LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

# Research Paper: Comprehensive Overview of ancient Near Eastern texts related to the Book of Deuteronomy

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Hermeneutics

by

Raleigh Bagley III

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**Abstract**

The examination of the Bible has been transformed by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' archaeological findings in the ancient Near East that have proposed challenging new inquests to interpreters, making it presently improbable to analyze the Old Testament without taking such findings into consideration. Deuteronomy's origin and purpose persist as two of the several challenging areas in biblical scholarship. In the past half-century, certain relationships have been observed in the outstanding features of Deuteronomy and ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties and pledges of loyalty, and efforts have been made to place the text of Deuteronomy in the historical context. Throughout the history of the ancient Near East, the use of different forms of vassal treaties in different historical periods and the treaty framework adopted by various other written forms are firm. One example profoundly similar in its framing to the treaty forms of the Hittite vassal treaties of the second millennium B.C.E and the Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties of the first millennium B.C.E. is the Hebrew Bible's book of Deuteronomy. Understanding comparative methodologies will assist in shedding light on the often-complex associations of ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Scriptures. It is to this advance of this academic analysis that the prevailing debate is fundamentally orientated, recognizing the current difficulties to the traditional reconstructions of ancient Near Eastern parallels for most of the Israelite social and religious institutions and exercising this momentum to cross-examine these entrenched elements— that Deuteronomic history becomes of critical importance when the question of the revelation and inspiration of the holy Scriptures is raised.

*Keywords*: comparative methodology, Hittite, and Neo-Assyrian treaties, Near Eastern textual criticism

## Methodology

The shaping of the Bible began millennia ago in the ancient Middle East, but this fact—let alone its meanings for interpretation—goes unrecognized for many readers of the Bible. Other readers aware of this fact but want an entrance to the Bible's ancient settings often lack the understanding of where to begin the research. However, this view has changed by the growing availability of scholarly resources communicating biblical antiquities to a widespread readership. Ancient Near Eastern discoveries reveal an intimate relationship between Israelite religious traditions and those of the religious milieu of the ancient Near East. As a result, the Israelite religion's uniqueness as described in the Old Testament has become an essential inquiry amongst scholars with evidence of Near Eastern parallels of several religious concepts and the inclusion of Israelite social and religious institutions. Questions relating to these similarities are frequently suggested in critical discussions of the inspiration and revelation of Scripture.

The Old Testament is deeply rooted in history, where archaeologists, historians, and social scientists have significantly advanced one's knowledge of the ancient world of the Bible. This historical account in the form of narratives, genealogies, laws, poetry, proverbs, and prophecies are foundational to interpretation and understanding the historical, social, and cultural background for each Old Testament passage.

How should one approach the problem of similarities between Israel and the ancient Near East nations? Given this intricacy, many of those that began the process regard the similarities between the two so close that it is challenging to consider Israel unique. To address this problem, one weighs two methods. The first involves the exploration of thoughts and behaviors unique to Israel. For example, one considers monotheism—Israel's relationship to One God. Although others argue that Israel and its counterparts share similar ideas and behaviors, Israel's distinctiveness would rest on the results of its reconfiguration or shaping of

those shared ideas and behaviors.[1] The point of revelation and inspiration is barely discussed in those conversations. However, Ringgren's exception argues for the latter position that "the important task of research . . . is to assess the Israelite use of foreign material and the reinterpretation it underwent in the framework of Yahwistic religion."[2]

The investigations are an effort to describe the foundation of the Israelite religion from sociology's perspective and the growth of its institutions. For those regarding the biblical canon and its OT association, one must address the revelation question regarding Israel's similarities with its neighbors. Scholars have attempted to produce a methodology to confront the problem that would allow one to manage the similarities and differences of each religion while upholding its particularity. Most concede that the comparative method is problematic because it leads to the danger of drawing wrong conclusions based on the evidence and general tendencies to overemphasize the similarities.[3]

When approaching similarities, one must be conscious of two points that the available evidence indicates. First, in several areas, Israel shares the ancient Near Eastern culture, and second, its history and culture evolve as an independent entity with a character and identity. Israel's distinctiveness connection with the ancient Near East is grounded in the Old Testament's testimony of the singularity of its people in the ancient world. According to Machinist, some 433 OT readings consider this truth.[4] One such verse, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen.12:3), underscores the use of the comparative method to emphasize the biblical accent on the singularity of Israel, a rehearsal not to be ignored.

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[1] Peter Machinist, "*The Question of Distinctiveness in Ancient Israel: An Essay,*" *in Ah, Assyria . . .: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, ed. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 197-200.

[2] Helmer Ringgren, "*Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*", edited by Douglas A. Knight (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1977), 45.

[3] Th. C. Vriezen, "The Study of the OT and the History of Religion," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 17 (1969):14-15

[4] Peter Machinist, "*The Question of Distinctiveness in Ancient Israel: An Essay,*" 203-204.

In the Creation accounts, the comparative method's use to explore similarities with the Bible and those of ANE provides that the latter's recitals are shallow and perhaps incidental, but on the other hand, significant. The use of any methodology to relate ANE texts to the OT presents a problem to anyone wishing to explore these ideas. Therefore, one needs to establish control over genre, purpose, and religious and theological frameworks.[5] Regrettably, evidence shows that scholars are inclined to "biblicize ancient Near Eastern documents before they are compared with OT materials"[6] while often interpreting the biblical documents mythologically— "it is imperative that the literature of each culture be appreciated on its own merits" before it is compared with the biblical texts."[7]

S. Talmon isolated four major principles issued in an exposition over 33 years ago on the principles and problems of using the comparative method in hermeneutics, referring to the steps of (1) proximity in time and place, (2) the priority of inner-biblical parallels analysis, (3) correspondence of social function, and (4) the holistic approach to texts and comparisons always proffering partiality above the atomistic. Comparing the genre of a text's particular function in the civilization composed with the corresponding genre of text from another culture must fulfill the same function there.[8]

The account of creation in Mesopotamia from the *Enuma Elish* uncovers similarities to the biblical creation account that could be incidental, though superficial. In light of W. G. Lambert's analysis, these differences are significant.[9] First, in Enuma Elish, deity Marduk's dominion in creation is not lasting and involves the cosmos' organization in contrast to

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[5] A. M. Rodríguez, "Ancient Near Eastern Parallels to the Bible and the Question of Revelation and Inspiration," *JATS* 12/1 (2001): 48-51.

[6] J. M. Sasson, "On Relating 'Religious' Texts to the Old Testament," *MAARAV* 3/2 (1982): 223.

[7] Ibid., 224.

[8] S. Talmon, "The 'Comparative Method' in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 381-419 [Reprinted by permission of E. J. Brill from *Supplements to VT* 29 (1977): 320-56].

[9] W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *JTS* 16 (1965): 287-300, cited in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96-113.

Genesis, where God is both Creator and organizer. Second, in Enuma Elish, the cosmologic elements, such as water, sky, and others, take shape by the gods' birth. From this point of view, theogony is the expression of cosmogony, a theological theory immediately denied by Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God." In the straightforward biblical narratives, no indication of theogonic mythology exists. Lastly, in Enuma Elish, creation takes place utilizing or as a result of a conflict. This fundamental difference in both the Mesopotamian and Canaanite texts reveal the diety's way of forcing cosmologic order by overcoming chaos or defeating rebel authorities. The antithesis is the theological concept appearing from the Genesis 1 creation account, an abiotic idea, with earth, described as absent of plant, animal, and human life, then by God's command, life emerges. Under no circumstances found in Genesis' creation account is chaotic earth emanating from fictitious clashes amidst the gods of ANE's myths and legends.[10]

Since the popularization of Julius Wellhausen's hypothesis and the late 19th-century Babylonian creation and flood accounts of George Smith, many critical scholars regard the Genesis creation accounts with a Babylonian framework dating exilic/post-exilic periods.[11] However, recent scholars propose that Genesis 1-2 exhibits an Egyptian backdrop. These include A. H. Sayce, A. S. Yahuda, Cyrus Gordon, and James Hoffmeier.[12]

Regarding a parallel between Genesis 1 and the Egyptian cosmogony of Hermopolis, Sayce remarked in 1887, "the chaotic deep; the 'breath' moving on the waters; the creation of light; the emergence of the hill 'in the middle of the waters.'"[13] Regrettably, Sayce's works

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[10] See J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and C. Kloos, *YHWH's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

[11] See discussion in, Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). On the Jewish responses to Wellhausen see Stefan Schreiner, "Protestant Bible Study and the Jewish Response in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10:2 (2003): 140-171.

[12] https://bible.org/article/genesis-1-2-light-ancient-egyptian-creation-myths [accessed May 27, 2021]

[13] A. H. Sayce, "The Egyptian Background of Genesis I," *in Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith* (London: 1932) 421.

were overlooked. In 1933 and 1934, Yahuda recognized various parallels within Genesis 1-2 and ancient Egyptian documents. He also noted that throughout the Pentateuch is the appearance of Egyptian influence.[14] In 1982, Cyrus Gordon presented similarities in the creation of man within the Egyptian and Hebrew traditions by drawing particular parallels between the potter-god Khnum's creation tradition and Genesis 2:4-25.[15] In 1983, James Hoffmeier similarly recognized remarkable parallels between ancient Egyptian cosmology and Genesis 1-2.[16]

In Egyptian cosmogonies, the creation of the world and the creation of man are separate acts. While Heliopolis, Memphis, and Hermopolis cosmogonies address the world's origin, the creation of humans and animals receives little consideration. Considering the Genesis creation account, Egyptian cosmology shares three similarities:

- the Egyptians ability to support conflicting creation views
- the creator god's means exercised in the creation
- the primordial state's condition at creation inception

Though the Egyptians simultaneously held three different means of creation without concern, they may answer two supposed different creation narratives in Genesis that Old Testament scholars have long fought.[17] Von Rad illustrates, "The long road in the history of tradition which lies behind the present form of this account of creation is in many respects recognizable. The exposition has dealt with the tension between creation by act and creation by word."[18] Further noting the Egyptian ANE creation narrative, one recognizes these three means: self-copulation (masturbation), divine word, and fashioning. Only two of these are

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[14] Abraham Shalom Yahuda, *The Accuracy of the Bible* (London: W. Heinemann, 1934); A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).
[15] Cyrus H. Gordon, "Khnum and El," in *Scripta Hierosolymitana: Egyptological Studies*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll, vol. 28 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982).
[16] James K. Hoffmeier, "Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2 and Egyptian Cosmology," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 15 (1983): 39-49.
[17] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 64.
[18] Ibid.

parallel to Genesis 1-2, or God's means used in creation. In Genesis 1:1—2:3, God creates by divine word. In Genesis 2:4-25, God creates by fashioning a garden and by forming both man and animals. There is no parallel with the Hebrew tradition of God creating using self-copulation, an act uncharacterized of him. Both divine word and self-copulation obtain significance in the Egyptian Memphite Theology without contradiction but instead complement.[19]

In view of Genesis 1-2 from the perspective of evangelicals and non-evangelicals, there are at least ten possible views between the biblical chronology and contemporary scientific dating:

- young-earth creationism
- mature creationism
- the revelatory-day theory
- the gap theory
- the local-creation theory
- the intermittent-day theory
- the day-age theory
- the analogical-day theory
- the framework view
- the religion-only theory[20]

Though all of the listed analyses have their challenges, the evangelical examination of Genesis 1-2 argues for a young earth. This interpretation is consistent with the literal six-day creation with each day being 24-hours. Al Mohler commented that the traditional 24-hour

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[19] Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 161-66.

[20] https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/evangelical-interpretations-genesis-1-2/ [accessed May 27, 2021]

calendar day view is the most straightforward reading of the text. As one reads Genesis 1 through the first three verses of Genesis 2, the most natural understanding of the text would be that what is being presented here by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is a sequential pattern of 24-hour days. The pattern of evening and morning, the literary structure, would point to a commonsense manner of 24-hour days. These 24-hour days would reveal a sequence, increasing differentiation, and eventually in the climactic creation of man as the image bearer of God. Six days of active creation and one day of divine rest (25:29).[21] Within this understanding is the historicity of Adam and Eve (Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Rev.10:6).

Notable is one non-evangelical view— the gap theory, a reference to God's initial creation. Though Genesis 1:1 assumes no presence of sin, 1:2 presents a great catastrophe that brought about chaos in the earth through God's judgment. According to the gap theory, 1:2 is in contrast to God's perfect creation. Whatever the occurrence for the cause of earth's chaos could have possibly lasted thousands of years.

## Geography and Archeology

**"**In 2009, the Tayinat Archaeological Project discovered a new exemplar of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST ms T-1808) in the inner sanctum of Building XVI - a Neo-Assyrian temple at Tell Tayinat, ancient Unqi, capital of the Neo-Assyrian province of Kullania."[22] This pervasive claim is rooted in extensive similarities between Deuteronomy's chapters 13 and 28 and the Assyrian vassal treaties focusing mainly on the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, regularly cited as VST. Persistent thought is that there are extensive references in Deuteronomy to VST regarding its origin and purpose. The archeological discovery at Tell Tayinat confirms the employment of VST's text on western vassals. It

[21] https://credomag.com/2013/06/why-does-the-universe-look-so-old-albert-mohler [accessed May 27, 2021]

[22] Hans U. Steymans,. (2013). Deuteronomy 28 and Tell Tayinat. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, *34*(2), 1-13. Retrieved June 09, 2021, from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2074-77052013000200022&lng=en&tlng=en.

proposed that the cuneiform tablet was formally located somewhere in the Jerusalem temple and given to Manasseh, king of Judah, in 672 B.C., the year that all the empire and vassals of Assyria swore an oath or treaty to obey the regulations set for their king's succession.[23]

Tell Tayinat's discovery and its complex curses of §§ 53-55, summoning the deities from Palestine, confirms allegations of its resemblance to Deuteronomy's curses invoked in 28:20-44. Further assertions suggest that the Deuteronomic verses borrow from VST's § 56, also indicating the existence of the Hebrew verses between 672 B.C. and 622 B.C., which relates to the year and discovery of a Torah scroll in Jerusalem's temple. Hereabouts, Josiah swore an oath of loyalty in the presence of YHWH.[24] "Proposals that the impressive similarities between Deuteronomy and the VST are not due to borrowing from the VST, but from any other Assyrian oath or treaty that was kept in Jerusalem, were brought forward before the tablet had been found in Tell Tayinat."[25]

Jerusalem's temple included several distinct areas, including the holy of holies, the main sanctuary, vestibule, and several courts. The VST tablet, along with other items on display, may have been located there in comparison to temple XVI at Tell Tayinat. "The discovery of the VST at Tell Tayinat confirms the Assyrian enforcement of this text on western vassals. Scribes working in the administration of state and temple must have passed by the cuneiform tablet every day."[26] During the reign of Manasseh, it is unlikely that access to the main sanctuary restricted others but Levitical priests. According to 2 Samuel 8:18, the sons of David also functioned as priests. Foreseeable, the arousal of Judean scribes' curiosity

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[23] J. Berman, "CTH 133 and the Hittite Provenance of Deuteronomy 13," *JBL* 131 (2011): 25–44 and A. Taggar-Cohen, "Biblical Covenant and Hittite *išḫiul* Reexamined," *VT 61* (2011): 461–88.

[24] Ibid.

[25] K. Radner, 2006, 'Assyrische uppi adê als Vorbild für Deuteronomium 28:20–44?', in M. Witte, K. Schmid, D. Prechel & J.C. Gertz (eds.), *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke: Redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur 'Deuteronomismus'-Diskussion in Tora und Vorderen Propheten*, pp. 251–278, W. de Gruyter, Berlin.

[26] B.M. Levinson & J. Stackert, 2012, 'Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty: Deuteronomy 13 and the composition of Deuteronomy', *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3, 123–140.

gave aim to their creation of something similar was likely influenced by the display of the cuneiform tablet. Scribes executing power in the temple were in a royal rite as referenced in 2 Kings 22:3 and Jeremiah 26:24. The priests and Levites were well-read and ardent in knowing what kind of text the Assyrians and Manasseh ordered them to present in their sanctuary. The Assyrian and Hebrew languages, both Semitic tongues, were familiar to Jerusalem scribes—some perhaps studying in Nineveh. Additionally, Assyrian cuneiform script restrictions of word signs and syllables in juridical or epistolary texts read by the priests and Levites required less effort to learn than today's 2000 typical Japanese Kanji. The composition of these texts employing numerical duplication of keywords resembles Baroque music. This illustration explicates the sophistication and skill of those producing these texts. Further analysis suggests that Judaean scribes attempted to compose a similar chancellery to that of Esarhaddon during Manasseh's reign.[27]

Research on the connection of Deuteronomy to VTE and others similar are divisible within several subcategories. The primary focus involves Deuteronomy's dating: those recognizing the connections to VTE as fundamental to its beginning in the Assyrian period alternately favoring a later, exilic period Deuteronomy's components incorporating the components of this treaty and loyalty oath. Scholars in the previous category originate from former eras of study to contemporary research methods by Dion, Halpern, Steymans, Otto, Levinson, and Frankera, who was among the earliest to investigate how a Judahite scribe familiarity with VTE might exist. His chronological implications and arguments propose that such vassal treaties in Assyria were an oral presentation to all vassals assembled. Specific examples include an Assyrian assembly chronicled in 672 BC[28] during Assurbanipal's

[27] A. Taggar-Cohen, "Biblical Covenant and Hittite *išḫiul* Reexamined," *VT 61* (2011): 461–88.

[28] R. Frankena, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy." *OTS 14* (1965): 124, 139, 150–51. The vassal lists are Esarhaddon 1 v 55 and Esarhaddon 5 vi 7' and the references to the succession of Assurbanipal are Esarhaddon 77 64B and Esarhaddon 93 40, as enumerated in E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria* (680–669 BC) (RINAP 4; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

installation as crown prince and Manasseh of Judah and other western vassal kings' assembly in Assyria for tribute purposes. Dion argues latterly that "the closer to 672 BC one places the composition of Deuteronomy 13, the easier to understand its precise contacts with the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon,"[29] while disputing the preponderance that Deuteronomy 13 is a deuteronomistic growth of Josiah's reign; he sees Deuteronomy and VTE's connections reflecting Deuteronomy's VT use during Assyria's collapse due to sedition indicating non-Yahwistic worship.[30] Thus, Levinson's interests in the "historical crisis" of the Josianic period led him to propose a Deuteronomic text using VTE to explain these matters employing arguments from both Frankena and Steymans suggesting that Manasseh, bound by VTE and Deuteronomy's Judahite author's acquaintance with it. Subsequently, he proposes the announcement of VTE in 672 and Josiah's reformation in 622 is the result of Deuteronomy's elements he traces to VTE.[31] Otto offers a related position for a Josianic origin for Deuteronomy's treaty alliances weighing on the work of Steymans. He questioned that the VTE material was related to the rest of the later Deuteronomy text.[32] In these variations, the similarity between VTE and Deuteronomy "offers nearly conclusive evidence that a form of Deuteronomy that included most of chapter 28 emerged in the period of Assyrian ascendancy over Judah."[33]

Notwithstanding the belief with many scholars that Deuteronomy's links to VTE suggest the beginnings of Deuteronomy in the pre-exilic period, this is not the unanimity

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[29] P. E. Dion, "Deuteronomy 13: The Suppression of Alien Religious Propaganda in Israel during the Late Monarchical Era," *in Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel* (ed. B. Halpern and D. W. Hobson; *JSOTSup* 124; Sheffield: *JSOT*, 1991), 196–205, with the quotation from 204–205; he maintains that "the imitation of long-familiar Assyrian models remained as natural an option as under the empire" (198–99).

[30] Dion, "Deuteronomy 13," 196–205.

[31] B. M. Levinson, "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty," 342; cf. idem, "'But You Shall Surely Kill Him!': The Text-Critical and Neo-Assyrian Evidence for MT Deuteronomy 13:10," in Bundesdokument und Gesetz: Studien zum Deuteronomium (ed. G. Braulik; HBS 4; Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 37–63.

[32] E. Otto, "Treueid und Gesetz: Die Ursprünge des Deuteronomiums im Horizont neuassyrischen Vertragsrechts." *ZABR 2* (1996): 1–52.

[33] R. D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy* (OTL. London: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 326.

among all. The rebuttals are often related to contradictory disagreements about the uniqueness of the connection between VTE and Deuteronomy, and occasionally similar to the disagreements on the originality of the text of Deuteronomy in chapters 13 and 28 of Deuteronomy. Pakkala is typical in displaying these trends; he argues that Deut 13 is unfamiliar to the Deuteronomic material of Deut 12; 14–16 and offers that it was a subsequent addition to the volume, associating it with a Deuteronomistic redaction after 586, categorized by language. He later argued that the relationship between Deut 13 and VTE was deceptive due to the large number of treaties and pledges of loyalty that spread in the ancient Near East. It is questionable to demand VTE to be Deuteronomy's specific charter. Thus, he presumes that Deut 13's treaty tradition originates with some other tradition than VTE and therefore, chronological parameters of VTE are not viable, disputing that Deut 13 is exilic.[34] Comparably, Koch places Deut 13 and 28 in the exilic period as its method and purpose by centering on Deuteronomy's response to the exilic experience in the illustration of covenant theology. Koch facilitates this observation of Deuteronomy from the chronological framework of VTE—identifying from the chapters' background a mixed tradition of distinct West Semitic and Assyrian components prohibiting the likelihood that the Deuteronomy material is the result of a single treaty or loyalty oath text. Koch's association of Deut 28:25–34 as a palindromic echo of the Assyrian deity hierarchy is of specific interest considering the present focus.[35]

With nearly fifty years of academic research on the literary relationship between Deuteronomy and VTE, additional efforts involve their technical classification. Assertions

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[34] J. Pakkala, "Deuteronomium 13," 125–37. His arguments regarding the date of Deuteronomy more generally may be found in idem, "The Date of the Oldest Edition of Deuteronomy," *ZAW 121* (2009): 388–401 and idem, "The Dating of Deuteronomy: A Response to Nathan MacDonald," *ZAW 123* (2011): 431–36.

[35] C. Vertrag Koch, Treueid und Bund: Studien zur Rezeption des altorientalischen Vertragsrechts im Deuteronomium und zur Ausbildung der Bundestheologie im alten Testament. *BZAW 383*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008; 315-23.

range from accusations Deuteronomy directly explains a considerable part of VTE. Other disputes propose that the parallels between the two stems from a shared tradition. Just because of the special understanding of VTE in modern academics, these similarities have been replaced by excessive attention. Expectedly, assumptions about the importance of the VTE-Deuteronomy relationship to the matter of Deuteronomy's date remain the question.
In light of the many scholarly proposals that compare Deuteronomy with VTE and the rendering of its numerous treaties and law codes, nothing appears out of the ordinary that would trigger suspicion that Deuteronomy's book cites some source that might be precisely Assyrian. Thus, the book's original audience would have no reason to understand its text in any meaning other than their own.

## The Hittite Vassal Treaty

### Historical Information

During the eighteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C.E., the Hittite empire's history originates from the early second millennium B.C.E. Assyrian traders within the region and indicates that the Hittite state resulted from the centralization of a network of small central and eastern Anatolian kingdoms bordering the Kaska lands to the north, the Hurrian lands to the east, and the Marssantiya river along the west and south.[36] Although there were no demarcation lines where the Hittite territory ends, several areas encompassing its core territory represented buffer zones facing hostile enemies.[37]

During the Kingdom period of the fourteenth century B.C.E., under the rules of Suppiluliuma I and Mursili II, the Hittite Empire extended its sovereignty over Anatolia, Northern Syria, and the distant lands of Amurru and Ugarit.[38] Due to the vast growth of the

[36]Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 B.C.* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 119.
[37] Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 43-46.
[38] Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 2, and Bryce, Kingdom of the Hittites, 48.

Hittite lands and vassal states under Suppiluliuma, constant defense of the kingdom from attacks by its enemies consumed Mursili's rule.[39]

**Literary Structure**

Several copies of the Hittite vassal treaties exist in various conditions— a result of twentieth-century archaeological explorations. Though all have undergone scholarly analysis, only a few resulted in publications. One example is the *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* published by the Society of Biblical Literature. Given the differences amongst the Hittite vassal treaties, most have a similar pattern beginning with the preamble, followed by a historical prologue, stipulations if any, the deposition, and finally, a list of curses and blessings.

In studying this general design, the preamble pronounces the king's name with a disclaimer to the vassals that the text contained therein is the king's words. The events leading to the treaty's creation are the historical prologue- for example, a vassal king reinstated to power, or the vassal saved from foreign aggression. The historical prologue's length varies from long to brief paragraphs, such as Suppiluliuma's treaty with Huqqana of Hayasa[40]— a brief statement compared with the more extensive sections of Tudhaliya II and Sunashshura Kizzuwatna's treaty[41]. All treaties contain at least one historical prologue; however, McCarthy cited nine treaties that omitted the historical prologue.[42]

Succeeding the historical prologue is a list of stipulations (if any) by the Hittite king that require the vassal's commitment in exchange for protection and the gods' blessings. The stipulations consisted of two forms- apodictic, "thou shalt not," and casuistic, "if...then...," with the previous form intermittently scattered all over the vassal treaties.[43] Alongside these

[39] Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, 190-205.
[40] Ibid., 27.
[41] Ibid., 18-19.
[42] McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 54-55.
[43] Ibid., 60-62.

patterns were four general conditions common to all treaties: the vassal's unconditional obedience to the Hittite king, military protection and support in times of war, purging Hittite fugitives from vassal lands, and the discipline of those accused of insurrection against the Hittite king. Some treaties consisted of moral demands as well, such as the Suppiluliuma and Huqqana of Hayasa treaty, which restricted certain sexual practices as well as incest, alluding to the Huqqana's marriage to Suppiluliuma's sister.[44] This example shows the Hittite kings' stake in moral standards amidst the vassals.

The deposition clause of the Hittite vassal treaty contains instructions on the storage and disposition of the treaty tablets. The command requires the sacred items' storage in a temple or other divine place. Public presentation is also a requirement to remind all parties of the stipulations attached. McCarthy notes, however, "such a clause is more often lacking than not."[45] An illustration, for example, is a treaty void of a deposition clause made during Mursili's reign.[46] This practice, though uncommon, occurs in other treaties where this part is needing as well. As a result, the need for a deposition clause is not necessary as other treaty components.

The list of sacred witnesses follows the testimony clauses (or regulations) in the treaty, in which the list of gods who witnessed the treaty enforces its clauses on the vassals- the blessing of obedience or the curse of disobedience. These gods are a miscellany of the Hittites and vassals collectively (sometimes referred to as "the thousand gods")[47], ensuring dual enforcement of treaty terms. Alternatively, a comprehensive list of gods is provided.[48]

The concluding section of the treaty is the list of curses and blessings providing incentives for the vassal's obedience in terms of the treaty. Failure to obey lays upon him the

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[44] Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, 31-32.
[45] McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 63.
[46] Ibid, 67-68.
[47] Beckman *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 40.
[48] Ibid.

afflictions of his gods, and those of the Hittites as well. This section's standard locale typically occurs at the end of the text but varies in a few earlier treaty examples. The Shattiwaza of Mittanni treaty's curses are an example of the vassal's disobedience against the treaty gods in vivid words: they "will draw you out like malt from its husk... assigned to your poverty and poverty... [and] they shall overthrow your throne."[49] An opposite view promises the blessing of Shattiwaza's compliance with the treaty: Mittanni "[shall return] to its former estate. It shall prosper and expand..."[50] There are also examples where blessings do not always follow curses, sometimes displaying the one-sided nature of some vassal treaties.

One has provided a brief explanation of the Hittite vassal treaty's structure of the 15th to 12th centuries B.C.E. Afterwards, a different framing of treaties bore other distinctive components. An example of this alternative structure is the Neo-Assyrian treaty of the 1st millennium B.C.E.

## Neo-Assyrian Vassal Treaty

### Historical Background

Assyria's reign as a great power began during the 10th century B.C.E. under Adad-nirari II's reign in 911 B.C.E., one of the many powerful kings to rule over Assyria.[51] During Adad-nirari's leadership, the Assyrian army led military campaigns yearly, causing a tremendous territorial expansion extending from western Iran in the eastern territory to Anatolia and Egypt in the far west and the temporary addition of Syria in the northeastern regions in the late 2nd millennium B.C.E.[52] Due to military unrest and the political implications resulting, a Syrian re-annexation would occur.[53] The emergence of numerous vassal states under Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal inducted numerous treaties

[49] Ibid., 48.
[50] Beckman *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 48.
[51] George Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 282-283.
[52] Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 229.
[53] Ibid., 238.

during the Assyrian empire's pinnacle reigns. Pritchard's *The Ancient Near East* provides three examples of vassal treaties: Ashurnirari V and Mati'ilu of Arpad; Esarhaddon and Baal of Tyre, and Esarhaddon and Ramataya of Urakazabanu.[54] Esarhaddon succeeded his father, Sennacherib, and is best known for conquering Egypt and assuring that Ashurbanipal, his son, would secure Assyria's throne following his death.[55] The study of treaties during his administration provides the most well-preserved examples of Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties. One will examine the structure a single example.

**Literary Structure**

Given the Hittite treaties with almost forty examples, comparatively, there are only five Neo-Assyrian treaties for examination; many survive as fragments.[56] However, determining their literary structures is accomplished due to persevering data. For example, the treaty of Esarhaddon and Ramataya is primarily complete. One notes that the design of the Hittite vassal treaties differs from the Neo-Assyrian treaties.[57] Essentially both are loyalty oaths, but they differ in purpose; whereas the Hittite treaties extend sovereignty outside of an empire's boundaries, its Neo-Assyrian counterpart strengthens the prominent dynasty.[58] Another significant difference in the Neo-Assyrian treaty is the absence of a historical prologue and temporal deposition defining blessings and curses. The similarity with the Hittite treaty is the presence of a stipulations list of divine witnesses and curses, but occurring in a different order. McCarthy notes these similarities with all Neo-Assyrian treaties but also

[54] James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 210-225.

[55] Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 214-220.

[56] Amnon Altman, "How Many Treaty Traditions Existed in the Ancient Near East?," in *Pax Hethitica: Studies on the Hittites and Their Neighbours in Honour of Itamar Singer*, ed. Yoram Cohen, Amir Gilan and Jared L. Miller (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrowitz GmbH & Co, 2010), 17.

[57] Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 213-225.

[58] McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 118.

records that each may follow a different sequence. Noting these circumstances, one will examine these treaties' ordering.[59]

The inaugural of the Neo-Assyrian treaty's structure is the preamble. Noting Ramataya, Ashur's depiction is "king of the gods, lord of all lands," supplemented by a commandment that his seal not be altered, neither his reign contested. Lastly, the preamble declares the Assyrian ruler's name, the name of the vassal ruler, and all subjects to whom the treaty binds to all listed terms of the agreement.

Regarding a historical prologue, they are absent from the Neo-Assyrian texts. However, McCarthy notes the Qedar treaty, concerning it containing one, "our few and broken text from Assyria is enough, after all, to show that a historical citation could form part of an Assyrian treaty." [60] Allegedly, Collins heeds this same possibility by stating, "the recollection of history is not as prominent in the Assyrian treaties as in the older Hittite examples, but it is not entirely absent."[61] Though there is a slice of evidence in favor of a historical prologue present in Qedar's treaty, there are difficulties with its citation. Fragments of the whole treaty show that the opening five lines are misplaced, indicated by the remaining parts that the opening piece was a part of a god list. Following these intricacies, the stipulations portion seems to be a brief anecdote instead of a historical prologue with the king stating that the Qedarites, out of loyalty to him, do not follow Yauta's pattern but rather oppose and kill him. This statement disqualifies it as a prologue because it is not meaningful history, neither does the information appear at the beginning.[62] In light of these dilemmas, no other evidence exists that would show that the Neo-Assyrian treaties included historical prologues.

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[59] Ibid., 120.

[60] McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 120.

[61] John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 161.

[62] Kenneth Anderson Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 290-291.

The list of divine witnesses in Neo-Assyrian treaties usually follows the preamble. However, as noted earlier, the sequence can vary, as in the Mati'ilu and Baal treaties, for example, appears towards the end, whereas it appears at the beginning in Ramataya's treaty.[63] It is a requirement that the vassals and Assyrians be familiar with the Mesopotamian gods, the treaty's emphasis. The vassal's local gods are not always of importance and sometimes disregarded utterly, but an exception exists in Mati'ilu, acknowledging Adad of Aleppo as are the Phoenician gods in the Baal treaty.[64]

Next, the list of stipulation's primary use is strengthening the principal dynasty by safeguarding succession rulership and the loyalty of annexed regions to the Assyrian crown. Note, there are no apodictic laws, but long strings of casuistic laws remain. Each paragraph of the Ramataya treaty's stipulations starts with "if...," accompanied the punishment for opposing Esarhaddon's heir or defiling the treaty tablet. This framing of stipulations creating a lengthy, complicated sentence is rare in the foundation of treaty language.[65]

Finally, the list of curses specifies the punishment the vassal would receive should one prove to be unfaithful. The list of curses mirrors the stipulations list. If there is a lengthy sentence, then one long conditional curse follows, describing the consequences for treaty infringement according to its terms.[66] In this framing, various gods, all mentioned one by one, would curse the unfaithful vassal by invoking specific punishments. Given these details, the curse list reflects the opening god list, but with the addition of each god acting within its respective domain.[67]

One has concluded the analysis of the Neo-Assyrian treaty's structure and will now compare both treaties with the framework of the book of Deuteronomy.

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[63] Ibid., 212-214.
[64] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* and McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 111, 118.
[65] McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 119-120.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 220-225.

## The Book of Deuteronomy

Studies concerned with the form and content of Deuteronomy in relationship to the various ANE vassal treaties usually place emphasis on which treaty structure follows the book more closely. However, the differences often lead to the question of which millennium the book should be assigned: the 2nd or 1st millenniums B.C.E.? Those scholars who favor the former support the similarity between Deuteronomy and the Hittite treaties, whereas those who support the latter hold that Deuteronomy's structure is closer to the Neo-Assyrian treaties. The 19th century produced distinguished biblical scholars such as Karl Heinrich Graf and Julius Wellhausen, of which a majority, like them, suggest that Deuteronomy's writing occurred during the Josianic reforms of 7th century B.C.E., centuries later than its traditional dating of 15th to 13th century B.C.E., thus marrying the book to the Neo-Assyrian treaties. In view of this traditional belief, Collins addresses the matter by indicating "much closer parallels are found in the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon... that were discovered in 1956."[68] As maintained by this view, Deuteronomy's writing is conceivably an Assyrian loyalty oath alternative, where the people of Judah pledge their adoration and devotion to Yahweh rather than Assyria's king. Nevertheless, a strong case exists for Deuteronomy's structural similarities with the 13th century Hittite treaties.

In view of the Hittite treaty's similarities, the preamble closely matches the Hittite's sovereign dictates to the vassal, rather than the two-party treaty of the Neo-Assyrian version.[69] "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan…" (Deut. 1:1). Further examination of Deuteronomy chapters 1, 2, and 3 functions as its historical prologue where it summarizes the incidents heading the Deuteronomic laws' giving as

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[68] Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 160.

[69] Altman, "How Many Treaty Traditions Existed in the Ancient Near East?," 31. Compare the treaty between Suppiluliuma and Aziras of Amurru with that of Esarhaddon and Ramataya in Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 205, 213.

documented in the Pentateuch. These include Israel's rebellion (1:34-46), the Hebrew wilderness experiences (2:1-25), and the defeat of Sihon and Og (2:26-3:22), all of which have similarities with the Hittite treaty tradition rather than the Neo-Assyrian tradition, regarding the absence of the historical prologue.

In an examination of the stipulations, one finds both apodictic and casuistic laws, with the two most familiar being the Decalogue and the Shema Y'israel (Deut. 5:6-21, 6:4-9). Though apodictic laws are scattered throughout Deuteronomy, most laws are casuistic, thus providing another parallel with the Hittite treaty rather than the Neo-Assyrian tradition where only casuistic laws exist.

Following the stipulations, a debate ensues as to the characteristics of Deuteronomy chapter 27. According to Hittite treaty tradition, it can be argued that there are similarities with the placement of the request for writing the commandments and them being publically read by the Levites, between the stipulations and the blessings and cursings, that the chapter functions as deposition and the public reading of the text. Seeing that the Jews are monotheists, there is no gods list for appeals, although some argue that in Deuteronomy chapter 31, Moses' song functions as a witness.[70] The nonexistence of divine witnesses is the principal distinction between the treaty genre, demonstrating that Israel's culture neither Deuteronomy are fully attached to either treaty genre.

Lastly, Deuteronomy chapter 28 provides the principal part of its treaty formation, noting one major difference between the Hittite treaties- the blessing list (28:1-14) occurs before the curses list (28:15-68). Given this fact, it is argued that this is evidence of the Neo-Assyrian influence upon Deuteronomy. Countering this argument determines that curses' history in ANE preceded both Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaty traditions.[71] Thus, one

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[70] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 284, Deut. 31:19-22 is evidential to this view in Scripture.

[71] Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 161.

concludes that the book is not formally framed as a treaty text. Collins notes that parallels and various similarities with the vassal treaties allow illumination of Deuteronomy's text by way of comparative analysis, an ongoing exercise since ANE archaeology's first unearthing of the treaty texts.[72]

**Deuteronomic Iconographic Connection and ancient Near Eastern Traditions**

**Sorting through the Evidence**

An essential question from antiquity resurfaces during the study of Deuteronomic history concerning its sanctuary location is revisited through the lens of an often-revolved phrase, IeSakken emO saim, a loan-adaptation of Akkadian Suma s'akinu, a vernacular commonplace to Mesopotamian royal monumental tradition's typology association with the engraving and foundation of display monuments. Given the description of hammaqom 'daeryibhar YHWH 'WIdhekd lEakke-n semo sam, the place deemed Deuteronomy's central sanctuary, is a link to an inscribed monument in some vague way, a proposition confirmed throughout Deuteronomy's book referring to Mount Ebal as "the place." Often, scholarship discounts the Ebal tradition's significance to the literal, archaeological, epigraphic, and geographical data to confirm Israel's first-century sanctuary and Yahweh's monument as the finale of a critical theme in Deuteronomy.[73]

The Deuteronomic phrase, lesakken semo sam, traditionally translated "the place in which Yahweh your God will choose to cause his name to dwell," according to Richter, occurs seven times within a central code and loan adaptation of the common Akkadian phrase "to place his name." Recognizing this Akk dialect's lending changes the former obscure Hebrew expression Iesakken semo sm reflexive in Deuteronomy and deuteronomic history to

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[72] Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 161.

[73] Sandra Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: l?sakk?n s?m? s?m in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 318; Berlin, 2002), 45-49.

"the place in which Yahweh your God will choose ldsum semo sam ('to place his name'; Deut. 8:5; 12:21; 14:24; 1 Kgs. 9:3; 11:36; 14:21; and 2 Kgs. 21:4, 7)."[74]

First emerging in the late third millennium and frequently resurfacing well into the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, the phrase Akk svuma svakdnu is commonplace in the typology and iconography of the Mesopotamian royal monumental tradition and is analogous with the royal act of producing engravings, the installation of iconographical monuments, and, in non-monumental settings, the notoriety arising from such monuments.[75] To "place one's name" or its inscription upon a monument is to claim ownership. The evidence associated with the Deuteronomic and the ancient Near Eastern traditions discussed might raise the question of where Yahweh placed his name? Perhaps Deuteronomy's book may be identifying "the place" by identifying an Israelite cult site at which a symbolic placing of Yahweh's monument's occurrence.

**Inscribed Monuments within Deuteronomy**

Specific to the language of the ANE in the making of inscriptions and monument installation, and referencing the idiomatic expression "to place one's name," Deuteronomy borrowed this language nine times when commanding the Israelites to come to "the place," notably, in Deuteronomy's old law code, where the idiom arises in chapters 12-26. Significant to reading the oldest recognizable portion of the book is the conception of the deity locating his inscribed monument at a particular cult site within the promised land. However, some may debate that the language is not original to Deuteronomy's legal core, but rather developments upon the original language's central formula (though a closer reading of the text would

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[74] Sandra Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: l?sakk?n s?m? s?m in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 45-49. This conclusion builds upon the work of Benno Jacob, In *Namen Gottes: eine sprachliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Alten und Neuen Testament* (Berlin, 1903); Roland de Vaux, "Le lieu que Yahv? a choisi pour y? tablir son nom," in *Das ferne und nahe Wort, Festschrift L. Rost* (ed. F. Mass; Berlin, 1967); S. Dean McBride, "The Deuteronomic Name Theology," (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 1969).

[75] Ibid., 199-205.

establish that the deity's inscribed name at the cult site is not restricted to the unifying procedure).[76] "Rather three pericopes within the Book of Deuteronomy show that this concept is embedded with the book as a whole, within what most would name *Urdeuteronomium*, Deuteronomy 5-26, 28."[77]

**Mt. Ebal, Canaan, and Iron Age I**

Establishing that the "placing of the name" motif within Deuteronomy provides a historically viable and literarily cohesive resolution in chapter 27 presses a final question: is Mt. Ebal's motif relationship the historically achievable fulfillment? As entered previously, Akk svuma sakdnu compromised installing inscribed monuments tradition- commonly votive and victory monuments. Mesopotamian tradition employed distinct strategies when the monument was triumphal. If the implications in Deuteronomy 27 of Yahweh "placing his name," then the monument installation's locale must be geographically and politically salient.[78] In this case, does Mt. Ebal qualify?

"Ebal is located in the hill country of Manasseh, the region identified as the densest area of early Israelite settlement. Two-thirds of the Iron I Israelite population in Canaan in the eleventh century BCE may be found here, as well as one-third of identified sites."[79] "In this region, the city and territory of Shechem was the political, geographic, and sociological center, the most important city in the northern part of the central hill country from the Middle Bronze to Iron I periods."[80] Though there is a gradual settlement process in these areas, for the most part, many segments of the central hills and Upper Galilee are hardly settled, such as

[76] Sandra Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 62-63.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 130-153, 184-203.
[79] Adam Zertal, "To the Land of the Perizzites and the Giants': On the Israelite Settlement in the Hill Country of Manasseh," in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological & Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (eds. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman; Jerusalem, 1994), 80-91.
[80] Ibid., 50.

the Judean mountains. However, there is much similarity between the material culture of the new settlements in the central hills and previous Canaanite culture, with much of Israel comprising a substantial measure of their rural and nomadic elements. During the early Iron Age, there is extensive archaeological evidence for the appearance of new sites in the central hills region, particularly in the area between Jerusalem in the south and the Jezreel Valley in the north, known as Samaria.[81]

In a defined assessment of Deuteronomy 27, Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas feature the setting-up of Mt. Ebal's altar emphasizing the stone monuments coated with plaster—"ancient writing techniques included ink on papyrus (Egypt), a stylus on clay tables (Mesopotamia), an inscribing tool on stone and a stick on wax-coated wooden boards. The altar spoken of here is actually constructed in Joshua 8. Some archeologists believe that the remains of the altar have been found."[82] "We have spoken of divine revelation by way of commands and instruction for the construction of temples and their equipment and other monumental architecture. But the ultimate form of divine revelation is the very presence of a god, accessible to the worshipper."[83] Given the temple theme, Niehaus suggests that evidence that ancient Near Eastern people believe that temple patterns were their god's revelation to their elect priest kings, just as the tabernacle pattern given to Moses by Yahweh.[84] The ancient Near Eastern cultures all believed that their gods not only ruled over them but also dwelt among them and sought to extend their rule through their people by wars of conquest. The ancients accounted for such an event theologically in several ways. The fundamental explanation was always that the gods had abandoned their temples.[85]

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[81] Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 56.

[82] John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 201.

[83] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 99.

[84] Ibid., 89.

[85] Ibid., 116.

Recognizing the Deuteronomic references to "the place in which I chose to place my name" and the cultural cargo surrounding the significance of inscribed monuments, chapter 12 "exhorts Israel to remove the inscriptions of the Canaanite deities from their cult sites as Yahweh will be placing his own inscription at his own site, and that Deuteronomy 11 and 27 communicate how, when, and where Yahweh's inscribed monument is to be installed."[86] Drawing from the Deuteronomic historical references of Scripture one may conclude that the question of the location of "the place of the name" is Mt. Ebal. What is broadly recognized as Urdeuteronomium and Deuteronomy 27 and the climax of a critical theme gives the clearest evidence to support these claims. The archaeological, epigraphic, and biblical material reveals the cultic appurtenances described as representing Iron Age Israelite religion and its relations to ancient Near Eastern iconographic tradition.

## Conclusion

Given the possibility of a common origin of some of the parallels between Israel and the ancient Near Eastern practices, one has examined these standard exercises and beliefs through comparative methodology, historical, archaeological, and scholarly methods utilized by biblical scholars when working with ancient texts. Each religion's expression of its primary practice and belief introduces significant differences uniquely but preserving some similarities. In these situations, by divine revelation, the traditions or faiths were stripped of their idolatrous perversions for God's use as the proper vehicle to communicate his divine message. Comparing ancient Near Eastern practices and their relationship to Deuteronomy proposes that God, through his work of revelation and inspiration, incorporated ancient pagan rituals in diverse ways for varying designs.

[86] Adam Zertal, *Israelite Settlement*, 231.

This study when incorporated into a Bible study of comparative study of Deuteronomic laws and culture with those of the ancient Near East can be accomplished by investigating the various similarities of treaty language and the results of those who abide or reject its proposed agreements between kings and vassals. Utilizing the Mt. Sinai covenant as a guide, one can compare it with its ancient Near Eastern comparatives.

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