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DEUTERONOMY 32: A GENRE ANALYSIS

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DEUTERONOMY 32: A GENRE ANALYSIS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

PREFACE

This project has been indebted to the efforts and contribution of a number of individuals. My thanks goes to the professors that I have studied with during my ThM program: Dr. Gentry, Dr. Plummer, and Dr. Hernández. These men have enriched this project by their dedicated service in the classroom. Also, I'm deeply indebted to the support and encouragement of my advisor Dr. Adam Howell, without his kindness this project would not have been completed. Finally, I'm thankful to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the opportunity to study God's Word in this capacity these past five years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy 32, also known as the Song of Moses,¹ has defied readers expectations and delighted their curiosity for a millennia. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, a new professional guild of scholars adopted historical critical methodologies that encouraged analytical probing of the Scripture. As a result, biblical studies has subjected The Song to vast amount of discussion regarding its provenance, literary function, historical situation, and genre.² Discussion about these separate aspects of the Song have each, in their own way, contributed to the guild's apparent overarching goal to pin the Song to a particular historical location and to explain with absolute

¹ In this thesis, for the sake of brevity I will often refer to Deuteronomy 32 as The Song. When making reference to Exodus 15, I refer to this poem as either The Song of the Sea or as Exodus 15.

² The major German commentators who feature prominently in the literature are Eissfeldt and von Rad. See Paul Sanders for the most thorough history of interpretation of The Song, O. Eissfeldt, *Das Lied Moses Deuteronomium 32 1-43 Und Das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Psalm 78 Samt Einer Analyse Der Umgebung Des MoseLiedes* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1958); Gerhard von Rad, *Das Fünfte Buch Mose Deuteronomium Übersetzt Und Erklärt* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1964); Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996); C. J. Labuschagne, "The Setting of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy," in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature. Festschrift C.H.W. Brekelmans*, ed. M. Vervenne and J. Lust (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1997), 111–29; C. J. Labuschagne, "The Song of Moses: Its Framework and Structure," in *De Fructu Oris Sui: Essays in Honour of Adrianus van Selms* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1971); Samuel R Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902); William Foxwell Albright, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32," *Vetus Testamentum* 9, no. 4 (October 1959): 339–46; William L Moran, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses," *Biblica* 43, no. 3 (1962): 317–27; Kemper Fullerton, "On Deuteronomy 32 26-34," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1928): 138–55; Mitchell Joseph Dahood, "Northwest Semitic Notes on Dt 32:20," *Biblica* 54, no. 3 (1973): 405–6; James R Boston, "Wisdon Influence upon the Song of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87, no. 2 (June 1968): 198–202; Solomon A Nigosian, "The Song of Moses (Dt 32): A Structural Analysis," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 72, no. 1 (April 1996): 5–22; Solomon A Nigosian, "Linguistic Patterns of Deuteronomy 32," *Biblica* 78, no. 2 (1997): 206–24; Patrick W. Skehan, "A Fragment of the 'Song of Moses' (Deut. 32) from Qumran," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 136 (1954): 12–15; Matthew Thiessen, "The Form and Function of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-43)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 3 (2004): 401–24; Steven Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying: The Role of Deuteronomy 32 in Its Narrative Setting," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 4 (October 1994): 377–93; Milton S. Terry, "The Song of Moses, Deut. 32," *The Old Testament Student* 7, no. 9 (1888): 280–83; Jan Joosten, "A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy Xxxii 8," *Vetus Testamentum* 57, no. 4 (2007): 548–55.

empirical precision the eccentricities and enigmatic beauties of this ancient poem.

Genre broadly—and the genre of The Song specifically—has been a concept much discussed in the last one hundred and fifty years of biblical studies, but genre as a concept has not always been critically analyzed. I believe that a reexamination of the concept of genre is warranted, and this reexamination could be an antidote to biblical studies' preoccupation with historicism.

The thesis of this project is that Deuteronomy 32 should not be read according to the standard taxonomical view of genre. But instead, by analyzing this ancient poem from the perspective of an intertextual view of genre, the interpreter is better able to unfold the meaning of The Song.

I will prove this thesis with the following methodology. First, I will explore the concept of genre; I will show the limitations of the current understanding of genre, explore alternative suggestions, and then explain the intertextual view of genre. In the second chapter, I will overview how the concept of genre has intersected with the study of Deuteronomy 32 in its history of interpretation. Finally, I will show how the fruit of this history of interpretation can be best understood when one applies the intertextual view of genre to Deuteronomy 32.

Genre

Throughout history, many interpreters have asked what genre Deuteronomy 32 belongs to. Contradictory answers to this question have led some scholars to suggest that studies in genre are an inconclusive tool for getting at the meaning of The Song.³ I believe that not only should genre analysis not be abandoned, but it is essential for unfolding the meaning of Deuteronomy 32. To recover the usefulness of genre, it must be redefined and repurposed. Interpreters must learn to stop asking what genre Deuteronomy

³ Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 96.

32 belongs to and learn to find what genres The Song participates in.

As I reexamine the concept of genre, I will build on the work of Will Kynes. In a recent monograph, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* Kynes argues that biblical scholars must allow the concept of "wisdom literature" to die in order to gain a more productive view of genre and its meaning uncovering possibilities.⁴ In this chapter, building on the work of Kynes I will illustrate the limitations of the predominate view of genre.

The Taxonomical View of Genre

The predominate view of genre today is what I will call the "taxonomical" view of genre. In broader literary criticism, it has long been understood that a taxonomical view of genre is inadequate for properly reading texts. For instance, literary critic Alistair Fowler says, "Genres are often said to provide a means of classification. This is a venerable error."⁵ Yet, consciously or more often sub-consciously, the taxonomical view has been the predominate paradigm for genre study in the field of biblical studies.

The taxonomical view of genre holds that genres are names for groups of texts that share essential features.⁶ This idea—first suggested by Plato in book 3 of *Republic*, but developed in Aristotle's *Poetics*—holds that genre is primarily a tool of classification.⁷ In the same way that Aristotle, rigorously classified lifeforms in the world around him, he used the taxonomical approach to genre to sort Greek plays into the

⁴ Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

⁵ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁶ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 108.

⁷ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. Patrick Atherton, John Baxter, and George Whalley (Montreal: MQUP, 1997); Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

categories of tragedy and comedy. He grouped them into these genres based on particular features that they shared. This view of genre is characterized by what Carol Newsom calls a “binary logic”: an impulse toward deciding whether particular texts are in or out of a particular genre.⁸

Alistair Fowler, however, illustrates the weakness of this view by comparing the so-called tragedies of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁹ Few similarities exist between these two “tragedies.” The plot, character, action, depiction of violence, and resolution are all different. In resignation, Fowler suggests that perhaps “seriousness” could be considered the defining characteristic of tragedy, and yet, comic instances like *Hamlet*’s gravediggers, or *Macbeth*’s porter defy even this abstract description.¹⁰

One might suggest that this problem could be resolved by dividing texts into narrower subcategories. Perhaps the classification of genre would operate better if divided diachronically between Shakespearean tragedy and Greek tragedy. But, even then the conundrum remains, but on a different scale. As Fowler says, “Each subgenre has too much variety too elusively and mutably distributed for definition to be feasible.”¹¹ For instance, an essential characteristic of Shakespearean comedy might be that the action resolves positively for its main characters. But even this abstracted definition fails to take account for the provocative ending of *The Merchant of Venice* which ends with Antonio standing alone on the stage as all his friends exit cheerfully.¹² Fowler summarizes, “In

⁸ Carol Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology" in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients : Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis Robert Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 445.

⁹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 39.

¹⁰ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*.

¹¹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*.

¹² Auden sees this often overlooked Shakespearean decision as a key to understanding Antonio as a tragic product of the Venetian environment, W. H. Auden, *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (New

short, genres at all levels are positively resistant to definition. Definition is ultimately not a strategy appropriate to their logical nature.”¹³

Essentially, the logical problem of genre is the problem of definition in general, and so some literary critics have suggested that despite the inherent logical difficulties of classification, it should be embraced pragmatically.¹⁴ In *An Obituary for “Wisdom” Literature*, however, Kynes shows that the last two hundred years of biblical studies have proven otherwise. Not only have genre classifications in biblical studies failed to properly classify the particularities of biblical literature, but they have obscured the meaning of the biblical text. This can be seen clearly in one of the most prominent genre classifications that has arisen: wisdom literature.

In *An Obituary for “Wisdom” Literature*, Will Kynes shows how the intrinsic weakness of a taxonomical view of genre has harmed the discipline of biblical studies specifically as it pertains to the unwieldy category of “wisdom literature.” Early in the book he summarizes his project and says, “I will argue, this weakness has been its strength, as a reliance on a vague, abstract, ill-defined, circularly justified, modernly developed, and extrinsically imposed *definition of the category* has enabled scholars to extend the boundaries of Wisdom Literature indefinitely, leading to a pan-sapiential epidemic in biblical scholarship.”¹⁵

Kynes uses scholarship on the Psalms as a case study in the damage that the taxonomical view of genre has done. He points out that—depending on the perspective of the scholar commenting on the Psalms—as few as five and as many as thirty-nine Psalms

York: Vintage Books, 1989), 233.

¹³ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 40.

¹⁴ Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 25.

¹⁵ Emphasis mine, Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 2 (emphasis mine).

have been considered “wisdom literature.”¹⁶ This sloppy categorization has resulted in a number of issues that scholars have been unable to resolve.

First, the ill-defined category of wisdom is always expanding due to its vague borders which renders the category meaningless. Kynes illustrates this point by pointing out that “none of these [“wisdom”] psalms is *only* like its closest wisdom parallel.”¹⁷ Instead, each Psalm categorized as wisdom literature has unique features that do not relate to texts considered wisdom literature.¹⁸ Scholars categorize this “semantic excess” variously, but not consistently.¹⁹ In order to account for it, the scholar must abstract his or her definition of wisdom enough to fit this new material.

Von Rad provides a clear example of the kind of expansive and abstracted definition produced by the taxonomical view of genre. He comments on the quality of “wisdom psalms” and says, “Thus it is, rather a general impression, one of a certain erudition and didactic quality, of a preponderance of theological thoughts, etc. which entitles us to separate these psalms from the great body of predominantly cultically oriented psalms.”²⁰ When he considers the diversity of material found in the Psalms that he wishes to classify as wisdom psalms, and not cultic psalms, he must abstract the definition to the vague summary, “a certain erudition and didactic quality,” a definition that could properly describe the entire Bible. This tendency for wisdom literature to expand out of the traditional corpus and assimilate new, previously unrelated, features of text which in turns creates a looser and more ill-defined definition of wisdom literature, is

¹⁶ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 44.

¹⁷ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature.”*

¹⁸ See the example of Psalm 73 below of this phenomena.

¹⁹ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature.”*

²⁰ Gerhard von Rad and James D. Martin, *Wisdom in Israel* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1993), 48.

what Kynes terms, “pan-sapientialism.”²¹

Second, the fusion of wisdom literature with the Psalms has provoked scholars to reconstruct various historical settings that explain how a particular social setting could have produced this literature. These reconstructions influence poor interpretations of the Psalms because they are necessarily hypothetical and speculative. For instance, Hermann Gunkel, and those influenced by his theory of *Gattung* and the search for the *Sitz im Leben*, thought that the social settings that produce particular forms of oral communication were pure. Therefore, for proponents of this theory literature that contains a mix of cultic and didactic features poses a difficult historical problem.²² Some scholars who adopted Gunkel’s view of genre have resolved this problem by suggesting that wisdom had seeped into all of Israelite religion.²³ But this suggestion removes any usefulness the idea of wisdom may have once had. If all of the texts produced by Israelite religion are wisdom, then this term fails to contribute to our understanding of any particular text.

Ultimately, this example illustrates how genre classification affects one’s historical reconstruction of the events that lie behind the text, and if that classification is ill-defined, then the historical reconstruction will necessarily reflect that slippage between the particularities of the text and the broader genre classification.

Third, once a Psalm has received the label “wisdom” the aspects of the Psalm that do not correspond to the wisdom genre are obscured.²⁴ For instance, Psalm 73, according to Kynes, relates to multiple kinds of texts and interpreters should not cordone it off to either wisdom or thanksgiving literature.

²¹ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature.”*

²² Martin J. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 209.

²³ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 44.

²⁴ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 46.

Kraus in his comments on Psalm 73 illustrates how the taxonomical view of genre unnecessarily drives interpretation.²⁵ Commenting on the thanksgiving aspects of Psalm 73, he asks rhetorically if the Psalm is a literal response to a situation in the Psalmist's life. He answers, "This is hardly possible. Rather, it is significant for the didactic wisdom poems that they are characterized by autobiographical stylization."²⁶ Kraus's view that the Psalm belongs to the wisdom category necessarily precludes him from admitting that thanksgiving Psalms arise from a literal situation. He says that it is essential to the genre of wisdom literature that the authors use "autobiographical stylization,." Therefore, for Kraus it could not have been written in response to a literal situation. In this way, his commentary illustrates how the ill-defined genre of wisdom redefines Psalm 73 as it consumes it.

The fourth problem inverts the third. The perspective with which the ill-defined wisdom genre frames the Psalms causes interpreter to miss affinities that exist, but are not considered essential to the genre.²⁷ For instance, Kynes points out that the similar language in both Psalms and Job has often been analyzed from the perspective of wisdom in the Psalms. But he points out that this comparison misses the way that Job interacts with praise and lament.²⁸

In summary, a brief look at scholarship on wisdom literature in the Psalms shows how this ill-defined genre has both lost its distinctiveness as it expanded into the psalter and obscured the particularities of the Psalms by selectively narrowing interpreters' lens. Of course, the weaknesses of the taxonomical view of genre have not

²⁵ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

²⁶ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, 85.

²⁷ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 47.

²⁸ See Kynes for a discussion of the scholarly debate about which text has priority, the Psalms or Job, Kynes *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature."*

gone unnoticed in either literary criticism broadly, or biblical studies. So, a couple of alternative approaches to genre have been suggested.²⁹

Alternative Approaches To Utilizing Genre

Family Resemblance

One alternative approach to genre is that of “family resemblance.” Literary critics took this idea from the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and applied to literary theory in the 1960’s.³⁰ In *Philosophical Investigations*, the concept of “family resemblance” appears in a discussion of Wittgenstein’s now famous theory of language games. He argues that what we call language cannot be described by one common attribute, but it is instead a series of individual things that are related to each other.³¹ To illustrate this concept, he describes how people understand games even though no single attribute is common to every activity called a game.³² For instance, there are a number of similarities between board games and card games, but certain features drop out depending on what games you are comparing. If one compares card games with ball games, the similarities are even less, but ball games are still recognizable as games. Wittgenstein asks whether the similarity between games is competition, “but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared.”³³ Ultimately, when recognizing games he concludes, “We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing.”³⁴ A good metaphor that illustrates this phenomena is family resemblance. We

²⁹ For a thorough study of recent approaches to genre see Brian Paltridge, *Genre, Frames, and Writing in Research Settings* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997), 5-46.

³⁰ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 41.

³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Cambridge, England: Blackwell, 1989), 31.

³² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 32.

³³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

cannot identify siblings because of any one particular characteristic that they share, but because of various resemblances. Games are not a *class*, therefore, but a *family*.

Alistair Fowler, summarizing how literary theorists co-opted this metaphor, says, “Representatives of a genre may then be regarded as making up a family whose septas and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all.”³⁵ This approach with its “blurred edges” seems appropriate for the kinds of similarities that one encounters when reading literature from different eras.³⁶ While no tragedy has one defining feature, the metaphor of family resemblance provides a conceptual framework for understanding the various similarities and features that tie two Tragedies together that are closely related—*Oedipus at Colonus* and *Oedipus The King* are related by theme, characterization, and plot—or that are more distantly related—*Oedipus The King* and *King Lear* are related by the exploration of humiliation.³⁷ In summary, the metaphor of family resemblance provides a way of understanding how interpreters can group texts into genres without insisting on a rigid, binary system of classification.

This metaphor also serves as an analogy for literary theorists to understand the historical development of genres. This use of the family resemblance metaphor departs from Wittgenstein’s initial illustration. Instead, Fowler points out that Wittgenstein’s illustration taken too far fails to account for certain kinds of differences and similarities. For example, there could be a number of overlapping similarities between a lie and a fiction, but no one would group them as a genre.³⁸ In other words, Wittgenstein’s initial analogy does not provide a framework for evaluating particular kinds of differences.

³⁵ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 41.

³⁶ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*.

³⁷ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*.

³⁸ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 42.

But family members are related by more than a mere collection of similarities. Instead, families connect biologically and genetically. In genre theory, according to proponents of the family resemblance theory, texts are not merely grouped according to various similarities, but by the traditions that they belong to.³⁹ Fowler doesn't explicitly define "traditions," but he uses this word to describe an author's decision to incorporate the features of a previous text into his or her own work. He says, "As kinship makes a family, so literary relations of this sort form a genre."⁴⁰ This extension of the metaphor provides a helpful lens for understanding the diachronic development of genres. Because all texts flow from particular families or traditions, they will exhibit various similarities, but they will exhibit them inconsistently.

To illustrate this extension of the metaphor, consider the nature of texts that belong to similar genres in vastly different time periods. Critics have observed how certain literary texts, that are quite distant from each other chronologically, exhibit more similarities than texts that are contemporary, and this phenomena has been explained by the logic of family resemblance.⁴¹ In other words, the family resemblance metaphor offers a historical dimension that understands the similarities of genres to be the product of literary traditions, but it cannot be reduced to mere source criticism because how and when "recessive" generic features surface cannot be explained scientifically.

In summary, the family resemblance approach to genre provides a metaphor for both how texts can be grouped despite the inherent difficulties of definition and for how to understand the historical development of genres. But this approach has one significant limitation.

The drawback is that the family resemblance theory could be used to

³⁹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*.

⁴⁰ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*.

⁴¹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 43.

theoretically justify any supposed genre. Newsom illustrates this flaw with a thought experiment which I have slightly adapted here.⁴² Imagine three texts in one family each labeled 1, 2, and 3 that share among them the features a, b, c, d, e and so on. One can observe the criss-crossing similarities of text 1 to text 2 because text 1 is characterized by a, b, and c while text 2 is characterized by c, d, and e. These two texts share the c characteristic. Text 2 and text 3 are also related because text 2 is characterized by c, d, and e, and text 3 is characterized by e, f, and g. These two texts share the characteristic e. This means, however, that text 1(a,b, and c) and text 3 (e, f, and g) are a part of the same family and yet exhibit no similarities. In the same way, the logic of family resemblance could be used to group any two texts regardless of the appearance of any perceived similarities. As John Swales comments, “A family resemblance theory can make anything resemble anything.”⁴³

Prototype Theory

A second theory of genre that has been proposed to replace the old taxonomical approach is the prototype theory of genre. The prototype theory of genre emerges from developments in cognitive science. Eleanor Rosch in a groundbreaking study published in the 1970s showed through a series of ten experiments that in the real world people do not recognize similarities between members of a group because of shared essential features that members of the group possess, but through comparison with a prototypical member of the group.⁴⁴

Rosch’s first experiment illustrates the results of her study. She administered it to college students who were asked to rate how good of an example certain members of a

⁴² Newsom, “Spying Out the Land,” 441.

⁴³ John M. Swales, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 50.

⁴⁴ Eleanor Rosch, “Cognitive Representation of Semantic Categories,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, no. 104 (1975): 192–233.

group were to that group. In her instructions to the students she explained that a Golden Retriever is a very “doggy” dog so it is a good example of the category dog, whereas a Pekinese is a less “doggy” dog.⁴⁵ The students were given examples of ten categories (fruit, bird, vehicle, vegetable, sport, tool, toy, furniture, weapon, and clothing) and were instructed to rank specific examples from 1 to 7 according to how good of an example they were of the category. The result was that in nine out of ten categories ninety-five percent of students marked the same example as the best example of that particular group. For example, nearly all of the students agreed that apples and robins were better examples of fruit and bird than bananas or chickens respectively.⁴⁶ This study has two important ramifications. First, people classify objects that they experience by means of comparison to a prototypical member of a set, and second, objects can be a member of a group, but not be as clear of an example of that group as another object.

The application of this insight to genre theory offers a practical alternative to the rigidity of the old taxonomical approach to genre. According to prototype theory, texts that have various similarities can be grouped together, but there is no need to rigidly define the boundaries of the genre.⁴⁷ Instead, the various differences can be described as being more or less aligned with the prototype of the genre. Also, in contrast with the family resemblance approach to genre, the prototype approach provides a means of evaluating the kinds of similarities and differences that exist between exemplars; the differences between two members of a group can be described in terms of how they differ from the prototype.⁴⁸

In biblical studies, Newsom sees the prototype theory at work tacitly in the

⁴⁵ Rosch, “Cognitive Representation of Semantic Categories,” 198.

⁴⁶ Rosch, “Cognitive Representation of Semantic Categories,” 201.

⁴⁷ Newsom, “Spying Out the Land,” 443.

⁴⁸ Newsom, “Spying Out the Land.”

apocalypse group and John J. Collins.⁴⁹ Collins in “Introduction: Toward A Morphology Of Genre” says, “There is a general consensus among modern scholars that there is a phenomenon which may be called ‘apocalyptic’ and that it is expressed in an ill-defined list of writings.”⁵⁰ These writings—Daniel 7-12, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and Revelation—are more prototypical examples of apocalypse than others, and though scholars agree that more texts fit into the category, they are perceived in relation to these central texts.

To understand prototype theory, one must clarify precisely what Newsom identifies in Collins’s work, especially because Collins explicitly denies that the apocalypse group recognizes a prototypical apocalyptic text.⁵¹ Prototype theory does not necessitate that a prototypical text or object actually exists. Instead, prototype theory attempts to describe the process of cognition whereby people intuitively perceive external stimuli as members of groups that are more or less related to prototypical member of the group. These “groups” are semantic frames that structure our perception of the world into schema.

Sinding points to a classic example that illustrates the concept of semantic frames, or the *Gestalt*, that structure our mental perception of the world.⁵² The word “bachelor” means “unmarried male adult.”⁵³ But this definition would include Tarzan and the Pope, even though no one would conceive of them as bachelors. Instead, bachelor evokes the semantic frame of a “typical man’s life as beginning with childhood, progressing to a period of sexual maturity, and involving (or not) marriage to one

⁴⁹ Newsom, “Spying Out the Land.”

⁵⁰ John J. Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 3.

⁵¹ Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction,” 1.

⁵² Michael Sinding, “After Definitions: Genre, Categories and Cognitive Science,” *Genre* 35, no. 2 (2002): 195.

⁵³ Sinding, “After Definitions: Genre, Categories and Cognitive Science.”

woman.”⁵⁴

Returning to the apocalypse group, Collins articulated the definition of the apocalypse genre in terms of its “internal coherence” or stated another way, a semantic frame.⁵⁵ He said that all apocalyptic literature has certain common implications that result from this frame, and it is all linked by the key term “transcendence.”⁵⁶ Therefore, an exemplar text like Revelation can be missing so-called “essential features” like pseudopigraphal authorship, and still be conceived of as a prototype of apocalyptic literature because of its relationship to the concept of transcendence.⁵⁷

In summary, the prototype theory of genre differs from the taxonomical approach by grouping texts as they relate to the prototype in its semantic frame instead of by a rigid list of essential features. The implications of cognitive science on genre theory are important, and I will return to them below, but the idea of prototype theory still has a significant challenge.

The challenge is that semantic frames are not the same for every individual and as a result, particular texts may be perceived as more or less prototypical depending on an individual's frame. Williamson, for instance, building on the work of Lakoff argues that semantic frames are conditioned culturally.⁵⁸ So, while a person in North America might consider a robin to be a “birdy” example of a bird, someone raised in Antarctica would likely consider a penguin to be more prototypical. In terms of genre, to properly account for one's genre conception it must be clarified how an interpreter's cultural situation affects the genre designation he or she assigns to a given text.

⁵⁴ Newsom, “Spying Out the Land,” 244.

⁵⁵ Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 10.

⁵⁶ Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre.”

⁵⁷ Newsom, “Spying Out the Land,” 244.

⁵⁸ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Robert Williamson, “Peshet: A Cognitive Model of the Genre,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 17, no. 3 (2010): 317.

The Intertextual Approach to Genre

The final alternative to the taxonomical view of genre that I will consider is the intertextual approach. Though I commend much about the family resemblance theory and the prototype theory of genre, I believe the intertextual approach to genre provides the most helpful lens for interpreting Deuteronomy 32.

Kynes defines genre, according to this approach, as “simply a group of texts gathered together due to some perceived significant affinity between them.”⁵⁹ In distinction from the taxonomical view of genre which groups texts according to certain shared essential features, the family resemblance theory which sorts texts into literary traditions, or the prototype theory which relates texts by their similarity to a prototype in a semantic domain, the intertextual approach allows *any* significant affinity between texts to be considered a genre. According to this approach, all texts will participate in a number of different genres, and it is the interaction and relationship of these genre designations to each other that most clearly unfold the meaning of the text.

The intertextual view of genre arises from a fundamental insight, and then two additional points developed by Kynes. The fundamental principle is that all texts are read through a process of relating texts to other texts, and the relationships observed between texts can be described as genres. In other words, the act of reading is the act of identifying similarities and dissimilarities between texts, and ultimately genres are names for textual similarities.

E.D. Hirsch articulates this point in *Validity in Interpretation*.⁶⁰ He says, “An interpreter’s notion of the type of meaning he confronts will powerfully influence his understanding of details ... This seems to suggest that an interpretation is helplessly

⁵⁹ Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 110.

⁶⁰ Eric D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 75.

dependent on the generic conception with which the interpreter happens to start.”⁶¹ And of course, the “generic conceptions,” or the genre assumption, that interpreters start with are informed by other texts.

Hirsch illustrates this point with an experiment performed by professor I.A. Richards.⁶² Richards gathered a group of college students and asked them to interpret various unfamiliar poems without titles or attributions. Of course, without any text to orient the students to the poems, their interpretations widely diverged. The titles and attributions would not have merely named these poems, but would have provided a genre expectation for how they should be read. According to John Frow, this is the function of genre: “It specifies which types of meaning are relevant and appropriate in a particular context, and so makes certain senses of an utterance more probable, in the circumstances, than others.”⁶³

Assigning genre, therefore, is not an act of classification, but an act of interpretation. As Hirsch has famously said, “All understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound.”⁶⁴ So, the first fundamental assumption of the intertextual approach of genre is that all texts are read in relationship to other texts.

For Hirsch, this principle led him to argue that each text has an intrinsic genre derived from the intention of the author which one must identify to accurately interpret a text.⁶⁵ But if one follows Hirsch here, he will encounter the same issue that makes the taxonomical view of genre problematic. Namely, no text fits into a precise genre category, and if meaning is “genre-bound” then necessarily no precise meaning is possible. Or to

⁶¹ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*.

⁶² Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*.

⁶³ John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 110.

⁶⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 76.

⁶⁵ Frow, *Genre*, 111.

restate the dilemma: genre determines meaning; genre cannot be precisely defined; therefore, meaning cannot be precisely determined.

Kynes resolves this dilemma in his articulation of the intertextual approach to genre by introducing two novel concepts. These two concepts when considered together make up a second fundamental premise of the intertextual approach to genre: readers do not find the meaning of a text by putting it into a genre category, but through observing how a text participates in multiple overlapping genres.

The first concept is emergence theory; a theory that provides for a reader-centric understanding of genre that does not devolve into hopeless relativism. In other words, it enters the dilemma posed above by providing a way to understand how genres are supplied by readers, but remain objectively rooted in texts. Emergence is an idea used to describe how complex expressions can arise out of and be more than the sum of individual components.

Concerning emergence theory, Johnson describes how the scientific community first gained an interest in emergence when a scientist reported that a large ball of slime had discovered how to find the fastest route towards a food source.⁶⁶ The prevailing theory, that was overturned by emergence theory, had suggested that there must be one cell leading the conglomerate of cells toward the food source, but in reality, it was discovered that each cell was working independently in such a way that it resulted in this larger, more complex phenomenon. Another example of this phenomenon is an ant colony. Ants each work independently, but contribute to a colony that surpasses the complexity of any individual ant's ability.⁶⁷

Genres, in an analogous way, emerge from texts. Each text operates

⁶⁶ Steven Johnson and 3M Company, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (Tulsa, OK: Gardners, 2012), 11-23.

⁶⁷ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 113.

independently; it is unique. But taken together with other texts, a genre emerges that is more complex than the sum of its parts and cannot *only* be defined by them. Furthermore, the genre is created *by the parts*. The genre is not merely the pattern that readers recognize when texts are taken together; the actual character of the text is constitutive of the genre.

In summary, emergence theory provides the first step in answer to Hirsch's dilemma. The foundation for objective meaning does not need to be the elusive and indefinable concept of intrinsic genre. Instead, genres emerge from texts and exist over and above them.

The second concept is conceptual blending. While the concept of emergence theory shows how genres emerge, it does not explain how readers identify what emerges as meaningful. For that explanation, I return to the cognitive sciences. Kynes, building on the work of Sinding, points out that cognitive scientists have shown that our minds have a tendency to assemble random stimuli into a coherent whole.⁶⁸

Kynes develops the analogy of constellations at length to illustrate this concept.⁶⁹ For those who have a familiarity with Greek mythology and its relationship to astronomy, when they look at the night sky conceptual blends occur. These individuals do not just see stars, but they also see a pattern (ie. Orion's belt). Not only has this constellation emerged from the stars, but cognitive scientists suggest that our minds explore the implications and meaning of the new structure.⁷⁰ Kynes says, "As a result, the emergent structure of the Orion blend has features that do not exist in either input: we can now speak of stars collectively wearing a belt, and of the star in Orion's shoulder."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 118; and Sinding, "After Definitions: Genre, Categories and Cognitive Science."

⁶⁹ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 118-119.

⁷⁰ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 118.

⁷¹ Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature."*

In an analogous way, a conceptual blend occurs when an interpreter recognizes affinities between two texts and recognizes them as a genre, like epic poetry or tragedy. These genres provide significance to the affinities that are recognized between texts. Conceptual blending cannot be left here, however. Because significance emerges from the features of the text, grouping texts into multiple genres to unfold aspects of the text that would be missed when construed differently is of utmost importance.

Once again returning to the concept of constellations, the three-dimensional nature of the heavens illustrates this phenomenon.⁷² From the perspective of constellations, by construing stars into the two-dimensional pattern of Orion, the location of individual stars is made more concrete. From a three-dimensional perspective, new constellations would become apparent and reveal more precisely how the stars of Orion relate to each other. Blending the two- and three-dimensional perspectives, rather than descending into abstract relativism, provides greater clarity and precision in description. In the same way, though readers construe the significance of genres differently from different perspectives, by blending these various perspectives a greater understanding of a text is possible.

In summary, all texts are read through a process of relating texts to other texts. The various relationships that exist between texts emerge to create distinct genres that arise from texts, but are distinct from them. Through the process of conceptual blending, readers recognize these various meaningful genres that emerge from texts. Therefore, one can gain a better understanding of a text, by recognizing the various genres that a text participates in. In this way, the intertextual approach to genre utilizes genres as an interpretive tool to uncover the meaning of texts, rather than restricting genre to the realm of classification.

⁷² Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 125.

CHAPTER 2

GENRE IN DEUTERONOMY 32

In the previous chapter, I showed that biblical students must reexamine the concept of genre itself and I showed that the intertextual view of genre is the best explanation of how the concept of genre can aid understanding.

The concept of genre, however, has often been used without critical examination or rigorous definition. In this chapter, I will show how the concept of genre has been considered in the history of interpretation of The Song. A survey of how scholars have understood The Song and its genre will show that three primary genre designations have consistently been suggested for The Song. I will begin this survey by showing that reflection on what *kind* of text The Song has long preoccupied readers, but no one has reached a consensus on this question. The survey will ultimately provide the tools necessary for moving beyond the question of what genre This Song is, to asking what genres The Song participates in.

The Genre of Deuteronomy 32

Although rarely mentioned by scholars attempting to designate the genre of The Song, significantly The Song is introduced with a genre designation in the text itself. For this reason, it is self-evident why scholars have been preoccupied with the question of what kind of text The Song is.

שירה

Chapter 32 is labeled as a שירה, a word used five times in Deuteronomy 31–32

and thirteen times in the Old Testament.⁷³ Of those thirteen occurrences, two times are used to describe other songs sung by the Israelites within the Pentateuchal narrative (Exod 15 and Num 21). And two other times it is used to refer to a song of David that is similar to Deuteronomy 32 (2 Sam 22:1 and Ps 18:1).

Two of the remaining instances are labeled with what appears to be a title. In Isaiah 5:1 in the parable of the vineyard the prophet sings שִׁירַת דָּוִד “a song of love,” and Isaiah 23:15 references שִׁירַת הַזֹּנָה “the song of the prostitute.” The verbs that introduce the six songs vary between אָמַר and the verbal cognate שָׁר, and often the song is directed to (לְ) someone. Only Isaiah 23:15 explicitly mentions musical instruments or offers any textual evidence that the שִׁירָה was sung, rather than spoken.

A brief overview of the word שִׁירָה reveals the basic difficulty of interpreting Deuteronomy 32, the difficulty that readers of the Song have wrestled with for hundreds of years. The difficulty is that, while the precise form of The Song is not revealed by the designation שִׁירָה, this word does indicate that the compositional unit is in a form distinct from the surrounding narrative and theological instruction. Any reader attempting to understand this unit must take into consideration that it will be read differently than the surrounding text. In other words, the text itself suggests analysis of genre and form.

New Testament Use of The Song

Some of the earliest reflections on The Song outside of the Old Testament canon are recorded in the New Testament. The NT repeatedly references and alludes to Deuteronomy 31–32, but two particular allusions prove relevant for a consideration of The Song’s genre.⁷⁴

⁷³ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic; Coded with the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 1010.

⁷⁴ Matt 17:17, 25:31; Luke 19:42; John 5:45; Acts 2:40, 17:26; Rom 9:14, 10:19, 11:11, 12:19, 15:10; 1 Cor 10:20; Phil 2:15; Heb 1:6, 10:30, 13:5; Rev 6:10, 9:20, 10:5, 6, 15:3, 19:2.

First, in Revelation 15:3 a “song of Moses the servant of God, and a song of the lamb” is cited. The lyrics of this song do not precisely match the lyric of any Old Testament song. The primary referent of the song is likely The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15.⁷⁵ Exodus 14:31 introduces The Song of the Sea by also mentioning that Moses is the servant of God. Furthermore, in Revelation 15 the beast has just been conquered so Revelation 15:3–4 functions as a song of deliverance from the beast in the same way that Exodus 15:1–18 functions as a song of deliverance from Egypt.

The allusion, however, is not a simple citation. Instead, the author of Revelation interweaves the themes of multiple Old Testament songs. For instance, notice how Deuteronomy 32:4 and Revelation 15:3 demonstrate lexical overlap.

LXX Deuteronomy 32:4	NA 28 Revelation 15:3
Θεὸς, ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ	Μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου
καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις	κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ
Θεὸς πιστὸς, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία	δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου,
δίκαιος καὶ ὁσιος Κύριος.	ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν.

Revelation 15:3 has taken a central theme of Deuteronomy 32:4, that the Lord will always be morally vindicated, and condensed it to one line stating that at the end of time, all will recognize that the Lord’s ways are faithful and just (*δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου*). For the purpose of genre analysis, this lexical overlap demonstrates that the author of Revelation found it appropriate to allude to The Song in a prophetic context.

The author of Revelation is not the only early reader of Deuteronomy 32 to place this text in a prophetic context.⁷⁶ The Babylonian Talmud references Deuteronomy 32:4 in the context of God standing in judgment over people who have gone to the

⁷⁵ Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 794-795.

⁷⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*.

“world-to-come.”⁷⁷ Also, *Pseudo-Philo* indicates that in Deuteronomy 32:1, the Lord has revealed to Moses what will happen in the end times.⁷⁸ What these ancient commentators and readers reveal is a striking level of comfort that the pre-modern reader had with prophetic utterances. Much of the modern debate surrounding the genre and content of Deuteronomy 32 concerns how to account for Deuteronomy’s attribution of foreknowledge to Moses, but for the pre-modern reader this was accepted. To state this observation in terms of genre, at least some early readers of The Song saw this text as prophetic.

Second, in Romans 10:19 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:21 to indict Israel for its failure to receive the gospel. The quotation of The Song is close to the LXX with three subtle alterations.

LXX Deuteronomy 32:21b	NA 28 Romans 15:19b	MT Deuteronomy 32:21b
<i>καὶ γὰρ παραζηλώσω αὐτοὺς ἐπ’ οὐκ ἔθνει</i>	<i>Ἐγὼ παραζηλώσω ὑμᾶς ἐπ’ οὐκ ἔθνει,</i>	וְאֲנִי אֶקְנִיאֶם בְּלֹא־ עֵם
<i>ἐπὶ ἔθνει ἀσυνέτῳ παροργισῶ αὐτούς.</i>	<i>ἐπ’ ἔθνει ἀσυνέτῳ παροργισῶ ὑμᾶς</i>	בְּגוֹי נִבְלָא אֶכְעִיסֶם

The LXX, which matches the MT quantitatively, is adjusted in Romans 15:19 in three places. The first change is that he has removed the conjunction at the beginning of the line to adapt this verse to his context.⁷⁹ The second two differences are third person plural pronouns that have been substituted with second person plural pronouns. Jewett

⁷⁷ אל אמונה ואין עול אל אמונה כשם שנפרעין מן הרשעים לעולם הבא אפילו על עבירה קלה שעושים כך אל אמונה ואין עול אל אמונה כשם שנפרעין מן הצדיקים בעולם הזה על עבירה קלה שעושים
<https://www.sefaria.org/Taanit>.

⁷⁸ “Biblical Antiquities of Philo: The Biblical Antiquities of Philo: Chapter XIX,” accessed August 9, 2020, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/bap/bap35.htm>.

⁷⁹ Robert Jewett, Roy David Kotansky, and Eldon Jay Epp, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 646.

argues that this substitution disambiguates the referents of the pronoun in verse 19 from the referents in the previous citation in verse 18.⁸⁰ The referent in Romans 15:19 is the rebellious nation of Israel, and for the second time in Romans 15, Paul directly appeals to the authority of Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, in the condemnation of his countrymen. The appeal to Moses is significant for Paul's argument because he grounds his condemnation of Israel's misguided zeal in "no new revelation," but in the teaching of Moses.⁸¹

The attribution to Moses does not operate merely as an affirmation of Mosaic authorship, but more so, as a meta-textual indicator of how this citation is to be read, as the binding, authoritative religious testament of Israel's first prophet, Moses. Paul's use of The Song not only relies on the text of Deuteronomy 32:21, but also on the broader context of Deuteronomy 32.

In summary, these passages reveal that The Song was read as a prophetic text. The trend in modern research has been to attempt to locate the historical situation of The Song by interpreting prophetic lines as reflections on a supposed redactor's contemporary events.⁸² But the earliest readers of The Song interpreted it in the context of the narrative of Deuteronomy as Moses' testament and impending death.

Early Jewish Commentary

No one knows the date of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's* composition, but it remains an important pre-medieval source of Jewish interpretation of the Pentateuch.⁸³ Its interpretation of The Song illustrate a couple of important principles about how genre and

⁸⁰ Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*.

⁸¹ Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*.

⁸² Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 21-35.

⁸³ David Noel Freedman, et al., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 6:322.

interpretation interact with reference to Deuteronomy 32.

The Targum's interpretation of The Song hinges on the expansion of the theme of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 32. The narrative of Deuteronomy 31–32 mentions Moses' death in 31:2, 14, 16, 27 as the basis for why Moses is writing The Song. The Song will serve as a witness against the Israelites when they forsake the Lord. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* picks up on this theme and introduces Deuteronomy 32:1 with an extended imagined soliloquy by Moses,

And when the last end of Mosheh the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from among the world, he said in his heart: I will not attest against this people with witnesses that taste of death in this world, behold, I attest against them with witnesses which do not taste of death in this world, and whose destination is to be renewed in the world to come....but Mosheh the prophet, when he now prophesied in the congregation of Israel, attributed hearing to the earth, and attentiveness to the heavens; because (in his case) heaven was nearest and earth more remote; for so it is written, Attend, ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.⁸⁴

The imagined internal dialogue shows why Moses chose to address heaven and earth in 32:1. They will serve as a witness against Israel after his death because they cannot die.

Contrary to this interpretation, in the nineteenth century interpreters seized on the invocation of the heaven and earth as a key piece of evidence in the argument that Deuteronomy 32 is a covenant lawsuit.⁸⁵ The Targum's reading of verse 1—that the heaven and earth are invoked as witnesses for their eternity—illustrates already how reading The Song according to one genre designation fails to take account for all of the information. Certainly, the witnesses are eternal, but modern commentators have shown that the importance of the witnesses is the eternity of the covenant that they witness to.

The great medieval commentator Rashi reiterated the interpretation of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*. Without citing it explicitly, he also writes an imagined dialogue in

⁸⁴ J. W. Etheridge, trans., *The Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts 1865), Deuteronomy 32:1.

⁸⁵ See below.

which Moses says that he will invoke heaven and earth to witness the Lord's covenant because they will not die like him.⁸⁶ But he also mentions that Moses invokes heaven and earth in connection with the end times similarly to *Taanit* 11a mentioned above. In the end times, when the people of Israel have returned to the Lord after their period of rebellion, the heaven and earth will reward them for their faithfulness by producing fruit and rain.

In the Jewish Targums, summarized by Rashi, The Song is seen as a text that encapsulates Moses final testament against Israel and records prophecies regarding the future of his people.

Christian Interpretation Prior to 1800

Similarly to Rashi and the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, the view that Deuteronomy 32 is a testament can also be found in early Christian interpretation. A clear example of this view is expressed by the fourth century bishop, Nicetas of Remesiana. In his polemic *Liturgical Singing*, an argument against those who said that singing aloud in church should be prohibited, he evinces the example of Moses who formed choirs and wrote two songs. He says about The Song, "He [Moses] left the song as a sort of testament to the people of Israel, to teach them the kind of funeral they should expect, if ever they abandoned God. And woe to those who refused to give up unlawful superstitions, once they had heard such a clear denunciation."⁸⁷ For Nicetas, in its narrative context The Song was best understood as a testament, but he also highlights that the function of The Song is to teach.

Origen, the great Christian philosopher, also mentioned the teaching function of The Song in a homily on Leviticus 16. In his sermon, he argues that rain in Leviticus

⁸⁶ "Rashi on Deuteronomy," accessed August 9, 2020, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Deuteronomy.

⁸⁷ Nicetas of Remesiana, *Writings*, in *The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 68.

26:4 is figural language that refers to the teaching of the law. He illustrates this point by citing Deuteronomy 32:2 where Moses appears to explicitly equate The Song with rain.⁸⁸ In terms of genre, Origen argues generally that the Scripture—and The Song implicitly—employs physical language to teach spiritual truth. Origen’s comment provides yet another possible metatextual context for how Deuteronomy 32:2 and the rest of The Song could be interpreted. For Origen, it is the kind of text that teaches spiritual truth in the context of Christian theology through the use of non-literal language.

At the close of the middle ages, Calvin provides another example of a pre-enlightenment Christian writer who focused on the teaching function of The Song. Calvin says that Moses wanted the children of Israel to recite The Song so that when they had rebelled against God, in their misery “they might at last learn that God is a just avenger.”⁸⁹ Calvin not only affirms the teaching function of The Song, but he also highlights its prophetic nature stating that the Holy Spirit dictated to Moses future events which Moses wrote down.⁹⁰

In summary, a few examples from the tradition of pre-enlightenment Christian commentary show that The Song was generally read didactically, but despite that commonality, the three examples cited each differed in the broader description of the nature of the text. For Nicetas, it was testament; for Origen, it was didactic figural language; and for Calvin, The Song was prophetic.

Interpretation After 1800

I have shown that in both Christian and Jewish interpretation Deuteronomy 32 had been thought of as didactic and prophetic generally, but early biblical interpreters did

⁸⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus, 1-16*, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 264.

⁸⁹ Jean Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 4, trans, James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 279.

⁹⁰ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*.

not specifically analyze their genre assumptions nor did they agree . Beyond these general characterizations, the most specific genre designation used in regard to Deuteronomy 32 was testament, but this term was never clearly defined. It was used to explain how The Song fit in the narrative context of the book of Deuteronomy as a whole. Each of these three genre designations would be elaborated on and expanded in the modern period.

But in the modern period, source, form, and redaction criticism arose. The result of these methodologies was analysis of The Song detached from its narrative context. S.R. Driver's comments in 1899 on The Song are illustrative of the difference in disposition between a modern interpreter and the commentator before 1800.

Driver argued that Deuteronomy 32 was in no way Mosaic. He speculated that the pseudo-prophetic references in the poem are literal reference to Israel reflecting on the Exodus period in the distant past, and he said the composition "exhibits also a maturity which points to a period considerably later than that of Moses."⁹¹

Furthermore, Driver saw the introduction to the Song in chapter 31 as two separate redactional layers. The first redactional layer, verses 16-22, is written in a style novel to the body of Deuteronomy which he attributed to the JE source. The other redactional layer, verses 23-30, also appears later to Driver and may have been inserted by a second source. He suggests that due to the poem's view of idolatry as reprobated, the comparison between Yahweh and other gods, the thought of Israel's lapse, punishment, and subsequent redemption are themes indicative of the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁹²

Driver does not explicitly label the genre of The Song, but his argument assumes that the highly mature nature of the composition means it was written at a late

⁹¹ Samuel R Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 96.

⁹² Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 97.

date, and he assumes *a priori* that literary or theological inspiration must be explained as the product of a particular historical situation. Driver's analysis which is driven by his pursuit of the historical situation of The Song illustrates the modern turn in biblical studies. Future scholars would have the same goal—uncover the historical situation of every biblical text—but pursue it with the concept of genre.

Covenant Lawsuit

Following in this tradition, a major shift in scholarship on The Song occurred in 1959 when Huffmon showed that The Song fit in the ancient covenant lawsuit genre. Building on the work of his teacher Mendenhall, Huffmon noticed that the lawsuit pattern is common in the prophets, but identified it in the Pentateuch only here.⁹³ The characteristic that marks a lawsuit oracle is “the distinctive introductory formula of the type, ‘Hear ..., give ear ...,’ an appeal to certain natural phenomena, in some capacity, to hear the controversy between Yahweh and his people.”⁹⁴ Deuteronomy 32 very clearly begins with the invocation of the heavens. Then in the pattern of the oracle the “speaker for the plaintiff” Yahweh, speaks for him in verse 3. Then in verses 5 and 6, the accused are charged. In 6b to 14, the mighty acts of Yahweh are summarized. The plaintiff is indicted in 15-18 and the sentence is specified in 19-25. He then calls what follows an appendix to the indictment.⁹⁵

The primary piece of evidence for Huffmon to read The Song as a covenant lawsuit is the invocation of the heavens as witnesses to a prior covenant. But there have been differing opinions about why the heaven and earth are invoked in the Song. For instance, Driver argued that the poet invokes the heavens because of the importance of

⁹³ George E Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (September 1954): 50–76.

⁹⁴ H. B. Huffmon, “Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 4 (December 1959): 285–95.

⁹⁵ Huffmon, “Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” 290.

the content of the message he is about to deliver.⁹⁶ R. B. Y. Scott, on the other hand, saw the heavens and earth, not as parts of the created universe, but as a synecdoche for the heavenly hosts and the people on the earth.⁹⁷ G.E. Wright suggested that the heavens and the earth are members of the divine assembly.⁹⁸

Huffmon counters these proposals by pointing out that in Mesopotamian culture the divine assembly was made up of a pantheon of deities and not natural elements like the heavens and earth. Instead, Deuteronomy 32 is akin to discovered Aramean treaties that allude to natural elements presumably because of their relationship to the blessings and curses within the covenant.⁹⁹ This evidence makes sense of three other instances in prose portions of Deuteronomy 32 where heaven and earth are invoked in a covenantal context.¹⁰⁰

Huffmon focuses on the address to heaven and earth as a primary piece of evidence in his theory, but his argument also relies on the covenantal framework. The lawsuit of Deuteronomy 32 can be distinguished from the lawsuits of Psalm 82 or Isaiah 40-55 because in The Song Yahweh accuses Israel of a lack of faithfulness to a prior covenant. For this reason, the covenant lawsuit requires a historical prologue that establishes the basis of Israel's obligations to Yahweh.¹⁰¹ This historical prologue, according to Huffmon, is in Deuteronomy 32:6b-14.

⁹⁶ Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 340.

⁹⁷ R. B. Y. Scott, "The Literary Structure of Isaiah's Oracles," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. H.H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 175–86.

⁹⁸ G. E. Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. James Muilenburg, Bernhard W Anderson, and Walter J Harrelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 2010), 43.

⁹⁹ Huffmon, "Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets."

¹⁰⁰ Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19; and 31:28

¹⁰¹ Huffmon, "Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," 294.

Wisdom

Not every biblical scholar agreed that The Song should be considered a lawsuit oracle. As early as 1914, Kent suggested that the poem should be classified as wisdom literature. He said it might

properly be classified with the other Wisdom writings, such as Pr. B. Sir., and Job. Here the didactic purpose of the psalmist is clearly revealed. The wise teachers of old Israel realized that what men sang under the influence of deep emotion sank deepest into their consciousness. Plato voiced the same when he declared, the character of *the people depends so much more upon their songs than upon anything else that we ought to make these the chief/eras in education.*¹⁰²

James Boston read Deuteronomy 32 in a similar way. Boston provided five reasons why he believed the Song of Moses should be categorized as wisdom. First, he disputed Huffmon's primary piece of evidence, the address to heaven and earth. Boston pointed out that the invocation of the heavens and the earth does not necessarily imply a covenant lawsuit. A study of the function of the heavens and earth revealed that while they are sometimes called upon to stand as witnesses, more often they are not.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Boston counted twelve examples of lawsuits in the Old Testament that do not include an address to the heaven and earth.¹⁰⁴

According to Boston, more important than the address to heaven and earth for identifying the literary type of the text was the poem's double request "to hear" in the opening lines. This trope is used in a number of "wisdom pericopes."¹⁰⁵ It is also found in extra biblical wisdom material in the opening of the *Instruction of Amenemopet* and the

¹⁰² Charles Foster Kent, *The Songs, Hymns and Prayers of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 261.

¹⁰³ Out of eleven invocations, four times heaven and earth are invoked as witnesses, as in the covenant lawsuit. In the seven other instances, heaven and earth are called upon to perform a variety of functions (1 Chron 16:31, Ps 69:34, 96:11, Isa 1:2, 44:23, 49:13, Jer 4:28) James R Boston, "Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87, no. 2 (June 1968): 199.

¹⁰⁴ Boston, "Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses," 199.

¹⁰⁵ Prov 7:24, Ps 49:2, 78:1, Isa 28:23, Prov 4:1, Job 13:6, 33:1, 33:31, 34:2, 34:1, Boston, "Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses."

Babylonian text “Dialogue on Human Misery.”¹⁰⁶ The same double invocation to hear is also used in many prophetic passages, but in these passages, the addressee hears a warning to heed the authority of Yahweh specifically.¹⁰⁷ In wisdom literature on the other hand, the speaker exhorted his hearers to listen to the authority of a teacher. Boston argued that the double exhortation to hear in The Song was closer to wisdom than prophecy because Yahweh’s authority is not mentioned.¹⁰⁸

Similarly to Huffmon, Boston’s argument hinged largely on his interpretation of the opening lines of The Song, but he also provided three other correlations between Deuteronomy 32 and wisdom literature. The second is that wisdom teachers associated corruption with a lack of understanding; something The Song does in vv. 6, 15, and 28.¹⁰⁹ Third, Deuteronomy 32:7 says, “Ask your father so that he can tell you. Your elders so that they will speak to you.” Boston speculated that this couplet might be a plea to listen to the wise man.¹¹⁰ Fourth, in Boston’s view, only the wisdom writers consider Sheol a place that Yahweh exerts some influence or control. On that basis, Deuteronomy 32:22 appears to reflect the influence of wisdom literature.¹¹¹ Fifth, Boston lists fourteen linguistic connections between the Song and wisdom literature.¹¹² Examples include the use of אָמַרִי which appears in Deuteronomy 32:1, and 33 out of 50 other biblical instances are in Proverbs and Job. Or, אָרַץ מְדַבֵּר used only in Deuteronomy 32:10 and Proverbs

¹⁰⁶ *The Instruction of Anemepet* opens, “Give thy ears, hear what is said, Give thy heart to understand them.” And the “Dialogue on Human Misery” begins, “Give heed, my friend. Understand my meaning. Guard the choice expression of my speech,” in Boston, “Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses.”

¹⁰⁷ Isa 1:2,10, 32:9, 49:1, 51:4, Jer 13:15, Hos 5:1, Joel 1:2, Mic 1:2.

¹⁰⁸ Boston, “Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses,” 200.

¹⁰⁹ Boston did not provide a citation, but one thinks of Proverbs 1:29. Boston, “Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses,” 201.

¹¹⁰ Boston, “Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses.”

¹¹¹ Boston, “Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses.”

¹¹² Boston, “Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses,” 201-2.

21:19.

Testament

Though Boston's view of The Song is laudable on certain points, critics pointed out that his genre designation fails to account for the apparently legal terminology in Deuteronomy 32.¹¹³ In view of Boston's evidence but the failure of his argument to account for the whole of The Song, Steven Weitzman suggested that the genre of The Song could only be properly understood in its narrative context. He returned to some of the oldest interpretations of The Song and argued that the presence of both wisdom and legal elements in The Song can only be understood as a part of the "last words tradition," as a testament.¹¹⁴

Weitzman's evidence for this argument arises largely from a widely circulated ancient story called *The Words of Ahiqar*. The ancient story, mentioned in the pseudepigraphal book Tobit and retold in many different forms, tells the story of a wise sage Ahiqar and his nephew, Nadan, who plots his murder. Weitzman considered four shared motifs that when considered together indicated that The Song was a product of the same literary logic that created *The Words of Ahiqar* or its ancient ancestor.¹¹⁵

The first similarity is that both narratives center on a dying sage leaving instruction. It is beyond dispute that Deuteronomy 31 depicts Moses writing The Song as he considers his own death, and in the narrative portion of *Ahiqar*, it is his threat of death that provides the central drama of the story.¹¹⁶ The second motif is that in both stories the recipient of instruction is ungrateful. The key is not ungratefulness itself, but that the

¹¹³ Steven Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying: The Role of Deuteronomy 32 in Its Narrative Setting," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 4 (October 1994): 378.

¹¹⁴ Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying," 380.

¹¹⁵ Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying," 383.

¹¹⁶ Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying," 384.

children of Israel, or Nadan, are ungrateful for instruction given at the time of the sage's death.¹¹⁷ The third motif is that in both stories an heir of the sage is disowned. In *Ahiqar*, in many versions, Nadan is disowned after he plots against his uncle's life. In Deuteronomy 31:17–18, Yahweh says that because of Israel's corruption he will have to forsake them. The fourth motif is that both Ahiqar and Moses give their instruction in written and oral form. Weitzman points out that this interpretation would solve a long-standing difficulty with interpreting תורה in Deuteronomy 31:30 as it would explain why Moses writes both a שירה and a תורה, the performed and written version of The Song.¹¹⁸

The weakness of this proposal is that under scrutiny the supposed shared motifs do not hold up. The clearest example is the third motif. Weitzman suggests that Nadan and the children of Israel are both ungrateful for the instruction they are receiving, but the children of Israel are not depicted as Moses' heir.

On the other hand, the strength of Weitzman's proposal lies in its taking seriously the narrative context of The Song which shows that the civil lawsuit terminology and didactic portions can and should be read together.

In the pre-modern period, readers recognized that the form of The Song was distinct from its narrative context. As a result, some labeled it didactic, others' testament, and still others' prophecy. In the modern period, while the theories of redaction, form, and source criticism, became more precise, these same genre designations were elaborated on to explain the diversity of The Song and its context. The didactic elements of The Song were explained as wisdom literature, the prophetic aspects were explained as a covenant lawsuit, and the narrative context was declared a part of the "last words tradition." The inevitable result of these competing genre designations was the division of

¹¹⁷ Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying," 385.

¹¹⁸ I offer a more satisfying proposal to resolve this dilemma below. See Brian Britt, "Deuteronomy 31-32 as a Textual Memorial," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 4 (October 2000): 358–74.

the text into redactional layers that best fit the preferred genre designation of the interpreter, loose definitions of the genre, or minimization of details that didn't fit.

In the final chapter, by utilizing the intertextual theory of genre, I will show how this approach to genre may offer a new way to see these genre designations that have been assigned to Deuteronomy 32. I will show how these genre designations need not oppose each other, but instead, provide a window into understanding the singularity of this text.

CHAPTER 3
DEUTERONOMY 32 AND THE INTERTEXTUAL
VIEW OF GENRE

I have endeavored to show that how scholars in the discipline of biblical studies have typically utilized the concept of genre has led to various and sometimes contradictory conclusions. In this final chapter, I will apply the intertextual understanding of genre, as described above, to Deuteronomy 32. This new approach will better articulate how the apparently conflicting genre designations for The Song are actually complementary, and it will lead to a more robust understanding of this ancient song.

I will accomplish this by utilizing the three primary genre designations offered by readers: covenant-lawsuit, wisdom, and testament. I will show how the mutually exclusive use of each of these designations has prevented accurate understanding of key problems in the text, but I will also show that these genre designations are essential for proper understanding. In this way, I will both confirm my assertion that texts must be read according to various genre designations and illustrate the use of various genre designations.

The contribution of this chapter is not necessarily to suggest any interpretation of The Song that has not been offered before. Instead, by expanding and rearticulating the role and function of genre, I will show how various interpretations of The Song that have been seen as contradictory actually can, and must, exist together.

Testament

The earliest interpreters of The Song described it as Moses' last will and

testament.¹¹⁹ This genre designation resurfaced in modern times in the work of Weitzmann who compared Deuteronomy 32 with the ancient fable of *Ahiqar*.¹²⁰ But, for the majority of scholars in the modern era, this genre designation has not played a significant role.

The disappearance of this genre comes from the misuse and misunderstanding of the concept of genre in the modern era. For instance, Driver, representative of the modern era, stated that The Song was in no way Mosaic. He thought The Song resembled the literature of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah.¹²¹

In this way, Driver's analysis severed the plausibility of the genre designation: testament. By questioning Mosaic authorship and relating The Song to Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Driver reframed Deuteronomy 32 outside of its narrative context. Thus, modern commentators dismiss entirely the clear textual indicators of Deuteronomy 31 that signal the relevance of Moses' death for the interpretation of The Song, or commentators evaluate them merely as an indication for why a later redactor decided to insert The Song in this particular location.¹²²

Driver's methodology illustrates the weakness of the taxonomical approach to genre. Though wound up in a more comprehensive and sophisticated program of historical, critical research, Driver chose to interpret The Song according to its resonance with the literature of Jeremiah and Ezekiel which necessarily ruptured Deuteronomy 32 from its surrounding context. This phenomena is what Kynes calls "canonical

¹¹⁹ Nicetas of Remesiana, "*Writings*," in *The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 68.

¹²⁰ Steven Weitzman, "Lessons from the Dying: The Role of Deuteronomy 32 in Its Narrative Setting," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 4 (October 1994): 377–93.

¹²¹ Samuel R Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 96.

¹²² Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*.

separation.”¹²³ According to the binary logic of the taxonomical approach to genre, Deuteronomy 32 must belong to one genre (literature produced in the era of Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and not another (testament). Kynes applies the term “canonical separation” to whole books which is why he labels it “canonical.”

My advancement on Kynes work is to suggest that in Deuteronomy 32 this tendency might better be referred to as “compositional separation,” the separation of a distinct compositional unit from its surrounding context because of its classification.

To overcome compositional separation some interpreters have rejected notions of genre altogether and labeled The Song a mixed poem.¹²⁴ This response fails to grapple with the reality that texts are always read in relationship to other texts.¹²⁵ The designation “mixed poem” does not uncover meaning because the term fails to provide any new or helpful context for understanding The Song. In other words, the proper response to the binary logic of the taxonomical approach to genre is not to reject genre, but to embrace its potential as a tool for clarifying understanding.

Therefore, I will show that the genre designation of testament is essential for understanding Deuteronomy 32 in its current form. This can be seen by considering an overview of the theme of the book of Deuteronomy. When reader’s understand the book’s message, it reveals that The Song operates in the context of the book as the testament of Moses.

Brevard Childs argues that an essential theme in the book of Deuteronomy is “how to actualize the covenant law in this new situation.”¹²⁶ An important rhetorical

¹²³ Will Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature”: The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 152.

¹²⁴ See Nigosian, who both adopts the concept of *mischgedicht* (mixed poem) in a helpful way, but also provides a bibliography for past commentators who adopted this term as an expression of *sui generis*. Nigosian, “The Song of Moses (Dt 32),” 7.

¹²⁵ See above, chapter 1.

¹²⁶ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 214.

In summary, Proctor says, “Deuteronomy reminds its readers that their ancestors' promise is their promise too. God is one, the covenant is one, the people are one.”¹³⁰ Childs’ argues that this theme ties the entire book of Deuteronomy together in a way that subverts the claims of those who analyze chapters 1-4 or 5-11 as better understood in light of the Deuteronomist.¹³¹ Chapters 5-11 are not a new edition of chapters 1-4, but an expansion of the significance of the covenant at Horeb with new and future generations.¹³² In this same way, the entire book of Deuteronomy can be seen as an actualization of the Sinai covenant—and the first four books of the Pentateuch—for a new generation and future generations to come.

Deuteronomy 31-34 can also be explained by this theme. Whatever meaning The Song has, or had, outside of its narrative context, within the book of Deuteronomy it plays an important role. It “provides a hermeneutical key by which to understand the Mosaic law in the age of disobedience.”¹³³ That key is God’s faithfulness to the covenant despite the unfaithfulness of future generations.

Since genre, as I argued above, is reading one text in relationship to another text, one way to articulate the genre of Deuteronomy 32 is to read it as a distinct compositional unit in relationship to the compositional units that make up Deuteronomy 1-31. That dynamic reveals the testamentary function of The Song in two ways: first, following Childs as I have laid out his argument above, in the same way that the entire book of Deuteronomy functions as a testament to the singular covenant of Yahweh, The Song is a microcosm of that testament, and second, it should be recognized as a testament because of the clear statement in 31:19 that Moses wrote The Song as a testament against

¹³⁰ J. Proctor, “Judgement or Vindication? Deuteronomy 32 in Hebrews 10:30,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 1 (2004): 68.

¹³¹ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 215.

¹³² Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 216.

¹³³ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 220.

the people before his impending death.

I will confirm the suitability of this genre in two additional ways. First, this genre designation helps to solve a difficult exegetical question that has troubled interpreters who have not adopted the genre concept of testament. In Deuteronomy 31:30, it says that Moses spoke the words of the song alone, but in Deuteronomy 32:44, it says that Joshua joined Moses in the recitation of the song. This is just one example of a litany of repetitions and apparent contradictions that have led some biblical scholars to suggest that the context of Deuteronomy 32 was badly redacted. Paul Sanders for instance says about the context, “There seem to be several repetitions and there is much thematic diversity.”¹³⁴

Brian Britt, however, argues that taken on its own terms, the “heuristic model of witness,” or one might say “the genre of testament,” offers a lens that ties the thematic inconsistency of the context surrounding The Song together.¹³⁵ The heuristic lens of “witness” is derived from the word עָד which appears seven times in various forms in Deuteronomy 31 and 32. The word has a verbal notion of “return, go about, repeat.” Its noun form means “witness” which appears to extend from the verbal notion of “emphatically repeating.”¹³⁶ Perhaps most significantly for our passage this word is also related to the form עֲדוּת, which describes the tablets that Moses wrote the law on.¹³⁷

The term appears in Deuteronomy 31:19, הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (this song will be a witness to the sons of Israel) and in Deuteronomy 31:26, לִקַּח אֶת סֵפֶר לְעֵד (take this book of the law... and it will there among you as a

¹³⁴ Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, 337.

¹³⁵ Brian Britt, “Deuteronomy 31–32 as a Textual Memorial,” *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 4 (October 2000): 372.

¹³⁶ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic; Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 729.

¹³⁷ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 730.

witness). These two terms תורה and שירה have contributed to the appearance that Deuteronomy 31 and 32 were compiled haphazardly because they appear to overlap. But Britt points out that the use of the term עד is highly appropriate for a few reasons.¹³⁸ The תורה and the שירה are both messages that will last in the memory beyond the initial delivery; they are enduring; they are concrete like stone; and they give witness to a covenant.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Britt suggests that תורה and שירה are intentionally used in an ambiguous way in these two chapters to focus on the act of preserving Moses' instruction/song rather than on the content which is developed more fully elsewhere.¹⁴⁰

While this explanation may resolve what do to with the ambiguity of תורה and שירה in this chapter, it does not yet explain why Joshua is mentioned in the recitation of the Song in 32:44. To resolve the latter question, Britt points out that another ambiguous situation is playing out in chapter 31. In verses 1-8, Moses appoints Joshua as his successor; in verses 9-13 he writes תורה to guide the Israelites after he departs; in verses 14-18, Joshua joins Moses in the tent before the Lord; in verses 19-22, Moses write the words of שירה; in verse 23, Joshua is exhorted by the Lord; then in verses 24-29, Moses writes תורה with instructions that overlap slightly with שירה. Britt observes that what תורה refers too precisely is unclear and the chronology of events is also unclear as the action bounces back and forth between תורה and Joshua. But what is absolutely clear is the importance of Joshua's appointment to leadership and the writing of תורה for the people before Moses' passing.¹⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, in Deuteronomy 32:44–46 these seemingly disparate themes coalesce. In 44, Joshua and Moses are recorded speaking the words of The Song together as leadership passes from Moses to Joshua upon Moses'

¹³⁸ Britt, "Deuteronomy 31–32 as a Textual Memorial," 371.

¹³⁹ Britt, "Deuteronomy 31–32 as a Textual Memorial."

¹⁴⁰ Britt, "Deuteronomy 31–32 as a Textual Memorial," 366-7.

¹⁴¹ Britt, "Deuteronomy 31–32 as a Textual Memorial," 365.

death, and then in 46, Moses states clearly that what he and Joshua have been doing is “witnessing” (מעיד) to תורה.

To summarize, without understanding Deuteronomy 31 and 32 as testament, the narrative strands of Joshua’s leadership, the writing of שירה, and the writing of תורה appear unrelated and haphazard. Read as testament each of these narrative strands plays a part in “witnessing” to the relevance of God’s covenant to Israel after the passing of God’s prophet Moses.

The second confirmation of this genre designation is the amount of other texts that appear to relate to Deuteronomy 32 that share a testamentary function. Remember that I have defined genre as a designation of any significant relationship between two texts. Therefore, I am not suggesting that every testamentary text is consciously related to Deuteronomy by its author, but, instead, that noticing how two texts appear similar to each other will highlight relevant aspects of a particular text. In other words, a number of texts have reminded interpreters of Deuteronomy 32, and these texts tend to be “testaments” which suggests that the concept of testament is important for understanding Deuteronomy 32 rightly.

First as mentioned above, the story of *Ahiqar* appears to bear resemblance to The Song.¹⁴² The similarities between the two stories are not perfect, so no one can prove that conscious literary dependence exists between the two texts. What is significant about the comparison with *Ahiqar* is the literary logic that caused Weitzman to compare the two texts. Weitzman shows that *Ahiqar* combines two themes that are also combined in The Song: the last testament of a dying sage accompanied by the exhortation of his wisdom.¹⁴³ *Ahiqar* shows that one need not read “testament” and “wisdom” as competing genre designations. Instead, testament *provokes* wisdom; a dying sage is likely to spend

¹⁴² Weitzman, “Lessons from the Dying,” 377-93.

¹⁴³ Weitzman, “Lessons from the Dying,” 390.

his last breath teaching those that follow him.

A similar point is made by other literature in the New Testament. In Philippians, for instance, Allen says that when the context of Deuteronomy 32 is accounted for, “Philippians as an episode, but particularly 2:12-18, thereby effectively becomes a Mosaic testamentary discourse.”¹⁴⁴ Allen presents five pieces of evidence regarding these alleged similarities. First, in both passages the sage (Paul and Moses), urge obedience (*υπακουω*) in light of an impending departure. Second, in verse 14 Paul compares his audience with the wilderness generation by exhorting them to obey *χωρις γογγυσμων και διαλογισμων* (without grumbling and complaining). Third, in verse 15 Paul says that his audience is among *γενεας σκολιας και διεστραμμενης* (a twisted and crooked generation) an almost exact quotation of LXX Deuteronomy 32:5. Fourth, in verse 16, Paul holds out a word (*λογος*) of life (*ζωης*) in the same way that Moses summarizes his word (*λογος*) in verse forty-seven that he does not teach in vain. Fifth, Paul *pours* out his life as a sacrifice in verse 17 in a way that calls to mind the cause of Moses death and his failure of faith which prevented him from entering the land.¹⁴⁵

Though none of these five resemblances taken on their own are particularly convincing, the amount of similarities in such a short span illustrates that reading Deuteronomy 32 as a testament is compelling and that reading can shed light on the function of this New Testament pericope. The parallel adds another dimension to Paul’s role as he pleads with the people of Philippi.

Outside of the New Testament, Geysler-Fouche summarizes how the Song was read in Second Temple literature and says, “God’s faithfulness and righteousness attested in the course of Israel’s past history can be introduced in a didactic and timeless manner

¹⁴⁴ David Allen, “‘Paul Donning Mosaic Garb?’ The Use of Deuteronomy 32 in Philippians 2:12-18,” *European Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (October 2017): 136.

¹⁴⁵ Allen, “‘Paul Donning Mosaic Garb?’,’ 4-7.

as ‘a textual witness’ for Israel’s subsequent generations.” One compelling example of this interpretation in Second Temple literature is Tobit 12-13 where Tobit is recast as a second Moses who gives a song before his death. The two songs both come from sages before their death, are followed by an address to the survivors, and share overlap in language.¹⁴⁶

In summary, the preponderance of texts that have been read in light of Deuteronomy 32 as “testament” confirms that this is an important genre designation for properly understanding The Song.

Covenant Lawsuit

I have shown above the importance of reading Deuteronomy 32 as the last testament of Moses, but an important question remains: what does The Song witness to? The answer is Yahweh’s covenant with his people. Unsurprisingly, interpreters have noticed a number of similarities between covenant lawsuits and the text of Deuteronomy 32. The mistake of interpreters has been to assume that affinity between The Song and the form of covenant lawsuit necessarily means the text should not be read as testament, or with any other genre designation.

Significant reasons warrant the belief that Deuteronomy 32 should be read as covenant lawsuit. G.E. Wright argued that the summons of the witnesses in verse 1, the indictment of the plaintiff in verses 15-18, and the verdict of the Judge in verses 19-29 reveal this pattern.¹⁴⁷ Wright points out that contra Huffmon, the heaven and earth are summoned as witnesses in the covenant lawsuit form. So in verse 1, the heavens and

¹⁴⁶ Weitzman identifies three overlaps between The Song and Tobit: 1) Tobit 13:2 and Deuteronomy 32:39 2) Tobit 13:6 and Deuteronomy 32:20 3) Both end with a prophecy concerning Israel’s resettlement in the land. Steven Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative: The History of a Literary Convention in Ancient Israel*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁷ G.E. Wright, “The Lawsuit of God,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, James Muilenburg, Bernhard W Anderson, and Walter J Harrelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 2010), 43.

earth are not judges invited to preside over the case, but witnesses to the original covenant.¹⁴⁸ For this reason Moses call to the heaven and earth three other times in Deuteronomy to witness the disobedience of the people as they relate to the covenant is significant (4:26, 30:19, and 31:28). Boston's critique of the genre designation covenant lawsuit, mentioned above in chapter 2, fails to account for the emphasis on covenant through the book of Deuteronomy. Though he is correct that the heaven and earth are not always evoked in the same way in the Old Testament, and that some covenant lawsuits do not include a summons of witnesses, the three references within Deuteronomy itself all revolve around the importance of covenant.

One significant obstacle to this interpretation of The Song is that Mendenhall, one of the scholars initially responsible for uncovering the nature of Ancient Near Eastern treaties did not believe that Deuteronomy 32 reflected a covenant lawsuit.¹⁴⁹ His argument, however, is instructive. He argues that The Song does not contain an accusation against Israel, but it instead records the aftermath of a breach in the covenant and contemplates how the Lord will reconcile with his covenant people.¹⁵⁰ Sanders summarizing this critique of the covenant lawsuit designation says, "In the normal lawsuit YHWH rebukes the covenant partner because of his sinning and expresses his anger...However, the song of Deut. 32 *looks back* on YHWH's punishment."¹⁵¹

This critique is worth examining for two reasons. First, it reveals the modern impulse toward historicism. Mendenhall argues that the song must have been written after a significant catastrophe in the life of Israel and when the concept of covenantal

¹⁴⁸ Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," 45.

¹⁴⁹ Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 50–76 and Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy* 32, 93.

¹⁵⁰ George Mendenhall, "Samuel's Broken 'Rib,'" in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, eds. John L. McKenzie, et al, (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1975), 455.

¹⁵¹ Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy* 32, 94.

language was in vogue. He concludes, “The poem cannot have originated at any time other than after the destruction of Shiloh.”¹⁵² He even goes so far as to say that the prophet Samuel wrote The Song.¹⁵³ Oddly enough, Mendenhall both cites the structure of covenantal thought in The Song and the “coincidence” of similarity between The Song and covenantal lawsuit language as evidence for his conclusion, but rejects that it functions as a covenant lawsuit. In light of the view of genre that I have laid out above, whether The Song *actually* was a covenant lawsuit is immaterial. Instead, the genre of covenant lawsuit provides a helpful way of understanding the meaning and content of The Song.

This observation leads to the second reason Mendenhall’s critique is significant. His critique fails to account for the elasticity of genre. G.E. Wright also states that the covenant lawsuit form does not accurately describe the entirety of Deuteronomy 32. At verse 30, Wright believes an expansion was added to The Song.¹⁵⁴ Both of these scholars recognize that the genre of covenant lawsuit helps to explain how the speaker in the song, the witnesses, and the plaintiff relate as they are construed in verses 1-29. But they also both recognize that a covenant lawsuit only pertains to consequences for the plaintiff when the suzerain’s covenant has been broken. This leaves Yahweh’s declaration of fidelity to His covenant people unexplained by the covenant lawsuit genre.

Mendenhall deals with this variance by suggesting that this is no covenant lawsuit at all. The Song is merely the remnants of theological language in vogue at the time of its writing. Wright, on the other hand, believes a later redactor is responsible for expansion. Neither of these solutions utilizes the elasticity of genre to its full advantage.

Instead, I would suggest the covenant lawsuit form dramatically depicts the

¹⁵² Mendenhall, "Samuel's Broken *"Rib."*"

¹⁵³ Mendenhall, "Samuel's Broken *"Rib,"*" 459.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," 56.

condemnation of the future unfaithfulness of God's people to the covenant, but then the song ironically manipulates the genre of covenant lawsuit by closing with the "suzerain's" promise of faithfulness to his people despite their infidelity. In other words, by reading the beginning of the song as a legal condemnation of Israel's unfaithfulness in a covenant lawsuit, it radicalizes the undying love of Yahweh when he pursues his people despite their disloyalty; this surprising turn is surprising precisely when it is read in light of the covenant lawsuit genre. In this way, the genre designation of covenant lawsuit powerfully anticipates the surprising grace of the covenant Lord of Israel.

This reading of the song is further supported by the insight of Michael Knowles into an important metaphor in The Song. His insight, once again, not only affirms the usefulness of the covenant lawsuit genre as it sheds light on a difficult exegetical issue, but also confirms its applicability.

He points out that the word צור which is commonly translated "rock" is used thirty-three times in the Old Testament to refer directly to God.¹⁵⁵ He shows that this metaphor in the vast majority of instances has two connotations. First, God is presented as a deliverer and second, this appellative is used by individuals experiencing God's deliverance personally.¹⁵⁶ For instance in Psalm 18:2b it says, יהיה סלעי ומצודתי ומפלטי (The Lord is my rock and my stronghold and my deliverer. My God, my rock, I take refuge in him, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold). In this verse, the metaphor communicates the experience of the Psalmist with a personal suffix and relates God explicitly to various key terms with salvific connotation: *refuge, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold*. With this metaphor, the Psalmist invites the reader to share in his own experience of the surety of Yahweh's

¹⁵⁵ Michael P Knowles, "'The Rock, His Work Is Perfect': Unusual Imagery for God in Deuteronomy 32," *Vetus Testamentum* 39, no. 3 (July 1989): 307.

¹⁵⁶ See 2 Sam 32:33, 47 Ps 18:3; 31:3; 38:8; 42:8; 61:4; 62:3, 7; 73:28; 84:27; 94:22; 95:1; Isa 37:10.

deliverance.

In Deuteronomy 32 the metaphor is used diversely.¹⁵⁷ In verse 3 it says, **כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא** (For the name of the Lord I will proclaim); it then proclaims his name in verse 4, **הַצּוֹר רְמִים פְּעָלוֹ כִּי כָל דַּרְכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עוֹל צְדִיק וְיִשָּׁר הוּא**, (The Rock, his works are perfect for all his ways are just. God is faithful, there is no iniquity, righteous and upright is he.). Here, instead of the language of deliverance, The Song uses the metaphor with covenantal terms: **צְדִיק, יִשָּׁר, מִשְׁפָּט, אֱמוּנָה**.

One might object to this interpretation by pointing to verse fifteen where the Rock is “of salvation.” But even in this verse, the metaphor of a rock does not describe Yahweh as an imminent savior as he is elsewhere in the Bible, but instead, it speaks of Israel forsaking its covenant and scoffing at the God who raised and nurtured it. The term is used in three other instances where it is used to describe foreign gods in contrast with Yahweh. In each of these cases, it is used with the traditional connotation of refuge, but directed toward foreign gods.

The uniqueness of the usage of the metaphor paired with its application to foreign gods leads Knowles to surmise that The Song is adopting common religious language from the Ancient Near East.¹⁵⁸ He suggests that the range of meaning reflects the poet’s freedom to utilize and adapt the rock metaphor because it had not yet been cemented in the Hebrew theological tradition. Four additional facts support this assertion. First, rock and mountain metaphors were commonly used for divinities in the Ancient Near East.¹⁵⁹ Second, The Song uses common Canaanite names for God (**אֵל, אֱלֹהִים**) with a description that appears apt for Canaanite deities—Yahweh fathering Israel.¹⁶⁰ Third, in

¹⁵⁷ Knowles, “The Rock, His Work Is Perfect,” 311.

¹⁵⁸ Knowles, “The Rock, His Work Is Perfect,” 317.

¹⁵⁹ Knowles, “The Rock, His Work Is Perfect,” 316.

¹⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 32:15

verse thirteen The Song describes Israel “suckling” from a rock which is unique language that has precedent in the worship of Baal.¹⁶¹ Fourth, in 1 and 2 Samuel, Isaiah, Habakkuk, and through most of the Psalms, the rock metaphor is used with remarkable consistency in a way that is different from the diverse usage in Deuteronomy 32, implying that this is an early usage of the metaphor unaffected by the standard meaning the metaphor would come to have in the Bible.¹⁶²

In summary, Knowles argument provides good reason to believe that not only is The Song adapting common Ancient Near Eastern religious language to its own ends, similar to the covenant lawsuit, but with the concept of צור specifically, it adapts this word and applies it in a way that accords with a covenantal reading of The Song.

Overall, reading Deuteronomy 32 as a covenant lawsuit does not contradict reading Deuteronomy 32 as a testament. Instead, these two genre designations are complementary, as they work together to reveal how Moses gave his final warning to His people not to abandon the covenant.

Wisdom

Of course, Moses’ testament concerning the covenant of Yahweh would be ineffectual if it did not instruct Israel to fear the covenant God. But The Song does just that and analyzing The Song from the lens of the wisdom genre reveals the didactic power of Deuteronomy 32. Also, as I mentioned above when discussing *Ahiqar*, the combination of testament and wisdom flow from the literary logic of death inspiring wisdom.

Above I pointed out that G.E. Wright thought that everything after verse 29 was redactional expansion because it did not fit the covenant lawsuit form. Janzen, then,

¹⁶¹ Knowles, “The Rock, His Work Is Perfect,” 318.

¹⁶² Knowles, “The Rock, His Work Is Perfect,” 321.

illustrates convincingly how wisdom connotations arise from verses 28-33 and he shows how the lens of the wisdom genre helps to solve a longstanding exegetical issue in Deuteronomy 32:42.

In Deuteronomy 32:6, The Song describes Israel as עם נבל ולא חכם (a people, foolish and not wise). I argued in chapter 1 above that a genre should be understood as the relationship between any two texts that share significant affinities. Proverbs 1-9 bears the significant feature of correlating moral culpability with a lack of wisdom, a feature also exhibited here in verse six of The Song.¹⁶³

Once this lens is adopted, other affinities begin to appear. In verse 28 citing again the correlation between knowledge and faithfulness, Israel is called a nation ואין בהם תבונה ([who] within them, there is no understanding). This section ends with verses 32-33 which describes the bitter wine and grapes of Sodom and Gomorrah that Israel possesses. Of course, the image of wine and grapes rings clearer in contrast with the wine of Proverbs 9:2 and 5: ושתו ביין מסכתי and מסכה יינה (she [lady wisdom] has mixed wine)(drink the wine I have mixed).¹⁶⁴ Or, in verse forty-one, Yahweh's adversaries are not only those he hates, but ones that hate him, an indictment of their failure to submit their emotions to Yahweh echoed in Proverbs 1:22.¹⁶⁵

Throughout The Song, reading the negative description of both Israel and Yahweh's enemies in light of Proverbs provides a helpful guide for understanding the nature of opposition to Yahweh. This point is particularly clear in verse 42. The line מראש פרעות אויב has provoked a vast amount of scholarly debate to determine the

¹⁶³ See Proverbs 1:7. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 35.

¹⁶⁴ J Gerald Janzen, "The Root Pr' in Judges 5:2 and Deuteronomy 32:42," *Vetus Testamentum* 39, no. 4 (October 1989): 404.

¹⁶⁵ Janzen, "The Root Pr' in Judges 5:2 and Deuteronomy 32:42."

meaning of the word פָּרַע.¹⁶⁶ Due to an alleged connection with Psalm 68:22 some have argued that the word means “long-haired” and describes the legendary Sea Peoples, an early theoretical enemy of Israel. Janzen, however, shows that the root is used with five distinct connotations, but always with the basic meaning of “let go, disregard.”¹⁶⁷ First, in texts that he identifies with wisdom, the word is used to connote letting go of the way or path, literally and metaphorically.¹⁶⁸ Second, he identifies three texts where the verb is used to talk about disregarding political order (Exod 5:4, 32:25 and 2 Chr 28:19). Third, it occurs in a prophetic text where it refers to Yahweh not letting go of his wrath (Ezek 24:14). Fourth, it refers to unfurling a head dress in a handful of legal texts (Lev 10:6; 13:45; 21:10 and Num 5:18). Based on this pattern of usage, it appears to be a stretch to assume that the verb connotes “long-hair” without a direct marker in the text. Instead, this word describes the enemies as ones who have ignored or disregarded Yahweh. This usage overlaps with wisdom texts above that also reflect how one can “let go” or “disregard” wisdom, an action that enrages Yahweh.¹⁶⁹ By reading this section, in light of wisdom, the nature of the evil committed by both Israel and its foes comes into clearer focus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that the traditional taxonomical view of genre is inadequate for properly reading and interpreting The Song of Moses. Instead, the intertextual view of genre allows a reader to more clearly uncover the complex and intricate meaning of the biblical text. In Deuteronomy 32, specifically, by applying the lenses of testament, covenant lawsuit, and wisdom, one comes to a fuller understanding

¹⁶⁶ For a thorough description of the debate see, Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, 245-8.

¹⁶⁷ Janzen, “The Root Pr’ in Judges 5,” 393.

¹⁶⁸ See Proverbs 1:24-25; 4:13; 4:14-15; 13:18-19.

¹⁶⁹ Janzen, “The Root Pr’ in Judges 5,” 405.

of the song and is able to solve some of the longstanding exegetical issues that surround this song. In final summary, The Song is the final testament of a wise sage Moses that encourages the Israelite people to learn the wisdom of the covenant God who they have disappointed and forsaken, but has never forsaken them.

For future students of Deuteronomy 32, I have endeavored to show that The Song is best read according to an intertextual view of genre, but this thesis has not exhausted the genre designations that could be applied to The Song. I have shown how only three genre designation when applied together reveal much about this passage, but as Deuteronomy 32 is observed to participate in even more genres, the meaning of The Song will become increasingly clear.

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ABSTRACT

DEUTERONOMY 32: A GENRE ANALYSIS

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For the last two hundred years, a taxonomical view of genre has dominated the field of biblical studies and contributed to the unhelpful emphasis on historicism. This project advances on the work of Dr. Will Kynes by articulating an intertextual view of genre. The first chapter advances this view of genre in contrast with alternative proposals and the standard taxonomical view. In this chapter, I first summarize the inadequacy of the taxonomical view of genre followed by an analysis of competing proposals. Finally, I explain the intertextual view. In the second chapter, I provide a brief survey of the history of interpretation of The Song with an emphasis on genre designations. The chapter starts with a focus on ancient interpretation and then covers interpretation in the modern era. In the final chapter, I applied the intertextual view of genre to one of the more difficult texts in the Old Testament from a genre perspective. The result of the inquiry is an illustration and confirmation of the effectiveness of the intertextual view of genre in bringing forward the meaning in Deuteronomy 32.

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