

WRITING AS READING: DEUTERONOMY'S PERSPECTIVE
ON THE DAY OF THE ASSEMBLY

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ABSTRACT: This article studies the Torah's depictions of God's descent on Sinai, 'the Day of the Assembly,' within Exodus 19–20 and across Deuteronomy to argue that Israel's failure to go on the mountain in Exodus 19:16 is sin. The Torah's cumulative depictions of this moment convey the Torah's theology of how God and man approach each other. After a brief contrast with Kibbe's recent study, this article examines the plausibility and profitability of interpreting Exodus 19 as a discussion of two covenantal relationships between God and Israel by testing its ideas through summary exegesis of Exodus 19–20 and Deuteronomy 4, 5, 9, 10, 18. The Torah revisits Israel's fear to transform that one moment into a larger story of how God changes the human heart. Israel's request for God's words to become Moses' words sets Moses' written mediation as the key to His people living with God. Exodus's and Deuteronomy 5's accounts of that day unveil the people's movement from a bad fear of God, which disobeys Him, to a good fear of God, which heeds His words, with the Ten Words standing between the narratives. Deuteronomy 9–10 characterize the trembling of Exodus 19:16 as sin, and Deuteronomy 18 connects that day's transformation to the request for the Prophet Like Moses and the promise of His victory over death. While Moses could not overcome death, Moses' book promises the Prophet Like Moses who will overcome death and bring God's people into God's presence in the end.

KEYWORDS: Torah, Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, Sinai, Horeb, Exodus.

Introduction

This article examines how Deuteronomy, as the fifth part of Moses' one book, reads the Sinai theophany of Exodus 19–20, the day which Deuteronomy labels 'the Day of the Assembly' (hereafter 'DOA'; Deuteronomy 9:10; 10:4). The biblical author continually revisits this same moment within Exodus 19–20 itself and across Deuteronomy 4, 5, 9, 10, and 18 because it unveils the terror and hope of bringing God and man together. By joining these sections of Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Torah's author sets that day as more than just a mere historical referent or one passing phase of a book. It becomes the Torah's heart. God's arrival on Sinai anticipates His future arrival everywhere, so the revisiting of this day throughout the book allows God's descent

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to Israel in Exodus 19:16 to stand as the cloud-covered and dramatically lit blueprint for God's continuing and final approach to man in the last days.

Through such composition, Deuteronomy presents the DOA as the day where the book's core problem, man's death in God's presence, becomes most visible to the reader. Deuteronomy interprets this past day at Sinai through repetitions that help make the Torah into one story. The DOA's wisdom speaks from its day (Exodus) to Moses' last day (Deuteronomy) and to the reader. In this way, the reader faces what Israel encountered at Sinai (Exodus) and at Moab (Deuteronomy). The author uses resumptive repetitions (Sprinkle 1994: 19–20) to direct the reader forward by looking back at Sinai. These repetitions of the DOA within Exodus 19–20 and through multiple sections of Deuteronomy offer God's counsel for a thousand generations by returning to the story's heart.

Michael Harrison Kibbe offers the most recent study of the DOA, stretching his analysis beyond the Torah into the book of Hebrews. He focuses on two key factors to interpret the DOA: 1) God's purpose for that day and 2) Israel's need to trust Moses the man as God's mediator (Kibbe 2016: 58–66). Kibbe weds these ideas to argue that in Exodus 19–20 God purposefully tests Israel to fear Him so that they will trust Moses permanently (Kibbe 2016: 85). He contends that God ultimately does not want Israel to go on the mountain, but he also recognizes that God commands Israel to do such in Exodus 19:13 (Kibbe 2016: 74–78). For Kibbe, this seeming contradiction creates intentional ambiguity that parallels God's instruction to Abraham at Moriah in Genesis 22 (Kibbe 2016: 65–66; 73–78). God did not ultimately mean to kill Isaac, even though He gave the command to slaughter him. In the same way, Kibbe argues, God tests Israel with a command to go on Sinai that He does not intend for them to heed. For Kibbe, Moriah and Sinai share commands not to be done. Positively, the unheeded command to go on the mountain positions Israel to walk in a proper fear of God so that they will then see their need to trust Moses' human mediation (Kibbe 2016: 73–78). Kibbe distinguishes Deuteronomy's contemplation of Moses' death and its prophetic aftermath from his claims about Exodus's lessons on the DOA.

Kibbe's analysis faithfully explains some tensions in Exodus 19–20 and provides a purpose for at least one of the text's major tensions, especially the relationship of Exodus 19:12–13 to the rest of the pericope. However, his view does not explain the reasons for the other tensions between the two parts of Exodus 19. Kibbe's focus on Moses' mediation is only partly satisfactory because he does not apply Deuteronomy's understanding of Moses' death to the Exodus text. The author's purpose for the DOA within Exodus must include, in our view, the prophet's mortality if the Torah is one book. We will consider the Torah as one book and will explain the composition

of Exodus 19–20 so as to propose a purpose for its tensions in light of Deuteronomy. Our answer differs from Kibbe's because we will not see a contradiction or ambiguity in the command to go on the mountain. God intends the command, and Israel fails to obey it when they tremble (Exodus 19:16). This bad fear of God echoes Adam and contrasts with Abraham, but God shows mercy through the covenant with laws.

The author writes the Torah and its depictions of the DOA in Exodus and Deuteronomy to lead the reader to trust Moses' book (Kibbe 2016: 92; Vogt 2006: 125) as the means to continually approach God and to keep returning to a good fear of God that loves Him, even after Moses' death. This composition sets Israel's trembling in Exodus 19:16 as the first part of a string of moments, a story, that reveals how God transforms people.

Exodus 19 and 20

After leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea and the wilderness (Exodus 1–18), God brings His people to Mount Sinai in anticipation of the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham (19:1–2). The key decision for the rest of Exodus 19 centers on whether the chapter presents one or two covenantal relationships between God and Israel (Sailhamer 1992: 51–57; 281–282; 288). Kibbe joins almost all scholars in arguing for one covenantal relationship in this chapter, but we will argue for two covenantal relationships that divide the chapter but unite the book around Exodus 19:16.

Most modern translations follow the dominant view that reads Exodus 19 as one covenantal relationship. This approach finds a level of consistency in the instructions at the chapter's beginning and ending, or it proposes a purpose to the tensions. Kibbe models one way to leverage the tensions of Exodus 19:12–13 by establishing God's purpose for Israel in them (Kibbe 2016: 66–78). He employs Sinai's parallels with Moriah (Genesis 22), as we said above, to explain the distinction between what God commands and what He wants. However, he fails to account for some significant changes, including the contrasting boundaries: the boundary around the people before God descends (19:12) and the boundary around the mountain after Israel trembles (19:23). In the end, Kibbe and those with one covenantal relationship understand Israel's trembling as an appropriate reverence for God. They see the first half of Exodus 19 summarizing the legal covenant that follows so that the nation's status as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation depend on it and on the work of the Aaronic priesthood (Davies 2004: 238–240).

For those who see two covenantal relationships in Exodus 19, the Torah's author designs the chapter to emphasize Exodus 19:16. What surrounds it guides its proper interpretation. Instead of Exodus 19's first half summarizing the legal covenant, it promises the end goal of God's relationship with Israel: an eschatological preview.

Also, this opening section stresses God's direct words to Moses but not Moses' direct words to the people, until you reach Exodus 19:15. Apart from that verse, the direct speech is in the heavens, and the indirect speech is on earth. God mediates His words to Israel through Moses that they may become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (19:6). In the first covenantal relationship of the chapter, God commands and desires Israel to approach Him on Sinai with faith that echoes how Abraham approached God on Moriah in a covenant relationship like Abraham's (Sailhamer 1992: 60–76; 282–283).

Unfortunately, Israel trembles instead of going up to God on the mountain (19:16). They sin in a bad fear of God, but God responds with the covenant of laws, the chapter's second covenantal relationship. Moses' mediation is God's good response to Israel's trembling (19:16). This section magnifies the distance between God and His people by delaying God's actual words until Exodus 19:21–22 and 19:24. Moses' words with God shepherd Israel to find a partial life with God. This relationship to God and His presence is only possible for Israel *through Moses*. The tensions between the chapter's two halves in our view allow the author to describe God's final relationship with Israel in Exodus 19:1–15 and His relationship with them until that time in Exodus 19:17–25. Exodus 19's differing instructions signal the story of God's patient mercy at Sinai and after it until the very end. The laws find their resolution in what comes after them because it was promised before them.

We will, now, examine Exodus 19–20 to test the plausibility and profitability of the two covenantal view. At the chapter's beginning, God tells Moses (19:3) what he will say to Israel (19:4–6) and then rehearses how He led Israel on the journey from Egypt to this moment (19:4). God calls Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation through Israel 1) obeying His voice and 2) keeping His covenant (19:5–6). They will walk *with God* and *to God* like Abraham did. The author, then, *indirectly* depicts Moses mediating these words to Israel. Israel agrees to God's terms, 'Everything the LORD has spoken, we will do' (19:8). Without taking a breath, Moses returns these words to God (19:8). The LORD Himself will come upon clouds *so that* Israel may hear the conversation between God and Moses and trust in Moses forever (19:9).

After Moses declares Israel's words to God, the LORD coaches Moses to prepare Israel for His arrival on the third day. Israel will wash their clothes (19:10) as part of sanctifying all of them rather than some of them (19:10–13). Accordingly, God commands a boundary around the people by warning them to 'be careful as you all go on the mountain' (19:12). God warns of death, however, if they touch even the mountain's end (19:12b). The people will die if they approach it wrongly. By setting a time for the people to go up, God confirms that this warning is a sanctifying boundary against coming too early: 'When the ram's horn blasts, they will go on the moun-

tain' (19:13b). If they come up before it blares, then they will surely die (19:12b–13a). When the trumpet blows, however, the people must go up on the mountain (19:13b). The people must wait properly and then go up properly to God when the horn blasts. Moses' mediatorial activities reinforce the boundary being around the people rather than the mountain: 'And he sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes' (19:14b). At last, Moses warns the people to get ready for a time, the third day, by not drawing near a woman (19:15). Thus, we expect all of them to get ready to go up on the third day when the trumpet blares.

But, then the day of truth comes: 'And so it was on the third day when there was morning. And there was thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud was upon the mountain. And the sound of the shofar was blaring exceedingly. **And all the people who were in the camp trembled**' (Exodus 19:16). First, Israel's trembling is disobedience to Exodus 19:13b. The fulfillment of the promises from the first half of the chapter connected to Israel being on the mountain and becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation is delayed. Exodus 19:1–15's anticipation of God's good ending with all the people on the mountain as His priests will wait for a future day (Sailhamer 1992: 35–37; 77; Sailhamer 2009: 349–354). Second, the remaining half of the chapter illuminates God's accommodation and direction until that time in the form of a legal covenantal relationship. It reframes our understanding of what will take place next for Israel's relationship with God.

The dissonance between Exodus 19:13's command to go up and Exodus 19:16's trembling lays the groundwork for the chapter's multiple tensions. Instead of the people going on the mountain, Moses now leads them to the base of the mountain (19:17). This moment's image, then, becomes more terrifying. The mountain trembles from God's fiery descent and sends its smoke upwards (19:18). This sight gives way to sound. 'And the sound of the shofar was going and blaring exceedingly' (Exodus 19:19a). Immediately after re-describing the trumpet blast of Exodus 19:16 and its signal to go up, the author directs us to God's and Moses' conversation in Exodus 19:19b. We could not hear God's words in Exodus 19:16, only terrifying sounds. Now, we learn that God and Moses speak in the midst of this chaos. Exodus 19:19 aligns this conversation to God's stated purpose for the DOA: 'The people will hear when I speak with you and they will believe in you forever' (19:9). This divine intention dovetails with Moses' purpose that Israel would meet God (19:17). Surprisingly, Exodus 19:19b only indirectly describes this most significant feature of the day: 'Moses was speaking, and God was answering with a voice' (see Alexander 2017: 382–383; Fretheim 1991: 218). This use of indirect speech clouds the immediate moment but forces the reader to listen for these words later in the story.

This delaying tactic is a feature of the composition because it resists myopic read-

ings by pressing the reader to hold together the book's multiple sections. We must keep reading to draw close to God through Moses. The author's purpose for the reader echoes God's purposes for Israel. Thus, he adds to the story's tensions by reporting that this conversation begins with Moses' unstated question (19:19b). The text never states this question, leaving us to ponder this lacuna.

Waiting to hear the precise words does not delay the author revisiting God's descent and a call for Moses to go to the top of the mountain (19:20). The author establishes, then, God's new instructions without any explanation of its tensions with the earlier commands (19:21–22). Instead of calling Israel to go up on the mountain, God now wants Moses to warn the people to not break through to see God because then many would die (19:21). While God envisioned a kingdom *of* priests, we now see Israel as a kingdom *with* priests, a limited number who will draw near to God (Sailhamer 1992: 51–57). These undefined priests, rather than all the people, must be sanctified in a consecration distinct from the prior preparations of Exodus 19:10–15. When Moses replies to these instructions, he affirms the people's inability to go up on the mountain because 'You warned us saying, "Put a boundary around the mountain and sanctify it"' (19:23). What began as the need for the people's sanctification to go up on the mountain (19:1–15) has now become a plan for a sanctified place and a deliberate distance (19:16–25). God's final words in this chapter ask Moses and Aaron to ascend, but the people and the priests should not (19:24).

The author finally lays out the Ten Words as God's answer to Moses' question in Exodus 19:19b. They become Moses' words from God to the people. The Ten Words describe life with God, especially the demands for approaching or being near God (Sailhamer 1992: 283). Exodus 20:1–17 give the reader, therefore, the words between God and Moses that Exodus 19:9 promised. As we said above, we do not know Moses' question that starts the conversation, but the DOA's context hints at possible questions, as seen in Psalms 15 and 24.

'O LORD, who may sojourn in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy mountain? (Psalm 15:1).'

'Who may ascend on the mountain of the LORD? And who may arise into Your holy place? (Psalm 24:3).'

These questions may echo what was asked. If so, the Ten Words describe the One who can rightly approach God and live, allowing the Torah's narratives to disqualify those who may not do so on their own.

The author returns us to Exodus 19:16 one more time in Exodus 20:18–21. We see God's descent from the view of those on the earth. Once again, we revisit the chaotic terror of God's descent: thunder, lightning strikes, the sound of the shofar,

and smoke from the mountain (20:18a). The second half of this verse emphasizes the people's response: 1) they saw, 2) they wobbled, and 3) they stood from afar (20:18b).

We also see something new. The words of the people come after God's descent and during its ensuing terror. They ask Moses to speak with God for them so that they can hear and stay alive. 'Let not God speak with us, lest we will die' (20:19b). They ask for God's words to become Moses' words. Moses, then, instructs Israel how to live at Sinai and after Sinai: 'Do not fear for God has come so that He might test you all and so that the fear of Him will be on all of your faces so that you all will not sin' (20:20).

The author weaves together two key ideas. First, the kind of fear Israel experiences at the sight of God descending on the mountain in Exodus 19:16 is a bad fear of God, a fear of death in God's presence that echoes Adam's struggles to obey God after his own sin (see Genesis 3; Sailhamer 1992: 105). Second, God's purposes for Israel hearing this conversation include a test that seeks to remove the fear rebuked at the verse's start and to replace it with a new fear of God that will restrain them from sin. Even in making this good request, Moses' counsel to put away the bad fear remains necessary. The changing of the heart is a war not a battle, a process rather than a point in time.

Because of their bad fear of God, the people stand from afar (20:21). Only Moses goes to where Israel had been invited. The DOA becomes a story of how God will change a flailing, fear-filled Israel. This story explains the Torah's whole story, especially its eschatological ending. It is the Torah *in nuce*. In asking for God's words to become Moses' words, they have sought to approach God by His mediated word through Moses. They will hear God in part now, and in this way they have drawn close to God.

Deuteronomy 4

Moses' first speech in Deuteronomy, the book of words, aims 'to explain this Torah' (Deuteronomy 1:5). Deuteronomy 1:6–4:40 tells the story of what happened once the laws were given at Sinai (Horeb), and it stretches from Sinai through the nation's time in the wilderness to the choice laid out before the second generation until the last days. Deuteronomy 4 picks up after Deuteronomy 1–3's rehearsal of God's life with Israel to call this next generation to break their parents' pattern of sinning. Deuteronomy 4:9–14 and 4:30–36 harken the reader to his future by drawing out the implications of God's descent on Sinai (Horeb) before Israel on the DOA. The way to see God's future approach to humanity is to revisit His approach to Israel on that one day through Moses' written words. Deuteronomy serves as a written response to Israel's request for Moses' words to become God's words.

In Deuteronomy 4:9–14, Moses commands Israel and the reader to carefully cling to the words they saw so that they may not forget them and so that they may make

them known to future generations (4:9). We see words in the act of reading, so this first speech and Deuteronomy in general focus on Moses' last day as an echo of the DOA through its written words. These seen words elevate Deuteronomy's writing as a prophetic act to the reader.

Deuteronomy 4:10, then, approaches this written rehearsal of the DOA by interpreting God's three speeches found in the first half of Exodus 19 into one plan for life with God: 'Assemble the people to Me so that I may cause them to hear My words by which they will learn to fear Me all the days that they are alive upon the ground, and it is their sons whom they may teach' (Deuteronomy 4:10).

Moses fuses God's purposes for the DOA in Exodus 19:9 to its counterpart in Exodus 20:20 for the benefit of future generations. The assembling of God's people around God's conversation with Moses becomes the way that multiple generations will encounter the warnings and promises of God's future descent to humanity (Deuteronomy 31:10–13). Each generation must renew its relationship with God through Moses' words (McConville 2002: 106), so God's people must continually re-hear, re-heed, and re-trust this conversation.

Deuteronomy 4:11 builds upon these insights to revisit the moment of God's descent: 'And you all drew near and stood at the base of the mountain. And, the mountain was burning with fire unto the heart of the heavens: darkness, clouds, and thick clouds' (Deuteronomy 4:11). In Exodus, the author moved from the intense description of the day and then tackled the human responses. Deuteronomy 4:11 inverts this technique, while echoing its language. The author depicts the people approaching the mountain and then paints the day's vivid imagery. Such clauses, 'And the mountain was burning with fire,' read as continuous action (Waltke and O'Connor 1990: 625; Williams 1967: 176). Thus, when Deuteronomy 4:11 is read in conjunction with Exodus, it shows Israel completing their movement 1) from immobilized fear (Exodus 19:16), 2) to being led by Moses (Exodus 19:17), and 3) to finally drawing near to the fiery mountain's base (Deuteronomy 4:11). Of course, this movement must also prove consistent with Exodus 20:18 that shows the wobbling people remaining far off from God. Even though they stand at a distance, they also draw close enough to the mountain base, presumably close enough to Moses, to make the request of Exodus 20:19 and to hear God's answer in Deuteronomy 4:12. This concurrent movement allows the people to plead with God through Moses in Exodus 20:19.

Deuteronomy 4:12–14 argue that each generation will relive the DOA through Moses' words. God spoke with Israel from the midst of the fire. They heard His voice and saw no image. We also read and hear His voice and see no image. The reader has similar access to God that Israel had at Sinai on the DOA and at Moab on Moses' last day. They only have words, and we only have words. God declares His covenant, the

Ten Words. Its lesson stretches the counsel of Deuteronomy 4:9–14 to Israel's continuing life with God: 'And you all will guard your souls exceedingly well because you all did not see any image on the day the LORD spoke to you all in Horeb from the midst of the fire' (Deuteronomy 4:15). The DOA teaches all Israel the need to hear God and not yet see Him to find life with God when facing death. The author expands this principle to their present choices. They approach God on the edge of the promised land by His word, as they did at Sinai: 'Guard yourselves all of you, lest you all forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He cut with you all ... for the LORD your God is a devouring fire. He is a jealous God' (Deuteronomy 4:23–24). The words between God and Moses through this legal, covenantal relationship depend on the reality of the DOA, not the other way around. God arrived with His fiery, terrifying presence on Sinai (Horeb), and He answered Israel's trembling with His word. Heeding God's word allows Israel to have real life with the real God.

Beginning with Deuteronomy 4:25, Moses pivots to what will happen after Israel enters Canaan under Joshua. They will enter the land, and they will fall into egregious idolatry (Deuteronomy 4:25). The depth of Israel's future idolatry will provoke God to anger that will lead Him to scatter them amongst the many peoples into an exile to learn the powerlessness of idols (Deuteronomy 4:27). In this exile amongst the peoples, Israel will finally seek God with all their hearts (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Deuteronomy 4:30 echoes the DOA's arrival of God: 'In your distress, all these words will find you in the end of the days. And you will return unto the LORD your God, and you will obey His voice.' His words will find His people. Moses promises a future return to God after exile. He turns the hope and anticipation of the promises from the first half of Exodus 19 to fulfillment in the end of the days. Despite all that has gone wrong and all that will go wrong, Israel will obey His voice in the end as Abraham did in Genesis 22:18; 26:5.

With this small clause and claim, 'And you will obey His voice,' Deuteronomy 4:30 promises an eschatological Israel who will echo Abraham's walk with God and to God on Moriah. There, God tested his heart's love for God. Abraham approached God on the third day on the mountain in the face of Isaac's death but found life (Genesis 22:1–19) through Abraham's circumcised heart (Genesis 17:23–27; Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6). He feared and loved God. Kibbe marks the connection between Moriah and Sinai by equating God's original commands not being intended nor acted upon in either scene, but this emphasis underplays the contrast between Abraham's successful approach with his son Isaac on Moriah and Moses' unsuccessful approach with God's son Israel on Sinai. Israel never made it to where Isaac was taken. The testing of Abraham provides a contrast with Sinai that also underscores what was expected in the first half of Exodus 19 and will take place in the end of the

days. God will have a relationship with Israel like Abraham's in the end. They will obey his voice. God will perform a heart change for Israel as He did with Abraham (Deuteronomy 30:6).

This promise of Israel obeying His voice also returns us to the command that Israel should obey the voice of God's Messenger with His Name in Him (Exodus 23:20). This Messenger will complete the ban on the Canaanites and fulfill God's covenant with Abraham (Exodus 23:21–23). Israel was commanded to obey His voice too. In order for eschatological Israel to be truly safe in God's presence or His Messenger's presence, they must have a genuine and complete heart change. This return to God in Deuteronomy 4:30 is both physical and spiritual, as it also proves to be in Deuteronomy 30:1–10. The conversation between God and Moses offers a good ending for Israel from what was promised to Abraham after they join the nations in exile (McConville 2002: 111). Moses' book is more than an Old Covenant of laws. The Torah unveils Israel's time with God under the Mosaic Covenant's laws so that the whole book's symphonic mixture of laws, narratives, poems, and genealogies might teach us about the hope that comes in the end (Sailhamer 1992: 33–79; Sailhamer 2009: 29–48).

The God who shepherded Abraham to obey His voice despite the prophet's failures now reminds Israel of His promise. 'He will not forget the covenant with your fathers which was sworn to them' (Deuteronomy 4:31). Moses challenges us to ponder the whole book of the Torah with a series of questions that link God's work from the beginning of time and across the whole creation to the miracle of the DOA.

'For ask please from the earliest days which were before you, for from the day which God created Adam in the land and from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens. **Has there been anything like this great word? Or, has anything like it been heard? Has a people heard the sound of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire just as you heard it and lived?** Or, has God tested to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of a nation with trials, with signs, with wonders, with war, with a strong hand, with an outstretched arm, and with great terrors according to what the LORD your God did for you all in Egypt before your eyes.'
(Deuteronomy 4:32–34)

The author compares the miracle of the DOA to God's works in creation and in rescuing Israel from Egypt. God's work at these moments anticipated God's descent on the DOA and anticipates a future work like the DOA.

Moses reasserts what Israel saw and the necessary conclusion from these mo-

ments: 'There is none except Him' (Deuteronomy 4:35). Deuteronomy 4:36–37 continues: 'From the heavens He caused you to hear His voice, to discipline you. And on the land, He has shown you His great fire. And His words you heard **from the midst of the fire** because He loved your fathers and He chose their seed after them. And He brought you out from Egypt by His presence with great strength.' Because God promised life with Him, He let them stay alive when they saw His great fire from the mountain's base. Despite this terror, God's word kept them alive, as He did in choosing Abraham and in redeeming Israel from Egypt. God's election of Abraham's seed calls us to keep drawing near to the God who approaches so that we may face death in His presence in an echo of the DOA.

Deuteronomy 5

Moses' second speech covers Deuteronomy 5:1–26:19 and interprets the Torah's laws as Torah, namely, instruction (Deuteronomy 4:44, 45; 5:1). To gain instruction about the laws, Moses returns the reader to the DOA. In Deuteronomy 5:2, the prophet reminds Israel that God cut a covenant with them at Sinai (Horeb), but he follows up this reminder with a contrast to the fathers that echoes Deuteronomy 4:32: 'Not with our fathers did the LORD cut this covenant because it is with us. These who are here today. All of us who are alive' (Deuteronomy 5:3). The legal relationship with God found in the Mosaic Covenant offers Israel a particular life with God that resonates much of the fathers' walks with God, but they had lived life with God before and apart from these legal restrictions.

Moses, then, portrays the DOA in Deuteronomy 5:4 as God speaking with Israel face to face. He compares Israel hearing God on the DOA to God speaking to Jacob in Genesis 32:31 and Moses in Exodus 33:11. This comparison also foreshadows the closeness the Prophet Like Moses must have to God in Deuteronomy 34:11. Israel's face to face closeness to God in the DOA must be consistent with Exodus depicting Israel being in the camp, being led to the mountain base by Moses, and ending up being far off after drawing near (Exodus 19:16, 17; 20:18). Deuteronomy combines these descriptions to either emphasize 1) the power of God's direct voice, which shook everything, or 2) the real presence of God's voice in Moses' words to Israel (Deuteronomy 4:11, 33; 5:4, 22).

In Deuteronomy 5:4, God also speaks closely with Israel from the midst of the fire, fearing their death at that moment. He says, 'I was standing between the LORD and between you all on that day to declare to you all the word of the LORD because you all were afraid before the fire and you all did not go up on the mountain' (Deuteronomy 5:5). This fear of death in God's presence left them unable to go on the mountain and also necessitated Moses' mediation. The author marks this bad fear of God as an obstacle to God's good desire, which echoes the particular fear we witnessed in

the first part of Exodus 20:20. Their failure to go up will not be the end of the story because Moses is mediating God's words. This mediation must in some way yield the good fear addressed at the end of Exodus 20:20. As such, Deuteronomy 5:6–21 reiterates the Ten Words, God's answer to Moses' unstated question. Minor changes show up in this version of the Ten Words, but the most important of these changes provide commentary that connects God's sabbath work in creation to Israel's redemption from Egypt (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15; Chirichigno 1981: 309–310; McConville 2002: 121–122; Sailhamer 1994: 437; Sailhamer 2009: 612).

After the rehearsal of the Ten Words, the author revisits God's descent on Sinai and amplifies its imagery: 'It is these words that the LORD spoke to all your assembly on the mountain from the midst of the fire: clouds and thick clouds, a great voice. And, nothing was added. And, He wrote them upon the two tablets of stone and gave them to me' (Deuteronomy 5:22). God speaks the Ten Words before mentioning the day's terrible calamity. God's word causes the shaking and quaking and also interprets it. Exodus 20:17–19 showed the terror and then Moses leading Israel to the mountain base. Deuteronomy 4:11 emphasized Israel approaching the mountain base during this terror. Now, Deuteronomy 5:22 clarifies that 1) God's word begins the terror and 2) the Ten Words mark the written ministry God gave to Moses.

Deuteronomy 5:23–27 transitions back to Exodus 20:18–19 and Deuteronomy 4:11. It adds a longer version of Exodus 20:19 and declares the previously unstated words between Deuteronomy 4:11–12: 'And so it was as you all were hearing the voice from the midst of the darkness. And, the mountain was burning with the fire that all the heads of your tribes, your judges and your elders, drew near to me. And they said, "Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness. It is His voice we have heard from the midst of the fire"' (Deuteronomy 5:23–24a). The leaders of Israel speak for the people during the chaos. They talk both in response to God's fiery presence and in the midst of it.

The leaders' words of Deuteronomy 5:24–27 reveal Israel's heart. The author sets the summit of Exodus 19:16's interpretation in their mouths since prophetic work seeks to shape men's hearts. They define this amazing display as 'God's glory' and 'God's greatness' (Deuteronomy 5:24). The thunder and the lightning, the fire and the darkness, the clouds and the thick clouds all reveal God's glory and greatness when bound to hearing God's word. They have also learned, surprisingly, that even though God is speaking to them from the midst of the fire, from facing death, they have seen that God's fire brings life through death: 'This day, we have seen that God will speak with man, and he will live' (Deuteronomy 5:24). This exclamation reiterates God's words after the golden calf in Exodus 33:20 (McConville 2002: 132). By using 'haadam' for 'man' in both Exodus 33:20 and Deuteronomy 5:24, the author relates God's

voice on the DOA and after the golden calf to His word reaching Adam in Genesis 3. The assembly of Israel lives but deserves death: 'And now, why should we die? For this great fire will devour us. If we continue to hear the voice of the LORD any longer, then we will die' (Deuteronomy 5:25).

Thus, fear and facing death in God's presence becomes Israel's test (Exodus 20:20), as it was for Abraham and Isaac at Moriah: 'For who is it **of all flesh** who has heard the sound of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire like us and lived?' (Deuteronomy 5:26). This question stretches the applicability of the moment to all humanity, even to the reader. Can any man hear from the living God of his deserved death and yet find life?

This predicament leads them to ask for God's words to become Moses' words so that Israel may continue to hear it and heed it (Deuteronomy 5:27). This request leads to seeking God's word in a book, especially as Deuteronomy develops its argument (Deuteronomy 17; 29; 30; 31; 32, 33). When the DOA is read with the rest of its book, therefore, they are asking for Scripture, the written word, which lays the foundation for this moment to become a written conversation across locations, generations, and peoples.

While Exodus 20:20 answered the shorter form of this request with the command to not fear, Deuteronomy 5:28–31 answers with God's approval. God finds their words to be good. The leaders' hearts anticipate what God wants His people's hearts to be all the time: 'And the LORD said to me, "I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they spoke to you. Everything which they have spoken is good. What could be given that this would be their heart to fear Me and to keep all My commandments all the days so that it would be good to them and to their sons forever?"' (Deuteronomy 5:28b–29).

God affirms this request and where it might lead them with yet another allusion back to the Torah's beginning. In Genesis 1, God's word transformed the land from an unfit wilderness to a good and very good place. Israel's heart transformation on the DOA is a new creation. Israel begins with a bad fear of God (Exodus 19:16; Deuteronomy 5:5) and then hears the Ten Words (Exodus 20:1–17; Deuteronomy 5:6–21). Finally, the author returns to the LORD's descent to show us a good fear of God through the people's request for God's word (Exodus 20:18–21; Deuteronomy 5:22–6:5). Israel moves physically and spiritually from their trembling fear (Exodus 19:16; Deuteronomy 5:5) towards God through Moses to a good fear of God that also loves Him and obeys Him (Exodus 20:18–21; Deuteronomy 5:22–6:5). Exodus and Deuteronomy parallel each other. When they hear God's words as they face death, their fear, fascination, and desire for the Mysterious, Holy One sanctifies their wobbly steps into love (Otto 1923: 12–52).

<u>Exodus 19–20</u>	<u>Feature</u>	<u>Deuteronomy 5</u>
Exodus 19:16	Bad Fear	Deuteronomy 5:5
Exodus 19:17–25	The Legal Relationship Begins	
Exodus 20:1–17	Ten Words	Deuteronomy 5:6–21
Exodus 20:18–21	Good Fear	Deuteronomy 5:22–6:5

Exodus's and Deuteronomy's presentations of the DOA model God using His word to change hearts to love God completely. This one, seemingly small change echoes the heart change God worked with Abraham at Moriah and anticipates what God will do for eschatological Israel.

Against Kibbe, the key comparison between Moriah and Sinai is not a test that yields a cautious, contemplative wisdom, moving people from obedience to disobedience of God's original command. Instead, Sinai and Moriah are God's tests of men who need to fear and love God by drawing to Him through trust. God's mercy allowed His word to intervene at Sinai, as it did at Moriah. This loving fear echoes the second fear of Exodus 20:20, 'the fear of Him.' The author takes a snapshot of Israel's heart. It previews a heart that heeds the Shema, the final state of the redeemed heart (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). Deuteronomy 5 establishes God's test of Israel to show how God has changed, is changing, and will change all His people.

Deuteronomy 9–10

As Moses progresses through his second speech, he frames the reasons for the giving of the Mosaic law by comparing the DOA with the golden calf. Most importantly for our discussion, Moses frames God's actions at and after the golden calf on the pattern established forty days earlier on the DOA. The far more detailed account of the golden calf helps the author clarify the nature of Israel's trembling in Exodus 19:16 as sin.

Moses cites God's promise to Abraham as the reason for the conquest (Deuteronomy 9:1–6). He then reminds them how they angered God in Egypt and in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 9:7). Even at Sinai (Horeb), they angered God so much that He was ready to destroy them (Deuteronomy 9:8). For most scholars, Deuteronomy 9:8–21 isolates Israel's sin with the golden calf and its aftermath (McConville 2002: 179–181). Two main problems exist with this view. First, the direct mention of the DOA in Deuteronomy 9:10 only makes sense if it is part of the larger argument of Israel's sin. Second, the judgments that clearly reference the golden calf also refer to the same situation occurring forty days prior. In this way, Moses clarifies that Exodus 19:16 was not merely trembling. It was sin and disobedience, just like the golden calf.

Deuteronomy 9:8 offers either a larger summary of Israel's time at Sinai (Horeb),

or it is joining Deuteronomy 9:9 to describe the presence of sin before the golden calf. Deuteronomy 9:11 moves to the golden calf and a long description of God's mercy. He does so by making sure that we know that God's wrath and Moses' intercession on that day was not the first such event at Sinai (Horeb). God showed mercy after the golden calf, just as He had forty days prior.

Deuteronomy 9:18a

'And I prostrated myself before the LORD **as at the first forty days and forty nights**. Bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink'

Deuteronomy 9:19b

'And the LORD listened to me **also that time**.'

Deuteronomy 10:10

'And I stood on the mountain **as on the first forty days and forty nights**. And the LORD listened to me **also that time**.'

Moses prostrated himself forty days before the golden calf, which marks the golden calf as the second time that Moses humbled himself because of Israel's sin. All three verses work together to establish this forty-day gap, and Deuteronomy 9:19 and 10:10 repeat that God was listening 'also that time.' When McConville ponders these aspects of the text, he contends that 'there is no record of an intercession before Moses' descent to the scene of the crime,' namely, at the golden calf (McConville 2002: 184). His analysis is reasonable, but his perceived gap is easily found if Exodus 19:16 is sin. Exodus and Deuteronomy set the Mosaic Covenant itself as an act of mercy that answers Israel's sin before the golden calf.

Deuteronomy 18

The author makes his last major, direct reference to the DOA in the second half of Deuteronomy 18. After outlawing all other ways of knowing God's will, the DOA establishes the basis for the Prophet Like Moses. Moses promises 'It is a prophet from amongst you, from your brothers, like me, whom the LORD your God will raise up for you' (Deuteronomy 18:15a). He concludes this verse with the instruction to obey this Prophet Like Moses. Many engage this section by asking whether this Prophet Like Moses refers to an individual, eschatological prophet or to the establishment of many prophets. We see both emphases in this text and with it a guideline for discerning between the two. Moses' inability to overcome the problem of man's death in God's presence on the DOA differentiates between the two. The Prophet Like Moses will overcome death, and the many prophets like Moses will not.

Deuteronomy 18:16 argues that the prior verse's promise of the Prophet Like Moses agrees with what Israel asked for at Sinai (Horeb): 'This is according to all which

you asked from the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, “Let me not again hear the voice of the LORD my God. And, this great fire, let me not see it anymore so that I will not die” (Deuteronomy 18:16). God will send this Prophet Like Moses because Israel requested to stay alive without hearing God’s voice directly and without facing their own death at that time. They need 1) God’s word, 2) His messenger, and 3) a substitute death. They need, in other words, God’s lamb that can be seen on God’s mountain (Genesis 22:14). Deuteronomy 18:16 merges Exodus 20:19 and Deuteronomy 5:24–27 together to explain their fear of death as their request. The Prophet Like Moses is God’s answer to the request embedded in their fear. When they asked to not die in God’s presence, their fear begged for ongoing life, delaying and avoiding death. God intends Israel to hear the conversation, a written word, and to receive the Prophet Like Moses, a living word.

As we witnessed in Deuteronomy 5:28b, God labels this request and fear as good.

‘And the LORD said to me, “What they have spoken is good. It is a prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers like you. And I will set My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them everything that I will command him. And it will be that the man who does not hear My words which he will speak in My name, I will seek it from him” (Deuteronomy 18:17–19).

Instead of repeating Deuteronomy 5:28’s focus on the quality of Israel’s heart, Deuteronomy 18:18 clarifies how God will honor their request. God’s words will become Moses’ words, and God’s words will be upon this Prophet’s mouth. As Moses was asked to speak everything God told Him to the people, so this Prophet Like Moses will do the same. As Moses’ words with God will become a book, Scripture, so this Prophet Like Moses will speak God’s word to them. He will be a living word of God, as Moses was in God’s presence. Deuteronomy 18:19 warns Israel about this Prophet Like Moses. Any man who will not heed what He will speak in God’s name will find judgment. This caution echoes the same warning given to Israel for the Messenger with God’s Name in Him (Exodus 23:21–22). He must be obeyed to find life with God, just as Moses warns here about the Prophet Like Moses.

Of course, Moses himself failed to obey God’s voice and to sanctify Him before the people in Kadesh (Numbers 20). Moses and Aaron lacked the faith to sanctify God before the people, so they ‘will not bring this assembly to the land which I gave them’ (Numbers 20:12). As Moses could not bring them on the mountain (Exodus 19) and could not bring them into the land (Numbers 13, 14), so he will not bring this assembly into the land on his last day. He too must die. The author parallels Moses’ and Israel’s dilemmas because they both need someone else to complete their

approaches to God. God wanted Israel to believe in Moses forever in Exodus 19:9, and we have argued that God's purpose, even in Exodus, emphasized Moses' ongoing ministry after his death through the anticipated writing of God's conversation with Moses: the Torah. Deuteronomy 18 proclaims this book's message: the Prophet Like Moses who will defeat death.

Deuteronomy 34 and Conclusion

The final parallel between Moses and the Prophet Like Moses is death itself. Moses' path of life leads to his death in God's presence and anticipates the Prophet Like Moses' death. He is the echo of the DOA, and the author's search for Him puts the book to death. The final three verses of the Torah promise miracles that echo and seemingly surpass Moses' own miracles. If Israel's hope is to be permanent, then the Prophet Like Moses' greatest miracle will be bringing God's people out of death and into God's presence. Thus, the Prophet Like Moses must be greater than Moses, and his death must not end the story. After overcoming death, his renewed life will bring all of God's people safely into His presence, if we can trust God's written word from Moses.

This brief article has not proven that Exodus 19 must be read as a discussion of two covenantal relationships, but it has demonstrated this view's plausibility and profitability for the careful reader. Perhaps, we now know why the author left Moses' question unstated in Exodus 19:19. The absence of this question sets one answer, God's Word, to whatever question we have when we approach God, especially our questions about the DOA.

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