

CHRISTIAN FREVEL

Desert Transformations

*Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
137*

Mohr Siebeck

Forschungen zum Alten Testament

Edited by

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137



Christian Frevel

Desert Transformations

Studies in the Book of Numbers

Mohr Siebeck

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ISBN 978-3-16-153967-1 / eISBN 978-3-16-153968-8

DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-153968-8

ISSN 0940-4155 / eISSN 2568-8359 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen, and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

Almost everyone knows the saying from the Midrash that the Torah has seventy faces (כך יש שבעים פנים בתורה, Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15). There are plenty of modes of expounding the Torah and each of it offers something. The context in which this famous saying is recorded is the wonderful allegoric interpretation of Numbers 7, where the twelve tribes inaugurate the cultic service by bringing silver bowls as their initiatory gifts. The Torah is compared to bread and wine, it is vital and nutritious, and its study is considered to be beautiful (יפה תלמוד תורה). And if it requires proof of the many faces of the Torah, the Midrash offers it, because every time a silver bowl is brought by one of the twelve chieftains, another interpretation is given. And at the end of the section a *qal wachomer* is given with regard to Num 7:89: If even Moses had to think about each passage of the Torah again and again, by how much more must that be the case with an ordinary person!

The reflection on the interpretation of the book of Numbers never comes to an end. This volume of collected essays records some interim results of my own understanding. It is published within a research project founded by the German Science Foundation (DFG FR2587/3-1: “Between Tradition and Innovation: The Book of Numbers in Literary and Theological Interpretation”) and is understood as preparatory work for a commentary on the book of Numbers. Twenty essays originated in publications and papers in the period from 2007 until 2019. They include six previously unpublished papers and seven first time translations of previously published German essays. All contributions have been slightly edited for this publication. Parts of the compilation and revision have been done during a research stay at the University of Pretoria, whose academic hospitality is always appreciated.

The preparation of this volume has accompanied me a long time and many helping hands have worked on it. I am very grateful to everyone. Peter Altmann translated five of the translations with great diligence, and Jordan Davis prepared the processing of previously unpublished contributions with a lot of empathy and commitment. He also did the final language editing. Annika Neurath, Sarah-Christin Uhlmann, Tobias Schmitz and particularly Katharina Pyschny were in charge of the copy-editing and the preparation of the camera ready manuscript, and they did their job extremely quiet, unagitated and meticulous. Finally, my secretary Katharina Werbeck supported me and everyone else involved throughout the whole process. In addition, I am grateful to the editors of the series, in particular Konrad Schmid, who accepted this vol-

ume for *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*. The publisher Mohr Siebeck had a great patience waiting for the final manuscript, and the support was as always professional and reliable.

Working on the book of Numbers for such a long time is a great privilege. For me, it has opened up theological horizons, led to a deeper understanding of the composition of the Pentateuch and triggered the insight in processes of interpretation within scripture. My hope is that this will be noticeable in the present volume.

Bochum, September 2019

Christian Frevel

Content

Wandering the Desert: A Survey into the Present Volume and Beyond	1
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Literature, History and Ideology

Torah Becoming a Blessing: Narratological Impulses for Understanding the Book of Numbers	23
The Compositional Relief of Numbers Within the Five Books of the Torah	53
Old Pieces – Late Bridges? The Role of the Book of Numbers in Recent Discussion of the Pentateuch	83
Understanding the Pentateuch by Structuring the Desert: Num 21 as Compositional Joint	121
Living in the Midst of the Land: Issues of Centralization in the Book of Numbers	143
Are There Any Reasons Why Balaam Had to Die? Prophecy, Pseudo-Prophecy and Sorcery in Numbers	155
Numbers and the Twelve	189
The “Arab Connection” in the Book of Numbers	209

Ritual and Practice

Purity Conceptions in the Book of Numbers in Context	225
Struggling with the Vitality of Corpses: Understanding the Rationale of the Ritual in Numbers 19	261
On the Imperfection of Perfection: Remarks on the Anthropology of Rituals in Numbers	289

The Texture of Rituals in the Book of Numbers: A Fresh Approach to Ritual Density, the Role of Tradition and the Emergence of Diversity in Early Judaism	317
The Sabbath and the Wood-Gatherer: Legal Hermeneutics and Literary History in Num 15:32–36	339
Interior Furnishing: Some Observations on Endogamy in the Book of Numbers	357

Leadership and Priesthood

The Transformation of Charisma: Reflections on the Book of Numbers on the Backdrop of Max Weber’s Theorem of Routinization	379
Leadership and Conflict: Modelling the Charisma of Numbers	401
“My Covenant with Him Was Life and Peace”: The Priestly Covenant and the Issue of Mixed Marriages	425
“And When Moses Heard That, He Agreed” (Lev 10:20): The Relationship Between Compositional History, the History of Theology and Inner-Biblical Exegesis in Leviticus 10	435
“...and the Levites Shall Be Mine”: Remarks on the Connections Between Numbers 3; 8 and 18	465
Ending with the High Priest: The Hierarchy of Priests and Levites in the Book of Numbers	487
List of First Publications	511
Bibliography	515
List of Bibliographic Abbreviations	559
Index of Biblical References	561
Index of Subjects	579

Wandering the Desert

A Survey into the Present Volume and Beyond

The 21st cent. is a fortuitous time to contribute to the study of the book of Numbers. Although in many ways Pentateuchal research is more divided and unsettled than ever before, at the same time this encourages new possibilities to be explored and new conceptions to be pondered. This volume of collected essays represents my own efforts at developing new concepts in understanding the book of Numbers in these exciting times. The articles of this volume are based on the understanding that the current challenges of Pentateuchal research cannot be solved without going deep into the diachrony of the book of Numbers, but that the solution to the so-called Pentateuchal problem cannot be developed only from the book of Numbers. The articles are furthermore convinced that an essential contribution of the book of Numbers lies beyond the analysis of its literary history.

The volume is separated into three major categories: The first section represents a collection of essays devoted to demonstrating the artistry of composition, its theological horizon and the significance of the book of Numbers in current Pentateuchal research. The second section offers a deeper look into the innovations the late scribes responsible for Numbers made within the field of rituals and other religious practices. The final section takes a deeper look at the priests and Levites, a topic that finds its clearest and greatest expression in the book of Numbers. In all three sections, the special features of the book of Numbers – which has received too little attention in former research – come to the fore. The following will mainly provide an introduction to each section by highlighting the specific features of the book of Numbers unfolded in the papers in more detail. It also aims at figuring out the characteristics of the book and the peculiarities of my approach. Therefore the presumed function of Numbers as tradition-literature and as part of the Torah is discussed several times. In addition, the three main theological lines *land* (“wherefrom” and “whereto”), *leadership* (“who is leading whom in what way”) and *blessing* (“why and how Israel is preserved in the desert”) are repeatedly emphasized as if under a magnifying glass. Finally, the significance of the book is indicated by pointing at three additional fields, which highlight particularly the special sociological features of the book of Numbers.

1. Literature, History and Ideology

The positive aspects of the so-called Pentateuchal crisis is a *de facto* breakdown of the former, dominant source criticism, which saw itself in a position to clearly assign each text to one of the main sources J, E and P, or to the editors who linked them. The problems became particularly acute in the book of Numbers, which suffered under the Documentary Hypothesis in that it was often overlooked and (relatedly) that it was often misunderstood. This misunderstanding was especially related to the book's composition, which seemed to be theologically insignificant and literarily obscure. The book of Numbers was an addendum, supplement or appendix to the real and original narrative of the Pentateuch. To provide two examples of this: In his 1927 commentary L. Elliott Binns writes as follows:

[...] as a piece of literature [the book of Numbers] falls short of the highest class owing to its lack of unity and proportion. At the same time it cannot be denied that it contains narratives of the greatest merit, strung like pearls on a string, but the underlying idea has been obscured by too great a profusion of detail, and the various authors and editors – even down to the unknown scribe who gave the book its final form – were not at one in their aims.¹

Some 30 years later Martin Noth likewise struggled with the overall structure and compositional unity of Numbers and even proposed that a lot of this disorder could be explained by the book functioning as some kind of repository for materials that could no longer be inserted elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Speaking of the laws contained at the beginning of the book he writes:

[...] it is understandable that the need was felt, even after the actual conclusion of the Pentateuch, to include various additional items of this kind within the Sinai pericope. The easiest place for this to be done was at the end of that pericope. So, at a very late stage, but before the Pentateuch achieved canonical status, thereby becoming unalterable, all kinds of material were added in 5:1–9:14, material which can no longer be regarded as belonging to the various “sources”. This material consists of numerous individual units, having no connection with one another and in whose sequence no factual arrangement can be discerned. The simplest hypothesis is that in the course of time these units gradually became attached to each other.²

Noth also struggled with the final third of Numbers and proposed that, “we shall have to reckon with the fact that the individual units were simply added one after the other in the order in which they appeared.”³

The situation characterized in broad strokes above led to two completely different approaches in the past decades. Irrespective of the increasing problems, even the book of Numbers was subjected to a clear source separation in

¹ BINNS, Numbers (1927), xiv.

² NOTH, Numbers (1968), 6.

³ NOTH, Numbers (1968), 10.

J, E and P by the so-called Neo-Documentarians.⁴ In contrast, the traditional source-critical model was increasingly regarded as outdated, especially in Europe. Any attempt to mediate between these two approaches, which are methodologically contrary to each other, has so far failed.⁵ However, while more or less accepting the “farewell to the Yahwist” and more so the elusive Elohist, my own approach is influenced by the assumption of a late, pre-exilic composition that integrates given older traditions into a narrative of origin that functioned as a charter myth in Judah.⁶ This history comprised the exodus narrative and ended up in the conquered land. Accordingly, this theory marks the starting point of the volume’s contributions in attempting to cut swathes in the thick forest of traditions within Numbers (see below). However, the complex literary history of the book of Numbers offers special challenges for this hypothesis as well.

More than other books Numbers is characterized by a literary history that spans almost five centuries. But unlike early research was willing to accept, the literary growth of the book of Numbers did not begin from a broad base of pre-priestly source material. The more the sources were doubted in general, the more their contribution to the book of Numbers was called into question. Even the Priestly Source has been challenged to have a share in the literary traditions of Numbers. Together with the striking lack of Deuteronomistic phraseology in the book (which differs compared to Exodus, Joshua and even Leviticus) this led to new models of explanation beyond the source-critical approach. It comes as no surprise that these new approaches were inspired by the Fragmentary Hypothesis.

Thomas Römer in particular makes use of Noth’s ideas in his proposal that the book of Numbers functions as late compositional bridge between the priestly Tritoteuch (Genesis–Leviticus) and the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy–2 Kings).⁷ According to Römer, the book of Numbers arose out of the efforts to merge these two corpuses into a single work. As a preexisting corpus, the Sinai tradition contained in Exodus and Leviticus was already in a relatively fixed state and could no longer be easily expanded, therefore new laws were instead added to the beginning of the book of Numbers in order to still fall under the influence of Sinai.⁸ However, Römer not only argues that Num 1–10 contains later laws, he also argues that the shift from the mountain itself (e.g., Exod 19:3) to the wilderness of Sinai (Num 1:1) demonstrates the subordinate nature of the laws in Numbers.⁹ While

⁴ E.g., MARQUIS, *Composition* (2013); BADEN, *Composition* (2012); IDEM, *Stratification* (2013); IDEM, *Narratives* (2014).

⁵ See FREVEL, *Review Gertz et al.* (2017).

⁶ ZENGER et al., *Einleitung* (2016), 123–35.

⁷ See, e.g., RÖMER, *Anfragen* (2002), 220–4.

⁸ RÖMER, *Anfragen* (2002), 223.

⁹ RÖMER, *Anfragen* (2002), 223.

Num 1–10 remained a deposit of later additions, Römer strengthened the view that the desert narratives in the book of Numbers were only interpretations of the narratives in Exodus.¹⁰ The focus shifted from originally old narratives, which were later adapted to the exodus narratives redactionally, to the assumption of late editorial formations that were created on the basis of the exodus narratives. The book of Numbers was considered to be “a theatre of scribal interpretations and discussions.”¹¹ This idea of the book of Numbers being a product of scribal erudition had previously been worked out in detail by Reinhard Achenbach. He understood the book of Numbers in general as *relecture* or better *réécriture* of the pre-priestly and priestly traditions. To characterize the complexity of the “bridge” between the priestly composition and Deuteronomy, he allowed for successive Hexateuchal and Pentateuchal redactions, which were supplemented by an extensive triple-formative theocratic editorial redaction. By this he characterized the book aptly as the completion of the Torah (*Vollendung der Tora*).¹² Rainer Albertz took these ideas and applied them particularly to the rear part of the book (Num 26–36), which he understood to be an anticipation of the book of Joshua.¹³ He employed the idea of a literary bridge, but underlined at the same time that the book of Numbers includes several closures Num 21:20a; 22:1; 24:25 and 36:13. For Albertz this indicates that the book became not only a formative part of post-exilic identity in the late 5th and 4th cent. BCE, but also a depository of legal and ritual supplements, which have almost nothing to do with the context of the book.¹⁴ This evaluation basically brings us back to Martin Noth’s misjudgment, which was coined half a century ago, that the book is an unsystematic compilation of innumerable pieces of tradition (“eine unsystematische Zusammenstellung von zahllosen Überlieferungsstücken”).¹⁵

It goes without saying that a better understanding of the internal structure of the book of Numbers will undoubtedly benefit, not only the understanding of the contents of the book itself, but significantly it will impact how one views the formation of the Pentateuch. One of the key aims of the first section of the present volume, then, is to demonstrate that these accusations of disorder are misguided. This will be demonstrated from a narratological point of view as well as from the composition history and from various literary historical angles. The book of Numbers, although admittedly complex, can be

¹⁰ RÖMER, *Sojourn* (2007), 441–5.

¹¹ RÖMER, *Sojourn* (2007), 445.

¹² ACHENBACH, *Vollendung* (2003), 629.

¹³ ALBERTZ, *Pentateuchstudien* (2018), 331.

¹⁴ ALBERTZ, *Pentateuchstudien* (2018), 333: “Wurde aber die Brücke zwischen Gen–Lev und Dtn–Jos erst spät und in mehreren Phasen gebaut, dann lässt sich auch erklären, warum im Numeribuch noch so viele gesetzliche und rituelle Regelungen eingeschoben worden sind, die nur wenig oder gar nichts mit dem Kontext zu tun haben.”

¹⁵ NOTH, *Numeri* (1977), 8.

demonstrated to be a self-contained work that was developed with intentionality and purpose. Its contents exhibit an internal logic that are not merely the result of a scribal oversight (such as suggested by the idea of alternating law and narrative segments) and that are not the result of a happy accident (produced by sequentially appended materials). The composition is rather determined by the theological idea of election, blessing and preservation of Israel, which is linked to the narrated history in the Pentateuch as well as to their actual history. While the narrated journey takes place in pre-monarchic times within the desert, it reflects upon the real-world challenges of shaping a collective identity in the late Persian period and developing social structures beyond monarchic leadership and state-bound borders. The book's narrative arch is deliberately stretched between the two main poles: the constitutive role of Sinai and the Promised Land as a realizing space. In this regard there can indeed be no doubt that the book of Numbers has a bridging function. However, it is misleading to assume that before or even within the priestly narrative there was no narrative link between Sinai and the land beyond Deuteronomy.

Although one has to admit that most of the texts included in the book of Numbers belong to post-Deuteronomistic and even post-priestly strata, which often presuppose major portions of (leaving aside the often unclear relation to Genesis) Exodus, Deuteronomy and to a slightly lesser degree Leviticus. Accordingly, many of the studies in this book demonstrate that Numbers often *presumes* other texts, interprets other texts, comments on other texts, plays with other texts, challenges other texts, expands the view of other texts, etc. Thus, in general, the Fragmentary Hypothesis is quite appropriate to explain the origin of the texts in Numbers. Most of the texts belong neither to a source nor are they part of a redaction (i.e., editorial activity that intervenes in existing texts in several places displaying shared characteristics). In contrast, even if the book of Numbers evinces a continuous sophisticated five-part final composition, it gathers a striking number of redactionally layered clusters, which could also stand more or less for themselves (Num 13–14; 16–17; 22–24 et al.). This peculiarity distinguishes Numbers from the other books of the Pentateuch. While this was repeatedly used as an argument for the so-called bridge thesis, in my opinion the book of Numbers does not fit completely into a post-priestly existence. The papers in this book illustrate this in detail, but one argument is the specific character of the independent Priestly Source (*Priestergrundchrift*), which does not end at Sinai according to my longstanding opinion.¹⁶

A further major difficulty with the idea that the book of Numbers was developed entirely as a post-Deuteronomistic, post-priestly bridge book is explaining the place of Deuteronomy 1–3. Even those scholars who champion

¹⁶ FREVEL, Blick (2000).

the idea of a late bridge still maintain that Numbers contains non-priestly materials that functioned as the basis for the re-telling given in Deuteronomy 1–3. In order to align these seemingly contradictory claims, it is suggested that the early materials used by the Deuteronomist were later added into the book of Numbers by the (post-priestly) Hexateuch redactor. However, it remains unclear why this late Hexateuch redactor felt the need to incorporate these earlier materials into his work. The structural role of promise to the fathers on the one hand and Martin Noth's insight that Sinai is the center but not the target destination of the narrative thread on the other hand suggest that this connection should not first be placed in the hands of a post-priestly redaction. In my understanding, the role of the spy narrative in Num 13–14 is crucial in this respect. The priestly narrative is neither the basic layer of Num 13–14 nor is it developed from the Deuteronomistic variant in Deut 1. The non-priestly spy narrative should rather be considered as part of a pre-priestly "bridge" between the Sinai narrative and the land. Portions of the itinerary in Num 20–21* and of the departure from Sinai in Num 10:19–36* can be regarded as part of this older narrative, precisely because the reasons for assuming that they were older traditions inserted into their current contexts by post-priestly redactional hands are barely comprehensible.¹⁷ In addition, it remains a plausible assumption that the death of the protagonist Moses played a role when the birth story made his life a decisive part of the exodus narrative. Since the subversive allusions to the Sargon legend most likely stem from the late Neo-Assyrian times in the late 8th–7th cent. BCE,¹⁸ it is reasonable to assume a narrative version of the death of Moses in Deut 34 connected to that.¹⁹ In sum, even if the individual boundaries of this non-priestly material remain controversial, the logical result is a pre-priestly narrative framework that cannot easily be dissolved into a Fragmentary Hypothesis and the impact of a post-priestly redactional inclusion. In a nutshell, the model applied here regards the classical Documentary Model for the explanation of the beginnings of the literarily contiguous tradition as having failed. It proved wrong in assuming a genius "author" close to the romantic concept. By taking into account the peculiarities of tradition-building processes and the emergence of tradition-literature, a concept is offered that interlinks the functions of collector, author and editor. This was already put forward by Julius Wellhausen and others and has also strongly influenced Martin Noth's conceptualization of the formation of tradition in the books beyond the Pentateuch. It was further strengthened in the idea of a Jerusalemite History by Erich Zenger, which has combined Fragmentary Hypothesis and source-critical approaches in a compromise, which brought Pentateuchal research a substan-

¹⁷ FREVEL, *Shapes* (2019); GERMANY, *Exodus-Conquest Narrative* (2017).

¹⁸ RÖMER, *Moses* (2013), 83; IDEM, *Mose* (2014), 80–1.

¹⁹ FREVEL, *Abschied* (2001).

tial step forward.²⁰ This perspective of literary growth is far beyond a mechanical source-critical allocation of the narrative material of the book of Numbers to sources as it was provided by the classical commentaries of the early 19th cent. or as it is suggested by the above mentioned more current Neo-Documentarian view.

The *continuous* growth of the narrative and legislative material in the book of Numbers is the underlying concept of the papers in this volume. The desert as interlink in the Pentateuchal narrative is paramount in literary, conceptual and theological respects. It is not an invention of late editors who found the almost empty space between Sinai and land in Deut 1–3 and filled it with all kinds of material, because otherwise there was no more space for editorial additions. On the contrary, even with the earliest Pentateuchal narrative it was made clear that there is no unbroken connection between exodus and land, but that formation and transformation in the intermediate space of the desert are indispensable.

Apart from this insistence on a pre-priestly narrative thread, it is quite obvious that the majority of the textual material in the book of Numbers is post-priestly and reaches down to the latest stages of the Pentateuch. By this the connecting character, which links the formative period of founding at Sinai with the perspective of realization in the land, is particularly accentuated. Even if the land is firmly in sight – which is especially underlined by the close Hexateuchal interlocking with the book of Joshua – the formative character is preserved and emphasized by the location of this “bridge” in the mythical primeval times of Israel. In addition to the insight that the vast majority of the book is post-priestly, a second insight is indispensable, namely that ongoing interpretation processes determine its growth. The book of Numbers can only be understood as closely related to Genesis–Leviticus on the one hand and the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua on the other hand. It is a *prime* example of what has been called “inner-biblical interpretation” in the past decades.²¹ Processes of textual supplementation, amendment, adaptation, alteration and transformation have been identified as the trigger of literary production. *Fortschreibung* is interpretation, and *Fortschreibung* also comprises redactional amendment as deliberate relation of textual traditions, integration of older material as well as camouflaging new texts as being old. The most intriguing insight within this *megatrend*²² comes from the book of Numbers: it is the insight that processes of adaptive interpretation do not only comprise legal material, but also in various ways narrative texts. Although future research will expand on this aspect to describe the common ground of

²⁰ FREVEL, Hermeneutik (forthcoming).

²¹ Among many others most recently BÜHRER, Fortschreibungs- und Auslegungsprozesse (2019). For the history of research, see LEVINSON, Revision (2008), 95–181.

²² For the classification as a megatrend of exegesis, see FREVEL, Pathos (2015), 42–8 and IDEM, Relationship, p. 444 in the present volume.

these processes, first and foremost it is crucial to understand that the most characteristic feature of many of the legal *and* narrative texts in the book of Numbers is to relate to other texts in an interpretative mode.

This is, however, a general characteristic of tradition-literature, but the special feature of Numbers is the density of these interpretation processes. This conceptual reflection of tradition forms the background of my understanding of *inner-biblical interpretation* within Numbers. A fresh understanding of *tradition*²³ can be of great help to appreciate this characteristic aspect of particularly late biblical literature and particularly the book of Numbers. Change in religious texts is not only triggered by the needs of adaption, assimilation or accommodation, it is rather an inherent aspect because of the dynamics of recursiveness of tradition. In contrast to the common understanding, tradition is not a static unchangeable block, but is rather formed by processes of adaptive application and is thus dynamic. Of course even texts are not static; they become dynamic although the words may not change at all: their interpretation transforms them and makes them a means of embedding. It is the paradox of tradition, that it is a concept that expresses *continuity* and *stability* on the one hand, and that it forms at the same time the base for *discontinuity* and *change* related to it on the other hand. It is decisive to understand that the metaphor of a “chain of tradition” includes that traditions are linked to other traditions. It is a characteristic of *tradition* that the absolute beginning where there is no relation to other traditions is no longer discernible. *Traditions are interpretation of traditions*. Aside from safeguarding, this is one of the most important functions of tradition. With Edward Shils and many others it is important to underline that traditions bridge discontinuity by a continuous process of change.²⁴ This is crucial even for the understanding of the interpretative power of the book of Numbers. Thus, the book of Numbers in particular combines old and new; it includes the *preserved* traditional (e.g., Num 10:35–36; 13:17–20; 25:1a, 3a, 5a; 22–24*), the *transformed* traditional (e.g., Num 11–12; 16–17; 32) and the *invented* traditional (e.g., Num 6:22–27; 27:1–11). The aspect of interpretation being a *trigger* of formation though is neatly related to the book’s position wherein Sinai and land overlap in the characteristic manner of “already” and “not yet.”

As the articles will explain in more detail, this intermediate position is crucial for the understanding of the structure of the book. Numbers’ allegedly confusing structure comes from its combination of two overlapping influences: on the one hand the book is shaped by the Hexateuchal progression towards the land – from Sinai, through the wilderness, to the plains of Moab – on the other hand the book is shaped by the Pentateuchal pivot about Sinai (in which Numbers is positioned as the counterpart of Exodus), and thus the

²³ FREVEL, Pathos (2015).

²⁴ SHILS, Tradition (1981), 44–5.

wilderness period in particular is shaped by links to Israel's journey from Egypt to Sinai. A closer look to this structure reveals a strategy of historicizing implementation. It is not only the continuity between the exodus generation and the generation which will inherit the land, but also the interpretation of tradition, which keeps Israel dynamic. The message is clear: Adaptive retaining is a means of preservation. The most striking fact though is that this "Israel" which is shaped in the book of Numbers as an important closed quantity never really existed; neither in the wilderness nor in the time of the tradents in the late Persian period. With its literary fiction, the book of Numbers gives rise to an "Israel," which is encompassing, inclusive, ideal, promising and even utopian.

The above-mentioned dual structure of the book of Numbers has broader implications for understanding the book, not only within the formation of the Pentateuch, but particularly also the Hexateuch. It is of paramount importance for the understanding of Numbers, that the interpretation processes comprise not only the transmitted stories from the exodus and Sinai narratives and the legislative references to Leviticus and Deuteronomy, but in addition develop a strong interlink with the book of Joshua in the greatest extent of its literary history from pre-priestly 7th cent. to post-priestly 4th cent. And again, what is characteristic for the present approach in methodical respect, is the entanglement of the literary and compositional history, which is embedded in former European history of research. Along with the fall of the Documentary Hypothesis, a second significant shift in recent scholarship, that has greatly benefited the study of the book of Numbers, is what I have elsewhere called, "the return to the Hexateuch perspective."²⁵ This return is primarily born out of the increasing acknowledgment that Noth's idea of a single work spanning from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings is flawed. In particular, this lacuna makes the idea that there existed a pre-priestly, proto-Hexateuch more plausible. One clear example of the difficulty caused by the Deuteronomistic History is the strong link between Numbers and Joshua. In particular it is the book of Numbers, rather than Deuteronomy, that features a prominent focus on the themes of the land and conquest, which are only concluded in the book of Joshua. I maintain that the idea of a non-priestly Jerusalemite History as first formulated by Erich Zenger and briefly overviewed above is still the most plausible model for the original "Hexateuch," which included at least the spy narrative and Israel's arrival at Shittim from the book of Numbers.²⁶ More crucial though is the insight that the Hexateuchal links were strengthened throughout the literary history of the book of Numbers. The idea of a Pentateuch redaction, which isolated the five books from their reading context by inserting the epitaph in Deut 34:10–12 as the closure of the Pentateuch is as misleading as

²⁵ FREVEL, *Wiederkehr* (2011).

²⁶ ZENGER et al., *Einleitung* (2016), 123–35.

the idea of the Persian authorization (Persian imperial authorization thesis) of this Torah as a compromise. Torah comes into being by internal growth of referentiality, and Pentateuch and Hexateuch are rather reference structures than separately existing contexts. It is most important that the horizon of many of the latest texts in Numbers lies beyond the Pentateuch. The standstill of redactional expansion though is rather driven by a growing outsourcing of interpretation in the so-called intertestamental literature. The more this exegetical Midrashic interpretative literature took over and the more the Torah became self-referential, the more the intra-Pentateuchal adaptation and interpretation processes came to an end.

The book of Numbers shows clear signs of containing many of the latest materials of the Pentateuch. In addition to the late innovations made with the legislative material and the priesthood, there are a number of other aspects that demonstrate that the contents of the book of Numbers derive from a relatively late social milieu. These include the role of the priests and their privileged access to cult, economy and political power, the emergence of the high priestly office and its political agenda, the formation of Israel as a cultic community particularly characterized by demarcational demands for purity, the growing importance of the diaspora, etc. We are not able to locate the issues of leadership, which are formed and elaborated within the book of Numbers (Num 11–12; 13–14; 16–17; 20:1–13; 25:6–18; 27:15–23), within the post-exilic society beyond a rather rough substantiation within the late Persian period. It is the impression that the narrated conflicts relating to these topics have a rather paradigmatic character. They are a discursive negotiation of a collective identity, which on the one hand extends the existing reality of Yehûd but forms particularly the Judahite community centered on the Jerusalemite temple. However, it is still one of the open questions, how the diversity of Jahwisms in the Persian period, including Samaritans, Judeans, Transjordanians, the communities in Elephantine, Makedah, Babylon, Alexandria, etc. relate to each other on the one hand, and to their shared tradition on the other hand. It is clear, however, that the Torah enables variety and thus represents a form of diversity management within Second Temple Judaism(s). Numbers 32 gives an illuminating example of such questions.

Many papers of this volume develop the idea that the locally unspecified centralization of cult and society, the fictitious limitation of priesthood to a small Aaronide family, the social structure of Israel as a twelve-tribe nation that encompasses the whole country is designed as an “identity reservoir” to which different groups can refer alike, in a similar but also slightly different manner. This enabled Samaritans and Judeans to share the tradition of the Torah and even to cooperate in managing the maintenance of this tradition. How far there were coordination processes in redactional respect is an open question for future discussions.

Index of Biblical References

Genesis

1:20	246
1:21	246
1:24	246
1:30	246
2:19	246
6:4	276
9:10	246
9:12	246
9:15	246
9:16	246
10:7	209
12:2–3	25
13:14–17	442
15:18	442
17:8	89, 442
17:14	351
20:3	170
24:7	195
25:2	214
25:4	219
25:18	214
28:1	365
28:6	365
28:8	365
29:29	357
29:34	440
30:27	183
30:40	182
31:24	170
34	430–1
34:8–10	430
34:14	430
34:16–17	430
34:21	430
34:26	358
35:22	358
36:4	214
36:10	214
36:28	209
36:32	209
38	430

41:45	359
41:50	359
44:5	183
44:15	183
45:5	195
46:7	358
46:10	359
46:11	430
46:15	358
46:20	359
49:5	430–1

Exodus

1:1–4	68
1:1	68
2	359
2:1	359
2:15	359
2:18	362
2:21	214, 359
3–4	453
3	196, 213
3:1	362
4	360, 395, 452
4:10	453
4:12	452
4:14	489–90
4:15–16	387
4:15	171, 349, 452–3
4:18	362
4:25	214
4:28–29	395
4:29	360
4:30	457
6	504
6:8	89
6:13	402
6:14–26	508
6:14	499
6:15	359
6:16	504
6:19	489

6:20	359	17:12	405
6:23	359, 406	18	68, 106, 213, 363, 372, 383, 403–5
6:24	387	18:2	214, 360, 364
6:25	359, 504	18:13–27	383
8:9	450	18:19	349
8:27	450	18:21	404
12	41, 323, 339, 480	18:22	349, 404
12:2	353	18:26	372
12:14	250	18:27	412
12:16	75, 341	18:30	372
12:17	250	19:7	403
12:18–19	111	20:6	447
12:21	403	20:8–11	350
12:37	361, 450	21:14	151
12:38	360–1	23	443
12:43	250	23:12	350
12:48–51	111	23:14–19	339
12:48	250	23:20	195
12:49	350	23:27–28	195
13:2	481	24:1	403, 407
13:13	147, 481, 483	24:9	403, 407
13:14	47	24:12	451–2, 454
13:15	481	24:14	403, 405
15–17	111	25–40	72–5, 77, 496
15	68, 196	25–31	109, 289, 403
15:20	198	25:8	237
15:21	68, 196, 198	25:22	62–3
15:24	68, 405	25:31–40	38, 74
15:25	452	27:20	74
16–40	382	28–29	395, 402, 408–9, 509
16	68, 106, 196, 198, 343, 353–5	28	381, 402, 410, 495
16:2	68, 405	28:1	448
16:7	68, 405	28:41	494–5
16:8	68	29	494
16:9	446	29:9	427, 502
16:10–20	353	29:14	267
16:10	457	29:28	455
16:20	354	29:29–30	387
16:23	355, 448	29:36	231
16:33	446	29:38–42	342
17	68, 106, 405, 414	29:43–44	448–9
17:3	68, 405	29:43	447–8
17:5	403	29:44	381, 447–8
17:6	403, 405	29:45	237
17:9–16	404	29:46	89, 152, 190, 257
17:9	404	30:7–8	74
17:10–12	404	30:10	231
17:10	405		

30:25	395	40:33	89, 190
30:30	395, 495	40:34–40	112
31:15–17	350	40:34	89, 190
31:15	355	40:35	291
31:18	112, 343		
32–34	69	<i>Leviticus</i>	
32–33	203	1–16	109
32:2	195, 457	1–7	289, 456, 496
32:9–14	69	1–3	343
32:11	203	1:1	63–4, 112
32:21	446	2:13	426
32:22	457	4–7	343
32:26–28	402	4:6	258
32:26	395	4:11–12	267
32:28	395, 450	4:13	352
33	69	4:17	267
33:11	413	4:24	267
33:12	203	5	293, 300, 304, 310, 327, 330
34	112, 443	5:5	301
34:6–7	69	5:9	267
34:15–16	366, 430	5:12	267
34:16	362, 365	5:20–26	293, 300–1, 327
34:18–26	339	5:21	230
34:21	350	5:22	302
34:32	112	6:17–23	456–7
35–40	77, 109, 289, 403, 509	7:34	455
35:1–3	343, 350	7:37–38	64
35:2	355	7:37	112
35:3	346	8–10	289, 382
35:14	38, 74	8–9	73–4, 123, 489, 496
35:34	452	8	381–2, 402, 408, 445, 494–5
36:11	74	8:3–4	479
36:22	74	8:11	267
36:29	74	8:12	395, 410, 412
37:17–24	38, 74	8:17	267
38:12	113	8:31	446
38:21	395, 403, 489	8:33–9:1	54
38:26	360	9	387, 445, 456–7
39:37	38, 74	9:1	340
40	73, 123, 382, 495	9:7	446
40:1–2	64	9:15	455–6
40:2	340	9:23	63, 448
40:4	38, 74	9:24	89, 104, 190, 448–9
40:14–15	502	9:26	445
40:15	427, 495	10	91, 110, 333, 403, 435–63, 508
40:16	74	10:1–8	253
40:17	54, 64, 340		
40:24	38, 74		

10:1-4	457	16:14	269
10:1-3	382, 447	16:15	458
10:3	446-8	16:16	152, 258, 269
10:6	367, 446, 457	16:17	112
10:7	450	16:19	269
10:9	451	16:24	458
10:10-11	349, 454, 457-8	16:27	269
10:10	255, 451-4, 456	16:28	89
10:11	451-4, 456, 452	16:29-33	510
10:12-18	454	16:32	412, 414, 509
10:12	446, 457	17-26	89, 113, 291, 316, 345
10:16-17	387	19:2	303
10:16	455	19:26-28	276
10:19	457	19:26	183
11-26	259-60	19:28	242, 313
11-15	232, 241, 254, 258, 289, 323	19:31	282
11	253, 259, 270, 298	20:1-5	367
11:10	246	20:2	344
11:24	270	20:6	282
11:25	246	20:12	308
11:27	270	20:24	344
11:28	246	20:25-26	256
11:31	270	21	110, 254, 258-9, 281, 298, 509
11:39	270	21:1-4	245-6, 250, 252, 259
11:40	246	21:1	242, 253, 275, 313
11:43-45	256	21:2-4	310
11:44-45	237-8	21:5	310
11:46	246	21:7	373
13-14	238, 240, 254, 298	21:10-12	505
13:46	242	21:10	381, 410, 450, 508
14:4	271	21:11	242-3, 250, 253, 275, 286, 310, 313
14:6	271	21:14-15	428
14:37	91, 454	21:14	359, 373
14:49	233, 271	22:1-7	458
14:51	271	22:4-7	251
14:52	233, 271	22:4	242, 253, 275, 313
15	242-3, 256, 272, 300	22:15-16	456
15:1-2	257	22:18-25	43
15:13	243	22:27	368
15:14-15	243	23	75, 105, 339-40, 342, 443
15:28	243	23:3	346
15:29-30	243	23:4-8	341
15:31	152, 256-9	24	42, 344, 362
15:32-33	256	24:2-4	38, 74
16	54-5, 109, 192, 291, 312, 325, 341, 384, 498, 509		

24:10–23	41, 341, 343–4, 348	1:36–45	239
24:10–14	362–3, 365	1:46	360
24:12–13	347	1:47–50	473
24:17–18	313	1:48–53	397
24:17	246	1:50	152, 402–3
25:1	112	1:53	152–3
25:32–33	403, 489	2	17, 152–3, 407
26	76–7	2:1–30	37
26:13	76	2:1	71
26:14	352	2:3	359
26:15	351	2:9	37
26:42	76	2:16	37
26:44–45	76	2:17	37
26:44	351	2:24	37
26:45	76	2:31	37
26:46	58, 61, 111–2	2:32	34, 361
27	38, 43, 89, 110, 289, 343, 368	2:34	37
27:27	147	3–4	384, 479
27:34	58, 61, 111–2, 127	3	408, 465–85, 498
28:34	111	3:1	28, 34, 41, 112, 451
		3:2–4	493–4
		3:2	34, 493, 506
<i>Numbers</i>		3:3–4	410
1–10	3–4, 38, 55, 57, 64, 67, 70–8, 89, 105, 109, 121, 128, 192, 289, 301, 480, 482, 496–7	3:3	409–10, 494
1:1–10:10	25, 37, 39, 57–8, 122, 130	3:4	41, 381, 493, 505
1–4	53, 73, 78, 147, 149–50, 152, 235, 239, 293, 297, 369, 397, 500	3:5–10	473
1–2	485	3:6–9	408
1	56, 60, 384, 397	3:7–8	498
1:1	24, 29, 36, 38, 40– 1, 58, 62–5, 68, 77, 111–2, 128, 406	3:8	381
1:3	406	3:9	470, 475, 478, 502– 3
1:4–44	407	3:10	501–3
1:4–19	383	3:11–48	479
1:4	406, 499	3:11–13	473–4, 480, 483–5
1:5–15	68	3:12	395, 468, 481
1:5	34	3:14	41
1:7	359	3:18	34
1:14–27	407	3:20	490
1:16	34, 407	3:30–31	74
1:19	41	3:32	387, 408, 490, 505
		3:38	150
		3:39	148
		3:40–51	17, 483
		3:41	395
		3:44–45	397
		3:45	395
		3:47	147
		4	340, 397, 481
		4:1	71

4:3	92	6	207, 259–60, 310–5
4:5	37	6:1–21	12, 18, 73, 225
4:9	74	6:2	18, 266
4:15	37	6:6–12	249
4:17	71	6:6–7	254
4:23	92	6:6	243, 275, 286, 313
4:28	148, 410, 493	6:7	226
4:30	92	6:9–12	310, 324
4:33	148, 410, 493	6:9	226, 275, 281
4:34–48	481	6:11	226, 228–9, 242, 313
4:34	348	6:12	226, 229
4:35	92	6:13–20	324
4:39	92	6:13	34
4:43	92	6:14	228
4:48	397	6:16	228
4:49	481	6:21	34
4:51	397	6:22–27	12, 38, 73, 121, 294, 327–30
5–10	73	6:22–25	19
5–6	18, 147, 289–316, 327, 3230	6:23–27	324
5	232, 259, 304–10, 349, 369–71	6:23	25
5:1–10	73	6:24–26	330–3
5:1–4	231, 233–60, 291, 294–5, 297–9, 303	6:24	25
5:1–3	225	6:26	294
5:2–3	275	6:27	25
5:2	37, 226, 242, 249, 251–3, 281, 313	7–9	387
5:3	18, 152, 226, 348	7–8	38, 73
5:4	38	7	17, 78, 147, 228, 384, 397, 407
5:5–6:21	294, 327	7:1–3	74
5:5–10	299–304, 327	7:1	38, 73, 77
5:5–8	327	7:2	499
5:6	18, 22, 266, 312	7:8	148, 493
5:7	228	7:10	38, 73
5:8	226, 495	7:12	359
5:9–10	397	7:17	359
5:11–31	12, 73, 121, 225, 304, 327, 495	7:89	28, 31, 38, 62, 75, 112
5:11–21	324	8	74, 78, 225, 232, 340, 384, 395, 465– 85, 498
5:12	266	8:1–4	72, 74
5:13	226	8:1	340
5:14	226	8:4	38
5:19	226	8:5–26	72, 479
5:20	226	8:5–7	229–30
5:27	226	8:6–15	395
5:28	226	8:6	226
5:29	34, 226		

8:7	226	10:11–36:13	57, 130
8:9–10	497	10:11–24:25	37
8:10–11	409	10:11–21:20	130
8:12	226, 228–30	10:11–20:29	70, 131
8:14	497	10:11–14:45	58, 66
8:15	226	10:11–14:33	57, 122
8:16	475	10:11–28	37, 481
8:18	470	10:11–13	412
8:19	226, 384, 471, 473– 6, 478	10:11–12	56, 66, 113, 129
8:21–32	395	10:11	64
8:21	226, 230–2, 488	10:12	64, 113, 412
8:22	488	10:14	359
8:24	92	10:19–36	6
9	250, 252, 259–60, 341–2, 346, 480	10:21	150
9:1–15	41	10:28	30
9:1–14	73, 112, 225, 339– 42	10:29–33	412
9:1–5	250	10:29–32	104
9:1	40–1	10:29–30	68, 212–213, 412–3
9:2	41	10:35–36	48
9:5	41	11–21	108
9:6–15	344, 348	11–20	67, 106–7
9:6–14	41, 340	11–14	71, 233
9:6–12	250	11–12	10, 68, 88, 104, 107–8, 113, 384–5
9:6–10	253	11	68, 193, 203, 363, 383, 389–390, 403– 4, 423
9:6–7	254	11:1–3	108, 136
9:6	226, 242, 281	11:2	38, 136
9:7	226, 242	11:3	150
9:9–14	324	11:4–35	106, 108, 111
9:10	226, 242, 266	11:4–11	136
9:11	242	11:4	361, 363
9:13	246	11:6	136, 312
9:14	371	11:7–9	30
9:15–23	29, 112, 150	11:10	367
9:15	77	11:11–15	396
9:16–23	33, 38	11:16–17	36, 413
9:16	28, 30	11:16	404, 407
10	213, 233, 363, 407	11:17	404
10:1–10	340	11:20	135, 149
10:1–6	38	11:21	361
10:2	75	11:23	36, 135
10:4	407	11:25–29	396
10:7–8	38	11:25	413
10:8	409	11:26–27	29
10:9–10	38, 75–6	11:26	33, 38
10:9	89	11:27–29	397
10:10	65	11:27	33

11:28–29	405, 413	14	135, 137, 215
11:28	405, 413–4	14:1	367
11:29	413–4	14:2	68, 410
11:30	397	14:5–10	414
11:31	33	14:5	410
11:34	361, 363	14:6	405, 413
11:35	56, 66, 129	14:10	410
12	35, 68, 106, 108, 136–7, 192, 198, 226, 240, 360–5, 414, 423	14:13–19	69
12:1–11	410	14:14	151
12:1	68, 135, 196, 214, 363, 457	14:16	55
12:2	18, 36, 397	14:18	69
12:3	30, 36, 396	14:23	55, 116
12:4	27, 71, 196, 397	14:24	78
12:6–8	396	14:25	30, 65, 68, 214
12:8	135	14:26	71
12:10–15	240	14:27	68
12:10	457	14:29	68
12:11	136, 228	14:30	78, 413
12:12–15	226	14:33–34	205
12:13–15	397	14:36	68
12:13	27	14:38	78, 413
12:14–15	38	14:39	58
12:16	56, 66, 113, 129	14:40–45	116, 134
13–25	189	14:40	136
13–14	5–6, 10, 57, 60, 65, 69, 78, 88–9, 103, 106–8, 111, 115, 132, 192–3, 201, 213, 343, 385, 509	14:42–43	69
13	128	14:42	149
13:2–16	407	14:43–45	33
13:3	113	14:43	68
13:4	34	14:45	29, 65, 68, 129, 134, 214
13:5–15	497	15–21	324, 353
13:8	414	15–20	57–8, 66, 70, 122– 3, 131, 141
13:16	413–4	15	42, 66, 106–8, 150, 342–3, 346
13:17	213	15:1–20:23	71
13:20	30	15:1	78
13:21–25	33	15:2	39, 266, 345
13:22	30	15:13	371
13:24	30	15:14	39
13:25	205	15:16	350
13:26	66, 131, 410	15:17–21	39
13:29	30, 68, 214	15:17	353
13:33	207, 276	15:18	266, 345
		15:19	345
		15:22–31	230, 352
		15:22–29	324
		15:22–23	352–3
		15:22	353

15:23	28	17:4	387, 505
15:24–26	230	17:6–15	226
15:24–25	228	17:6–10	410
15:25	226	17:11–12	410
15:27–29	230	17:11	226, 446
15:27–28	228	17:12–14	33
15:27	312	17:12–13	409
15:28	246, 312	17:12	226
15:29–30	371	17:13	367
15:30–31	350–1	17:15	367
15:30	312	17:16–28	408–9, 418, 498– 500
15:31	312	17:16–25	410
15:32–36	339–55	17:17–18	498
15:32–35	41	17:17	266, 407
15:32	33, 340	17:20	24, 68
15:33	345–8	17:21	407
15:34	41	17:23–24	39
15:36	42	17:27–28	466
15:38	266	18–19	106, 108
15:40–41	343, 352	18	14, 29, 107, 150, 253, 397, 410, 429, 465–85, 488
16–18	66, 144, 147, 386, 395	18:1–24	33
16–17	5, 10, 14, 24, 104, 106–8, 150, 233, 253, 343, 389, 397, 408, 418, 466, 470, 503	18:1	71, 150, 410
16	89, 193, 446, 488, 498	18:6	468–71, 475, 478
16:1–2	407	18:8–19	426
16:2	348	18:8	71, 410
16:3	397, 410	18:9–14	225
16:8–10	497–8	18:9	228
16:9	498	18:11	226
16:11	410	18:13–14	150
16:14	68	18:13	39, 226
16:17–19	324	18:15	226, 483
16:20	71	18:16	147
16:21	498	18:19	39, 425
16:22	387, 415	18:20–21	148, 150
16:26	228	18:20	71
16:36–50	324	18:23–24	403
16:46–48	324	18:23	500
17–18	389	18:24	148
17	151, 193, 226, 390, 397, 449, 487, 498– 500, 505–9	18:25–32	148
17:2	387, 505	18:26–32	395
17:3	312	18:29	150
		18:32	225–6
		19	12, 42–3, 66, 107, 110, 149, 192, 226, 232–3, 244–50, 252–4, 258–60,

	261–88, 314, 324, 450, 495, 509	20:23–28	79, 198
19:1	71, 505	20:23	71
19:2	34	20:24	387
19:3–4	387, 505	20:25–28	409
19:3	38	20:26	410
19:7	226	20:28	410
19:8	226	20:29	58
19:9	226	21–25	57–8, 66, 71, 122–4
19:10	226, 371–2	21–24	107
19:11	226, 242	21	57, 65–6, 68, 77, 113, 121–41, 161, 178, 198, 207, 217
19:12–13	232	21:1–3	25, 66, 116, 130–5, 137, 386
19:12	226, 229–31	21:1	29, 33, 132–4
19:13	226, 231, 242, 246, 255	21:3	65
19:14–16	248–9	21:4–20	103
19:14	34, 226, 372	21:4–9	108, 129, 131, 135– 8
19:15	226	21:4	56, 65–6, 129, 216– 7, 312, 387
19:16	226, 348	21:5	312
19:17–19	229	21:7–8	387
19:17	226	21:7	136, 387
19:18	226, 312	21:10–20	131, 138–41
19:19	226, 231, 348	21:10–13	56, 66, 129
19:20	150, 226, 231–2, 312	21:11	183, 217
19:21	226	21:14–20	48
19:22	226, 312	21:13	30, 126, 212
20–25	233	21:14–15	30
20–21	6, 65, 89, 101–2, 132, 217	21:15	128
20	59, 68, 78, 106–7, 123, 132, 193, 364, 386, 390, 410, 505, 509	21:17–18	181
20:1–13	10, 102–3, 108, 111, 253	21:20	4, 103, 126–7
20:1	66, 68, 129	21:21–36:13	130
20:2–13	410	21:21–31	131
20:6	150, 367	21:21	130
20:9	151	21:23	134
20:12	55, 71, 124, 132, 387	21:26	126, 134
20:13	132	21:26–30	30, 48
20:14–21	102–3	21:26	126
20:14	58, 65, 217	21:28	126
20:16	65, 217–8	21:29	126
20:21	217	21:32–35	131
20:22	56, 65–6, 128–9	22:1–26:55	131
20:23–29	66, 133, 147, 394	22:1–26:38	141
		22–25	130, 209, 219–20
		22–24	5, 11, 19, 29, 33, 57, 66, 68, 77, 89,

	116, 129, 155–87, 192, 196, 198, 366	23:20	25, 180
22:1	4, 29, 55–6, 58, 60– 2, 66, 78, 124, 126– 30, 414	23:21	170, 185
22:2	162–3	23:22	170, 185
22:3	33	23:23	158, 160, 170, 184– 6
22:4	160, 162–3, 209, 220	23:25	25, 197
22:5	157, 167	23:26	170, 197
22:6	25, 178, 180	23:27	175, 180, 197
22:7	158, 160–1, 212, 220	23:28	29, 139, 164, 200
22:8	170, 173	23:29–30	177
22:9	170	24:1	25, 158–9, 175, 182–4, 186–7
22:11	134	24:2	170, 173
22:12	25, 180	24:3–9	48
22:13	170	24:3–4	172
22:18	170, 173	24:3	171
22:19	170	24:4	169–70, 173, 203
22:20	170–1	24:8	170, 185
22:28–29	166	24:9	25
22:28	173	24:10–11	197
22:35	171	24:10	25
22:38	171, 173	24:11	170
22:39	179	24:12–13	197
22:40	177, 179	24:13	170, 173
22:41	139	24:14	198
23:1–3	177	24:15–16	172
23:3–4	183	24:15	171
23:3	170, 178–80	24:16–24	48
23:4	169–70	24:16	169–70, 173, 203
23:5	170–1, 173	24:17	173, 198
23:6	177	24:20	171
23:7	167, 171	24:21	171
23:8–10	48	24:23	170–71
23:8	170	24:25	4, 209
23:10	312	25–36	93, 101–2
23:11	25, 195	25	25, 66, 68, 89, 104, 155–87, 199–203, 208, 212, 221, 226, 365–8, 371, 387, 389, 395, 413, 426, 428, 505, 508–9
23:12	170–1, 173, 197	25:1–36:13	37
23:13	183, 197	25:1–18	11, 102
23:14	29, 177	25:1–9	129
23:15–16	183	25:1–6	29, 163
23:15	170	25:1–5	102, 159, 168, 192, 202, 210, 372, 461, 500–4
23:16	169–71, 173	25:1–2	200
23:17	170		
23:18–24	48		
23:18	171		
23:19	170		

25:1	31, 60, 126, 197, 372	27	14, 123, 192, 360, 373-4, 385, 387-8, 390, 414-8, 461
25:2-5	279	27:1-11	18, 39, 42, 79, 130, 341, 344, 348, 411
25:3	166, 200-1	27:1	34
25:4	29	27:2	407
25:5-15	226	27:6-11	80
25:5	200	27:7	79-80
25:6-18	10, 102-3, 190, 461	27:8	374
25:6-15	210	27:12-23	394
25:6-13	372	27:12-14	55, 60, 125, 414
25:6-8	372	27:13-14	387
25:6-7	38	27:15-23	10, 79, 414, 418
25:6	58	27:16	415
25:7-8	324	27:17	415-7
25:7	504	27:18-21	396
25:11	503-4	27:18	405, 413-5, 415
25:12-13	426, 428, 432, 500- 2	27:19	415
25:12	147, 503	27:20	415-6
25:13	410, 427-8	27:21-22	395
25:16-18	210	27:21	349, 416-7
25:17-18	155, 371	27:22	413, 415
25:18	163, 221, 372	27:23	89, 417
25:19-36:13	60, 77-9, 122-3, 126	28-34	192
25:19-26:65	129	28-30	78
25:19	130	28-29	39, 75, 105, 228, 324, 339-40, 443
26-36	4, 57-8, 60, 71, 79, 110, 126-8	28:1	396
26	25, 39, 56, 60, 66, 78, 125, 130, 397, 505	28:9-10	342
26:1-3	410	28:15	228
26:1	71	28:22	228, 230
26:3	55, 60-1, 124-7	29:5	228, 230
26:13	359	29:7	312
26:20	358	29:11	228, 230
26:30	34	30	18, 105, 324, 368-9
26:55-56	17	30:1	396
26:55	373	30:3-6	42
26:57	490	30:3	225-6, 312
26:58	34	30:5	312
26:59	196, 359	30:6	312
26:60	493	30:7	312
26:62	148	30:8	312
26:63	55, 60, 124-5	30:9	312, 351
26:64	403	30:10	312
26:65	78, 413	30:11	312
27-36	79, 91, 105	30:12	312
		30:13	312, 351
		30:14	312, 351

30:16	351	32:3	186
30:17	34	32:9	55
30:19	312	32:12	413
31	25, 34, 44, 68, 112, 155–87, 210, 219– 20, 254, 366, 371– 3, 388, 395	32:20–22	79
31:1	396	32:23	228
31:2	147	32:28	92, 396, 405, 413, 415
31:6	385, 504	32:29	79
31:7–11	34	32:34–42	34
31:7–8	161	33	31, 59, 113, 140
31:7	371	33:1	31
31:8	155, 158, 160, 209, 219–21, 461	33:2	31
31:12–24	225, 233	33:3	31
31:12–13	34	33:39	216
31:12	38, 55	33:40	216
31:13–20	396	33:41	216
31:13	348, 407	33:44	139
31:14–16	372	33:48–50	55
31:15–16	155	33:48	59, 124
31:16	158–60, 163, 165, 168, 186, 220–21, 461	33:49	31
31:17	163	33:50–56	59, 125
31:19–24	248, 253, 273	33:50	59, 124, 396
31:19–20	232	33:51	26
31:19	38, 226, 231, 250, 275, 312, 372	33:54	17
31:20	226, 231	34	25, 78
31:21	34	34:1–12	94
31:23	226, 231	34:1	396
31:24	38, 226, 250	34:2–13	442
31:27	92	34:13	396
31:28	92, 312	34:17	413, 415
31:30	373, 395	34:18	407
31:34	312	35–36	107
31:35	246	35	15, 25, 59, 79–80, 144, 151, 389, 409, 411, 418, 488, 507– 8
31:40	246, 312	35:1–2	396
31:46	246, 312	35:1	55, 58, 124
31:47	373, 395	35:2	403
31:50	312	35:7	80
32–35	79, 105	35:9	124
32	10, 17, 25, 59, 78– 9, 89, 93, 104, 107, 125, 193	35:10–34	411
32:1	29	35:10	266
32:2	348, 396, 407	35:11	312
		35:12	411
		35:14	124
		35:15	312
		35:25	14, 151, 333, 395, 409–12

35:28	14, 151, 333, 395, 409–11, 507	4:46	103, 164, 200
35:30	312	5:12–15	350
35:31	312	5:27	170
35:32	333, 411, 507	6:20	47
35:33–34	225, 233, 257	7:2–3	430
35:33	152, 226	7:2	431
35:34	28, 37, 152, 226, 238	7:3–4	366
36	25, 27, 57, 80, 360, 373–4, 461	7:3	362, 374, 429
36:1–13	39, 79, 130, 411, 508	7:5	374
36:1–12	18, 41–2, 387	7:8	195
36:1	41, 92, 396, 407	8:2	205–6
36:2	79	8:4	205–6
36:5	396	8:15	137
36:12	28	9–10	99–100
36:13	4, 24, 29–31, 34, 36, 55, 58–63, 79, 111, 124–7	10:5	492
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		10:6–7	493
1–3	5–7, 54, 99–100, 107–8, 141, 189– 90, 206	10:8–9	490, 492–3
1	6, 103, 116	11:24	442
1:1–5	60, 103, 126	12:31	162
1:5	103, 443, 452	13	158, 163, 462
1:7	442	13:2–7	174
1:9–18	389, 403	13:2–6	11
1:15	407	13:6	195
1:19–46	115	13:13–19	186
1:19–25	206	13:14–17	372
1:20	206	13:15	162
1:27	206	13:16–18	163
1:44	206, 216	14:1	242
2	140	14:3	162
2:1	54	16	442–3
2:4–5	217	16:18–18:22	389
2:7	205–6	17:4	162
2:13–14	139	17:9	496
2:24	139	17:10–11	347, 452–3
3:11	207	18:6–7	496
3:20	103	18:9–22	11
3:27	103	18:9	186
3:29	166, 200	18:10	160, 162, 183–6
4:3	165, 200, 366	18:11	226, 276, 282
4:27	103	18:13	226
4:43	181	18:14	160
		18:15	171, 184, 203, 388
		18:18	171
		18:19–20	174
		18:20	186
		20	11, 161–3, 371–3
		20:10–18	186
		20:13	161, 371
		20:14	371

20:16–18	162–3	2:1	60, 126, 197
20:18	162	2:10	207
21	275, 371	3–4	385
21:1–9	268	3	61
21:10–14	371	3:1	60, 126, 197
21:11	371	4:19–20	197
21:14	372	5:11–12	354
21:22–23	275	6–11	132
22:22	308	9:10	207
23	361	9:21	477
23:3	371	9:23	477
23:4	371	9:27	477
23:5–6	169	10:40–43	197–8
23:5	167	11:3	214
23:10–15	239	12:14	216
23:11–14	239	13–22	79, 91, 105, 127
23:18	368	13–19	153
23:22–24	105, 368	13–14	92
24:1	360	13:1–14	79
24:3	360	13:2–6	94
24:8	349, 452–3	13:15–33	79
26:14	276, 278–9, 282	13:17	179
29:4	205–6	13:20	164, 200
31:1–8	389	13:22	160, 169
31:4	207	14–19	79, 125
31:7–8	388	14	93
31:9	490	14:1	79, 92
31:16	351	17:3–4	79
31:20	351	19:1	92
31:25	490	19:49	414
33	430	19:51	78–9, 92
33:4	453	20–21	79, 124
33:8–10	91, 453	20:6	508
33:8–9	490	20:8	181
33:9	429, 504	21:1	92
33:10	347, 450	21:43–45	79
34	55, 60–1, 79–81, 127, 353, 438	22	17, 144
34:1	60, 103, 126	22:1–9	79
34:5	126	22:12	92
34:6	103, 164, 200	22:14	499
34:8	61, 89, 121, 126	22:17	164–5, 200
34:9	121, 388, 414	22:21	407
34:10–12	9, 80, 90, 463	22:23	92
34:10	202	24	93
		24:2	195
		24:5–6	196
<i>Joshua</i>		24:9–10	160, 169, 197
1:10–18	79	24:9	209
2	202		

<i>Judges</i>		37:6	351
1	153	37:22	351
1:17	133	41:26	170
4:11	413	44:25	170
6	215	51:16	171
6:3	215	54:10	451
6:5	215	55:3	425
6:33	215	57:9	276
7:12	215	59:21	171
11	140–1	65:3–7	276
11:22	181	65:4	279
18:30	360		
<i>1 Samuel</i>		<i>Jeremiah</i>	
3:10	172	1:9	171
12:6	196	3:2	210
15:7	214	3:16	416
16:11	415	3:24	120–1
28	176	8:17	183
31:9–12	274	10:14	170
		11:19	120–1
		14:14	203
		23	174
<i>2 Samuel</i>		23:16	203
7	428	25:20	209
7:12–16	425	25:23	209
14:3	171	31:31–34	425
14:9	171	33:14–26	425
23:1–7	172–3	33:17–18	427
23:5	425	34:5	276
		51:17	170
<i>1 Kings</i>		<i>Ezekiel</i>	
11:1–8	366	13:7	170
16:31–32	366	13:16	203
20:33	183	14:7	200
22	176	16:59	351
22:17	388, 415–6	17:2	171
22:23	171	17:16	351
		17:18	351
<i>2 Kings</i>		17:19	351
3	176	20:27	351
19:6	351	21:5	171
19:22	351	22:2	351
		22:8	351
<i>Isaiah</i>		24:3	171
1:1	203	27:13	246
13:20	210	34	416
14:9	276	34:6	388
26:14	276	34:25	451
26:19	276		
32:7	170		

37:24	416	3:6	203
40:46	465	6-7	193
43:19	465	6:1-8	194
43:23	451	6:3-5	195
43:24	426	6:4-5	193, 208
44	465-6	6:4	193-9
44:9-15	487	6:5	171, 209
44:10	465		
44:11-14	465	<i>Nahum</i>	
44:15	465	1:1	203
44:21	451		
45:20	352	<i>Haggai</i>	
47:9	246	2:12-14	193
48:11	465	2:13	242, 313
<i>Hosea</i>		<i>Zechariah</i>	
5:2	193	2:4	193
6:5	170	10:2	416
9:4	193	12:12	193
9:10-17	199-200		
9:10	166-7, 193, 199- 202, 208	<i>Malachi</i>	
10:1-8	199	1:1	196
10:9-15	199	1:6-2:9	429
11:1-7	199	2	429-31, 504
11:2	193	2:4-9	430, 432
11:8	199	2:4	193, 429
11:9	193	2:5	425, 429, 431, 501
12:10	203	2:6	431
12:11	203	2:8	429
12:13	203	2:10-14	430
12:14	193, 202-4, 208	2:10	429
13:4-6	193	2:14	429
		3:1	429
		3:23	196
<i>Amos</i>			
2:9-12	204-8	<i>Psalms</i>	
2:10-12	193	36:2	172
2:10	206	44	351
2:11-12	206	88:11	276
3:1	205	89	425
5:25	193	106:28	165, 120, 276, 279
6:10	276		
9:7	205	<i>Job</i>	
		1:1	209
<i>Obadiah</i>		26:5	276
1:1	203	32:2	209
		32:6	209
<i>Micah</i>		42:17	209
3	174		

<i>Proverbs</i>		13:25	361
2:18	276	13:28–29	429, 503–4
9:18	276	13:29	367, 428, 432
21:16	276		
27:4	307	<i>1 Chronicles</i>	
30:1	172	1:33	219
		1:35	214
<i>Lamentations</i>		1:36	214
4:21	209	5:21	246
		5:29	196
<i>Ezra</i>		6:33	475
2:36–63	476	6:55	169
4:14	426	7:27	414
7:24	478	10:10	274
8:17	171, 475	23:3	476
8:20	475, 478	23:16–17	360
9:1–3	429		
9:15	351	<i>2 Chronicles</i>	
10	360, 375, 429	13:5	425–6
10:18–19	429	17:11	210
		18:16	415
<i>Nehemia</i>		18:22	171
2:19	210	21:7	425
3:26	478	21:16	210
4:1	210	22:1	210
6:1	210	26:7	210
7:39–65	476	26:14	276
11:19–36	476	<i>Tobit</i>	
		4:17	279
		<i>Sirach</i>	
11:21	478	30:18	279
13	367, 372, 375	45:24–25	425, 427
13:2	169		
13:3	361	<i>1 Maccabees</i>	
13:15–22	346	2:24–26	428
13:20–30	372	2:54	428

Index of Subjects

- Aaron 14–5, 18, 24, 31–3, 35–6, 41, 57–8, 71, 74, 79, 96–7, 106, 111, 129–30, 134–5, 147, 150–1, 171, 192–9, 226, 252–3, 255–6, 264–6, 276, 288, 337, 347–50, 352, 357, 359–60, 363, 382–8, 394–7, 401–3, 405–12, 409, 414, 416, 418–9, 422–3, 430, 445–49, 451–2, 454–8, 460–2, 466, 472, 479, 482, 487–502, 505–8
- Aaronides 10, 14–6, 33, 39, 50, 54, 70, 91, 96, 112, 118–9, 145–8, 150, 229, 233, 251, 253, 257, 268, 318, 328, 331–3, 337, 349, 367, 381–2, 384, 386, 388, 394–5, 403, 408, 409–12, 419, 423, 425, 432, 445, 447–50, 453–7, 460, 466–71, 475, 478–80, 482, 484–5, 487–8, 492–8, 501–7, 509
- Abihu 333, 382, 445–6, 450, 456–9, 493, 499
- Abiram 35–6, 96, 98, 193, 386, 389, 498–9
- Abraham 55, 89, 195, 214, 276, 278, 426, 436, 442
- administration/administrative 15, 17, 216, 219, 331, 386, 391–2, 397, 404, 418–22, 506
- adultery 162, 293, 295, 305–9, 324, 367, 369–71
- altar 12, 74, 77, 119, 144, 151, 165–6, 227–8, 230–1, 371, 428, 447, 475, 505
- Amalek/Amalekites 30, 33, 68, 211, 214–7
- Ammon/Ammonites 94, 132, 161, 167, 212, 220, 361
- Amorites 30, 129, 131, 161, 178, 181, 204–7, 211, 214
- amulets 329–1
- ancestor cult 276, 278–81, 483
- anointment 151, 395, 410, 412, 494–5, 502, 507
- Arabization 11, 162, 209–12
- Arabs/Arabian 11, 162, 209–12
- Arad 33, 35, 57, 132, 134, 216, 219
- Aram/Arameans 161, 167, 187, 202, 212, 334, 359
- Aramaic 168, 176, 285, 475, 478
- Arnon 30, 131, 139–40, 165, 178, 181, 222
- Assyria/Assyrians 6, 210–1, 215, 274, 444
- asylum 25, 59, 79, 119, 151, 371, 409, 411
- Atharim, way of 132–3
- atonement/expiation 66, 73, 76, 129, 147, 192, 226, 228, 230–2, 267, 284, 289, 299–300, 303, 323–4, 350, 352–3, 367, 426, 455, 500, 507
- authority 14, 18, 33, 68, 91, 106, 112, 144, 147, 219, 222–4, 328–9, 335, 337–8, 350, 363–4, 367, 379–399, 401–2, 408–9, 411, 414–7, 419–21, 423–4, 449–50, 452–3, 455–6, 458, 460, 462–3, 488
- authorization 328, 331–3, 335, 337, 364, 402, 406, 423–4, 446, 505
- Baal 166, 168–9, 179, 199–202, 305
- Baal-Meon 162
- Baal-Peor 96, 114, 117, 155–160, 162–9, 186, 192, 199–202, 221, 279, 365–6, 372, 428
- Babylon/Babylonians 10, 15, 210, 215, 318, 333, 444, 475
- Balaam 11, 25, 29, 31, 33–5, 47, 57, 59, 77, 88, 96–9, 114, 116–7, 124, 126–7, 129, 134, 138–40, 155–87, 192–9, 202–4, 209, 212, 219–21, 461
- Balak 25, 34–5, 77, 155–8, 160, 166–7, 175, 177–180, 182–3, 186–7, 192–99, 203, 209, 220
- Bamoth-Baal 139, 164, 179
- ban 132–3, 372
- Beth-Peor 164–6, 200
- blasphemer 343–4, 347, 349, 362
- blessing 1, 5, 12, 17, 19, 25, 57, 59, 66, 68, 70, 73, 76–8, 81, 116, 121, 124, 129, 140–1, 145, 154, 158, 164, 173–87, 197, 294, 316, 323–4, 327–33, 337, 396, 430–1, 445, 453, 490, 492–3
- blood 12, 227, 230, 232, 239–40, 245, 257, 267–9, 287, 306, 351, 411–2, 456, 507, 509

- body 43, 239–46, 248–9, 251, 255, 260, 262, 272, 274–5, 282–8, 311–3, 326, 330
- bones 43, 248, 271–2, 276, 313
- borders 25, 27, 30, 55, 60, 65, 68, 70, 79, 123, 125, 127–8, 132, 140, 154, 178, 202, 222, 233–5, 237, 258–9, 307, 401, 441–2
- bridge-thesis 3–7, 100, 103–104, 107–17, 119, 121, 123, 190, 509, 510
- bronze/copper serpent 77, 96, 114, 129, 131, 135, 387
- burial 43, 248, 262, 272, 275–6, 278, 280, 283, 329–30, 457
- burnt offering 12, 75, 177, 228, 241
- Caleb 27, 35, 60, 78, 99, 119, 385
- camp 14, 24, 32–3, 36–8, 73, 78, 97, 118, 128, 146, 149–53, 225, 233–60, 266–9, 275, 281–2, 291–5, 297–9, 307, 313, 315–6, 342, 346–8, 362, 384–5, 397, 406–7, 450, 455–6, 473
- Canaan/Canaanites 25, 33, 65, 68, 114, 116, 123–5, 128–9, 132–4, 205, 214, 216, 276, 358–9, 362, 365, 442, 497
- carcasses 227, 241, 246, 253, 270, 298
- census 25, 39, 56–7, 60, 64, 66, 69–70, 76, 78, 125, 129, 148, 233, 239, 291, 383–4, 397, 406–7, 410, 466–7, 473, 481
- centralization 10, 12–5, 17–9, 25, 37–8, 54, 78, 110, 123, 143–54, 219, 222, 233–4, 237–40, 243, 256, 258, 260, 277, 281, 288, 291, 293–5, 314, 318, 331, 336, 341, 367, 401, 411, 453, 471–2, 484, 496, 508
- charisma 379–81, 383–4, 387, 390, 392, 394, 398, 402, 404–5, 410, 413–5, 419, 422–4
- charter myth 3, 51, 88, 104, 106–7, 277, 318, 338, 396, 398–9, 405, 461
- Cisjordan(ians) 17, 25, 33, 59, 79, 88, 134, 195, 233
- clean/unclean 43, 74, 118, 147, 154, 162, 226–7, 229, 232, 234–8, 240–2, 245–6, 249–52, 254–6, 258, 265–6, 268–70, 272, 279, 281, 298, 313, 341, 346–8, 367, 445, 450–1, 453–5, 495
- colophon 31, 58, 61–63, 79, 111, 124–5, 127, 255
- community 10, 12–5, 17, 38, 54, 81, 99, 101, 107, 145, 147, 156, 158, 210, 230, 232–3, 237, 239–41, 250–3, 256, 258–60, 265, 268, 276, 284, 298–9, 317–8, 320, 326, 328, 331, 336–8, 340–1, 347–8, 352–3, 357–62, 365–7, 371–2, 375, 383, 386, 388, 397, 401, 406, 411, 414–6, 420, 432, 450, 456, 476, 479, 482–4, 487, 498–9, 501, 503, 507
- completion 4, 26, 51, 90–1, 98, 100, 111, 398, 463
- composition 2, 5, 23, 54, 55–8, 122–3, 128–31, 233
- conquest 9, 25, 59, 65–6, 70, 77–81, 87–8, 99, 102, 108, 114, 116–7, 119, 125, 129, 131–4, 138, 140, 189–91, 197–8, 205–6, 275, 388
- consecration 14, 54, 72–5, 77, 199–200, 228, 238, 331, 384, 408–9, 445, 447, 466–7, 475–6, 479–84, 490, 507
- corpse 12, 110, 118, 192, 226, 228–9, 233, 235, 239–55, 258–60, 269, 271, 274–5, 284, 287, 295, 298, 310–1, 313–4, 324, 341, 348, 445, 450, 457, 505, 509
- covenant 76, 147, 195, 202, 314, 351, 355, 365–6, 387, 442–3, 462, 490, 500–6
- Covenant Code 301, 339, 442–3
- Cozbi 36, 155, 157, 159, 210, 221, 226, 357, 360, 365–8, 372, 413, 426, 428, 503, 505
- cult 10, 12, 14, 18–9, 32–3, 38, 54, 73–8, 148, 150, 232, 240, 249–50, 260, 262–3, 275, 281, 287, 290, 303, 314, 318, 320, 322, 325, 328–9, 331–2, 334–5, 342, 371, 401, 403, 408–9, 418, 420, 448–9, 451, 454, 455, 457–8, 467, 470–1, 473, 477–8, 479–85, 489–93, 496, 502–3, 506–7
- cult of the dead 166, 273, 275–81, 283, 288
- Cush/Cushite 68, 99, 357, 360, 361–5, 457
- Dathan 35–6, 96, 98, 193, 386, 389, 498–9
- daughters 12, 18, 35, 39, 42, 97, 119, 123, 130, 155, 159, 183, 210, 221, 344, 348, 358–60, 362, 364–5, 368–9, 373–5, 411, 428, 430, 489, 495
- David 172–3, 428, 477, 503
- Davidides/Davidic 276, 425–8
- death 6, 11, 19, 25, 27, 31, 33, 41, 42, 43, 55, 57, 60, 66, 78, 80–81, 96–7, 121, 123, 125, 130, 132, 134, 137, 147, 151, 158, 163, 165, 198, 229,

- 231–2, 236, 241–53, 255, 257, 259,
260–2, 299, 306, 309, 311–5, 333,
344, 353, 355, 365, 369, 374, 385,
387–8, 395, 410–1, 414, 445, 449–50,
457–9, 472–3, 493, 496, 505, 507,
509
- democratization 106, 311, 383–4, 386,
393–4, 396–7, 414, 422
- departure 6, 24, 25, 30–1, 34, 37–8, 56–
7, 64–6, 69, 72–8, 96, 99, 153, 212–3,
233, 260, 301, 324, 340, 353, 383,
399, 403, 412, 480–1, 483
- depersonalization 381–3, 391–3, 397,
414, 419, 422, 423
- desert 1, 7, 11–2, 19, 24–5, 27, 50, 54,
60, 64–5, 67, 70, 73, 111, 125, 128,
131, 140, 145–6, 148, 150–1, 180–2,
199, 209–10, 213, 216, 233–4, 345,
349, 361, 385, 399, 412, 422, 443,
507, *see also wilderness*
- Deuteronomistic History 3, 9, 87, 102,
104, 121, 189, 190
- Deuteronomy 3–5, 7, 9, 44, 55, 59–60,
72, 80, 84, 90, 99–101, 103–5, 107,
109–10, 112–3, 116–9, 121, 123–4,
127, 143, 162, 189–90, 208, 217,
389–90, 423, 428, 437–8, 442–3,
452–3, 463, 465, 487–93, 496, 508–
10
- diaspora 10, 19, 363–4, 427
- Dinah 358, 430–1
- disorder 2, 4, 8, 23–4, 53, 66, 105, 118,
122
- diversity 10, 12, 17, 56, 83, 94, 145,
334–5
- divination 159, 162, 170, 175–80, 182–
6, 220, 282
- divorce 306–7, 309, 360, 364, 367, 370,
373–4
- Documentary Hypothesis 2, 6, 9, 11,
86–7, 97–8, 100, 114, 121, 435, 438–
9
- economy/economic 10, 12, 14, 86, 146–
8, 215, 326, 365, 368–70, 386, 390,
392, 394–5, 397, 399, 420, 427, 436
- Edom/Edomites 65, 68, 98–9, 128–9,
132, 139, 209, 211, 212, 215–20, 222,
386
- Egypt/Egyptians 9, 27, 59, 65, 67, 69–
70, 124, 128, 135, 183, 195, 199,
202–5, 214, 238, 282, 318, 340, 358–
60, 362–5, 404, 411, 420, 442
- Eldad 29, 35–6, 384, 413
- elders 33, 36, 158, 160–1, 212, 220, 268,
350, 382–4, 389, 396, 399, 402–4,
407, 413, 417, 423
- Eleazar 14–5, 32, 35, 71, 79, 111, 130,
148, 150, 192, 265–8, 288, 333, 348,
359, 382, 384, 387–8, 396, 409–10,
413–7, 456, 488, 493–6, 498–9, 504–
8
- Elephantine 10, 146, 154, 320, 333–5,
375, 420, 475
- Elohist 2, 3, 84, 96–7, 114, 189, 436
- embezzlement 73, 76, 293, 295, 299–
300, 303
- emotions 27, 31, 263, 295–6, 304–11,
315, 388, 429
- endangerment 38, 68–9, 77, 128, 176,
228, 232, 234, 239, 244–5, 247, 253,
255–6, 26–1, 270, 283, 287–8, 299,
307–9, 315, 320, 360, 365–7, 370,
372, 392, 397, 445, 448, 451, 454,
467, 471–3, 484, 505
- endogamy 11–2, 42, 214, 357–75, 387,
411, 426, 504
- Enneateuch 102, 121, 134, 438–40,
462–3
- Ethiopia 364
- Ethiopia(n) 215
- exodus 3–4, 6–7, 9, 25, 27, 31, 57, 59–
60, 64, 74, 76–9, 81, 84, 87–9, 99,
104, 106, 108–9, 117, 119, 123–5,
132, 189–6, 198–9, 203–5, 250, 345,
353, 358–63, 375, 401–2, 436–7, 453,
471, 480, 483–4
- Exodus, book of 3–5, 8, 17, 23, 35–6,
38, 55, 64, 66–7, 72, 74, 76, 81, 88,
90, 98, 101, 104–6, 109–12, 119, 121,
128, 138, 147–8, 192, 198, 231, 259,
318, 323, 342, 346, 360, 382, 389,
401, 403–5, 487–91, 496, 509
- festivals/festive calendar 18, 39, 42, 69,
77–8, 105, 143–4, 228, 230, 250, 324,
339–42
- fiction/fictional/fictionality 9, 35, 45–50,
150, 161, 219, 322, 420, 422, 440,
461, 478
- fire 162, 174, 184, 268–9, 346, 350, 371,
445–6, 456, 458
- fire-offering 165, 228, 371
- firstborn 229, 397, 467–9, 471, 473–4,
478–85
- foreign(er)/strange(r) 11–12, 162–3,
166, 174, 187, 196, 201, 250, 350–1,
355, 358–62, 365–75, 404

- formation/formative tradition 4, 6, 8–9,
 12, 15, 49, 51, 81, 85–7, 90–5, 107,
 135, 138, 324, 326, 337, 396, 398–
 401, 437
Fortschreibung 4, 7, 11, 16, 42, 84, 90,
 92, 94–5, 97–8, 100, 106–7, 109–11,
 118–9, 133–4, 150, 152, 161, 185,
 189, 191, 194, 204–6, 209, 220, 222,
 256, 259, 266, 304, 325, 328, 343,
 354, 360, 364, 367, 389, 417, 438–9,
 444, 458–62, 483, 491–2, 494, 504,
 508
 Fragmentary Hypothesis 3, 5–6, 11, 86,
 88, 97, 435
 garments 450, 472, 507
 gender 17–19, 235, 239, 298, 304–5,
 308
 generation 9, 25, 27, 56–7, 60, 66, 69–
 70, 78, 106, 116, 122–3, 125, 130,
 132, 345, 353, 373, 385, 480, 483,
 499, 502, 504
 Genesis 3, 5, 7, 17, 23, 44, 86, 88, 90,
 98, 101, 103, 104, 117–8, 121, 138,
 190, 192, 198, 214, 384, 407, 463,
 489, 491, 509
 Gerizim 15, 93, 146, 149, 318, 320, 411
 Gershonites 153, 233, 384, 410, 491,
 493
 gift of God/gift to God 468–70, 471,
 478, 482, 484
 Gilead/Gileadites 41, 79, 80, 125, 359
 Gilgal 190, 194–8
 grace (formula) 69, 129, 426, 471
 Hebron 30, 115, 278
 Hellenism/Hellenistic period 120, 211–
 2, 277, 279, 329–30, 399, 418, 439
 Heshbon 30, 141
 heterodoxy/heterodox 93, 336
 Hexateuch 7–10, 24, 36, 55, 77–81, 90–
 5, 102, 105, 109, 119, 121–2, 124,
 126–8, 131–5, 138, 141, 189, 198,
 202, 208, 319, 354, 401, 415–6, 440–
 1, 462, 508
 Hexateuch redaction/redactor 4, 6, 16,
 99, 103, 116, 133–5, 137, 140, 190
 hierarchy/hierarchization 14, 17, 54, 66,
 70, 144, 146–8, 151, 153–4, 267, 291,
 314, 323, 326, 337, 384, 395, 397,
 401–2, 406, 408–10, 412, 415, 417,
 421, 423, 476
 hierocracy/hierocratic 19, 24–5, 50, 66,
 100, 119, 388, 397, 399, 402, 412,
 416–23, 500, 506
 high priest 10–1, 14–5, 25, 50, 110, 147,
 151, 192, 242–3, 250, 265–8, 310–1,
 314, 333, 348–50, 367, 373, 381, 385,
 387–9, 395, 399, 401–2, 405–6, 408–
 12, 416–23, 428–9, 432, 450, 457,
 462, 485, 487–510
Hirbet 'Uyūn Mūsā 165–6, 180, 200
 Hobab 68, 96–7, 99, 104, 114, 213–4,
 363, 412–3
 Holiness Code 77, 89, 99, 110–2, 149,
 254, 257, 259, 289, 293, 303–4, 308,
 314, 339, 342–3, 352, 354, 439, 442–
 3, 450, 509
 Holiness School 90, 111, 152, 256, 288–
 9, 293, 353–4, 439, 460, 487, 491,
 508–9
 holy of holies 63–4, 78, 228, 230–2,
 243, 249, 251, 256, 291, 299, 449,
 456, 472, 499, 503, 505
 holy/holiness 13–4, 17, 23, 25, 73, 153,
 179, 230–2, 234, 237–40, 243, 249,
 256, 258–61, 273, 283, 288–9, 291–2,
 295, 298–9, 303–4, 307, 310–1, 313–
 6, 341–3, 351, 367, 386–7, 397, 408–
 9, 445, 447–9, 451, 454, 456, 466–7,
 469, 471–4, 481–2, 484, 487, 499,
 502–7
 Hor 31, 132–4, 216–7
 Horeb 170, 206, 405, 442–3, 452
 Hormah 25, 33, 65, 116, 128–9, 131,
 216–7
 husband 18–9, 305–9, 324, 369–70
 identity 4–5, 10–11, 13, 19, 45, 50, 107,
 145–6, 156, 250, 262, 277, 285–6,
 312, 315, 317–9, 323–4, 326, 333,
 336–8, 398, 432, 436
 identity reservoir 10, 13, 19, 145, 318,
 323, 336–8
 idolatry 156, 159–160, 162, 201–2, 359
 Idumea/Idumeans 94, 154, 215, 219,
 221–2
 imperial authorization 10, 91, 211, 438
 impurity 36–7, 110, 192, 261–2, 264–5,
 268, 270, 272, 281–4, 288, 292, 295,
 297–8, 308, 315, 324, 458, 472, 509
 inauguration/initiation/investiture 27,
 54, 74–5, 77, 225, 229–30, 232, 260,
 340, 382, 387–8, 395, 401–3, 408–10,
 414–5, 417, 445, 448–9, 455, 459,
 479–80, 483, 489, 495, 497, 502, 507
 incense/frankincense 74, 175, 215, 445,
 449, 505
 individualization 17–9

- inheritance 9, 12, 17–8, 35, 42, 55, 79, 97, 123, 150, 304, 308, 327, 345, 360, 370, 373–5, 403, 411, 461, 497
- inner-biblical exegesis/interpretation 7–8, 11, 13, 16, 49, 90, 118, 158–9, 214, 357, 373
- innovation 1, 10–3, 16, 19, 26, 51, 144, 289–90, 292, 301, 304, 306, 311, 320, 327, 331, 336, 341–2, 435
- institutionalization 14, 119, 349, 381, 383, 386, 392–9, 402, 404–6, 409, 413–4, 417, 419, 422–4, 452
- intercession 69–70, 106, 137, 203, 278, 387, 397, 428, 457
- interfering formation 94, 321, 334, 338
- intertextuality 69, 127, 157, 163, 366, 444
- invention of tradition 8, 111, 140, 145–6, 290, 332, 364
- Israel (people) 10–11, 14, 16–9, 24–6, 39, 45, 50, 54, 67, 73, 75, 78, 81, 101, 148, 153, 212, 233
- Israel (state) 165–7, 206
- Ithamar 148, 150, 333, 382, 384, 403, 409–10, 456, 489, 491, 493–6, 498–9, 505
- itinerary 6, 31, 34, 56, 58–9, 66, 97, 103, 113, 116, 119, 124–5, 127, 129–30, 132–4, 138–40, 165, 181, 217, 412, 414
- Jabbok 131–2, 167–8, 181
- Jacob 55, 182, 184–5, 199, 202–4, 358–9, 384, 430, 436, 453
- jealousy 18–9, 76, 121, 225, 295, 304–10, 315, 324, 349, 369–70, 413
- Jericho 34, 59–60, 124–5, 165, 190, 210
- Jerusalem/Jerusalemites 15, 146, 148, 149, 151, 234, 258, 276, 292, 318–20, 334–7, 364–5, 411, 418–20, 436, 439, 463
- Jethro 68, 213–4, 359–60, 362–3, 404, 412
- Jordan 34, 59–60, 79, 81, 123–6, 165, 167–8, 181, 187, 197, 202, 214, 386, 390, 396, 414
- Joshua (person) 14, 27, 29, 33, 35–6, 60, 68, 78–9, 96–7, 119, 123, 198, 275, 385, 388–90, 396–7, 402, 404–6, 412–7, 419, 422–3, 507
- Joshua, book of 3–4, 7, 9, 14, 55, 59, 72, 79, 91–4, 99, 102, 119, 121, 123, 125, 128, 132, 134, 189, 198, 208, 396, 417
- journey 9, 27, 31, 37, 45, 61, 66, 68, 70, 72, 76, 132, 165, 206, 213, 217
- Judah (person) 358, 430
- Judah (tribe) 17, 153, 337, 359, 406, 499
- Judah/Judahite 3, 10, 106, 115, 162, 206, 213, 218, 280, 329, 334, 336, 459
- Judaism(s) 10, 13, 15, 39, 46, 94, 145–6, 318–9, 333, 335–6, 338, 398–400, 423, 463
- judges 383, 402–4, 453
- Kadesh 54, 65–6, 68, 96–7, 123, 128–30, 132, 189, 213, 216–8
- Kemosh 167
- Ketef Hinnom* 329–32
- kipper* 226–8, 230–2, 241, 256, 367, 455, 480, 482, 500, 503, 507
- Kohath/Kohathites 74, 148, 153, 233, 384, 450, 473, 499
- Korah/Korahites 35, 97, 100, 193, 343, 389, 408, 472, 487, 497–9
- lamp(stand) 32, 38, 72–5, 77
- land 1, 3, 5–9, 11, 15–7, 19, 25–7, 38–9, 42, 55, 57, 59–60, 65, 67–8, 70, 72–3, 75–81, 89, 94, 106–7, 110, 115–7, 122–6, 128, 130–2, 140, 149–53, 162, 189, 191, 197, 201–2, 205–6, 216, 232–4, 238, 257, 268, 342, 345, 352, 354, 373, 375, 386, 388, 390, 396, 399, 401, 411, 414, 416, 422–3, 441–2, 490, 495–7
- land distribution 17, 55, 59, 78–9, 99, 102, 403, 407, 415–6, 461
- law 16, 23, 26, 50–1, 53, 56, 59, 86, 111–2, 121, 203, 343, 389, 396, 421, 442–3, 450, 461–2
- laws 2–3, 5, 39–46, 50, 57, 71–2, 76, 111, 124, 291–2, 301, 343
- leader/leadership 1, 10, 12, 14–8, 24–6, 35, 50, 92, 123, 126, 129, 132, 137, 148, 177, 192, 194, 196, 204, 210, 214, 219, 348, 363
- legal hermeneutics 13, 112, 300, 442–4, 451
- legal interpretation/innovation 12, 44, 339, 341–2, 364, 388
- legislation 40, 43, 53, 62–3, 72, 77, 79, 124, 162, 257, 259, 275–6, 292, 301, 322, 340–1, 344, 349–50, 352, 371, 414, 453
- Levi (person) 202, 214, 359, 426, 429, 453, 489, 491, 499, 503–4
- Levi (tribe) 147–8, 484, 492, 496–7, 499

- Levites 16–7, 72, 74, 76–8, 112, 118,
 147–8, 150–3, 225, 229–30, 232–3,
 236, 239, 276, 295, 299, 332, 339–40,
 372–3, 382, 384, 386, 395, 397, 401–
 3, 406, 408–10, 428–9, 453, 465–85
 Levitical cities 14, 59, 79, 124, 143,
 148, 151, 488–9
 Leviticus 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 18, 23, 35, 44–5,
 54, 62–5, 67, 70–2, 74–7, 80–1, 88–
 90, 101, 103–5, 109–12, 117–9, 121,
 127–8, 147–8, 190, 225, 227–8, 232–
 3, 240–1, 249, 253–4, 258–60, 289,
 293, 298, 301, 320, 323–5, 342, 382,
 384, 403, 407, 460–1, 463, 487–91,
 496, 509
 magician/magic 158, 164, 174, 183–4,
 273–4, 276, 284, 288, 304, 393
 Makedah 10, 219, 333
 manna 30, 68, 106, 136, 198, 312, 343,
 353–5, 404
 manslaughter 151, 411, 496, 507
 Marah 68
 marriage 11, 42, 160, 162, 192, 201–2,
 209, 214, 305–6, 308–10, 358–62,
 368–70, 372–4, 407, 461, 499
 Massah 68, 490
 meal offering 165, 279, 342, 370
 Medad 29, 35–6, 384, 413
 Medeba 162, 181
 Merarites 148, 153, 233, 384, 410, 491,
 493
 Meribah 30, 68, 193
 Midian/Midianites 11, 34, 68, 97, 129,
 155–63, 165, 186, 209–15, 219–22,
 225, 252, 275, 359–60, 365, 371–3,
 412, 426, 504, 507
 Midrash/midrashic 10, 13, 100, 105,
 110, 118, 339, 359, 404, 430, 461,
 463
 midst 12, 28, 54, 78, 232, 236–8, 254,
 256–7, 259–60, 268, 291, 295, 298,
 314–5, 361, 386, 454, 468–9, 471–2,
 480
 military 57, 101, 131, 158, 175, 177–8,
 219, 235, 239, 253, 274, 388, 402,
 404–5, 407, 413–7, 423
minḥa 228
 ministry 236, 328, 333, 350, 490, 493,
 498, 501, 506
 Miriam 18, 32, 35, 57, 68, 71, 129, 132,
 135, 192–9, 226, 240, 276, 278, 357,
 360, 363, 385, 396–7, 423, 457
 mixed marriages 11, 160, 162, 192, 202,
 357–75, 407, 431, 461, 503
 Moab/Moabites 8, 25, 30, 33–5, 37, 58–
 60, 62, 65–6, 68, 70, 78, 94, 123–31,
 139–40, 155–63, 165–8, 176–8, 181,
 190, 195, 200, 202, 208–12, 217,
 219–22, 361, 365–6, 372, 428, 442,
 490
 morality/moral 48, 227–8, 231–2, 299–
 308, 315, 326, 369, 375, 502–3
 Moses 26–35, 51, 60, 71, 74, 80–1, 91,
 106, 137, 158, 193–99, 202–4, 337,
 348–50, 353, 355, 364, 384–7, 394–7,
 402, 404–5, 407, 413–7, 419, 423,
 446–53, 461–63
 mourn/mourning (ritual) 58, 280, 310,
 313, 450, 457
 Münster Pentateuch Model 6, 9, 88,
 435–40, 461
 murmuring 24, 33, 66, 68–70, 106–8,
 111, 134–7, 405, 499–500
 Nabateans 11, 162, 211–2, 220–1
 Nadab 333, 382, 445–6, 450, 456–9,
 493, 499, 507
naepæs 135, 229, 241–7, 249, 251, 261–
 2, 271–2, 281, 284–7, 311–5
 narrative 5, 51, 57, 86, 121, 343, 421
 narrativization 23–4, 36, 45–50, 422
 narration 4, 23, 26, 32, 35, 39–40, 44,
 49, 51, 422, 509
 Nazirite 12, 18, 73, 76, 154, 204, 206–7,
 225, 228–9, 243, 249–50, 293, 295,
 310–1, 313–4, 324, 327
 Nebo 162, 165, 167, 179, 278
 Negev 133, 206, 211–3, 216–8, 221–2,
 318
 Neo-Documentary Hypothesis 3, 7, 84,
 86
netûnim 408, 468, 469–71, 474–79
 normativity 11, 13, 15, 19, 45, 48, 50–1,
 76, 80, 90, 112, 154, 318–9, 324, 335,
 349, 379, 391, 398, 418, 421, 423–4,
 449–50, 453, 455, 462–3
 office 10, 12, 15, 310, 333, 337, 349–50,
 379–92, 395–7, 399, 401–6, 408–13,
 415–7, 419–24, 428, 432, 449–51,
 459, 471–4, 485, 488, 502
 Og 206–7
 orality 41, 131, 137, 142, 163, 178, 186,
 320, 329–30, 332, 336, 342, 344–5
 ordination 74, 382, 395, 494
 orthodoxy/orthodox 318, 326, 333–6,
 366

- Paran 113, 123, 412
 Pentateuch 9–10, 90–5, 102, 105, 122,
 131–3, 160, 354, 401, 440–1, 462
 Pentateuch redaction/redactor 4, 9, 16,
 87, 90, 93, 97–9, 102, 110, 133–5,
 137–8, 185, 437–8, 461
 Peor 96, 114–7, 155–60, 162–9, 179,
 181, 186, 192, 199–202, 221, 279,
 365–6, 372, 428
 Persia/Persians 5, 9–13, 15–6, 91, 94,
 98, 107, 110, 112, 114, 118, 120, 166,
 194, 199, 206, 208, 210, 211, 213,
 215–6, 219–20, 244, 258, 276–78,
 280, 283, 287, 311, 319, 325, 329–30,
 334, 338–9, 350, 363, 375, 409, 418–
 21, 432, 439, 463, 475–6, 485, 508
 person, concept of 243–4, 249, 261–2,
 272, 285, 286–7, 295, 298, 311–2
 Pesach 18, 41, 67, 69, 73, 77, 110, 225,
 250, 252, 323–4, 339–42, 344, 346–8,
 350, 355, 371, 480
 Phinehas 15, 28, 35, 58, 66, 129, 148,
 150, 155, 159, 166–7, 192, 201–2,
 221, 226, 333, 357, 359, 365, 366–8,
 387, 395, 409–10, 413–4, 426–9,
 431–2, 461, 493–6, 500–8
 Pisgah 127, 179
 plagues 67, 69–70, 130, 137, 155–6,
 159–60, 226, 246, 324, 367
 plains of Moab 8, 34, 58–60, 62, 66, 70,
 78, 124–30, 202, 217
 plot 27, 29, 34–5, 37, 40–2, 45, 49, 119,
 123, 155, 229, 233, 398, 401, 402–6,
 414, 422, 484–5
 pollution 41, 175, 225–8, 230–2, 237,
 239, 241–2, 246–7, 249, 251–2, 255–
 7, 260, 270, 272, 281, 284, 295, 298,
 308, 367, 428, 472
 post-priestly 5–7, 9, 16, 85, 88, 92, 98–
 100, 103, 105–7, 118–9, 137, 150,
 160, 190–1, 205, 208, 214, 221–2,
 363, 438–9, 460, 496, 498, 508–9
 preservation/saving 5, 9, 13, 17, 19, 25,
 45, 66, 68, 76–8, 123, 129–31, 137,
 141, 195–7, 203–4, 206
 priest 10, 13, 425–6
 priest/priesthood 425
 priestly benediction 12, 19, 25, 38, 73,
 294, 327–30, 333
 Priestly Source 2–3, 5, 84, 88–9, 96, 98–
 100, 104, 109, 117, 121, 143, 259,
 354, 412, 437–8, 440, 448, 458, 460,
 485, 496, 508–9
 Priestly supplements 90, 95, 259, 438,
 460, 491, 509
 priests/priesthood 10, 16, 50, 91, 112,
 118–9, 145–6, 148, 252, 318, 331–3,
 335, 337, 348, 365, 367
 profane vs. sacred 143, 22–6, 229, 234,
 283, 295, 299, 315, 351, 430, 451,
 454, 472, 503
 promulgation 42, 72, 104, 338, 389, 396,
 451, 453
 prophecy/prophetic 18, 33, 36, 106, 158,
 163–4, 168–75, 177, 182, 184, 186–7,
 192, 197, 203, 220, 308, 384–5, 388,
 393, 396–7, 405, 423, 425–7, 429,
 431–2, 462
 punishment 41, 57, 69–70, 205, 274–5,
 306, 308–9, 339, 347, 350, 354–5,
 365, 385–6, 397, 489
 purification 225–32, 245–6, 251, 255,
 265, 267–9, 284, 288, 294, 348, 372,
 429, 449–50, 455, 480–1, 488
 purification offering 226–8, 230–1, 267,
 288, 455–7
 purification rituals 12–3, 50, 229–30,
 241, 256, 272, 281, 323, 371, 481
 purity 10, 12, 23, 37, 43–4, 73, 110, 206,
 225–61, 269–70, 272–3, 281, 283,
 288–9, 291–2, 294–5, 298, 300, 303,
 314–5, 326–7, 341, 367, 372, 387,
 431, 471–4, 503, 509
 Qedar/Qedarites 211, 215, 218–9
 quails 33, 68, 97, 135, 193
 reader 27, 29–32, 40, 45, 48–50, 56, 73,
 132, 274, 372, 403, 444, 463
 rebellion 59, 66, 69–70, 97, 100, 106,
 108, 111, 125, 129, 132, 156, 385,
 396
 red heifer 226, 252, 265–9, 273, 283–4,
 297, 314, 324, 371
 Red Sea 68–70, 128, 140, 215, 217
 referentiality 10, 17, 49, 51, 90, 263,
 461–3
 religion 13, 18–9, 46, 145, 317, 350,
 398, 422
 Reuben/Reubenites 97, 386, 499
 Reuel 213–4, 362
 revelation 18, 28, 38, 41, 62–4, 71–2,
 80, 105–6, 109, 111–2, 170–1, 175,
 178, 182, 184, 186–7, 196, 324, 337,
 339, 344, 347, 349–50, 352, 363, 385,
 393–4, 396–7, 413–5, 423, 441, 443,
 446, 449, 452–3, 508
 ritual density 16–7, 26, 144–7

- ritual innovation 1, 12–3, 289, 304, 327, 331
- ritual script 13, 145, 290–1, 319–20, 322, 327, 330, 332, 335–6, 495
- ritualization 326, 331, 424
- rituals 1, 4, 12–5, 18–9, 43, 53–4, 66, 73, 81, 118, 144–7, 149, 154, 177, 208, 225, 227, 245, 290, 295–6, 317–8, 391, 424, 457, 469, 472, 478–81, 495–6, 505, 507
- rod 151, 193, 403, 408, 499, 506
- routinization 349, 402, 406, 409–10, 413, 419, 422–4
- Sabbath 33, 41, 339–40, 342–6, 353–5, 426, 448
- sacrifice 12, 39, 74–5, 150, 156, 162, 177, 200, 227–31, 250, 252, 267–8, 276, 278–80, 282, 284–6, 306–7, 310, 323–4, 340–2, 348, 354, 426, 428, 431, 442–3, 445, 454–7, 459, 470, 473, 482, 496
- Samaria/Samaritans 10, 15, 93–4, 154, 318, 334–6, 398, 411, 420
- sanctification 24, 76, 78, 314–5, 454, 471, 480
- sanctuary 13–4, 17, 19, 24, 32, 37, 54, 73, 78, 101, 143–4, 149–53, 158, 163–8, 227, 229–34, 237, 246, 249–51, 255–60, 267–8, 270, 276, 281–2, 288, 291, 293–5, 299–300, 303–4, 306–7, 309–11, 318, 327, 331, 333, 340–2, 346–7, 366–7, 370, 382, 384, 386, 397, 399, 409, 445–6, 448–50, 454, 456–7, 466–7, 469–5, 477, 479–82, 484, 489–90, 493, 496, 505, 508–9
- Sargon legend 6
- scripturalization 317, 319, 323, 335–6, 424, 461
- Septuagint 203, 209, 237, 255, 266, 279, 361, 380, 411, 438, 445, 494
- sexuality/sexual 156, 166, 305, 308–9, 366, 371
- Shechem/Shechemites 190, 430–1
- Shittim 9, 25, 60, 69, 126, 159, 164–5, 167–8, 194–7, 365, 414, 426
- Sihon 30, 96–7, 114, 117, 134, 141, 181, 206–7
- Simeon/Simeonites 155, 359, 407, 430
- sin 43, 123, 136, 156, 200, 226–32, 246, 267, 272, 284, 295, 299, 302–3, 315, 324, 343–4, 347, 350–5, 367–8, 383, 403
- Sinai 3, 5–9, 16, 25–6, 37–40, 51, 53–5, 58, 62, 64–81, 88–9, 96, 99–100, 104–5, 107–13, 115, 121, 123, 128, 130, 189–90, 203, 208, 211–3, 216, 255, 260, 289, 292–3, 295, 301, 315, 318, 324–5, 332, 340–1, 353, 358, 381–3, 395, 399, 401–5, 408, 412, 422–3, 425–6, 430, 442–3, 445, 447–8, 452, 454, 471, 473, 480, 483–4, 502, 507
- sin-offering 226–32, 241, 267, 272, 288, 383, 403, 445, 454–8, 479
- skin 235, 239–40, 251–2, 258, 260, 267, 298
- sorcery/sorcerer 11, 35, 162, 184
- sotah 73, 154, 297, 304, 324, 327, 368–71
- soul 242–4, 286–7, 312–3
- source criticism 2, 3, 6, 11, 86, 121, 133, 138, 141
- space/spatiality 5, 17, 23, 35–39, 41, 54, 56, 58, 61, 63–7, 122–4, 126–31, 141, 144, 148–9, 153, 175, 233, 237–9, 247–8, 257, 260, 262, 269–72, 281, 287–8, 291, 293–4, 299, 307, 311, 313, 315, 327, 339, 345–6, 355, 401, 472, 502
- speech-introduction formula 32, 58–9, 71, 124–5, 182, 268
- spy/spies 6, 9, 25, 30, 33, 57, 78, 96–7, 99–100, 103, 106, 108, 113–6, 122, 128, 138, 141, 189, 193, 205, 214, 343, 354, 385, 407, 413–4, 497
- standardization 13, 15, 19, 144–8, 153–4
- structure 2, 4, 8–9, 23–5, 53–8, 65–8, 70, 72, 81, 87, 102, 110, 122, 128–31, 141, 198, 233
- subordination 3, 15, 42–3, 50, 72, 109, 112, 289, 349, 384, 388, 402, 408, 410, 413–5, 417, 428, 453, 465–6, 470–1, 475–6, 478, 480, 484, 495, 507
- succession 14–5, 54, 66, 79, 130, 147, 300, 333, 348, 382–3, 387–91, 394–6, 401–2, 408–11, 413–7, 422–3, 450, 457, 494–5, 504–8
- Supplementary Hypothesis 4, 86, 88, 435
- tabernacle 58, 63, 73–5, 78, 112, 143, 146, 150, 152–3, 225, 232, 246, 254, 256, 267, 291, 295, 307, 333, 342, 347, 367, 384, 408, 413, 446–8, 466,

- 468, 471, 474, 479–80, 489, 491, 498, 503, 505
- taboo 175, 253, 261, 283, 314, 371, 446, 472, 505
- Tell Dēr 'Allā* 163–4, 167–9, 173–4, 187
- temple 10, 17, 143, 146–7, 258–9, 281, 290–1, 297, 319, 328–9, 332, 335, 368, 399, 418, 419–21, 425, 429, 469, 475–8
- Tetrateuch 79, 81, 95, 102, 116, 128, 189, 403, 496, 509
- textuality 45, 50, 261, 290–1, 296, 320–2, 327–8, 375, 409, 418, 420, 488, 49–6
- textualization 13, 34, 144–5, 319–23, 327–8, 330–3, 335–6, 452
- theocracy/theocratic 4, 16, 66, 99–100, 343, 416, 418, 422, 439, 460, 467, 485, 507
- time 12, 24, 27–8, 32, 36–40, 42, 45, 50, 54, 56, 64–5, 123, 148, 238, 248, 262, 269, 271–2, 281, 288, 297, 340, 385, 396, 401, 419, 422, 502
- tithe 14, 148, 150, 278, 466, 469
- Torah 10, 13, 16–7, 19, 26, 34, 42, 45–6, 50–1, 56, 90–5, 98, 100, 102, 104, 107, 117, 119, 146, 158, 318–9, 331, 334, 336–8, 348–50, 353, 398–400, 404–5, 421, 423, 444–63
- trade 210, 212–3, 215, 221
- tradition 1, 6, 8, 10, 15–6, 19, 26, 317, 319, 321, 324, 326, 338
- Transjordan(ians) 10–1, 17, 25, 54, 59, 65, 66, 79, 88, 97, 99, 108, 117, 119, 144, 157, 166, 175, 193, 206, 210–2, 217, 220–2, 233, 253, 318, 334, 414
- Triateuch 88, 90, 100, 102–4, 107, 109, 112, 119, 190, 488–9, 509–10
- tribes/tribal 10–1, 14, 17–8, 37, 43, 50, 54, 74, 78, 94, 148–9, 153, 212, 215, 219–22, 233, 291, 293, 318, 337, 348, 358, 362, 373–5, 383–5, 397, 401, 406–9, 417, 431, 461, 498–99, 504
- Tritoteuch 3, *see also Triateuch*
- trumpets 38, 73, 75–7, 340, 493, 504
- twelve-tribe system 10, 17–8, 50, 54, 94, 148, 153, 233, 318, 337, 358, 362, 375, 383–5, 401, 406–8, 461, 497–99
- Urim and Thummim 349, 453, 490, 507
- utopia(n) 9, 11, 322, 399, 416, 441–2
- variation/variance/variety 10, 13, 15, 19, 145–6, 317, 322–3, 325, 334–8, 444
- vows 12, 18, 32, 42, 78, 105, 132, 137, 154, 206–7, 225, 229, 249–50, 293–95, 310–11, 313–4, 324, 327, 342, 368–9
- war 30, 34, 44, 97, 155, 158, 160–3, 175, 186, 219–21, 225, 246, 248, 252, 271, 274–5, 371, 477, 504, 507
- water 30, 43, 68, 96–7, 106, 136, 140–1, 193, 229, 241, 246, 251–2, 255, 268, 269–70, 272–3, 281, 284, 306–7, 309, 403
- wave-offering 455, 467, 479–80, 482
- wife 18–9, 68, 99, 202–3, 209, 214, 305–9, 324, 357, 359–63, 368, 370–2, 375, 457
- wilderness 1, 3, 7–9, 17, 19, 24–5, 27, 37, 40, 50, 57–8, 60, 64–5, 67–8, 72, 100, 106–7, 112–3, 125–6, 128–9, 133–4, 136, 138, 148, 181, 189–90, 192, 195, 198–206, 233–34, 339, 341, 345, 349, 353–4, 396, 401, 409, 412, 419, 423, 490, 493, 496, 507, *see also desert*
- wilderness journey 5, 128, 132, 140, 190, 193, 291, 473, 480
- women 12, 18–9, 155–6, 158–9, 162–3, 165–6, 168, 171, 173, 210, 221, 239, 252, 293, 298–9, 302, 305–10, 314, 357–73, 375, 426
- wood 33, 41, 342, 347
- Yahwist 2, 3, 84–5, 88, 96–8, 104, 114, 116–7, 121, 133–4, 138, 141, 189–90, 208, 436
- Yehowist 98, 133–4, 141, 159–60, 190, 208, 366, 436
- Yehûd/Yehûdites 10, 93–4, 154, 278, 318–9, 336–8, 398, 409, 420
- Yom Kippur 54, 323, 339, 507
- Zadok/Zadokites 14, 96, 145, 337, 432, 465
- zeal/zealous 66, 365, 367, 387, 395, 405, 413, 427–8, 431, 459, 500, 503
- Zelophehad's daughters 35, 39, 119, 123, 130, 344, 348, 368, 373–5, 411
- Zimri 36, 155, 159, 210, 226, 357, 365, 407, 426, 428
- Zipporah 68, 214, 359–60, 362, 364
- Zoroastrianism 244, 258, 283, 286, 311, 458