

“A PLACE FOR MY NAME”: HOREB AND ZION IN THE MOSAIC VISION OF ISRAELITE WORSHIP

DANIEL I. BLOCK*

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Israel’s protracted but one-time audience with YHWH at Sinai/Horeb and the regular encounters between Israelites and YHWH envisioned by Deuteronomy at the place YHWH would choose for his name has not received the attention it deserves.¹ In an earlier publication I suggested that

the place that YHWH chooses for his name ensures a means of communion with all Israel in perpetuity, analogous to his communion with them at Horeb, except that here Moses democratizes the experience. At Horeb only a privileged few ate in YHWH’s presence; here Moses opens fellowship with him to everyone.²

Upon further reflection and study this proposal seems unwarranted; inasmuch as the contrasts between the Israelites’ worship at Horeb³ and their future worship at the central sanctuary as envisioned in Deuteronomy are much more dramatic than their shared features, the former actually provides a foil for the latter. My strategy in this paper is first to investigate Deuteronomy’s disposition toward Horeb and the events that happened there and then to explore Deuteronomy’s vision for the kind of experiences that Moses anticipated would transpire in the future at the place that YHWH would choose to establish his name. My method is largely inductive and constructive, sifting through the text of Deuteronomy to determine what features of the Israelites’ encounters with YHWH at these two places were shared and which features were unique.

* Daniel Block is Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of OT at Wheaton College, 501 College Avenue, Wheaton, IL 60187.

¹ This is a version of a paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego, November, 2014. The study was inspired by Michael Kibbe, whose Ph.D. dissertation, “Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure? Hebrews 12:18–29 and the Sinai Theophanies” (Wheaton College, 2014) explored the inner biblical story of Israel’s encounter with YHWH at Sinai, beginning with Exodus 19–24 and ending with Hebrews 12. I am grateful to Michael and to Franklin Wang for reading earlier drafts of this paper, and for their helpful suggestions in improving it.

² Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 308.

³ In keeping with Deuteronomy’s preferred designation, I shall refer to the mountain where YHWH established his covenant with Israel as Horeb rather than Sinai.

II. SINAI/HOREB IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

The toponym “Sinai” (סִינַי) occurs only once in Deuteronomy, in the exordium to Moses’ farewell blessing of the tribes of Israel:

YHWH came from Sinai
 and dawned upon them from Seir;
 He shone forth from Mount Paran;
 accompanied by myriads of holy ones,
 and fire emanating from his right (33:2, author translation).

In its details, the entire exordium (vv. 2–5) is extremely difficult to interpret, but the gist seems clear. YHWH is portrayed in glorious theophanic form as coming from the mountains in the desert, presumably to deliver his people, and to be acknowledged as king over all the tribes of Israel. The place from which he came is identified by three names: Sinai, Seir, and Mount Paran. To Moses and the Israelites camped on the plains of Moab east of the Jordan almost forty years later (2:7) these three names identified generally the mountainous region in the southern Sinai Peninsula. There YHWH had confirmed Israel as his covenant people in fulfillment of his promise to their ancestor Abraham in Gen 17:7. But now from a distance, both in time and space, in Deut 33:2–5 the Horeb theophany takes on a different significance. Here YHWH appeared as the divine warrior who rose in defense of his people Israel. This text perceives Horeb not primarily as a place where the law was given or where YHWH’s covenant with Israel was formalized, but as the place where YHWH had appeared in his cosmic and transcendent glory, accompanied by a myriad of holy ones and sending out fire from his right side.

In Deuteronomy, Moses’ preferred designation for the mountain of revelation is Horeb (חֲרֵב). The name occurs nine times in the book, twice in the narrative frames to the first two addresses (1:2; 28:69 [ET 29:1]),⁴ four times in the first address (1:6, 19; 4:10, 15), and three times in the second address (5:2; 9:8; 18:16).⁵ Whereas “Sinai” is often preceded by “Mount,”⁶ “Horeb” never is. While the narrator’s preference for Horeb suggests he has been caught up by the spirit of Moses, it is unclear why this name should have been favored over Sinai. Since the name is related etymologically to חֲרָבָה, “wasteland, ruin,” it may reflect Moses’ disposition toward the mountain as a nondescript and empty piece of land in contrast to the “good land” (אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה) of Canaan (8:7–10; 9:6; 11:10–12).⁷ A more ideological

⁴ Like Moses in 33:2, in 1:2 the narrator associates Horeb with Seir, though he notes that Seir lay between Horeb and Israel’s destination Kadesh-barnea. Seir/Horeb is traditionally identified with Jebel Musa (“Mount of Moses”), which rises 7,486 feet above the southern Sinai desert.

⁵ Deuteronomy accounts for more than one half of the occurrences of the name. Cf. Exod 3:1; 17:6; 33:6; 1 Kgs 8:9; 19:8; 2 Chr 5:10; Ps 106:19; Mal 3:22 [ET 4:4].

⁶ Exod 19:11, 18, 20, 23; 24:16; 31:18; 34:2, 4, 29, 32; Lev 7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34; Num 3:1; 28:6; Neh 9:13; cf. Acts 7:30, 38; Gal 4:24–25 in the NT.

⁷ The expression “good land” (אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה) occurs ten times in Deuteronomy: 1:25, 35; 3:25; 4:21–22; 6:18; 8:7, 10; 9:6; 11:17.

explanation is also possible.⁸ Contrary to the intention reflected in Exodus 19–24, after four decades of putting up with this miserable generation (cf. 1:9–12), for Moses Sinai represented a spiritual “wasteland.”⁹ This should have been the place where Israel’s history as the officially recognized people of YHWH began. Not only had YHWH entered into covenant relationship with them there, but there he had also revealed himself and his will in a manner previously unimaginable (Deut 4:9–15, 36). But Moses associates Horeb with Israel’s rebellion (9:7–21). For him Horeb represented a false start (cf. 5:1–5), since there the previous generation had apostatized and ignited YHWH’s fury (9:8). With his preference for “Horeb,” Moses may also have intentionally sought to detract attention away from the physical site, which served as only a temporary “mountain of God,” and to prepare his audience for “the place that YHWH will choose” in the land of Canaan (cf. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 26, etc.).

Like the narrator in 1:2, Moses recognized in his recollections that Horeb was the place from which the Israelites had set out for the Promised Land as YHWH’s covenant people. Their journey had indeed begun in Egypt (9:7), but instead of heading directly to Canaan YHWH had led them here for a special appointment with himself. Although he had entered into covenant relationship with his people here (5:2), they had broken that covenant within forty days by worshiping the golden calf (9:7–21). After Moses’ intercession for the people, YHWH had renewed the covenant (9:25–10:5), and eventually they set out from there for their final destination in Canaan (1:6, 19).

Moses’ recollections of Israel’s encounters with YHWH at Horeb are concentrated in three primary texts (4:9–15; 5:1–33; 9:8–10:11) and alluded to in several others (4:33, 36; 18:16). His descriptions in the first two suggest that what transpired between YHWH and Israel on Mount Horeb was an extremely formal event, involving an audience with YHWH in the fullest sense of the expression. Because Moses’ primary concern in Deuteronomy 9 was people’s rebellion against YHWH at Horeb, he mentioned the actual audience with YHWH only in passing (v. 10), but long enough to characterize that event as “the day of the assembly” (יום הקהל); cf. 10:4; 18:16), to identify the primary feature of that event as “all the words that YHWH spoke with you” (כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם), and to set the context as being “at the mountain from the midst of the fire” (בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ).

Moses did not name the mountain in Deut 4:33 and 36, but twice remembered that the people heard God’s/YHWH’s voice (קול), noting first that he was speaking (מִדְּבַר, v. 33) and second that they heard YHWH’s words (דְּבָרָיו) from the midst of the fire (מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ). Moses’ rhetorical question (“Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire as the Israelites have heard it, and survived?”) hints at the extraordinary nature of the event and the potentially

⁸ Similar to Ezekiel’s avoidance of “Zion,” because his syncretistic generation had claimed the sacred place as a [false] basis for security.

⁹ For further discussion on the issue, see Lothar Peritt, “Sinai und Horeb,” in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie*, W. Zimmerli *Festschrift* (ed. H. Donner *et al.*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977) 303–22.

life-threatening force of the word of God (v. 33). Moses would recount in greater detail this dimension of Israel's experience at Horeb in 5:1–33, and later in 18:16 recall the problem by quoting the people's verbal response to YHWH's speech: "Do not let me hear the voice of YHWH my God or see this great fire any more, or I will die." By referring to "people" (עַם) in 4:33, he highlighted the corporate nature of the experience at Horeb.

In 4:36 Moses noted that the purpose of the divine speech was to discipline (יָסַר) Israel. YHWH had not appeared simply to add an eighth item to the wonders of the world. In 8:5 the word יָסַר will be used of YHWH training Israel as a man trains his son, presumably to walk in his ways. In this context the discipline obviously does not refer to punishment, but to education. He does not declare the goal of the instruction here, but 4:10 suggests "to fear YHWH" as a possibility. However, the theological conclusion drawn in 4:35 and 39 suggests that the intent was that Israel might "know that YHWH alone is God"; the God of Israel is *sui generis*—in a class all his own.

In remembering that YHWH had let his voice be heard from heaven but that it had been heard on earth from the midst of the fire, Moses drew attention to a fundamental conviction in Israelite theology: YHWH is *both* in heaven, his true residence, *and* on earth, in the very midst of the fire. Indeed, as in Exodus 3, the fire functions as the visible symbol of his presence, a fact reinforced syllogistically by the last clause of verse 36:

On earth YHWH reveals his fire;
YHWH speaks from the midst of the fire;
Therefore YHWH is present in the fire.¹⁰

Hundley rightly notes that YHWH's presence is much more than "a disembodied voice." Although veiled, his presence in the fire is real. If other ancient Near Easterners could conceive of their gods as being simultaneously in heaven and within their statues, surely YHWH could be present in heaven and on earth at the same time.¹¹ Indeed, with the fire YHWH brings his radiant and lethal splendor to earth without deserting heaven.

The fullest descriptions of Israel's Horeb experience are found in 4:9–15 and 5:1–33. At first sight Moses appears to set the stage for the former by highlighting its significance in 4:7–8:

For which other great nation has a god so near to it as YHWH our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and judgments as righteous (צַדִּיקִים) as this entire *Torah* that I am setting before you today?

¹⁰ For full discussion of the real presence of YHWH in Deuteronomy, see Ian Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy* (SBLDS 151; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), esp. pp. 66–73.

¹¹ Michael Hundley, "To Be or Not to Be: A Reexamination of Name Language in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 59 (2009) 538–40.

To be sure, Horeb was the place where YHWH revealed his statutes and judgments (מִשְׁפָּטִים וְחֻקִּים; cf. Exod 21:1–23:19),¹² but the references to calling on YHWH and this *Torah* that Moses is presenting to the people “today” point in a different direction. The emphatically redundant opening to verse 9 (רַק הַשְּׁמַר לְךָ וְשָׁמַר נִפְשְׁךָ מְאֹד, “Only guard yourself and watch yourself diligently”) and the focus in verses 9–10 on “events (הַדְּבָרִים) the people witnessed” (רְאוּ עֵינֵיכֶם) and “a day” (יוֹם) when all Israel stood before YHWH at Horeb distinguish that event from what is currently transpiring on the Plains of Moab.

Figure 1: The Syntax of Deuteronomy 4:9–10



The “events” that transpired on that “day” (vv. 10b–14) may be summarized as follows:

1. At Horeb YHWH charged Moses to assemble the people for an audience with him (v. 10b).
2. The people assembled at the foot of the mountain, which blazed with fire and whose top was shrouded in deep darkness (v. 11).
3. YHWH spoke audibly from the mountain declaring his covenant, that is, the ten basic principles of covenant relationship (v. 13).¹³

¹² If חֻקִּים refers to divine decrees (from a root meaning “to engrave” [a text]), then מִשְׁפָּטִים refers to divine “judgments” concerning righteous conduct of YHWH’s vassals.

¹³ Whereas NIV treats “the Ten Commands” [*sic*; read “Ten Words”] as appositional to “covenant,” v. 13 actually consist of two clauses, the first declaring the principal idea and the second clarifying it: “Then he declared to you his covenant, that is, he commanded you to do the Ten Words.” The first clause refers to the entire process of covenant-making through YHWH’s speech at Horeb,¹³ which obviously includes the announcement of the Decalogue, but includes much more. The second clause concretizes the image by drawing attention to the Decalogue as the official covenant document by which the Israelites are to live. “The Ten Words” should be treated as object of the infinitive, “to do” (לַעֲשׂוֹת), which YHWH commanded the people. For discussion, see most recently Jerry Hwang, *The Rhetoric of Remembrance: An Investigation of the “Fathers” in Deuteronomy*, Siphru 8 (Winona Lake, IN: Ei-

4. YHWH charged Moses to teach the “statutes and judgments” (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) to Israel (v. 14).

Moses’ recollection is cryptic, awaiting a fuller recounting in chapter 5. However, several features highlight the formality of Israel’s encounter with YHWH at Horeb. First, Horeb was the place where Israel stood before YHWH (עֲמַדַּת לְפָנָיו, v. 10).¹⁴

Second, technically in essence this event was not primarily theophanic, but auditory—an audience with YHWH. Regarding the first, the people saw no form (תְּמוּנָה) of God (4:12, 15); indeed the mountain was shrouded in “darkness, cloud, and deep gloom” (חֹשֶׁךְ עָנָן וְעִרְפָּל).¹⁵ Metaphorically the intense darkness and cloud expressed the perceptible though invisible presence of God, but practically they protected the Israelites from the lethal dose of divine glory.

Regarding the second, the choice of הַדְּבָרִים (literally, “the words”) in the clause, הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ (“the events that your eyes saw”) hints at the focus of the revelation, that is, the “words” (הַדְּבָרִים, vv. 9, 12) and the “voice/sound” (v. 12a, b) of YHWH. The preponderance of verbs for speech reinforces this impression: YHWH caused the people to hear (הִשְׁמִיעַ, v. 10) his words, he spoke (דָּבַר, v. 12) to them, he declared (הִגִּיד) to them his covenant and commanded the Ten Words (v. 13). Moses identifies the sound the people heard as “the Ten Words” (עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים),¹⁶ which functioned as shorthand for the covenant YHWH made with Israel at Horeb. Significantly, although the Israelites standing before Moses possessed no visual image of the Horeb experience, the “sound” of YHWH’s voice had been inscribed on stone tablets (v. 13; cf. 10:4), elsewhere referred to as “the tablets of the covenant” (לוחות הַבְּרִית), 9:9, 11, 15).

Third, on that occasion (בְּעַת הַהוּא) YHWH charged Moses to teach Israel the statutes and judgments, a shorthand expression for the regulations and laws re-

senbrauns, 2012) 192–96. Hwang builds on the work of Norbert Lohfink and Georg Braulik, “Deuteronomium 4,13 und der Horebbund,” in *Für immer verbündet: Studien zur Bundestheologie der Bibel* (ed. C. Dohmen and C. Freud; SBS 211; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2007) 29–33.

¹⁴ The idiom “to stand before” a human superior may involve either courtiers before the king (1 Kgs 12:8//2 Chr 10:8, Rehoboam’s counsellors) or individuals in a formal hearing (1 Kgs 3:16, prostitutes before Solomon; 2 Kgs 4:12, Shunamite woman before Elisha; 5:15, Naaman before Elisha; 8:9, Hazael before Elisha). As a theological idiom the expression is used generally of having God’s approval (1 Sam 6:20; Ezra 9:15; Jer 15:19; cf. Ps 15:1; 24:3), but usually more specifically of (1) officials in YHWH’s court: a spirit (1 Kgs 22:21//2 Chr 18:20); Levitical priests (Lev 9:5; Deut 10:8; 18:7; Ezek 44:15; cf. Zech 3:1); prophets (Elijah, 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15; 19:11; Elisha, 2 Kgs 3:14; 5:16; Rechabites [Jonadab, Jer 35:19]; an advocate (to stand in the breach, Gen 18:22; 19:27 [Abraham]; Ps 106:23 [Moses]; Jer 15:1 [Moses, Samuel]; Ezek 22:30); two witnesses (Rev 11:4); (2) people before God for judgment (Dan 7:10) or a formal convocation (Deut 4:10; 29:9[10], 14[15]; 2 Chr 20:13).

¹⁵ The choice of words intentionally echoes Exod 19:16 and 20:21. Ezek 34:12 speaks of “a day of cloud and deep gloom” (יּוֹם עָנָן וְעִרְפָּל) suggesting this combination represented a stock phrase. Cf. Ps 97:2.

¹⁶ On the Decalogue as “ten words,” see Daniel I. Block, “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *The Decalogue through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI* (ed. J. P. Greenman and T. Larsen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012) 4–5; idem, “Reading the Decalogue Right to Left: The Ten Principles of Covenant Relationship in the Hebrew Bible,” in *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011) 24–25.

vealed at Horeb (v. 14). Here Moses does not even hint at the reasons behind the transition from YHWH’s direct address of the people (vv. 10–13) to Moses’ mediation of the revelation to follow. Chapter 5 will provide those details.

Moses begins his second address by recounting in considerable detail what the Israelites had experienced at Horeb. Inasmuch as the core of that text is devoted to repeating with some slight modifications the words that had previously come from YHWH’s lips (5:6–21), in Moses’ mind the heart of that event involved YHWH’s verbal communication with his people. Verses 2–5 and 22–33 provide a narrative frame for these words.

The narrative preamble and the opening call to attention (v. 1) create anticipation for instruction on the statutes and judgments YHWH had revealed at Horeb. Instead we hear Moses’ interpretation of what happened at the mountain. Significantly, to Moses Horeb was not merely the location of divine verbal revelation; it was also the place where God made a covenant with the present generation of Israelites (v. 3).¹⁷ His transfer of the present generation to Horeb is just one element in a series of events in which they supposedly had participated: (a) YHWH made a covenant (בְּרִית בְּרִית) with them (vv. 2–3); (b) YHWH spoke (דִּבֶּר) directly¹⁸ to this generation from the midst of the fire (v. 4); (c) through Moses YHWH declared his word (תְּגִיד אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה) to them; and (d) YHWH’s “saying” (לְאמֹר) the Decalogue (v. 5) made this generation the recipient of his communication. By specifying “this covenant” (הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת) (v. 3) and reciting the Decalogue, Moses superimposes the present covenant-ratifying procedure on the Plains of Moab over the events at Horeb and superimposes his current addresses on the “statutes and judgments” (v. 1) over the “Book of the Covenant” and the remainder of the Horeb revelation. Furthermore, although the boundaries between the discreet elements of the people’s experience at Horeb are blurred, he casts his own role in the present context as the fulfillment of that requested by the people at Horeb and assigned to him by YHWH (v. 5).

The boundaries among the elements of the Horeb experience may be blurred in verses 1–5, but this is definitely not the case in verses 5:22–30, as Moses focuses on a singular element: the people’s response to YHWH’s speech from the midst of the fire. He has been broaching this subject carefully, teasing his present audience with his reference to the “darkness, cloud, and deep gloom” (4:11), asking whether anyone could survive the voice of deity speaking from the midst of the fire (4:33), alluding to the purpose of this element (יִסָּר, 4:36), and specifically attributing their stopping short of ascending the mountain to fear before the fire (5:5). After Moses had recited YHWH’s words from the fire, he could focus on the people’s reaction to those words.¹⁹ His recollections divide into four parts: a narrative summary of

¹⁷ The heaping up of expressions focuses attention on this people here and now: “with us” (עִמָּנוּ) (v. 2); “indeed with us, we, these, here, today, all of us, living” (כִּי אִתְּנוּ אָנֹכֶנוּ אֱלֹהָ פֹה הַיּוֹם כְּלָנוּ חַיִּים) (v. 3).

¹⁸ Since the Israelites saw no form of YHWH (4:12, 15), here “face to face” (פְּנִים בְּפְנִים) cannot be interpreted literally, but functions idiomatically for “directly, one on one.”

¹⁹ Although 5:5 suggests the people’s fear preceded hearing the word, in 4:33 he had hinted at the potentially lethal force of the words.

what has transpired (v. 22), followed by three roughly equal parts, each involving a different voice: the people (vv. 23–27), YHWH (vv. 28–32), and Moses (5:32–6:3). Inasmuch as the last section involves Moses fulfilling his newly assigned role, we need for our purposes to examine only verses 22–31.

1. *The transcriptional epilogue (5:22)*. Although usually considered the introduction to the next literary section extending from 5:22 to 6:3,²⁰ on form-critical grounds and based on ancient treaty form, this verse represents a colophonic conclusion to Moses' recitation of the Decalogue, summarizing what the narrator described in greater detail in Exod 24:12–18 and 31:18.

Echoing expressions he had used in 4:11–14, Moses reminds the people once more of several key facts:

- (1) The words of the covenant were declared by YHWH himself (cf. 4:10, 13).
- (2) The words were declared publicly to the entire assembly (קָהָל; cf. 4:10).
- (3) YHWH spoke from the midst of the fire (cf. 4:12, 15, 36; also 5:4).
- (4) The mountain was wrapped in cloud and deep darkness (cf. 4:11).
- (5) YHWH spoke with a (loud) voice (cf. 4:12).
- (6) YHWH's direct communication with Israel was limited to the Decalogue (cf. 4:13–14).²¹

(7) YHWH's transcription of the Decalogue on two tablets of stone and his delivery of the documents to Moses confirmed the permanent validity of the Decalogue for the Israelites.

Moses observes that YHWH's revelation at Horeb was visual (fire and thick cloud), oral (YHWH spoke words with a strong voice), and textual (written on two tablets of stone). But he also notes the continuity between the oral and the textual revelation: what YHWH said, that he wrote, and no more. And there can be no mistaking the authority of the document: YHWH, the covenant Suzerain, both spoke it and wrote it. He spoke the words to the whole assembly, but he placed the document into the hands of Moses, his authorized interpreter of the text.

2. *The people's response to the theophany at Horeb (5:23–27)*. Moses describes the response of the assembly (קָהָל, v. 22) in rather official terms. Upon hearing the thunder of YHWH's voice (קוֹל גְּדוֹל, literally "big voice/sound," v. 22), a delegation of tribal leaders (רָאשֵׁי שְׁבָטִים) and elders (זְקֵנִים)²² approached Moses on behalf of the people with a specific request. Sounding like an utterance crafted by a speechwriter,

²⁰ Thus Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 164; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 319–27; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990) 72; Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 157–58; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 90. Not so J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* (trans. E. M. van der Maas; BSC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 99–100; C. J. Labuschagne, *Deuteronomium* (2 vols.; De Prediking van het Oude Testament; Nijkerk: Uitgeverij Callenbach, 1990) 1.56–57.

²¹ With the clause, "and he added nothing more" (וְלֹא יִסַּף), Moses formally declares the end of YHWH's direct speech to the assembly.

²² These leaders appear elsewhere: "the heads of your tribes," 1:15; 29:9 [ET 10]; elders, 27:1; 29:9 [ET 10]; 31:9, 28.

the request consists of three parts, each opening with a rhetorical marker: (1) “Look” (הִנֵּה), followed by a description of the visual experience at Horeb (v. 24); (2) “And now” (וְעַתָּה), followed by an expression of the *Angst* the theophany had created in the people (vv. 25–26); (3) “You approach [YHWH] and listen . . .” (קָרַב אֶתְּךָ וּשְׁמַע), followed by a proposal to resolve the crisis (v. 27). Here Moses has expanded what the narrator had reported in ten words in Exodus 20:19 into a carefully constructed seventy-five-word address.

Moses’ report of the leaders’ speech notes three dimensions of the Horeb experience: (1) They acknowledged the sight as a revelation of divine glory and majesty²³—as if YHWH had permitted a glimpse inside his heavenly palace. (2) They recognized the sound from inside the fire as YHWH’s voice. (3) They expressed amazement that they had survived a direct encounter with divinity (v. 24; cf. 4:33). However, the rhetorical questions that follow (vv. 25–26) suggest the people were unsure they had escaped; the great fire from which they heard the sound of YHWH’s voice could still consume them (v. 25);²⁴ under normal circumstances for any mortal to be addressed by divinity from the midst of the fire would have been deadly (v. 26).²⁵ The people’s questions reflect their confusion. In the same breath they recognize the deadly threat of God’s voice and that this God who speaks is “the living God.” While their confession may not have risen to the sort of monotheism suggested in 4:35 and 39, it seems to acknowledge that despite YHWH’s invisibility behind the darkness and deep gloom, he presented a stark contrast to visible but lifeless gods of wood and stone (cf. 4:28).

The people’s questions also recall the narrator’s comment after reporting the Israelites’ eating and drinking on the mountain as guests of God (cf. Ps 23:4–6), “Yet he did not stretch out his hand against them” (Exod 24:9–11). If they were unsure of their place at YHWH’s table after the covenant had been ratified, we should not be surprised that prior to the ratification—the scene described in 5:22–33—the people were still unsure about their safety in the presence of God. To ward off the danger resulting from further exposure to the lethal voice and fire of God, they requested that Moses serve as a buffer, a sort of lightning rod between them and God (v. 27).²⁶ In so doing they formally acknowledged Moses’ authority to represent them before YHWH and YHWH before them. Indeed, from now on they will treat the voice of Moses as if it were the very voice of God.²⁷

²³ Note the assonance/rhyme in the combination of words, כְּבוֹדוֹ and גְּדֻלוֹ, “his glory” and “his greatness,” which may function as a hendiadys, “his majestic glory.” NJPS translates, “his majestic presence.”

²⁴ Their choice of words, “for this great fire will consume us,” reinforces the epithet, אֵשׁ אֹכְלָה, “consuming fire,” that Moses had used of YHWH in 4:24.

²⁵ Hebrew כָּל־בָּשָׂר may refer to all living creatures (Gen 6:17, 19; Num 18:15), but usually refers more particularly to humankind (Gen 6:12, 13; Isa 40:5, 6; etc.).

²⁶ The construction, וְאַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ . . . וְנִשְׁמָעְנָה וְנַעֲשֶׂה . . . (‘‘You approach and listen . . . and you speak to us . . . and we will listen and do . . .’’) is both official and emphatic.

²⁷ See further Michael Kibbe, ‘‘Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure?’’ 72–81.

3. *YHWH's response to the people's proposal* (5:28–31). After recounting YHWH's positive response to the leaders' request (v. 28a),²⁸ Moses reproduces his speech, which consists of four parts. First, YHWH declares in the first person what Moses had reported in the third person regarding his (YHWH's) response. Unlike the gods of wood and stone worshiped by the nations, which have ears but do not hear (4:28), YHWH, who has no literal ears, has heard his people—even though they have not addressed him. He overheard what they said to Moses.

Second, YHWH affirms the correctness of the people's response explicitly (by commending them for their request to Moses) and implicitly (by acknowledging that their words reflect a proper mental and spiritual disposition, v. 28b). Whereas in Exod 20:20 Moses had asserted that YHWH had come (בָּא) to the Israelites to test (נִסָּה) whether or not they feared him, God hereby declares both that they had passed that test and that the divine intent declared in 4:10 had been accomplished²⁹—in some measure.³⁰ And having passed the test, the Israelites declared their readiness to hear further revelation from God, albeit indirectly through a mediator.³¹

Third, YHWH declares his longing that the impulse reflected in the Israelites' response to his visual and verbal speech would be internalized, and demonstrated by keeping all his commands (בְּלִמְצוֹתַי, not only the Decalogue), all the time (כָּל־הַיָּמִים, literally “all the days,” v. 29). This longing is expressed with an awkward optative question: מִי־יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה לְיִרְאָה אֹתִי וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתַי כָּל־הַיָּמִים. The question may be interpreted idiomatically as, “If only they had this kind of heart, so they would fear me and observe all my commands all the days.”³² Exodus

²⁸ In contrast to Moses' expansionistic recollection of the people's speech in vv. 24–27 (cf. Exod 20:19), YHWH's speech in response is missing in the earlier narrative. In Exod 20:19–21 Moses' interpretation of God's intent with the foregoing revelation follows immediately after the people's request.

²⁹ Despite contextual differences, this testing event recalls Genesis 22, which begins with the narrator's note that God tested (נִסָּה) Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son (v. 1). And then after Abraham's remarkable act of obedience, the narrator quotes the envoy of YHWH declaring (on behalf of YHWH), “Now I know that you fear (יָרָא) God, for you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” For a recent study of the motif of testing in these and other texts, see Gregory S. Smith, *The Testing of God's Sons: The Refining of Faith as a Biblical Theme* (Nashville: B&H, 2014).

³⁰ Kibbe (“Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure?”) argues that YHWH's goal was actually not achieved; the divine longing for a continuation of the present disposition (v. 29) suggests a flaw in their disposition (pp. 97–100), which is the golden calf incident confirmed (pp. 89–93). Moses' claim that Israel has been rebellious since the day he knew her (9:7, 24), and his appeal to stop misbehavior today (12:8) suggest the problem persists with the present generation.

³¹ So also Merrill, *Deuteronomy* 159. Moses' positive interpretation of the people's response to the divine revelation at Sinai contrasts with that of John H. Sailhamer, who speaks of “a growing distance between God and the people—one that was not intended at the outset of the Sinai narrative” (*Introduction to OT Theology: A Canonical Approach* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995] 286 n. 47). For expressions of his negative interpretations of the Horeb experience, see also idem, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009) 374–415; idem, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 46–57, 281–88, 435–38. The way the covenant is ratified in Exod 24:1–11 suggests the opposite. For fuller response to Sailhamer, see Kibbe, “Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure?” 33–34, 37, 47–49, 67–71.

³² The first part, מִי־יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה לְיִרְאָה אֹתִי, formally rendered, “Who will grant and they will have this their heart,” is idiomatic for, “O that they had such a heart as this!” The idiom recurs in 28:67, and in

20:20 provides the needed background for this comment; responding to the people’s fright in the wake of the Horeb revelation, Moses had explained that its purpose was to “instill the fear of God *on their faces* so they would not sin” (וּבְעֵבֹר וּבְתִיָּה יִרְאַתּוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבַלְתִּי תִהְיֶינּוּ). Both texts assess the “fear” of the Israelites positively, but after four decades of history with this people YHWH and Moses recognize how superficial their response had been.³³ Their lips and faces expressed the right disposition, but within forty days they would prove how shallow their commitments were. What was needed is described elsewhere as a divine heart implant,³⁴—or, to use Moses’ preferred metaphor, a circumcised heart, which is demonstrated in whole-hearted and full-bodied love for YHWH (10:16; 30:6). In this context that disposition would be demonstrated by full observance of the divine Suzerain’s commands, which would result in permanent well-being for this generation and their descendants (לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָהֶם וְלִבְנֵיהֶם לְעֹלָם).³⁵ However, despite YHWH’s affirmation of the people and his desire for their well-being, the tone of Moses’ report is ominous. Within weeks YHWH’s doubts would be realized.

Fourth, after instructing Moses to dismiss the people, in fulfillment of the leaders’ request YHWH inducts Moses into the office of mediator. Using the language of the court, in verse 31 the divine King invites him to enter his presence: “But you, here, stand with me that I may speak to you” (וְאַתָּה פֹּה עִמָּד עִמָּדִי וְאִדְבַּרְתָּ). But this conversation will be anything but casual; YHWH will declare to Moses “the entire command,³⁶ that is, the statutes and judgments” (כָּל-הַמִּצְוָה) (וְהַחֲקִים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים לְמַד) the people to govern their conduct in the Promised Land.

In Deuteronomy 9:8–10:11 Moses recounts one more Horeb experience. But this event is chronologically separated and generically different from the “day of the assembly” described in chapters 4–5. To be sure, it involves Israel at worship, but this is not the sort of worship YHWH expected from his newly established covenant people. Forgetting their earlier commitments and blatantly violating the first principle of covenant relationship (4:15–24; 5:6–10), within forty days they

varied forms in Exod 16:3; Num. 11:29 (“O that all the people of YHWH were prophets!”); Job 6:8; 11:5; 13:5; 14:4; 19:23; 23:3.

³³ In Exod 20:20 the word “fear” (יִרְאַתָּה) is used in two different senses. In the wake of the terrifying revelation at Horeb, Moses says, אַל-תִּירָאוּ, “Do not be terrified.” However, contra Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy 1–11* 325), YHWH’s aim in the theophany had not been to terrorize the people, but to instill in them reverence and awe (יִרְאַתָּה) that would motivate righteous living (cf. Deut 10:12–13).

³⁴ Moses will hint at this in 29:3[4] (cf. 1 Kings 3:9, 12; Jer 24:7; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26), though in Deut 28:65 he threatens the people with the opposite: YHWH will give them an anxious heart.

³⁵ For the first time in the book Moses links fear toward YHWH and well-being. In 4:40 he had linked obedience with well-being, but without reference to fear as the motivating disposition. On the links between fear, obedience, and life/well-being, see also 6:2, 24; 17:19–20; 28:1–4. The book of Malachi offers a prophetic study on the relationship between fear/reverent awe and life.

³⁶ The singular form is intentional (cf. 6:1, 25; 7:11; 8:1; 11:8, 22; 30:11, also 15:5; 17:20; 19:9; 27:1; 30:1; 31:5), referring to the basic covenantal demand: absolute and unreserved loyalty to YHWH as declared in the first principle of the Decalogue and as Moses will expound in chaps. 6–11. So also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* 326; Norbert Lohfink, *Das Hauptgebot: Eine Untersuchung literarischer Einleitungsfragen zu Dtn 5–11* (AnBib 20; Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1963) 55–56.

manufactured and worshiped substitute gods. Had Moses not intervened for them, YHWH would have destroyed them. However, in response to Moses' intercession YHWH withdrew his threat and renewed the covenant—a fact symbolized by the production of new tablets, inscribed with the identical text of the original (10:1–5).

In his recollection of these events Moses does not portray the gracious character of YHWH with the explicit strokes of the narrator of Exodus 32–34 (cf. 33:19; 34:6–7). Despite YHWH's gracious acceptance of Israel as his covenant people and his gracious renewal of the covenant after this rebellion, forty years later in Moses' mind Horeb was not the sort of place to which one would want to return for renewed encounters with YHWH. On the one hand, the place was too closely associated with Israel's rebellion and near annihilation (cf. 9:7, 24). On the other hand, while we should not underestimate YHWH's extraordinary grace in inviting Israel to an assembly before him, the Israelites naturally shrank back from close encounters of this kind, having had little or no previous experience with YHWH. In their minds Horeb was a scary place.

III. ZION IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

Having explored Deuteronomy's portrayal of Horeb, we may now turn our attention to the book's disposition toward Zion. By using the term "Zion" I do not concede to critical orthodoxy that the book of Deuteronomy is the product of late scribes eager to centralize political power in the Davidic king (whether Hezekiah or Josiah) by imposing on the people exclusively centralized worship,³⁷ or even worse, to use the central sanctuary and Levitical towns as taxation centers to finance royal ambition.³⁸ Assuming Deuteronomy antedated the Deuteronomistic history and the Psalms and Prophets, it would be wrongheaded to read later highly developed Zion theology into Moses' vague reference to the place that YHWH would choose. However, the one who inspired him in this address ultimately had Jerusalem in mind, even as he would have David in mind in 17:15.³⁹ After David had brought to Jerusalem "the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of YHWH Šeba'oth" (2 Sam 6:2), and after "YHWH had given him rest from all his enemies around him" (7:1), David concluded it was time to build a temple for YHWH. The use of הַיְיָ, "to give rest," suggests the narrator viewed the construction of the temple as the fulfillment of Deut 12:5–10.⁴⁰

³⁷ I have argued against absolute centralization in two forthcoming essays, "Deuteronomic Law," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law* (ed. Jeffrey Stackert and Brent A. Strawn; New York: Oxford University Press); and "The Meeting Places of God in the Land: Another Look at the Towns of the Levites," in *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond* (ed. Roy E. Gane and Ada Taggar-Cohen; Resources for Biblical Study; Atlanta: SBL).

³⁸ On which see Block, "Meeting Places of God in the Land."

³⁹ Ps 78:69–71 links the election of Mount Zion within the tribal territory of Judah (as opposed to Joseph/Ephraim) as YHWH's eternal dwelling place with the election of David as king.

⁴⁰ Psalm 132 links YHWH's election of and covenant with David with the election of Zion as his dwelling place.

I acknowledge that I am using the toponym “Zion” anachronistically. The name appears often in the Prophets and the Psalms, but is used by the Deuteronomistic historian only twice (2 Sam 5:7; 1 Kgs 8:1).⁴¹ “Zion” occurs twice more, but both times within a speech by the prophet Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:21, 31 = Isa 37:22, 32).⁴² Many have noted the absence of references to Zion or Jerusalem or the temple in Deuteronomy,⁴³ and some have used this as evidence for a Persian date for *das Urdeuteronomium*.⁴⁴ Following the lead of the psalmist, I use the name because Zion represented the fulfillment of what Deuteronomy envisions as “the place YHWH chooses to establish for his name”:

כִּי־בָחַר יְהוָה בְּצִיּוֹן	YHWH has chosen Zion;
אֲנִי לְמוֹשָׁב לוֹ:	He has desired it for his residence.
זֹאת־מְנוּחָתִי עַד־עַד	“This is my permanent resting place;
פֹּה־אֲשֵׁב כִּי אֲנִיָּהּ:	Here I will reside, for I have desired it.” (Ps 132:13–14)

1. *The place of the place in Deuteronomy’s vision of worship.* Although the place is never named, the notion of a place where “YHWH would choose to establish his name” is part of a larger map of Deuteronomistic historical and theological geography.⁴⁵ However, in his addresses Moses’ gaze is cast largely on Israel’s future place in the land promised to the ancestors,⁴⁶ and to YHWH residing at his chosen place (מְקוֹם). This is the place that concerns us, for this was Israel’s destination. There they would worship him when their journeys were over and they were living in the land allotted to them and living out the ideals of which their ancestors could only dream.

⁴¹ Both occurrences are repeated by the Chronicler. In 2 Sam 5:7 (= 1 Chr 11:5) the name is glossed with “it is the city of David” (צִיּוֹן הַיָּהּ עִיר דָּוִד), and in 1 Kgs 8:1 (= 2 Chr 5:2), the name glosses “the city of David” (עִיר דָּוִד הַיָּהּ צִיּוֹן).

⁴² On Zion and the Zion traditions in the historiographic writings, see J. A. Groves, “Zion Traditions,” in *Dictionary of the OT: Historical Books* (ed. B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005) 1019–25.

⁴³ The expression יהוה ביתו occurs only in 23:19[18], but as in Exod 23:19 and 34:26, the phrase is a generic designation for the sanctuary as the divine residence, and could just as well apply to the tabernacle.

⁴⁴ Thus Juha Pakkala, “The Date of the Oldest Edition of Deuteronomy,” *ZAW* 121 (2009) 394–95. However, evidence like this argues more naturally for an ante-monarchic provenance for *das Urdeuteronomium*.

⁴⁵ In Moses’ recollection, Egypt was the place of YHWH’s multiplication of the population in fulfillment of the promises to the ancestors, but also the place of oppression and ultimate redemption and revelation through YHWH’s mighty acts (1:30; 4:34; 6:21; 10:22; 11:3; 16:12; 24:18; 26:5–8); Sinai/Horeb was the place of covenant and revelation of the divine will for Israel (4:9–15; 5:2; 18:16; 28:69[29:1]), but also of Israel’s failure (9:7–21) and YHWH’s gracious covenant renewal (9:25–10:5); the desert was a place of providential care (1:31; 8:15–16), but also of testing (8:2–6) and failure (1:19–46; 6:16; 9:22–24); the Plains of Moab was a place of covenant renewal (11:26–28; 26:16–19; 28:69–29:20[29:1–21]; 30:11–20) and Moses’ farewell (31:1–34:12). On the importance of time and place in Deuteronomy, see J. Gordon McConville and J. Gary Millar, *Time and Place in Deuteronomy* (JSOTSup 179; Sheffield Academic Press, 1984).

⁴⁶ Deut 1:8, 21, 35; 4:1; 6:3, 10, 18, 23; 7:13; 8:1; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 12:1; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 27:3; 28:11; 30:5, 20; 31:7, 16, 20.

In this book Moses refers twenty-one times to the place that YHWH would choose to establish his name.⁴⁷ The “place formula” occurs in a variety of forms, ranging from the most elemental, “the place that he will choose” (16:16; 31:11), to the most complex, “the place that YHWH your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and to establish it” (12:5). This most complex form—which happens to be the first in the book—makes four fundamental assertions concerning “the place.” (1) YHWH, the God of Israel, will choose the place.⁴⁸ (2) It will be chosen from within the tribal territorial allotments.⁴⁹ (3) It will bear YHWH’s name. The expression speaks of divine ownership: just as a person who bears the name of YHWH is recognized as belonging to YHWH,⁵⁰ so the place bearing the imprint of his name is recognized as his possession.⁵¹ The idiom “to put his name there” (לָשׂוּם/לְשׂוֹן אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שָׁם) alludes to the practice of inscribing the name of the founder of a building on the foundation stone. By putting his name on a place YHWH validates the location as the place of legitimate worship.⁵² (4) The place will be the goal of Israel’s pilgrimages.⁵³

⁴⁷ Deut 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11. For variations/echoes of the formula in later writings, see Josh 9:27; 2 Kgs 21:7; 23:27; Jer 7:12; Ezra 6:12; Neh 1:9.

⁴⁸ Moses does not say how that choice would be made or communicated, but the location was revealed to David through Gad the prophet (2 Sam 24:18–25; 1 Chr 21:18). On the initiative of deities in ancient Near Eastern accounts of temple construction, see V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 135–67.

⁴⁹ Predicted in Numbers 34 and fulfilled by Joshua in Joshua 14–19. The history of Israel’s worship at a single sanctuary involved three distinct phases: (1) at the center of the camp during their desert wanderings; (2) at a series of locations in the land of Canaan during the nation’s transition from tribal government to a monarchy: Mount Ebal/Shechem (Deuteronomy 27; Josh 8:30–35; 24), Bethel (Judg 20:26–27), Shiloh (Judg 21:19–21; 1 Samuel 1–3; Jer 7:12–14; Ps 78:60); and (3) at a permanent location after the transition was complete. For a successive interpretation of “the place that YHWH will choose,” see Gordon J. Wenham, “Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary,” *TynBul* 22 (1971) 103–18; J. Gordon McConville, “Time, Place, and the Deuteronomical Altar-Law,” in *Time and Place in Deuteronomy* 89–139; idem, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 98–135.

⁵⁰ On which see Daniel I. Block, “Bearing the Name of YHWH with Honor,” in *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012) 61–72. Cf. Exod 20:7; Deut 5:11; Isa 44:5. Isaiah 18:7 speaks of the temple as the place of YHWH’s name. Note also the references to “building a house for the name of YHWH” (2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 3:2; 5:17–19[3–5]; 8:17–20, 44, 48).

⁵¹ For equivalent expressions in Akkadian texts, see EA 287:60–63 (ANET 488; cf. EA 288:5, ANET 488); in an Egyptian text, Rameses III builds a temple for Amon “as the vested property of your name” (ANET 261). Here the expression is equivalent to “the place where YHWH causes [people] to remember his name” in Exod 20:24, “the place on which my name is called/read,” which later always refers specifically to the city of Jerusalem (Jer 25:29) or the temple/house of YHWH (1 Kgs 8:43; Jer 7:10, 11, 14, 30; 32:34; 34:15). The same expression (קָרָא שֵׁם עָלַי) is used of Israel as the elect people of YHWH in Deut 28:10 and 2 Chr 7:14, and is applied to a prophet in Jer 15:16, and the elect nations in Amos 9:12; Isa 63:19 notes the nations are not called by God’s name.

⁵² On the inscription of a name on the foundation stone of a temple for its validation, see S. D. McBride, “The Deuteronomical Name Theology” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1969) 93–94. The translation of לָשׂוּם/לְשׂוֹן שְׁמוֹ, “to establish his name,” assumes virtual synonymy for וָשׂוּם, “to set, place,” and שָׂבַן, “to establish,” and that שָׂבַן is a shap’el form of בָּוֹן, “to establish,” rather than a piel infinitive of שָׁבַן, “to dwell.” Thus Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*

Given the frequency of the place formula in Deuteronomy, readers may be fixated on geography and forget that the place represents something much greater. In the ancient world temples were not merely monuments for people to visit; they were viewed as residences for deities. The frequent association of “the place that YHWH would choose” with phrases like יהוה לפני יהוה, “before YHWH,”⁵⁴ and אֶת־יְהוָה, “with YHWH” (16:16; 17:12; 31:11), reinforces this interpretation. The emphasis on “the place” highlights the presence and accessibility of the One who actually dwells in heaven (4:39),⁵⁵ but who condescends also to reside on earth for the purpose of communing with his people.⁵⁶

2. *The function of the place in Israel’s worship.* Examining specifically what YHWH invited the Israelites to do “before his face” magnifies the significance of this conclusion. Limiting ourselves initially to contexts in which the place formula occurs, we observe that the Israelites were invited to come there to “see the face of YHWH” (31:11; cf. 16:16); to hear the Torah read (31:11) and thereby learn to fear YHWH (14:23; 31:9–13); to celebrate the three great annual pilgrimage festivals;⁵⁷ to present their offerings and recall YHWH’s saving and providential grace (26:1–11); to demonstrate their covenant commitment to YHWH horizontally by gifts of charity to the marginalized (26:12; cf. 10:12–22); to demonstrate communal solidarity by celebrating with their children, servants, the Levites, and aliens (12:12; 14:27–

(Hildesheim: Olms, 1966) 1.522. Much of the evidence for this position derives from Akkadian counterparts to the Hebrew expression. See McBride, “Deuteronomistic Name Theology” 204–10; S. L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: l’šakkēn šēmō šām in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 318; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); idem, “Place of the Name in Deuteronomy” 342–66. LXX translates, ἐπινομάσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖ ἐπικληθῆναι, “to call for his name to be invoked there.” Recognizing the oddity of the consonantal text, the Masoretes pointed the word as if from שָׁכַן, “to dwell,” and attached it to the following verb, “you shall seek his dwelling place.” The Targums read “to make his Shekinah dwell there.” For discussion of the textual and grammatical issues involved, see C. McCarthy, *Deuteronomy* (Biblia Hebraica Quinta 5; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007) 85*–86*.

⁵³ Whereas elsewhere the verb דָּרַשׁ, “to seek,” usually speaks of looking for something, or inquiring, or even caring for, that is, to seek someone else’s welfare (11:12), here the idiom דָּרַשׁ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם, literally, “to seek to the place,” means “to make a pilgrimage to the place,” or “to visit the place with spiritual intent.” Cf. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 120. See also Amos 5:5, and Isa 11:10, “you may make a pilgrimage to the place” (דָּרַשׁ אֶל).

⁵⁴ 10:8; 12:7, 12, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:11; 18:7; 19:17; 24:4, 13; 26:5, 10, 13; 27:7; 29:9, 14[10, 15]; cf. earlier references to events “before YHWH”: 1:45 (at Kadesh Barnea the people wept before YHWH); 4:10 (at Horeb the people stood before YHWH); 6:25 (people are recognized as righteous before YHWH because of their obedience); 9:18, 25 (Moses fell down [הִתְהַפֵּל] before YHWH to intercede for the people). For a thorough discussion of the significance of יהוה לפני יהוה, “before YHWH,” in Deuteronomy, see Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire* 142–97.

⁵⁵ As Solomon recognized repeatedly in his prayer of dedication for the place that is stamped with the name of YHWH: 1 Kgs 8:23, 30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49.

⁵⁶ A deeply entrenched scholarly tradition interprets the temple as the residence for the name of YHWH (יהוה שָׁם) as a late theological abstraction of earlier perceptions of real presence. See Moshe Weinfeld, “Deuteronomy, Book of,” *ABD* 2.175–78. In recent years this interpretation has come under increasing scrutiny. See especially Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*; Peter Vogt, *Deuteronomistic Theology and the Significance of Torah: A Reappraisal* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006); Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*; idem, “Central Sanctuary or Local Settlements? The Location of the Triennial Tithe Declaration (Dtn 26,13–15),” *ZAW* 120 (2008) 323–40.

⁵⁷ Passover (16:1–8), Festival of Weeks (Pentecost, 16:9–12), Festival of Booths (16:13–17; 31:9–13).

29; 16:11); and to settle legal disputes before the Levitical priest/judge (17:8–13). This was also the place where Levites would serve in the name of YHWH, standing before him, and blessing the people in his name (10:8; 18:6–8).

Many today view Israel's worship as involving obligatory cultic actions demanded by YHWH to satisfy his need for honor, which the people would perform dutifully in response to divine commands. Supposedly all males were compelled to go to the central shrine three times a year to observe the national festivals of Passover/Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths (16:1–17), and if they could drag the females in their families and their neighbors with them so much the better. However, the picture painted by Deuteronomy is very different.

Deuteronomy 12:2–14 lays the attitudinal foundations.⁵⁸ Although most translations render this unit as a series of legal prescriptions, its genre is established by the hortatory sermonic injunctions that punctuate it (vv. 4, 8–9, 13–14) and the festive nature of the activities to transpire at the site. Indeed, if we render many of the verbs in verses 5–7 modally rather than as imperatives we will recognize that this represents an invitation to celebrate in the presence of YHWH rather than a deontological command to worship him:

But you *may* make pilgrimages (lit. “seek”) to the place YHWH your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there to establish it. To that place you *may come*, there you *may bring* your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of YHWH your God, you and your families *may* eat and you *may* celebrate in everything you have put your hand to, because YHWH your God has blessed you (vv. 5–7).

Translating the text this way yields a profoundly positive picture of Israelite worship at the central sanctuary (Zion).

First, the Israelites are invited “to come to/enter” the place where YHWH resides. To render the verb בּוֹא as “go,” as many translations do, obscures the intent. Speaking on behalf of YHWH, Moses says, “There you may come/enter.”⁵⁹ The verb perceives the Israelites’ movement from the perspective of the person at the destination, rather than a person sending them off.⁶⁰

Second, in agreement with the previous verb, the Israelites are invited to bring (בָּרִיחַ) all their offerings to YHWH (vv. 6, 11). Again, as authorized spokes-

⁵⁸ For fuller discussion of this text, see Block, “The Joy of Worship,” in *How I Love Your Torah!* 98–117. On worship as joyful celebration, see also Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (1972; repr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 210–24; Georg Braulik, “The Joy of the Feast,” in *The Theology of Deuteronomy: Collected Essays of Georg Braulik* (trans. U. Lindblad; Bibal Collected Essays 2; N. Richland Hills, TX: Bibal, 1994) 27–65; idem, “Commemoration of Passion and Feast of Joy,” in *ibid.* 67–85; T. M. Willis, “Eat and Rejoice Before YHWH: The Optimism of Worship in the Deuteronomistic Code,” in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis* (ed. Rick R. Marrs; JSOTSup 284; Sheffield: JSOT, 1999) 276–94.

⁵⁹ “To go” would have been expressed with יָצָא.

⁶⁰ The opposite of בּוֹא, “to come, enter,” is יָצָא, “to go out” (cf. 28:6, 19). This is the Hebrew Bible’s equivalent to Jesus’ invitations, “Come to me all you that labor and are loaded down” (Matt 11:28), and “If any are thirsty, let them come to me and drink” (John 7:37).

man for YHWH, Moses envisions the action from the vantage of the divine host at the worshippers’ destination rather than their homes scattered throughout Israel.⁶¹ His catalogue of seven types of offerings reflects his enthusiasm: “whole burnt offerings,” “animal sacrifices,” “tithes,” “specially dedicated donations,” “votive offerings,” “freewill offerings,” and “the firstborn of herds and flocks.” The list is obviously not exhaustive but represents Israel’s entire cultic provision for fellowship with YHWH.

Third, the Israelites are invited to eat there in the presence of YHWH.⁶² As elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern and biblical contexts, eating together was a ritual act of communion, often symbolizing a covenantal relationship.⁶³ However, unlike pagan offerings that were presented as food for the gods, the present instructions focus on the offerings as food for the worshippers. The Israelites’ God will host his vassals at this banquet table, but he will not eat with them.⁶⁴

Fourth, the Israelites are invited to celebrate the blessing of YHWH on their work. Whereas verbs for joy and celebration occur in the Horeb regulations only in Leviticus 23:40, the second address in Deuteronomy sets the mood of worship with the verb **שמח**, “to rejoice,” various forms of which occur eight times in connection with appearing before YHWH.⁶⁵

Fifth, Moses extends the privilege of access to all. Whereas at Horeb access to the table had been granted only to Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and the elders (Exod 24:9–11), in Zion all will be welcome—heads of households, sons and daughters, male and female servants, as well as landless Levites, aliens, widows, and the fatherless within their towns (12:12, 18; 16:11, 14; 26:11; 31:10–12). In Zion Israelites will celebrate both the vertical relationship graciously established by YHWH and their common membership in the covenant community.

This freedom of access to the presence of YHWH and confidence in his acceptance characterizes not only other “Zion” texts in Deuteronomy, but life away from the sanctuary as well. In the sequel to 12:1–13, Moses emphasizes that offer-

⁶¹ So also v. 11. In v. 26, “to take” the offering to a place is expressed with **נשא**, “to carry.”

⁶² On “eating before YHWH,” see Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire* 161–65.

⁶³ Gen 31:54; Exod 24:5–11.

⁶⁴ In Exod 18:12 a select group involving Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel ate with Jethro “before God.” Compare Uriah’s eating before David (2 Sam 11:13); Adonijah’s supporters eating before him (1 Kgs 1:25); and Jehoiachin’s eating “before” his overlord, the king of Babylon (2 Kgs 25:29//Jer 52:33). In Ezek 44:3, the prince (**נשיא**) eats “before YHWH.” At Sinai/Horeb the elders had observed the glorious presence of YHWH as they ate and drank (Exod 24:10–11), but there is no hint of YHWH dining with them. This pattern recalls the banquet Joseph prepared for his brothers (Gen 43:26–34). Not only did the brothers sit in rank according to age, but they sat “before” (**לפני**) Joseph, rather than “with” him (v. 33).

⁶⁵ Deut 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14–15; 26:11; but cf. 27:7, which envisions a special ritual event celebrating the completion of the covenant triangle involving YHWH, Israel, and the land at Mount Ebal (on which see Daniel I. Block, “What Do These Stones Mean?: The Riddle of Deuteronomy 27,” *JETS* 56 [2013] 17–41). The root **שמח** also occurs in 24:5 and 33:18, where it speaks of rejoicing in other circumstances. It seems that Moses has generalized the tone of the legislation concerning the Festival of Booths in Lev 23:40 to all worship before YHWH: when the tithe is presented (14:21–27), at the Festivals of Weeks (16:9–12) and Booths (16:13–17), the presentation of first fruits (26:1–11), and the Israelites’ celebration of arrival in the Promised Land (27:1–8).

ings presented to YHWH must be eaten at the central sanctuary (vv. 14–19). However, if Israelites desire to eat meat where they live, they may do so freely, provided animals are ritually clean (of the type acceptable as sacrifices to YHWH) and the sanctity of the animal's life is respected by draining the blood (vv. 20–28). In a sense, every slaughter is a sacrifice and every meal is worship, suggesting that the so-called food laws in 14:1–21 invite the Israelites to imagine themselves dining at YHWH's table whenever they sit down for a meal. The emphasis in this text is not on foods prohibited, but on the full range of foods available to YHWH's covenant people, identified at the outset as his "sons," "a holy people belonging to YHWH" (עַם קְדוֹשׁ לַיהוָה), chosen (בְּחַר) to be his "special treasure" (עַם סֻּגְיָה). The Israelites may enjoy precisely those foods that YHWH accepted as offerings.

Rather than considering the annual tithe of 14:22–29 as a burdensome duty, we should recognize in YHWH's blessing of the fields and herds another occasion for him to invite them to come and eat in his presence. Indeed, YHWH finds such delight in fellowship with his people that he expressly removes hindrances to participation. When distance from the central sanctuary renders it impractical for worshipers to carry the tithe physically, they may come to the sanctuary with silver and purchase all the food they want at the destination (v. 26). Meanwhile those with means are to ensure that the privilege and satisfaction of eating in YHWH's presence is open to all: Levites, aliens, the fatherless, widows (vv. 27–29).

Similar considerations characterize the offering of the firstborn in 15:19–23, where, as in 12:5–14 and 14:22–29, the key verbs may be interpreted modally:

Each year you and your family *may* eat them in the presence of YHWH your God at the place he will choose. If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to YHWH your God. You *may* eat it in your own towns. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean *may* eat it, as if it were gazelle or deer (vv. 20–23).

As is the case with the annual tithe (14:22–29), we should not interpret the divine demand for the firstborn of flocks and herds as an intrusive and burdensome duty. Rather, the consecration of the animal symbolized Israel's privileged status as YHWH's firstborn among the nations, and the arrival of the first offspring to each ewe or heifer reminded the people of YHWH's delight in their company. Each new birth represented an invitation to come and eat in his presence.

This positive understanding of the sacrifices climaxes in 26:1–15, where, for the first time, Moses offers some ritual detail, in this case involving the presentation of first fruits of the field. Although we may imagine similar rituals being performed by devotees of the fertility gods of Baal and Asherah, Moses will not allow Israel's cult to degenerate to mere fertility religion. This annual event offers another occasion for the people to celebrate YHWH's grace in their history as well. Indeed, the creed they are to recite during the ritual touches on the offering presented only at the very end. After handing the offering to the priest and affirming, "I declare today to YHWH your God that I have come to the land YHWH swore to our forefathers to give us" (v. 3), they are to say:

“My father was a wandering Aramaean; he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to YHWH, the God of our fathers, and YHWH heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So YHWH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O YHWH, have given me.” (vv. 5–10; author’s translation)

The center of gravity in this “Little Creed” is not celebration of the present harvest, but grateful commemoration of YHWH’s gracious establishment of Israel as his covenant people and his provision of this good land in fulfillment of the promises to the ancestors.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOREB AND ZION AS PLACES OF WORSHIP

Having explored Deuteronomy’s disposition toward Horeb and Zion we may now stand back and reflect on the relationship between these two places. In the past, I have imagined a fairly close relationship between the two, with Zion making permanent the presence of YHWH among his people and giving them ongoing access to him, as they had at Horeb. This was indeed true of the tabernacle, which functioned as a portable temple (identified as a *miškān*, “dwelling” and *miqdāš*, “sanctuary,” Exod 25:8–9), eventually to be replaced by the permanent temple in Jerusalem. However, the Tabernacle was less a provision for worship at Horeb, than for future worship away from this place. More significantly, Israel’s encounters with YHWH at Horeb differed fundamentally from the encounters envisioned at the central sanctuary in Deuteronomy. This becomes clear if we summarize the data on each in synoptic tabular form (see Table 1 at the end of this article).

Remarkably, the most significant—if not the only—common denominator between Horeb and Zion is that here God’s people encounter him; otherwise the contrasts are stark.

1. The Horeb event was a “one-off” “day of assembly” (יום הקהל, 9:10; 10:4; 18:16); Zion is not only the location of the three annual national festivals, but also envisioned as hosting people continuously as they bring their firstfruits and their firstborn.

2. Horeb has two names; “the place” in Deuteronomy is not named at all; the divine host and the events that transpire there are more important than the location.

3. The Horeb encounter was a bilateral event involving only YHWH and his people in a faraway location; Zion is located within the Promised Land, the third element in the trilateral covenant relationship, and chosen specially by YHWH.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ On which see Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (2d ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013 [reprint of Baker, 2000 edition, with added Appendix]) 93–112.

4. Whereas the Horeb encounter happened on a mountain, and time will demonstrate “the place” also to be on a mountain,⁶⁷ Deuteronomy has no interest in its elevation. A cultic event will happen “before YHWH” (לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ) on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal (chap. 27), but like the Horeb encounter, this was envisioned as a “one-off” event and exhibited more links with the rituals at Horeb than those envisioned for Zion.⁶⁸

5. Whereas Horeb was declared to be a “holy place” by virtue of YHWH’s presence there (Exod 3:5; cf. 19:10–24), the only place that Deuteronomy modifies with the adjective “holy” is heaven, YHWH’s “holy dwelling place” (מִמַּעוֹן קֹדֶשׁ) (26:15). Otherwise Zion is characterized as “the place where YHWH’s name is imprinted” (לְשֹׁבֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם) (12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11).

6. Whereas the encounter with YHWH at Horeb produced terror among the Israelites, Zion is envisioned as awe-inspiring, but not at all terrifying; it will be a place of close fellowship, confidence, and celebration (שָׂמֵחַ, 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14; 26:11).

7. Whereas Deuteronomy speaks only of Moses’ official role at Horeb—though it is characterized as prophetic (18:15–18), rather than cultic⁶⁹—in Zion, Levitical priests will (1) carry the Ark; (2) stand before YHWH; (3) serve YHWH; (4) bless in YHWH’s name (10:8; 18:5–8); (5) pronounce oracular judgments in insoluble cases (17:8–13); and (6) receive the firstfruit offerings of worshipers (26:3–4).

8. Deuteronomy refers to the worshipers at Horeb only generically and collectively as “the people” (4:10, 33) and “your [i.e. Moses’] people” (9:12), and “your whole assembly” (בְּלִקְהֵלְכֶם, 5:22). In 23:2–4 and 9 the worshipers at “the house of YHWH” (בֵּית יְהוָה, cf. v. 19) are identified collectively as “the assembly of YHWH” (קְהֵל יְהוָה). In general the second person masculine verbs in texts like 12:1–14 assume the involvement of heads of households in worship at Zion, but Moses’ democratization of worship at “the place” is striking.

9. Whereas Exod 24:1–11 restricts the climactic phase of worship at Horeb—ascend up the mountain and eating in the presence of YHWH—to Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders—Deuteronomy invites entire households and communities, specifying men and women, sons and daughters, male and female servants, widows, the fatherless, aliens, and economically marginalized Levites into the presence of YHWH.⁷⁰

10. Regarding the status of the worshipers, Deut 4:11 locates the worshipers near the foot of the mountain, but no one except Moses is authorized to come any

⁶⁷ Zion is referred to as Mount Zion or otherwise associated with a mountain more than thirty times in the First Testament.

⁶⁸ See Block, “What Do These Stones Mean?” 17–41.

⁶⁹ Aaron’s only role in Deuteronomy involved his heterodox manufacture of the golden calf (9:20). The Sinai narrative in Exodus has Moses playing a leading role in the event, though Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, seventy elders, and some young men were involved in the ratification rituals (24:1–11). Exodus 19:22–24 makes passing references to priests, but they apparently were not involved in the ritual.

⁷⁰ Deut 12:12, 18; 14:27–29; 16:11, 14; 26:12–13; 31:12.

closer than that to YHWH. This image matches that of Exodus 19, which highlighted YHWH’s separation from the people. On the one hand, they needed three days to prepare for the meeting with YHWH (Exod 19:10–16); on the other hand, YHWH alone was at the top of the mountain, which was fenced off (19:12–13, 21–24), and the people were shielded from his lethal radiance by the “darkness, cloud, and gloom” (חֹשֶׁךְ עָנָן וְעַרְפָּל) (4:11). Deuteronomy envisions the people in Zion in the very presence of God, seeing his face.

11. Insofar as Exodus speaks of the status of the worshipers, their standing/role as “treasured possession” (סִגְלָה), “kingdom of priests” (מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים), and “holy nation” (גּוֹי קְדוֹשׁ) is cast as a future prospect (19:4–6). By contrast, Deuteronomy envisions these as a present reality; indeed it is as YHWH’s “sons” (בָּנִים) (אֲתֶם לַיהוָה, 14:1), “his holy people” (עַם קְדוֹשׁ אֶתְהָ לַיהוָה) (עַם סִגְלָה), specially chosen from all the peoples on earth (מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר) (עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה) that they are invited to eat at his table and celebrate in his presence (14:1–21).

12. Like Exodus 19–24, Moses’ radically theocentric characterization of the events of Horeb focused on YHWH’s actions: YHWH spoke to the people face to face (5:4), but he spoke from heaven and out of the midst of the fire (4:10, 13–14, 33, 36; 5:5, 6–27); YHWH cut the covenant with Israel (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בָרַת עִמָּנוּ בְרִית) (בְּחַרְבַּב, 5:2–3); and YHWH wrote the words of the covenant on two tablets of stone (4:13; 5:22; cf. 10:4). As we will see below, Moses’ portrayal of worship on Zion focuses on human actions, with YHWH’s involvement being assumed rather than described: YHWH receives the offerings of the people (12:6, 11; 15:19); YHWH hosts celebrations and fellowship meals eaten in his presence (12:7, 12, 16, 18, 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:10–11, 15–16); YHWH receives the ministry of the priests (10:8; 18:6–7; 26:2–3); YHWH reveals solutions to insoluble judicial problems (17:8–13); YHWH speaks through the reading of the Torah (31:9–13).

13. As for the human activities, at Horeb the people initially stood before YHWH (4:20, 11), but at the sound of his voice from the midst of the fire they shrank back in fear before him (5:5, 22–31; 18:16).⁷¹ Here the contrast with Zion may be greatest. While one of the goals of the appointments with YHWH at the central sanctuary was to learn to fear (יָרָא) YHWH,⁷² that fear has a fundamentally different character. In Zion there is no hint of terror in his presence. On the contrary, the encounter reflects total confidence, trust, security, and delight at coming before him. Twice Moses speaks explicitly of coming to the sanctuary “to see the face of YHWH your God” (16:16; 31:11). Apparently, Moses assumed this direct

⁷¹ Exodus 24 has the people involved in the covenant ratification rituals, assenting to the will of the divine Suzerain as revealed in “all the words of YHWH” (כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה), presumably “the [Ten] Words” [cf. Deut 4:13; 10:4] and “the judgments” (כָּל־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים), Exod 24:3) recorded in “the Covenant Document” (סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית), 24:7), and passively received the blood of the covenant (דַּם־הַבְּרִית) sprinkled on them (24:8). And when it came to eating in the presence of YHWH, the elders were amazed to survive the experience (24:10–11).

⁷² Cf. 14:23, לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד לְיְרֹאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־הַיּוֹמִים, 31:13, לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד לְיְרֹאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיכֶם, כָּל־הַיּוֹמִים אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם חַיִּים עַל־הָאָדָמָה.

encounter would happen when the Torah was heard.⁷³ The references to worshipers' activities at the central sanctuary reinforce the impression of intimacy and comfort in the presence of YHWH.

V. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

How shall we account for these fundamental differences between Israel's encounter with YHWH at Horeb and her future encounters at the place that he would choose for his name? Several possibilities exist. The Horeb experience was never intended to be normative or regular; this was a one-time event, whose function differed fundamentally from the anticipated regular worship of YHWH in the central sanctuary. One goal of this encounter was to introduce the Israelites more fully to YHWH, the God of the Exodus, and in so doing clarify the meaning of the divine name, YHWH (cf. 3:12–15).⁷⁴ To this point they had witnessed his awesome deeds against the Egyptians and in Israel's favor; deeds that had demonstrated that YHWH was God in heaven above and on earth below (4:32–39). However, the Horeb encounter declared his transcendent glory and ultimately his grace with unprecedented brilliance. Even though the Israelites became the covenant people, they should never take his grace for granted.

Second, Horeb had a particular axial significance in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption through his chosen people. If the exodus from Egypt marked the beginning of Israel's history as an independent people (Exod 12:2), Horeb was the place where YHWH formally declared Israel to be his covenant people. Through the ritual at Horeb those who had been the slaves (עֲבָדִים) of Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Deut 5:6; 6:12, 21; 7:8; 8:14; 13:6, 11) were inducted as privileged vassals (עֲבָדִים) of YHWH.⁷⁵ Here YHWH established with Abraham's descendants the covenant he had first made with the ancestor and transferred Abraham's commission to them (cf. Gen 12:1–3), in fulfillment of his promise in Gen 17:7: "I will establish my covenant (וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי) between me and you and your descend-

⁷³ As with the finite verb יִרְאֶה in 16:16, in 31:11 the Masoretes vocalized the present infinitive לִרְאוֹת as a niph'al form, i.e. "to appear," a reading that is followed by LXX, SamP, and most modern translations. However, not only is בּוֹא לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי, "to come to appear before," unnecessarily redundant, but also the natural preposition following this reading would be אֶל־פְּנֵי, literally, "to the face of" (Exod 23:17), or לִפְנֵי, "before." Treating אֶת as the direct object marker, the verb is better rendered transitively, "to see." The sense "appear" is communicated more conventionally by בּוֹא לִפְנֵי, "to come before" (Exod 28:30, 35; etc.). On the Masoretic vocalization as a secondary development to prevent people from imagining that YHWH's face could actually be seen, see Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 159; HALOT 1160; D. Vetter, "בּוֹא לִרְאוֹת," *TLOT* 3.1179–80.

⁷⁴ For a detailed analysis of this subject, see Austin Surls, "Finding the Meaning of the Divine Name in the Book of Exodus: From Etymology to Literary Onomastics." (Ph.D. diss., Wheaton College, 2015).

⁷⁵ In the Exodus narrative the choice of verb in YHWH's appeal to Pharaoh, "Let my people go that they may serve (עֲבַד) me" (Exod 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7), is deliberate, signaling something more specific than "worship," as the word is usually translated. This word anticipates the moment when Israel will become YHWH's vassals (עֲבָדִים).

ants after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be your God and the God of your offspring after you.”⁷⁶ This was that moment.

Third, as heirs of the ancestors, Israel was formally commissioned through the rituals at Horeb as YHWH’s agent of blessing to the world. While this ritual is perceived both as a marriage⁷⁷ and as an adoption ceremony,⁷⁸ Israel’s vassaldom was to be missional; Horeb marked the place of Israel’s ordination for priestly service. The Exodus narrative will ground the key concepts of “treasured possession” (סְגוּלָה), “kingdom of priests” (מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים), and “holy nation” (גּוֹי קְדוֹשׁ) in YHWH’s claim to the whole earth (בִּיְלִי כְּלֵיהֶאָרְצָי, Exod 19:4–6). In Deuteronomy, Moses says little explicitly of Israel’s mission, but picks up some of this vocabulary (סְגוּלָה, Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18), adapts the rest—Israel is a “holy people belonging to YHWH your God” (עַם קְדוֹשׁ אֲתָהּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ; 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19)—and then casts that mission in his own words: “And he will set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor (וּלְתִהְיֶה וְלִשְׁמֹר וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת); and for you to be a people holy to YHWH your God, as he had [previously] declared” (26:19).

The experience at Horeb did indeed involve an audience with YHWH and included ritual acts of worship. However, because Israel was not formally covenantally related to him and because their experience of YHWH to this point was limited, they rightly shrank back in fright at YHWH’s arrival on the mountain. While they had observed a microcosm of his glory in the pillar of cloud/fire (Exod. 13:21, 22; 14:19, 24), what happened at Horeb was unlike anything they had ever experienced, and as it turns out, was something the nation would never experience again. This was an inaugural moment.

By contrast, from the outset the experiences envisioned for the place that YHWH would choose to brand with his name were intended as ongoing means of celebrating YHWH’s saving and covenantal grace, and in maintaining the health of Israel’s relationship to their Redeemer. In that respect, Zion would be a fixed and permanent successor to the tabernacle, the symbol of YHWH’s presence among his people and the key to his dispensing of grace. In the grand divine scheme the

⁷⁶ While scholars and theologians generally draw sharp distinctions between the Abrahamic covenant and the covenant made with Israel at Horeb, this is unwarranted; they are one and the same. For fuller discussion of the relationship between the Abrahamic and Israelite covenants, see Daniel I. Block, “Covenant: A Whole Bible Perspective” (paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society in Baltimore, November, 2013).

⁷⁷ This perspective is implied in the Decalogue reference to inciting YHWH’s passion (קִנְיָה) through the worship of other deities (Exod 20:2–6; Deut 5:6–10), but explicitly expressed by later prophets (Hosea 1–3; Ezek 16:1–14).

⁷⁸ Hence the references to Israel as YHWH’s sons in Deut 14:1; etc. On “sonship” as a metaphor for vassaldom, see Jer 3:19–20. For discussion, see Block, “The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deut 26:16–19),” in *How I Love Your Torah!* 151–52; Seock-Tae Sohn, *The Divine Election of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 62–73; idem, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People: The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula,” in *Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine* (ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 355–72; Brittany Kim, “‘Enlarge the Place of Your Tent’: The Metaphorical World of Israel’s Household in the Book of Isaiah” (Ph.D. diss., Wheaton College, 2014) 31–34.

land of Canaan was to serve as new Eden, and the Israelites as a new humanity, creating an island of *shalom* in a fallen world and declaring to the nations what divine grace can accomplish. Within that agenda Horeb had no function, but Zion would be the link between heaven and earth. From here YHWH's grace should have flowed out to the entire world. While Israel as a nation failed in this vision, the eighth-century prophets looked forward to the day when Zion would be the spiritual capital of the earth:

- 1 In the last days the mountain of YHWH's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and peoples will stream to it.
- 2 Many nations will come and say,
 "Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH,
 to the temple of the God of Jacob.
 He will teach us his ways,
 so that we may walk in his paths."
The Torah will go out from Zion,
the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.
- 3 He will judge between many peoples
and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.
- 4 Everyone will sit under their own vine
and under their own fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
for YHWH Almighty has spoken.
- 5 All the nations may walk in the name of their gods,
but we will walk in the name of YHWH our God for ever and ever.
- 6 "In that day," declares YHWH, "I will gather the lame;
I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief.
- 7 I will make the lame my remnant,
those driven away a strong nation.
YHWH will rule over them in Mount Zion
from that day and forever.
- 8 As for you, watchtower of the flock,
stronghold of Daughter Zion,
the former dominion will be restored to you;
kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem."
(Mic 4:1–8, NIV, adapted; cf. Isa 2:1–4)

VI. EPILOGUE

Having established the distinctions between Horeb and Zion, we may have discovered a vital clue to the context of the only occurrence of the name “Zion” in the book of Hebrews.⁷⁹ Since through the work of Christ the new covenant is established and the ideals of God’s covenant with Israel are realized (Jer 31:27–40; Heb 8:10–13), there is no need for God’s people to go back to Horeb and start all over again. On the contrary, the Hebrew Christians

have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than [the sacrifices] of Abel. (Heb 12:22–24, NRSV)⁸⁰

In Christ, the shadow institutions have been replaced by the real, and the inaugural observances of Horeb have been rendered *passé*. Nevertheless, much of what is said here of NT believers could have been said of ancient Israelites, as in the following paraphrase:

You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the earthly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable host in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,⁸¹ and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to YHWH, the one who has established you as his covenant people, and to the sprinkled blood through which your forgiveness is assured.

⁷⁹ For full discussion of the relationship between Sinai and Mount Zion, that is, the heavenly Jerusalem, in Hebrews 12, see Kibbe, “Godly Fear or Ungodly Failure?” Kibbe has not considered adequately the data concerning “Zion” in Deuteronomy.

⁸⁰ On this interpretation of κρείττον λαλοῦντι παρὰ τὸν ἄβελ, see the postscript to Block, “Covenant” 36–38.

⁸¹ Cf. Exod 32:32–33; Ps 69:29[28]; Dan 12:1. The links between the Hebrews text and Ps 69:29[28] are especially striking: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous” (NRSV).

Table 1: Horeb and Zion: A Comparison*
 (Unless otherwise specified all references are to Deuteronomy.)

Feature	Horeb	Zion
Event	“Day of the assembly” (9:10; 10:4; 18:18)	Annual pilgrimage festivals, three times a year (Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot) (16:16) Time of firstfruits (18:4–6; 26:2), bringing the firstborn (12:6, 17; 14:23; 15:19–20), and the tithe (14:23–24)
Name of the Place	Sinai (33:2); Horeb	Unnamed (“the place”)
Location	Vicinity of Seir, Paran (33:2) Eleven days’ journey from Kadesh-barnea (1:1–2)	In the land (26:3) In one of the tribal territories (12:5, 14)
Topography	On the mountain (5:4, 5, 22; 9:10; 10:4)	Never specified
Characterization of the Place	Holy (Exod 3:5) Sanctified by YHWH’s glorious presence (Exodus 19)	Nondescript Where name is imprinted (12:5; 12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11) Cf. “your holy abode” (Exod 15:13) Cf. “look down from your holy dwelling place, from heaven” (26:15)
Atmosphere	Terror (4:33; 5:5, 23–27; 18:16) Fear (אָרֵר, in the sense of “fright”)	Joy and celebration (12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14; 26:11) Trusting awe (אָרֵר, in the sense of “reverence and awe”)
Officials	Only Moses was officially involved, but his role was prophetic, rather than priestly (18:15–18) Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Nadab and Abihu, 70 elders (Exod 24:1, 9) The nobles of the sons of Israel (Exod 24:11) Passing references to priests (Exod 19:22, 24) and Aaron (Exod 19:24), but they do not participate in the ritual Young men, who offer the burnt and fellowship offerings (Exod 24:5)	Elders and Levitical priests receive the Torah (31:9) Levitical priests (1) carry the Ark; (2) stand before YHWH; (3) serve YHWH; (4) bless in YHWH’s name (10:8; 18:5–8); (5) pronounce oracular judgments in insoluble cases (17:8–13); (6) receive the firstfruit offerings of worshippers (26:3–4)
Identity of the Worshipers	The people (4:10, 33) “Your people” (9:12) “Your whole assembly” (5:22)	All Israel (32:11) “The assembly of YHWH” (23:2–4, 9) Heads of households, sons and daughters, male and female servants, Levites (12:12, 18; 16:11, 14) Men and women, children, aliens (31:12) Widows, fatherless, aliens (14:27–29; 16:11, 14; 26:12–13)
Status of the Worshipers and Their Relationship to YHWH	Status/role as “treasured possession, kingdom of priests, holy nation,” is a future prospect (Exod 19:4–6) Separated from YHWH: (1) three days’ preparation required (Exod 19:10–16)	Status as “sons of YHWH,” chosen to be “holy people belonging to YHWH,” “treasured people” chosen out of all the peoples on earth, is a present reality (7:6; 14:1–2; 26:18–19; cf. Exod 28:36) Direct and immediate access to YHWH

	<p>(2) at the top of the mountain (3) which was fenced off (Exod 19:12–13, 21–24) (4) shielded from YHWH by “darkness, cloud, and gloom” (4:11) At the foot of the mountain (4:11) Only Moses goes higher up the mountain (Exodus 19)</p>	<p>without barriers or an intermediary, to eat and celebrate before YHWH (12:7, 12, 16, 18, 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:11, 16; but cf. 27:7)</p>
<p>Divine Activities on the Occasion[s]</p>	<p>Focus is on YHWH’s actions: YHWH cut the covenant with Israel (5:2–3) YHWH spoke to the people “face to face,” but from the midst of the fire (4:10, 13–14, 33, 36; 5:5, 6–27) YHWH wrote the words of the covenant on two tablets of stone (4:13; 5:22; cf. 10:4)</p>	<p>Focus is on human actions: YHWH receives the offerings of the people (12:6, 11; 15:19) YHWH hosts celebrations and fellowship meals eaten in his presence (12:7, 12, 16, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:10–11, 15–16) YHWH receives the ministry of the priests (10:8; 18:6–7; 26:2–3) YHWH reveals solutions to insoluble judicial problems (17:8–13) YHWH speaks through the reading of the Torah (31:9–13)</p>
<p>Human Activities on the Occasion[s]</p>	<p>Stood before YHWH (see below) Shrank back in fear before YHWH (5:5, 22–31; 18:16) Participated in covenant ratification rituals and were amazed that they survived (Exod 24:1–11)</p>	<p>Making pilgrimages to the place (12:5; 16:1–8 [Passover]; 16:9–12 [Shavuot]; 16:13–17; 31:9–13 [Sukkot]). Entering there (12:5; cf. 23:21; 31:16, of entering the land) Bringing offerings there (12:6, 11; 26:2) Eating and celebrating YHWH’s blessing of their work in his presence (12:7, 12, 16, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:11, 16; but cf. 27:7) “Seeing the face of YHWH” (31:11; cf. 16:16) Hearing the Torah read (31:11), and thereby learning to fear YHWH (14:23; 31:9–13) Recalling YHWH’s saving and providential grace (26:1–11) Demonstrating covenant commitment to YHWH horizontally by gifts of charity to the marginalized (26:12; cf. 10:12–22) Demonstrating communal solidarity by celebrating with their children, servants, the Levites, and the alien (12:12; 14:27–29; 16:11) Settling legal disputes before the Levitical priest/judge (17:8–13) Observing Levites serving in the name of YHWH, standing before him, and blessing the people in his name (10:8; 18:6–8).</p>