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MURMURING MET WITH MERCY AND GRACE:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRE-SINAI WILDERNESS WANDERINGS
TRADITIONS

by
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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Luther Seminary
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Textual

| | |
|------------|------------------------|
| ET | English Translation |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| MT | Masoretic Text |
| NT | New Testament |
| OT | Old Testament |
| SP | Samaritan Pentateuch |
| Syr. | Syriac |
| Tg. Ps.-J. | Targum Pseudo-Jonathan |
| Vulg. | Vulgate |

Journal, Reference Works, Series

| | |
|---------|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ApOTC | Apollos Old Testament Commentary |
| BDB | Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> |
| BKAT | Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament |
| BWA(N)T | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament |
| BZ | <i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i> |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| CBQ | <i>Catholic Bible Quarterly</i> |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| <i>CTJ</i> | <i>Calvin Theological Journal</i> |
| ECC | Eerdmans Critical Commentary |
| <i>EstEcl</i> | <i>Estudios eclesiásticos</i> |
| FAT | Forschungen zum Alten Testament |
| FRLANT | Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| HAT | Handbuch zum Alten Testament |
| HCOT | Historical Commentary on the Old Testament |
| HKAT | Handkommentar zum Alten Testament |
| IBC | Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching |
| <i>JBL</i> | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| NCB | New Century Bible |
| <i>NIB</i> | <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> |
| NIBCOT | New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| NIVAC | The NIV Application Commentary |
| NSBT | New Studies in Biblical Theology |
| NSKAT | Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar, Altes Testament |
| OTG | Old Testament Guides |
| OTL | The Old Testament Library |
| <i>OLZ</i> | <i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i> |
| SemeiaSt | Semeia Studies |

| | |
|------------|--|
| TOTC | Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries |
| <i>VT</i> | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| WMANT | Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament |
| <i>ZAW</i> | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> |
| <i>ZTK</i> | <i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i> |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The wilderness wanderings traditions have received significantly less attention than other parts of the Pentateuch; this is regrettable given their literary and theological significance within not just the Pentateuch but the entire Bible, and for the life of faith. A foundational element of the wilderness wanderings traditions is the murmuring motif. George W. Coats' 1968 book, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, is perhaps the most comprehensive study of the wilderness wanderings traditions and the murmuring motif to date.¹ Much of the following essay will include a critical engagement of his material. A new definition of the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions will be proposed along with key characteristics for identification. The murmuring motif will then be situated within the broader context of the pericopes and books in which it appears. It will be shown that the murmuring motif comprises one element of two recurring patterns throughout the wilderness wanderings traditions, what will be termed Pattern A and Pattern B. The pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts will be examined at length in this essay, and there will be an extended discussion on the murmuring motif in each one of these texts. The following analysis will primarily take a discourse-oriented approach with a focus on the final form of the book of Exodus. However, source-critical comments will be made where relevant. In conjunction with exegetical observations, theological comments will

¹ George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 13.

be made regarding the notions of testing, obedience, trust, and the mercy and grace of the LORD.

CHAPTER 2

THE MURMURING MOTIF IN THE WILDERNESS WANDERINGS TRADITIONS

The term ‘wilderness wanderings’ refers to the OT texts that recount the period from Israel’s exodus out of Egypt until their entrance into the promised land.¹ Brevard Childs observed that this “material lacks both the formal and material unity of the traditions of the exodus and conquest,” and yet there has been a tendency within the OT to “see it as a sharply defined period within the nation’s history.”² In general, two sections of material comprise the wilderness wanderings traditions, Exod 15:22–18:27 and Num 10:11–36:13. Childs determined that “the most basic traditio-historical problem of the wilderness tradition” perhaps “has to do with the role of the murmuring motif;” the motif does not occur in every wilderness story, but it increasingly became “the rubric under which these stories were interpreted.”³ The problem is in how varied the OT is in its presentation of the wilderness wanderings traditions; they are described as a time of rebellion and disobedience as Israel murmured against the LORD, but also a honeymoon

¹ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1974), 254.

² Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 255. See Ps 78; 106.

³ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 256. See Deut 9:22–29.

before Israel was corrupted by Canaanite idolatry.⁴ It is debated if there was an early, positive version of the wilderness wanderings traditions and then a late, negative version that increased in negativity over time. Either way, each OT author used the wilderness wanderings traditions and the murmuring motif for their authorial purposes.⁵

Suggested Origins of the Murmuring Motif

Considering the variety of ways the OT discusses the wilderness wanderings traditions, several attempts to identify the origin of the murmuring motif have been made. Martin Noth determined that the motif was “too firmly embedded in the substance of several of the narratives to be regarded as a theological element first introduced into the literary formulations in order to contrast human ingratitude and unworthiness with the saving activity of God.”⁶ Because he observed that the motif “constantly appears in practically the same form,” he concluded it had become stereotyped within his ‘guidance in the wilderness’ theme and that it represented “an element that only subsequently entered into the individual narratives.”⁷ Noth thought that the motif had “its roots in the realization of the miserable conditions of life in the wilderness with its constant

⁴ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 256, 263; Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 13; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G Stalker, vol. 2 of *OTL* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 280.

⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 173; the OT authors could emphasize “divine action (Ps. 136:16; Amos 2:10); or on the murmuring (Deut. 9:7–29; Ps. 78:14–54; 95:8–11; 106:13–23; Ezek. 20); or be quite balanced (Neh. 9:12–21) or positive (Deut. 32:10–14; Jer. 2:2–3; Hos. 2:14–15).” See Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 259, 263.

⁶ Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 122.

⁷ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 124.

privations, above all the shortage of food and water.”⁸ In general, he did not believe the motif was closely tied to the stories in the wilderness, especially the water stories, for “these stories have as their presupposition the simple fact that the people were threatened with thirst owing to the lack of water.”⁹ However, Noth argued that in Num 11:4–35, the motif was “most firmly rooted” and could “be derived without difficulty from the traditio-historical source of a particular name-etiology.”¹⁰ He contended that the core of this story was the tradition of a feeding in the wilderness that did not require the murmuring motif. Yet, he conceded that in its transmitted form, the narrative “is so completely oriented toward the discontent of the people and the associated etiology of the place name קברות התאוה [“(Kibroth Hattaavah”)], with its motif of the punishment of the sinners, that here one cannot disregard this narrative element without at the same time giving up the entire story.”¹¹ Thus, he surmised that Num 11:4–35 contains the origin of the murmuring motif, which then spread to other units in his ‘guidance in the wilderness’ theme. Noth presumed that the Kibroth Hattaavah etiology was a secondary expansion of an older quail story that focused on the LORD feeding people in the wilderness. This assumption would make the murmuring motif a late traditio-historical development in his ‘guidance in the wilderness’ theme that initially was a collection of narratives that

⁸ Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J.S. Bowden, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 128. Coats thought these shortages were “the ‘rootage’ for the motif of Yahweh’s gracious aid,” and that they do not “give any insight into the basic nature and origin of the motif;” *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 90n7.

⁹ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 123.

¹⁰ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 123. See Exod 15:24; 17:2–3; Num 20:4.

¹¹ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 123. Noth reasoned that קברות (“graves”) assumes a divine punishment and that התאוה (“craving”) “points beyond that to a ‘craving’ which, as the expression of the discontent and discord of the people, occasioned the divine punishment;” *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 124.

concerned the LORD providing help to the exodus generation in the wilderness.¹² In general, Noth's conclusions regarding the origin of the murmuring motif have been rejected.

Coats thought that the murmuring motif characterizes "a basic tradition about the rebellion of Israel" and that J contains the earliest occurrences of this tradition; however, he concluded that these occurrences "do not seem to be a homogenous part of the immediate context in which they stand."¹³ According to Coats:

Since both the murmuring and the material in the context bear unmistakable signs of the style of J, the disunity cannot be attributed to a compounding of literary sources. Quite the contrary, it reflects a traditio-historical problem, a complex history of growth which shows the murmuring to be secondarily imposed on Israel's affirmations about Yahweh's aid in the wilderness. The murmuring tradition, however, cannot be defined as an elaboration of seeds already present in the primary traditions. The primary traditions, unified by the confession of Yahweh's aid to Israel in the face of various crises posed by wilderness life, are apparently positive in their description of Israel's relationship with Yahweh. In contrast, the murmuring is completely negative, reversing the characteristic features of Yahweh's aid until they take on a negative form.¹⁴

Because Coats thought that the primary form of the wilderness wanderings traditions did not have Israel's rebellion and the LORD's aid as complementary themes, he concluded that the interchange between the LORD's patience and Israel's rebellion must be a product of a deuteronomic reinterpretation of the murmuring tradition.¹⁵ Coats

¹² Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 125.

¹³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 249.

¹⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 249–50. Coats thought Num 16 (ET) was an exception; here the murmuring "is not a secondary motif in the tradition which composes the unit but the very substance of the unit," *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 252.

¹⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 254; see 253. He saw this development in the Meribah tradition where "there is firm basis for suggesting that an even later process of leveling traditional characteristics, probably associated with the Deuteronomist in its earliest stages, has joined Meribah with a

determined that the murmuring motif originated in the cult of Jerusalem, early in the period of the divided monarchy, to speak against the Northern Kingdom and “argue that the northern rights to election were forfeited when the fathers in the wilderness rebelled.”¹⁶ He also contended that the murmuring tradition was repeated at the fall festival of election and that its sophisticated nature indicates a priestly influence.¹⁷ Coats appealed to Ps 78 for support in light of its “pro-Judean flavor,” which he claimed was projected back onto the wilderness period.¹⁸ Childs found this argument unlikely. While he acknowledged that the divided kingdom conflict might be a later application of the motif, he noted that the motif is often used to explain different events throughout Israel’s history, like when Ps 106 relates it to the exile.¹⁹

Simon De Vries contended the murmuring motif arose “out of the theological reflex that faced the necessity of calibrating the southern conquest tradition with the already dominant tradition of the central amphictyony.”²⁰ This theory is unlikely not only because it does not sufficiently explain the content of the murmuring and its emphasis on the exodus, but also because the amphictyony theory has generally been abandoned.²¹

tradition about the spring at Massah and interpreted them both as traditions which show Israel’s lack of faith in Yahweh;” *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 70–71.

¹⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 251.

¹⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 251.

¹⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 251; see 123–27.

¹⁹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 256, 257.

²⁰ Simon J. De Vries, “The Origin of the Murmuring Tradition,” *JBL* 87.1 (1968): 58.

²¹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 257.

Frank Schnutenhaus contended that the motif has its roots in conditions typical to the wilderness, but he also discerned a theological pattern related to the motif: “Gottes Rettung--Israels Undank--Gottes Strafe, bzw., meist Rettung.”²² While Coats supposed this schema oversimplified the motif, the notion of a pattern aligns more closely with what Childs proposed: the “origin of the murmuring tradition takes as its starting point the stereotyped language of the complaints...The fact of the close similarity in both form and content within these protests, and the lack of variations in quite different situations, would support the thesis that a set traditional language is being used.”²³

Childs focused the discussion of his day regarding the origin of the murmuring motif on its broader framework, and in doing so he discerned two patterns: Pattern 1 always begins with a legitimate need (Exod 15:22, 23; 17:1; Num 20:2), is followed by a complaint (Exod 15:24; 17:2; Num 20:3), then an intercession by Moses (Exod 15:25; 17:4; Num 20:6), and finally, the LORD miraculously meeting the need (Exod 15:25; 17:6; Num 20:11); Pattern 2 only occurs after the covenant at Mount Sinai, there is an initial complaint (Num 11:1; 17:6; 21:5), anger and punishment from the LORD (Num 11:1; 17:10; 21:6), an intercession from Moses (Num 11:2; 17:45; 21:7), and the LORD’s relenting from the punishment (Num 11:2; 17:50; 21:9).²⁴ Childs concluded that these two patterns “do not give the impression of being a literary creation” but that they stem

²² Frank Schnutenhaus, “Die Entstehung der Mosetraditionen“ (PhD diss., Heidelberg University, 1958), 129. Translation: “God's salvation - Israel's ingratitude - God's punishment, or, in most cases salvation.” See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 16.

²³ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 257. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 16.

²⁴ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258; he saw some elements of Pattern 1 in Exodus 14:11–31.

“from a particular situation in the oral tradition.”²⁵ Yet, he found it challenging to determine the relationship between the two patterns because the murmurings function differently in each pattern despite the stereotyped language. Childs hypothesized that in the oral tradition stage, Pattern 1 could have functioned “as a form by which to relate stories of the miraculous preservation of Israel in the desert as part of the recitation of the sacred history,” and Pattern 2 could have assisted people in recalling their ancestor's disobedience, the LORD's anger, judgment, and forgiveness.²⁶ Yet, he determined that even in the oral tradition stage, these two patterns began to be closely joined and had a mutual influence on one another. He conjectured that initially, only the Pattern 1 complaint had its foundation in a legitimate need, but then over time, the complaints in both patterns were leveled, and an “identical set of stereotypes” was used; this “suggests that both patterns began to serve an identical function.”²⁷ Childs clarified that this does not mean that Pattern 1 was changed from a “purely positive stance” to a negative one, but that Pattern 1 always had a negative complaint element that was expanded upon when it was leveled with Pattern 2.²⁸

Childs attempted to trace the development of the murmuring tradition within JEDP. In doing so, he determined that his theory about the early age of the tradition and its role in the oral tradition was confirmed as he found a strong representation of the tradition in J; yet, he saw signs of tension to speculate that E may have had the tradition

²⁵ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258.

²⁶ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258; see 259.

²⁷ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 259.

²⁸ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 259.

as well.²⁹ Childs ascertained that the original arrangement of J's murmuring narratives must have looked different from their present arrangement, but he found it challenging to try and determine what this order may have been.³⁰ He was confident that the tradition had been adapted within J to fit the needs of the narrative, and he deduced that the redaction of the J material greatly impacted the development of the murmuring tradition as he found several indicators of "change in the understanding and role of the tradition."³¹ As for the D source, Childs thought that the development of the tradition was characterized by "an elaboration of the parenetic function of these stories" as the homiletist found "ideal examples by which to admonish the people to obedience."³² In the P source, Childs saw that the tradition underwent "an important and often dramatic transformation," but that it still retained Patterns 1 and 2.³³ He acknowledged that P has overlapping material with J, but that it also has unique content, such as the introduction of a theophany at the tent of meeting coupled with the appearance of the glory of the LORD after the people's murmuring.³⁴ Childs inferred that some of P's stories were

²⁹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 259, 260.

³⁰ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 260.

³¹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 260 Childs did not think that it was "by chance that the stories placed before the great apostasy are all of Pattern I, which stressed the help of God in overcoming a genuine need...whereas the stories following the golden calf incident are all of Pattern 2;" the redactor of J must have understood that "Israel's rebellion and disobedience increased and intensified following the disaster with the calf;" *The Book of Exodus*, 260. In terms of Num 11:4–35 (J) and Exodus 16:1–36 (P), Childs argued that both accounts "must have once been formed on Pattern I," but the J account was later "reworked in order to include the element of unworthy complaint and divine judgment, which are characteristic of Pattern II;" *The Book of Exodus*, 260.

³² Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 261. See Exod 32; Num 11:1–3; 14; Deut 9:7.

³³ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 261; see 262.

³⁴ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 261; see 262. See Exod 16:10; Num 14:10; 16:19, 42 (ET); 20:6.

secondarily included in the murmuring tradition, which confirmed for him “the later tendency already found in the Deuteronomist to expand the scope of the murmuring tradition;” for example, he saw that P crafted Num 14 in the form of the murmuring tradition.³⁵

Terence Fretheim perceived weaknesses in Childs’ two patterns, mostly notably because Exod 16 and Num 16:1–35 ET do not fit into either of his patterns; Fretheim instead advocated for one pattern that evolved through the transmission of the stories and the development of the Pentateuch which includes “the ‘splitting’ of the wilderness narratives before and after the golden calf debacle.”³⁶ Fretheim’s pattern consists of the following elements: journey (Exod 15:22; 16:1; 17:1; Num 10:33a; 20:1; 21:4), need/murmuring (Exod 15:23–24; 16:2–3; 17:2–3; Num 11:1a, 4–6; 14:2–4; 16:3, 12–14, 41; 20:4–5; 21:4–5), judgment (Num 11:1, 19–20, 33–34; 14:11–12, 26–35; 16:20, 45–47; 21:6), repentance (Num 11:2; 14:40; 21:7; cf. 16:22), intercession (Exod 15:25; 17:4; Num 11:2; 14:13–19; 16:48; 20:6; 21:7), disputation (Exod 16:6–8; Num. 14:6–9; 16:5–7), and deliverance (Exod 15:25; 16:4, 12; 17:5–6; Num 11:2; 14:20; 16:50; 20:10–11; 21:8–9).³⁷

Of the options for the origin of the murmuring motif explored above, Childs’ suggestion regarding the origin of the motif having its starting point in the set traditional language of the murmurings has the most merit and evidence. This study of the pre-Sinai

³⁵ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 262. While Num 16 (ET) has many of the stereotyped features of the murmuring tradition Childs saw that the story’s structure differs from Patterns 1 and 2; the “central element is rather a contest between Korah and Moses which calls for a divine decision;” *The Book of Exodus*, 262.

³⁶ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 174; see 173.

³⁷ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 174; the elements of judgment and repentance only occur after Mount Sinai.

murmuring texts will take its starting point in language and form of the murmurings, which will be explored below.

The Language and Form of the Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Wanderings Traditions

A Lexical Analysis

The murmuring motif in the wilderness wandering traditions can be identified primarily by its stereotyped verbs and collocations. The murmuring motif is so termed because of the regular occurrence of the verb, לון which, at its most basic level, means “to murmur.” Yet, a deeper understanding of לון is “to express dissatisfaction or anger by subdued, often inarticulate, and always resentful complaint.”³⁸ This verb is almost exclusively found in the wilderness wanderings traditions; the one exception is Josh 9:18.³⁹ לון can be conjugated either as a plural or singular, perfect or imperfect, or as a plural participle. It can occur in either the *niphal* or *hiphil* stem, but there does not seem to be a difference in meaning between the two stems.⁴⁰ לון must be differentiated from לין, a middle *yod*, meaning “to lodge” or “to pass the night.” However, there could be a linguistic connection between לון and רון considering that at times ל and ר interchange. רון means “to call loudly,” but in late Hebrew, the *piel* stem is used to refer to Israel’s past

³⁸ George Arthur Buttrick et al., eds., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962). 457.

³⁹ Exod 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11; 17:5 MT (16:40 ET); Josh 9:18. As a substantive (תִּלְמוֹת): Exod 16:7, 8, 9, 12; Num 14:27; 17:20, 25 MT (17:5, 10 ET).

⁴⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 23. See BDB, 534.

murmurings and means “to murmur” or “to complain.”⁴¹ Another possible connection to לון could be made to a verb related to the howling of dogs found in line 10 of the extra-biblical inscription of King Kilamuwa from Sengirli. Siegfried Herrmann understood this verb to be a *hithpolel* from the root לון.⁴² Line 10 of the Kilamuwa Stela would then read: “Under their previous kings, the [people] had murmured like dogs.”⁴³ Herrmann supports his conclusion by appealing to what he believes is a close parallel in Ps 59:16 MT (59:15 ET):

וַיִּלְיִנוּ לֶחֶם וַיִּלְיִנוּ אֶם-לֹא יִשְׂבְּעוּ וַיִּלְיִנוּ
 הָמָּה יְבוּעוֹן לְאֹכֵל אֶם-לֹא יִשְׂבְּעוּ וַיִּלְיִנוּ
 (“They wander about for food and murmur if they do not get their fill.”)⁴⁴ Many lexicographers understand וַיִּלְיִנוּ in this verse to be from the root לין, but “to lodge” or “to pass the night” would not be accurate translation within the context of the psalm.⁴⁵ The most persuasive evidence in favor of translating וַיִּלְיִנוּ as “and they murmur” is the LXX’s translation of Ps 59:16 MT (59:15 ET), which uses the verb γογγύσσοισιν (“to murmur”), the verb typically used in the LXX for לון. Coats, however, is not convinced that וַיִּלְיִנוּ should be translated as “to murmur” at least in the same sense of the uses of לון in the Pentateuch.⁴⁶ There is evidence to support Coats’ uncertainty, and

⁴¹ BDB, 943; a more primitive form of the word may have had an onomatopoeic usage meaning the “*twang* (of bowstring),” in Arabic it means to “cry aloud.” See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 22, 22n3.

⁴² Siegfried Herrmann, “Bemerkungen Zur Inschrift Des Königs Kilamuwa von Sengirli,” *OLZ* 7 (1953): 295–97. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 22.

⁴³ Michael Kerrigan, *The Ancients in Their Own Words* (New York: Fall River Press, 2009), 154–55.

⁴⁴ Herrmann, “Königs Kilamuwa von Sengirli,” 295–97. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 22.

⁴⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 23.

⁴⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 22, 23.

it comes from a few verses earlier in the psalm. In v. 7 MT (6 ET), the root *המה* (“to howl”) is used: *יָשׁוּבוּ לְעֶרְבֵי יְהֵמוֹ כְּלֵב וִסְוֵבֵי עֵיר* (“Each evening they return, howling like dogs and prowling about the city”). This evidence reveals that the best translation of *וַיִּלְיִנוּ* in Ps 59:16 MT (59:15 ET) is “and they howl” or perhaps “and they growl;” it is “the sound of discontented dogs.”⁴⁷ This insight gleaned from Ps 59 can help the reader of the wilderness wanderings traditions imagine the Israelites in the wilderness murmuring like a pack of howling, discontented dogs.

Common Verbs and Collocations

The most distinctive collocation of the murmuring motif is *על + לון*, which at its most basic level means “to murmur against” with *על* functioning as a preposition of disadvantage.⁴⁸ Coats explained that

the specification effected by the preposition *על* moves the action described by the verb from an inarticulate complaint to a well-defined event. The preposition is always present, and in each case it must be interpreted in its hostile sense. The event itself consistently involves a face to face confrontation between the murmurers and the object of the preposition.⁴⁹

Num 14:9 and 17:25 MT (17:10 ET) assist in defining the nature of the hostility expressed by *על + לון*. In Num 14:9, Joshua and Caleb exhort the people not to rebel against the LORD, *בְּיַהֲרֹג אֶל־תִּמְרֹדוּ* (“do not rebel against the LORD”). *מרד* (“to rebel”) here refers to the events of vv. 1–4 when the Israelites murmured against Moses and

⁴⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 23.

⁴⁸ Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 112.

⁴⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24; even for the substantives (תִּלְבוֹת) “the preposition is germane to the proper construction of the motif;” 24n10.

Aaron, an event that was initially described by *לון + על* which suggests “a common connotation of an open act of rebellion.”⁵⁰ In Num 17:25a MT (17:10a ET), the LORD instructs Moses to put the staff of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign “for the rebels” (לְבַגְי־מְרִי). The term מְרִי (“rebels”) is a reference to Korah’s rebellion; more specifically, it refers to Num 17:20 MT (17:5 ET): “And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the people of Israel, which they murmur against you.” The fact that מְרִי in 17:25a MT (17:10a ET) also refers to an action that was initially described in 17:20 MT (17:5 ET) by *לון + על* again suggests “a common connotation of an open act of rebellion.”⁵¹ Num 17:25b MT (17:10b ET) also speaks of putting an end to the murmurings against the LORD. Thus, the collocation *לון + על* implies not only hostility but also rebellion.

לון + על is not the only collocation that signals the murmuring motif. When *יעד* (“to gather, meet, designate, arrive”)⁵² and *קהל* (“to gather, assemble”)⁵³ appear in relationship with the preposition *על*, they have a meaning synonymous to *לון + על*.⁵⁴ The collocations *יעד + על* (“to gather against”) in Num 14:35; 16:11; 27:3 and *על + קהל* (“to assemble against”) in Num 16:3, 19; 17:7 MT (16:42 ET) refer to an event where *לון* is

⁵⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24.

⁵¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24.

⁵² In the wilderness wanderings traditions *יעד* appears as a *niphal*, plural, participle, and has a reflexive function meaning “to meet at an appointed place,” and it “is used uniformly in reference to previous events of murmuring,” Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 25.

⁵³ *קהל* appears in the wilderness wanderings traditions “in the *Niph`al* with a reflexive or passive connotation and the *Hiph`il* as a causative from the same connotation;” Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 25. See *קהל* in Exod 32:1; Num 16:3, 19; 17:7 MT (16:42 ET); 20:2; Jer 26:9.

⁵⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24. See Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 112.

used.⁵⁵ Another collocation that signals the murmuring motif is *ב + דבר* means “to speak,” and when combined with an adversative *כִּי*, the collocation can be rendered as “to speak against,” an expression of hostility.⁵⁶

The collocation *עָם + רִיב* is found on two occasions in the wilderness wanderings traditions, Exod 17:2 and Num 20:3, and is typically translated as “to quarrel with.” However, the term *רִיב* has a variety of meanings, such as: to bring a charge against, find fault with, strive, contend, argue, quarrel, debate, or protest.⁵⁷ A “primary usage of *רִיב* in the OT has to do with formal legal proceedings,”⁵⁸ and the collocation *עָם + רִיב* is often “a technical term for legal process.”⁵⁹ However, *רִיב* can have “a usage that refers to an informal and prelegal accusation and quarrel” that is “composed of an exchange of accusations and counteraccusations.”⁶⁰ These accusations and counteraccusations can “appear in the form of a question which carries the burden of the case against the

⁵⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24n11. See Num 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11; 17:6 MT (16:41 ET); 17:20 MT (17:5 ET). The *עַל + קָהַל* in Exod 32:1 does not refer to a murmuring event where *לֹן* occurs, but it is still clear that the people are gathering around Aaron for a specific, hostile, and rebellious purpose. However, Coats argues that it “is widely recognized that the text represents a conflation of various levels as a polemic against Jeroboam’s cultic centers. It is therefore likely that the proper continuation of vs. 1 is no longer preserved;” *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24n11.

⁵⁶ Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 97. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 25, 26. *ב + דבר* occurs in Num 12:1, 8; 21:5, 7 in the *piel binyan*. *ב + דבר* is also found in Job 19:18; Ps 50:20; 78:19.

⁵⁷ See John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3 of *WBC* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 230; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of *NAC* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 388.

⁵⁸ Durham, *Exodus*, 230. See Exod 23:2–3, 6; Deut. 25:1.

⁵⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57. Nahum M. Sarna translates *רִיב* in Exod 17:2 as “to present a legal case” and Meribah in v. 7 as “lawsuit;” *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 69.

⁶⁰ Durham, *Exodus*, 230.

opposition and challenges him to some kind of explanation.”⁶¹ The occurrences of ריב + עַם in Exod 17:2 and Num 20:3 align most closely with this informal and prelegal usage. However, neither text suggests a heated exchange. The accusation in Exod 17:2 is not even in the form of a question; thus, it is best to translate ריב + עַם in Exod 17:2 and Num 20:3 as to “protest/bring a charge against,”⁶² or even as “to be dissatisfied with.”⁶³ These occurrences of ריב + עַם do not describe “a formal ‘suit’ against Yahweh,” but rather “a complaint, a general protest of dissatisfaction.”⁶⁴ They are “outside the legal sphere” and are intended “to fix blame.”⁶⁵ This conclusion implies ריב + עַם is another collocation comprising the murmuring motif that has essentially the same meaning as על + לֹן.⁶⁶

Num 11:1a also contains the murmuring motif. It is a narrative account of the people’s murmuring: וַיִּהְיֶה הָעָם כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים רָע (‘‘And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes’’). לֹן does not occur here, but rather, אָנַן, which can mean ‘‘to complain’’ or ‘‘to murmur.’’⁶⁷

⁶¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 34.

⁶² Stuart, *Exodus*, 388. An עַם is of disadvantage; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 126.

⁶³ Durham, *Exodus*, 228, 230.

⁶⁴ Durham, *Exodus*, 230.

⁶⁵ Ernst Würthwein, ‘‘Der Ursprung Der Prophetischen Gerichtsrede,’’ *ZTK* 49.1 (1952): 1–16, www.jstor.org/stable/23584208, 4n1.

⁶⁶ Source critics typically see Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:1–13 as parallel texts or doublets. Coats appeals to this reasoning to explain why על + קהל occurs in Num 20:2b and is followed in v. 3 by ריב + עַם instead of referring to a murmuring event where על + לֹן occurs. According to Coats, because Exod 17:3, the parallel text, contains על + לֹן, the difficulty is resolved; *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24n11. However, if ריב + עַם is another collocation of the murmuring motif, this is not a necessary conclusion.

⁶⁷ Num 11:1a is the only occurrence of אָנַן in the wilderness wanderings traditions; the only other appearance in the MT is in Lam 3:39.

The murmuring motif is present on three other occasions, Exod 14:11–12; Num 11:4*b*–6, 13, 18, 20; and Num 16:13–14, but it is more difficult to identify because these verses lack the above verbs and collocations. In these verses, the murmuring motif is only identifiable by the form and stereotyped language and content of the murmurings (see below).

The Subjects and Objects

The language used for the subjects of the murmuring can vary, but most often, it is the people of Israel. The specific terminology is as follows: בני ישראל (“the people of Israel”);⁶⁸ כל בני ישראל (“all of the people of Israel”);⁶⁹ העדה (“the congregation”);⁷⁰ כל־העדה בני־ישראל (“the whole congregation of the people of Israel”);⁷¹ [כל־] העדה הרעה הזאת (“[all] this wicked congregation”);⁷² כל־העדה (“the whole congregation”);⁷³ or העם (“the people”).⁷⁴ However, in Num 12, the subject of the murmuring is Miriam and Aaron, and in Num 16:3, the implicit subject “they” in נִקְהָלוּ (“they assembled themselves”) refers to those listed in vv. 1–2: Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, and the 250 additional men. Dathan and Abiram are then the subjects in v. 12.

⁶⁸ Exod 14:11; 16:3, 12; Num 11:4; 14:27, 29; 17:20 MT (17:5 ET); 20:1.

⁶⁹ Exod 16:7, 8; Num 14:2.

⁷⁰ Num 17:7 (16:42 ET); 20:2.

⁷¹ Exod 16:2, 9; Num 17:6 MT (16:41 ET).

⁷² Num 14:27, 35.

⁷³ Num 14:1, 2, 36.

⁷⁴ Exod 15:24; 17:2,3; Num 11:1; 20:3; 21:5, 7; cf. Num 11:10, 18.

When *קהל*, *יעד*, and *לון* occur, the object of the *על* preposition is most often Moses and Aaron together, which is stated explicitly or implicitly through a plural suffix.⁷⁵ At times Moses is the sole object of the murmuring, while Aaron is the sole object on only one occasion.⁷⁶ When *עם + ריב* occurs in Exod 17:2 and Num 20:3, Moses is the sole object; so too in Num 12:1, 8 when *ב + דבר* occurs. “The LORD” (*יהוה*) or “God” (*אלהים*) can also be the object of murmuring.⁷⁷ In Exod 14:10, the people cry out to the LORD, but then in v. 11, their murmuring is directed to Moses. Num 11:1 does not contain any dialogue, but through narrative, it reports that the people complained about their misfortunes “in the hearing of the LORD.” In Num 11:4–6, there is no specific object, but v. 10 states that Moses heard the people weeping and v. 13 adds that the people were weeping before him. Additionally, v. 18 says that the people have wept in the hearing of the LORD. In Num 16:12, Dathan and Abiram do not come when Moses summons them; thus, their murmur was likely not said directly to Moses, but it was undoubtedly reported to him, for v. 15 states that he became very angry.

Regarding the texts that specify the murmuring is against the LORD, Coats writes: “In each of these texts there is either some textual confusion where the LXX reads in part a pronoun which refers to Moses and Aaron, a reference to an earlier event involving only human leadership (Num. 14:29, 35; 27:3), or a reinterpretation of an earlier reference to Moses and/or Aaron as a reference to Yahweh (Exod 16:7, 8; Num.

⁷⁵ Explicitly: Exod 16:2; Num 14:2; 16:3; 17:6, 7 MT (16:41, 42 ET); 20:2. Implicitly: Exod 16:3, 7, 8; Num 16:19; 17:20 MT (17:5 ET). See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 27.

⁷⁶ Moses: Exod 15:24; 17:3; Num 14:36. Aaron: Num 16:11.

⁷⁷ *יהוה* is used in Exod 16:7, 8; Num 14:27, 29, 35; 16:11; 17:20 MT (17:5 ET); 27:3. *אלהים* is used with *ב + דבר* in Ps 78:19 and in Num 21:5 where Moses is also included.

16:11).⁷⁸ This evidence signals that the leadership Moses and Aaron hold is ultimately made possible by the LORD; Moses and Aaron are cognizant of this reality, for at times, they say that the murmurings of the people are not against them but the LORD.⁷⁹ Even when Moses and Aaron are the objects of the murmuring, the ultimate object is LORD; this means that the people “are in effect threatening to depose Yahweh from his position as their deity in the wilderness.”⁸⁰ Indeed, Moses is the LORD’s spokesman and thus a “likely target for blame,” but ironically, the people direct their murmuring against him even as they follow the pillar of cloud through the wilderness; “they knew perfectly well that it was Yahweh” who was leading them.⁸¹

A Form-Critical Analysis

The primary indicator of the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions is the stereotyped verbs and collocations mentioned above. Still, it must be determined if there is a stereotyped form of the motif. This task is necessary given that Exod 14:11–12; Num 11:4*b*–6, 13, 18, 20; and Num 16:13–14 do not contain the stereotyped verbs and collocations of the motif. Coats ascertained what he thought was a formal, two-part structure associated with the verbs of murmuring in the wilderness wanderings traditions, both parts having their setting in the preofficial stage of a trial: “(1) a question addressed directly to the object of the murmuring which challenges some

⁷⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 27. Num 14:27*b*β LXX reads *περὶ ὑμῶν* (“concerning you”); Num 17:20*ba* (17:5 ET) in the Codex Alexandrinus reads *ἀπὸ σοῦ* (“against you”); and Exod 16:8*a*β LXX reads *καθ’ ἡμῶν* (“against us”).

⁷⁹ See Exod 16:7, 8; Num 16:11.

⁸⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 40. See Exod 17:3–4; Num 14:4, 10.

⁸¹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 366.

past deed, and (2) a response from the addressee which provides an explanation for that event.”⁸² Coats was correct to ascertain that some texts in the wilderness wanderings traditions associated with the murmuring verbs and collocations feature what will be termed an accusatory question. The accusatory questions are indeed a prominent form of the murmuring motif, but not every text takes this form. Instead, the texts associated with the murmuring verbs and collocations take a variety of forms: (1): non-accusatory questions: (Exod 14:11a β , 12; 15:24b; Num 11:18ba, 12:2a β -b; 14:3c; 16:14b); (2) accusatory questions: (Exod 14:11b; 17:3b; Num 11:20c; 14:3a; 16:3d, 13; 20:4, 5a; 21:5b); (3) accusatory statements (Exod 16:3; Num 16:41b); (4) statements of complaint (Num 11:4c-6, 18b β ; 14:2c-d, 3b; 16:3a-c, 14a,c; 20:3b, 5b; 21:5c); (5) demands (Exod 17:2a β ; Num 11:13c); (6) and narrative descriptions (Num 11:1a; 12:1a). Even when the murmuring takes the form of an accusatory question on only one occasion is there “a response from the addressee which provides an explanation for that event;” this response appears in Num 16:25-35 and is in the form of an *Erweiswort*, namely “an announcement that an event will occur in the near future which will prove to the people that Yahweh is the one who stands behind the deed which has been challenged, or better, that he is the authority who stands behind the man who has been challenged.”⁸³ The only other recurring response to an accusatory question that Coats was able to find was the act of falling on one’s face (Num 14:5; 16:4; 20:6a).⁸⁴ Because the murmuring motif often takes

⁸² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 40.

⁸³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 39, 40. There is an *Erweiswort* in Exod 16:6b-12, but it is preceded in v.3 by an accusatory statement and not a question. Yet, Coats argues that v. 3 still “challenges the past actions of Moses and Aaron through a ׁ clause;” *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 30.

⁸⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 38.

the form of an accusatory question, the nature of these questions will be explored below. However, because (1) accusatory questions do not appear with every verb and collocation associated with murmuring. And (2) because most of the accusatory questions that do appear lack the explanatory response posited by Coats; it will be concluded that the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions does not follow Coats' formal, two-part structure.

Accusatory Questions

Coats asserted that the purpose of the accusatory question “is to challenge the interrogated for an explanation of the event described by the principal verb. The implication of the challenge is to accuse the interrogated of irresponsibility.”⁸⁵ In terms of content, the majority of the accusatory questions in the wilderness wanderings traditions posed by the people have stereotyped language and content that focuses on what the Israelites' life was like in Egypt and why they were brought out to now die in the wilderness or be killed entering the promised land.⁸⁶ In terms of form, the interrogatives in these questions are fairly consistent. Num 16:3c features מַדּוּעַ (“why”), Exod 17:3b, Num 14:3a; 20:4, 5a; and 21:5b feature לָמָּה (“why”), and Exod 14:11b features מָה (“what”). The verbs are typically perfect verbs, which indicates that the event in question is complete and in the past; however, imperfect verbs also occur, and they signal the event is not yet complete.⁸⁷ The standard syntax of accusatory questions is the principal

⁸⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 30.

⁸⁶ See Exod 14:11b; 17:3b; Num 14:3a; 20:4, 5a; 21:5b. In Num 16:3, Korah and the other insurgents question the holiness and leadership of Moses and Aaron. See Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 257.

⁸⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 30. Exod 14:11b; 17:3b; Num 20:4, 5a; 21:5b have perfect verbs, Num 16:3c has an imperfect verb, and Num 14:3a has a participle.

verb followed by an infinitive, construct. The “purpose of the infinitive is to define the nature of the result expected from the action described by the principal verb,” the result could have already happened as in Num 20:5, or it can be an event still needing fulfillment such as in Exod 17:3; Num 14:3; 20:4; 21:5.⁸⁸ In these passages, “it is not the result, either real or anticipated, which is challenged by the question, but the action producing the result;” for example, in Exod 17:3, “the point of the challenge does not lie in the fact that thirst poses a threat to the lives of the people and their cattle. This threat is subordinated to the principal event, the Exodus out of Egypt under Moses’ leadership.”⁸⁹

Exod 14:11–12 does not contain any of the stereotyped verbs or collocations associated with the murmuring motif, and yet it is still to be considered part of the motif. In this passage, it is the presence of an accusatory question with stereotyped language regarding the Israelites’ life in Egypt and their exodus that signals the motif. In v. 11, the people of Israel challenge what Moses has done with two questions, the second of which is accusatory.⁹⁰ With the use of the אִם interrogative the people first ask, ““Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?”” Then with the interrogative pronoun מַה , they ask a follow-up accusatory question, ““What have you done in bringing us out of Egypt?”” Their first question is ironic and rhetorical; clearly, there were graves in Egypt, but it is the second question that has proved to be more challenging to interpret. When the people ask what Moses has done to them, they do not legitimately request information from him. The *hiphil*, infinitive, construct,

⁸⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 31. A *lamed* of purpose; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 110.

⁸⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 31–32.

⁹⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 30.

להוציאנו (“in bringing us out”), signals they know what Moses did for them. However, their question is not merely rhetorical, for “the answer provided by the interrogators would reduce the effectiveness of such a construction.”⁹¹ To clarify the nature of their second question and have it cohere with the other accusatory questions in the murmuring motif, Coats suggests the following translation: “‘Why have you done this to us? Why have you brought [Heb: to bring] us out from Egypt?’”⁹² As is characteristic of the syntax of accusatory questions, Exod 14:11b has a perfect, principal verb (הֲפָעַלְתָּ; “have you done”) followed by an infinitive, construct (להוציאנו; “in bringing us out”). Yet the function of this infinitive differs from what was described above. This infinitive, construct is not the result of the action of the perfect, principal verb, but is equivalent to the action; להוציאנו must be understood “as a more precise definition of the primary event and as such carries an equal burden of the challenge.”⁹³

The Numbers 11:4–35 pericope is tougher to analyze. Not only does it lack the stereotyped verbs and collocations associated with the murmuring motif, but there are verses later in the pericope (vv. 13, 18, 20) that provide further information regarding the people’s initial weeping in vv. 4b–6. The weeping coming from the people of Israel is in vv. 4b–6, but these verses are not in the form of an accusation; however, they do express a desire for meat and contain stereotypical language that recalls the people’s former life in Egypt. On their own, these verses are not part of the murmuring motif as they not only lack the stereotypical verbs and collocations but also because they are statements of

⁹¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 31.

⁹² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 31.

⁹³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 32. A *lamed* of specification; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 108.

complaint that do not have a specific addressee.⁹⁴ Num 11:4*b* does contain an interrogative, מִי (“who”), but the expression מִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בֶּשֶׂר is an “indefinite formulation” which when paired with an imperfect verb, as it is here (יֵאָכְלֵנוּ), it “commonly expresses a wish” and thus ought to be translated as “Oh that we had meat to eat!”⁹⁵

Verse 13 provides more information regarding the people’s weeping, but Moses reports it. The information here provides a bit of a different form of the weeping “and the direct question which is associated with it. In contrast to the text in vss. 4*b*–6, the crying is now done in the presence of Moses. The preposition עַל is used to indicate this, but it does not seem to carry the same hostile sense which it does for the other verbs of murmuring. Instead it connotes simply proximity.”⁹⁶ “Give us meat, that we may eat” is indeed a demand, but it does not signal the murmuring motif, nor is it “associated in any way with an appeal to Egypt.”⁹⁷ Vv. 18 and 20 are part of the LORD’s response to Moses. V. 18 indicates that the people’s weeping was not “directed specifically to Yahweh but simply overheard;” this verse is quite similar to vv.4*b*–6 as the “same kind of indefinite question with an imperfect verb is employed, and it is related to an allusion to the state of life in Egypt.”⁹⁸ מִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בֶּשֶׂר (“Who will give us meat to eat?”) is a legitimate interrogative and not a wish, but it is still not an accusatory question. V. 20 contains the

⁹⁴ The root בכה in v. 4 “appears in all the cognate languages and in each means nothing more than ‘to weep,’” and not a sense of rebellion; Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 100.

⁹⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 101. See Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 194.

⁹⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 103–04. The pairing of עַל with בכה simply indicates an “intense petition;” Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 104. A locative עַל; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 112.

⁹⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 104. See Exod 17:2.

⁹⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 105.

final reference to the people's weeping; in this verse, the LORD dictates to Moses what he is to say to the people. The LORD announces that the people will be given meat, but a nauseating amount, because they rejected the LORD and wept before him saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?" Again the verb בכה ("to weep") appears, but its pairing with the preposition לשפני ("before him") means "nothing more than weeping in the presence of someone, in this case Yahweh."⁹⁹ The people's weeping is now in the form of a question beginning with למה ("why"), and it is no longer about food; instead, "it questions the advisability of having left Egypt...And the verb יצא ["to come out"] leaves no doubt that the problem has shifted from simply remembering the food in Egypt to the Exodus itself."¹⁰⁰ This question is accusatory, albeit in a shortened form. It confirms that the people's weeping mentioned throughout Num 11:4–35 is to be considered part of the murmuring motif. This accusatory question is the "climax of an intensification. The previous quotations have referred to Egypt in anticipation of the final question."¹⁰¹

Num 16:13–14 is the final passage that lacks the stereotyped verbs and collocations of the murmuring motif, but it still must be considered a part of it. In v. 12, Moses calls for Dathan and Abiram, which presumes that they are not in his presence.

⁹⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 106. Locative לשפני; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 194.

¹⁰⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 106.

¹⁰¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 107. "Vs. 20b β , composed of the introductory verb בכה and this question, is set in relationship with vs. 20b α and its governing verb מאס ["to reject"]. This verb, clearly indicating an event which is in keeping with the rebellion motif, construes Yahweh as the direct object...The relationship of the *waw* consecutive imperfect ותבכו ["you have wept"] with מאסתם ["you have rejected"] in the יען כי ["because"] clause can be labeled as a more exact definition of the event which is governed by יען כי. Thus, the sentence which contains the verb בכה defines how Israel rejected Yahweh...and shows that at this point the crying is conceived as a rebellion directed against Yahweh;" Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 107. Classifying the people's comments in Num 11:4–35 as rebellious murmuring leads to the conclusion that the LORD's sending of quail in nauseating amounts is a punishment.

They refuse to come, yet their reply is still addressed to Moses. Their reply, in v. 13, not only mentions the exodus and their former life in Egypt, but it takes the form of an accusatory question. Yet, the question lacks the typical interrogatives as it begins with an interrogative ה. Despite the verb, הָעֲלִיתֵנוּ (“you have brought us up”), is a *hiphil*, second person, masculine, singular which references the exodus, and there is an infinitive, construct that questions if Moses brought them out of Egypt to kill them, 13a is not in the form of an accusation (“Is it not enough that you have brought us up from the land of Egypt to kill us in the wilderness...”).¹⁰² הַמְעַט כִּי (“Is it not enough that”) only recognizes the circumstances described in the כִּי clause; the point of the question is in the second half of the verse, 13b.¹⁰³ Here, Moses’ actions are challenged, namely his intent to make himself a prince over them. The fact that תִּשְׁתַּחֲרַךְ (“you must make yourself a prince”) is an imperfect verb signals that this “act which has been challenged extends into the present; i.e., it is incomplete.”¹⁰⁴ V. 14 is connected to the accusation of v. 13, but it does not add to the challenge regarding Moses’ position and leadership; instead, it provides the reason for the challenge against Moses: he “has not kept his promise; he has not brought the people into the land.”¹⁰⁵

It has been shown that the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions frequently takes the form of an accusatory question that has stereotyped

¹⁰² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 164. A lamed of purpose; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 110.

¹⁰³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 164.

¹⁰⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 164.

¹⁰⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 165.

language and content regarding the Israelites' former life in Egypt and their exodus. The responses to the accusatory questions or lack thereof will now be examined.

Responses to the Accusatory Questions

The second element of the structure of the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions that Coats posited was the response to the accusatory question from the addressee that explains the event; however, Coats found the task of categorizing these responses extremely difficult.¹⁰⁶ He pinpointed two factors: “(1) The questions are often followed by elements which seem unrelated in both form and content to the murmuring, thus giving the murmuring a strong appearance of a secondary addition to the text. (2) The responses that do occur vary from case to case according to the content of the murmuring.”¹⁰⁷ Despite these complications, he still ascertained two recurring forms of responses in which “the burden of response is placed on the fact that the authority for the event arises from Yahweh.”¹⁰⁸

Coats thought the first form of response was “perhaps the most puzzling;” it is found in Num 14:5; 16:4; and 20:6.¹⁰⁹ In Num 14:3, the whole congregation asks: ““Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little children will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?”” After they suggest choosing a new leader and heading back to Egypt in v. 4, Moses and Aaron

¹⁰⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 40; see 32, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 38.

¹⁰⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 38. It is also found in Num 16:22, 45 ET (17:10 MT) though not in response to an accusatory question.

fall on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel gathered there (v. 5). Num 16:3–4 is similar in that Moses falls on his face upon hearing the following accusatory question: “‘Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’” Additionally, in Num 20:6, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces after hearing the people in vv. 4–5 say: “‘Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.’” This gesture of prostration is found numerous times outside the wilderness wanderings traditions; on these occasions, the subject(s) is presenting himself before someone of a higher estate than them such as their deity; it also occurs when a subject comes before a king, or a woman comes before a man.¹¹⁰ Coats concluded that on these occasions, there is no “intrinsic petition or supplication involved in the formula, although such items do appear in connection with it. Rather, it seems to be simply a matter of self-abasement before one of higher rank.”¹¹¹ In the wilderness wanderings traditions, Moses’ prostration, and at times Aaron’s, is not to be interpreted as self-abasement before the people, but instead a humbling of themselves before the LORD. This act of humility is clarified in Num 16:43–45 ET and 20:6 when they go to the tent of meeting and fall on their faces; “the significance of the response for the murmuring motif lies in” their “deference in favor of

¹¹⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 38. See Gen 17:17; 44:14; Lev 9:24; Josh 5:14; 7:6; 7:10; Judg 13:20; Ruth 2:10 includes תִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה (“and bowing to the ground”); 1 Sam 25:35; 2 Sam 9:6; 14:4, 22 but with the addition of אֶרְצָה (“to the ground”); 1 Kgs 18:7; 2 Kgs 4:37 פְּנֵיהֶם (“their faces”) is replaced with רַגְלָיו (“his feet”); Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 11:13; 43:3; 44:4; and Dan 8:17.

¹¹¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 39.

the authority against whom this murmuring is really directed.”¹¹² Gordon Wenham notes that in Numbers, this act of prostration “usually anticipates some great act of judgment;” this can lead to the conclusion that prostration does include a sense of petition for help from the LORD.¹¹³

As for the second form of recurring responses to the accusatory questions in the wilderness wanderings traditions, Coats looks to Num 16:25–35, where Moses’ response is in the form of an *Erweiswort*.¹¹⁴ In Num 16:25–35, the event that occurs is the judgment of those that took part in Korah’s rebellion. Coats argues that there is also an *Erweiswort* in Exod 16:6b–12, where the LORD announces the provision of the manna and quail. Coats acknowledges that the murmuring in Exod 16:3 is not an accusatory question because it does not have an interrogative. Still, he views the וְ conjunction as functioning as an accusation and challenge against Moses and Aaron for bringing the people out of Egypt.¹¹⁵

Identifying the Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Wanderings Traditions

Upon examination of the wilderness wanderings traditions, it must be concluded that the murmuring motif does not follow Coats’ proposed formal, two-part structure. Not every verb and collocation associated with murmuring is connected to an accusatory question. Even when there are accusatory questions, they are not always followed by “a

¹¹² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 39.

¹¹³ Gordon Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 121. See Num 16:4, 22, 45; 20:6.

¹¹⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 89.

response from the addressee which provides an explanation for that event.”¹¹⁶ The primary indicator of the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions is the presence of the following collocations: על + לון; על + יעד; על + קהל; ב + דבר; עמ + ריב, and the verb אגן. When these are not found, as in Exod 14:11–12; Num 11:4b–6, 13, 18, 20; and Num 16:13–14, it is the presence of an accusatory question with stereotyped language and content regarding the Israelites’ life in Egypt and their exodus that signals these verses are part of the murmuring motif. The murmuring motif does not have a single, stereotyped form. The murmurings take various forms, a prominent one being the accusatory question. Still, since it has proved challenging to identify a consistent response to the murmurings, it is best to restrict the murmuring motif to the murmurings themselves and to exclude any responses these murmurings may or may not have. The murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions does not appear in isolation; it is a part of a pericope and has a context that must be examined. When the murmuring motif is restricted to the murmurings, the pericope in which the motif occurs can be more effectively evaluated. It will be shown below that in the wilderness wanderings traditions the murmuring motif comprises one element of two repeated patterns.

¹¹⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 40; see 32.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A Focus on Final Form

The material in the Pentateuch is not homogeneous; there are various writing styles set right next to each other.¹ The Documentary Hypothesis, which once held a “quasi-canonical status in critical scholarship,” attempted an explanation of the Pentateuch’s lack of homogeneity; however, in the late twentieth century, the landscape of pentateuchal scholarship began to see substantial changes as scholars moved away from the hypothesis or abandoned it altogether.² The Documentary Hypothesis is right in the sense that the lack of homogeneity in the Pentateuch can likely be explained by one or more individuals bringing together a variety of material written by others, perhaps on

¹ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, ApOTC 2 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 14, 15. See Exodus 14 and 15:1–21.

² Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, eds., *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), xi. The current state of pentateuchal research can be organized into three settings of scholarship, North America, Europe, and Israel; unfortunately, the discussions between these settings are “poorly connected to each other, and at times even independent from one another;” *The Pentateuch*, xi. The Documentary Hypothesis, with some modifications, is still widely accepted in North America, though other methodologies are explored. Many Israeli scholars hold to the Documentary Hypothesis, but there is also a “tendency to understand pentateuchal research as a literary endeavor...only at a second stages should extratextual evidence and historical parameters enter the discussion,” *The Pentateuch*, xii. In Europe, the Documentary Hypothesis is no longer mainstream; most scholars “accept only P as a sufficiently plausible hypothesis, and they have abandoned the assumption that the non-P texts can be divided into continuous sources (such as J and E) that cover the whole textual range from Genesis at least to Numbers,” *The Pentateuch*, xii.

more than one occasion, and perhaps at times contributing their own thoughts. This material need not be restricted to only fragments, an approach commonly attributed to European scholars. Konrad Schmid effectively dismissed the notion that European scholars “do not recognize any source ‘documents’ underlying the Pentateuch and that their approach is not ‘documentarian,’ but ‘fragmentarian.’”³ He clarifies that fragments “are called ‘fragments’ not because of their incompleteness but instead because of their character as formerly stand-alone texts;” in methodological terms, there is no reason to deny documents and fragments an equal status.⁴ If one reads their work carefully, it was Julius Wellhausen, Hugo Greßmann, and Hermann Gunkel, who argued that the documents, J, E, and P, have a composite and fragmentary nature.⁵ However, these men’s conception of the compositeness of sources was overshadowed by Gerhard von Rad’s theory of “the so-called short historical creed with the entire storyline of the Hexateuch as a blueprint.”⁶ According to von Rad, J was a theologian “who grouped the material at his hands according to a certain ancient and tradition idea—the ‘short historical creed.’”⁷ Despite von Rad’s confidence, his theory rested on very little evidence, and yet it

³ Schmid Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis? Some Reminders on Its History and Remarks on Its Current Status,” in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 15.

⁴ Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis?,” 22; see 24.

⁵ Hugo Greßmann said the “only satisfying explanation is to consider JE as redactors or collectors;” *Mose und seine Zeit: ein Kommentar zu den Mose-Sagen*, vol. 1 of *FRLANT* 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 372. Hermann Gunkel concluded that J and E were “not individual writers but narrators;” *Genesis*, 6. Aufl. nachdruck der 3. Aufl., HKAT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), lxxx.

⁶ Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis?,” 28. See Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch: And Other Essays*, trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 4.

⁷ Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis?,” 27.

convinced scholars of his day, in particular, Noth. Schmid made the critical observation that the “shape of the Documentary Hypothesis that is today seen as the ‘classical theory’ was established by von Rad, and by Noth’s surrender to von Rad. The texts of the Pentateuch are mainly interpreted within the context of their assumed source contexts; their prehistory and their possible former independence spark only marginal interest.”⁸ It is this classical theory that more modern scholars, such as Rolf Rendtorff, disputed, and rightly so. Rendtorff thought that the “twentieth-century German documentarians were decidedly bound to the notion of sources, especially J, as *theological* texts, but they never really asked what this theology was nor whether this theology was identical in the different sections of the assumed sources.”⁹ The resurging desire to investigate the prehistory of the sources of the Pentateuch as opposed to assuming their literary or material unity is commendable; so is Rendtorff’s desire to explore the composition of the Pentateuch more so on the “basis of *material* than solely on *formal* criteria, like doublets or the alternation of Yhwh and Elohim.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, any attempts to reconstruct the exact process by which the texts came into being are ultimately hypothetical.¹¹

While diachronic, source-oriented approaches to pentateuchal studies are important endeavors, only the final form of the text is available today, not its prehistory. By way of contrast, a discourse-oriented approach views each book of the Pentateuch as a

⁸ Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis?,” 28.

⁹ Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis?,” 28; emphasis original. See Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, trans. John J. Scullion, JSOTSup 89 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 28.

¹⁰ Konrad, “Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis?,” 29; emphasis original.

¹¹ See Alexander, *Exodus*, 11, 12, 13.

“fully composed literary creation,” each book “is the object of study, not the process by which it was created.”¹² While the texts in each pentateuchal book may not be homogenous, the books themselves “have all been combined to form a literary work that, while far from homogenous in terms of style and form, is remarkably unified in the story that it communicates.”¹³ The interpretation of these texts must be controlled by the common narrative and literary contexts that they now share within each book, the context of a text determines its meaning; thus, what is said in each book must be interpreted within the context of the whole book.¹⁴ In his 1974 commentary on Exodus, Childs acknowledged the importance of studying the final form of the biblical texts. He wrote: “The final literary production has an integrity of its own which must not only be recognized, but studied with the same intensity as one devotes to the earlier stages.”¹⁵ However, later in his commentary, he added:

If one assumes, as I do, that a major purpose of biblical exegesis is the interpretation of the final form of the text, the study of the earlier dimensions of historical development should serve to bring the final stage of redaction into sharper focus. Indeed the recognition of different layers of tradition, both on the oral and literary levels, can have exegetical importance even though the factors which produced them often remain unclear.¹⁶

There is merit to Childs’ later remark because, in *theory*, diachronic, source-oriented approaches and discourse-oriented approaches can be complementary, but in *practice*, Childs’ statement must be viewed with caution because it presupposes that diachronic

¹² Alexander, *Exodus*, 12. See Durham *Exodus*, 211, 212, 217, 218, 224, 229.

¹³ Alexander, *Exodus*, 15; see 14.

¹⁴ Alexander, *Exodus*, 14, 15, 16.

¹⁵ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 224.

¹⁶ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 393.

approaches to pentateuchal studies have “produced results that can reliably inform our understanding of the final redaction phase of” each book’s composition.¹⁷ The current state of pentateuchal scholarship, however, reveals the vast disparities scholars have regarding the composition of the Pentateuch. The conclusions drawn from diachronic approaches can be helpful supplements to one’s exegesis. Still, when comparing the two approaches, it is the discourse-oriented approaches that rest “on a more secure foundation.”¹⁸

Recently, Joel Baden argued for one compiler of the final form of the whole Pentateuch. He contends the compiler merged “four originally, independent documents,” J, E, D, and P, which were written by four different authors; it is their “disparate historical claims” that “constitute the primary mark of authorship.”¹⁹ Baden uses the term ‘compiler,’ for he is “first and foremost, a preservationist,” the compiler desires “to retain as much of his source material as possible,” but he is “not an author: he does not create new material, but rather uses the words and phrases of his sources when he makes insertions.”²⁰ Although Baden calls his compiler a preservationist, he caveats this by saying that the “sources have been combined into a single story, and in this the compiler reveals himself as a master of narrative logic... the creation of a single chronologically

¹⁷ Alexander, *Exodus*, 12; see 13.

¹⁸ Alexander, *Exodus*, 13. “The *harmonizing* reader may at least recreate the editors’ understanding of their product. But the *atomizing* reader posits and analyses literary materials whose existence is highly questionable” (emphasis original); William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2B of *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 734.

¹⁹ Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 214; see 220, 246.

²⁰ Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 224; see 246.

coherent story is apparently what drove the compiler's method."²¹ The fact that Baden views the work of his compiler as being of a "fundamentally literary nature" is commendable.²² Still, Baden's conclusions seem to depict the compiler as an objective literary weaver of source threads that never weaves a substantive thread of his own voice into the masterpiece. This conclusion is far too limiting.

Since each book of the Pentateuch is a "fully composed literary creation," it is best to speak of the person(s) behind the final form of each book.²³ If the pentateuchal books are the product of a compilation of various sources, then 'author' is not an apt term for this person(s) since not every word originated from them. Yet, it also seems unlikely that this person(s) is simply a redactor or compiler who contributes no original thought. Baden ruled out the notion of his compiler having the role of an interpreter who creates new theological concepts. He says that the compiler may have recognized that, "in his ordering of the sources, he had created at points a novel theological message," but "this message was not his intention, or, at the very least, that it cannot be proved that this was his intention."²⁴ Ultimately Baden concludes: "It is the job of the canonical interpreter to find meaning in the final form of the text; it does not follow, however, that it was the intention of the compiler to create that meaning."²⁵ However, this conclusion makes the

²¹ Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 225–26.

²² Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 226.

²³ Alexander, *Exodus*, 12. See Durham *Exodus*, 211, 212, 217, 218, 224, 229.

²⁴ Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 228.

²⁵ Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 227. Baden does not think that the compiler's composition of the Pentateuch was "a theologically meaningless exercise;" he asserts that the theological intentionality of the compiler is not found in the text of the compiled Pentateuch, but the act of compilation; *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 228.

job of canonical interpretation entirely too subjective. Whose meaning is the canonical interpreter supposed to find, their own, their congregation's, or their denomination's? No, the job of the canonical interpreter is to "to get at the 'plain meaning of the text,' the author's intended meaning."²⁶ In Baden's schema, that would be the authorial intent of J, E, D, and P, but each of these authors likely had different intentions for their manuscripts. As was stated above, the context of a text determines its meaning, and when a text is taken from its context within a source, like J, E, D, or P, and combined with other texts, a new meaning is created in the new document. Despite T. Desmond Alexander uses the term 'author' to refer to the person behind the final form of Exodus, he makes an excellent point:

Unfortunately, for two centuries scholars have generally ridden roughshod over the authors responsible for producing biblical books in their final form. Viewed as mere editors or redactors, their compositional skill has usually been dismissed and they themselves have been demeaned as creative writers. Scholars have not chosen to listen carefully to their voices, preferring rather to substitute the reconstructed voices of earlier sources, all of which are hypothetical and speculative. Unintentionally perhaps, many OT commentators have been less than faithful to the task of explicating with the ultimate 'author' of Exodus wants to say.²⁷

The exegesis below will primarily be a discourse-oriented analysis. Although source-critical comments will be made where deemed necessary, the primary focus will be on the final form of these texts. This methodology seeks to honor the final hand(s) responsible for the texts discussed and takes care not to misrepresent the material.²⁸

²⁶ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Fourth edition. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 22.

²⁷ Alexander, *Exodus*, 14–15.

²⁸ Alexander, *Exodus*, 14, 15.

Two Patterns

There are two sections of text, before and after the covenant at Mount Sinai, that comprise the wilderness wanderings traditions. The texts before Mount Sinai are Exod 13:17–14:31; 15:22–27; 16:1–36; and 17:1–7 while those after are Num 11:1–35; 12:1–16; 14:1–45; 16:1–50 ET; 20:1–13; and 21:4–9. Fretheim was correct in saying that there were weaknesses in Childs’ patterns; however, Fretheim’s pattern has its weaknesses too, as it does not adequately deal with the differences in the pre-Sinai and post-Sinai texts, does not address the murmuring motif in Num 12, or the uniqueness of Num 20:1–13. To accommodate all the texts in the wilderness wanderings traditions, I propose two new patterns. Pattern A occurs in Exod 13:17–14:31; 15:22–27; 16:1–36; 17:1–7; and Num 20:1–13, and it has the following elements: (1) journey (Exod 13:20; 15:22; 16:1; 17:1; Num 20:1); (2) legitimate need/murmuring (Exod 14:10–12; 15:22–24; 16:2–3; 17:1–3; Num 20:2–5); (3) intercession/instructions (Exod 14:13–18; 15:25; 16:4–12; 17:4–6*a*; Num 20:6–8); and (4) deliverance (Exod 14:19–31; 15:25; 16:13–14; 17:6*b*; Num 20:9–11). It will be demonstrated below how Exod 13:17–14:31 serves a unique introductory role to the subsequent pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts. Additionally, it will be shown how in the subsequent pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts, the level of hostility grows in each pericope; as the hostility grows, so does the formality of the murmuring. While the form of the murmuring in Exod 15:24 is a simple, non-accusatory question with a low level of hostility, in Exod 16:3, the form of murmuring grows into a robust accusatory statement with an increased level of hostility. In Exod 17:2, the murmuring takes the form of a protest against Moses coupled with a demand for water; while in v. 3, the form of the

murmuring and level of hostility reach their climax as the people pose an accusatory question to Moses, and he fears they may stone him.

Pattern B occurs in Num 11:1–3, 4–35; 12:1–16; 14:1–45; 16:1–50 ET; 21:4–8; these are exclusively post-Sinai texts. This pattern is slightly more complex than Pattern A as not every Pattern B text contains all the elements of the pattern. The full Pattern B is comprised of the following elements: (1) illegitimate murmuring (Num 11:1*a*, 4*b*–6, 13, 18, 20; 12:1–2; 14:2–3; 16:1–3, 13–14, 41 ET; 21:4–5); (2) judgment (Num 11:1*b*, 33–34; 12:10; 14:12, 29–35, 37, 16:31–33, 35, 46–47 ET; 21:6); (3) repentance (Num 11:2*a*; 12:11; 14:40; 21:7); (4) intercession (Num 11:2*b*; 12:11–13; 14:13–19; 16:22, 46–48 ET; 21:7); and (5) deliverance (Num 11:2*c*; 12:14–16; 14:20; 16:48 ET; 21:8–9). The Pattern B texts have a distinct opening and closing as both Num 11:1–3 and Num 21:4–9 contain all the elements of the pattern in order. These two pericopes function as the bookends to the texts of Pattern B. In Num 11:1, the people are described as complaining (נִאָחַז) about their misfortunes; there is no dialogue recorded here, nor is Moses even mentioned. Instead, the LORD's anger is aroused, and he immediately executes a punishment of fire around the outskirts of the camp. It is not until after the punishment is executed and the people cry out to Moses, and he prays to the LORD, that the fire dies down. Just as the final pre-Sinai, Pattern A text, Exod 17:1–7, ends with an accusatory question, so does the final post-Sinai, Pattern B text, Num 21:4–9. The response to this murmur has the same structure as Num 11:1–3. In Num 21, Moses is not mentioned; instead, the LORD responds immediately with a punishment of venomous snakes. After the snakes are sent, the people come to Moses to repent and petition him to act as their intercessor, and he prays to the LORD to take the snakes away.

It is between these two bookends that arguably, the greatest crisis of the wilderness wanderings traditions occurs. Num 14:1–45 is the central text of the Pattern B texts where the level of hostility climaxes; in v. 4, the people want to choose a new leader and reverse the exodus, and in v. 10, the people talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Num 14:1–45 contains all the elements of Pattern B, but they are expressed in a slightly different way. After the people illegitimately complain, the LORD, in a conversation with Moses, threatens judgment; the element of repentance is passed over as Moses intercedes in vv. 13–19 and the LORD responds with a type of deliverance in v. 20 when he pardons their iniquity. Although the LORD does not wipe out the entire population of Israel, he still judges the exodus generation and the ten unfaithful spies. The people repent in v. 40 after learning their fate, but the elements of intercession and deliverance are not found again in the chapter.

When the murmuring motif is restricted to the murmurings alone and does not include any responses from the addressee, the murmuring, be it legitimate or illegitimate, can be identified as one element of a pattern, and the rest of the pericope can be more accurately examined. When analyzing the pericopes in full, it becomes clear that there are two very significant and consistent ways in which the LORD addresses the murmuring in each pattern. Aside from Num 20:1–13, the two patterns are split by the Mount Sinai tradition, Exod 19–Num 10. In the pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts, the LORD is patient with the people and does not punish them when they murmur, but his response to their murmurs after they leave Mount Sinai is markedly different. It is because “the Israelites make a solemn pledge to obey YHWH when ratifying the Sinai covenant (24:3; cf. 19:9), [that] their subsequent disobedience takes on greater significance...After the covenant

is sealed, much more is expected of the people and they are held to account fully for disobeying YHWH.”²⁹ Indeed, the striking difference between the Pattern A and Pattern B texts is the lack of judgment and repentance in the Pattern A texts. In the Pattern A texts, the LORD does not punish the Israelites for their murmuring; instead, he miraculously provides for their legitimate needs, even though they do not repent. One could posit that the motif is not complete without a form of judgment, but a better conclusion is that the lack of judgment is intentional. Num 20:1–13 stands out amongst the Pattern B murmuring texts, for although there are two accusatory questions, in v. 4 and v. 5, the LORD does not punish the people, nor do they repent. Instead, he provides them with the water they desire. Num 20:1–13 is the only post-Sinai text with the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions that exhibits Pattern A. Scholars have noticed this and have sought to come up with solutions for why this is the case. Coats saw that the announcement of Moses’ death outside the promised land was a vicarious punishment on behalf of the Israelites.³⁰ Noth was far less confident; he concluded that Num 20:2–13 can be attributed to the P source and that the author(s) of P introduced a punishment not on Israel but her leaders for “special reasons” which are “not exactly transparent.”³¹ It is commonly thought that Num 20:1–13 is from the P source and is a doublet of Exod 17:1–7, a J(E) text; thus, the P source author/compiler must have modified his version to explain why Moses and Aaron were not able to enter the promised land. However, there is evidence which suggests that Num 20:1–13 is a unique

²⁹ Alexander, *Exodus*, 329.

³⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 94.

³¹ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 124n351.

situation which presumes knowledge of Exod 17:1–7: (1) in Exod 17, Moses is the only one mentioned while in Num 20, both Moses and Aaron are mentioned; (2) Num 20 refers back to Aaron’s budded rod from Num 17; and (3) the LORD gives different commands to Moses for how to obtain water from the rock in each passage.³² The reason a Pattern A text is amidst exclusively Pattern B texts is far more theological than it is source-critical. In Num 20:1–13, the Israelites’ murmuring comes from a place of legitimate need; as the covenant people of the LORD, the Israelites now know better than to complain against him, but they did need water to survive, and so in his grace and mercy the LORD did not punish them.

A Suggestion for the Origin and Development of Patterns A and B

Coats argued that the murmuring motif in the wilderness wanderings traditions was “secondarily imposed on Israel’s affirmations about Yahweh’s aid in the wilderness,” and that because the murmurings do not seem to be “a homogenous part of the immediate context in which they stand” there must have been “a complex history of growth which shows the murmuring to be secondarily imposed on Israel’s affirmations about Yahweh’s aid in the wilderness.”³³ However, classifying material as a secondary addition is tenuous given that reconstructing the history of texts is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. David M. Carr writes:

One reason that ancient texts like the Bible do not preserve many traces of growth is that their authors often worked from memory in incorporating earlier texts...the texts of the Hebrew Bible, like those of many better-documented cultures surrounding it, were formed in an oral-written context where the masters of literary tradition used texts to memorize certain traditions seen as particularly

³² Wenham, *Numbers*, 149.

³³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 250.

ancient, holy, and divinely inspired... This writing-supported process of memorization was how ancient cultures passed on to the next generation their most treasured written traditions.³⁴

Childs viewed the murmuring motif as one element in each of his two patterns. He did not think these patterns gave “the impression of being a literary creation,” but that they stemmed “from a particular situation in the oral tradition.”³⁵ Childs first discussed what he thought the function of each pattern was in the oral tradition stage before he traced their development in the literary tradition stage. This methodology, however, represents what Carr finds is “all too common in studies of the ancient world,” a dichotomy “between orality/memorization and writing/literacy.”³⁶ According to Carr:

Students in a culture such as Israel’s learned the *written* tradition in an *oral-performative* and *communal* context... the writing-reading process for literary texts was supported by and oriented toward a process of memorization of tradition by the individual and performance of the tradition and adaptation of it for a community or sub-community... literary texts circulated and were reproduced in traditional contexts organized by hierarchies of authority. Those scribes/priests/scholars who stood at the top of a given social group had the power to dictate which texts were worthwhile to teach, copy, and revise within that group... in so far as master scribes were the primary teachers and guardians of the memorized literary tradition in ancient cultures, they possessed the power—at least at certain junctures—to adapt or revise the tradition for the broader community as well as to conserve it.³⁷

The references to Israel’s time in the wilderness in other OT and NT books suggest that this was an important time in Israel’s history to remember, but, at least in

³⁴ David McLain Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4–5. See David McLain Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁵ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258.

³⁶ Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 5.

³⁷ Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 5, 6; emphasis original.

terms of the murmuring, not a time to emulate.³⁸ Perhaps it was prominent scribes/priests/scholars that first discerned semblances of patterns in the stories circulating orally about the wilderness period or in early fragments/documents. Then, due to the important theological nature of this period, they revised the stories/texts and made the patterns more discernable and memorizable so as to teach the community. Patterns, after all, are helpful memory devices for the literate and nonliterate and can be passed down to later generations. It is especially memorable when a pattern breaks as it does in Num 20:1–13 when a Pattern A text is surrounded by Pattern B texts. Because the murmurings in Pattern A are triggered by a legitimate need while in Pattern B, they are illegitimate, it seems plausible, as Childs suggested, that Pattern A functioned “as a form by which to relate stories of the miraculous preservation of Israel in the desert as part of the recitation of the sacred history,” and Pattern B assisted the community in recalling their ancestor's disobedience, the LORD's anger, judgment, and forgiveness.³⁹ Since, as Carr states, “scholars decades ago deconstructed the idea that there was a ‘great divide’ between orality and literacy,” it can be suggested that the prominent scribes/priests/scholars maintained the distinctions between Patterns A and B not only in orality but also literacy.⁴⁰ This hypothesis could then, in contrast to Coats, suggest that in the Pentateuch, the murmuring motif, as defined in this paper, is a homogenous part of its immediate context within either Pattern A or B. Furthermore, because the murmuring is

³⁸ See Ps 95:7–11; Heb 3:7–11.

³⁹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258; see 259.

⁴⁰ Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 5.

always negative, the notion that Pattern A at one point was purely positive and Pattern B was purely negative ought to be rejected.⁴¹

Childs posited that in the oral stage, his patterns began to serve an identical function as the “complaints in the two patterns were levelled and the identical set of stereotypes used in both instances.”⁴² This theory seems like a logical development for Patterns A and B, but it need not be limited to the oral stage. A notable example of this is in Ps 106, where traces of Pattern A and B can still be discerned (cf. Deut 9; Ps 78). V. 6 recalls the Reed Sea crossing (Exod 14:11–12; Pattern A); the murmuring there was triggered by a legitimate need, the approaching Egyptians. Vv. 14–15 then refers to the craving for meat (Num 11:4–35, Pattern B), an illegitimate murmuring. The psalmist can move seamlessly from one example to another because Pattern A and B both contain the element of murmuring. Whether the murmuring was triggered by a legitimate need or was illegitimate is not the point, the point is that every instance of murmuring in the wilderness wanderings traditions is hostile and an act of open rebellion (see Ps 106:7).

Concentric Arrangements

A broader examination of the pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts reveals they form a concentric arrangement:⁴³

- A The Lord provides protection from the Egyptian army (13:17–14:31)
- B Water at Marah made sweet; twelve springs at Elim (15:22–27)
- C Quail and manna provided in the Sin wilderness (16:1–36)
- B` Water from the rock at Rephidim (17:1–7)
- A` The Lord provides victory over the Amalekites (17:8–16)

⁴¹ See Barth, “Zur Bedeutung Der Wüstentradition,” 14–23.

⁴² Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 259.

⁴³ See Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 4–8.

James K. Bruckner identified the major theme of this concentric arrangement as the LORD's provision; B, C, and B' focus on the LORD's provision of food and water while A and A' focus on the LORD's protection from Egyptian and Amalekite enemies.⁴⁴ Additionally, a broader examination of the post-Sinai, Pattern B texts, and the one post-Sinai, Pattern A text reveals they are in the form of a concentric arrangement:

A Fire at Taberah (11:1–3)

B Quail; the appointment of elders; a plague (11:4–35)

C Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses (12:1–16)

D Rebellion and judgment at Kadesh (14:1–45)

C' Korah's rebellion (16:1–50 ET)

B' Water from the rock; Moses and Aaron disobey (20:1–13)

A' The bronze serpent (21:4–9)

It is noteworthy that both C and C' include murmurings from people in leadership, and that the murmurings in B and B' pertain to daily sustenance.

Testing and Trial Runs

Through the plagues, the exodus, and the deliverance at the Reed Sea, the LORD was revealing himself to the Israelites and showing them he could be trusted. However, as Alexander writes: “Deliverance from exploitation and oppression is merely the first stage in a process that will require the Israelites to exercise ongoing trust in YHWH and exclusive commitment to him.”⁴⁵ It is in the three pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts after the Reed Sea account that the LORD will continue to reveal himself to the Israelites as he purposefully puts them in vulnerable situations where they will need to rely on him. Life

⁴⁴ Concentric arrangement adapted from James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, NIBCOT 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 144–45. In Exod 17:8–16, no mention made of the Israelites murmuring. It is possible that the LORD's provision of food and water instilled in the Israelites a greater sense of trust in the LORD and his provision. However, as Exod 32 will show, this trust is not long-lasting.

⁴⁵ Alexander, *Exodus*, 309.

in Egypt will still prove to be attractive to the people, especially when they need food and water.⁴⁶ These needs are understandable and legitimate, and the LORD will provide them for the people, but he is putting them in these vulnerable situations to test them. Exod 15:25 and 16:4 use the terms נִסָּהוּ (“he tested them”) and אֶנְסֶנְנִי (“I may test them”) respectively, which are from the root נסה and can be translated “tested,” “proved,” or even “trained.”⁴⁷ The principal meaning of נסה “is to decide between two opposing alternatives without prejudice in favor of the one over the other;” here, the options are either to trust the LORD to provide, or to not.⁴⁸ However, as the pre-Sinai, Pattern A narratives will show, the LORD is not simply interested in learning Israel’s inclinations; he is primarily concerned with instructing and training them for a life in relationship with him and obedience to him.⁴⁹ The wilderness is going to be the Israelites’ training camp. Each of these tests is “part of a plan to develop a people’s willingness to trust him. Explaining everything in advance would have run counter to that plan. It was necessary for Israel to learn faith while confused, while afraid, while desperate.”⁵⁰ The LORD tests the people so that they can build new faith and trust in him before they enter into a covenant together.⁵¹ The more faithfulness Israel can show to the LORD, the more natural a response of obedience to him will become; and as Exod 15:26 will reveal,

⁴⁶ Alexander, *Exodus*, 315.

⁴⁷ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 144.

⁴⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 53. See Judg 3:1, 4; 6:39; I Kgs 10:1; Ecc 2:1; 7:23.

⁴⁹ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, NSBT 28 (Downers Grove: Apollos, 2012), 66; see Deut 8:2–5 where testing (נסה) “‘to know what was in your heart’ and instruction are the stated goals of the wilderness.”

⁵⁰ Stuart, *Exodus*, 374.

⁵¹ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 144. נסה is also found in Exod 20:20.

obedience to the LORD is essential for the Israelites' well-being.⁵² These are difficult tests, but they are not about passing or failing; instead, they are educational experiences for Israel to learn more about the LORD.⁵³ Despite Exod 17:1–7 does not explicitly say the LORD is testing the Israelites, the concentric arrangement mentioned above signals that the lack of water in this chapter must be regarded as a test as well.

Bruckner referred to these three tests as trial runs.⁵⁴ The Collins Dictionary has an apt definition of a trial run: “A trial run is a first attempt at doing something to make sure you can do it properly.”⁵⁵ The Israelites will get three attempts to make sure they can trust the LORD properly. It will be seen that they “are incredibly slow to learn from their experiences in the wilderness;” each time the people are in a precarious situation, they murmur, which reveals their weak faith.⁵⁶ Their murmuring is always an act of rebellion against the LORD, and it is always hostile. However, the level of hostility will increase in degree in each pericope till the climax in Exod 17:1–7. In each one of these trial runs, the LORD is patient with these newly liberated slaves, for they are in legitimate need, and he put them in these precarious circumstances. It is Exod 17:2 and 7 that reveal a new

⁵² Fretheim, *Exodus*, 188; Bruckner, *Exodus*, 144.

⁵³ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 144. See Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 66, 68. If they were pass/fail tests, it could be argued that Israel failed all three because each time they murmured rebelliously and exhibited a lack of obedience and trust. And yet the binding statute of Exod 15:26 states that if Israel failed to trust and obey, the LORD would bring upon them the disasters (הַלָּמָּוֹת) he put on the Egyptians, which he does not. It is not until after Israel commits to the covenant that the LORD punishes them for their illegitimate, rebellious murmuring in the book of Numbers.

⁵⁴ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 144. Despite Num 20:1–13 is a Pattern A text it is still a post-Sinai text and must not be regarded as a test or trial run. The Israelites are again faced with a water shortage, but instead of trusting the LORD, they murmur. Clearly, they had not learned from the pre-Sinai trial runs.

⁵⁵ “Trial Run,” in *COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2020), <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/trial-run>.

⁵⁶ Alexander, *Exodus*, 315. See Brucker, *Exodus*, 149.

element, namely while the LORD was testing Israel to determine her level of faith and obedience, Israel tested (נסו) the LORD. Testing the LORD has to do with ““putting God to the proof;” it is an attempt to coerce him to act in a certain way or show himself, and an endeavor to “force God’s hand in order thereby to determine concretely whether God is really present or not.”⁵⁷ When viewed in this manner, it can be suggested that there is mutual testing in all three of the pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts.⁵⁸ Testing the LORD is a behavior Israel continued as Num 14:22 says that the people have put the LORD to the test ten times and have not obeyed his voice.

Exod 13:17–14:31 does not include the verb נסו, but it is there in concept. Indeed the LORD was “leading them in odd directions without fully explaining why (14:1–4), surprising them with potentially destructive enemy attacks even after they had left Egypt (14:10ff.; cf. 17:8ff.), [and] requiring them to walk into and through deep ocean water (14:15ff.).”⁵⁹ While Exod 13:17–14:31 could technically be viewed as a test and a trial run, it will be shown below how in the book of Exodus, this pericope serves a unique introductory function to prepare the reader for the subsequent pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts.

⁵⁷ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 189.

⁵⁸ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 72. See especially Exod 16:28.

⁵⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 374.

CHAPTER 4
AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-SINAI
MURMURING NARRATIVES

Exodus 13:17–14:31

The Beginning of the Wilderness Wanderings Traditions

There is disagreement as to when the wilderness wanderings traditions begin. The account of the Reed Sea in Exod 13:17–14:31 dominates this discussion. In the framework of the exodus narrative, Noth regarded the plague tradition as the prelude and the Reed Sea tradition as the culminating postlude, but in terms of the history of tradition, he thought that the Reed Sea crossing was the very “nucleus of the Exodus theme.”¹ Thus for Noth, the Reed Sea crossing was part of the exodus tradition. By way of contrast, Coats argued that the Reed Sea crossing was part of wilderness wanderings traditions because he thought that the Reed Sea tradition viewed the exodus as a past event.² Coats determined that J, E, and P are all represented in Exod 13:17–14:31 and that they all

¹ Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 105; see 104. See Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 65–71.

² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 135, 136. See George W. Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” *VT* 17.3 (1967): 256. doi: 10.2307/1516845.

presuppose that the setting for the Reed Sea crossing is the wilderness.³ He thought Exod 13:17 (E) provided “an obvious beginning for the theme of Yahweh’s leadership in the wilderness,” and he pointed to the use of מִדְּבָר (“wilderness”) in v. 18 to strengthen his argument.⁴ Coats also contended that in v. 21 (J), the participle הֵלְךָ (“went”) in the phrase, “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud,” suggests “that the description is not one of a specific event but one of an enduring motif. And indeed, it is clear that the pillar of cloud and fire constitutes the unifying motif in J for the Wilderness theme, the means by which Yahweh leads his people through the wilderness.”⁵ As for P, Coats understood P’s setting to be in Exod 14:1–2; the “specification of the various camp sites here corresponds to P’s normal characteristic of giving the precise itinerary for the wilderness journey.”⁶

Coats maintained that the Israelites’ murmuring in Exod 14:11–12 also presupposes the exodus is a past event. He reasoned that the question in v.11a, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt...,” shows that the “murmuring is given a setting in

³ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 256.

⁴ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 255; he also thought 14:5a (E) implied Israel already fled Egypt, 257.

⁵ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 256. Coats also concluded that Exod 14:5 (J) “shows that the Israelites are no longer under the authority of the Egyptians. Since the redemption from servitude is an intrinsic part of the Exodus event, the statement also presupposes that the Exodus had already been effected;” “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257. See Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 109.

⁶ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 256. Coats also thought that Exod 14:3 (P) suggests that Pharaoh would think Israel was wandering around in the wilderness, which would cause him to change his mind and pursue them; “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257.

the *wilderness* in contradistinction to the earlier life in Egypt.”⁷ Coats argued that “the form of the question presupposes not only that graves in Egypt would have been preferable to the ones they might have had in the wilderness, but also that there was no chance for them to obtain that preference.”⁸ Additionally, he thought that the reference to the exodus in v.11*b* indicated “that the Exodus event now lies in the past.”⁹ There is not a record of the Israelites saying the contents of v. 12 to Moses while they were still in Egypt, yet, for Coats, the repetition of this alleged statement presupposes that their life in Egypt is a past reality.¹⁰ Furthermore, in v. 12, the *qal*, imperative לְהַנִּיחַ (“leave us alone”) and its accompanying purpose clause, וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם (“so that we may serve the Egyptians”), signals that the Israelites would have rather stayed in Egypt than be led by Moses into the wilderness; the “servitude *in Egypt*, the thing from which they were saved in the Exodus, (cf. Ex. xx 2), is set in contrast to the death they now face in the wilderness.”¹¹

Coats pointed to the development of the tradition in J and P where he not only discerned that there were distinctive stylistic features of J used to describe the Reed Sea event, but also that the “moment of crisis and delivery appears in a structure which moves beyond stylistic features.”¹² Coats observed the following pattern in Exod 14:10–14 (J):

⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 133; emphasis original. See Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257.

⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 133.

⁹ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 256.

¹⁰ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 256. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 133; Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 113.

¹¹ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257; emphasis original.

¹² Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257.

(1) Israel sees the Egyptians approaching and in fear they cry out to the LORD; (2) the murmuring motif appears as the Israelites murmur against Moses; (3) Moses assures the people that the LORD will deliver them.¹³ In P, Coats determined that “the event is again presented in characteristic style. But beyond the stylistic features, evidence of the same structural pattern present in J can be detected;” P’s report of “the crisis, Yahweh’s assurance of help, and instruction to Moses for securing that help” was enough evidence for Coats to conclude that “the same tradition, modified according to the specific concerns and style of P, is to be seen here.”¹⁴

Childs critiqued Coats’ conclusions by noting that the OT is not consistent in associating the crossing of the Reed Sea with the wilderness wanderings traditions; “the lack of consistency reflects not some accidental confusion, but rather a complex development of tradition.”¹⁵ Childs agreed with Coats that the older J(E) source includes the Reed Sea account in the wilderness wanderings traditions. But, when examining the later P source, he argued that it incorporates the Reed Sea account as part of the exodus tradition.¹⁶ Childs determined that in J(E), the Reed Sea account is included in the wilderness wanderings traditions because it lacks plague imagery; however, because plague imagery occurs in P’s Reed Sea account, the wilderness wanderings do not begin

¹³ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257.

¹⁴ Coats, “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 257; Coats admits a few key elements are missing in P that are present in J, such as the people’s fear of the Egyptians, a cry to the LORD for help, and the murmuring motif. Coats found this pattern in Exod 15, 16, 17, and Num 11; “The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,” 258.

¹⁵ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 222.

¹⁶ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 222.

until after Israel crosses the sea.¹⁷ Childs thought P likely incorporated the Reed Sea account in the exodus tradition for three reasons: (1) the “influence of mythological language from the sea battle affected the transmission of the tradition of the Reed Sea;” (2) the probability that “the language of the Reed Sea was influenced by the Jordan tradition of the river’s crossing which introduced the language of a path through the sea and the river’s stoppage;” and (3) the fact that the “passover became the major cultic vehicle for commemorating the deliverance which had begun with the plagues. The sea event therefore became the heart of the exodus story which was annually rehearsed in the passover ritual.”¹⁸ Childs’ concluded that by “the end of the Old Testament period the Reed Sea event had been thoroughly identified with the departure from Egypt rather than marking the beginning of the wilderness wanderings.”¹⁹

An Alternative Proposal

While Exod 13:17–14:31 may very well be the product of a combination of sources, an examination of its final form reveals that it exhibits all the elements of Pattern A just like the subsequent Pattern A pericopes. Yet, Exod 13:17–14:31 displays notable differences from these pericopes: (1) although v. 11*b* contains an accusatory question, vv. 11–12 lack the לֹךְ + עַל collocation; (2) although protection from the approaching Egyptian army is a legitimate need, this pericope does not mention basic human sustenance; (3) Exod 13:17–14:31 does not include the term נִסָּה. While the rest of the OT

¹⁷ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 223.

¹⁸ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 222, 223.

¹⁹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 223–24.

may variously attribute the Reed Sea tradition to the exodus tradition or the wilderness wanderings traditions, an examination of the final form of Exodus reveals that Exod 13:17–14:31 functions as both the postlude to the exodus tradition and the prelude to the wilderness wanderings traditions. Such an understanding allows the Reed Sea tradition to be the culminating postlude to the exodus narrative and the very “nucleus of the Exodus theme,” as Noth argued, but also the beginning of Israel’s new life in the wilderness, as Coats argued.²⁰ It is the presence of Pattern A and the murmuring motif in the form of an accusatory question that prepares the reader for the subsequent pre-Sinai, Pattern A pericopes. Although the verb נסּוּ does not occur in this pericope, the notions of testing, and even a trial run, are there in concept (see Exod 13:17–18; 14:1–4). The LORD could have taken Israel on a shorter route to Canaan; however, there were Philistine outposts there, and the LORD knew that if these newly emancipated people faced war, they might change their minds about leaving Egypt. More importantly, the LORD knew that before he gifted the Israelites the promised land, they would need a greater knowledge of him, his will, and his commands. Thus, it was at the Reed Sea that the LORD tested their faith and obedience by placing them between an approaching enemy of slave masters and an impassable body of water. Because of the striking similarities that Exodus 15:22–27; 16:1–36; and 17:1–7 share, Exod 13:17–14:31 must technically not be viewed as a test or trial run, at least in the sense that the subsequent pericopes are. The notions of a test and trial run that are present in Exod 13:17–14:31 ought to be viewed as foreshadowing what is to come in these following pericopes.

²⁰ Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 105; see 104. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 135, 136.

Verses 10–12: The Murmuring Motif²¹

The first element of Pattern A, journey, is found in Exod 13:20 with the verb נסע, while the second element, legitimate need/murmuring, is found in Exod 14:10–12. The legitimate need is made evident in v. 10 as the Israelites cry out to the LORD in a state of great fear over the approaching Egyptians. V. 11 begins the murmuring motif. Notably, v. 11a does not contain any of the stereotyped verbs or collocations of the murmuring motif, so the form and content of Israel's dialogue must serve as the indicators of the motif. There is a change in addressee from v. 10 to v. 11. In v. 10bβ, the people of Israel, the subject, cry out to the LORD, and one would assume that v. 11 would provide the content of their cry to the LORD, but Moses is accused instead. The dialogue in v. 11 begins with הֲמִצְדָּקִי (“Is it because there are no”), a negative, causative, particle introduced by a הֲ interrogative. The אֵין (“no”) that follows is redundant since the מְבִלִי particle contains the negation.²² The main verb of the address is לָקַחְתֶּםנוּ (“that you have taken us”), a *qal*, perfect, second person, masculine, singular verb, and it is followed by a *qal*, infinitive, construct לָמוּת (“to die”).²³ This infinitive functions in the standard way the infinitives in the accusatory questions do as it expresses “the same connotation of result arriving from the main verb.”²⁴ However, the question does not have the same function as an

²¹ While Exodus 15:22–27; 16:1–36; 17:1–7 will be discussed in full; the focus in Exod 13:17–14:31 will only be on the murmuring motif.

²² A double negative is employed to make a strong negative; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 142.

²³ A *lamed* of purpose; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 110.

²⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 132.

accusatory question because it “does not challenge the act itself, but raises a possible *reason* for the act.”²⁵

The accusatory question is found in v. 11*b* when the people ask, “Why have you done this to us? Why have you brought us out of Egypt?”²⁶ The question begins with *מָה* (“why”), and the principal verb is *עָשִׂיתָ* (“have you done”), a *qal*, perfect, second person, masculine, singular. The perfect tense of the verb signals that the deed in question is in the past. This deed is further described by the subsequent *hiphil*, infinitive, construct, *לְהוֹצִיאֵנוּ* (“brought us out”), and the ensuing *מִמִּצְרָיִם* (“out of Egypt”). The infinitive, construct clause more fully defines the perfect verb and what has been done to the people, namely the exodus.²⁷

What is the reason for the people’s murmuring in Exod 14? According to Coats’ assessment of the murmuring motif, the reason for the rebellion is typically expressed in immediate juxtaposition to the accusation; indeed, v. 12 reveals that back in Egypt, the Israelites had told Moses to leave them alone so that they could continue to serve the Egyptians.²⁸ In v. 12, the people speak in a way that considers their life in Egypt as a thing of the past. The “imperative *לְהַדִּיל* [“to leave”]) and its purpose clause express even more explicitly than vs. 11*a* the preference of the people to remain in slavery rather than

²⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 132.

²⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 133.

²⁷ A *lamed* of specification; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 108; Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 133, 136.

²⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 134. It must be concluded that this statement was simply not recorded.

leave Egypt under the leadership of Moses.”²⁹ The people compare their slavery in Egypt to their apparent imminent death at the Reed Sea. While the exodus event is the reason for the murmuring, it is the sight of the approaching Egyptians that triggers it.

There is no response to the accusatory question from Moses, the addressee, that explains the event in question; instead, the narrative moves on to the intercession/instructions element of Pattern A in vv. 13–18 and then the element of deliverance in vv. 19–31. This pericope does not contain judgment for the people’s murmuring and lack of trust; instead, the LORD shows them mercy and grace, for they legitimately need him to save them from the approaching Egyptians. Exod 13:17–14:31 ends on a high note, the salvation of the LORD transformed the Israelites’ fear (יִרָא) of the Egyptians in 14:10 into a fear (יִרָא) of him in 14:31. Furthermore, their murmuring against Moses, and ultimately the LORD, was transformed into belief (see Exod 14:31).

Exodus 15:22–27; 16:1–36; 17:1–7

The remaining three pre-Sinai, Pattern A pericopes in Exod 15:22–17:16, have been arranged very intentionally. Not only do they form the inner elements of the concentric arrangement mentioned above, but some keywords link them together: “to set out,” “to test,” “bread,” “water,” and “to murmur.”³⁰ The water and food about which the Israelites murmur are genuine human needs, but the simple fact that they are murmuring reveals their “repeated unwillingness to trust and obey YHWH.”³¹ These three pericopes

²⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 134.

³⁰ Arie C Leder, “Reading Exodus to Learn and Learning to Read Exodus,” *CTJ* 34.1 (1999): 27. See Bruckner, *Exodus*, 144–45; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 263.

³¹ Alexander, *Exodus*, 315.

contain three tests and trial runs where the LORD intentionally puts them in a precarious situation to see if they will rely on him. These are not pass/fail tests; instead, this time in the wilderness is to be viewed as the Israelites' educational, training camp before they enter into a covenant with the LORD.

Exodus 15:22–27

Verses 22–23

The first element of Pattern A, journey, is found in v. 22, which is signaled by the verb נסע. Typically in Exodus, נסע is in the *qal binyan* and has the Israelites as the subject, but in Exod 15:22, Moses is the subject, and נסע is in the *hiphil binyan*; this is the only occurrence in the Pentateuch of נסע in the *hiphil binyan*. Alexander argued that this use of נסע “deliberately draw[s] attention to Moses,” and that with this highlighting of his “role as leader at the start of this short passage, the narrator possibly signals in advance that the contents of vv. 25b–26 refer specifically to Moses, and not to all of the people.”³² V. 22 also introduces the element of legitimate need/murmuring as the Israelites found no water after traveling three days into the wilderness of Shur. V. 23 continues this element in that when they finally do find water, it is bitter. There is a play on words here with the name of this site, Marah (מַרָּה), which comes from the adjective מַר (“bitter”).

Verse 24: The Murmuring Motif

From a human perspective, it is not surprising that the Israelites would be worried after not finding water for three days. It “is not inconceivable that as they approach

³² Alexander, *Exodus*, 311, 312. See Exod 12:37; 13:20; 16:1; 17:1; 19:2; 40:36–37. See a discussion of this below.

Marah in expectation of being able to drink all they wanted, many of them drank their last water and/or gave it to the animals. Accordingly, finding foul water at Marah was not merely a disappointment but a cause of panic.”³³ In v. 24, the subject of the murmuring is the people who murmur against (על + לון) Moses, the object. They ask, “What shall we drink?” This question is not accusatory; not only does it lack the standard grammatical elements, but it also lacks the challenge of a past deed. Is this question merely a request for information, or should it be considered as rebellious? Coats considers the possibility that this question

disguises a demand. The people obviously want not only information but water itself (cf. 17:2). Moreover, it would be reasonable to assume that such a demand was presented in a negative attitude, and thus legitimately described in terms of the combination על...לון. But if this should be the case, what significance could be placed in the deviation from the formal structure of the accusation? Would the demand be simply an implied threat, a stylistic variation of the same form? This must be denied since this question in no sense accuses a second party of irresponsible action. Does it mean that a different form, and as a consequence, a different type of negative motif is introduced by the murmuring? If this is the case, our understanding of its character must come from another source other than the question, for the question in itself connotes no hostile overtones.³⁴

The only solution Coats could come to is that the “motif introduced by על...לון in vs. 24 does not have the same character” as the formal, two-part structure he identified for the murmuring motif.³⁵ Coats claimed that v. 25a substantiated his conclusion. He excluded v. 25 from the murmuring motif since there was no accusatory question in v. 24 that necessitated a direct response.³⁶ Coats determined that neither the question in v. 24 nor

³³ Stuart, *Exodus*, 365. See Durham, *Exodus*, 213.

³⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 51.

³⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 52.

³⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 52.

the LORD's gracious response in v. 25 had any intrinsic negative connotations. He thought that the "only contact in this unit with the murmuring motif, and thus with a negative view of the people's request for water," was in the narrative introduction of v. 24.³⁷ He suggested that there was an interweaving of two motifs in this passage: the negative narrative introduction to the question in v. 24a, and the positive request for water that is met by the LORD's gracious aid in vv. 24b–25.³⁸ He could not find any evidence to suggest that the original form of this tradition included an accusation and response that corresponded with the verb לון, or that the positive motif replaced an earlier account of murmuring. Thus, he concluded that in Exod 15:24, the "לון...על" combination has been employed in contradiction to its primary meaning" and that the "positive motif constitutes the basic expansion of the aetiological saga."³⁹

Coats struggled with this pericope because his understanding of the murmuring motif was confined to his formal, two-part structure. And when there was a deviation, he was forced to conclude that the לון + על collocation was being employed in "contradiction to its primary meaning," and that the negative narrative introduction in v. 24a was a secondary addition.⁴⁰ When the form of murmuring motif is unhitched from his structure, it is then not surprising that the people's murmuring does not come in the form of an accusatory question with an accompanying explanatory response. The על + לון collocation confirms the presence of the murmuring motif, which is employed with its

³⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 52.

³⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 52.

³⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 52.

⁴⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 52.

primary meaning; namely, it signals a well-defined event with hostility, albeit here a low level, and it is an act of open rebellion.⁴¹ Coats was right to conclude that the people's question is not inherently negative or hostile, but since the prehistory of this text is not known, the final form is what must be assessed, and the final form pairs לֹנֶן + עַל with "What shall we drink?". The negative murmuring motif cannot be restricted to the narrative introduction of v. 24a; it must include the people's question.

The legitimate need for water in v. 23 coupled with the murmuring motif in v. 24 comprises the legitimate need/murmuring element of Pattern A; this understanding of the murmuring motif and its place within the pericope allows the final form of Exod 15:22–27 to have a greater sense of unity and cohesion. It was argued above that Pattern A likely had its origin in the "writing-supported process of memorization."⁴² And that it could have functioned "as a form by which to relate stories of the miraculous preservation of Israel in the desert as part of the recitation of the sacred history;" this understanding would remove the need to relate the negative narrative introduction v. 24a to a secondary addition.⁴³

Verses 25–27

When the murmuring motif is limited to the murmurings themselves and excludes any response from the addressee, the rest of the pericope in which the motif occurs can be more accurately assessed. V. 25 contains the third and fourth elements of Pattern A,

⁴¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24.

⁴² Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 5.

⁴³ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258.

intercession/instructions, and deliverance. Because the question in v. 24 was not accusatory, Moses, the addressee, does not need to provide an explanation to the people. V. 25 shows that Moses does not even address the people; instead, he cries out to the LORD, who responds with instructions on how to solve the problem. The LORD brought them to this place with no potable water in order to test their trust in him. Their murmuring reveals a severe lack of trust and patience, which the LORD could have judged them for, but since their need was legitimate and they were still in training camp, he was merciful and gracious and used this as an opportunity for instruction.⁴⁴

It is not immediately clear what the phrase, *שָׁם שָׁם לְוַחֲקֵם וּמִשְׁפָּט* (“there the LORD issued for them a statute and a rule”) refers to since the LORD has not yet given any formal laws to the people.⁴⁵ C. Houtman suggests that “statute” (*חֵק*) and a “rule” (*מִשְׁפָּט*) do not refer to two separate instructions but one, and that they are functioning as a hendiadys and can be translated as “a binding statute.”⁴⁶ V. 26 then reveals the content of the binding statute, but not before v. 25 ends with the statement, *וַיִּצְטַח* (“and there he tested them”). It is noteworthy that both *שָׁם* (“to issue”) and *נִסָּה* (“to test”) in v. 25b have third person, masculine, singular suffixes while v. 26 has second person, masculine, singular objects and suffixes. Additionally, although v. 25b appears to insinuate that the LORD is the subject of *שָׁם* and *נִסָּה* and that he is the one speaking in v. 26a, he is referred to in the third person there. These details beg the following questions: (1) Who is the subject of vv. 25b and 26a, the LORD or Moses? (2) If it is the LORD, is he issuing a

⁴⁴ Although it is not explicit, their murmuring could be conceived as them testing the LORD.

⁴⁵ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 65.

⁴⁶ C. Houtman, *Exodus: 7:14-19:25*, vol. 2 of *HCOT* (Kampen: Kok, 1996), 313; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 29, 30.

binding statute for Moses or Israel? (3) Is the LORD testing Moses or the people of Israel as a whole? The LXX and Vulg. favor the singular objects and suffixes and take them as references to Moses. In comparison, most English versions interpret these singular objects and suffixes collectively as a reference to Israel.⁴⁷ Alexander believes this pericope focuses on Moses rather than the people of Israel, and the singular objects and suffixes in vv. 25*b* and 26 provide him with further evidence for this conclusion.

Alexander does acknowledge that the Hebrew narrative can switch subjects without explicitly stating the new subject and that this may be the case in v. 25*b*; he also notes that “on occasions the third-person m. sg. may be used to refer to the Israelites as a group” and that such “possibilities explain why different readings of these verses have been adopted.”⁴⁸ Alexander lists three reasons why Exod 15:25*b*–27 should be interpreted as the LORD testing Moses and not as the LORD testing the people, or the people testing the LORD: (1) in vv. 22–27 the verbs that have the Israelites as the subject are plural; (2) when other passages describe the Israelites testing the LORD, the verb נָסָה is in the plural (see Exod 17:2, 7; Num 14:22); (3) the “content of the speech in v. 26 strongly implies that the speaker is YHWH himself.”⁴⁹ Alexander supports his hypothesis by noting the prominence he believes Moses has in v. 22 and the role that Moses has as Israel’s leader.

Alexander notes that Moses is set apart and “under particular obligation to obey

⁴⁷ Alexander, *Exodus*, 313. See Durham, *Exodus*, 211.

⁴⁸ Alexander, *Exodus*, 313.

⁴⁹ Alexander, *Exodus*, 313. Houtman thought the LORD was the subject of the verbs in verse 25*b* and that Moses was the subject of the first verb in verse 26, yet he writes, “Moses speaks in 15:26 as if he were YHWH;” *Exodus: 7:14-19:25*, 312. See Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 184; William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., vol. 2A of AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 577.

YHWH's commands and keep his decrees. Moreover, in chapter 18 Moses is presented as the one who carries ultimate responsibility for judging disputes among the people. Given his special status, he is distinguished from the rest of the Israelites and is tested regarding his obedience to God."⁵⁰ Alexander concludes that the nature of Moses' test is described in v. 26; the LORD requires absolute obedience from Moses, and if he faithfully obeys, the LORD will not bring upon him the diseases he brought upon the Egyptians. And yet, Alexander states that v. 26 applies to Israel as well, for with "its reference to YHWH's commands and decrees and the benefits of obeying them, v. 26 is proleptic in nature, anticipating what will happen at Mount Sinai."⁵¹

Alexander's conclusion is compelling; however, although one cannot be certain, within the context of the exodus narrative and the wilderness wanderings narratives, it seems more likely that the LORD issued a binding statute for the Israelites and tested them. This interpretation would require viewing the singular conjugations as collective references to Israel, which Alexander states is possible.⁵² Alexander correctly notes that in Exod 17:2, the verb is plural when the Israelites are described as testing the LORD. However, in Exod 16:4, when the LORD is described as testing the people, the verb is a *piel*, imperfect, first person, singular from the root נָסָה, and it is paired with a third person, masculine, singular suffix.⁵³ It is clear that Israel, not Moses, is being tested in Exod 16:4 because the text explicitly says the LORD is talking to Moses, so why would

⁵⁰ Alexander, *Exodus*, 313–14. See Brian T. German, "Moses at Marah," *VT* 63.1 (2013): 47–58. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341092>.

⁵¹ Alexander, *Exodus*, 315; see 314.

⁵² Alexander, *Exodus*, 313.

⁵³ See Exod 17:2 and Num 14:22.

there not be a plural suffix on אֶנְסֶנּוּ (“I may test him”)? Additionally, הֲיֵלֵךְ (“whether he will walk”) is a third person, masculine, singular verb and not a plural verb. Since Exod 16:4 refers to the Israelites collectively, it seems more likely that Exod 15:25 and 26 do as well, and that the LORD is the speaker in v. 26, and the subject of the verbs in v. 25b. The similarities in diction, syntax, and structuring in Exod 15:22–27; 16:1–36; and 17:1–7, and the concentric arrangement mentioned above suggest that Exod 15:22–27 is the first of three wilderness tests and trial runs for the people of Israel. It is the people, after all, and not Moses, who are displaying hostility and rebellion through their murmuring. And they are the ones who will continue to murmur and increase their hostility against Moses in the subsequent wilderness wanderings narratives. Moses, on the other hand, displays remarkable faith as he was “willing to do what God commanded him, without understanding why or how it would work.”⁵⁴

The LORD tested the Israelites by bringing them to a place with no drinkable water to see if they would trust him to provide, and in v. 26, he provides the reasoning behind the test. He tells them the binding statute, which reveals that the primary purpose of the test is instruction and education.⁵⁵ In v. 26, the LORD teaches the Israelites that it is in their best interest to obey him; their well-being depends on it, and it is in their obedience to the LORD that they signal that they trust him.⁵⁶ The LORD was asking Israel for “loyalty in the sense of a willingness to pay close attention to what God’s will

⁵⁴ Stuart, *Exodus*, 366–67.

⁵⁵ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 68. A “wordplay in 15:26 may suggest instruction...the phrase ‘and the LORD showed,’ referring to the log of 15:25, comes from the Hebrew root *yryh*, rendered (in the hiphil) as ‘teach’ or ‘instruct;’” *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 66–67.

⁵⁶ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 178, 180; Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 66.

was and to want above all else to please him by doing what he thinks is right...and obedience by not failing to ‘pay attention to all his commands and keep all his decrees.’”⁵⁷ This ‘law’ does not speak of specifics but instead of “fostering an observant relationship with the Lord.”⁵⁸ As Fretheim states, “verse 26 is a *preventative measure*; it sets out guidelines for the shape of life beyond deliverance.”⁵⁹ There is not a corpus of laws for Israel yet, that will come at Sinai, and so this binding statute refers to any commandments that the LORD will institute from this point forward.⁶⁰

In this first test and trial run, the LORD used several training methods to teach Israel to trust and obey: (1) his purification of the water should have shown Israel that his commitment to them and their well-being did not stop at the Egyptian border or the edge of the Reed Sea; (2) the inclusion of אֲנִי יְהוָה (“for I am the LORD”) at the end of v. 26 “would remind Israel of the lesson she learned in the exodus, that he is willing and able to do her good;” (3) the designation of the LORD as their “healer” (רִפְּאֵי), or better yet, the “one who maintains your welfare,” shows Israel that their God can be trusted.⁶¹

Verse 26 is phrased as a conditional statement. If Israel obeys the LORD, then he will not put any of the מַחֲלָה that he put on the Egyptians, on them. The term מַחֲלָה, typically translated as “disease” or “sickness,” occurs here and in Exod 23:25. Given its

⁵⁷ Stuart, *Exodus*, 367.

⁵⁸ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 146. See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 178.

⁵⁹ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 178; emphasis original; see 179.

⁶⁰ See Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in *General and Old Testament Articles; Genesis; Exodus; and Leviticus*, vol. 1 of *NIB* (Nashville: Abington, 1994), 807–08.

⁶¹ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 67. Blackburn writes, the “appearance of ‘I am the LORD’ in 15:26 suggests instruction, given that it has been used consistently to this point in Exodus in the context of teaching Israel, Egypt and the nations who the Lord is,” *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 66.

sparse usage, its meaning in Exod 15:26 is a bit unclear, but it likely refers to the signs and wonders the LORD brought upon Egypt.⁶² In addition to the tests, it is through the fear of having the disasters (הַלְּאֵלִים) of Egypt brought upon them that the LORD engenders Israel's trust and obedience.⁶³

V. 27 reports that the LORD directed the Israelites to a place with abundant water, the oasis at Elim, a stark contrast to what they experienced at Marah. The people likely came to Elim shortly after they left Marah, leading to the probable conclusion that if they would only have waited longer and displayed greater trust in the LORD, he would have abundantly provided for their needs.⁶⁴

Exodus 16:1–36

Some verses in Exod 16 are said to “contain illogical sequences, awkward repetitions, and abrupt shifts,” which, for source-critical scholars, has made a source analysis of this chapter difficult.⁶⁵ A traditional source analysis assigns the majority of the chapter to P and a few verses to J primarily for linguistic and sequential reasons, but also in light of its similarities to Num 11:4–35, which is typically considered a parallel J(E) text.⁶⁶ In light of the difficulties of attempting a source analysis of Exod 16, Joseph

⁶² Alexander, *Exodus*, 314.

⁶³ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 67; see Exod 20:20, where “the purpose of the theophany at Sinai is to instill fear.”

⁶⁴ Alexander, *Exodus*, 314.

⁶⁵ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 154. Vv. 6–8 and 9–12.

⁶⁶ Alexander, *Exodus*, 320; Durham, *Exodus*, 216, 223.

Coppens, E. Galbiati, and B.J. Malina performed structural analyses.⁶⁷ Childs did not find any of these approaches adequate, so he advocated for a traditional sequence, which he found in Exod 16, Num 14, and 16. He argued that Exod 16 is linked together by a pattern of murmuring, disputation, a theophany, and then a divine word spoken first to Moses and then through him to the people.⁶⁸ John I. Durham, however, asserted that all of these analyses “appear a bit too clever, imposing upon the text about as much as they take from it;” he acknowledged that Exod 16 is composed of many parts, but cautioned that any source analysis “must not be permitted to obscure the impact of a chapter that is far more in compilation than the sum of its supposed component parts.”⁶⁹ He concluded that the form of Exod 16 is dictated by a “provision demonstrating Presence” motif, which “overrides the sources that present it and any alignment of those sources logical by our Western canons precisely because its theological importance far outweighs considerations of style and sequence.”⁷⁰ Durham split Exod 16:1–36 into two parts with vv. 1–12 functioning as the introduction that didactically multiplies “two preparatory themes: Israel’s grumbling and Yahweh’s authoritative statement of his response to their complaint.”⁷¹ He determined that it is when these two themes are repeated, literary critics become troubled by the apparent *non sequiturs* that emerge.⁷² Durham advocated for

⁶⁷ See Joseph Coppens, “Les Traditions Relatives À La Manne Dans Exode, Xvi,” *EstEcl* 34 (1960): 473–89; E. Galbiati, *La Struttura Letteraria Dell’ Esodo* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1956), 164–75; Bruce J. Malina, *The Palestinian Manna Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 1–20.

⁶⁸ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 280. See Durham, *Exodus*, 217.

⁶⁹ Durham, *Exodus*, 217, 224; see 216.

⁷⁰ Durham, *Exodus*, 224.

⁷¹ Durham, *Exodus*, 217; see 223.

⁷² Durham, *Exodus*, 217, 128.

viewing the repetition as didactic as it prepares to show the reader how Israel's God proves his presence by providing for their needs.⁷³ Durham conceded that Child's traditional sequence approach has the most merit of the other analyses mentioned above. However, he was still concerned that it might "be an imposition which would have come as a surprise to the authors/editors of Exod 16 and Num 14 and 16."⁷⁴ He thought that a "more convincing" place for a pattern such as Childs suggested would be in Num 11 because it is the closest parallel to Exod 16, but "Childs does not find his 'traditional sequence'" in Num 11.⁷⁵

Childs was right to identify a traditional sequence in Exod 16, but the elements of his sequence needed refinement. It was argued above that the final form of Exod 16 exhibits Pattern A; Num 11:4–35 indeed has similarities to Exod 16, but it exhibits Pattern B. Durham was concerned when modern logic takes precedence over purpose and sequence take precedence over emphasis, and rightly so.⁷⁶ However, the elements of Patterns A and B are inherent within the text, not imposed upon it, and they serve to clarify the purposes of the texts in which they occur. It will be shown below that Exod 16 has a logical progression to it, and that the repetition it contains should not be viewed as redundant or unnecessary, but intentional. William H.C. Propp aptly writes: "Unaware of the Documentary Hypothesis, we would probably not suspect multiple hands in chap.

⁷³ Durham, *Exodus*, 217, 218, 221.

⁷⁴ Durham, *Exodus*, 217.

⁷⁵ Durham, *Exodus*, 217.

⁷⁶ Durham, *Exodus*, 218.

16.”⁷⁷ Additionally, there are distinctives that signal Exod 16 and Num 11:4–35 are not doublets: (1) Num 11 assumes knowledge of Exod 16 as it presupposes the people are growing tired of eating manna;⁷⁸ and (2) Num 11 primarily focuses on the quail while Exod 16 mainly focuses on the manna.

Verse 1

Just as Exod 15:22 began with נִסַּע, so too Exod 16:1; this signals the first element of Pattern A, journey. Israel spent several weeks at Elim before departing to enter the wilderness of Sin; it has likely been about two months since the Passover event. The food that the people brought from Egypt may be depleted or nearly depleted at this point, and no doubt, an awareness of the lack of resources available in the wilderness was weighing heavier upon their minds. These concerns are understandable, but it must be remembered that the LORD is again deliberately putting the Israelites in an uncertain circumstance to show them that their only recourse is to depend on him. Even though the verb נִסַּח does not occur in vv. 1–3, it still can be asserted that LORD was testing the Israelites/determining their inclinations to see if they have learned to trust him to provide for their needs. נִסַּח will occur in v. 4; the focus there is not on inclination, but on instruction. Israel is still in training camp, and Exod 16 is the second of three trial runs. In this chapter, the LORD will give Israel multiple attempts to obey him until they can do so properly.

⁷⁷ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 590. See Houtman, *Exodus: 7:14–19:25*, 322.

⁷⁸ John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 182. See Alexander, *Exodus*, 320, 321.

Verses 2–3: The Murmuring Motif

The visible presence of the LORD in the cloud leading the Israelites through the wilderness should have instilled within them a sense of trust, but as Egypt grew farther and farther away and the pangs of hunger began to assail them, any trust they had in the LORD waned. And so, the people murmured, perhaps their murmuring was partly motivated by the fact that it got them what they wanted only a short time ago at Marah.⁷⁹

Vv. 2–3 contain the second element of Pattern A, legitimate need/murmuring; the legitimate need of hunger is revealed at the end of their murmuring in v. 3. The characteristic collocation of the murmuring motif, על + לון, opens v. 2. The subject of the murmuring is the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while the objects are Moses and Aaron. The content of the murmuring is described in v. 3 as it opens with the people expressing a death wish beginning with מִי־יָתֵן. The interrogative, מִי, is functioning as a desiderative or optative, which, when followed by an imperfect verb, can open a desire clause.⁸⁰ מִי is followed by an imperfect verb here, a *qal*, imperfect, third person, masculine, singular verb from נתן, which when paired with מִי must be translated as “if only” or “would that.” V. 3 narrates that the people resent the exodus and that they wish they would have died by the hand of the LORD in Egypt. Perhaps they wish they could have died a swift death like the Egyptian firstborns rather than slowly starving to death, which is what they seem to think will happen.⁸¹ The Israelites then reminisce about the food they had in Egypt; however, as Noth says, their descriptions seem to be set “in

⁷⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 369.

⁸⁰ Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 52, 194. See Num 14:2; 20:3.

⁸¹ Alexander, *Exodus*, 321.

rather too rosy a light,” for “the slave labour in Egypt would hardly as a rule have eaten boiled ‘flesh’ by the ‘fleshpots.’”⁸² The Israelites’ statements do appear exaggerated, “but not necessarily baseless. Nothing in the prior account of the Israelite suffering under Egyptian oppression suggested a lack of food.”⁸³ Coats suggests, “it may well be that instead of offering a reflection of life in Egypt which might be considered accurate or judged inaccurate, we have here a conscious connection between the accusation raised about the Exodus and the coming miracle of meat and bread.”⁸⁴ Indeed in the Israelites’ description of their life in Egypt, they “ironically and unwittingly describe the abundance that the Lord would give them (see v. 8, ‘meat to eat...and all the bread you want.’).”⁸⁵ The people conclude their murmur by accusing Moses and Aaron of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them in the wilderness with hunger. It is with these words that they “seem to imply that YHWH is no longer with them: YHWH is associated with Egypt, but Moses and Aaron are responsible for bringing them to the Wilderness of Sin.”⁸⁶ This accusation signals that the level of hostility has heightened since chapter 15. Douglas K. Stuart believes that this encounter “represents the most serious opposition to Moses’ and Aaron’s leadership since the verbal attack by the Israelite foremen in 5:19–21.”⁸⁷

⁸² Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 133. See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 181.

⁸³ Stuart, *Exodus*, 371.

⁸⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 89. See Exod 16: 8, 12, 13.

⁸⁵ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 148.

⁸⁶ Alexander, *Exodus*, 322. See Exod 14:10–12 for a similar thought.

⁸⁷ Stuart, *Exodus*, 374.

No doubt the people were running out of the supplies they brought from Egypt, but is hunger their primary motivation for murmuring, or is it the exodus? It would seem logical to conclude that the memory of the food they had in Egypt “forms the *immediate* motivation” for their murmuring, yet, Coats posits that “the reference to an unrealistic picture of life in Egypt seems to put the emphasis by virtue of its exaggeration on the fact that the people had been taken out of Egypt.”⁸⁸ V. 3 is not an accusatory question as there are no interrogatives here, and yet the construction of this verse is similar to the accusatory questions in Exod 17:3 and Num 20:4. In accusatory questions, the interrogative is typically followed by a perfect verb that signals that the deed in question is a past event. Here in v. 3, the כִּי is followed by a perfect verb, הוֹצֵאתֶם , a *hiphil*, perfect, second person, masculine plural verb from the root צא (“to go out”). This verb is not an explicit reference to the exodus, but the fact that צא is used and not בוא (“to come/go”) signals that the exodus is being referred to here.⁸⁹ It can be concluded that the כִּי clause serves the same purpose as an accusation. It takes the form of an accusatory statement, because its “function is to challenge the act it describes,” the exodus, and according to Coats, the “food seems to do nothing more than provide the setting.”⁹⁰ Indeed the people would not have been in this situation if they had not left Egypt, but at this point in their journey, the problem they want to be solved is their hunger. Unlike in Num 14:4, the people do not want to turn around and go back to Egypt. To say that hunger only provides

⁸⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 89; emphasis original.

⁸⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 89. See Deut 6:21 for the use of צא (“to go out”) in reference to the exodus.

⁹⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 89, 90. The כִּי is concessive; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 158.

the setting of the murmuring is not accurate; instead, it serves as the trigger. It is the lack of resources in the wilderness that triggers the Israelites' memory of the resources they had in Egypt, which then leads to the murmuring against Moses and Aaron for bringing them out of Egypt. The people's hunger can still be the "rootage" of the LORD's gracious aid for his people, as Coats contends, for the LORD is going to respond by providing food, not reversing the exodus.⁹¹

Verses 4–36

Even though the murmuring in v. 3 is not in the form of a question, it is essentially functioning in the same way as an accusatory question. Because of this, Coats attempted to find "a response from the addressee which provides an explanation for that event."⁹² Coats argued that the response to the accusation is in vv. 6b–12 and that it takes the form of an *Erweiswort*; however, as it will be shown below, there is no *explanation* for the event being challenged, the exodus, from the addressees, Moses and Aaron. To be sure, vv. 6b–12 is in the form of an *Erweiswort*; however, instead of focusing on the reason for the exodus, the focus is on the 'who' of the exodus and not the 'why.' The murmuring motif must then be confined to the murmuring in vv. 2–3 and not include the *Erweiswort*. The motif is then followed by the third element of Pattern A, intercession/instruction in vv. 4–12. In vv. 4–5 the LORD tells Moses that he is going to rain down bread from heaven for the people and that they are to go out each day and gather enough for that day, but on the sixth day of the week when the people are

⁹¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 90.

⁹² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 40.

preparing what they bring in, there will be twice as much bread as they typically gather. In v. 4, the LORD clarifies these instructions are a test (נסו) for the people. He seeks to prove their ability, as to whether or not they will obey his instructions and trust him to provide; their level of willingness to obey here will reveal if they are ready to receive and obey the covenant law at Sinai.⁹³

Vv. 6–7 provide the timing of the events; in the evening, the Israelites will know that it was the LORD who brought them out of Egypt, and in the morning, they will see the glory of the LORD. The nominalizing ךֿ in v. 6*b* clarifies what this future event will prove to the people; the focus is “given to the purpose underlying YHWH’s actions. He wants to correct the people’s false understanding of the leadership roles of Moses and Aaron.”⁹⁴ The use of יהוה in v. 6*b* is “not to show that Moses and Aaron, or Yahweh, can provide food, but that Yahweh instigated and directed the Exodus.”⁹⁵ Vv. 7–8 indicate that Moses and Aaron know they are simply spokesmen for the LORD and are not ultimately responsible for the exodus and wilderness journey; the “status of Moses and Aaron’s leadership was in question, but it was the Lord’s leadership that was truly at stake.”⁹⁶

While v. 6 revealed the timing of the events, the specific event to which the *Erweiswort* refers is not immediately apparent.⁹⁷ V. 7*a* appears to indicate that the event

⁹³ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 149; Stuart, *Exodus*, 372.

⁹⁴ Alexander, *Exodus*, 232. See Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 159.

⁹⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 91; see 90.

⁹⁶ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 150.

⁹⁷ While Moses’ speech in v. 8 repeats much of what was already said in vv. 6–7 there are enough differences to keep the repetition from being monotonous and from viewing v. 8 as superfluous; see

is the appearance of the כבוד יהוה (“the glory of the LORD”), which the Israelites will see in the morning, but v. 8 appears to suggest that the event is the appearance of meat and bread.⁹⁸ Some scholars equate the provision of manna with the glory of LORD since both will be seen in the morning.⁹⁹ Others argue that the event to which the *Erweiswort* refers is the appearance of the glory of the LORD in the cloud in v. 10 because there are times in Exodus that the appearance of the glory of the LORD is associated with the presence of the LORD.¹⁰⁰ It is unlikely the appearance of the glory of the LORD in the cloud in v. 10 is what is meant by the כבוד יהוה in v. 7 because the v. 10 appearance is not tied to a specific time.¹⁰¹ The appearance of the glory of the LORD in the cloud (v. 10) must then be a secondary appearance; after all, as Alexander writes, “the people’s complaint in v. 3 seems to imply that YHWH is no longer with them. Perhaps for this reason there is a particular need to demonstrate YHWH’s presence.”¹⁰² It is v. 12 that clarifies the exact nature of the event to which the *Erweiswort* refers: in the evening, the meat will appear, and the people will eat it, and in the morning, the bread will appear, and they will eat it.¹⁰³ The people primarily took issue with leaving Egypt, and it will be through the

Alexander, *Exodus*, 323. It is revealed in v. 8 that the LORD will provide the people with meat in the evening and bread in the morning.

⁹⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 91.

⁹⁹ Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 187; Bruckner, *Exodus*, 150.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander, *Exodus*, 323. See Exod 24:16–17; 33:18, 22; 40:34–35.

¹⁰¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 91.

¹⁰² Alexander, *Exodus*, 323.

¹⁰³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92, 93.

provision of meat in the evening and bread in the morning that they will know *who* brought them out of Egypt, but not necessarily *why* he did it.

Coats observed what he thought was a “noticeable duality in this tradition,” as v. 6 contains a self-revelation formula that appears to be repeated in v. 12.¹⁰⁴ He did not think this issue could be solved by resorting to two literary sources, for the “distinctions between the duplicate forms which rise to the surface under closer examination show that they cannot be considered doublets but should probably be explained as different levels in the same literary source.”¹⁰⁵ V. 6 contains an extended self-revelation with an explicit reference to the exodus, but no first person, personal pronoun. V. 12 has a shorter self-revelation that includes the first person, personal pronoun, but lacks an explicit reference to the exodus. Coats thought that the phrase, *אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם* (“that I am the LORD your God”), in v. 12 “calls to memory, in fact establishes, Yahweh’s role in the Exodus. But the fact that vs. 6 drops the first person pronoun and includes the expansion of the form,” *הוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם* (“who brought you out of the land of Egypt”), “only emphasizes its construction as a conscious response to the murmuring.”¹⁰⁶ Coats questioned if the inclusion of *יהוה* in v. 12, but lack of reference to his role in the exodus, suggests that this “response may not have been primarily oriented toward the challenge of the Exodus,” or if it signals that “the motif of meat and bread once had a life of its own without reference to the murmuring motif.”¹⁰⁷ Coats ultimately concluded that the murmuring motif in

¹⁰⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92.

¹⁰⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92.

¹⁰⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92.

¹⁰⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92.

Exod 16 was a secondary expansion in this once positive narrative that simply contained a petition to the LORD for food; for Coats, this explains why v. 12 lacks a reference to the exodus, namely because it is simply the response to the people's petition that states the people will know that the LORD is their God when he provides them with bread and meat.¹⁰⁸ Coats cites two factors which led him to this conclusion:

First, we have assumed that the need for meat and bread formed the immediate motivation for the murmuring. But here the appearance of meat and bread is Yahweh's response to the rebellion. And second, it would be rather incongruous if Yahweh should attempt to resolve the rebellion by submitting to the demands of the rebels.¹⁰⁹

The notion of the murmuring motif being a secondary addition is an unnecessary conclusion; this narrative has a logical progression that is advanced by the elements of Pattern A. The murmur for food is triggered by the lack of it in the wilderness, which caused the people to challenge their exodus from Egypt, where they had food. The appearance of meat and bread was the LORD's response to the rebellion, but not because he was submitting to the demands of the rebels. The LORD mercifully and graciously provided them with food because it was a legitimate need; he had put them in this situation to test their trust, and unfortunately, their murmuring revealed their trust in him was lacking. Coats was right to say vv. 6 and 12 are not doublets, but it is not necessary to conclude that they are different levels of the same literary source; each verse has a different purpose and the element of murmuring ties them together. In v. 6, Moses and Aaron are speaking, and they say that it is through the event of the *Erweiswort* that Israel will learn that it was the LORD who brought them out of Egypt. In v. 12, the LORD is

¹⁰⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92, 96.

¹⁰⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 92.

speaking, and his final words introduce a new element to the narrative, one that focuses not on the exodus, but on the central role he has in the provision of food.¹¹⁰ V. 12 reports that Israel will “come to know, on the basis of firsthand experience, that Yahweh is God, and moreover, that he is Israel’s God.”¹¹¹ The inclusion of אֲנִי יְהוָה (“I am the LORD”) in v. 12 should also engender trust in Israel by reminding them what the LORD has done for them. This phrase should “effectively remind Israel of the Lord’s promise to escort her into the land.”¹¹² Concerning vv. 6–12 Alexander aptly writes:

It is often claimed that YHWH’s speech to the people [in vv. 11–12] is redundant in the light of what Moses and Aaron have already said [in vv. 6–8]. However, it addresses directly the people’s implied criticism that YHWH is uninterested in them. Moreover, it confirms that Moses and Aaron have been acting faithfully on YHWH’s behalf and not pursuing an agenda of their own making. While there is considerable repetition within the speeches in vv. 6–12, this has every appearance of being intentional. The motif of grumbling ties together vv. 2–12, resulting in YHWH’s announcement, delivered through Moses, that he will send meat in the evening and bread in the morning (v. 12). God’s initial response to the people’s grumbling needs to be clearly distinguished from the regular pattern that is established thereafter.¹¹³

One would expect that after the plagues, the exodus, the Reed Sea deliverance, and the water at Marah that the Israelites would know that the LORD brought them out of Egypt

¹¹⁰ Alexander, *Exodus*, 319, 323.

¹¹¹ Durham, *Exodus*, 220.

¹¹² Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 69; “in [Exod] 6:6–8, the promise of deliverance from Egypt and provision of the land are bracketed by ‘I am the LORD’ . . . with ‘you shall know that I am the LORD your God’ in the centre (6:7), both structurally and theologically. Moses’ reiteration of the Lord’s words ‘I am the LORD your God,’ last spoken directly to Israel in 6:7, should remind Israel that the Lord’s promise of 6:6–8 included both deliverance from Egypt and guidance and protection into the land. Knowledge that the Lord promised Israel the land should serve to confirm that he will provide for her in her journey to the land, thereby fostering Israel’s trust in the Lord.”

¹¹³ Alexander, *Exodus*, 323–24.

and that he was their God, but their murmuring suggests they do not even really know him.

It would seem as though the call to “Come before the LORD” in v. 9 and the appearance of the כבוד יהוה in v. 10 is signaling that judgment is coming upon the people for their rebellious murmuring; instead, the appearance of the כבוד יהוה brings an announcement of merciful and gracious provision. The final element of Pattern A, deliverance, is in vv. 13–14 when the quail comes in the evening, and the manna comes in the morning. As is the case in all Pattern A texts, there is neither the element of judgment nor repentance. The LORD had every right to punish the people for their rebellious and hostile murmuring, but he did not; this was another trial run to test the people’s trust.

The LORD did as he promised and provided both meat and bread for the hungry Israelites. In response to the people’s question, “What is it?” (מַה הִוא) in v. 15, Moses tells the people that the substance in question is the bread that the LORD has given them to eat. This response, combined with the daily occurrence of the “manna” (מַן), which would feed the Israelites for forty years (v. 35), signaled to the people that the LORD was present with them in the wilderness and was providing for them. It is in v. 16 that Moses calls “discipleship school” to order as he tells them the first instruction of their three-part “manna training.”¹¹⁴ It could be said that there are actually three tests for the Israelites in regards to the manna; the point of these tests is not about passing or failing, rather education. “Faith in YHWH is measured by obedience;” the LORD was not merely going

¹¹⁴ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 151, 152.

to test their willingness to obey him; he was going to teach them how to obey.¹¹⁵ When Moses first instructed the people to collect an *omer* per person, the people responded obediently. Even though some gathered much, and some gathered little, each person's amount miraculously equated to an *omer*. However, when Moses gave them the second instruction and told them not to leave any manna till morning, some failed to obey, and the manna bred maggots and stank. This failure to comply reveals that they did not trust the LORD to provide for tomorrow's needs, and a failure to take the LORD's instructions seriously is a failure to take the LORD seriously.¹¹⁶ The appearance of maggots and the rancid smell are not to be regarded as a punishment; the LORD had simply "built in a natural consequence for inattention to instruction."¹¹⁷ The people who disobeyed Moses' instructions in v. 19 evidently learned their lesson and never saved manna overnight again; they had learned to trust the LORD for their daily bread.

The third and final instruction of manna training is given after the people measured what they had gathered on the sixth day and discovered that it had miraculously doubled to two *omers* per person. When the leaders of the congregation came to report this change to Moses, he told them that the next day was going to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD and that the people must save their leftover manna for the next day. Apparently, all the people obeyed these instructions, and no maggots appeared; however, some people still went out to try and gather manna, but they found none. The failure to obey this instruction is "not a promising sign in light of the fact that soon enough they

¹¹⁵ Alexander, *Exodus*, 329.

¹¹⁶ Stuart, *Exodus*, 375.

¹¹⁷ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 151. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 95.

would be expected to keep his entire covenant law as an indication of their trust in him.”¹¹⁸ To teach the people to rest on the seventh day, the LORD had “employed a form of ‘operant conditioning,’” and not everyone learned on the first try.¹¹⁹ This lack of complete and total obedience led the LORD to ask Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?” There is no judgment or discipline here, but this is a rebuke of some of the people’s behavior, albeit a quite restrained one.¹²⁰ The people were slow to learn what the LORD had explained to them in Exod 15:26, namely that their well-being depended on their obedience to the LORD, yet he was still patient with them as they learned. It was after the concept of the Sabbath was explained to the people a second time (v. 29) that they finally learned their lesson and rested (v. 30). The LORD had “‘proved their ability’” (נסו) to do so, yet the initial disobedience of some was disappointing.¹²¹ The LORD demonstrated care for Israel’s well-being through the manna and quail and in the institution of a day of rest. To rest requires trust in the LORD and that he will provide for one’s daily needs; the Israelites would be reminded of this every sixth day as they gathered extra manna, trusting that it would stay fresh for the seventh day. In this sense, it can be said that the Israelites are tested every week on their ability to trust in the LORD’s provision for their daily bread.¹²² The institution of the Sabbath also

¹¹⁸ Stuart, *Exodus*, 382.

¹¹⁹ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 152.

¹²⁰ Alexander, *Exodus*, 329. The “you” in v. 28 is plural and references the whole people of Israel; although it is not explicitly stated, this verse could signal a sense of Israel testing the LORD.

¹²¹ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 149. See Exod 16:30.

¹²² Stuart, *Exodus*, 372.

teaches/trains Israel to imitate the LORD, just as the LORD rests on the seventh day and does not provide manna, so too the Israelites rest because there is no manna to gather.¹²³

Manna was a defining factor of the Israelites' life in the wilderness; it sustained them and was also a daily reminder that the LORD was present with them in the wilderness. Waking up to manna six days a week should have instilled a greater trust in the LORD in the hearts of the Israelites. In light of its significance, the LORD commanded Moses to save some manna for future generations, which miraculously did not breed maggots, so that they could see and know that this was the bread that the LORD fed the people with when he, not Moses, brought them out of Egypt.

Exodus 17:1–7

While there have been various attempts at a source analysis of Exod 17:1–7, some common ground is found in the notion that vv. 2 and 3 are doublets and that the “double-barrelled” name etiology in v. 7 (Massah-and-Meribah) signals that two accounts have been combined.¹²⁴ However, it will be shown below why it is best to not understand vv. 2 and 3 as doublets, and that the “double-barrelled” name in v. 7, in fact, accurately captures the sense of this pericope and does necessitate a conclusion of a combination of sources. Scholars also suggest that Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:1–13 (typically assigned to P) are doublets because of their similar wording, yet a closer examination reveals that a variety of factors indicate these pericopes are related but separate incidents: (1) in Exod 17 Moses was commanded to strike the rock while in Num 20 he disobediently strikes it

¹²³ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 70, 71.

¹²⁴ Alexander, *Exodus*, 332. Childs thought that the Meribah etiology was an expansion of the “primary tradition” that is reflected in his Pattern 1; *The Book of Exodus*, 258.

twice; (2) Num 20:1–13 presupposes knowledge of Exod 17:1–7 through the use of the word מַיִם; and (3) the Num 20:1–13 incident is referred to as the ‘Waters of Meribah’ in Num 20:13, 24; 27:14; Deut 33:8; Pss 81:7[8]; and 106:32, while Exod 17:1–7 is referred to as Massah-and-Meribah in Exod 17:7; Ps 95:8, or simply as Massah in Deut 6:16; 9:22; 33:8.¹²⁵

Exod 17 completes the concentric arrangement that began in Exod 13:17–14:31. Israel’s final pre-Sinai test and trial run in vv.1–7 is flanked by the account of Israel’s protection from her Amalekite enemies in vv. 8–16. At some point, after the LORD provided the Israelites with quail and the initial provision of manna, they set out from the wilderness of Sin and traveled from place to place according to the commandment of the LORD. V.1 shows that the Israelites are not always rebellious and disobedient murmurers. They could have rejected the LORD’s itinerary plans and pursued an alternate route; instead, they obediently followed his leading.¹²⁶ The Israelites camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for them to drink. Unlike in Exod 15:22–27 and 16:1–36, the term נִסָּה is not employed in Exod 17:1–7 to say that the LORD tested the Israelites, yet he was the one who brought them to Rephidim. Exod 17:2 adds a new element to the pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts as it reveals that the people tested (נִסָּה; v. 2, 7) the LORD. While this is the first time, it is explicitly said that the Israelites tested the LORD, Num 14:22–23 states it will not be the last.

¹²⁵ See Alexander, *Exodus*, 332, 335–36; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 188, 189; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 603–04; Kok, L. Johnson. “Parallel Scripts, Paradigm Shifts.” *BZ* 42 (1998): 83–86; Stuart, *Exodus*, 388n179, 392n188; Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 192.

¹²⁶ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 188.

Verse 1

The first element of Pattern A, journey, is found in v. 1a with the use of נסע. The second element of Pattern A, legitimate need/murmuring, is introduced in v. 1b as the people come to Rephidim, where there was no water for them to drink.

Verses 2–3: The Murmuring Motif

Verse 2

The lack of water at Rephidim serves as the trigger for the people's first murmurous address to Moses. The people are the subject of the murmuring, and they are described as protesting against (עָם + רִיב) Moses, the object.¹²⁷ It was mentioned above that a “primary usage of רִיב in the OT has to do with formal legal proceedings,”¹²⁸ and that the collocation עָם + רִיב is often viewed as “a technical term for legal process.”¹²⁹ Joachim Begrich had an essential role in laying the foundation for later study of legal forms with his examination of the *Gerichtsrede* (“court speech”); he defined the structure of the legal process and argued it has two stages.¹³⁰ The first stage is informal as neither a judge nor a witness is present; there is simply “an initial quarrel between two parties,

¹²⁷ V. 2 only mentions Moses, but תָּנוּ (“give”), a second person, masculine, plural, imperative, likely signals Moses and Aaron. תָּנוּ is a singular imperative in the LXX, Syr., Tg. Ps.-J., Vulg., and SP.

¹²⁸ Durham, *Exodus*, 230. See Exod 23:2–3, 6; Deut. 25:1. See surveys of רִיב in Ludwig Köhler, *Deuterocesaja (Jesaja 40-55) Stilkritisch Untersucht*, BZAW 37 (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1923), 110–20; Würthwein, “Der Ursprung Der Prophetischen Gerichtsrede,” 1–16; B. Gemser, “The RĪB-* or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1969), 120–37, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004275263_010; Hans Walter Wolff, *Dodekapropheten. 1, Hosea*, vol. 1 of BKAT 11 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 39.

¹²⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57.

¹³⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 33. See Joachim Begrich, *Studien Zu Deuterocesaja*, BWA(N)T 25 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1938), 18–31.

either private individuals or groups” that is “composed of an exchange of accusations and counteraccusations. These appear in the form of a question which carries the burden of the case against the opposition and challenges him to some kind of explanation.”¹³¹ This initial quarrel can be resolved quickly if one party persuades the other to agree. If this cannot be done, the quarrel transitions to an official procedure, which is “usually indicated by some designation of and appeal to a judge or judges who can decide the question.”¹³² The second stage of the legal process is the “formal process of law,” the

plaintiff and defendant present themselves at the public square where the judges and witnesses can be chosen from the full citizens of the community. The case is presented, the judges call the appropriate witnesses to inform themselves concerning the case, and the decision is returned. If the defendant’s case is strong, he may follow his defense with an accusation of his own (cf. Gen. 31:41–42). In either the defense of the accused or the renewed accusation by the defendant, it is not unusual to find motifs or even formal elements from the first, pre-official stage reappearing. This is readily understandable since the goal of the official procedure is to present the quarrel which began in the first stage.¹³³

Begrich thought that the legal process was cohesive enough to be deemed a *Gattungseinheit* (“genre unit”), but not a *rîb*, which he believed serves as “die technische Bezeichnung der Verhandlung des Streitiges vor Gericht.”¹³⁴ Hans Boecker refined Begrich’s conclusions, and although he did not believe accusatory questions were part of a “vorgerichtlichen Auseinandersetzung” (“pre-trial dispute”), he did argue that they can

¹³¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 34.

¹³² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 34. See 1 Sam 24: 9, 12, 15.

¹³³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 34–35. See Jeremiah 26 for the full legal process.

¹³⁴ Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterocesaja*, 30. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 35. Translation: “the technical name of the hearing of the quarrel in court.”

be part of the context of a formal lawsuit and thus be considered part of the *rîb*.¹³⁵

Although Boecker subsumed the *Gerichtsrede* (“court speech”) under the term *rîb*, he ultimately concluded that a decision about the *rîb* could be left open “da das Wort hier nicht in seiner strengen Bedeutung steht und einen offiziellen Gerichtsakt im Auge hat, sondern mit einer unpräzisen Ausdrucksweise bereits den vorgerichtlichen Akt mit diesem Terminus belegt.”¹³⁶

Begrich’s and Boecker’s definitions led Coats to conclude that the verb ריב and “the general character of accusation and response suggest that the *Sitz-im-Leben* for the [accusatory] question is legal process.”¹³⁷ Coats acknowledged that the accusatory questions of the murmuring motif “fall outside the technical character” of a *rîb* as defined by Begrich, but that they do fall “within the formal unity of a *Gerichtsrede* (“court speech”).¹³⁸ He determined that the term *rîb* “can be used in a broad sense to include the preofficial quarrel that forms the basis of the murmuring,” and that the accusatory question “presupposes a response while the quarrel is still in a preofficial stage;” however, the responses will “vary in form and content according to the content and setting of the challenge.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Hans Jochen Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament*, WMANT (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964), 30n1.

¹³⁶ Boecker, *Redeformen Des Rechtslebens Im Alten Testament*, 30n1. See Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 36. Translation: “since the word is not in its strict meaning here and does not have an official judicial act in mind, but with an imprecise mode of expression it already assigns this term to the pre-trial act.”

¹³⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 33; see 35, 36.

¹³⁸ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 35.

¹³⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 36, 57. When the verb ריב occurs in the murmuring motif in connection with an accusatory question Coats was careful to differentiate between its narrow sense and its broader connotations. A narrow connotation views the accusatory question “as a part of the official process of law,” as being within the “formal setting of justice in the court,” and as being within the context of a

Coats sought to determine the nature of the ריב between Moses and the people in Exod 17:2. Because the people's address to Moses is in the form of a demand, "Give us water to drink," and not a question, he concluded that the people's quarrel with Moses "is not an informal accusation-response (cf. vs. 3)," but seems instead to be a formal claim.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, because the imperative תנו ("give") does not accuse Moses of irresponsible action, Coats concluded: (1) v. 2 is not a doublet of v. 3; and (2) the technical term *rîb* is not appropriate here for this type of legal claim since the root, ריב, is never again paired with a sentence that is controlled by an imperative.¹⁴¹ Coats hypothesized that it was possible to view the demand for water "in a basically negative fashion and thus as a supporting part of the murmuring motif," perhaps saying "Give us water [or we will rebel]!;" however, to do this would assume that the verb ריב was essentially negative, and according to Coats, there are no other negative connotations beyond this assumption.¹⁴² Because Coats did not equate ריב + עז in v. 2 with Israel's murmuring, he suggested v. 2 may signal a positive tradition of Israel requesting aid from the LORD. And because the LORD responds in v. 5 with instructions for finding water,

technical *rîb*; *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 36. A broader, more informal connotation allows for the possibility that the accusatory question may still be in its "original preofficial state" in a quarrel between two parties; this would mean the accusatory question is only part of a *rîb* "in a broad and imprecise sense;" *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57n24.

¹⁴¹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57.

¹⁴² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57. Similarly, Noth argues that "the name Meribah does not lead naturally to the idea of the murmuring of the people, since the verb ריב is not a proper expression for it. This etiology was probably first introduced after the narrative motif of the discord of the people had once appeared;" *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 123n348.

Coats believed that the tradition “is complete without negative connotations” and is not part of the murmuring motif.¹⁴³ However, because Coats still assumed the collocation עַם + רִיב was “a technical term for legal process,” he determined that its appearance in Exod 17:2 must be “tied closely to the legal character of the local aetiology.”¹⁴⁴ Yet, he did not see that the local etiology explained the presence of the spring, for the provision of water was simply the consequence of the רִיב. Because Coats thought that the spring from the rock motif was a positive one, the Meribah tradition must then be a secondary addition, “which introduces the motif of Yahweh’s gracious aid in the wilderness into the context of a local tradition.”¹⁴⁵ Coats did not equate the רִיב in v. 2 with the testing of the LORD, which he thought was also a secondary addition; he believed that the earliest level of the Meribah tradition did not portray the LORD as the object of the רִיב, for the רִיב “in this tradition questions neither Moses’ nor Yahweh’s behavior, but simply presents a claim: ‘Give us water that we may drink.’”¹⁴⁶

Childs makes a valid point when he suggests that Coats might have over-interpreted the evidence when he asserted the formal structure of the murmuring had “its setting in the pre-official stage of the trial,” because murmurings such as “‘Would that we had never left home, or ‘You have led us out to kill us,’” are “universal human reactions in times of adversity which are shared by all cultures.”¹⁴⁷ Childs noted that the “fact that

¹⁴³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 58; see 57, 58n26.

¹⁴⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57; see 59, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 58n26.

¹⁴⁷ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 257.

these same expressions appear in an actual trial situation is to be expected, but it does not offer adequate reason for speaking of a *Gattung* (“genre”).¹⁴⁸ The similarities in the form and content of the murmurings, and the “lack of variation in quite different situations” does, as Childs wrote, “support the thesis that a set traditional language is being used.”¹⁴⁹

The occurrence of ריב + עַם in Exod 17:2 makes the most sense when it is viewed as essentially negative and removed from the legal sphere. There is no formal suit made against Moses or LORD here, neither is there a heated quarrel filled with an exchange of accusations and counteraccusations. ריב + עַם occurs again in Num 20:3 and is accompanied by two accusatory questions that carry “the burden of the case against the opposition and challenges him to some kind of explanation,” but Moses does not counter the accusations.¹⁵⁰ Neither usage of ריב + עַם in the wilderness wanderings traditions indicates a quarrel or interchange between the Israelites and Moses.¹⁵¹ When the murmuring motif is limited to the murmurings only and does not include any responses to the murmuring from the addressee, Coats’ assertion that the formal structure of the murmuring has its setting in the preofficial stage of a trial is untenable. It is best to view the occurrences of ריב + עַם in Exod 17:2 and Num 20:3 as being outside of the legal sphere and as another collocation of the murmuring motif. This collocation ought to be translated as “to protest against.” And because it has essentially the same meaning as לִן

¹⁴⁸ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 257; Josh 7:7 has an accusatory question but is not part of murmuring tradition.

¹⁴⁹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 257.

¹⁵⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 34.

¹⁵¹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 388.

+ על, the notions of hostility and open rebellion must also be included. The protest in Exod 17:2 is not “Give us water [or we will rebel],” the protest, “Give us water” is the rebellion.¹⁵²

When ריב + עַם is viewed negatively, and as the indication of the murmuring motif, the murmuring must then be considered as being a part of element two of Pattern A, legitimate need/murmuring. This conclusion negates the notion of a positive tradition that shows Israel demanding aid from the LORD. It also requires Moses’ questions in v. 2*b* to have a close connection to the demand in v. 2*a*, and to the Massah (מַסָּה) reference in v. 7, rather than viewing them as secondary additions. While it is true that the etiologies in v. 7 do not explicitly explain the presence of the spring, this does not necessitate that the spring narrative is a subsequent development. The water from the rock in Exod 17 is not merely a consequence of the protest; it is intricately connected to it. The water is the LORD’s gracious act of deliverance, the final element of Pattern A.

The lack of water was genuine, and the concern to not have any was legitimate, but the way the Israelites handled their concern was unacceptable. They did not wait on the LORD to provide for their need, “they do not even assume that it *can* be met;” instead, they wrongly “assumed, in spite of their recent experiences, that they must do something.”¹⁵³ The LORD did, after all, almost immediately provide for them after they grumbled in Exod 15 and 16. If ריב + עַם is understood as another collocation of the murmuring motif, where it has been argued, that Israel’s murmurs are ultimately against the LORD, then, by way of contrast with Coats, the LORD is indeed the object of the

¹⁵² Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 57.

¹⁵³ Durham, *Exodus*, 232; emphasis original.

protest. The behavior of both Moses and the LORD is being questioned. In their demand for water, the people are implicitly blaming Moses, but they are also revealing that they still lack full faith in the LORD's power and desire to provide water for them. Moses' first response is not a counteraccusation but a question, "Why do you protest against me?" Moses knows that he is simply a servant of the LORD and ultimately not the one responsible for bringing them to Rephidim, and he also realizes that inherent in their hostile protest against him is a criticism against the LORD.¹⁵⁴ Thus, his first question serves to remind them that they are, in fact, protesting against the LORD.

In Moses' second question, he challenges the people's attitude toward the LORD as he asks, "Why do you test the LORD?" Here Moses equates Israel's protest against him as testing the LORD; the same term, *נסו*, that was used in Exod 15:25 and 16:4 to describe the LORD testing the Israelites, and their willingness to obey him is used here.¹⁵⁵ Testing the LORD, or "putting God to the proof," is to attempt to coerce the LORD to act in a certain way or show himself; it is an endeavor to "force God's hand in order thereby to determine concretely whether God is really present or not."¹⁵⁶ Testing the LORD "always involves some degree of doubt about whether or not one's present circumstances are all that one deserves and whether or not God could or should have done a better job of providing one's needs."¹⁵⁷ V. 7 clarifies the nature of Israel's testing of the LORD as they ask, "Is the LORD among us or not?" If Israel was going to believe

¹⁵⁴ Alexander, *Exodus*, 334. See Exod 16:7, 8.

¹⁵⁵ Alexander, *Exodus*, 334. See Num 14:22; Deut 8:2, 16; 13:2; Judg 2:22; 3:1, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 189. See Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ Stuart, *Exodus*, 389.

that the LORD was present with them, then they want him to prove he was with them in a very concrete way; they were making him their servant and were attempting “to turn faith into sight.”¹⁵⁸ Israel wanted to “train God to be at their beck and call,” which is “what one did with other kinds of gods. If the god did not produce results, one changed gods. This was the original form of conceiving and creating a god that is one’s personal ‘water boy.’ They challenged the Lord as if the Lord were a false god, suggesting that if they were still thirsty, then the Lord was not really there (v. 7).”¹⁵⁹

It was this protest and test that gave way to the naming of the location as Massah-and-Meribah (מַסָּה וּמֵרִיבָה; Test-and-Protest) in v. 7. Stuart highlights the following stark reality: “The day of this current protest, after all, was one more day on which the people had been able to gather manna to feed themselves and their animals.”¹⁶⁰

Verse 3

It is commonly argued that vv. 2 and 3 are doublets primarily because, in v. 2, the people protest against Moses, and then in v. 3, they murmur against him, but also because in v. 7, two names are listed based on two explanations of the events that occurred there.¹⁶¹ However, it is best not to view vv. 2 and 3 as doublets mainly because the form of the murmurings is different; v. 2 contains a demand while v. 3 contains an accusatory question. Alexander provides additional justification for the uniqueness of each verse:

[T]o describe v. 3 as a doublet or variant of v. 2, merely on the basis of the verbs ‘to quarrel’ and ‘to grumble,’ displays how the spectre of supposedly parallel

¹⁵⁸ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 189.

¹⁵⁹ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 156, 157.

¹⁶⁰ Stuart, *Exodus*, 389.

¹⁶¹ Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 191.

documents unduly influences source analysis within the Pentateuch. In everyday human experience quarreling with another person and grumbling about them are commonly juxtaposed. There is no need to ascribe such activities to separate sources or traditions...on the contrary, one might readily expect that they would appear together in an account such as this. V. 3 emphasizes the depth of emotion felt by the Israelites due to the lack of water. Without some sense of this, Moses' remark in v. 4 about being stoned by the people would seem a gross exaggeration.¹⁶²

V. 3 is the first time in the Exod 15:22–17:7 that an accusatory question occurs.

The form of the murmuring and the hostility of the Israelites has grown steadily; now, in Exod 17:3, it reaches its climax as they accuse Moses of intending to kill them, their children, and their livestock from the beginning. The murmuring motif is signaled by the לֹן + עַל collocation in v. 3; the subject of the murmuring is the people, and the object is Moses. The accusatory question begins with the interrogative לָמָּה (“why?”), and it is followed by a *hiphil*, perfect, second person, masculine, singular verb from the root עָלָה (“to go up”). Here the people are questioning why Moses brought them up out of Egypt. Following the reference to Egypt is a *hiphil*, infinitive, construct, לְהַמִּית, from the root מָוַת (“to kill”). The purpose of this infinitive is to define “the nature of the result expected from the action described by the principal verb,” yet, here, the result is only anticipated and not realized.¹⁶³ The people think that Moses brought them, their children, and their livestock out of Egypt to kill them with thirst. Yet, “it is not the result, either real or anticipated, which is challenged by the question, but the action producing the result;” the primary challenge of the accusatory question is the exodus.¹⁶⁴ The Israelites still do not

¹⁶² Alexander, *Exodus*, 332.

¹⁶³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 31. A *lamed* of purpose; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 110.

¹⁶⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 31; see 32.

understand that the LORD is the one responsible for leading them; their accusation reflects their lack of true faith in the LORD and reveals that they think the LORD does not genuinely care for them.¹⁶⁵

According to Coats, the problem of thirst provides the introduction to the murmuring in v. 3; in conjunction with the accusatory question, the problem of thirst appears “only in a dependent construct clause. It is not impossible for such a clause to carry the emphasis of the sentence. But when it does, the infinitive is normally placed before the governing verb.”¹⁶⁶ Coats thought that the problem of thirst was only the setting for the murmuring and that the infinitive, construct, לְהַמִּיֵּת, “seems to do nothing more than state the attendant circumstance of the primary action, in effect the result of the action.”¹⁶⁷ Again, Coats’ interpretation of the reason for murmuring is too narrow; the evidence does confirm that the exodus is the primary reason for the murmuring, but the water shortage is not merely its setting. The lack of water is what triggers the murmuring about the exodus. It is when the people experience thirst that they understand they would have never been in this situation if Moses did not bring them out of Egypt. The threat of death by thirst is the immediate problem that needs to be solved, not the exodus. The people do not want to return to Egypt; they merely do not wish to of thirst. Water is an essential and legitimate human need, and the shortage of it here serves as the root of the LORD’s merciful and gracious aid for his people.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander, *Exodus*, 334.

¹⁶⁶ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 60. See Gen 42:9.

¹⁶⁷ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 60.

Verses 4–7

Vv. 4–6a contain the intercession/instructions element of Pattern A.¹⁶⁸ V. 4 deviates from the structure Coats proposed as Moses does not respond to the people’s accusatory question to explain the reason for the exodus; instead, Moses cries out to the LORD and asks, “What shall I do with this people?”¹⁶⁹ It is Moses’ next statement to the LORD, “they are almost ready to stone me,” that confirms the level of hostility has increased since chapter 16. In vv. 5–6 the LORD responds to Moses’ cry with instructions for how to obtain water; there is no hint of anger or punishment in the LORD’s instructions even though it would have been warranted. For the final time in the pre-Sinai, Pattern A texts, the LORD demonstrates “characteristic reliable and gracious provision” instead of judgment.¹⁷⁰ Stuart provides a helpful translation of v. 5: “‘The LORD said to Moses, ‘Get out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand your rod with which you struck the Nile, and start walking.’”¹⁷¹ V. 6 begins with the LORD stating, “Here I am standing before you here on the rock in Horeb;” this reveals that the LORD indeed is present with Israel, and once again, the proof the LORD’s presence will result in provision for the Israelites.¹⁷² The

¹⁶⁸ Coats includes verse 4 in the murmuring motif; *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 61.

¹⁶⁹ Note the similarities to Exod 15:25.

¹⁷⁰ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 158.

¹⁷¹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 390. Blackburn observed: “Noteworthy in the light of the first two episodes is the absence of ‘I am the LORD’ as the goal of what the Lord seeks to teach Israel. However, present in this particular section is the staff of Moses, which may serve a similar function. The same staff that represented the power of the LORD in the plague accounts...represents that same power as the Lord provides for Israel in the wilderness, this time as Moses strikes the rock with the staff, the sign that indicates the Lord’s action on Israel’s behalf;” *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 72.

¹⁷² Durham, *Exodus*, 231.

final instruction is for Moses to strike the rock with his staff, and when he does, water will come out of it, and the people will be able to drink. This pericope does not record the people drinking the water, but the final element of Pattern A, deliverance, is still found in v. 6b. Moses did as the LORD commanded, and it was done in the sight of the elders. Given that the people were questioning the authority of Moses and the LORD, it is logical to conclude that the LORD's instructions to Moses serve to substantiate the authority of both the LORD and his chosen servant. The call for Moses to walk in front of the people where they could see him was a visible sign of his leadership, and the instructions to bring the staff, "the symbol of Moses' original commission," supports this.¹⁷³ The elders were not there simply to witness the provision of water; they were there to signal support of Moses' leadership.

This pericope concludes with a naming etiology. Moses names the place Massah-and-Meribah (מַסָּה וּמִרְיָבָה; Test-and-Protest) in light of the references in v. 2 to protesting (רִיב) and testing (נִסָּה). Some scholars think that the "unusual form of [the] double-barrelled name" indicates a combination of two stories or two etiologies, but this is an unnecessary conclusion; for not only are the concepts of protesting and testing very closely associated in this pericope but the name Massah-and-Meribah also makes good sense of what occurred at Rephidim.¹⁷⁴ While v. 2 narrated the protesting and testing, a new element is added in the final portion of v. 7, "Is the LORD among us or not?" The LORD's presence is not explicitly mentioned in vv. 1–6, aside from the LORD saying he

¹⁷³ Bruckner, *Exodus*, 158. See Durham, *Exodus*, 231.

¹⁷⁴ Alexander, *Exodus*, 335. "It is pure speculation on the part of Noth that 'Meribah and Massah were two different places, each with its specific local tradition from the time of the wandering in the wilderness' (1962: 139). Nor is there any evidence supporting the view that two stories involving different names were told about the same place (*pace* Hyatt 1971:179);" Alexander, *Exodus*, 333.

would stand before Moses on the rock (v. 6), presumably in the form of the pillar of cloud. This question reveals a profound lack of faith by the Israelites, and it is an insult that has overlooked the LORD's visible presence with them. It is particularly shocking that the Israelites would ask this after everything that has transpired in the book of Exodus thus far. This question "goes to the very heart of everything that is being narrated in the book of Exodus. YHWH has come to deliver them from slavery in order that he might dwell among them. The whole movement within the book of Exodus is towards God's living constantly in the midst of his people," and yet this question also "runs counter to all that God is seeking to achieve by bringing the Israelites out of Egypt."¹⁷⁵ The LORD's proof of his presence in Exod 17 through the provision of water shows Israel once again that he is with them and that he can be trusted to provide for their daily needs. It also "serves also as an accumulating anticipation of the even greater proof to come" at Mount Sinai, which, unfortunately, it is "followed, not preceded by, an even greater disbelief," the golden calf episode.¹⁷⁶ Israel's distrust of the LORD then climaxes with their fearful refusal to enter the promised land in Num 13–14. Exod 17:1–7 suggests that the lessons the LORD has been teaching Israel "are not being learned, even if the outworking of Israel's lack of trust in disobedience has yet to be fully realized."¹⁷⁷ Exod 17:1–7, along with the other references and allusions in the Bible to this testing of the LORD, paints this event in a negative light that future generations must not repeat.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Alexander, *Exodus*, 336.

¹⁷⁶ Durham, *Exodus*, 232.

¹⁷⁷ Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 74; see 73. See Num 14:11.

¹⁷⁸ Deut 6:16; 9:22; Ps. 95:7–9. See also Pss 78:16–20, 41, 56; 95:9; 114:8; Isa 48:21; Heb 3:8.

People of the LORD need to trust that he is with them and that he will provide for their daily needs. As God, the LORD has the authority to test the faith of his people, but his people do not have the authority to test him. Thus, Ps 95:7b–8 issues the stark warning: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness” (ESV).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

While various OT and NT authors may employ the wilderness wanderings traditions for their own purposes, the traditions themselves generally present the Israelites in a negative light. This negative presentation is primarily due to the murmuring motif. This essay revealed the stereotyped verbs and collocations of the motif in addition to the variety of forms the murmurings can take, a prominent form being an accusatory question. When the stereotyped verbs and collocations do not occur, it is the presence of an accusatory question with stereotypical content and language regarding the Israelites' life in Egypt and their exodus that signals the murmuring motif. The motif must be limited to the murmurings only and must exclude any responses from the addressee(s) that may be present in the text. When this is done, the final form of the pericopes in which the motif occurs can be more effectively evaluated. This essay has shown that the murmuring comprises one element of the two recurring patterns in the wilderness wanderings traditions, Pattern A and Pattern B. The murmuring motif must always be viewed as negative and hostile, and as an act of open rebellion against the LORD. The failures of the Israelites are on full display in the pre-Sinai, Pattern A, wilderness wanderings texts as they time and time again murmur against the LORD; however, it is in

the midst of these failures that the mercy and grace with which the LORD meets their murmurings is magnified.

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