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 serves 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 which apply to other synoptic narrative contexts of scripture.

Key words: Deuteronomy 1, Numbers 13-14, Kadesh, Moses, synoptic narratives, harmonic approaches, excavative approaches, Aristotle, scriptural use of scripture.

Introduction

Narrative function determines narrative shape. Redemptive events have more to teach and invite manifold re-presentations. Deuteronomy 1 houses enduring instruction to a new faith-challenged generation by zeroing in on personal responsibility and (in)fidelity 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 (Num 13-14; 32:8-14; Deut 1:19-45), prophetic and liturgical retrospectives (Ezek 20:15-16; Ps 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. Recycling, repackaging, and repurposing the infidelity at Kadesh signals the enduring relevance of divine judgment against covenantal people in revolt. This study will work out implications of the version of the Kadesh rebellion in Deuteronomy 1 with special attention to its synoptic function.

Deuteronomy houses 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

| 1:19-45, rebellion at Kadesh (Num 13-14; cf. 32:8-14) | 5:1-33, revelation at Horeb (Exod 19-20) |
| 1:46-2:23, not warring against Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Num 21) | 9:7-10:11, rebellion at Horeb (Exod 32) |
| 2:24-3:20, conquest of transjordan (Num 21) | 23:3-6, Balaam and Moabites (Num 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.¹

The next sections take up several interpretive issues under two heads, namely, synoptic narratives as problems versus as advantages, 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.

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 harmonistic 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: 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’ appeal to stay the people’s rebellion which has been omitted from Numbers 14 since it was unsuccessful (1:29–31); even though Moses blames the people that he cannot enter the land in this context it happens many decades later “[f]or 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 keep a strong focus on the people’s guilt and he later takes responsibility (1:37; 32:51); when he says “you came back” (שׁוּב) he does not mean to Kadesh nor that they experienced “true conversion to repentance” but that they gave up their impulsive military attack (1:45).⁴ 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;

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Deut 2:14). Keil’s concern to harmonize stems naturally from his approach to Mosaic authorship of Numbers and Deuteronomy.

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.” The harmonistic impulse stems, in part, from canon. Harmonizations of the X+Y sort may be called “additive” by filling in blanks with “scenarios” to resolve apparent contradictions.

Zealous harmonization enjoys top billing as the fundamental liability of the approach according to its most seasoned advocates. Too much harmonization tends to undermine the point of the entire enterprise by making everything look sketchy. The worst offenders overuse the kind of additive harmonization that conjectures multiple occurrences of similar events to handle synoptic differences. 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.” Dillard speaks of an “uneasy feeling” due to “solutions” that seem “forced and contrived.” Youngblood offers sage advice that some difficulties are better left “unresolved than to resort to forced harmonization.” While adjudicating controls needed for responsible

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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 (1:29; cf. Num 14:6-9) (see 4:53-54, 61, 69, etc.). Harmonizing apparent incongruities in Num 13-14//Deut 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 versus 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. Salmon (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), 209-20.


7 Eran Viezel, “Context, Harmonization, and the Uniqueness of the Commentaries to the Book of Chronicles,” JSQ 22 (2015): 5 [1-35]; 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—Chronicator’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 [82-94]).


12 See ibid.

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.”

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 holiness source) in the historical sections “exactly in the same manner” as the legislative sections. 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 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).

If detecting multiple versions of narratives as sources of the Pentateuch solves apparent incongruities it creates a new problem of explaining the circumstances which 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, for example: von Rad suggested Levitical sermons based on the homiletical flavor of the laws and narratives of Deuteronomy; Noth claimed an exilic “author” drafted narratives of the Mosaic period as prologue to the Deuteronomistic History he had compiled; Nicholson proposed Deuteronomy as theological retrojection of the northern prophetic tradition who fled to Judah when Israel collapsed; Weinfeld popularized seeing vassal treaties of Esarhaddon (seventh century BCE) with elements of the Hittite treaties with their historical prologues (latter half of second millennium BCE) to explain the basic shape of Deuteronomy sponsored by the Judean court (along with wisdom flavoring); 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; and 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.

14 Dillard, “Harmonization,” 162.
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, Deut 1-3 reworks tetratuechal accounts, see John E. Harvey, Retelling the Torah: The Deuteronomistic Historian’s Use of Tetratuechal Narratives, JSOTSS 403 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 7-32. Unhelpfully, Harvey brackets out evidence that does not fit as later editorial insertions (18-19). For a view that the narratives of Num and Deut 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).
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 to the function of 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. 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’ accounts of rebellion at Kadesh designed to emphasize Israel’s blame: the people seek to send spies rather than divine initiative (Deut 1:20-21; Num 13:1-2); the spies only speak thirteen positive words instead of seventy-one inclusive of both positive and discouraging words recast as reminiscence, versus third person, in a different sequence (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’ 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, and so on).

It is easy to affirm the essential place of theoretical constructs to suggest authorship. The present study focuses on the alleged underlying problems which 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, disunified, and/or


contradictory—whether real or apparent. 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 which 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. 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 excavative 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 dissembling 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 insistence on synoptic contexts as problems.

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. 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, re-voicing narration, direct discourse versus narrative action versus narrative background commentary, and (non)sequential rearrangement expunge most of the supposed

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difficulties of Deuteronomy 1:19-46.\textsuperscript{23} These ordinary 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.\textsuperscript{24} This does not give license to sweep everything under the carpet. 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 which 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.\textsuperscript{25} Knoppers’ study of mimesis offers two observations which 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.\textsuperscript{26} 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 canon-consciousness. Second, authors of derivative works did not seek to repeat but modify, develop, and sometimes even compete with parent texts.\textsuperscript{27} The narrator of Deuteronomy describes its purpose as “explaining” Torah—inclusive of narrative and legal instruction (Deut 1:5).\textsuperscript{28} This

\textsuperscript{23} 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 and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 113-16, 142-43.

\textsuperscript{24} 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. For a discussion of different literary registers of biblical narratives see Gary Edward Schnittjer and Bryan Murawski, Ezra-Nehemiah, Kerux (Grand Rapids: Kregel, forthcoming), “Design and Narrative Interpretation of Ezra-Nehemiah” in introduction.


\textsuperscript{26} See Knoppers, “Synoptic Problem?,” 18-19.

\textsuperscript{27} See ibid., 16-17.

\textsuperscript{28} Some commentators regard “the Torah” (תּוֹרָה) in Deut 1:5 as referring only to the legal materials of Deut 12-28. Working backward, however, Deut 4:44 heads the major middle section of the book as “now, this is the Torah” but then begins with narrative and parenesis which sets up legal instruction (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 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 Deut 12-28, see Richard D. Nelson, Deuteronomy, a Commentary, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 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;
fits with the general drift of esteem and interpretive innovation but suggests a complimentary rather than a competition model.

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). 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, and so on (1459a, 32-34). Arrangement includes chronological versus dischronological, jump-cuts, as well as decisions of discourse analysis which 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 innovations shines light on details which can offer mutual enrichment to exegesis of both contexts.

**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 innovations 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. The evidence of Deuteronomy’s innovative 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? 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 (13:27-14:10)
III  Yahweh relates judgment to the intercessor (14:10-25)
IV  Public condemnation and Israel’s belated and ill-advised reversal (14:26-45)

Several expansive elements appear exclusively within this public version of rebellion: details of reconnaissance (13:3-26); Caleb’s minority report (13:30); Joshua and Caleb’s attempt to dissuade Israel (14:6-10); Moses’ prayer attempting to dissuade Yahweh from wrath (14:13-19); and the fatal plague against the ten scouts (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. 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 9:23-24 and another version of Horeb prayer in 9:26-29; Ps 106:19-27). The extended consultation concerning divine judgement 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 (14:24), and Joshua and Caleb together

31 For a side by side comparison of these prayers see Gary Edward Schnittjer, *The Torah Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 408.
seek to dissuade Israel from rebellion (14:6-9) and they are together publicly exempted from
judgment of the older generation (14:30) and together spared from the plague against the scouts
(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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Deuteronomy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caleb’s minority report</td>
<td>13:30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua and Caleb try to dissuade rebellion</td>
<td>14:6-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private exemption of Caleb</td>
<td>14:24</td>
<td>1:36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public declaration of exemption</td>
<td>14:30 (both)</td>
<td>1:38 (Joshua only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua and Caleb spared judgment of scouts</td>
<td>14:38</td>
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</table>

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 (compare 20:28; 33:38). The intervening three-part episode is bracketed by regulations that augment legal collections in Exodus and Leviticus (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 (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 whole (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 shows 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 rapid transition between a series of degenerating reports from the scouts and the people deciding to go back to Egypt (Num 14:1). Where Numbers presents the rebellion bang-bang, Deuteronomy unfolds the people’s systematic investigation, private personal deliberation, and defiant unfaith.32 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 if 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 scouting report and their considered rebellion (1:22-28)
III Moses urges confidence in Yahweh (1:29-33)
IV Judgment against Israel and Moses and an ill-advised, belated reversal (1:34-45)

Deuteronomy features several elements unique to this version of the story: Moses’ urging Israel to military action (1:20-21); the people taking initiative and requesting investigation of the land (1:22); Moses seeking to dissuade Israel (1:29-33); and Moses’ own condemnation because

32 Num 14:11 alludes to extended unbelief leading up to the rebellion of Kadesh, to be sure (cf. Deut 1:32). But this tendency to contempt for the divine will does not get at the step by step build up to rebellion recounted in Deut 1. Thank you to John Biegel for this observation.
of Israel (1:37). The expansive treatment of Moses himself seems all the more striking since this version features his first person narration. When Moses finally drops the bomb 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’ 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 (1:19-22, 29-33). Moses’ urgings of the people to obey makes his own failure seem even more spectacular.

The same events open themselves to an entirely different narrative function in Moses’ 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:

(a) Scouts discourage Israel from obedience (Num 32:8-9//13:31-33; see G in Table 4)
(β) Yahweh’s pronouncement of judgment (32:10-12//14:21-22, 30; see L in Table 4)
(γ) Forty years of wandering (32:13; cf. 14:32-33)
(δ) Comparing the transjordan leaders to ten scouts (32:14; cf. 32:6-7)

Moses’ 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” (32:8, 14). This additional abbreviated synoptic version demonstrates that the same events can be repurposed to condemn other leaders by analogy in Number 32:8-14. The narrative shape of each of these versions of the Kadesh debacle may be seen as a function of the respective purpose 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) then narrative shaping (Table 4).

Table 3: General Comparison of the Kadesh Rebellion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moses’ call to invasion</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Deuteronomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>1:19-21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to send scouts</td>
<td>13:1-3</td>
<td>1:22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of scouts</td>
<td>13:4-16</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission of expedition</td>
<td>13:17-20</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scouting expedition</td>
<td>13:21-24</td>
<td>1:24-25a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official report</td>
<td>13:25-29</td>
<td>1:25b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb’s recommendation of invasion</td>
<td>13:30</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second bad report of ten scouts</td>
<td>13:31-33</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private reminiscence and rebellion</td>
<td>14:1</td>
<td>1:26-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel’s collective revolt</td>
<td>14:2-4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses and Aaron prostrate themselves</td>
<td>14:5</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice to not be afraid</td>
<td>14:6-10 (Caleb &amp; Joshua)</td>
<td>1:29-33 (Moses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses advocates to Yahweh</td>
<td>14:11-19</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 higher level 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 (compare II-Num and c-Deut in Table 4). Whereas Numbers features extensive attention to Moses’ private intercession before Yahweh Deuteronomy has been structured around his public attempts to persuade Israel to obedience (compare III-Num and I, III-Deut in Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Narrative Shaping in Numbers 13-14</th>
<th>Narrative Shaping in Deuteronomy 1:19-45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Reconnaissance of the land and (2) initial formal report of the scouts</td>
<td>I Reconnaissance of the twelve scouts (13:1-26)</td>
<td>I Moses urges the people to invade the land of promise (Deut 1:19-21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A) The decision to send scouts (13:1-3)</td>
<td>II Israel requests scouting report leading to their considered decision to rebel (1:22-28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(B) Scouts list (13:4-16)</td>
<td>(a) The decision to send scouts (1:22-23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(C) Moses commissions scouts (13:17-21)</td>
<td>(b) Reconnaissance and report of the scouts (1:24-25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(D) Reconnaissance of the scouts (13:22-26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II The congregation rebels against the minority report (13:27-14:10)</td>
<td>(c) The rebellion decided individually (1:26-28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(E) First report of twelve scouts (13:27-29)</td>
<td>III Moses tries to persuade the people (1:29-33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Rebellion and attempted persuasion</td>
<td>(F) Caleb’s advice (13:30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(G) Second bad report of the scouts (13:31-33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(H) The rebellion of the congregation (14:1-4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(I) Joshua and Caleb try to persuade the people (14:5-10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Divine judgment decided</td>
<td>III Yahweh determines judgment to the intercessor (14:10-25)</td>
<td>IV Judgment against Israel and Moses and Israel’s belated and ill-advised reversal (1:34-45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(J) Yahweh contemplates wrathful judgment (14:10-12)</td>
<td>(d) Pronouncement of judgment (1:34-40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(K) Moses prays for forgiveness (14:13-19)</td>
<td>• Yahweh’s judgment (1:34-36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(L) Yahweh’s private summary judgment to Moses (14:20-25)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The comparison in Table 4 demonstrates basic concord between the sequence 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 they 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 versus c). 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.

Third, some of the most significant interpretive innovations in the re-presentation 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’ recollections with occasional updates the only character to speak in Deuteronomy 1-11 is Moses. All other embedded discourses, whether Yahweh or Israel, are mediated within Moses’ reporting voice. In Deuteronomy, Moses’ narration functions within the larger veneer of the controlling narrative framework.

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

33 Weinfeld notes the people complain in their tents in Num 11:10 (Deuteronomy 1-11, 144).
34 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 reminiscence from another perspective. Though the report of the scouts differs in details between Num 13 and Deut 1, the basic function runs along similar lines. See Ian Wilson, Out of the Midst of the Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy, SBL Dissertation Series 151 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 26-28.
36 The present approach follows the norm of ignoring 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.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea for reconnaissance</th>
<th>Numbers 13-14</th>
<th>Deuteronomy 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval of scouting report initiative</td>
<td>Yahweh (13:1-2)</td>
<td>Israel (1:22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement to military action</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Moses (1:23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to dissuade Israel from infidelity</td>
<td>Caleb (13:30)</td>
<td>Moses (1:20-21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to dissuade Yahweh from wrath</td>
<td>Moses (14:13-19)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for judgment of Moses</td>
<td>Moses (20:12)</td>
<td>Israel (1:37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to dissuade Israel from unsanctioned invasion</td>
<td>Moses (14:41-43)</td>
<td>Yahweh (1:42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The narrators of Numbers and Deuteronomy repeatedly cite Yahweh’s condemnation of Moses’ 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). Three times Moses blames Israel for Yahweh’s disallowing him to entry into the land of promise (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’ 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” (5:23, 28).37 Thus, the context of Deuteronomy itself does not condemn the people’s initiative. In Numbers Caleb calls the people to invade the 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 gets 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” (1:19).38 Then Moses reverts to second person address: “You saw” (1:19).39 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” (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 in the hand of the Amorites’” (1:27, emphasis mine). In private the people categorically reverse Moses’ teaching on Yahweh’s motivation for covenantal fidelity (7:8)—hatred versus love.40 Moses further invades Israel’s

37 See Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1-11, 143.
38 See Robson, Deuteronomy 1-11, 38.
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’” (1:28). 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 standing under the same 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” (1:29-31, emphasis mine). The powerful irony of these contrasting statements—the people fear for their children while Yahweh cares for Israel like his child—do not come from subtle semantics but daring temporal assimilation. The use of second person direct address enjoins all generations of Israel together even while working out distinctions which 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. 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” (5:3 lit.; yet compare 11:2; cf. 29:3-4 [2-3]). The present generation listening to Moses share the identity of the rebels and yet enjoy the mercy of their God. This demonstrates one of the significant ways

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41 Rahab blends this language with promised dread from the song of the sea (Josh 2:9, 11=Exod 15:15+Deut 1:28).
42 **Contra** MacDonald who emphasizes that the successful obedience of the second generation in the transjordan conquest stems from Yahweh’s presence with the people (1:31, 33) in contrast to the previous generation (1:42). See Nathan MacDonald, “The Literary Criticism and Rhetorical Logic of Deuteronomy I-IV,” VT 56.2 (2006): 218 [203-24]. To the contrary, Moses urgings in 1:29-33 were reminiscences of advice they rejected at Kadesh.
43 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).
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.”

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 grammatic 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).

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

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’ viewpoint: “Moses … suffered and offered expiation for the sins of his people.” 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. Von Rad’s view is only possible by removing Moses’ 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] “Because you acted unfaithfully against me … you shall not enter the land” (Deut 32:51-52).

There seem to be two challenges with Moses’ claims—one a non-issue. The timing of Moses’ punishment seems less critical than who is at fault. Some commentators suggest that Deuteronomy 1:37 offers a parenthetical thought to smooth out the timing of Moses’ complaint. Within the larger context of Deuteronomy 1-3 Moses’ threefold blaming of Israel may not be set in the rebellion Kadesh since he mentions it within several different contexts (Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). Moses seems to include it in Deuteronomy 1:37 as part of his enumeration of those who may and may not enter the land—evil generation of Kadesh rebellion.

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45 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 נברא as a rare root for “anger.” Since נברא literally means “cross over” Robson puns, “Yahweh was very cross with me” (122).
48 See Robson, Deuteronomy 1-11, 56; contra Tigay, Deuteronomy, 19, 425.
may not enter (1:35), Caleb may enter (1:36; Table 2), Moses may not (1:37), Joshua may enter (1:38; Table 2), little ones of Israel may enter (1:39). 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. The deeper issue stems from Moses’ insistence of a punishment for something he did not do.

Moses’ threefold blaming of Israel for his own breach of faith creates a difficult irony. This context features Moses going to the nth 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. Although God can silence Moses (Deut 3:26), itself an important interpretive clue, his auditors (and readers) need to listen to him go on (4:21). If Moses pushes on Israel to take personal responsibility for rebellion, readers realize Moses should do the same thing. Moses’ 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’ 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, point 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 taking responsibility proves difficult even for the most humble of persons (Num 12:3).

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 and whether the relationship is direct or indirect.

Contrary proposals need to be evaluated based on evidence. Levinson and Stackert argue the narrative materials support Deuteronomy’s attempt at a “hostile takeover” of legal authority. 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. This suggests a permanent subordination of the wilderness stories of Exodus and

49 For a helpful summary of interpretive approaches to Moses’ 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 if they had obeyed and entered the land thirty-eight years ago he never would have rebelled as Meribah (ibid.). Even if this harmonization could work here it does not adequately handle Moses repeating his complaint in other contexts (3:26; 4:21). Although he does not walk back his harmonization of 1:37, Grisanti emphasizes Moses’ guilt in his comments on 3:26.

50 For further discussion of Moses’ blaming Israel and associated implications see Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 473-74.

51 See Levinson and Stackert, “Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty,” 139.

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 these proposals of
replacement and subordination accord with scriptural evidence. And, to get at the alleged
underlying problem which these proposals solve it can be asked: Do scriptural exegetes 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. To
conclude that this merely affirms 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 (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 1:21 in line with other references
to his own role in decisions and advising the people (1:23, 29). This kind of recontextualization
matches two different ways of framing the fearful Anakites (1:28; 9:1-2). In short, the variety of re-presentations have nothing to do with harmonization but signify the seemingly inexhaustible
need 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. 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
Num 14, Deut 1, and Ps 106; underlining exclusive to Num 1 and Ps 106, dotted underlining
what seems like irony; bold text exclusive to Deut 1 and Ps 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 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 (לון) 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).

You grumbled to yourselves (רגן) 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’ 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
(רגן) 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 breech to

53 The concept of “interpretive blend” is broader but based on Michael Fishbane’s helpful term “legal blend” to
speak of interpreting one context in light of another, see Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (New York: Oxford
seek deliverance from Yahweh (Exod 32 and Num 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).54

The psalmist also compiles together the threefold complaint of Moses of 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, emphasis mine; cf. NRSV).55 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 his mouth” (Ps 106:32-33 lit., emphasis mine).56 The psalmist notes that Moses can rightly cast blame on the people since the narrator of Numbers interchanges “the people contended (ברח) with Moses” and “the people of Israel contended (בִּרְחָ) with Yahweh” both of which play off the name Meribah (מריבת) (Num 20:3, 13). The psalmist should not be regarded as a harmonizer with a weak stomach since he quickly affirms and even strengthens Moses’ 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.

The panoramic retrospective confession in Nehemiah 9 features scriptural tradition from the Kadesh narrative found in Numbers 14 and Deuteronomy but not necessarily Deuteronomy 1.57 A crucial allusion makes a surprising ironic interpretive innovation (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 Neh 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 punchline—“Look! We are slaves today” (9:36)—draws energy from the allusion of 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 innovations of exile oppression as slavery and single out Moses and Phinehas to turn away divine wrath from Israel respectively. Both prayers freely rearrange the sequence of

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55 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.
56 “Speak rashly” (יָרָר) is in Piel in Ps 106:33, with a negative connotation akin to when this root is in its noun form in Num 30:7, 9 (see BDB).
57 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). For detailed analysis of the innovative use of scripture in Neh 9-10, see Schnittjer and Murawski, *Ezra-Nehemiah, ad loc.*
wilderness episodes to establish their innovations (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 innovative interpretive blending of synoptic contexts.

Ezekiel 20:15-16 makes allusion to Numbers 14:31 by means of “reject” (阿拉伯) and the idiomatic phrase for swear, “lifted up hand,” also appearing in Psalm 106:26 (underlined text is shared with Num 14 and Ps 106 and dotted 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 influence. These broad allusions offer evidence of interpretive traditions with blended themes from the versions of the rebellion at Kadesh of Numbers and Deuteronomy together.

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” (שָׁעוּת) (Deut 12:8, 9) and “you did not obey his voice” (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 (קצף) and he swore (שבע), 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 (קצף). And at Kadesh-barnea when Yahweh sent you, saying, “Go up to the land I gave to you,” but 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 (שבע) in my anger (ףי), “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 of 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 Numbers 14:29, 32, 33 LXX.58

Paul and Sosthenes may make the strongest statements to the enduring relevance of the judgment of the older generation in Numbers 14 by including an allusion to it among their series

58 See BDAG; LEH. The term κῶλα literally means “limbs” and is used 7x of 17 for פֶּרֶּג, see John Williams Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 227.
of references to wilderness narratives (see 1 Cor 10:5). They say these events function as examples for the instruction of their gentile congregation (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 superseded it. The evidence also does not support a view that these accounts present manifold apparent contradictions which require harmonization. Instead, scriptural exegetes continue the initial interpretive innovations 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.

Conclusion

Scriptural writers return to the same events. The multiplication of interpretations invite 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’ habit of blaming Israel should not be brushed 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 judgement 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 re-narration. 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 which breed infidelity.