (v. 49). As noted in the previous section, Nebo was part of the “Abarim” range within the “land of Moab” and across from “Jericho” on the eastern side of the Jordan River in Canaan. Moab was bounded on the west by the Dead Sea and on the east by the Arabian Desert, while Moab’s northern and southern borders were formed by the Arnon and Zered rivers, respectively. Jericho was an ancient fortified city located about 10 miles northwest of the Dead Sea and around 17 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Canaan denotes the territory bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Jordan River. Canaan’s northern and southern boundaries were formed by Phoenicia and Wadi of Egypt, respectively.

The Lord permitted Moses to look out across the promised land, which the Israelites would receive as their tangible and longstanding “possession.”⁷⁸ Then, as the Creator had previously revealed,⁷⁹ he would bring to an end the temporal life of his bondservant and cause him to join⁸⁰ his departed ancestors.⁸¹ Deuteronomy 32:50–51 reiterates what God declared in Numbers 27:13–14, namely, that in the presence of the Israelites, both Moses and Aaron were guilty of acting unfaithfully or treacherously.⁸² As observed by Brueggemann (2001, 282), their flagrant transgression falsely signaled to God’s chosen people that his directives could be flouted and his holiness⁸³ profaned with impunity. For this reason, the Creator declared that neither of the brothers would ever enter Canaan, the land God had pledged to give the Israelites as an enduring

72 Cf. Deut 4:9; 6:7, 20–25; 11:19; 31:9–13.

73 Cf. Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1; 8:3; 30:20.

74 The testimony of Scripture is that later generations of Israelites flouted Moses’s words of admonition, which in turn led to their banishment from Canaan for seventy years; cf. 2 Kgs 17:7–17; 2 Chr 36:15–19.

75 Cf. Num 12:7; 34:5; Josh 1:1–2; Ps 105:26.

76 The “eleventh month” (Deut 1:3) would be Shebat in the sacred Hebrew calendar of ancient Israel and mid-January to mid-February in the Gregorian calendar used throughout the modern world.

77 According to an early dating of the Exodus, the fortieth year would be 1446 BC. Also, Deut 1:2 states that the excursion from “Horeb to Kadesh Barnea” usually took only eleven days to complete.

78 “Possession” (Deut 32:49) renders the Hebrew noun, *‘ăḥūzzā(h)*’.

79 Cf. Num 20:12.

80 The Hebrew verb rendered “will die” is in the Qal imperatival form to rhetorically indicate that, by divine decree, it was necessary for Moses to perish on Mount Nebo.

81 As in Num 27:13, Deut 32:50 is literally rendered, “be gathered to your people.”

82 In Deut 32:51, the Hebrew verb, *m’l*, conveys the lexical sense of acting “unfaithfully” (Thompson 2015). This connotation indicates an outright betrayal of one’s “legal obligations.” The second masculine plural form of the verb indicates that God was referring to an act of disloyalty on the part of both Moses and Aaron.

83 As in Num 20:12 and 27:14, the underlying Hebrew verb in Deut 32:51 is *qdš*. The form is second masculine plural.

inheritance; yet, as a divine concession, Moses would be allowed to look from a long way off at the promised land spread across the horizon.⁸⁴

Centuries later, an episode involving the Creator's rejection of Saul as Israel's first king provides theological insight concerning God's prohibition against Moses (and Aaron) entering the promised land. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul claimed that he heeded the Lord's directive to completely exterminate⁸⁵ the Amalekites;⁸⁶ yet, his assertion was contradicted by his own admission that he spared the enemies' king, Agag, and allowed the Israelite troops⁸⁷ to remove from the plunder what they regarded as the choicest sheep and cattle (vv. 20–21). These acts also violated God's command that Saul, as the Lord's designated agent, was to utterly wipe out the Amalekites, whom he regarded as "sinners" (v. 18).⁸⁸ In light of the preceding context, the Creator regarded Saul's transgression as being "evil" (v. 19).⁸⁹

In response to Saul, Samuel rhetorically asked whether Israel's God obtained greater delight⁹⁰ from a person's "burnt offerings and sacrifices" (v. 22) than from heeding his "voice." Samuel signaled through the use of the Hebrew interjection⁹¹ rendered "behold," along with a synonymously parallel construction, the answer to his query. Specifically, there was no moral equivalency between obeying the Lord and offering sacrifices. Likewise, there was no ethical comparison between heeding God and bringing him the "fat of rams." In both cases, submitting to the Creator's will eclipsed performing costly religious rituals.

Verse 23 is even more incisive in explaining the outrage connected with all forms of sedition against the Lord, such as those connected with Saul and Moses.⁹² Samuel declared that such attempts at insurrection were morally equivalent to transgressions⁹³ involving "divination" or "witchcraft."⁹⁴ Moreover, displays of obstinance⁹⁵ were ethically comparable to the abhorrent

84 Deut 32:52 uses the Hebrew noun, *nē'ōšed*, which, according to Clines (2001), denotes what is "opposite" or "in front of" a person or object.

85 In 1 Sam 15:18 and 20, the Hebrew verb, *ḥrm*, is used to denote what, by divine decree, is placed under a ban and devoted to destruction. During episodes involving military conflict, a "city and its inhabitants" (Naudé 1997) could be set apart (or consecrated) in a "permanent and definitive" manner for "total annihilation." In keeping with the ancient Near Eastern understanding of reality that forms the backdrop of the Conquest narrative in Joshua, the Lord was removing Canaan (i.e., its inhabitants, towns, and objects) from profane human possession and usage. God's unique initiation and unrepeatable sanctioning of violence (sometimes referred to as "Yahweh war"), then, was for covenantal and ethical, not ethnic (or racially motivated), reasons.

86 Mare (2009, 142) concisely describes the Amalekites as an "ancient marauding people" from the southern portion of Canaan, as well as the Negev. They were "fierce enemies of Israel, particularly in the earlier part of its history"; cf. Deut 25:17–19; 1 Sam 15:1–2.

87 As in 1 Sam 13:11–12, Saul's statement in 15:21 was a feeble and unconvincing attempt to shift some of the blame for his disobedience to the soldiers under his command.

88 "Sinners" (1 Sam 15:18) renders the Hebrew noun, *ḥāṭṭā'()*, which metaphorically depicts people, in their thoughts, words, and actions, missing the "mark" (Luc 1997) or failing to attain the high ethical standard found in God's Word.

89 "Evil" (1 Sam 15:19) translates the Hebrew noun, *rā'*, which here conveys the notional sense of what is "morally objectionable behavior" (Thompson 2015).

90 In 1 Sam 15:22, the underlying Hebrew verb is *ḥē'pēs* and denotes the presence of "extreme pleasure or satisfaction" (Thompson 2015).

91 The Hebrew interjection, *hinnē(h)*, carries the adverbial force of "behold" (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV), "look" (CSB, Lexham), "surely" (NRSV), "certainly" (NET), "know this" (EHV), or "listen" (NLT).

92 The Hebrew noun, *merī* (1 Sam 15:23), points to a bitter, contentious spirit that refuses to accept God's "authority" (Thompson 2015).

93 The underlying Hebrew noun in 1 Sam 15:23 is *ḥāṭṭā'()*.

94 In 1 Sam 15:23, the Hebrew noun, *qē'sēm*, refers to a "pagan form of foretelling" (Thompson 2015), along with "declaring secret or obscure knowledge," especially through the use of "signs, omens," and/or presumed "supernatural powers."

95 The Hebrew verb, *pšr* (1 Sam 15:23), conveys the notional sense of "recalcitrance" (Thompson 2015), and is variously rendered as "stubbornness" (KJV, NKJV, NRSV), "insubordination" (NASB), "defiance" (CEB), "presumption" (ESV, NET), and "arrogance" (NIV, EHV, Lexham).

practice of venerating idols.⁹⁶ The inference is that both Saul and Moses were guilty of insolence. This led them to value their own preferences and priorities more than the will of the Creator, which made both idolaters. Because Saul treated with disdain⁹⁷ the Lord's clear and specific injunctions, the Lord would respond in kind by spurning Saul as Israel's king. As for Moses's apostasy and denial of God's authority, the lawgiver's fate was being excluded from the Israelite cohort whom the Lord enabled to enter and take possession of Canaan.

3. A descriptive analysis of Deuteronomy 1:37-40 3:23-29 and 4:21-24

As noted in section one, Deuteronomy 1:37-40, 3:23-29, and 4:21-24 leave readers with the impression that it was the Israelites' fault for Moses transgressing the Lord's command. The following three subsections deal, respectively, with each of these passages.

3.1. A descriptive analysis of Deuteronomy 1:37-40

Moses began Deuteronomy 1 with a summary of Israel's journey north from the Sinai peninsula to Kadesh Barnea, which was a large oasis located at the southern extremity of the promised land (vv. 18-25).⁹⁸ There the Israelites allowed their worst fears to squelch their faith in God's abiding presence, power, and provision. In turn, the entire covenant community rebelled against the Lord's command by refusing to enter Canaan (vv. 26-33). For this reason, the Creator vowed that he would not permit one individual from the Israelite cohort to enter the promised land. He would, however, exempt Caleb and Joshua from this outright ban, for they alone remained completely loyal to the Lord (vv. 34-36).

In verse 37, Moses redirected his comments to his own situation nearly four decades later when he impetuously transgressed the Lord's directive.⁹⁹ Not even¹⁰⁰ the illustrious lawgiver would escape God's prohibition of entering Canaan. On one level Moses acknowledged that the Creator was "angry" with his bondservant; yet, on another level, Moses glossed over the precise reason for the Lord's intense displeasure.¹⁰¹ The lawgiver stated that his misfortune was due to the insubordination of his Israelite peers.¹⁰² One could imagine Moses emphatically declaring to the assembled cohort, "It was because of you that God became enraged with me!"

96 In 1 Sam 15:23, two different Hebrew nouns are used, namely, *'āwēn* ("iniquity," "wickedness") and *terāpīm*' (figurine-sized, household idol). When grammatically distinguished, the terms convey the sense of "having useless idols and consulting household gods" (EHV). Oppositely, when grammatically taken together, they convey the sense of the "evil of idolatry" (NET, NIV).

97 The Hebrew verb, *mā'as* (1 Sam 15:23), conveys the notional sense of "to reject with contempt" (Thompson 2015) and is commonly translated as "rejected" (KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, CSB, Lexham, NET, NIV, EHV, NLT).

98 The events recounted in Deut 1 are detailed in Num 13-14.

99 Deut 1:37 begins with the Hebrew adverb, *gām*, which carries the sense of "even me" in reference to Moses (cf. NRSV, ESV, Lexham). Contra Craigie (1976, 105, 127), Driver (1986, 26-27), Tigay (1996, 19, 425), and Weinfeld (1991, 150), this essay understands Moses to be speaking about the episode recorded in Num 20:1-13.

100 The second half of Deut 1:37 again uses the Hebrew adverb, *gām*, which carries the sense of, "not even" (cf. NASB, Lexham, NLT).

101 "Was angry" (Deut 1:37) renders the Hebrew verb, *'ānap*, which etymologically refers to one's nose or nostrils (Struthers 1997a). It points to an "intense emotional state," due to breathing hard, and denotes being infuriated. With respect to the Creator, his "anger" remained "rational and controlled."

102 In Deut 1:37, Moses used the Hebrew preposition, *gālāl*, which conveys the sense of "because" or "on account of." Contra Merrill (1994), there is little ambiguity in the wording to suggest that Moses only seemed to hold his peers liable for his "predicament." Also, given the chronological reference in v. 3, it is doubtful that, contra Christensen (2014, 31), Moses was "taking the blame" for the prior generation of Israelites' "failure" and, as their "leader," was shouldering the "consequences" of their unfaithfulness four decades earlier.

103 Cf. Exod 24:13; 33:11; Num 11:28; Josh 1:1.

Block (2012, 780) remarks that the Lord would not tolerate Moses's "blame game." Likewise, Fernando (2012, 77) points out that "Moses had to bear the responsibility for his own action." The divine decree included Moses's appointment and commissioning of Joshua as the lawgiver's successor. The Lord literally referred to Joshua as he who "stands before" (v. 38) or "in the presence of" Moses. As both Tigay (1996, 20) and Weinfeld (1991, 151) elucidate, the idiomatic expression depicts Joshua serving as Moses's aide-de-camp or high-ranking, personal assistant.¹⁰³ Joshua, then, not Moses, would have the privilege of leading the new generation of Israelites into Canaan. God directed Moses to "encourage"¹⁰⁴ Joshua as he oversaw the efforts of the chosen people to "inherit" the promised land. The lawgiver could do so before his death by offering Joshua moral support and verbal affirmation.

Verse 39 shifts the focus to the previous generation of Israelites. According to Numbers 14:3, they questioned the Lord's wisdom in rescuing them from Egypt so that their enemies might murder them and carry off their families—both wives and children¹⁰⁵—as plunder. In Deuteronomy 1:39, Moses accurately conveyed this sense,¹⁰⁶ while at the same time nuancing his observations to make a distinction between the families' infants and their older siblings. The lawmaker seemed to refer especially to the various clans' preadolescent sons and daughters. Thirty-eight years earlier, they did not yet have the requisite insight and awareness—which was derived from parental training and life experience—to discern the difference between moral right and wrong.¹⁰⁷

The Creator declared through Moses that the entire cohort of the new generation of Israelites would be offered the privilege of entering Canaan. The Lord would give the promised land to them, as well as enable them to begin the process of taking full possession of it.¹⁰⁸ God alone was responsible for graciously deeding Canaan to his chosen people as their legitimate, enduring inheritance. In contrast, God ordered the first Exodus generation,¹⁰⁹ including Moses, to "turn around" (v. 40)¹¹⁰ and head back¹¹¹ in the direction of the "wilderness" toward the "Red Sea."¹¹² Their death would be the wages paid for their individual and collective insurrection.¹¹³

104 "Encourage" (Deut 1:38) translates the Hebrew verb, *hzaq*, which conveys the notional sense of "to inspire with confidence" (Thompson 2015), "to give hope," or "to give courage"; cf. the EHV rendering, "strengthen."

105 In Num 14:3, the Hebrew noun, *ṭāp*, collectively denotes "children" (KJV, NKJV, NIV, CSB, NET, EHV), especially those of early age (e.g., "little ones"; NASB, NRSV, ESV, Lexham, NLT). In Deut 1:39, Moses used the same noun in a more focused manner to refer to "infants" (NET) or "toddlers" (EHV), and then added a reference to their older siblings ("children"; KJV, NKJV, NRSV, ESV, NET, NIV, EHV, NLT).

106 Both Num 14:3 and Deut 1:39 use the Hebrew verb, *bāz*, which denotes "valuables" (Thompson 2015), such as "people or goods," which are "taken by violence," particularly in military conflict.

107 Deut 1:39 is literally rendered, "who do not know today good or bad." Moses used a figure of speech known as a merism, in which contrasting words denoted the entire spectrum of ideation between two extremes. According to Bratcher and Hatton (2000), at the time of the infraction recorded in Num 14:3, the "younger generation" of Israelites were not yet able to ascertain clear enough distinctions between thoughts, words, and actions characterized by either virtue or vice.

108 Deut 1:39 uses the Hebrew verb, *yrš*, which has the notional sense of "to take possession" (Thompson 2015), "including future endowments by claim of right."

109 The Hebrew personal pronoun, *'āttēm* ("you"; Deut 1:40), is in the second person, masculine, plural form.

110 Deut 1:40 uses the Hebrew verb, *pnh*, which conveys the notional sense of changing "orientation or direction" (Thompson 2015).

111 In Deut 1:40, the Hebrew verb, *ns'*, imparts the image of the Israelites pulling up their tent pegs and starting on a journey taking them "along the route to the Red Sea" (NIV).

112 Or "Sea of Reeds."

113 Cf. Rom 6:23.

3.2. A descriptive analysis of Deuteronomy 3:23–29

As noted above, the first cohort of Israelites who left Egypt rebelled against the Lord. Consequently, they wandered in the desert for thirty-eight years, until a whole generation perished (Deut 2:1–23). Verse 14 explicitly mentions all the warriors who were old enough to fight in battle. This fulfilled what the Creator announced decades earlier in Numbers 14:29, namely, that these combatants, along with the corpses of the entire first Exodus generation of their peers, would carpet the Sinai desert.¹¹⁴ Also, to reiterate what was previously observed, verse 30 lists Caleb and Joshua as the only exceptions to the preceding ban, due to their insistence on remaining faithful to the Lord, despite the rest of the community's treasonous intent.¹¹⁵

Next, in Deuteronomy 2:24–3:20, Moses described Israel's victories over the Amorites, whose kingdoms east of the Jordan were granted to the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites. Moses also explained that God had chosen Joshua to lead a new generation of Israelites into the promised land. The divine Warrior pledged to fight on behalf of his chosen people and enable them to overcome their pagan, Canaanite foes (3:21). For this reason, neither Joshua nor the forces under his command were to become immobilized by fear at the prospect of going into battle; instead, they were to remain valiant and vigilant, knowing that the Lord would enable them to triumph over their enemies (v. 22).¹¹⁶

Verses 23–28 are of particular interest to the central question being explored in this essay. In a petition that Block (2012, 104) candidly labels as being “embarrassingly self-serving,” Moses recounted ardently imploring the Lord to be compassionate¹¹⁷ by relenting from his earlier decision to ban the lawgiver from entering Canaan (v. 23). Moses literally referred to the Creator as the “Lord GOD” (v. 24),¹¹⁸ which conveys the notional sense of “Sovereign LORD.”¹¹⁹ The lawgiver drew attention to the fact that the divine Warrior was at the headwaters of disclosing¹²⁰ his “greatness”¹²¹ and “strong hand”¹²² to his bondservant,¹²³ particularly in the Exodus event and bringing two generations of his chosen people through almost forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Moses realized there were many more significant events to unfold for God's chosen people, and the lawgiver coveted the possibility of playing a central role in them. Consequently, Moses petitioned¹²⁴ the Lord for the opportunity to journey with the rest of the Israelites across the Jordan River to experience Canaan firsthand (v. 25). The lawgiver used the same Hebrew adjective¹²⁵

114 Num 14:29 uses the Hebrew verb, *lwn*, to refer to the Israelites' incessant grumbling and acrid complaining against the Lord. Psalm 78:22 reveals that the entire Exodus generation neither had faith in God nor believed he would continue to watch over, provide for, and deliver them from their plights. Verse 40 further discloses that as a result of their unbelief, discontentment, and murmuring, they spurned the Creator and defied his authority, as indicated by the presence of the Hebrew verb, *mrh*; cf. Num 20:10.

115 Cf. Num 14:6–9.

116 Cf. Josh 1:5–9.

117 Deut 3:23 uses the Hebrew verb, *ḥānan* I, which conveys the notional sense of “earnestly requesting compassion” (Thompson 2015). This includes entreaties from the supplicant for God to take pity and display his favor (Fretheim 1997).

118 The Hebrew phrase in Deut 3:24 is *'āḏōnāy' yhw̄h*.

119 Cf. NET, NIV, NLT.

120 Deut 3:24 uses the Hebrew verb, *r'h*, which conveys the notional sense of “to reveal” (Thompson 2015) or “to cause to see.”

121 In Deut 3:24, the Hebrew noun, *gō'dēl*, points to the Creator's “outstanding importance” (Thompson 2015) and “eminence.”

122 The idiomatic expression, “strong hand” (Deut 3:24), draws attention to God's uncontested might and absolute “authority” (Thompson 2015).

123 *'Ĕbēd* is the underlying Hebrew noun used in Deut 3:24.

124 In Deut 3:25, Moses used the emphatic Hebrew particle, *nā(')*, which can be translated as either “surely” or “please.”

125 The Hebrew adjective, *ṭōb*, appears two times in Deut 3:25.

to refer to the entire promised “land,” as well as the “hill country” and “Lebanon” mountain range. In general, Canaan was fertile territory, and even the elevated regions were lush. This depiction mirrored the material abundance the Israelite spies initially had reported seeing nearly four decades earlier, using the idiomatic expression of the land “flowing with milk and honey” (Num 13:27).¹²⁶

Next, Moses stated that the Creator responded with righteous indignation¹²⁷ to the lawgiver’s petition (Deut 3:26). While this observation was somewhat valid, Moses’s claim as to the reason why differed sharply from God’s perspective. The lawgiver stated that the divine ban was “on account of” or “due to”¹²⁸ the recalcitrance of the Exodus generation of Israelites. Put differently, Moses placed the blame on his cohort peers for why the Lord would not “listen” to and grant his bondservant’s request. The Creator went even further in forcefully directing Moses to desist from making any additional petitions about the issue.¹²⁹ Any effort to the contrary would be counterproductive and deleterious for the lawgiver.

God, in his grace, would permit Moses to ascend to the summit of Mount Pisgah and from there visually examine the promised land in every direction of the compass.¹³⁰ As the NET, EHV, and NLT paraphrase verse 27, the Lord permitted Moses to “take a good look” at Canaan; nonetheless, the Creator would not permit his bondservant to travel across the Jordan River with the rest of the Israelite cohort. This remained the case, regardless of Moses’s attempt to hold the Israelites at least partially responsible for his earlier transgression.

The lawgiver’s final task was to pass the baton of leadership¹³¹ over to Joshua, as well as infuse him with inner fortitude and determination (v. 28).¹³² Under his command, the Israelites would pass through the Jordan River.¹³³ Likewise, Joshua would enable them to “inherit”¹³⁴ the

126 Block (2012, 106) postulates that Moses’s “description” might be “passionately hyperbolic.” After all, “to anyone who had been wandering around the desert of Sinai for forty years, the landscape across the Jordan would have seemed Edenic.”

127 The use of the vav-consecutive at the beginning of Deut 3:26 signals the Lord’s strong aversion to Moses’s entreaty. Also, the Hebrew verb commonly rendered “angry” is *’ābar*, and conveys the notional sense of feeling a strong “aversion or antipathy for something” (Thompson 2015). Its root form is the same as the verb, *’ābar*, Moses used in v. 25, which is usually translated as “cross over.” The latter is likewise related to the noun, *’ēbēr*, which refers to the region across from or beyond the Jordan River; cf. Harmon (1997); Struthers (1997b). As Woods (2011) observes, these literary aspects rhetorically signal the strong contrast between what Moses desired and God decreed.

128 In Deut 3:26, the Hebrew prepositional phrase is *lemā’ān*. Miller (1990, 43) interprets the phrase to mean that it was “for the sake of the people” that Moses bore the divine “judgment.” Allegedly, the lawgiver “identifies with and gives his life for the many.” Similarly, Christensen (2014, 66) asserts that while Moses was personally “blameless,” it was necessary for him to “accept responsibility for the rebellious generation at Kadesh-barnea.” Thompson (1974, 101) counters that “it is difficult to argue” that the prepositional phrase is “unambiguously used” to mean “instead of.” Also, when taking into account 32:51, it is “difficult to accept the view that Moses’s suffering was vicarious” (p. 305). Furthermore, Mann (1979, 486) explicates that “vicarious suffering” denotes someone enduring agony “in place of another.” Meanwhile, Israel’s lawgiver experienced deep personal loss “because of the people,” not on behalf of them. Additionally, his demise did not “provide” his peers “with any hope of salvation.” Kissling (1996, 12) puts a fine point on the “innocent suffering mediator” depiction of Moses by indicating it is “somewhat simplistic and idealizing.”

129 Deut 3:26 uses the idiomatic expression, *rāb-lāk’*, which is literally translated “much to you” and might be more loosely rendered, “enough of that from you” (Lexham).

130 Deut 3:27 literally says, “lift up your eyes toward the west and north and south and east.”

131 The use of the vav-consecutive at the beginning of Deut 3:28 signals a strong contrast and is commonly rendered as “but.” Furthermore, the Hebrew verb, *šwh*, conveys the notional sense of “charging someone to do something” (Thompson 2015). In this case, the Lord directed Moses to appoint or commission Joshua as the Israelites’ new leader; cf. Num 27:18–23; 31:14.

132 In Deut 3:28, the Hebrew verb, *hza*, conveys the notional sense of to “inspire with confidence” (Thompson 2015), along with giving “hope or courage.” The closely correspondent verb, *ms*, emphasizes the necessity of being “resolute” (Wakely 1997), even in the midst of intense opposition; cf. Deut 31:6–7, 23; Josh 1:6, 7, 9.

133 Deut 3:28 literally says that Joshua would “cross over before (or at the head of) this people.”

134 In Deut 3:28, the Hifil, imperfect form of the Hebrew verb, *nhl*, conveys a causative sense. Moses was transferring his authority to Joshua and empowering him to be successful as Israel’s new leader.

entirety of the promised land Moses looked out upon. As Wakely (1997) observes, the Israelites' newly-installed commander could overcome the presence of "anxiety, inadequacy, fear, and despair" by focusing on the Lord's abiding, "powerful presence." In verse 29, Moses explained that the preceding priorities were the reason why the entire covenant community encamped in the "valley" facing¹³⁵ the town of "Beth Peor."¹³⁶

3.3. A descriptive analysis of Deuteronomy 4:21–24

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses again warned the new generation of Israelites to heed the stipulations of their covenant with the Lord. Their faithfulness to observe his statutes and ordinances was the basis for their entering and flourishing within the promised land (vv. 1–14). Moses also reminded God's chosen people not to compromise their ethical integrity by venerating idols. This included revering objects depicting humans, as well as extolling the creatures of the earth and the celestial objects in the sky.¹³⁷ After all, the Creator made and designated these entities for the benefit of all humankind (vv. 15–19).¹³⁸

In verse 20, Moses shifted and narrowed his focus from the heathen nations to his Israelite peers. He reminded them that God, in his grace, had rescued the preceding generation from Egypt. The lawgiver metaphorically depicted Egypt as an iron crucible¹³⁹ where intense heat was used to remove impurities from metal being smelted. In a similar way, the Lord used the fiery trials the Hebrews endured in Egypt,¹⁴⁰ as well as their epic journey through the Red Sea, to so refine them that they literally became the "people of his inheritance."¹⁴¹ This idiomatic expression emphasized that God highly prized and protected the present generation of Israelites.

Moses redirected his comments¹⁴² in verse 21 to himself by categorically stating that the Lord was infuriated¹⁴³ with his bondservant due to¹⁴⁴ the transgressions of the Israelites. In turn, Moses noted that the Creator solemnly vowed¹⁴⁵ that the lawgiver would neither cross over the Jordan River with the new generation of God's people nor enter with them into the land of Canaan. Moses added that the divine Warrior had pledged to give this fertile land to his chosen people as their special, enduring "inheritance."¹⁴⁶ Just as the Israelites were the Lord's valued possession, so too he wanted them to regard Canaan in the same way.

135 Deut 3:29 uses the Hebrew noun, *mûl*, which is commonly rendered "opposite" (NKJV, NRSV, ESV, NASB, NET, EHV).

136 Beth Peor was located in Moab east of the Jordan River (Deut 4:46). Somewhere in the surrounding valley, the Creator buried Moses (34:6).

137 Cf. Deut 4:16–17; Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11; Acts 17:29; Rom 1:18–23.

138 An alternative view is that, according to Gen 10–11 (involving the tower of Babel episode and its tragic aftermath) and Deut 32:8–9, the Creator judged rebellious humankind by abandoning them to the folly of quarreling. He also caused them to become fractured and geographically dispersed. In the aftermath, they wallowed in the veneration of innumerable and contradictory pagan deities.

139 Deut 4:20 uses the Hebrew noun, *kûr*, which refers to a "metal-smelting furnace" (Swanson 2001).

140 Cf. 1 Kgs 8:51; Isa 48:10.

141 "Inheritance" (Deut 4:20) translates the Hebrew noun, *năḥălā(h)*, which depicts Israel as the Creator's "special, permanent, and precious possession" (Wright 1997).

142 The use of the vav-consecutive at the beginning of Deut 4:21 is variously rendered as "but" (NET, EHV, NLT), "and" (Lexham), "now" (NASB), or "furthermore" (KJV, NKJV, ESV).

143 "Was angry" (Deut 4:21) renders the Hebrew verb, *'ānap*, which etymologically refers to one's nose or nostrils (Struthers 1997a).

144 Deut 4:21 is literally translated, "because of your matter," and variously rendered as "for your sakes" (KJV, NKJV), "because of you" (NRSV, ESV, NET, Lexham, NIV, NLT), "because of your words" (EHV), or "on your account" (NASB, CSB).

145 The Hebrew verb, *šāba'*, conveys the notional sense of "to promise solemnly" (Thompson 2015).

146 As in Deut 4:20, in v. 21, "inheritance" translates the Hebrew noun, *năḥălā(h)*.

Concerning Moses, he bluntly affirmed¹⁴⁷ that he would soon die on the east side of the Jordan River in Moab. His demise—the reason for which he placed squarely on the shoulders of God’s people—ensured that Moses would not venture into the promised land (v. 22). Meanwhile, his cohort peers, under Joshua’s military leadership, would make their incursion into Canaan and begin the process of laying claim to its abundance.

Moses then reiterated his earlier admonitions, namely, that the Israelites were to remain vigilant¹⁴⁸ in recalling their binding agreement¹⁴⁹ with the Lord, along with shunning all forms of idolatry (v. 23). The lawgiver provided additional incentive by comparing the sovereign Creator to a “fire” that is “consuming” or “devouring.”¹⁵⁰ Likewise, Moses declared that the Lord maintained a holy zeal¹⁵¹ for the unwavering devotion of his chosen people.¹⁵² As Moses learned on the hard anvil of personal experience, God did not look with favor upon any acts of sedition, which both challenged his authority and were laced with idolatrous intentions.

4. An objective deliberation of the biblical data

As broached in section one, there seems to be a lack of clarity within the Pentateuchal accounts about three interrelated, unsolved issues, as follows: (1) the precise nature of Moses’s transgression; (2) whom to hold most responsible for the infraction; and, (3) the juridical basis for God’s resultant prohibition against the lawgiver entering the promised land. Section two presented a descriptive analysis of Numbers 20:1–13, 27:12–14, and Deuteronomy 32:48–52, respectively, in three separate subsections. In each case, the consistent portrayal is that the nexus of blame for the lawgiver’s transgression rested principally with him, notwithstanding other extenuating factors. Section three presented a descriptive analysis of Deuteronomy 1:37–40, 3:23–29, and 4:21–24, respectively, in three separate subsections. In each case, Moses held his Israelite peers mainly responsible for his dereliction of duty.

The preceding, then, constitute two differing and potentially contravening narratives of an agreed upon central, historical event. In undertaking here an objective deliberation of the biblical data, one option delineated in section one is to maintain that there are two contradictory streams of oral tradition embedded within the Pentateuch that differing groups of scribal redactors spliced together over centuries of editorial development. Allegedly, the competing accounts deviate considerably in their separate renditions. The notion of antithetical and Deuteronomic explanations for Moses’s banishment from the promised land serves to undermine the doctrine of Scripture’s inspiration and authority. Indeed, it might be affirmed that the collection of passages examined in sections two and three, respectively, illustrate how the Judeo-Christian canon is

147 Deut 4:22 begins with the Hebrew conjunction, *kī*, which here has an explanatory force and might be roughly paraphrased, “this means that” (MSG). The verse is followed by the explicit use of the first person, personal pronoun, *’ānōkī*.

148 Deut 4:23 uses the Hebrew verb, *šmr*, which conveys the notional sense of “to be attentive or focused” (Thompson 2015) on a matter of utmost importance.

149 The Hebrew noun, *berīṭ* (Deut 4:23), refers to a “contractual agreement between God and a person” (Thompson 2015). Exodus 24:7 refers to it as the “Book of the Covenant”; cf. 2 Kgs 23:2, 21; Heb 9:19.

150 Cf. Gen 15:17; Exod 3:1–6; 13:21; 19:18; 20:18; Lev 9:24; 10:2; Num 11:1–3; 1 Kgs 18:38; Heb 12:29.

151 Deut 4:24 uses the Hebrew adjective, *qānnā’*(’), which is commonly rendered as “jealous” and conveys the notional sense of being “fiercely protective and unaccepting of disloyalty” (Thompson 2015); cf. Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 6:15. As Merrill (1994) notes, there is no trace within the Creator of a “petty, selfish envy.”

152 Later in Deut 6:15, Moses exhorted the new generation of Israelites to exclusively worship the Lord. As in 4:24, the lawgiver stressed that because the Creator was “jealous,” his “anger” would erupt against his chosen people should they forget him, abandon their covenant with him, and venerate pagan deities (vv. 10–14).

primarily a humanly-produced, culturally-conditioned, ancient document that makes no inherent claims to its veracity and accuracy.

From the theological and hermeneutical vantage point espoused in section one, the preceding scenario is neither convincing nor necessary to make sense of the differing portrayals appearing in the two sets of passages being deliberated here. In fact, the above view is undermined by being too conjectural, overly complex, and lacking in any consensus among its adherents. The preceding includes unrelenting scholarly doubt and disagreement over fundamental questions. A more cogent and nuanced option, then, is in order, one that does sufficient justice to the biblical data appearing in the two groups of passages being considered, while at the same time affirming and preserving the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration and authority.

For instance, in all likelihood, both sets of accounts faithfully report and truthfully portray God's view of the commonly-affirmed incident, as well as Moses's perspective. Similarly, neither rendition attempts to harmonize nor gloss over the disparities in the assumptions, claims, and conclusions put forward by the Creator and his bondservant regarding the tragic event and its outcome. From this standpoint, then, the respective Pentateuchal narratives present sensible and compelling summations of what actually happened, along with the differing views of the Lord and Moses. This line of reasoning serves to uphold the veracity and accuracy of what appears in the passages being deliberated here.

A key goal remains, namely, to sort out in an objective manner the ambiguity in the respective biblical texts about the locus of blame connected with Moses's sin. This, in turn, forms the juridical basis for God's resultant prohibition against the lawgiver entering the promised land. The occurrence of his infraction is commonly acknowledged in each of the passages. Likewise, it seems reasonable to affirm, rather than doubt, the underlying historical integrity of the narratives presented in Numbers and Deuteronomy. So, then, how might one account for the unmistakable discrepancy in the views held by God and Moses regarding the nexus of culpability?

An evenhanded assessment of the respective, biblical texts suggests that it was Moses, not the Creator, who was incorrect regarding where to place the blame for the lawgiver's infraction. Also, as previously noted, this sheds light on the basis for the Creator forbidding his bondservant from entering Canaan with his Israelite peers. Scripture accurately conveys, rather than tries to elide or distort, Moses's flawed interpretation of the episode in question. This includes his overstepping of his authority, failing to exactly follow God's directive, and either doubting or casting doubt on the Lord's power.

The preceding observations serve as a sobering reminder that even the best of persons—including such an Old Testament luminary as Moses—are still sinners. From a New Testament perspective, fallen human beings are saved only through the merits of the Messiah, for redemption comes solely by the Father's grace through the gift of faith in the Son.¹⁵³ A further deliberation of the biblical data serves to place a twofold perspective on Moses. First, while he was a prophet, he was just as prone to iniquity as anyone else, including the sin of idolatry. This remained the case, even though the lawgiver enjoyed the wonderful opportunity of being in the sacred presence of the Creator, including extended sessions when, as Olson (1996) points out, they spoke in a "direct and unmediated way."¹⁵⁴ Second, Moses remained just a human being (albeit a highly privileged one) who represented the Lord to his chosen people. Against this backdrop, the stark disagreement

153 Cf. Eph 2:5, 8–9.

154 Cf. Num 12:6–8.

about Moses's blame, as well as the basis for God barring the lawgiver from Canaan, accentuates the reality of his fallen nature.

5. Conclusion

As noted in sections one and four of this article, proponents of higher criticism have fallen short in offering a convincing and satisfactory explanation for three interrelated, unsolved issues in the Pentateuch, as follows: (1) the precise nature of Moses's transgression; (2) whom to hold most responsible for the infraction; and, (3) the juridical basis for God's resultant prohibition against the lawgiver entering the promised land. Three Pentateuchal texts, specifically, Deuteronomy 1:37–40, 3:23–29, and 4:21–24, present Moses's claim that it was Israelites' fault. Oppositely, three other Pentateuchal texts, namely, Numbers 20:1–13, 27:12–14, and Deuteronomy 32:48–52, put forward God's assertion that his bondservant shouldered most of the liability for his iniquity. Sections two and three provided a descriptive analysis of these passages, followed by section four with its objective deliberation of the biblical data. The present (fifth and final) section puts forward a salient wrap-up of the essay's major findings, including the articulation of a workable solution to the three issues in question, while at the same time affirming the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

With respect to the first issue, it was argued that Moses was guilty of flagrantly transgressing God's command. Also, rather than trust that the Lord's will was just and good, his bondservant openly violated it. One outtake is that the lawgiver offended the Creator, debased his holiness, and failed to credit the miracle that occurred to him. A second outtake is that when Moses acted in a rash and violent manner, he left the covenant community with the false notion that God is temperamental, fickle, and pugnacious—in other words, as emotionally flawed as human beings.

Concerning the second issue noted above, it was argued that both sets of accounts faithfully report and portray God's view of the commonly-affirmed, historical incident, as well as Moses's perspective. Also, when all the evidence is evenhandedly assessed, God's bondservant bore the brunt of the culpability for his infraction. This remained the case, despite his flawed interpretation of the episode in question and recurring attempts to shift the blame to his Israelite peers.¹⁵⁵

Finally, regarding the third issue mentioned at the beginning of this section, the Creator's barring Moses from the promised land was not a travesty of justice. Similarly, the Lord was not being excessively harsh in his prohibition. As was argued in section two, displays of obstinance are ethically comparable to the abhorrent practice of venerating of idols. Just as insidious is the fact that Moses valued his own preferences and priorities more than God's will. Consequently, the Lord was fully justified in prohibiting his bondservant from entering Canaan. Even then, God displayed enormous grace and mercy in allowing Moses to glimpse the entirety of the promised land before he died on the heights of Mount Nebo in Moab.

155 Kalland (1992, 46) opines that Moses's "repetitious reference to the Lord's prohibition reflects" the lawgiver's "keen disappointment."

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