

KADESH INFIDELITY OF DEUTERONOMY 1 AND ITS SYNOPTIC IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: *New challenges call for new versions of redemptive narratives. Divine action, and all that this means, seems to initiate an inexhaustible resource for scriptural instruction. The stunning failure of Israel at Kadesh repeatedly appears in synoptic narratives within Torah, prophetic and liturgical retrospectives, apostolic instruction, and manifold brief allusions in Scripture. Repackaging the infidelity at Kadesh in Deuteronomy 1 signals the enduring relevance of God's judgment as motivation for crises of faith. Harmonistic and/or excavative approaches to synoptic narratives presuppose incoherence, disunity, and contradiction, whether real or apparent. By contrast, the present narrative-critical approach begins with the coherence and unity of Numbers 13–14 and Deuteronomy 1. These competing approaches need to be evaluated based upon evidence. The results of this study include implications that apply to other synoptic narrative contexts of Scripture.*

Key words: *Deuteronomy 1, Numbers 13–14, Kadesh, Moses, synoptic narratives, harmonistic approaches, excavative approaches, Aristotle, scriptural use of Scripture*

I. INTRODUCTION

Narrative function determines narrative shape. Redemptive events have more to teach and invite manifold representations. Deuteronomy 1 houses enduring instruction to a new faith-challenged generation by zeroing in on personal responsibility and (in)fideliy under pressure at Kadesh. Deuteronomy 1 augments individual dimensions of the story of collective failure in Numbers 13–14. The new generation should not simply blame the older generation *en masse* but needs to learn that lust for revolution grows strong in the privacy of one's own tent.

Scriptural synoptic narratives illustrate that new challenges call for new versions of old stories. Divine action, and all that this means, initiates a seemingly inexhaustible resource for scriptural instruction. The stunning failure of Israel at Kadesh repeatedly serves in synoptic narratives within Torah (Numbers 13–14; 32:8–14; Deut 1:19–45), prophetic and liturgical retrospectives (Ezek 20:15–16; Pss 95:10–11; 106:24–26; Neh 9:17), apostolic instruction (1 Cor 10:5; Heb 3:7–4:7; Jude 5), and manifold brief allusions in Scripture.¹ Recycling, repackaging, and repurposing the infidelity at Kadesh signal the enduring relevance of divine judgment against covenantal people in revolt. This study will work out implications of the

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¹ See Num 26:65; Deut 1:2–3; 2:14–15; 8:2; 9:2, 23; Josh 5:6; 14:6–9; Amos 2:10; 5:25; Ps 78:32–33; Acts 7:36, 42; 13:18; cf. Deut 2:7; 8:4; 29:5; Josh 11:21–23; 15:14; Judg 1:10.

version of the Kadesh rebellion in Deuteronomy 1 with special attention to its synoptic function.

Deuteronomy features eight synoptic narratives (see Table 1). These synoptic narratives serve as an important template for others in Scripture.

Table 1: Eight Synoptic Narratives in Deuteronomy

1:6–18: appointing judges (Exodus 18; Numbers 11)	3:21–29; 31:1–8, 14, 23: commission of Joshua (Num 27:12–23; Josh 1:1–9; cf. Deut 32:44–47; 34:9)
1:19–45: rebellion at Kadesh (Numbers 13–14; cf. Num 32:8–14)	5:1–33: revelation at Horeb (Exodus 19–20)
1:46–2:23: not warring against Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Numbers 21)	9:7–10:11: rebellion at Horeb (Exodus 32)
2:24–3:20: conquest of Transjordan (Numbers 21)	23:3–6: Balaam and Moabites (Numbers 22–24)

Many divine redemptive actions appear in multiple biblical narratives. For the purposes of this study, any scriptural narrative version of an event also housed in at least one other scriptural narrative, including identifiable verbal parallels, can be referred to as “synoptic”—“to see together.” Even a modest amount of verbal parallel in synoptic narratives virtually guarantees some kind of relationship—whether direct or indirect. Synoptic narratives make up a vital subset of the scriptural use of scripture and appear extensively across the Christian Bible.²

The next two sections take up several interpretive issues under two heads, namely, synoptic narratives as problems versus synoptic narratives as advantages, the second of which seeks to set up an approach to the revolt at Kadesh in Deuteronomy 1. Evidence from Scripture will be used to evaluate these competing approaches to synoptic narratives with a brief conclusion.

II. SYNOPTIC PROBLEMS

Viewing synoptic contexts of Scripture as problems to be solved long ago became an unquestioned norm. This needs to be observed before identifying the underlying issue. Approaching synoptic contexts as problems activates harmonic

² Synoptic narratives include: (1) Gen 1:26–28; 2:4//5:1–2; (2) Gen 24:12–21//24:42–48; (3) Gen 42:7–38; 43:1–8//44:18–34; (4) Exodus 25–31//35–40; (5) Josh 14:13–15//15:13–14//Judg 1:10, 20; (6) Josh 15:15–19, 63//Judg 1:11–15, 21; (7) Josh 1:10; 16:10//Judg 1:27, 29; (8) Josh 24:29–31//Judg 2:7–9; (9) 2 Samuel 5–24//1 Chronicles 11–21; (10) 1 Kings 3–11//2 Chronicles 1–9; (11) 1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25//2 Chronicles 10–36; (12) 2 Kings 18–20//Isaiah 36–39; (13) 2 Kings 25//Jeremiah 52 (cf. Jeremiah 39); (14) Ezra 1:1–4//2 Chron 36:22–23 (cf. Ezra 5:13–15; 6:3–5); (15) Ezra 2//Nehemiah 7; (16) Acts 9:1–18//22:3–17//26:4–20; (17) Acts 10:1–6//10:30–33//11:13–14 (cf. 10:22); (18) Acts 10:9–16//11:5–14 (cf. 10:28; 15:7–11). Also see numerous synoptic contexts in Matt, Mark, and Luke, and a few in John. For eight synoptic narratives in Deuteronomy, see Table 1. In this study so-called “doublets” do not count as synoptic (e.g. “she’s my sister” stories in Genesis 12; 20; 26).

and excavative impulses.³ One response tries to hold together and the other to disassemble.

Carl F. Keil harmonizes apparent incongruities along the way in his commentary. Note several difficulties he works out in Deuteronomy 1:⁴

- The people request and Moses approves scouts to do reconnaissance of the land in Deuteronomy 1, which does not appear in the fuller account of Numbers 13 (Deut 1:22).
- Deuteronomy 1 recounts Moses's appeal to stay the people's rebellion, which has been omitted from Numbers 14 since it was unsuccessful (Deut 1:29–31).
- Even though Moses blames the people that he cannot enter the land in this context, it happens many decades later, “for Moses did not intend to teach the people history and chronology” (Num 20:12; Deut 1:37).
- When Moses blamed the people for his own punishment, he did not want to excuse himself but to keep a strong focus on the people's guilt, and he later takes responsibility (Deut 1:37; 32:51).
- When the text says, “you came back” (שוב), it does not mean to Kadesh or that the people experienced “true conversion to repentance” but that they gave up their impulsive military attack (Deut 1:45).

But Keil has limits on how much creativity should be used to harmonize details. He disapproves of another commentator who explained that some of the people stayed at Kadesh (“you”) and the others went wandering in the wilderness (“we”) to resolve the tension between remaining in Kadesh thirty-eight years versus wandering in the wilderness thirty-eight years after leaving Kadesh and/or camping at Kadesh twice (Num 20:1; Deut 2:14).⁵ Keil's concern to harmonize stems naturally from his approach to the Mosaic authorship of Numbers and Deuteronomy.⁶

³ The term “excavative” which gets at the agenda of many sorts of diachronic critical studies of Scripture comes from Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (rev. ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2011), 14.

⁴ See C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols. (Commentary on the Old Testament; trans. James Martin; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 3:287, 288, 289, 290.

⁵ See *ibid.*, 3:291. Harmonization of apparent incongruities stands at the head of the agenda of John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, 4 vols. (trans. Charles William Bingham; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855). He harmonizes different issues than Keil in some cases: Deuteronomy 1 offers fuller detail of the impulse for the scouting expedition coming from the people and then affirmed by God (Deut 1:22; Num 13:1–3); Caleb was not alone but spoke also for Joshua (Num 13:30); Moses rearranged the order of recounting the negative details of the scouts' reports (Deut 1:28); Moses omits the appeal of Joshua and Caleb to dissuade the people from rebellion in the interest of brevity (Deut 1:29; cf. Num 14:6–9; see 4:53–54, 61, 69, etc.). Harmonizing apparent incongruities in Numbers 13–14//Deuteronomy 1 includes many of the same strategies that are used on the gospels—omissions, expansions, rearrangement—by Tatian, Augustine, and others. On resolving Mark 6:51–52 vs. Matt 14:33 by rearrangement, see *The Earliest Life of Christ Ever Compiled from the Four Gospels being the Diatessaron of Tatian* (trans. J. Hamlyn Hill; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1894), 118 [XIX.10–13]; and on resolving apparent incongruities of the infancy narratives, see Augustine, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Harmony of the Evangelists* (trans. S. D. F. Salmond; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), 209–20.

⁶ See Keil, *Pentateuch*, 1:17–28. Keil regards Deuteronomy 34 as post-Mosaic (1:27–28).

The usual sorts of harmonization include X=Y (this statement/person/event is the same as its counterpart) and X+Y (this statement/person/event completes its counterpart to offer a fuller view of it). These traditional “local” harmonistic solutions were “so natural that it is doubtful the exegetes were even aware of it.”⁷ The harmonistic impulse stems, in part, from canon.⁸ Harmonizations of the X+Y sort may be called “additive” by filling in blanks with “scenarios” to resolve apparent contradictions.⁹

Zealous harmonization stands as the fundamental liability of the approach according to its most seasoned advocates. Too much creative harmonization tends to undermine the point of the entire enterprise. The worst offenders overuse the kind of additive harmonization that conjectures multiple occurrences of similar events to handle synoptic differences.¹⁰ Excesses are legion because “harmonization is not hard to do, can always be done, can usually be done in several different ways, and cannot ordinarily be shown right or wrong.”¹¹ Raymond Dillard speaks of an “uneasy feeling” due to “solutions” that seem “forced and contrived.”¹² Ronald Youngblood offers sage advice that some difficulties are better left “unresolved than to resort to forced harmonization.”¹³ While adjudicating controls needed for responsible harmonization falls outside the present study, Dillard’s desire to convert synoptic problems into “opportunities” comes close to the argument below. Dillard notes, without commenting on the irony, “Often the difficulties that are grist for harmonization provide keys to the author’s larger purpose.”¹⁴

Samuel Driver represents early source-critical interests when he regards Deuteronomy as dependent on JE (the earlier combined sources of the Yahwist and Elohimist) and independent of P (the later priestly source combined with the holi-

⁷ Eran Viezel, “Context, Harmonization, and the Uniqueness of the Commentaries to the Book of Chronicles,” *JSQ* 22 (2015): 5; and on X+Y and X=Y, see 7. The special case of Chronicles requires other general solutions related to its manifold special features relative to its synoptic counterparts—Chronicle’s sources, agenda to elevate David, etc. (34, n. 97).

⁸ John Barton remarks, “When texts are canonical, we are constrained to read them canonically, that is, as compatible with other canonical texts and with the religious system within which they are canonical” (“Canon and Content,” in Timothy H. Lim, ed., *When Texts Are Canonized* [BJS 359; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2017], 90).

⁹ Raymond B. Dillard, “Harmonization: A Help and a Hindrance,” in Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, and a Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 152.

¹⁰ See Craig L. Blomberg, “The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 144, 158, 160–61, *et passim*. Even among advocates of harmonization there is general distaste for solutions like Jesus raising Jairus’s daughter twice or Peter denying the Lord nine times as proposed by Andreas Ostander (1537); see Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer, “The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction to Its Key Terms, Concepts, Figures, and Hypotheses,” in *The Synoptic Problem: Four Views* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 4. For the much-cited and more restrained multiplication of Peter’s denials to six times, see Harold Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 174–76.

¹¹ Dillard, “Harmonization,” 157.

¹² See *ibid.*

¹³ Ronald Youngblood, “From Tatian to Swanson, from Calvin to Bendavid: The Harmonization of Biblical History,” *JETS* 25 (1982): 423.

¹⁴ Dillard, “Harmonization,” 162.

ness source) in the historical sections “exactly in the same manner” as the legislative sections.¹⁵ From this starting point Driver handles elements which cannot be harmonized: the people’s initiative for scouts to do reconnaissance converted to divine initiative (Deut 1:22; → P = Num 13:1); Caleb alone allowed to enter land expanded to include Joshua (JE = Num 14:24; Deut 1:36; → P = Num 14:30); Moses’s forbidden entry into the land because of the people leading to Joshua’s nomination converted to Moses denied entry because of his own presumption (Deut 1:37–38; cf. 3:26; 4:21; → P = Num 20:12; 27:14; Deut 32:51); anxiety over captivity of wives and children abridged to anxiety over captivity of children (JE = Num 14:3; → Deut 1:39; P = Num 14:31).¹⁶

If detecting multiple versions of narratives as sources of the Pentateuch solves apparent incongruities it creates a new problem of explaining the circumstances that led to combining competing versions, whether independent or supplementary. A long parade of proposals—some entirely theoretical and others based on analogy to empirical models from other ancient contexts—have identified why Deuteronomy begins with the sort of narratives found therein.¹⁷ Consider several examples.

- Von Rad suggested that Levitical sermons explain the homiletical flavor of the laws and narratives of Deuteronomy.¹⁸
- Noth claimed an exilic “author” drafted narratives of the Mosaic period as a prologue to the Deuteronomistic history he had compiled.¹⁹
- Nicholson proposed Deuteronomy as theological retrojection of the prophetic tradition of the northern kingdom imported to Judah when Israel collapsed.²⁰
- Weinfeld popularized seeing vassal treaties of Esarhaddon (seventh century BCE) to explain the basic shape of Deuteronomy when it was spon-

¹⁵ S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906), xiv. For the opposite approach, namely, Deuteronomy 1–3 reworks tetrateuchal accounts, see John E. Harvey, *Retelling the Torah: The Deuteronomistic Historian’s Use of Tetrateuchal Narratives* (JSOTSS 403; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 7–32. Unhelpfully, Harvey brackets out evidence that does not fit with his proposal as later editorial insertions (18–19). For a view that the narratives of Numbers and Deuteronomy have a complex relationship of mutual influence and multistage development, see Nathan MacDonald, “Deuteronomy and Numbers: Common Narratives concerning Wilderness and Transjordan,” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012): 141–65.

¹⁶ See Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 22, 26, 28. Driver speculates at length regarding one versus two encampments at Kadesh and, if one, whether Israel departed at the beginning or end of the thirty-eight years (32–33).

¹⁷ Tigay promotes the idea of “empirical models” of available ancient literary sources to compensate by analogy for the absence of evidence of the sources for the Pentateuch. See Jeffrey H. Tigay, ed., *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985).

¹⁸ See Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (London: SCM, 1953), 67–68; idem, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 24–28.

¹⁹ See Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSS 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981), 26–35.

²⁰ See E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 122–24.

sored by the Judean court (along with wisdom flavoring adapted from Proverbs).²¹

- Tigay suggests that the anthological combination of first-person narratives and preaching of the prophetic writings offers a model for producing similar literature in ancient Israel, like Deuteronomy.²²
- Levinson and Stackert claim Deuteronomy's narratives and laws replace earlier counterparts by "direct literary dependence" on the Neo-Assyrian Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon and the Covenant Code (Exod 20:23–23:19). The "replacement" was later undermined when incompatible and mutually exclusive legal and narrative traditions were compiled into the Torah via a "compromise" during the Persian era.²³

Joshua Berman valorizes contradiction as the intentional contribution of the author of Deuteronomy in order to defeat proposals by scholars he loosely refers to as "source critics." Berman detects the intentional use of contradictory narrative prologues as the conventional way to signal new and renewed political relations within ancient Hittite treaties as identical in function to synoptic narratives of Deuteronomy. Treaty senders purposely contradicted their own and/or their ancestors' previous treaty narratives as political posturing which, according to Berman, treaty recipients dutifully compared to previous treaties to identify contradictions and (hopefully) accept the newer version.²⁴ For Berman, the inconsistencies of Deuteronomy stand at the heart of its intended outcomes. Berman lists a number of "bald contradictions" in Deuteronomy's versus Numbers's accounts of rebellion at Kadesh designed to emphasize Israel's blame.²⁵

- The people seek to send spies rather than divine initiative (Deut 1:20–21; Num 13:1–2).

²¹ See Moshe Weinfeld, "Traces of Assyrian Treaty Formulae in Deuteronomy," *Bib* 46 (1965): 417–27; idem, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 59–80, 69–74; idem, "Deuteronomy, Book of," *ABD* 2:170, 181–82; idem, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 6–9.

²² See Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Anthology in the Torah and the Question of Deuteronomy," in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature* (ed. David Stern; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2–31; idem, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xxiv–xxv.

²³ See Bernard M. Levinson, "The Right Chorale": *Studies in Biblical Law and Interpretation* (FAT 54; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008; repr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 138–43, 184–90; idem, "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty as a Source for the Canon Formula in Deuteronomy 13:1," *JAOJ* 130 (2010): 337–47; idem and Jeffrey Stackert, "Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty: Deuteronomy 13 and the Composition of Deuteronomy," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012): 123–40; Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson, "How, When, Where, and Why Did the Pentateuch Become the Torah?" in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 1–8. For a counterpoint, see Markus Zehnder, "Building on Stone? Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon's Loyalty Oaths (Part 1): Some Preliminary Observations," *BBR* 19 (2009): 341–74.

²⁴ See Joshua A. Berman, "Histories Twice Told: Deuteronomy 1–3 and the Hittite Treaty Tradition," *JBL* 132 (2013): 229–50; idem, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), chaps. 3, 4 (63–103; primarily adapted from article cited in this note).

²⁵ See Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah*, 96–98.

- The spies only speak thirteen positive words within a first-person reminiscence recast in a new sequence instead of seventy-one inclusive of both positive and discouraging words within third-person prose (Deut 1:25–27; Num 13:28–33).
- Moses offers strong leadership versus Moses and Aaron displaying “weak leadership” by falling on their faces (Deut 1:29–33; Num 14:5).
- Deuteronomy does not include the account of Moses’s prayer or divine forgiveness (Num 14:11–25).
- Moses blames the people for his own punishment (Deut 1:37).
- Yahweh warns the people not to make a hasty invasion of the land instead of Moses communicating the divine will (Deut 1:42; Num 14:41).

Before offering an alternative a couple of distinctions need to be made. Comparison of Scripture to potentially similar ancient writings naturally accompanies the pressing needs of exegesis entirely apart from source and/or redaction criticism. Study of comparable ancient writings offers insight into the Torah as it stands as much as why it has been assembled as it is. The present argument does not take issue with important debates regarding ancient analogues to Deuteronomy or Torah (e.g. models of ancient treaties, anthologies, etc.).

It is easy to affirm the essential place of theoretical constructs to suggest authorship. The present study focuses on the alleged underlying problems that give rise to theoretical solutions. Harmonizing and disassembling impulses stem from the goal of identifying the authorship of Deuteronomy and Torah when they are regarded as incoherent, disunited, and/or contradictory—whether real or apparent.²⁶ Synoptic contexts naturally heighten impulses to handle narrative incoherence, disunity, and/or contradiction.

The present argument narrowly focuses on the function of synoptic stories as narrative prior to authorial questions. Moving immediately from incoherent text to harmonistic or excavative solutions before identifying narrative function of the resultant text risks fixing the wrong problems. Sometimes the urgent needs generated by harmonistic and excavative impulses solve pseudo-problems that get lumped together with actual difficulties. Stackert makes a subtle distinction speaking of “cohesion” as related to texts themselves versus “coherence” which can be projected upon contradictory texts by readers.²⁷ Though disentangling textual cohesion from the readerly perception of coherence slices things too thin for the broad point being made in the present argument, deciding what exactly counts as non-cohesion/incoherence hits the mark. To exaggerate the issue: If some harmonistic practitioners claim synoptic versions are saying the same thing and if some excava-

²⁶ Jeffrey Stackert states, “Compositional analysis requires a cultivated resistance to the human impulse toward coherence” (“Pentateuchal Coherence and the Science of Reading,” in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America* [ed. Jan C. Getz, et al.; FAT 111; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016], 268); similarly, see Levinson, “*The Right Chorale*,” 7–24. For a helpful overview of harmonistic versus critical approaches to the parallel narratives of Deuteronomy 1–3, see Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 422–29.

²⁷ See Stackert, “Pentateuchal Coherence and the Science of Reading,” 254–55.

tive practitioners claim that nearly any difference contradicts unity and cohesion/coherence, then the present argument claims there is more than one way to tell a story.

In sum, the question of authorship—whether by an individual or by collaboration, whether all at once or over time, and all that these contingencies mean—falls outside or after the present study. The argument herein takes no issue with either the goals or methods of responsible harmonistic and disassembling approaches. The disagreement turns on the premise of these approaches. The present concern is narrative function. To put a sharp point on the contention here: Harmonizing and disassembling impulses *as they are often practiced* require ignoring, suppressing, and/or denying the narrativity of ancient narrative. The absence of adequately handling narrative function underlies the insistence on viewing synoptic contexts as problems.

III. SYNOPTIC ADVANTAGES

The literary turn, canonical approaches, and renewal of theological exegesis have shifted the focus of many scholars of all stripes toward narrative-critical concerns.²⁸ Narrative critical research on the texts themselves releases tensions of many apparent incongruities which so bother harmonizing and excavative approaches. The present study focuses on interpretive advantages of synoptic narratives by investigating the Kadesh rebellion of Deuteronomy 1 as a subset of the scriptural use of Scripture from a narrative-critical perspective.

Commonplace ancient narrative conventions like selection, abridgment, representative spokespersons, revoicing narration, direct discourse versus narrative action versus narrative background commentary, and (non)sequential rearrangement expunge most of the supposed difficulties of Deut 1:19–46.²⁹ It could be objected at this point that this sounds like “harmonization.”³⁰ Observing these ancient

²⁸ Representative literary and canonical approaches to the Hebrew Bible include, respectively, Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987) and Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). See also J. Daniel Hays, “An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism,” *BSac* 166 (2009): 3–18; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Introduction: What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19–25.

²⁹ For an evaluative summary of the function of embedded discourse in Deuteronomy see “Appendix: Quoted Direct Speech in Deuteronomy,” in George W. Savran, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 113–16, 142–43.

³⁰ I am grateful for blind peer-review feedback that raised this objection. Though narrative-critical approaches overlap more with harmonistic than excavative approaches, the differences remain substantial. The differences between harmonization as it is often practiced and narrative critical approaches relate to starting points and solutions. Harmonizers start with a view that differences in scriptural synoptic contexts represent apparent problems—disunity, incoherence, and contradiction—that need to be harmonized. A narrative critical approach begins with a view of the coherence and unity of the synoptic counterparts based on ancient narrative conventions like those discussed in this section. Harmonizers use evidence when available but also often use theoretical scenarios to explain how the apparent problems may be harmonized. A narrative-critical approach is limited to empirical evidence like ancient narrative conventions and cannot explain all difficulties. The citations above of Dillard and Youngblood

narrative conventions may be part of the work of harmonistic approaches. But when a harmonistic approach uses theoretical scenarios beyond the scriptural evidence, it parts company with a narrative-critical approach. In any case, ordinary ancient literary conventions invite an initial approach to Deuteronomy and Torah and their synoptic contexts as coherent and unified. The natural differences of synoptic contexts put the narrativity of narrative on full display.³¹ This does not give license to ignore actual difficulties. On the contrary, recognizing conventional ancient narrative maneuvers helps dispense with pseudo-problems to reveal real difficulties. For example, the case of Moses blaming the people for his punishment remains a special case that requires close attention (see below).

To get at advantages of synoptic narratives, two general concerns can be framed as questions. Why retell stories? How do synoptic narratives function? In this section, these issues can be addressed concerning antiquity and Scripture, at least in broad terms. In the next section all of this will be applied to Deuteronomy 1.

Why did ancients, including scriptural narrators, so often repackage stories? Gary Knoppers investigated how an understanding of ancient literary *mimesis* (imitation) could benefit biblical research. He cast the net widely across all genres through the centuries of antiquity—though his discussion primarily relates to Mediterranean contexts from the classical to the late ancient periods.³² Knoppers's study of *mimesis* offers two observations that bear on scriptural synoptic narratives in general but with only marginal application to Deuteronomy 1. First, ancients reworked older revered literary pieces because they esteemed antiquity.³³ While this refers mostly to respect for ancient literature with distinguished aesthetic value or importance, it partially overlaps with emerging scriptural authority—sometimes referred to as canonical consciousness. Second, authors of derivative works did not seek to repeat but modify, develop, and sometimes even compete with parent texts.³⁴ The narrator of Deuteronomy describes its purpose as “explaining” To-

get at the basic elements of harmonization as it is often practiced that narrative-critical approaches seek to avoid.

³¹ Narrativity—the essence of narrative interpretation and presentation of events—does not refer to literary or artistic dimensions of story *per se*. Not all scriptural narratives operate identically or at the same literary register. Just the opposite. In the wide spectrum of narrative artistry from the literary graces of Genesis, Ruth, or John on one side all the way to the near absence of editorialization to stitch together sources in Ezra-Nehemiah, each narrative in between needs to be approached on its own terms. Calibrating artistic literary register needs to be set aside here to attend to the function of narratives in synoptic contexts.

³² See Gary N. Knoppers, “The Synoptic Problem? An Old Testament Perspective,” *BBR* 19 (2009): 11–34. Knoppers discusses why ancients intentionally adopt and adapt style, genre, and works, without explicit citation (15). In such contexts, disputes often arose on other mimetic practices like parody and plagiarism (25–28). Knoppers's study probably offers greater gains to studying so-called rewritten Scripture, like Jubilees, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, and some of the rewritten pentateuchal scrolls of Qumran (e.g. 11QT, 4Q158), several of which he lists (23–24). For another more general discussion of ancient mimetic practices and synoptic contexts, see John Van Seters, “Creative Imitation in the Hebrew Bible,” *Studies in Religion* 29 (2000): 395–409.

³³ See Knoppers, “Synoptic Problem,” 18–19.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, 16–17.

rah—inclusive of narrative and legal instruction (Deut 1:5).³⁵ This fits with the general drift of esteem and interpretive advancement.

How do synoptic narratives function? Here assistance comes from Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE), which intermittently focuses on multiple versions of the same plot. Though Aristotle typically limits his agenda to comparative evaluation of aesthetics, tone, and genre, his sensible observations can be constructively applied to interpreting synoptic narrative contexts in Scripture. Each of these observations point to advantages for interpreting synoptic narratives.

First, Aristotle observes that authors select which portion of the plot to dramatize (*Poetics* 1456a, 6–9).³⁶ The choice of what narrators exclude could be as important as what they include. The normal invisibility of selection of plot segment becomes visible by comparison in synoptic narratives.

Second, authors arrange episodes and determine their focus—biographical, action, theme, etc. (1459a, 32–34). Arrangement includes chronological versus dischronological, jump-cuts, as well as decisions of discourse form that overlap with voicing (see next point). The comparative opportunity of synoptic contexts heightens the precision for evaluating the choice of narrative arrangement.

Third, Aristotle notes that authors select how to voice narration and embedded discourses so that even one different word within shared verbal parallels can shift the entire narrative (1458b, 18–21). Narrators decide on action versus narrative comment versus embedded discourse. Detailed evaluation of differences between synoptic contexts at the level of discourse analysis provides an obvious way to work toward positive interpretive outcomes. If a story could be told in alternative ways, differences provide points of reference for detecting the function of the context in question. Identifying and evaluating synoptic differences shines light on details, which can offer mutual enrichment to exegesis of both contexts.

³⁵ Some commentators regard “the Torah” (הַתּוֹרָה) in Deut 1:5 as referring only to the legal materials of Deuteronomy 12–28. Working backward, however, Deut 6:1 heads the parenthesis (Deuteronomy 6–11) with Yahweh’s command for Moses “to teach” Israel. Deut 4:44 heads the major middle section of the book as “now, this is the Torah” but then begins with narrative which, along with the parenthesis, sets up legal instruction (Deuteronomy 5; 6–11). In much the same way Deut 1:5 speaks of Moses explaining Torah in the heading of the book which begins with numerous narratives. The function of t/Torah in Deut 1:5 and 4:44 within the framework of Deuteronomy as context seems inclusive of narrative and legal reinterpretation. For commentators who regard Torah in 1:5 as referring only to legal instruction esp. in Deuteronomy 12–28, see Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 17; Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), on 1:5; for those who regard it as referring comprehensively to legal, parenetic, and narrative instruction, see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 129; Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 79; and as referring to law of chaps. 12–28, exhortation of 5–11, and “perhaps also to the didactic narrative and exhortations of 1:6–4:40,” Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 5. Wevers deduces that the LXX of 1:5 refers to all of 1:6–28:69 by repeating “in the land of Moab” in 29:1 [28:69 MT], thus νόμος in a broad inclusive sense; see John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* (SCS 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 4–5.

³⁶ See Aristotle, *Poetics* (ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell; LCL 199; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). While Aristotle primarily interacts with fictional narratives, he explains that the same principles apply to historical narratives. “The poet should be more a maker of plots than of verses ... even should his poetry concern actual events, he is no less a poet for that” (1451b, 27–30).

IV. REMINISCING INFIDELITY

Why retell it? To get at why requires evaluation of what and how. Deuteronomy presents different details of the rebellion at Kadesh in a different manner. Considering these differences together points to specific reasons for newly retelling an old story. A preview of outcomes can guide an examination of the details.

To characterize the account in Deuteronomy as “more pronounced” is fine but vague.³⁷ The evidence of Deuteronomy’s version of the Kadesh rebellion suggests an agenda to define the rebellion more personally, which, ironically, more deeply establishes collective culpability. Numbers tells the public ordeal. This corporate revolution transpires categorically and rapidly, driven by fear. Moses pleads for mercy. Ten of the scouts die by plague and the older generation faces a life and death sentence in the desert. Deuteronomy handles each of these details differently. The revolution begins privately. The decision to reject Yahweh does not happen instantly by means of an hysterical crowd but methodically and based on individual calculation and premeditation. Even Moses blames the people for his own problems. If Numbers depicts the collective identity of rebellious Israel, Deuteronomy details individual responsibility.

What variations does Deuteronomy feature, and how so? The following comparisons work through inclusion and exclusion, sequencing, voicing the story in terms of agency, and the special difficulties of Moses blaming the people for his punishment. The first three of these get at issues suggested by Aristotle’s observations on synoptic narratives noted above.

First, the versions of the infidelity at Kadesh in Numbers and Deuteronomy focus on some common but many different details. In addition, another abbreviated synoptic version of the Kadesh rebellion housed in Numbers 32 emphasizes still different details. Considering the choices made in this brief version helps define the rationale of selectivity in the two longer synoptic versions.

The Numbers account of the definitive rebellion of the exodus generation of Israel revolves around formal communal actions and accents shared corporate culpability. The following outline seeks to organize the main storyline.

- I. Reconnaissance of the Twelve Scouts (Num 13:1–26)
- II. The Congregation Rebels against the Minority Report (Num 13:27–14:10)
- III. Yahweh Communicates Judgment to the Intercessor (Num 14:10–25)
- IV. Public Condemnation and Israel’s Belated and Ill-advised Reversal (Num 14:26–45)

Several expansive elements appear exclusively within this version of public rebellion: details of reconnaissance (Num 13:3–26); Caleb’s minority report (Num

³⁷ See Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah*, 94. Berman goes on to cite Nelson regarding Deuteronomy “underscoring” the people’s culpability in Numbers (96, based on Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 25). This argument seems exceptionally odd. Berman claims Deuteronomy purposely contradicts Numbers to establish a different agenda but the new message, in his view, seems to be the exact same thing, only louder.

13:30); Joshua and Caleb's attempt to dissuade Israel (Num 14:6–10); Moses's prayer attempting to dissuade Yahweh from wrath (Num 14:13–19); and the fatal plague against the ten scouts (Num 14:36–38). The prayer of Moses closely follows his earlier prayer, which successfully dissuaded Yahweh from striking down the entire people for the rebellion of the golden calf.³⁸ The similarity between these two prayers, especially in light of the contrasting outcomes, naturally leads to referring to them together elsewhere in scripture (see Deut 9:8–29—Kadesh rebellion cited in Deut 9:23–24—and another version of Horeb prayer in Deut 9:26–29; Ps 106:19–27). The extended consultation concerning divine judgment with Israel's representative followed by a public formal pronouncement of judgment signal the definitive termination of Israel's older redemption generation (Num 14:20–25, 26–35). In certain respects, the rebellion at Kadesh in Numbers 13–14 functions as an apologetic for this corporate condemnation.

The mention of Caleb or Joshua alone at times and elsewhere as a pair seems to derive from the plan of the episodes compiled in Numbers (see Table 2). More precisely, Numbers and Deuteronomy each handle Joshua and Caleb at Kadesh according to their own symmetrical designs. Numbers presents Caleb's minority report (Num 13:30) and his exemption from judgment in a private divine consultation with Moses (Num 14:24), and Joshua and Caleb together seek to dissuade Israel from rebellion (Num 14:6–9) and are together publicly exempted from judgment of the older generation (Num 14:30) and spared from the plague against the scouts (Num 14:38). Deuteronomy 1 handles Caleb and Joshua separately according to its own symmetrical logic (see below).

Table 2: Caleb and/or Joshua in the Accounts of Rebellion

	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Caleb's minority report	13:30	—
Joshua and Caleb try to dissuade rebellion	14:6–9	—
Private exemption of Caleb	14:24	1:36
Public declaration of exemption	14:30 (both)	1:38 (Joshua only)
Joshua and Caleb spared judgment of scouts	14:38	—

The storyline of Torah presents a thirty-eight-year gap here. From Exodus 3 to Numbers 14, the narrative tells of redemption, revelation, and struggles in the wilderness. In Numbers 20, the narrative picks up thirty-eight years later with the younger generation (cf. Num 20:28; 33:38). The intervening three-part episode is bracketed by regulations that augment legal collections in Exodus and Leviticus (Numbers 15; 18–19). The rebellion of Korah and company, the associated plague against Israel, and the budding of Aaron's staff offer the only highly ironic glimpse of the damned generation (Numbers 16–17). The people who were mortally afraid to invade the land of promise for it metaphorically swallowed people were sentenced to die in the wilderness, which sometimes literally swallows rebel families

³⁸ For a side-by-side comparison of these prayers, see Gary Edward Schnittjer, *The Torah Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 408.

whole (Num 13:32; 14:2–3; 16:32). In short, when Israel definitively rejected Yahweh they were deleted from the story. The last fleeting glimpses of these insurgents show them rebelling and dying in the desert.

The Deuteronomy version of the Kadesh infidelity accents personal responsibility and premeditated individual defiance of God's will. If the younger generation wonders whether the older generation was swept up in hysterical fear and thoughtlessly rebelled, the new version of the story schools them. In Numbers, readers hear of weeping through the night, but only as part of a quick transition between a series of degenerating reports from the scouts and the people deciding to go back to Egypt (Num 14:1). Whereas Numbers presents the rebellion in rapid succession, Deuteronomy unfolds the people's systematic investigation, private personal deliberation, and defiant unbelief.³⁹ In Deuteronomy, Moses takes auditors and readers inside the tents of Israel as they talk themselves into revolt (Deut 1:27). When individual members of Israel decide to reject Yahweh's plan for invasion of the land of promise readers may get suspicious that this stood behind the people's request for a scouting expedition to begin with. The following outline accents this alternate storyline.

- I. Moses Urges the People to Invade the Land of Promise (Deut 1:19–22)
- II. Israel Requests a Scouting Report and Their Calculated Rebellion (Deut 1:22–28)
- III. Moses Urges Confidence in Yahweh (Deut 1:29–33)
- IV. Judgment against Israel and Moses and an Ill-advised, Belated Reversal (Deut 1:34–45)

Deuteronomy features several elements unique to this version of the story: Moses's urging Israel to military action (Deut 1:20–21); the people taking initiative and requesting investigation of the land (Deut 1:22); Moses seeking to dissuade Israel (Deut 1:29–33); and Moses's own condemnation on account of Israel (Deut 1:37). The expansive treatment of Moses himself seems all the more striking since this version features his first-person narration. When Moses claims that the people are at fault for his own judgment, the preceding elements become temporarily unstable. If Moses seems to distort the reason for his judgment, then does he offer extensive rehearsals of his meritorious actions on behalf of Israel as part of an apologetic to justify himself? Moses's blame-shifting causes a double-take of his claims about himself even while there seems to be plenty of incrimination to go around. The new version reveals complications and messy details of infidelity. In the case of Israel's definitive rebellion, Moses promoted military invasion and urged trust in God (Deut 1:19–22, 29–33). Moses's urging the people to obey makes his own failure seem even more spectacular.

³⁹ Numbers 14:11 alludes to extended unbelief leading up to the rebellion of Kadesh, to be sure (cf. Deut 1:32). But this tendency toward contempt for the divine will does not get at the step-by-step buildup to rebellion recounted in Deuteronomy 1. I am indebted to John Biegel for this observation.

The same events open themselves to an entirely different narrative function in Moses's condemnation of the Transjordan tribes. Moses employs narrative selectivity to isolate a particular analogy to the Transjordan tribal infidelity. The first two points of this outline summarize the abridgment by selectivity:

1. Scouts Discourage Israel from Obedience (Num 32:8–9//13:31–33; see G in Table 4)
2. Yahweh's Pronouncement of Judgment (Num 32:10–12//14:21–22, 30; see L in Table 4)
3. Forty Years of Wandering (Num 32:13; cf. 14:32–33)
4. Comparing the Transjordan Leaders to Ten Scouts (Num 32:14; cf. 32:6–7)

Moses's abbreviated reference to the rebellion targets only one detail—the bad advice of the ten scouts—to castigate the Transjordan tribes. Moses says, “This is what your ancestors did. . . . And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your ancestors and making Yahweh even more angry with Israel” (Num 32:8, 14).⁴⁰ This abbreviated synoptic version demonstrates that the same events can be repurposed to condemn other leaders by analogy in Num 32:8–14. The narrative shape of each of these versions of the Kadesh debacle may be seen as functions of the respective purposes of their individual contexts.

Second, scribal decisions go beyond what to include and exclude but extend to narrative sequence. Properly arranging the order of vignettes for narrative effect functions as a normal part of ancient storytelling, frequently applied in scripture. The arrangement of elements within Deuteronomy's version of the Kadesh infidelity, whatever else it does, makes it personal. The two versions may be compared in relation to general content (Table 3) and then narrative shaping (Table 4).

Table 3: General Comparison of the Kadesh Rebellion

	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Moses's call for invasion	–	1:19–21
Plan to send scouts	13:1–3	1:22–23
List of scouts	13:4–16	–
Commission of expedition	13:17–20	–
Scouting expedition	13:21–24	1:24–25a
Official report	13:25–29	1:25b
Caleb's recommendation of invasion	13:30	–
Second bad report of ten scouts	13:31–33	–
Private reminiscence and rebellion	14:1	1:26–28
Israel's collective revolt	14:2–4	–
Moses and Aaron prostrate themselves	14:5	–
Advice not to be afraid	14:6–10 (Caleb & Joshua) ^a	1:29–33 (Moses)

⁴⁰ All scriptural translations mine from *Biblia Hebraica* and NA²⁸ unless stated otherwise.

Moses advocates to Yahweh	14:11–19	–
Yahweh’s judgment presented to Moses ^a	14:20–25	1:34–36
Yahweh’s judgment presented to Israel	14:26–35	–
Moses prevented from entering land	–	1:37
Younger generation spared ^a	14:33	1:38–39
Remain in the desert	14:34–35	1:40
Plague against the ten scouts ^a	14:36–38	–
The people’s ill-advised invasion	14:39–45	1:41–46

^a On Caleb and/or Joshua, see Table 2.

Table 4 summarizes the way events have been interpreted and shaped by the synoptic narratives of Numbers 13–14 and Deuteronomy 1. The Roman numerals in the outlines point to some of the respective agendas of the versions. Numbers narrates collective rejection of plans for military invasion while Deuteronomy points to infidelity starting with individual nighttime anxieties (cf. II-Num and c-Deut in Table 4). Whereas Numbers features extensive attention to Moses’s private intercession before Yahweh, Deuteronomy has been structured around his public attempts to persuade Israel to obedience (cf. III-Num and I, III-Deut in Table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of Narrative Shaping of Two Versions of Kadesh Infidelity

Events	Narrative Shaping in Numbers 13–14	Narrative Shaping in Deuteronomy 1:19–45
(1) Reconnaissance of the land and (2) initial formal report of the scouts	I Reconnaissance of the twelve scouts (13:1–26)	I Moses urges the people to invade the land of promise (1:19–21)
	(A) The decision to send scouts (13:1–3)	II Israel requests a scouting report leading to their considered decision to rebel (1:22–28)
	(B) List of scouts (13:4–16)	(a) The decision to send scouts (1:22–23)
	(C) Moses commissions scouts (13:17–21)	(b) Reconnaissance and report of the scouts (1:24–25)
	(D) Reconnaissance of the scouts (13:22–26)	
(3) Rebellion and attempted persuasion	II The congregation rebels against the minority report (13:27–14:10)	
	(E) First report of twelve scouts (13:27–29)	
	(F) Caleb’s advice (13:30)	(c) The rebellion decided individually (1:26–28)
	(G) Second bad report of the scouts (13:31–33)	III Moses tries to persuade the people (1:29–33)
	(H) The rebellion of the congregation (14:1–4)	
	(I) Joshua and Caleb try to persuade the people (14:5–10)	

(4) Divine judgment decided	III Yahweh communicates judgment to the intercessor (14:10–25) (J) Yahweh contemplates wrathful judgment (14:10–12) (K) Moses prays for forgiveness (14:13–19) (L) Yahweh’s private summary judgment to Moses (14:20–25)	IV Judgment against Israel and Moses and Israel’s belated and ill-advised reversal (1:34–45) (d) Pronouncement of judgment (1:34–40) • Yahweh’s judgment (1:34–36) • Moses claims Yahweh judged him because of Israel (1:37–38)
(5) Plan for resuming invasion in the next generation	IV Public condemnation and Israel’s belated and ill-advised reversal (14:26–45) (M) Yahweh’s public detailed pronouncement of judgment (14:26–38)	• The mission to continue with the younger generation (1:39–40)
(6) Israel’s abortive invasion	(N) Israel reverses their decision, attacks the hill country against Moses’s counsel, and suffers defeat (14:39–45)	(e) Israel reverses their decision, attacks the hill country against Yahweh’s counsel, and suffers defeat (1:41–45)

The comparison in Table 4 demonstrates basic concord between the sequences followed in the two versions. Many of the major interpretive differences between the versions of rebellion at Kadesh in Numbers and Deuteronomy pivot on the use of private versus public space. In Numbers the rebellion of the people takes place in public—readers listen to the scouts along with Israel. But in Deuteronomy the people reach the decision in the privacy of their own tents—auditors and readers hear the scouts’ reports refracted through grumbling individuals (Num 13:31–33; 14:2–4; Deut 1:27–28; Table 4 G, H vs. c).⁴¹ In reality, this rearrangement functions as a subset of re-voicing the narrative under the next point, but these narrative maneuvers overlap. Though this shift seems like a flashback from a comparative point of view it more rightly may be regarded as a shift of emphasis.⁴²

Third, some of the most significant interpretive advances in the representation of the Kadesh infidelity in Deuteronomy 1 can be grouped under shifts in agency, but these shifts occur within a re-voicing. Fundamentally, Moses shifts from a character within a third-person narrative in Numbers 13–14 to a first-person narrative reminiscer himself in Deuteronomy 1. Though the narrator of Deuteronomy frames Moses’s recollections with occasional updates, the only character to speak in Deuteronomy 1–11 is Moses. All other embedded discourses,

⁴¹ Weinfeld notes the people complain in their tents in Num 11:10 (*Deuteronomy 1–11*, 144).

⁴² The versions of the Kadesh rebellion largely adhere to a shared episodic arrangement (see Table 4). Rather than dischronological narration common elsewhere in Torah, the rearrangement in Deut 1:25–28 elegantly retains the same chronological order by presenting some details as reminiscences from another perspective. Though the report of the scouts differs in details between Numbers 13 and Deuteronomy 1, the basic function runs along similar lines.

whether Yahweh or Israel, are mediated within Moses's reporting voice.⁴³ In Deuteronomy, Moses's narration functions within the controlling narrative framework.

Now, within Moses's version of the Kadesh rebellion in Deuteronomy 1 he speaks directly to the congregation of Israel before him in second person.⁴⁴ The direct communication between Moses and Israel heightens the intensity of accusation and responsibility without a need for background narrator commentary. While many shifts in agency and/or revoicing technically fall under the category of selection (inclusion/exclusion), the nature of the case demonstrates the overlap of these aspects of retelling stories.

Table 5 summarizes differences of expressed agency in the surface of the synoptic narratives of rebellion.

Table 5: Expressed Agency in Synoptic Versions of Infidelity at Kadesh

	Numbers 13–14	Deuteronomy 1
idea for reconnaissance	Yahweh (13:1–2)	Israel (1:22)
approval of scouting report initiative	--	Moses (1:23)
encouragement to military action	Caleb (13:30)	Moses (1:20–21)
attempt to dissuade Israel from infidelity	Joshua and Caleb (14:6–9)	Moses (1:29–33)
attempt to dissuade Yahweh from wrath	Moses (14:13–19)	--
responsible for judgment of Moses	Moses (20:12) ^a	Israel (1:37) ^b
attempt to dissuade Israel from unsanctioned invasion	Moses (14:41–43)	Yahweh (1:42)

^a The narrators of Numbers and Deuteronomy repeatedly cite Yahweh's condemnation of Moses's sin as the reason for disallowing him entrance into the land of promise (Num 20:12; 27:14; Deut 32:51–52; cf. 34:4).

^b Three times Moses blames Israel for Yahweh's disallowing him to enter into the land of promise (Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21).

Several narrative interpretive differences between the synoptic versions of infidelity stem from shifting credit among subjects relative to resistance of rebellion. Numbers summarily credits Yahweh with the decision to send scouts, but Deuteronomy unpacks the details of the people's request for reconnaissance and Moses's approval (Num 13:1–2; Deut 1:22–23). If the people already had "mutinous intent" the language—"you (plural) came to me"—runs identical to their approach to Moses after hearing the divine pronouncement of the ten words which God affirmed as "good" (Deut 5:23, 28).⁴⁵ Thus, the context of Deuteronomy itself does not condemn the people's initiative. In Numbers, Caleb calls the people to invade the

⁴³ See James E. Robson, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 4.

⁴⁴ The present approach follows the norm of treating the frequent shifts between second-person plural and singular as literary emphasis. For a summary of views and a different conclusion see Michael Grisanti, "Deuteronomy" (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) on 1:21.

⁴⁵ See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 143.

land in response to the scouts' report, whereas in Deuteronomy Moses credits himself with urging invasion even prior to the report (Num 13:30; Deut 1:20–21). In Numbers, Joshua and Caleb seek to persuade the people to turn from rebellion, whereas Moses again gives himself credit in Deuteronomy (Num 14:7–9; Deut 1:20–21). The rationales for all of these shifts of narrative emphasis get at the major contrast in Deuteronomy between the people's personal responsibility for revolution set in sharp relief against the disallowance of Moses to enter the land in spite of his commitment to the divine plan for military invasion.

Moses affirms the solidarity of his congregation and the previous generation with a first-person plural narrative verb: "We set out from Horeb" (Deut 1:19).⁴⁶ Then Moses reverts to second-person address: "You saw" (Deut 1:19).⁴⁷ He lays the responsibility upon Israel standing before him: "You were not willing to go up and you rebelled against the word of Yahweh your God" (Deut 1:26). Moses brings his auditors (and the readership) into the tents of the rebels and explains to them what they themselves had said in private: "You grumbled in your tents and you said, 'Because Yahweh hates us he brought us out of the land of Egypt to give us into the hand of the Amorites'" (Deut 1:27). In private, the people categorically reverse Moses's teaching on Yahweh's motivation for covenantal fidelity (Deut 7:8)—hatred versus love.⁴⁸ Moses further invades Israel's personal space by giving voice to their private fears and motives which they speak in their own tents: "Our fellows [scouts] have caused our hearts to melt, saying, 'The people are greater and more numerous than us, with cities large and fortified to the heavens'" (Deut 1:28).⁴⁹ With respect to responsibility, Moses eliminates blaming collective decisions made in public. The revolt against the divine will was born in the people's own minds and developed through their own personal deliberations.

In Deuteronomy Moses accents the mercy of Yahweh to the congregation who stand before him, citing what he had earlier attributed to them (= their parents; emphasis marks parallels).

[Moses speaks for Yahweh] *Your little ones whom you had said would become plunder*, I will bring them and *they will know* the land that you have rejected (Num 14:31).

[Moses says] *Your little ones whom you had said would become plunder*, your children, who today *do not yet know* good and evil, they will enter there, and to them I will give it and they will possess it (Deut 1:39).

The shift in referents seems especially striking in the nearly identical statements separated by about thirty-eight years. Moses repackages the parental anxiety for their children with great irony for the little ones now grown stand under the same

⁴⁶ See Robson, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 38.

⁴⁷ See Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 26.

⁴⁸ See Eugene E. Carpenter, "Literary Structure and Unbelief: A Study of Deuteronomy 1:6–46," *Asbury Theological Journal* 42 (1987): 81. Carpenter's discussion of a chiasmic structure highlights a series of negative reversals stemming from Israel's fear and rebellion (79).

⁴⁹ Rahab blends this language with promised dread from the song of the sea (Josh 2:9, 11=Exod 15:15 + Deut 1:28).

indictment “today” even while they prepare to enter the land. This irony suggests a double take on what Moses had said a moment before/thirty-eight years before.

[Moses says] So I said to you, “Do not be in dread and do not fear them. Yahweh your God goes before you. He will fight for you as he did for you in Egypt before your own eyes, and in the wilderness where *Yahweh your God carried you like a person carries his child*, all the way which you went until you came to this place” (Deut 1:29–31).

The powerful irony of these contrasting statements—the people fear for their children while Yahweh cares for Israel like his child—does not come from subtle semantics but daring temporal assimilation.⁵⁰ The use of second-person direct address joins all generations of Israel together even while working out distinctions that apply to specific historical moments. The kind of expansion of referential identity Moses works at in this retelling of the Kadesh rebellion anticipates other dramatic transgenerational identifications of auditors (esp. Deut 30:1–5). Moses goes so far as to say with fivefold clarity (marked by commas), “Not with our ancestors did Yahweh cut this covenant [ten commandments], but with us, us, those here today, all of us alive” (Deut 5:3 lit.; yet compare Deut 11:2; cf. 29:3–4 [2–3]).⁵¹ The present generation listening to Moses shares the identity of the rebels and yet enjoy the mercy of their God. This demonstrates one of the significant ways the narratives of Deuteronomy house a surplus of motivation akin to its motivation-laden version of legal instruction. Moses looks back to change “future attitudes and conduct.”⁵²

Fourth, Moses blames the people for his own punishment. This surprising claim stands apart from the various narrative moves discussed above as a special case. Moses did not slip up. He made the same claim three times—and it is not a grammatical issue since he says it in three different ways. Even after Yahweh told him to never speak of it again to him, Moses continues to repeat it to his hapless congregation (*italics refers to similar syntactic structure even with lexical differences*).⁵³

Even *against me Yahweh became angry because of you*, saying “Even you shall not enter there” (1:37).

⁵⁰ Another layer of irony can be seen when comparing this to similar statements Moses makes, complaining about carrying Israel like a child (Num 11:12; cf. Hos 11:1, 3–4; see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 148). In addition to irony Yahweh provides evidence of his fidelity by rehearsing his past redemptive actions. Tigay observes that scriptural credos calling Israel to faith affirm divine actions rather than his nature—e.g. Deut 4:32–40; 6:20–25; 11:2–9; 26:1–11 (*Deuteronomy*, 17, 347 n. 103).

⁵¹ Commas in translation correspond to Masoretic disjunctive accents (*לֹא אֶתְּאַבְתִּינֶנּוּ כְּרַת יְהוָה*) (Deut 5:3).

⁵² See Grisanti, “Deuteronomy,” on 1:6–4:49.

⁵³ Although the English translation of Moses blaming Israel in Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21 looks very similar in most modern translations, they are worded differently. In Deut 3:26, *HALOT* regards II עבר as a rare root for “anger.” Since I עבר literally means “cross over,” Robson puns, “Yahweh was very cross with me” (*Deuteronomy 1–11*, 122).

Yahweh became angry against me because of you, and he refused to listen to me, and Yahweh said to me, “Enough from you. Do not again speak to me concerning this matter” (3:26).

Yahweh was angry against me on your account (4:21).

Von Rad overstates his interpretation, affirming Moses’s viewpoint: “Moses ... suffered and offered expiation for the sins of his people.”⁵⁴ He overreaches perhaps to suggest Christian typology by saying the death of Moses “was vicarious for Israel” and making a series of comparisons between Moses and the suffering servant of Isaiah.⁵⁵ Von Rad’s view is only possible by removing Moses’s speeches and treating them as a source outside the book of Deuteronomy. The controlling frame narrative of Deuteronomy repeats the twofold judgment of Yahweh in Numbers against Moses. This eliminates von Rad’s strained typology within the context of Deuteronomy.

Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust me ... you shall not bring this congregation to the land” (Num 20:12).

[Yahweh says] “You [Moses and Aaron] contended against me” (27:14).

[Yahweh says] “Because you acted unfaithfully against me ... you shall not enter the land” (Deut 32:51–52).

There seem to be two challenges with Moses’s claims—one a non-issue. The timing of Moses’s punishment seems less critical than who is at fault. Some commentators suggest that Deut 1:37 offers a parenthetical thought to smooth out the timing of Moses’s complaint.⁵⁶ Within the larger context of Deuteronomy 1–3 Moses’s threefold blaming of Israel may not be set in the rebellion of Kadesh since he mentions it within several different contexts (Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). Moses seems to include it in Deut 1:37 as part of his enumeration of those who may and may not enter the land—the evil generation of the Kadesh rebellion may not enter (Deut 1:35), Caleb may enter (Deut 1:36; Table 2), Moses may not (Deut 1:37), Joshua may enter (Deut 1:38; Table 2), little ones of Israel may enter (Deut 1:39).⁵⁷ In this way, Moses does not need to blame his punishment on the Kadesh debacle so much as it provides one more occasion for him to make his favorite complaint.

⁵⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Moses* (2nd ed.; ed. K. C. Hanson; trans. Stephen Neill; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 14.

⁵⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 1:295; 2:261–62. See also idem, *Deuteronomy*, 45.

⁵⁶ See Robson, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 56; contra Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 19, 425.

⁵⁷ For a helpful summary of interpretive approaches to Moses’s blaming Israel with a similar suggestion to the one here regarding its function within a list of exclusions from the land, see Grisanti, “Deuteronomy,” on 1:37. However, Grisanti goes on to suggest that Moses may be implying that if they had obeyed and entered the land thirty-eight years ago he never would have rebelled at Meribah (*ibid.*). Even if this harmonization could work here it does not adequately handle Moses repeating his complaint in other contexts (Deut 3:26; 4:21). Although he does not retract his harmonization of Deut 1:37, Grisanti emphasizes Moses’s guilt in his comments on Deut 3:26.

The deeper issue stems from Moses's insistence of a punishment for something he did not do.

Moses's threefold blaming of Israel for his own breach of faith creates a difficult irony. This context features Moses going to the *n*th degree to assign responsibility to his congregants personally, birthing rebellion in their own tents. Amid such a context Moses shirks his own guilt, blaming his congregants. This forces readers to recognize that while Moses is special—there is no other prophet like him (Num 12:6–8)—he stands under divine judgment for his rebellion like anyone else.⁵⁸ Although God can silence Moses (Deut 3:26), itself an important interpretive clue, his auditors (and readers) need to listen to him go on (Deut 4:21). If Moses pushes on Israel to take personal responsibility for rebellion, readers realize Moses should do the same thing. Moses's hypocrisy does not undermine his point so much as amaze readers of the susceptibility of anyone to make excuses—even someone like Moses. The inclusion of Moses's deflection within his lengthy condemnation of Israel deepens the irony and increases the attention such a claim requires from readers.

In sum, the version of the rebellion at Kadesh housed in Numbers narrates a quick, categorical, and public corporate rebellion. Why retell it? The new version gets at personal responsibility of every member of the covenantal people when facing a crisis of faith. The version in Deuteronomy does not let individuals blame rebellion on an unfortunate mass hysteria or make excuses about circumstances. The entire event, beginning with the people's own desire for reconnaissance of the land and inclusive of time alone to make reasoned response, points to the comprehensive guilt of Israel. Rebellion at Kadesh did not just happen. But even while Moses methodically condemns the congregation, he seeks to excuse himself. It turns out that taking responsibility proves difficult even for the most humble of persons (Num 12:3).

V. THE ENDURING FUNCTION OF SCRIPTURAL SYNOPTIC NARRATIVES

Scriptural synoptic narratives retain an enduring function. The younger version of the story neither replaces nor diminishes the older version. Actually, reworking the materials within parallel synoptic narratives increases the importance of authoritative counterparts by the comparative attention. This applies to the Torah versions of the revolt at Kadesh, whichever is younger, whether the relationship is direct or indirect.

Contrary proposals need to be evaluated based on evidence. Berman contends the older version (for him Numbers) retains its relevance only as a “baseline” against which to apprehend intentional contradictory changes which characterize the “tone” and “diplomatic signaling” of the current posture of the developing covenantal relationship.⁵⁹ This suggests a permanent subordination of the wilder-

⁵⁸ For further discussion of Moses's blaming Israel and associated implications see Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 473–74.

⁵⁹ Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah*, 91–94.

ness stories of Exodus and Numbers as antiques which now only provide a comparative index pointing to the new relevant contradictory details in Deuteronomy's version. It needs to be asked if proposals of *replacement* and *subordination* accord with scriptural evidence.⁶⁰ And to get at the alleged underlying problem that these proposals "solve," it can be asked: Do later scriptural authors regard Torah's synoptic versions of the rebellion at Kadesh as incoherent, disunified, and contradictory?

Deuteronomy contains within its larger context the same kind of variation of expressed agency seen when comparing parallel events in Numbers 13–14 and Deuteronomy 1 (cf. Table 5). To conclude that this merely affirms that the narrator coercively harmonizes difficulties may be too hasty. Moses claims in first-person narration that he himself had commanded the people to "go up" and possess the land (Deut 1:21). But elsewhere in first person he clarifies expressed agency telling the people Yahweh had said "go in" and "go up" and possess the land (Deut 1:8; 9:23). These alternative ways of contextualizing the command signify authorial freedom to present narrative interpretation in just the right way. Moses told it as he did in Deut 1:21 in line with other references to his own role in decisions and advising the people (Deut 1:23, 29). This kind of recontextualization matches two different ways of framing the fearsome Anakites (Deut 1:28; 9:1–2). In short, the variety of representations have nothing to do with harmonization but signify the seemingly inexhaustible opportunity to retell redemptive stories in new ways.

Other scriptural traditions freely use the Numbers and Deuteronomy versions of the Kadesh infidelity together in an array of interpretive blends.⁶¹ Numerous scriptural writers work with these counterpart contexts apparently failing to detect their alleged incompatibility. In addition, scriptural exegetes in different kinds of contexts do not treat the Numbers version as a mere baseline to highlight the newer relevant details located in Deuteronomy. Psalm 106 engages both versions as relevant, offering enduring instruction to Israel (*italics* signify what is shared by Numbers 14, Deuteronomy 1, and Psalm 106; *underlining* exclusive to Numbers 14 and Psalm 106, *broken underlining* what seems like irony; *bold text* exclusive to Deuteronomy 1 and Psalm 106).

Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? How long *will they refuse to believe* in me, even with all the signs I have done in their midst? (Num 14:11).

In this wilderness your corpses shall fall—all who were counted in the census from twenty years and upward, who grumbled (נִבְּלָה) against me. Not one of you will come into the land which I lifted up my hand for you to reside in it ... the land which you rejected. But you, your corpses shall fall in this wilderness (Num 14:29, 30a, 31b, 32).

⁶⁰ The two options presented in Joshua Berman, "Supersessionist or Complementary?: Reassessing the Nature of Legal Revision in the Pentateuch; Law Collections." *JBL* 135 (2016): 201–22.

⁶¹ The concept of "interpretive blend" is broader but based on Michael Fishbane's helpful term "legal blend" to speak of interpreting one scriptural context in light of another, see *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 110–19, 134–36.

You grumbled to yourselves (גָּרַגְר) in your tents and said, “Yahweh hates us. He brought us out of Egypt to give us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us” ... But in spite of this word [of Moses’s encouragement] *you did not believe in Yahweh your God* (Deut 1:27, 32).

They rejected the pleasant land, *they did not believe* in his word. **They grumbled to themselves (גָּרַגְר) in their tents** and they did not obey the voice of Yahweh. So he lifted up his hand against them that he would make them fall in the wilderness (Ps 106:24–26).

The blended interpretation of personal responsibility for defiance in their own tents from Deuteronomy with the collective condemnation of falling in the wilderness from Numbers plays a crucial role in Psalm 106. There were times when Moses and Phinehas stood in the breach to seek deliverance from Yahweh (Exodus 32 and Numbers 25 in Ps 106:23, 30). The psalmist frames the retrospective within a first-person plural prayer for a congregation again in crisis. The psalmist voices solidarity of the congregation with the rebels showcased in the retrospective: “We have sinned with our ancestors” (Ps 106:6; cf. Num 32:8, 14). As anticipated by Moses and Solomon, the psalmist leads the congregation to seek mercy: “Save us, O Yahweh our God, and gather us from the nations” (Ps 106:47; cf. Lev 26:39–41; Deut 30:1–6; 1 Kgs 8:47, 50).⁶²

The psalmist also compiles together the threefold complaint of Moses in Deuteronomy with his rebellion at Meribah as narrated in Numbers 20. The psalm puts these very challenging contexts together in one place. Some modern committee translations soften the language making it seem like the psalmist tries to harmonize away the difficulty: “and trouble came to Moses because of them ... *and rash words came from Moses’ lips*” (Ps 106:32–33 NIV; cf. NRSV).⁶³ But the psalmist seeks to blame everyone for their rebellion—the people and Moses: “They provoked him to anger by the waters of Meribah, so it went badly for Moses on their account, for they made his spirit bitter, *and he spoke rashly with his own mouth*” (Ps 106:32–33 lit.).⁶⁴ The psalmist notes that Moses can rightly cast blame on the people since the narrator of Numbers interchanges “the people contended (רִיב) with Moses” and “the people of Israel contended (רִיב) with Yahweh,” both of which play off the name Meribah (מֵרִיבָה; Num 20:3, 13). The psalmist should not be regarded as a harmonizer since he quickly affirms and even strengthens Moses’s responsibility: “he spoke rashly with his own his mouth” (Ps 106:33). The psalmist sympathizes with Moses only to a point but then makes clear he spoke wrongly of his own accord. In short, the psalmist unflinchingly brings together in one place the apparent incongruity but does not let anyone off the hook.

⁶² See John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3: *Psalms 90–150* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:226.

⁶³ The passive sounding translation of Ps 106:33 NIV likely stems from trying to handle the idiom “with his own lips” rather than an attempt to harmonize. The passive voice unfortunately obscures the psalmist’s interpretation.

⁶⁴ “Speak rashly” (בָּטַח) is in Piel in Ps 106:33, with a negative connotation akin to when this root is in its noun form in Num 30:6, 8 [7, 9] (see BDB).

The panoramic retrospective confession in Nehemiah 9 features scriptural tradition from the Kadesh narrative found in Numbers 14 and Deuteronomy but not necessarily Deuteronomy 1.⁶⁵ A crucial allusion makes a surprising ironic interpretation (marked in italics): “They refused to obey, and they did not remember your wonders that you had done among them, but they stiffened their necks and set their head *to return to their slavery in Egypt*” (Neh 9:17; cf. Num 14:4). The Levitical intercessors led the restoration in confession leading up to a dramatic vow, featuring remarkable first-person plural legal exegesis, all at a level above Torah standards (see Nehemiah 10). The prayer of the Levitical intercessors boldly reinterprets exile as a function of slavery, meaning vassalage, rather than slavery as a function of exile. The dramatic climax—“Look! We are slaves today” (9:36)—draws energy from the allusion to their ancestors who attempted to return to slavery as they themselves seek mercy amid a failing restoration. The desperate restoration intercessors looked to the account of rebellion in Numbers 14—unmediated by Deuteronomy 1—as a vital and enduring part of their own identity.

To push back and claim the Levitical intercessors and/or the psalmist display harmonistic impulses badly distorts their tendencies. The prayers in Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 106 feature bold interpretive advances. Both prayers freely rearrange the sequence of wilderness episodes to establish their interpretations (the wilderness, rebellion and judgment by opening the ground, judgment by fire, rebellion with golden calf, grumbling in tents and sentenced to die in wilderness, rebellion with Baal of Peor in Ps 106:14–30; revelation at the mountain, provision of bread and water, rebellion and decision to return to slavery, forgiveness according to divine attribute formula, rebellion with golden calf in Neh 9:13–18). The lyrical reworkings of the wilderness narratives, including the rebellion at Kadesh, do not exhibit mere harmonistic impulse, but display interpretive blending of synoptic contexts.

Ezekiel 20:15–16 makes allusion to Num 14:31 by means of “reject” (רָצַח) and the idiomatic phrase for swear, “lifted up hand,” also appearing in Ps 106:26 (underlined text is shared with Numbers 14 and Psalm 106 and broken underlining is ironic; compare to citations above).

I even lifted up my hand against them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land I had given them—a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands—because they had rejected my rules and they did not walk in accord with my statutes, and they desecrated my sabbaths for their hearts went after their idols” (Ezek 20:15–16).

The point here does not require direct relationship nor this or that direction of dependence. This set of broad allusions offers evidence of interpretive traditions with blended themes from the versions of the rebellion at Kadesh of Numbers and Deuteronomy together.

⁶⁵ The Levitical intercessors are aware of and interact with various Torah traditions, e.g. Neh 9:17//Num 14:4; Neh 9:18//Exod 32:4; Neh 9:20//Num 11:17, 24–25; Neh 9:21//Deut 8:4; 29:4 (here “//” signifies allusion).

Psalm 95:7b–11 offers a free lyrical re-presentation of the wilderness rebellion, drawing especially on the language of Deuteronomy like “today” and “rest” (קִנְיֹהָה; Deut 12:8, 9) and “you did not obey his voice” (Deut 9:22–23//Ps 95:7b). While these are all common terms they fit the lexical profile of Deuteronomy more than Numbers (*italics and bold refer to verbal parallels*).

When Yahweh heard your words, he was angry (קִצַּף) and *he swore* (שָׁבַע), saying, “Not one person from this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors” (Deut 1:34–35).

At Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, you provoked Yahweh to anger (קִצַּף). And at Kadesh-barnea when Yahweh sent you, saying, “Go up to the land I gave to you,” you rebelled against the word of Yahweh your God. You refused to believe in him and you did not **obey his voice** (9:22–23).

Today, if **his voice you will obey**, do not harden your heart as at Meribah, as in the day at Massah in the wilderness. . . . Forty years I was disgusted by that generation, and I said, “They are a people with a wandering heart, and they do not know my ways.” Concerning them *I swore* (שָׁבַע) in my anger (אֵף), “They shall not enter into my rest” (Ps 95:7b–8, 10–11).

The author of Hebrews extensively quotes Psalm 95 LXX, with its Deuteronomy lexical flavor (see Heb 3:7–11, 13, 15; 4:3, 5, 7). Along the way he intersperses allusions to the Kadesh rebellion in Numbers—“Was it not those who sinned whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?” (Heb 3:17)—with the somewhat rare term “carcasses” in Num 14:29, 32, 33 LXX.⁶⁶

Paul and Sosthenes may make the strongest statements concerning the enduring relevance of the judgment of the older generation in Numbers 14 by including an allusion to it among their series of references to wilderness narratives (see 1 Cor 10:5). They say these events function as examples for the instruction of their Gentile congregation (1 Cor 10:6, 11).

In sum, the evidence from Scripture does not support claims that the synoptic Kadesh rebellion narratives of Torah are incoherent, disunified, and mutually exclusive. Likewise, the evidence excludes limiting Numbers 13–14 as a foil only relevant to highlight real contradictions in the parallel account in Deuteronomy which has supplanted it. The evidence also does not support a view that these accounts present manifold apparent contradictions that require harmonization. Instead, scriptural exegetes continue the initial interpretive advances of the Torah synoptic narratives and recontextualize these in new ways to warn their constituents in new crises of faith. They do not bristle or merely tolerate synoptic differences. Scriptural exegetes seek out synoptic variation to help recontextualize the Kadesh rebellion once again for their own constituents.

⁶⁶ See BDAG; LEH. The term *κῶλα* literally means “limbs” and is used 7x of 17 for פָּרְגָי, see John Williams Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 227.

VI. CONCLUSION

Scriptural writers return to the same events. The multiplication of interpretations invites further interpretation and instruction derived from the same events along with the scriptural traditions generated by them. If the rebellion at Kadesh is typical, pride of place for reinterpretations goes to synoptic narratives of Torah. The recontextualization of the infamous revolt highlights many aspects of this tragic event whereby prophets, lyrical intercessors, and teachers return to derive additional interpretations for their constituents.

The many scriptural reinterpretations of the rebellion of Kadesh approach them in ways at odds with modern scholars who consider synoptic contexts as problems to be solved. The difference, at least in part, may stem from approaching scriptural narratives in light of their natural narrativity. This evidence suggests that attending to narrative function of synoptic contexts should precede leveraging variations for harmonistic and/or excavative ends. By starting with narrative interpretation itself, synoptic stories offer an advantage for studying the scriptural use of scripture. Aristotle's observations about parallel narratives can increase these interpretive advantages: authorial selection of what to dramatize, how to arrange the narrative, and even how to voice narratives. These ancient narrative observations offer significant help for exegesis of synoptic versions of stories across the Scriptures.

Some difficulties remain. Moses's habit of blaming Israel should not be explained away but accepted as testimony to his ironic stubbornness. Neither the Numbers nor the Deuteronomy versions relieve Israel. Instead where Numbers 13–14 provides rationale for definitive collective judgment, Deuteronomy 1 makes it personal. The rebellion grew from private anxieties and anti-covenantal attitudes in the solitude of Israel's own tents. The revolution against Yahweh starts with calculated premeditation. What ends with open defiant rejection of divine will begins by secretly claiming "Yahweh hates us."

Profound events benefit by renarration. The danger Israel faced on the banks of the Jordan invites a new version of the old story of infidelity. The synoptic versions of the rebellion at Kadesh provide sustained mutual enrichment. Scriptural exegetes across the generations warn God's people who linger over private meditations that breed infidelity.