Reading Exodus in Tetratuch and Pentateuch

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Deuteronomy, the final book in the present Pentateuch, is couched as, in the main, Moses' farewell address to the Israelites on the last day of his life. In its first eleven chapters, Moses recalls a series of events that preceding books of the Pentateuch, especially Exodus and Numbers (but not Leviticus), record. Unexpectedly, however, the reminiscences in Deut 1–11 differ in many respects from the record of these events as it now stands in these preceding books. In this article, I wish to develop the thesis, which I have presented in a number of previous studies,¹ that the reminiscences in Deuteronomy enable the recovery of a matching account of events in Exodus and Numbers that a later edition has overlaid. The Pentateuch is composite but provides its own instrument for the identification and appreciation of its component parts. The thesis will be illustrated first by the version of the “Ten Commandments” that Deut 5:6–21 recalls and the influence that that Decalogue has had on the composition of the “Sinai pericope” in Exod 19–40. The deviations in the present book of Exodus from the version that Deuteronomy attests will be attributed to a later edition. The account of Israel’s journey from exodus to Sinai in Exod 12–18 will further illustrate the radicality of that later edition’s revisions.

1 The Decalogue As Case Study

The Pentateuch records the Decalogue twice, Exod 20:2–17 and Deut 5:6–21.² One would expect that the Decalogue engraved on stone by the “finger of


God” (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10) would be immutable, yet, while there is indeed substantial agreement between these two records, there are, if one counts carefully, about thirty variations between them. These include many minor matters of spelling and punctuation but there is one major difference: the motive for keeping the Sabbath. In Exod 20:11, it is to commemorate the completion of creation, “For in six days the L ORD made heaven and earth ... but rested the seventh day; therefore the L ORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it,”3 while in Deut 5:15 it is to celebrate Israel’s liberation, “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the L ORD your God brought you out from there ...; therefore the L ORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:12, however, claims to be accurately remembering the wording of the Sabbath commandment as originally promulgated, by explicitly adding the phrase, “as the L ORD your God commanded you.”4 Deuteronomy 5:16 adds the same phrase in connection with the parents’ commandment, “Honor your father and your mother, as the L ORD your God commanded you.” The most obvious candidate for identification as the original promulgation that Deuteronomy claims to cite is the substantially identical Decalogue of Exod 20:2–17.5 In the case of the parents’ commandment, the wording between Deut 5 and Exod 20 is essentially the same. The wording of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus may then once have been, like the wording of the parents’ commandment, essentially as Deuteronomy recollects. That is, Exod 20:11 originally justified Sabbath observance by reference to Israel’s exodus from Egypt, a hardly surprising sanction in the light of the opening words of the Decalogue in Exod 20:2: “I am the L ORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,” which is, in turn, the distillation of the whole narrative in Exod 1–19. The thesis is thus that the

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3 All biblical citations are from nRSV, unless stated otherwise. Verse numbering follows mt.

4 This article does not address the issue of hypothetical earlier stages of development of the Decalogue, e.g., whether it originated in shorter, independent collections; nor does it speculate on the social and historical contexts in which such collections might have arisen. See, e.g., Erhard Blum, “The Decalogue and the Composition History of the Pentateuch,” in Dozeman, Schmid, and Schwartz, The Pentateuch: International Perspectives, 289–301.

5 Hossfeld, “Vom Horeb zum Sinai: Der Dekalog als Testfall der Pentateuchkritik” (ed. Christian Frevel, Michael Konkel, and Johannes Schnocks; QD 212; Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 92, relates the cross-references in Deut 5 to the Book of the Covenant and the “Privilegrecht” (for which, see below).