CHAPTER 6

DIVINE HOSPITALITY IN EXODUS THROUGH DEUTERONOMY

Having applied the “GOD IS A HOST” model to the book of Genesis, this chapter will consider its explanatory function regarding portions from the rest of the Pentateuch. Unlike the material in Genesis, the object of God’s favor is now a nation which at the opening of the book of Exodus stood in great need of intervention. The lifestyle of slavery soon gave way to life in the wilderness. It was here that Israel’s identity as a nation was forged primarily by its experiences with God and within the community itself. The motif of divine hospitality is evident in the mode of Israel’s wilderness existence as well as at the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant. Furthermore, as covenant Lord and divine Host, Yahweh set down regulations for the behavior of his guests. Moses assured Israel of Yahweh’s continuing favor in response to their obedience and warned of Yahweh’s wrath as contingent upon their disobedience. As the guests of God, Israel both experienced divine hospitality and were tutored in the manners and customs appropriate to its continuing life together with Yahweh.

A. God as the Host of Israel in the Wilderness

When the descendants of Abraham had grown in number and experienced deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses, they entered a prolonged period of wandering in the wilderness until
eventually crossing the Jordan River into Canaan, their new territory and “Promised Land.” During this time, the pentateuchal narrative indicates that they were sustained with food and water through the miraculous provision of Yahweh himself. As aliens in a hostile environment, Israel (with varying degrees of willingness) assumed the role of a guest, becoming totally dependent on their divine Host.

In order to appreciate the contribution of this material to the topic of divine hospitality, this section will note the instances of several divine gifts and consider their placement as a whole in the context of the wilderness phase of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. Afterward, it will show how these non-metaphorical traditions provided a point of reference for subsequent hermeneutical transformations.

1. God “Spreads a Table”

As part of the renewal of the covenant just prior to Israel’s entry into Canaan, Moses presented a brief historical survey of the previous forty years. A prominent feature was Yahweh’s self-revelation to Israel in the fact of his provision of food and other basic needs. Deuteronomy 29:5–6[4–5] reads,

> And I led you for forty years in the wilderness—your garments did not wear off from upon you, nor did your sandals wear from your feet. Bread you did not eat and wine or beer you did not drink so that you might know that I am Yahweh, your God.

The purpose of these acts was that Israel would recognize Yahweh as its God and the purpose of this discourse was so that Israel would carefully adhere
to the words of the covenant.\(^1\) This non-metaphorical historical reminder was followed by a poetic song of praise recited by Moses. Deuteronomy 32:13-14 is saturated with metaphor and reads,

\[
\text{He [Yahweh] caused him [Israel] to ride on the heights\(^2\) of the earth, and he fed him\(^3\) with the fruit of the field, and he nourished him with honey from the crag, and with oil from the flinty rock, with curd from the herd and milk from the flock, with the fat of rams and lambs, with rams from the breed of Bashan, and with he-goats, With the finest of grains of wheat, and with the blood of grapes, you drank wine.}
\]

The Psalter also used metaphorical language to describe this time, placing these words in the mouth of the murmuring Israelites: “Can God arrange a table in the wilderness?” (Ps 78:19). Evidently, Yahweh did just that by providing water, manna, and birds (Ps 78:20-29). The historical foundations of these memories are recorded in the books of Exodus and Numbers.

Yahweh provided manna (חֵ֣ם) beginning in the Desert of Sin (Exod 16; cf. Num 11:4-9).\(^4\) Yahweh also provided water at least three times: at Marah where

\(^1\) In Deut 29:9[8], waw-relative with the suffix conjugation of פֹּלַשׁ marks an entreaty consecutive to a list of past acts (IBHS 32.2.3d). The sense of the passages is that the gracious acts of Yahweh which “you have seen” (29:2-3[1-2]) form the basis for the encouragement which follows in 29:9[8]: “So observe the words of this covenant.”

\(^2\) Following the Kethiv, vocalized as יָשָׁבַת.

\(^3\) Reading נְאָיָה in harmony with the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX.

\(^4\) The historical identification of the manna is uncertain, though the most common parallel is to secretions from the tamarisk (Tamarisk gallica) as well as the Sinai manna (Alhagi maurorum) and the flowering ash (Fraxinus ornus) (Joel C. Slayton, “Manna,” in ABD, vol. 4 [New York: Doubleday, 1992] 511. See also F. S. Bodenheimer, “The Manna of Sinai,” BA 10 [1947] 1-6). The quality and quantity of these naturally-occurring substances, however, falls
bitter water turned to sweet (Exod 15:22–25a), from the rock at Rephidim (Exod 17:1–7), and from the rock at Kadesh (Num 20:8–11). Israel also camped by twelve springs at Elim which may be considered a non-miraculous yet still fully divine instance of provision (Exod 15:27). Twice Yahweh provided meat: once with the manna (Exod 16) and then at Kibroth Hattaavah (Num 11:18–34). These moments of dependence on God contrast with Israel's stated lack of need to draw from the resources of the inhospitable Edomites (Num 20:17–20; Deut 2:2–6) and Amorites (Num 21:21–23; Deut 2:26–30).

The manna which could be picked right off of the ground without the labor associated with planting, cultivation, as well as weed and pest control mirrored the free fruit of Eden. This food was essential for survival and just as fruit tends to have a relatively short “shelf-life,” so did the manna, not lasting overnight.5 It is typical of life in the wilderness that instances of divine provision of food not only give Israel an opportunity to respond well, but also short of the supernatural dimensions of the biblical descriptions. Further investigation of the subject of manna must move beyond the issue of historicity and consider literary traditions and biblical inter-textuality (See Bruce J. Malina, The Palestinian Manna Tradition: The Manna Tradition in the Palestinian Targums and Its Relationship to the New Testament Writings, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Späteren Judentums und des Urchristentums 7 [Leiden: Brill, 1968]; J. Coppens, “Les Traditions relatives à la manne dans Exode xvi,” Estudio Eclesiásticos 34 [1960] 473–89; Peder Borgen, Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo, NovTSup 10 [Leiden: Brill, 1965]; and Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974] 270–304).

5 Edwin Yamauchi’s study of food that was apportioned daily surveyed ancient Near Eastern and Greek texts, revealing the following themes: 1) food is often spoken of as apportioned, 2) this apportionment is often designated as “daily,” 3) the bread or food is designated as that necessary for existence, and 4) the “wise” man is content with this amount of food (“The ‘Daily Bread’ Motif in Antiquity,” WTJ 28/2 [1966] 153–54).
badly. The material in Numbers 11 is thematically linked around the themes of complaint and judgment and the description of manna (vv. 7–9) is little more than an explanatory gloss on the word “manna” which is part of the objection raised by the dissatisfied Israelites: “But now our appetite is dried up; there is nothing for our eyes [to see] except manna!” (v. 6). In Exodus 16 the focus is rather on Yahweh’s generosity. The majority of the community apparently followed the instructions of Moses and so behaved appropriately as the guests of God. But the minority, simply referred to as “some of the people” (v. 27, µ[ hAnî) went out on the Sabbath expecting to gather the daily manna. This group of greedy “guests” may have overlapped with those incited Moses to anger by keeping some of the manna overnight (v. 20). Thomas Mann characterized God’s generosity and the improper response as follows:

The manna story thus depicts a God who provides for the people’s needs, and a people who are not satisfied with that provision because it is beyond their control. They are too insecure to rely on “daily bread,” so they gather more than they need, hoard it even though it is perishable, and work to get more when they already have enough.6

2. The Wilderness as Locus of the Host-Guest Relationship

As a literary motif, the subject of the desert has come under close scrutiny.7 In biblical theology, the desert motif contains a network of


associated themes: testing, theophany and covenant, as well as murmuring and abundant provision. Of this last component, Talmon observed,

YHWH provides Israel with sustenance and guides his people in the chaotic wilderness. In his benevolence he shields them from danger, although the wanderings in the desert had been appointed by him as a punishment for Israel. But the people, stubborn and without remorse, continue flagrantly to disobey the Lord and to kindle his anger. Worse than in the future days of the Judges, the desert period is typified by Israel's wickedness, by an uninterrupted sequence of transgressions.

The Psalms and pre-exilic prophets use the historiographical narratives of the Pentateuch to “capture the quintessence of the trek experience” and to present it “as the typological crystallization of the immanent relation between

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8 I think Talmon is correct in refusing to recognize the desert as an ideal. He wrote, “A close reading of the pertinent texts reveals that neither in its space nor its time dimension is the desert considered a value per se. It is not presented as a goal towards which Israelite society strove in past history, nor which it expects to attain in some future age, as one school of biblical theologians would assert” (“Har and Midbār,” 135). As representative of these theologians, James Houston supplements biblical portrayal of the desert with those from church tradition and personal experience. For him, the desert is seen as the sphere for renewal, for the simplification of life, a place where people can meet God as the ultimate succour. It points persons of faith away from the self-reliance of knowledge mastered to the deepening mysteries of life, calling them to go forward in faith (“Desert: A Motif of Spiritual Freedom,” 2–6). Although not a mirror-image reflection of the Bible's view of the desert, I find this modern appropriation of the theme to be both helpful and welcome in this current busy and materialistic environment.

9 Talmon, “Har and Midbār,” 129.
the nation and God” (Deut 32; Ps 78; 106). Yet the desert is hardly an ideal place. As Clines observed, the pentateuchal theme of relationship is especially strong in the book of Exodus where it is seriously called into question by Israel’s repeated murmurings.

The desert or wilderness is a particularly fitting location to display the hospitality of Yahweh toward Israel as a wandering alien in great need. But even though the relationship that existed there between Yahweh and his people, the location is not paradigmatic, nor does it stand as a goal toward which the rest of the history of redemption moves. Rather, the wilderness as a location is the antithesis of the mountain motif. What ties the two together is the faithful hospitality of God. From the mountain-location of Eden through the wilderness and on to the eschatological mountain of God, there is abundance from the divine Host.

In descriptions of the future, Israel does not head into an idealized desert that will be devoid of murmuring. Instead, God brings Israel to the mountain which is the scene of victorious justice and lavish celebration. Again, Talmon notes,

On the mountains of Israel the final battle against Gog will be fought

10 Ibid., 128.

11 David J. A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, JSOTSup 10 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 48. Instances of Israel’s murmuring include Exodus 15:24; 16:3; 17:2–3; Numbers 11:4–5; 20:2–5; and 21:5.

12 Genesis does not explicitly locate the garden on a “mountain” or “hill” but implies as much in the flow of its four rivers away from Eden in four different directions. The language of Ezekiel 28 taps into this imagery by placing Eden on the “mountain of God” (vv. 14, 16).
(Ezek. 38ff.). Then (as in the past) YHWH will defeat the nations upon the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14.3ff.; cf. Joel 4.1–17). In these battle scenes, where the wrath of God is turned against the nations, ‘the mountains shall flow with their blood’ (Isa. 34.2ff.), an antithesis to the image of the ‘hills that flow with milk’. On this canvas of future events is portrayed as well the great banquet that God will prepare upon his mountain for all nations (Isa. 25.6–8; Ezek. 39.17–20).13

3. Spiritualizing Divine Hospitality

Israel’s historical memory of life with Yahweh in the wilderness provided a ground of hope for future interventions, much the way Israel trusted their Creator to again bring forth life. Brueggemann observed that from any historical moment, Israel could look both back and ahead.

The God of Israel is peculiarly present in wilderness circumstances in transformative ways. The narrative testimony of Israel responds to such acts and gifts with wonder and gratitude. In turn, these narrative testimonies evoke and authorize other petitions for like action from God in new circumstances of threat.14

One instance of this situation was when Israel stood near the border of Canaan with the wilderness to their back. Having urged Israel to remember the past, Moses told Israel that Yahweh would lead them into a good land brimming with streams, springs, wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olives oil, honey, and bread (Deut 8:7–9). Then he warned Israel not to forget Yahweh after they had “eaten” (יָאֵכְלָה lka) and been “satisfied” (יָסָב bכ, 8:10). Brueggemann noted that this verbal pairing (which also exists in Exodus 16:8) intensifies the sense of eating due to Yahweh’s provision.


The two verbs together, “eat and be satisfied,” affirm Yahweh’s extravagant generosity, which gives abundantly beyond Israel’s need, and Israel’s complete delight in Yahweh’s abundance. Yahweh is the God who performs in situations of hazardous scarcity in order to generate abundance.15

a) Life-Giving Food

More specifically, the topic of manna invited transformation.16 Deuteronomy 8:2–3 offered Israel insight into the pedagogical purposes of Yahweh.

Remember the entire way which Yahweh your God led you these forty years in the desert so as to humble you and to test you to know what was in your heart, if you would keep his commands or not. And he humbled you, and made you hungry and fed you the manna which you did not know about, nor did your fathers know, so as to teach you that not by bread alone does man live, but by everything which comes from the mouth of Yahweh does man live.

The essential idea of manna as food from God experienced a transformation based on the understanding that the Torah was also Israel’s gift from God. Illustrating the genius of haggadic exegesis, Michael Fishbane wrote,

In this way the paraenesis seeks to redirect the attention of its audience to a deeper continuity of divine sustenance than was immediately apparent, and to the manifold ways that sustenance may be manifested. For far from it being a natural bounty sent by a supernatural agency, Moses teaches the people that the manna is essentially a supernatural gift—a concretization of the gracious divine will, just like the tablets of the law.17

15 Ibid., 203.

16 See the study by Malina, Palestinian Manna Tradition. He notes that the idea of manna is never used in haggadic exegesis before Deuteronomy 8:3, 16.

b) Life-Giving Water

The abundance of water in the wilderness is a reflection of the freely-flowing water of Eden. Indeed, the importance of water as an image of life and fertility is difficult to overestimate whether in reference to biblical literature or that of the ancient Near East.\footnote{See Propp, Water in the Wilderness, especially the overview on pp. 10–13.} The miraculous flow of water in the wilderness also anticipated the freely-available water of Canaan. As territory, this land was not only a gift—it was also a bearer of gifts. In a short exhortation for Israel to remember Yahweh, Moses informed the people that the land they were entering would be furnished with ready-made cities, houses, pantries, vineyards, olive groves as well as “hewn cisterns which you did not hew out” (Deut 6:10–12). The same God who made water flow from the natural rock for the first generation in the wilderness would give to the second generation water from the hewn rock of the Promised Land.

These historical instances of divinely-given water provide the basis for secondary literary settings in which the ideas associated with water are transformed and applied to new situations. Isaiah, for example, uses water-related images from Israel’s wilderness period to depict Yahweh’s future care for Israel ( Isa 35:6–7; 41:17–18; 43:19–20). An example of the motif of well-water being spiritualized comes from the prophet Jeremiah.\footnote{See Michael Fishbane, “The Well of Living Water: A Biblical Motif and Its Ancient Transformations,” in “Sha’arei Talmön”: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmön, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov with the assistance of Weston W. Fields, 3–16 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 5–6.} Based on the

\footnote{See Propp, Water in the Wilderness, especially the overview on pp. 10–13.}

life-giving property of water, the prophet calls Yahweh himself “the Fount of living water” (Jer 2:13; 17:13) and then metaphorically likens apostasy to the digging of new wells in strenuous rejection of the ones given by Yahweh.

In summary, in the wilderness Yahweh filled the role of an able and concerned host, providing for Israel’s every need. Israel’s behavior as a guest left much to be desired but the historical imprint of this experience nevertheless provided a basis for perpetual praise regarding Yahweh’s goodness. Beyond this, Israel’s experience of dependence on Yahweh in the wilderness inspired later believers toward Torah-centered piety.

B. God as the Host of the Elders at Sinai

Exodus 24 contains the last of the genuinely anthropomorphic stories of the Bible and from this point on, Scripture presents Yahweh in figurative terms.20 The meal which Yahweh shares with the elders of Israel in 24:9–11 is set in the context of history and constitutes a fixed traditum subject to the traditio of the Prophets and Writings, culminating most notably in the concept of an eschatological banquet.21

1. Translation and Analysis of Exodus 24:9–11

Exodus 24 is a narrative account of the confirmation of the Sinaitic

20 Nelly Stienstra, YHWH is the Husband of His People: Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with Special Reference to Translation (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993) 58.

21 For an explanation of these Latin terms and their importance for appreciating the dynamic of Jewish exegesis, see Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel, 6-19.
covenant. Along with the narratives of 19:1–25, 20:18–21, and chapters 32—34, it punctuates the legal material of Exodus 19—40, resulting in a regular alternation between law and narrative. Fretheim observed that this structural pattern prevented law from degenerating into legalism by infusing it with a personal character and set forth an integral link between divine initiative and human response.²² Having received the ten commandments (20:1–17) and the covenant code of 20:22–23:33, Moses together with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel were summoned to ascend Sinai. Following the setting up of twelve stone pillars, Moses presented offerings, publicly read of the “Book of the Covenant” (24:7), and sprinkled blood on the people who had unanimously consented to obey everything Yahweh had said. Then the group of seventy plus four men ascended Sinai to meet with Yahweh (24:9–11).²³

Afterward, God summoned Moses alone to remain on the mountain. For six

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²² Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 203. Nahum Sarna has also noted that the vocabulary of Exodus 24 frames the unit started in chapter 19. Each chapter has seven instances of the key stem עב (“to speak”); chapter 19 has seven instances of עב (“to go down”) which are complemented by seven instances of its antonym עב (“to go up”) in chapter 24 (Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1991] 150).

²³ J. B. Lloyd noted the mention of “seventy” as a parallel to the seventy sons of Asherah that Baal invited (KTU 1.4 vi 45f) as well as the seventy “bulls” and eighty “gazelles” that Keret asked to attend a banquet (KTU 1.15 iv 6 and parallels). Lloyd summarized, “The fact that we encounter this group of seventy elders only in Ex 24:9–11 as part of the oldest stratum of the tradition, in which we have a group of seventy who go up to the mountain and eat and drink with the high god, gives this story a remarkable similarity in detail with the banquet theme found in Ugaritic literature” (“The Banquet Theme in Ugaritic Narrative,” UF 22 [1990] 188).
days Moses dwelt within the theophanic cloud which covered Sinai and on the seventh day, Yahweh initiated a forty-day legislative session. During this time, Moses was totally dependent of God’s sustaining power, not eating or drinking (Exod 34:28). In short, Moses was Yahweh’s sole guest.

Exodus 24:9–11 is of immediate significance to the topic of divine hospitality.

9.  

And Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy from the elders of Israel went up

24 The six-plus-one pattern which recalls the structure of creation has been noted and discussed by Duane A. Garrett (Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991] 193) and Jeffrey Niehaus who wrote, “The six-day period and the seventh-day calling of Moses were meant to communicate symbolically to Israel the reality of the new creation which Yahweh was accomplishing by the Exodus events and the Mosaic covenant. The new creation was liberated Israel” (God at Sinai: Covenant & Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology, ed. Willem VanGemeren and Tremper Longman III [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995] 198–99, noting that the connection between creation and redemption is also affirmed in Isaiah 43:15–17).

10. "And they saw the God of Israel. Now under his feet was like the work of a pavement of sapphire and like the very heavens for purity.

11. But against the nobles of the sons of Israel he did not extend his hand. And they saw God, and they ate and they drank.

a) The presence of God (24:10b–11a)

Although the text clearly says that the men “saw God,” about half of this section is devoted to the appearance of the pavement on which God stood. This concern was shared by Isaiah and Ezekiel in their explanations of divine encounter. Apparently, this sight was one step removed from beholding the

26 Interclausal waw before a non-verb is disjunctive; in this case it specifies explanatory circumstances (IBHS 39.2.3).

27 Or lapis lazuli.

28 The word μξ[ means “bone” but is used metaphorically for substance (GKC §139g).

29 This disjunctive waw introduces a contrast with the preceding situation (IBHS 39.2.3b).

30 The word μξα is a hapax legomenon which is apparently related to the Arabic ‘asīl meaning “well rooted” and therefore of noble descent (Kenneth T. Aitken, “μξα [# 722],” in NIDOTTE, vol. 1, 485–86 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997] 485).

31 The last two verbs form a hendiadys meaning “to have a meal” (Gen 24:54; 25:34; 26:30; 2 Sam 11:13; 1 Kgs 13:19; 19:6, 8; 2 Kgs 7:8; 9:34; and 1 Chr 29:22).

32 On the parallels of this account to Ugaritic descriptions of the divine
fullness of God himself.

What Moses and his companions experience is a theophany of the Presence of God, not a vision of his person, and what they see, bowed before even that awesome reality, is what could be seen from a position of obeisant prostration, the surface on which his Presence offered itself.\(^33\)

This proximity to God naturally called the safety of the men into question and v. 11a is careful to assure the readers that by God’s own choice, this meeting was non-lethal, especially in the light of Exodus 19:12.

**b) The vision of God (24:11b–a)**

It is difficult to tell precisely what the men saw. The text uses two verbs of perception (ḥar and ḫj) to describe what happened. I am inclined to construe them as synonyms that belong quite naturally in this anthropomorphic story as opposed to adopting Child’s view that ḫj in this instance is a technical term for prophetic clairvoyance, thus specifying a special category of non-visual perception.\(^34\) The prophetic aspect is not integral to ḫj and is entirely lacking in the psalmists’ expectations of “seeing” Yahweh’s “face” (Ps 11:7; 17:15; cf. Ps 27:4; 63:2[3]; cf. Matt 5:8). Whatever the case, this degree of closeness to God is practically unequaled in the OT and stands as a high ideal.\(^35\) Indeed, it bears a protean quality. McCarthy commented,
The picture of God in His splendid place calls to mind Is 6:1, but it lacks the specific reference to the paraphernalia of the Temple which marks the Isaian vision. Despite the mention of the jewels the directness and simplicity of the passage is in sharp contrast to the tortured magnificence of the enthroned God in Ezekiel’s vision. . . . We are closer to the simplicity of Yahwe walking in His garden, which had its jewels too. \(^{36}\)

Brueggemann observed that not only was Israel called to hear God, it was also called see God.

The assertion of Exod 24:9–11 does not tell us what the leadership of Israel saw. But there is no doubt that this testimony means to say that one of the characteristic markings of +Israel [sic] is to be in Yahweh’s presence, to see God, to commune with Yahweh directly, face to face. This encounter at the mountain, moreover, is not instrumental, not for the sake of something else. It is a moment of wondrous abiding in the Presence. \(^{37}\)

If hearing God raises the issue of ethics, then seeing God highlights the importance of aesthetics. Just as the appreciation of Yahweh’s righteousness was an incentive to obedience and justice; admiration of Yahweh’s beauty was an incentive to communion and imitation of his communicable attributes. It is quite fitting that the elder’s close experience with God and Moses’ forty-day stay stand together at the head of Yahweh’s instructions regarding the tabernacle as the very place where he would “dwell” and so be with his people (Exod 29:45). The language of fellowship surrounding the descriptions of the tabernacle is an uncontrived extension of the paradigmatic scene in Exodus

\(^{36}\) McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant (2\(^{nd}\) ed.), 265.

24:9–11. Just as Yahweh hosted the elders as representatives of the nation, so Yahweh would allow himself to be hosted by them, not for a single day but on a continuing basis. Brueggemann offered this portrayal of the tabernacle's significance.

The tabernacle is made into a suitable and appropriate place for Yahweh’s visible presence by the practice of a beauty commensurate with Yahweh’s character. It is possible to host the holiness of Yahweh, and in this tradition the purpose of life is communion with Yahweh, a genuine, real, and palpable presence.38

c) The meal with God (24:11b)

The account of the elders’ meal with God is so brief that it practically defies description. Beside the fact that they were invited to eat and drink on a special occasion, other matters such as seating arrangements, menu, and length of the feast are out of the question. It should be noted that Nicholson denies that 24:11 even makes reference to a meal at all. Rather, he holds that the combination of “eating” and “drinking” is a standard word pair used in parallelism and simply indicates the general process of living one’s life. In this case, it would mean no more than that the elders survived the otherwise lethal presence of God.39 Given the theological impact of this text on Israel’s thinking, such a view is extreme.

But there is some doubt as to whether the elders ate “with” God or merely in God’s presence. The text does not supply the prepositional phrase

38 Ibid., 426.

that would be necessary to clarify the situation. In addition, the verbs of v. 11b do not carry an explicit subject. Since both the elders (as \text{אֲכֵלֹנָם yəqəla} and God are in close antecedent proximity (\text{בָּאָה} closer), the third-person masculine plural verbs could be understood as pertaining to the first party or both. The overt theophanic language of the passage favors the view that God and the elders shared a meal, but the case cannot be proven. It is clear, however, that God was their Host.

2. The Meal as Part of the Covenant Ceremony Complex

a) The role of the meal

The association of shared meals and events of special significance is well-established and their pairing in the OT is consistent with what we know of the ancient Near East. In the OT a meal can serve as the occasion for recognizing a new level of relationship as in the case with Jethro’s confession about Yahweh’s greatness (Exod 18:12). A meal can also serve as the setting for the initiation or proposal of a future covenantal relationship as with Samuel’s anointing of Saul (1 Sam 9:24) and Abner’s suggestion to make a covenant establishing David as king (2 Sam 3:20–22).

Less common is the use of a meal to ratify a covenant.\textsuperscript{40} In the case of the covenant between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen 26:30–31), ratification was accomplished by oath plus a feast (\text{חֶטָּא הָאֱלֹהִים} Jacob and Laban ratified their covenant by heaping stones as a perpetual witness, eating by the heap, taking

\textsuperscript{40} The covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 21:22–34) involved a gift of lambs, but no meal.
an oath, offering sacrifices, and sharing a meal (Gen 31:44–54). Even though the practice of sealing a covenant with a meal is uncharacteristic of ancient Near Eastern treaties which tend to favor the oath for this purpose, the covenant meal of Exodus 24 appears to be an authentic ancient rite.41

Köhler, however, has pressed this issue too hard in his etymological derivation of τυρίβ (“covenant”) from the verb ήρμ (“to eat”), going so far as to claim that the idea of “cutting” a covenant had to do with the cutting up of food for the meal.42 James Barr’s refutation of this claim is cogent and convincing.43 It is likewise unnecessary to prove the association of meals and covenants by appealing to the description of a treaty as a “covenant of salt” (יָנְחָלַיִּב, Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5; cf. Lev 2:13) as if the expression depended on a synecdoche of the part (“salt”) for the whole (“meal”). Rather, the idiom merely conveys the idea of permanence.44

Whereas the association of meal and covenant in Exodus 24 is clear, the precise role of the meal in the covenant-ratification process is not. Both McConville and Baltzer regard the meal as an act of ratification or

41 McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant (2nd ed.), 254.


44 McConville, “τυρίβ (#1382),” 750.
confirmation. Hillers is less confident about assigning the meal such a momentous role. Niehaus preferred to call the meal a covenant “sign” and type of the eschatological banquet and the Last Supper. William Dumbrell denies any power of the meal to actually ratify the covenant but nevertheless affirms the significance of this particular covenant feast.

We can hardly see this meal as covenant ratification since that has already occurred. Yet the association in the ancient world of a meal with covenant conclusion was fairly common, presumably as an indication of the close nature of the resulting new relationship. But more capital should probably be made of the extraordinary character of this meeting. The vision of God received by the representative seventy elders is unique in the earlier part of the Old Testament and this meal on the mountain seems clearly an anticipation of such projected eschatological meals in the later Old Testament (cf. Isa. 25:6–8), meals which are also so much a part of the New Testament end-time expectation (cf. Rev. 19:7–9).

The precise role of the meal on Sinai is therefore difficult to specify, but ultimately not necessary in order to establish its distinctiveness and potency as a theological statement.


49 With this claim, I oppose the view of Jean Ska that Exodus 24:9–11 was composed in the post-exilic period and functions to confirm the authority of the priesthood and elders of Israel together as legitimate successors of Moses (“Le repas de Ex 24,11,” Bib 74/3 [1993] 305–327). Likewise, I take issue with Ernest Nicholson who tipped the chronological scale the other way, alleging that the tradition contained in 24:9–11 is of very great antiquity and associated only with theophany, neither being concerned with nor implying the existence of a
b) The significance of the meal

The covenant meal on Sinai is important for its function within Exodus 19—24 because of its significance as an indication of the new level relationship brought about by the covenant. Fretheim noted, “Both stages—the blood sprinkling and the meal fellowship—have the common themes of communion, real divine presence, and the sharing of life in and through concrete earthly realities.”50 But lest the nature of this relationship become sentimentalized, it is important to observe that Israel’s initial experience of theophany at Sinai was so vividly frightening that they begged Moses to act as a mediator, buffering them from such awesome contact with God (Exod 20:18–21; Deut 18:14–16). McCarthy noted that in this particular context, the meal functioned as more than a mere sign.

After the terrifying manifestation of Yahwe with all His frightening attributes there came a meal to symbolize the community between God and Israel. The people might well be in need of reassurance that this mighty God was friendly. The meal was not merely a sign that the people accepted Yahwe but also a guarantee that He had not come with His awesome presence and His imperious demands to destroy them but to bring them to Himself.51

The meal at Sinai thus did more than to confirm the covenant or even set a benchmark of intimacy. In graphic terms, it cast Yahweh and Israel (as represented by Moses and the other leaders) in the roles of generous host and grateful guest. Audience with Yahweh would never come at the expense of


50 Fretheim, Exodus, 255.

commitment to obey, but it would definitely come and always take place within
the context of a covenantal relationship initiated by God who chose to reveal
himself not only in deafening thunder and lightening (Exod 19:16) but also in
the din of table fellowship (Exod 24:9-11).

C. Dietary Regulations from God the Host

One component of the Abrahamic promise is the assurance that Yahweh
would be “with” Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:2-3; 26:3; 28:15; 48:21).
The book of Exodus narrates the initiation of that divine-human relationship;
the book of Leviticus stipulates the terms of its maintenance.\textsuperscript{52} Leviticus 26:12
states the promised result of Israel’s obedience: “I will walk about in your midst
and I will be your God and you will be my people.”\textsuperscript{53}

Consistent with Clines’ understanding of Leviticus stated above,
Averbeck claimed that “its central theological concern is the presence of God in
the midst of Israel.”\textsuperscript{54} The continuance of this presence is conditioned on
Israel’s maintenance of holiness as a fitting expression of God’s nature. The
extensive and diverse behavioral regulations are united by this one command:

\textsuperscript{52} Clines, Theme of the Pentateuch, 47, 50.

\textsuperscript{53} Gordon Wenham noted that the verb \textsuperscript{[1]} describes the divine
presence in Eden as well as in Israel’s midst (“Sanctuary Symbolism in the
Garden of Eden Story,” in “I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood:” Ancient
Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1—11, ed. Richard S.
Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, 399-404, vol. 4, Sources for Biblical and
with reference to Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14[15]; and 2 Sam 7:6-7).

\textsuperscript{54} Richard E. Averbeck, “Leviticus: Theology of,” in NIDOTTE, vol. 4,
907-23 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 908.
“Be holy, because I, Yahweh your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). Brueggemann affirmed this essential connection between holiness and presence when he wrote,

Israel is to order its life so that it is qualified for communion with Yahweh, even as it is to practice justice for the sake of the community. In this tradition of obligation, the purpose of Israel’s life is to host the holiness of Yahweh.55

The concept of “hosting the holiness of Yahweh”56 rings true with the substance of Old Testament theology. As recipients of God’s favor, Israel could never initiate hospitality toward Yahweh but out of respect and gratitude could respond to that gracious divine initiative with behavior appropriate to that of a guest. The language of imitation in Leviticus 19:2 suggests that Israel had both the obligation and opportunity to reflect the social attributes of God, including hospitality. Mealtimes are well-suited for this purpose.

Leviticus 11 is devoted to the subject of clean (אֱלְבֹּד; rhôd) and unclean (אֱמַפ; amēf) animals as the source of food.57 The reason (or combination of reasons) behind the particular rules for selection and exclusion is still a topic of rather intense


56 Brueggemann also uses this idea with reference to the tabernacle as a structure erected with great care, at great cost, and with scrupulous attention to detail. The entrance of Yahweh’s glory upon its completion validated that human construction as a suitable and appropriate place for Yahweh’s visible and ongoing presence (Theology of the Old Testament, 426).

discussion and the options do not need to be rehearsed here. While no system is entirely free from problems, it is evident the reason for the code as a whole was to keep Israel separate from the surrounding nations. But beyond this, at least two points are clear.

1. The Menu as an Expression of the Host

First, the laws of Leviticus 11 are not the result of Israel’s collective aspirations to please God. They are reflections of Yahweh’s character and were communicated at his initiative: “And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Say to the Israelites: ...’” (11:1–2a). As in the garden of Eden, Yahweh commanded certain food to be eaten and other food to be strictly avoided. As with Genesis 2:16, it is important to grasp the correct sense of the main verb in question. Leviticus 11:2b–3 reads,

2. 

“These are the animals which you may eat from all the animals

—


60 Hartley, Leviticus, 144.

61 As a class noun, takes the article (IBHS 7.2.2a). Here it is used with the singular demonstrative which must be translated into English with the plural.
which are on the land:

3. Anything [having] a dividing hoof and a splitting cleft, chewing cud— among the animals such you may eat.”

The two instances of the Qal prefix conjugation form of the verb lka (“to eat”) both signify permission. As God, Yahweh is allowing Israel to eat individual members within a class of animals. The language of absolute command to eat this type of meat is not appropriate because in this post-Edenic mode of existence, people could choose from a wide variety of available foods. After listing the many animals which are not permitted, Leviticus 11:47 offers this summary statement about the purpose of the law (hrf):

47. to distinguish between the unclean and the clean and between the edible animals and between the animals

62 The Hiphil and Qal participles here function in an attributive adjectival sense (IBHS 37.4b). The construction as a whole is awkward and may be evidence of textual corruption (Hartley, Leviticus, 149).

63 IBHS 31.4d.

64 The preposition l plus the infinitive construct here specifies the purpose of the regulations referred to in the preceding verse (IBHS 36.2.3d).

65 The Niphal here is used in an adjectival, gerundive manner signifying that the adjectival state denoted by the verb is proper or permitted (IBHS 23.3d). This use is especially typical of Niphal participles (IBHS 37.4d). The precise sense of the Niphal then, is “. . . animals which you are allowed to eat.” The word “edible” in English normally indicates possibility but is nevertheless used here in place of that longer expression.
The particle al ֹ plus the Niphal prefix conjugation in the relative clause indicates the absence of permission.\textsuperscript{68} The prefix conjugation negated with al ֹ normally signifies a prohibition,\textsuperscript{69} but from a purely syntactical point of view this is unlikely in this instance because the verb is passive and is used in a relative clause rather than in direct address to the whole group on whom the obligation is imposed. In terms of its narrative function, however, the non-perfective of (negated) permission comes as a decree from Yahweh himself to his servants Moses and Aaron to pass on to the rank and file of Israel. Considering the social distance between God and his people, the language of permission here is equivalent the language of command, but it is a command to observe this particular set of regulations, not a command to eat.

\textsuperscript{66} The KJV, NEB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, and NJPSV all use the phrase “may not” which does not necessarily convey the full force of the rule.

\textsuperscript{67} The particle al ֹ plus the Niphal prefix conjugation indicates the absence of permission (IBHS 31.4d). As an incomplete passive, the construction does not specify the agent who is nevertheless clear from context (Lev 11:2)—“the sons of Israel” (IBHS 23.2.2e). The particle al ֹ plus the prefix conjugation normally signifies a prohibition (IBHS 31.5d) but from a purely syntactical point of view this is unlikely in this instance because the verb is passive and is used in a relative clause rather than in direct address to the whole group on whom the obligation is imposed. In terms of its narrative function, however, the non-perfective of (negated) permission comes as a decree from Yahweh himself to his servants Moses and Aaron to pass on to the rank and file of Israel. Considering the social distance between God and his people, the language of permission here is no less than the language of command.

\textsuperscript{68} IBHS 31.4d. As an incomplete passive, the construction does not specify the agent who is nevertheless clear from context (Lev 11:2)—“the sons of Israel” (IBHS 23.2.2e).

\textsuperscript{69} IBHS 31.5d.
The logic of this passage stands in clear continuity with previous instructions concerning food. Just as Yahweh exercised his right as Creator to offer food to Adam by command and then to Noah and his family (with the important restrictions in each case), Yahweh extends that right as Redeemer in the specification of Israel’s diet in both positive and negative terms. In each and every case, the Host-guest relationship remained operative and in force. With reference to Israel’s dietary regulations then, the word of Deuteronomy 8:3 is especially pertinent: “Not by bread alone does humanity live, but by everything which comes from the mouth of Yahweh does humanity live.”

These dietary laws are a logical extension of the postdiluvian prohibition about eating blood (Gen 9:4–6) which in turn, takes its cue from the original creation mandate with its gift of vegetation as food from the divine Host (Gen 1:28–30; 2:16–17). Baruch Levine draws this biblical and theological connection when arguing for a socioreligious intent underlying the dietary classification system.

Ideally, humankind should be sustained by the produce of the earth. When, instead, other living creatures are used as food, as is permitted, such use should be restricted to living creatures that sustain themselves with what grows on the earth and that do not prey on other living creatures or attack man. In eating the substance of other living creatures, care must be taken not to eat their “life,” which is to say “their blood.” To do so would be a form of murder.70

2. The Meal as an Expression of Relationship

The second point is that the holiness which was to function as the axis

70 Levine, Leviticus, 248.
of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel would come to expression on a regular basis every time God’s people shared a meal or feast. Israel was to know that it was not just a guest, but the guest of a holy Host. Although the following statement is not necessarily dependent on the correctness of her sociological analysis of clean and unclean food (as she suggests), Mary Douglas has nevertheless stated an important observation.

If the proposed interpretation of the forbidden animals is correct, the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal.⁷¹

Although the rules governing diet and the protocols of fellowship vary from culture to culture, mealtime behavior in every society is a function of the social relationship pertinent to that group.⁷² Especially in the case of special feasts, these times are not only laden with symbolism, but the formative power they possess is evident in the plain fact of their regularity. When Israel observed the dietary regulations encoded in the Torah, the central document of the covenant, it maintained and reinforced its identity as a covenant-partner with Yahweh and gave expression to the historical outworking of that relationship in the course of everyday life. Furthermore, when gathered around meals every Israelite had the opportunity to acknowledge and applaud Yahweh for daily sustenance and for the joy of being able to share it together in good


D. Responses of God the Host toward Guests

The covenant between Yahweh and Israel in the OT displays a close formal connection with the vassal-treaties of the ancient Near East which routinely link covenant violation to maledictions and covenant obedience to benedictions.73 This is especially evident in the Pentateuch and particularly so in the book of Deuteronomy and to a smaller degree in Leviticus. As with the vassal-treaties, curses outnumber blessings.74 In addition, covenantal blessings and curses never function as an impersonal result within the nexus of cause and effect; they are consequences which fall on the weaker party of an interpersonal relationship. They are not mere aftereffects; they are intentional responses from the initiator of the covenant. Taken as a whole, the lexical and motific stock of the pentateuchal curses point to an un-doing of the blessings and gains contained in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Christopher Wright commented,

The curses include specific negative echoes of the blessing of Abraham and of the exodus. Disobedient Israel will find history inverted. Instead of the Abrahamic blessing of national growth and greatness in the land of promise, it will wither away to insignificance and through expulsion of the land (vv. 43f., 62f.). Instead of exodus deliverance from their enemies, the Israelites themselves will suffer all the plagues once laid on the Egyptians


74 McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant (2nd ed.), 173.
and finally go back into the very kind of captivity from which they had been rescued (vv. 27–29, 60f., 68).75

Just as Genesis and Exodus display Yahweh’s blessing in terms of generosity and hospitality, Leviticus and Deuteronomy threaten the retraction of blessing in terms of scarcity (non-hospitality) and even anti-hospitality, understood as the substitution of delightful with disgusting food.76

1. The Blessings and Curses of Leviticus 26

Even having stated this, it is remarkable just how central food is to many of the blessings and especially curses. To begin with, Leviticus 26:3–46 contains a proclamation of blessings and curses.77 The blessing falls into four parts: (1) fertility (vv. 4–5), (2) security (vv. 6–8), (3) prosperity (vv. 9–10), and (4) divine presence (vv. 11–12). The curse falls into five: (1) plague and defeat (vv. 17–17), (2) drought (vv. 19–20), (3) victimization by animals (v. 22), (4) lack of satisfaction due to war, plague, and famine (vv. 25–26), followed by (5) cannibalism, exile, and desolation (vv. 29–35).78

The blessing of fertility affects the yield of the land, tree, and vine “so


76 In chapter 3, reference was made to the Sumerian “Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur” which spoke of judgment in terms of the lack of sustenance—not its replacement with sickening food.

77 Although similar in tone, this passage has relatively few verbal parallels with Deuteronomy 28 which looks like an independent composition (Hartley, Leviticus, 459).

78 This enumeration of blessings and curses follows Hartley, Leviticus, 456.
that you will eat your food to the point of satisfaction” (v. 5). But just as the threshing will “overtake” (שָׁלַיִם) the grape harvest which in turn will “overtake” the planting, so will the curses (Deut 28:15, 45). What is more, they will actively “pursue” (כל) the disobedient. The blessing of prosperity also makes reference to fertility expressed in terms of a harvest which will outlast the months (v. 10). The correlated curses state that the disobedient will “eat but not be satisfied” (v. 26), that the land and trees will fail to yield enough produce (v. 20), and that victorious enemies will consume Israel’s hard-won harvest (v. 16), effectively pushing Yahweh’s people away from their honored seat at his table.

The second blessing promises secure living conditions with freedom from ravenous animals. Here is a hint that as ruler of creation and sole possessor of the top spot on the food chain, the eater has the grim potential to be eaten. The terror of this eventuality is spelled out rather tersely in the third curse: animals will “deprive” (Piel of לָכֵו) you. The verb is sometimes used of miscarriage but carries the general meaning of becoming childless, especially in violent ways. The loss of young children is perhaps the parent’s most frightening nightmare, but the vision of carnivores tearing at a toddler is

79 The Hebrew phrase is [b'c¿&l; µk,m\]l' µT,&l;k'a}w”. Waw-relative plus the suffix conjugation after the prefix conjugation (C') marks the consequence of the preceding situation (IBHS 32.2.1c). The preposition here is allative and points to the goal of the main action (IBHS 11.2.10d).

80 Deuteronomy 28:2 also states that blessings will “overtake” (שָׁלַיִם) the obedient covenant partner.

81 Victor P. Hamilton, “לָכֵו (# 8897),” in NIDOTTE, vol. 4, 105–7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 106 with reference to this verse as well as Ezekiel 5:17; 14:15 and the destruction of the sword (Deut 32:25; 1 Sam 15:33; and Lam 1:20).
practically beyond description.

The climactic placement of the fifth curse is thus quite appropriate, for only cannibalism could generate more abhorrence than the thought of having one's own children consumed by beasts. In this final instance, the food chain is not only inverted; it is turned back on itself in ultimate corruption of the created order.

2. The Blessings and Curses of Deuteronomy 28

Graphic as they are, the curses of Leviticus are outdone by those of Deuteronomy. Chapter 28 begins with a short list of four formulaic blessings (vv. 3–6) which receive immediate comment and explanation (vv. 7–14). Two of these have to do with food. The second blessing (v. 4) is on the “fruit” of the womb and one's crops and livestock. The third blessing is on the basket and kneading-trough, suggesting abundant harvest and food to spare. The fourth blessing is inclusive: “You will be blessed when you come in and you will be blessed when you go out” (v. 6). While not mentioning food, the coming and going suggests a daily routine of work which will prove productive and satisfying. This blessing is a welcome reversal of Yahweh's curse on the ground, picturing Adam with hoe in hand, wiping the sweat from his forehead as he stands beside a pile of thorns and thistles gathered out of his cultivated field

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82 The word “fruit” (ỹP) is common in Deuteronomy 28, appearing 13 times (vv. 4 [thrice], 11 [thrice], 18 [twice], 33, 42, 51 [twice], and 53). A blessing in Deuteronomy 11:14–15 also deals with fertility, but in terms of an ordered chain of events: Yahweh sends seasonal rain (r̃f̃m) which waters the land so that it yields grass for cattle so that the obedient believer can eat (l̃k̃a) and be satisfied (l̃b̃c).
The four blessings of Deuteronomy 28 find their match in four nearly-identical curses (vv. 16–19) which then receive extensive elaboration (vv. 20–68). Again, the concept of food dominates. In place of the “rain” (11:11, 14) which the land “drinks” (11:11, ḫt v), Yahweh will send “dust and powder” (r p ṣv) from heaven (28:24). Inversion of the food chain is promised for those who fall in battle: “Your carcasses will be food (l k q) for all the fowl of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to scare [them off]” (28:26). Another result of defeat will be that enemies will enjoy one’s resources, eating grapes and a slaughtered ox, taking sheep and the yield of the land (28:30–33, 51). Defeat will give way to exile and the hard life associated with it. In this case, the enemy who eats the produce will be the “locust” (hB ȗ) and the “worm” (28:39). Instead of Israel inheriting the land (Deut 3:20), insects (l xl x) will inherit (vry) the trees and fruit of the ground (v. 42). Captive

83 Here I follow the accentual division of the MT. Otherwise, the verse could read, “Yahweh will make the rain on your land dust, and powder from heaven will descend upon you until you are destroyed.”

84 The word “worm” (h lv and here t l m) is general, including worms and maggots of many kinds, mostly the larvae of flies and beetles. Here it may denote either the grapeberry moth (Polychrosis botrana) or the wine hawk moth (Chaerocampa celerio) (Robert C. Stallman, “h lv[#9357],” in NIDOTTE, vol. 4, 281–83 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997] 282).

85 This noun is a hapax legomenon (Isa 18:1 is debatable) and the insect’s identification is therefore uncertain. It is an onomatopoeic term which uses the letter šdēh to mimics the chirping sound of locusts and crickets. The specie in question may be the mole cricket (Gryllotalpa vulgaris) which attacks tree roots (Robert C. Stallman, “h ȗ[4746],” in NIDOTTE, vol. 1, 491–95 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997] 491–92). The destruction caused by the collective appetite of actual locust swarms is of nearly apocalyptic dimensions (Raymond B. Dillard, “Joel,” in The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository
Israelites will serve their foreign masters “in hunger and thirst” (v. 48).

As with the list of curses in Leviticus, a description of cannibalism comes last (28:53–57). The grotesque “menu” consists of relatives, children, and afterbirth. The passage is full of contrasts. While the enemy eats “the fruit of your animals and the fruit of your ground” (v. 51), the starving men and women of Israel would be cursed to the point of eating “the fruit” of their wombs (v. 53). Second, Israel’s sons and daughters who are slated for consumption are described as those “whom Yahweh your God has given (ךנ) to you” (28:53), recalling the memory that originally it was food that Yahweh had “given” (ךנ).

86 Last, these despicable acts of repulsive consumption are attributed to men and women whom the text goes to great length to depict as otherwise tender and considerate individuals (vv. 54, 56).

3. The Punishment of Israel as the Guest of God

The presence of these blessings and curses within the covenantal document place emphasis not just on the fact and gravity of the covenant, but on the lasting relationship it inaugurated. For better or worse, Israel would be Yahweh’s people and the Host-guest relationship entailed in the covenant would obtain throughout Israel’s history. The conquest of the Promised Land was proof that the blessings were genuine. Likewise, the Deuteronomic History shows evidence of a theological conviction that Israel’s decline and exile was


86 Gen 1:29; 9:3; Deut 28:11, 12.
not accidental but a completely just divine retribution from Yahweh who had placed the people under a special obligation within the framework of a covenantal relationship, complete with sanctions.\textsuperscript{87}

The curse of wide-scale drought (Deut 28:23–24) was actualized in the lifetime of Elijah whom Yahweh miraculously fed by ravens and food from widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17—18). The cannibalism occasioned by siege warfare is detailed in the story of the two mothers who conspire to eat their infants (2 Kgs 6:24–30). The terror of wild animals fell on the foreigners sent to replace the Israelites in Samaria after its defeat in 722 BCE (2 Kgs 17:24–32).

But as if to tell Israel that Yahweh was not finished with Israel, the Deuteronomistic History closes on an exceptional note. The Judean king Jehoiachin was allowed to eat at the table of Evil-Merodach during the exile (2 Kgs 25:27–30). This note is significant for the writer of Kings because it showed his readers that God had not forgotten his promise regarding Davidic kingship. Table food in this case is used as slender but sure evidence of divine favor and symbolizes the continued existence of Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with his people in spite of the horror of Jerusalem’s annihilation and Judah’s exile.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Martin Noth, The Deuteronomistic History, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., trans. Jane Doull and others, JSOTS\textsuperscript{Sup} 15 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 134–35.

\textsuperscript{88} The legitimacy of this epilogue within the framework of the Deuteronomistic History has been sharply contested. Noth regarded it as a “mitigating conclusion” with no “intrinsic historical significance” which the Deuteronomist was forced to give (Deuteronomistic History, 27, 117). Frank Moore Cross is in essential agreement with this position, adding that it does not provide enough evidence that the Deuteronomist expected Yahweh to fulfill the Davidic promise (Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the
In conclusion, the decision to refuse hospitality in the ancient Near East was a serious matter possibly endangering the very life of the would-be guest. But in addition to this, Yahweh raised the ugly prospect of anti-hospitality toward rebellious Israel, promising that their behavior as ungrateful and defiant guests would merit exactly what it deserved: a thoroughly repulsive meal.

E. The Land of Promise in the Scheme of Divine Hospitality

The Pentateuch closes with a new generation of Israelites preparing to enter Canaan which is regularly designated as the land Yahweh has promised to Abraham. The land is a major theme of the Pentateuch and the ways it is described have been ably explored by Paul Duerksen. The more limited purpose of this section is to consider how the pentateuchal descriptions of the land fit within the parameters of the Host-guest relationship between Yahweh and his people. It will treat the subject of the land as gift, as the recipient and benefactor of Yahweh’s blessings, and as “flowing with milk and honey.”


89 The description of the land as “promised” by Yahweh is especially common in the book of Deuteronomy, appearing both in Yahweh’s first and final words to Moses constituting a frame for the whole book (1:8; 34:4). The collocation of ℏ豳 (“land”) and some form of the verb ℏ豳 (“to promise”) appears in 18 times in Deuteronomy and 9 times in the rest of the Pentateuch.

1. Land as Gift

Beginning with Yahweh’s word to Abraham at Shechem (Gen 12:7), the Pentateuch repeatedly refers to the land as something which God “gives.”91 The quality of life in this land is contrasted with the austerity of the wilderness and the travail of Egypt. Joshua 5:12 records the precise place and day when the manna ceased and the Israelites began to eat from the produce of Canaan. The gift has changed, but the divine giver had remained the same. As Westermann observed, “The bread of blessing now takes the place of the bread of saving.”92

As good as the miraculous provision of food in the wilderness was, it was always sent in the context of Israel’s alienation from the land on which it camped. Brueggemann noted this feature of the Promised Land: “The water does not need to come at the last moment, incredibly from a rock. Its sources are visible and reliable. The food does not need to appear surprisingly. It rises from the land of gift.”93 In the future, plenty of food and water were to be an assured and ongoing fact of life, but always to be regarded as a favor.94

91 There are 92 verses in the Pentateuch which contain both the word לארֶץ (land”) and some form of the verb תן (“to give”) specifically with reference to Canaan as Israel’s gift either directly from God or through the intermediacy of Moses. Deuteronomy contains 54 (59%) of these verses.


94 Prosperity was never understood as an unmitigated blessing but carried with it the temptation to abandon Yahweh in disrespectful ignorance of the Host-guest relationship (Deut 6:12; 8:11–17; 11:16). As Mann wisely observed, “Affluence is not inherently evil, but it is inherently dangerous” (Mann, Book of the Torah, 151).
Although the fertility of the Nile delta is legendary, Moses exhorted Israel to serve Yahweh who would lead them into an abundant land. Deuteronomy 8:7–9 provides an extensive catalogue of the produce of Canaan, mostly in terms of food and fresh water. Abundance would not only be available, but readily so. Again, Brueggemann observed the contrast between the new and old land.

Here security and well-being are not from the grudging task-master, but from the benevolent rain-sender, the same one who was bread-giver. Both rain and manna come from heaven, from outside the history of coercion and demand.

Although the Promised Land was Yahweh’s gift to Israel, it was never a permanent gift in the sense that Israel ever became its sole owner. Instead, the land is a perpetual gift from Yahweh who never gives it away. Hence, Israel was never more than a tenant or, in the language of Leviticus 25:23, “The land must not be permanently sold because the land is mine and because you are aliens and sojourners with me.” This familiar concept is important because it protects Yahweh’s right remove Israel from the land should they fail to behave properly as guests. Just as the language of entering and enjoying the Promised Land was drawn from the domain of eating, the language of expulsion is too. But rather than simply being asked to “leave the table” or to “go home,” the metaphorical rhetoric of Leviticus is more severe and vivid. Israel must not commit abominations, “lest the land vomit you out on account


96 Brueggemann, Land, 51.
of your defiling it, just as it vomited out the nation that was before you” (18:28; cf. 20:22). The repulsive sexual sins of Leviticus 18 not only bring shame to one’s family, one’s self, and even the name of God (vv. 7, 10, 14, 16, 21), they defile the land itself. As Mann observed, “Defilement is both poisonous and emetic.”

The antidote for this moral toxin must be administered as a preventative: it is gratitude based on an accurate memory. The book of Deuteronomy rates memory high on the scale of theological significance for the generation of Israelites who had not personally experienced the exodus event. Moses exhorted these people, “Remember the entire way that Yahweh your God led you these forty years in the wilderness” (Deut 8:2a) and “When you have eaten and are satisfied, then bless Yahweh your God for the good land that he gave to you” (Deut 8:10). Since plenty of food offers an occasion to become self-satisfied, Moses commanded Israel to use daily meals as regular opportunities to neutralize this danger.

2. Land as Guest and Host

In Deuteronomy 11:10 Moses offers a second view of the Promised Land by contrasting it with the land of Egypt:

10.  הַמָּרוֹן הַתָּרָם הָרָעָבִי  For the land that you are entering

97 Mann, Book of the Torah, 122.


99 The participle is part of a relative clause with a resumptive deictic
to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and you watered with your foot like a garden of vegetables.

The contrasts run along several lines: ownership, size, and management. First, the “land of Egypt” is named in the simplest of terms and is “not like” (al plus K) “the land which you are entering to possess” (v. 10a). The Promised land is both goal and gift to be inherited. Second, Egypt is compared to a “garden of vegetables” (i.e., a mere patch) in contrast to expansive territory called “a land of mountains and valleys” (v. 11a).

Third, Egypt was “watered with your foot” in contrast to the new land which “drinks” the rain from heaven and is cared for by Yahweh’s personal attention (v. 11b–12). This final description of Egypt is somewhat vague and subject to a variety of interpretations. The phrase may refer to a type of Egyptian irrigation system in which sluice gates are opened by foot, dirt ridges

adverb of location which does not need to be represented in English (IBHS 4.7c). This verse also contains a second instance of a resumptive pronoun (µv).

100 The prefix conjugation here signifies customary action in past time (IBHS 31.2b).

101 The cognate accusative is the recipient of the transitive verb’s action. It is not an effected-object accusative (IBHS 10.2.1c, f).

102 The suffix conjugation (with the simple waw and no accent shift to the last syllable) here signifies a constant past-time situation in simple coordination with the preceding verb (IBHS 30.5.1b, 32.3a).

103 The article with this collective noun is generic (IBHS 13.5.1f).

104 This same idea is immediately echoed in v. 11a, “but the land which you are crossing over to possess . . .”
are broken down by foot to control the flow of water through channels, or water as carried in containers on foot. This practice would stand in contrast to the unaided and abundant natural irrigation of the Promised Land. On the other hand, the association of water and “foot” (qua) is a standard euphemism for human urination. If this is the intention of Deuteronomy 11:10, one ought not to jump to the conclusion that Moses’ primary purpose was to sarcastically depict the produce of Egypt as disgusting, for it would be ordinary for ancient farmers (whether in Egypt or Israel) to urinate on the ground while out at work in their fields. What’s more, urine contains nitrogen-rich urea (CO[NH₂]₂), a natural fertilizer. Given our ignorance of ancient humor and the limitations of reading a written text which does not convey tone of voice or aspects of non-verbal communication, sarcasm and irony can be difficult to detect. It is rather more clear that the focus falls not on the means of the land’s irrigation but on the land itself. As George Nicol concluded with regard to


107 This is the conclusion of L. Eslinger, “Watering Egypt (Deuteronomy xi 10–11),” VT 37/1 (1987) 88–89.

Deuteronomy 11:10-11,

Although the author evokes different means of irrigation in Egypt and the promised land, these different means are not the point of the contrast which is rather the amount of land available in Egypt and Palestine. In this way the author has Moses celebrate the sheer spaciousness of the land which is soon to be possessed by the Israelites, and in so doing he refers to the Egyptian experience with some contempt.\(^\text{109}\)

But even though Nicol makes a better case than Eslinger, Nicol himself under-reads the metaphoric depth of the passage. Relative size is not the ultimate issue, for that point has already been made in the contrast between “garden” and “mountains and valleys.” The issue here is Yahweh’s own care for the land by giving it plenty of water to “drink.” The Promised Land is personified as Yahweh’s unique guest who is so abundantly supplied that it, in turn, is suitably prepared to host Yahweh’s personal guest, Israel.

3. Land “Flowing with Milk and Honey”

Although the Promised Land was to be abundant in many ways, its repeated description as “flowing with milk and honey” presents the land figuratively in terms of rich food. The phrase (or its equivalent) appears 18 times in the OT with reference to Canaan and 14 of these are in the Pentateuch.\(^\text{110}\) The only other pentateuchal reference to it is in the mouth of the Israelite rebels who had spitefully said that the land they came from was


\(^{110}\) It also occurs in Sirach 46:8. Related expressions appear in Deuteronomy 32:13-14 and Joel 3:18(4:18). In the Song of Songs the lover says that “milk and honey” are under the tongue of his beloved (4:11).
flowing with milk and honey (Num 16:13–14). The phrase occurs first in Yahweh’s programmatic announcement of his intention to deliver the Israelites from slavery. Exodus 3:8 reads:

8. So I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a good and wide land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

In the OT, *bl j;* (“milk”) is mostly from goats (Exod 23:19) but also from *rq;B;* (“large cattle,” Deut 32:14) and even *èx* which includes sheep and goats

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111 Their same taste for metaphorical language was shared by the pessimistic spies who reported that the land “consumes” (lkt) its inhabitants (Num 13:32; see Ezek 36:13–14). They obviously had no intention of letting their names stand on that menu.

112 Waw-relative usually occurs with the short prefix conjugation (as in *dr<YEàw*) but can be used with the long prefix conjugation as is the case here (IBHS 33.1.1b). The construction follows three perfectives in 3:7. The waw signifies succession which in this case is primarily logical rather than temporal (IBHS 33.2.1a). The prefix conjugation form expresses perfective value with reference to the recent past (IBHS 33.3.1a).

113 The noun is in the absolute state and is followed by an attributive adjectival phrase.

114 This active fientive participle in the construct state governs two adverbial genitives of a mediated object (IBHS 37.5a, 37.3c, 9.5.2d).

115 Gentilic nouns are usually singular, as here (IBHS 7.2.2b).
The word vb̄m̄ means bee honey (Judg 14:8–9, 18; 1 Sam 14:25) but could also refer to fruit syrup produced from grapes, dates, figs, and fruit of the carob tree.  

The combined phrase “milk and honey” has been variously understood. A minor view is that it contains mythological concepts which have nothing to do with the historical reality of Canaan. More commonly, it is taken as a factual description of the products the Israelites could expect to find when they entered and occupied Canaan. Related to this is the view that the collocation of “milk” and “honey” is a metaphor pointing to the interdependent and symbiotic relationship between the two major ways of living in the land.

Olivier commented,

Both milk and honey are the best products of a land rich in natural vegetation. Since d̄b̄s also refers to sweet syrup, i.e., the epitomy of the agricultural yield, and milk that of animal husbandry, it has been argued that the expression represents the different ways in which people subsisted in the Promised Land in contrast to peoples in Egypt and Babylonia.


120 Olivier, “vb̄m̄ (#1831),” 917. Apiculture is not necessarily indicated. Based on archaeological evidence from ancient Jordan, Olivier proposed that the interdependence of two rural modes of subsistence made it possible for the
Beyond these rather prosaic claims which few discount, most interpreters recognize the figurative dimension which is triggered by the participle “flowing.” The land will be a source of abundance. As evidence of this, the spies brought back a gigantic cluster of grapes, plus pomegranates and figs (Num 13:23–24, 27; cf. 16:14). Thus, the land was viewed as a generous gift from Yahweh to Israel, but this point is already amply

Israelites to occupy the high country of Canaan. In spite of the lack of evidence from ancient Cisjordanian sites, Olivier inferred that “this symbiosis of livestock husbandry and dry farming within the same village or region seems prerequisite for the development of settlements in the central highlands” (“A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey: Some Observations on the Modes of Existence in Ancient Israel,” Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif 29 [1988] 10).

121 The verb בּוּז (“to flow”) appears 40 times in the OT, twice with reference to water flowing from the rock in the wilderness (Ps 78:20; 105:41; cf. Isa 48:21). According to Richard Hess, the verb has two major uses. One is with the phrase “milk and honey” in connection with the land; the other has to do with bodily discharges (“בּוּז #2307,” in NIDOTTE, vol. 1, 1086–88 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997] 1087). Since the context and genre of the latter use which suggests “oozing” is unrelated to the phrase in question, we are left the first two references to help clarify the image, together with the original description of the accounts of water coming from the rock (Exod 17:1–7; Num 20:7–11). They suggest “gushing” rather than mere “flowing” but this evidence is not strong enough to warrant revising the traditional translation of this important description of the land.

122 Isaiah 7:22 is unclear, given its location within an oracle of judgment: “And because of the abundance of the production of milk [from a single heifer and two goats], he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the midst of the land will eat curds and honey.” On the positive side, it may be a note of eschatological hope for the remnant (Otto Kaiser, Isaiah 1—12, 2nd ed., OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983] 177). But more probably it should be taken in context as negative; the people in the land will be so few that only a few animals will provide more than enough food (John N. Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1—39, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 217–18).

123 Although it is an argument from silence, if the description “flowing with milk and honey” was understood in a primarily literal sense, the spies would have returned with curds and honey. The former would probably have to be stolen but wild honey would not have been impossible to find.
made in the frequent pentateuchal associations of “land” and the verb “to
give.” That Canaan did produce milk products and honey is certain, but the
phrase was probably valued more for its metaphorical impact.\textsuperscript{124} But even this
point needs to be sharpened and the “\textit{GOD IS A HOST}” model is a fitting tool for
it.

To call the land “flowing with milk and honey” is to describe it in terms of
taste more than rural lifestyle. Rather than characterizing the land as rich in
terms of forestry, mining, or other natural resources, the Pentateuch uses an
image showing the pleasant abundance of food. From this concrete conclusion,
imagination may be able to extend the image a bit further.\textsuperscript{125} Like other foods, milk and honey have nutritional value, but as rich in fat\textsuperscript{126} and sugar this particular combination would also be desirable as a snack or dessert.

Knowledge of diet, the preparation of food, and eating habits in the ancient
Near East is relatively sketchy,\textsuperscript{127} especially with regard to milk and honey.\textsuperscript{128}
But it is not far-fetched to assume that ancient Israelites combined milk (or

\textsuperscript{124} The phrase may be considered proverbial (Duerksen, “Canaan as a
Land of Milk and Honey,” 123).

\textsuperscript{125} Of course, this inevitably entails some loss in our degree of
certainty, but the rationalistic under-interpretation of Scripture is a loss too.

\textsuperscript{126} “Milk” (\textit{bl j}) is related to the word “fat” (\textit{bl j $\&$}).

\textsuperscript{127} Mayer I. Gruber, “Private Life in Ancient Israel,” in

\textsuperscript{128} Cristiano Grottanelli, “Aspetti simbolici del latte nella Bibbia,” in
Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near
East, ed. Lucio Milano, 381–97, History of the Ancient Near East / Studies 6
(Padova: Sargon, 1994) 396.
curds) with either bee’s honey or the sweet jam of dates or other fruit to produce a delicious treat, perhaps enjoyed at the conclusion of a meal. If this picture indeed came to mind, an Israelite who heard Moses describe the Promised Land as “flowing with milk and honey” could well have gotten the idea that as heavenly Host, Yahweh would not only make sure that his people had enough to eat, but that God would not fail to bring out the dessert as well.

F. Summary of the Discussion

In the hostile environment of the wilderness, Yahweh cared for Israel with manna, water, and meat. Scriptures that reflect on this period of time tend to use the language of hospitality to describe God’s sustaining gifts inasmuch as in the wilderness Yahweh “spread a table” of food for Israel. The people’s response was mixed and often included murmuring. Far from being an ideal, the desert was a place of human complaining and divine provision. But beyond that, a major purpose of the desert phase of Israel’s relationship with God was to cause the nation to learn that even in future circumstances which would not be as austere, they would still be totally dependent on divine grace, living on

129 The high popularity of ice cream in modern times is without doubt and it is tempting to hypothesize that ancient Israel knew of this treat as well, but given the lack of supporting evidence, such a claim is almost certainly anachronistic. Unsubstantiated legend credits Marco Polo (1254–1324) with having seen ice cream being made in China and then having introduced the dessert to Italy. The initial documentary evidence of anything that could have resembled modern ice cream comes from China’s T’ang period (618–907 CE). The earliest reference to “ice cream” proper is from England in 1672 during the reign of Charles II (Caroline Liddell and Robin Weir, Frozen Desserts: The Definitive Guide to Making Ice Creams, Ices, Sorbets, Gelati, and Other Frozen Delights [New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996] 10-12).
the very words of God. Israel’s experience in the desert supplied them with a rich fund of historical memories which could be figuratively transformed to express new spiritual truths.

The ratification of the covenant instituted on Mount Sinai involved a special meal in which the elders of Israel were exposed to God’s majestic presence yet were recipients of divine hospitality. The vision of Yahweh inspired aesthetic appreciation of God and his relationship with his people. Furthermore, that recognition of God’s presence was central to the controlling idea of the tabernacle sanctuary. The exact role of the meal on Sinai with respect to the covenant is difficult to specify. It was more than a symbol of the inauguration of a covenantal relationship; the fellowship it entailed expressed something of the intimate nature and ongoing importance of that relationship. As a covenantal act, the meal took place within the dialectic of God’s nature as both frightening and welcoming as well as lethal and nourishing. The meal also demonstrated that audience with God the Host takes place within a covenantal framework which revolves around the verbal expression of God’s will for his people.

As the collective guest of Yahweh, Israel was to be holy not only in imitation of its Host, but also in order to suitably accommodate the divine presence. Israel’s dietary laws were not self-imposed regimens of righteousness but expressions of the will of Yahweh as divine Host who maintains the right to direct his people toward food that right for them and away from food that is wrong. Daily meals would be visible reminders that Israel enjoyed a special relationship as guest to this divine Host.
If Israel would honor the Host-guest relationship, it would enjoy the covenantal blessings which were predominantly cast in terms of abundant food and satisfaction. On the other hand, covenant violation would occasion the loss of this divine hospitality and worse. Enemies would consume the plenitude originally designated for God’s special guest. Disobedience would even result in Israel being consumed by creatures of lower position on the food chain. Beyond that, the rejection of God would even lead to grotesque meals eaten under siege conditions, including cannibalism. The Deuteronomistic History provided documentation of these curses, but closed on a positive note of grace with Jehoiachin enjoying the favor of royal hospitality.

The pentateuchal theme of land also has a place within the scheme of divine hospitality. In general terms, it was Yahweh’s gift to his people but beyond that, the land was the recipient of Yahweh’s special attention and copious provision. Yahweh hosted the land so it in turn could host Israel. As the land freely received, it was divinely positioned to freely give. Finally, the common evaluation of the Promised Land as “flowing with milk and honey” pictured Israel’s future home as a place where Yahweh would furnish a bounty of delight over and above the nation’s basic needs.

G. Analysis of the Model of God as Host

As with the concluding analysis of the “GOD IS A HOST” model in the book of Genesis, this chapter will end by considering the dynamics of the model in terms of its distribution, range, and form, including a discussion of analogies.
1. Distribution

In the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, Israel’s God is spoken of in terms of a host in several genres and contexts. In historical narrative, Yahweh directed Israel into a hostile wilderness where he then sustained them with food and water. This general provision of food for the nation is part of Yahweh’s gracious dealings with Israel and fits together with his acts of deliverance as a historical foundation for the covenantal relationship established on Sinai. The book of Exodus alternates between narrative and legal genres as it details the beginnings of this covenant. In chapter 24, following the issuing of the Decalogue and Book of the Covenant, the ratification ceremony included a dramatic meal between the elders and Yahweh himself.

The strictly legal material of the Pentateuch touches on the issue of divine hospitality when Yahweh prescribes Israel diet and calls Israel to be a holy people who are fit to have Yahweh in their midst. Here the emphasis falls on Israel’s responsive obedience as recipients of divine favor.

The covenantal blessings and curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy function paraenetically as incentives to covenant loyalty. In these texts, Yahweh as Host speaks authoritatively regarding the consequences of Israel’s behavior both in positive and negative terms. As Israel honored their Host, generosity would not only continue but increase beyond what they had experienced in the wilderness. But if Israel dishonored their Host, scarcity and dietary unpleasantness would certainly follow. As certainly as Israel’s divine Host had acted in its past, so would God intervene in the future. In this relationship, the nation had no option to cease being a guest. The issue was solely what kind of
This chapter also observed that the qualitative evaluation of the land into which Yahweh was leading Israel was regularly made in terms of abundance, food, and security—all signified by the appellation “flowing with milk and honey.” This designation is widely scattered throughout the Pentateuch and is never directly explained. Rather, it is a stock phrase capable of use in a fairly broad range of discourse. What it may lack in specificity, it gains in feeling and imagination. The figurative description of a land in which milk bubbled up from springs, trickled down ravines, and collected in pools spoke of sheer delight and a life of blessing. The thought of honey everywhere must have infused wandering Israelites with a sense of anticipation and divine favor.

2. Range

The “GOD IS A HOST” model shows a degree of flexibility as it extends beyond God’s general provision for humanity, as is common the book of Genesis. In the rest of the Pentateuch, Yahweh’s concern is mostly for his infant nation. What Israel experienced in a general way, the elders saw first-hand on Sinai: God preparing a table. Divine hospitality also stands in marked contrast to the inhospitality of the Edomites through whose territory Israel had to pass. Beyond caring for his people, Yahweh’s hospitality is also evident in his care the Promised Land.

Within the relatively short temporal span covered by the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy there is not much room for diachronic
development of the model of divine hospitality. But already in Moses’ words that people do not live by bread alone there is evidence of some spiritual transformation. This chapter showed how the motifs of water in general and well-water specifically became potent ideas for Jeremiah’s expression of spiritual truths. This type of reflection and development of divine hospitality can be seen in other prophets as well as in the NT material.

3. Form

The model of God as Host is usually invoked by the literal use of terms for food and eating. Whether it be the provision in the wilderness, the covenant meal at Sinai, dietary regulations, or blessings and curses—all depend on realistic language. In the case of the Promised Land, however, the evaluative phrase “flowing with milk and honey” is a figure of speech which gathers together an unspecified variety of blessings. According to Deuteronomy 11:11, this is the land which metaphorically “drinks rain from heaven” indicating that not only is the land irrigated with water from the sky, but also that the land is the personal guest of Yahweh who cares for it by superintending the seasonal course of nature.

a) Positive and Negative Analogies

As in the book of Genesis, Yahweh is like a human host in that he cared for people in need. His hospitality was issued on a grander scale than that of any human host, whether civilian or royal and in the case of the quail, this abundance was not indicative of generosity. On the contrary, divine disfavor resulted in a loathsome experience in which Israel was nearly suffocated by the
amount of birds that came in on the wind. With human hospitality, hostility between guest and host usually results in the cessation of fellowship and the withdrawal of food. In the case of Yahweh and Israel, a breach in the covenant relationship was expected to result in scarcity from famine and subsequent disease. But beyond that, the sin which violated the covenant would also poison the Host-guest relationship, resulting in more than Israel’s deprivation. The nation would still experience the hospitality of Yahweh, but it would no longer be for benefit. Instead, Yahweh would subject them to vile hospitality: the eaters would become the eaten. The seriousness of this situation is unparalleled in the hospitality-related literature of the ancient Near East. The corruption of Israel’s covenantal relationship with its Redeemer would be reflected in the corruption of their relationship with God as Creator. Just as Adam’s sin resulted in a disturbed relationship with the ground, Israel’s sin would result in a disturbed relationship with nature as a whole.

The covenant meal on Sinai was a particularly vivid experience of divine hospitality. It was preceded by an invitation to approach the divine presence (Exod 24:1). The meal celebrated the inauguration of a new phase of Israel’s covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The text does not detail the menu but does mention that the elder-guests not only received divine hospitality, they were protected from the deadly effects of exposure to God’s absolute presence.

b) Neutral Analogies

Neutral analogies are not limited to matters of similarity and dissimilarity between God’s hospitality and that which occurs in society. One
example of a neutral analogy is the power of Yahweh’s hospitality to influence
Israel’s behavior with respect to aliens. Several Scriptures enjoin Israel to
refrain from mistreating aliens for the expressed reason that Israel itself was
once an alien in Egypt (Exod 22:21[20]; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 23:7[8]). But
beyond this motivation, Israel is to love the alien because Yahweh “acts with
justice on behalf of the orphan and the widow, and loves the alien (תֵּרְפָּה
giving to him food and clothing” (Deut 10:18). Historical and theological
realities merge to become a dynamic incentive for Israel to follow the ways of
Yahweh.

One way for Israel to demonstrate this care for the stranger consisted in
the donation of one’s tithe to the poor (Deut 26:12–15). But the tithe, together
with the offering of firstfruits also functioned as expressions of gratitude that
are appropriate to those who have received lavish expressions of hospitality. A
tithe of the firstborn of the flock and herd, together with a tithe of the grain,
new wine, and oil is to be collected and eaten “in the presence of Yahweh” (Deut
14:23, 26). The reason for this is related to the concept of gratitude: it is so that
Israel “may learn to fear (אָרָי Yahweh” (Deut 14:23). This purpose is reflected
more fully in the instruction concerning the offering of firstfruits from the
initial harvest taken in the Promised Land. This offering is to be accompanied
by worship (bowing down) and a verbal confession of Yahweh’s kindness in
delivering the nation from Egyptian servitude and bringing it into its own good
land (Deut 26:1–11).

Just as ancient Israelites could reflect on their historical experience of
Yahweh’s generosity and respond with concrete expressions of gratitude,
modern believers can survey the landscape of the biblical period and take in a much wider view of God’s activities. Together with personal experiences of divine hospitality, this historical foundation can support manifold expressions of gratitude both in worship of God and ministry to others.