

# The God of Joshua

## *An Ambivalent Field of Negotiation*

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The contours of critical issues in the book of Joshua are relatively clear, even though these issues have not been settled in any consensus. For that reason, I do not need to engage further those critical questions, but can move to a post-critical, probe of theological-interpretive matters concerning the text of Joshua. What follows is a theological probe in the manner of a “second naïveté” that may strike one as rather fanciful. Or it may be regarded as a theological fantasy informed by what I have been reading lately. At any rate, let me consider what must be an important interpretive question in the book of Joshua, namely, the matter of legitimated violence and, beyond that, the indispensable commitment of YHWH to that violence on behalf of Israel at the expense of the prior inhabitants of the land.

### I

The interface of YHWH and violence is, in the end, an acute theological embarrassment. Commentators have been remarkably agile in overcoming that embarrassment by a variety of interpretive strategies:

- An evolutionary hypothesis that does not need to take early “primitive” texts seriously, as they have been better superseded and displaced by better, subsequent texts.
- A distinction between ancient text and reutilization in the Persian (“canonical”) period, when ancient memory has been purged of its literal toxic quality and now functions in a more credible way as a conviction of faith, but without any literal intention. A variety of

approaches, as with Douglas Earl, to read mythologically or symbolically, past the unmistakable substance of the text, this way in particular in the service of Christian interpretation (Earl 2010).

Each of these approaches no doubt has merit, and I have no wish to denigrate them or the interpreters who practice them. Nonetheless, they all smack, in one way or another, of a Marcionite temptation to select and cherry-pick the text for what is most palatable, and to dismiss or deny what is most objectionable in it. These are, in the end, various strategies to explain away the text. I have no doubt that the harshness of the text, including its violence, requires some such reading agility.

Given that, however, it remains to admit that the statement of the text persists and continues to wound and to authorize systemic wounding. The land is still described as violently seized; and the God of Israel is still narrated as the legitimator of that violent seizure. As a result, for all of our hermeneutical imagination, we still have before us texts that wound. These texts offer a God willing to enact, and capable of enacting, summary violence against the enemies of the chosen people and in the service of the divine promise.

## II

In what follows, I will articulate three probes in an attempt to understand more fully, and in an effort to consider the responsibility of ongoing theological interpretation in the light of the witness of the text. I do so in the context of our own acutely violent society in a violent world, in an awareness that theological ideologies, interpretations, and institutions regularly collude in supporting violence as a proper and moral undertaking, sometimes in local authoritarian and patriarchal ways and sometimes in colonizing military actions. It is of course an enormous stretch from ancient text to contemporary legitimation, but the texts remain available precisely for such legitimation, a stretch often undertaken with an untroubled conscience.

### *PROBE 1*

The violent seizure of the land is the function of the chosenness of Israel by YHWH to be YHWH's "treasured possession" (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). It is impossible to follow the narrative account of the book of Joshua except with an assumption of chosenness that binds Israel to radical Torah obedience (1:7-8; 8:30-35; 23:6) and to covenant fidelity of an exclusionary kind (23:7, 12-13). Conversely, the chosenness of Israel binds YHWH to a

singular commitment to and passion for the well-being of Israel that comes to mean safe settlement in the land (see Deut. 26:16–19).

I have learned the most in recent times about chosenness from the critical reflections of Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz in their book, *The Chosen Peoples* (2010). They accent that the chosenness of Israel, in the tradition of Israel, is integrally and intrinsically linked to the chosenness of the land. Thus the initial promise to Abraham concerns the land (Gen. 12:1–3), and the declaration to Moses at the burning bush concerns guidance to the land (Exod. 3:8). In the founding traditions, the commitment of YHWH to Israel is all about land that is promised and that must be taken.

The counter side of chosenness, as Gitlin and Leibovitz show, is that others must be “unchosen” and that the “unchosenness” must, perforce, face land loss and land defeat. The unchosen, as adversaries of the promise of God, will not and cannot hold the land. In their extrapolation from this conviction of people and land, they observe that as God chooses this people, so this chosen people becomes the chooser. Thus in the Song of Deborah, “New gods were chosen,” clearly the God who will defeat Sisera and the Canaanites for the sake of the land (Judg. 5:8). That the chosen can choose a God gives the initiative in the relationship to the chosen and suggests an act of ideological self-promotion. The connection to the land and its seizure, clearly enough, means that violence is intrinsic to the status of chosenness, for the land to be *given* is the land to be *taken*, as is required.

Two extrapolations are offered by Gitlin and Leibovitz that may be taken, *mutatis mutandis*, as claims from the book of Joshua that have continuing contemporary force. The authors trace, in summary fashion, the way in which that ancient chosenness has eventuated in contemporary Zionism that practices a messianic passion for the land that exempts the land and all of its questions from any ordinary political reasoning. They dare to suggest a straight line from Joshua to the contemporary linkage of land and people.

Second and of more immediate interest to me, Gitlin and Leibovitz trace the same chosenness in American self-understanding from the earliest Europeans in America through the Puritans to the imperial expansion of the United States. They observe that the most expansionist of U.S. presidents—Jefferson, Jackson, Polk, and Theodore Roosevelt—traded on chosenness (cast in evangelical language) as warrant for imperial expansion. They draw a line, moreover, from the earlier expansionists through Roosevelt directly to George W. Bush and his elective wars. Most recently, that same expansionism has been pursued in the decision of Barack Obama to launch a new U.S. military base in Australia. Of course, the book of Joshua cannot

directly receive credit or blame for such a contemporary practice. But with equal clarity, the texts persist in ways that make chosenness a warrant for legitimate violence that is a living out of a distinct God-given destiny. Regina Schwartz has judged that *monotheism* is intrinsically violent, and now we may see that the status of *being chosen*—in ancient election or as contemporary exceptionalism—draws palpably from such an ideology for the practice of violence (Schwartz 1997).

Gitlin and Leibovitz are not sanguine of any remedy for such claims of chosenness: “When a people declares themselves chosen, or act as if they are, or were, there is no rolling back the history that ensues. The clock cannot be reset to zero. We cannot choose to be unchosen. We cannot end the ordeal. The cycles of race hatred, revenge, and war cannot be rescinded, erased from memory. History is unsparing” (Gitlin and Leibovitz 2010: 191). They hope that the chosen may choose differently in time to come: “The chosen people must choose (Gitlin and Leibovitz 2010: 192). More radical is the project of Mark Braverman (2010) and the authors he cites, that chosenness must be renounced if violence is to be curbed. It is astonishing that the biblical tradition, so grounded in the neighborly Torah, could narrate the violence without objection or even without notice. It is surely even more astonishing, in my judgment, that critical scholars, religiously committed, could for a very long time pass over the issue without notice, so contained has been our reading in grip of the ideology of chosenness. It is chosenness that propels the chosen, chosen God and chosen people together, to perpetrate violence.

## *PROBE 2*

The violence perpetrated for the sake of chosenness consists in the negation of the “other” (Brueggemann 2009). The covenant that provided the basis for “chosenness” in the deuteronomic History (and so in the book of Joshua) is an exclusionary enterprise with no room for the other. In the book of Joshua, the other consists of all the previous inhabitants of the land of promise (the land promised in the act of chosenness), inhabitants given in the text in various forms that are highly stylized and summarized in the list in 12:1-24. All of them are to be rejected and eliminated in order that YHWH can keep the land promise made to the chosen covenant partner, Israel.

There are in the tradition of Israel, to be sure, early signs that YHWH had room for “the other.” The initial promise to Abraham, variously reiterated, has the “families of the earth” in purview as recipients of divine blessing (Gen. 12:3;

18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). But there is none of that here. The dismissal of the other for the sake of the chosen is, inevitably, a prescription for violence.

I have come at this issue of the other through the remarkable book by Martha Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, her critical exploration of the clash between Hindus and Muslims in India (Nussbaum 2007). Her book, as indicated by its title, is deliberately and forcibly a response to Samuel Huntington, who in his book *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) anticipates a future inescapable conflict between Islam and Western civilization. Given Huntington's premise, one could judge that conflict narrated in the book of Joshua between Israelites and Canaanites is a harbinger of what Huntington anticipates, an anticipation on his part that has, in important ways, become a self-fulfilling prophecy that has shaped ideology and consequently policy. Nussbaum, to the contrary, denies that the conflict in India is between Hindus and Muslims. She finds that the "clash," among both the Hindu and Muslim persons she interviewed, is not between those two "sides" in that conflict. It is rather a "clash" between two types of people within the society itself.

The clash between proponents of ethnoreligious homogeneity and proponents of a more inclusive and pluralistic type of citizenship is a clash between two types of people within a single society. At the same time, this clash expresses tendencies that are present, at some level, within most human beings: the tendency to seek domination as a form of self-protection, versus the ability to respect others who are different, and to see in difference a nation's richness rather than a threat to its purity" (Nussbaum 2007: 15).

That is, the propelling conflict is between those who need to exclude the other and those who can welcome (or at least tolerate) the other in an ordered society. By the end of her book, Nussbaum has moved her argument even further. She proposes:

The real "clash of civilizations" is not "out there," between admirable Westerners and Muslim zealots. It is here, within each person, as we oscillate uneasily between self-protective aggression and the ability to live in the world with others (Nussbaum 2007: 337).

The clash is between self-protective aggression and the ability to live with the other!

Now it is of course a huge leap from contemporary India and Nussbaum back to the book of Joshua. It is, however, a leap I propose to make in order to

consider afresh the force of violence narrated in the book. In the book of Joshua, the main story line is the elimination of the other for the sake of the promise of the chosen.

There are, to be sure, side notes to the contrary in the book of Joshua. In his close study of the ban authorized by Deuteronomy, Robert Polzin (1980: 123) observes that there is a narrative indication of “a relaxation of application of the ban,” so that exceptions are made for Rahab, for the Gibeonites, and for the booty and cattle of northern cities (11:11–14). Polzin judges that what is being “mocked” is the sweeping authoritarian dogmatism of total destruction commanded by Deuteronomy (Polzin 1980: 127). Polzin sees the text making room for the processing of outsiders and so can find a “clash” within between the total rejection of others and a more-restrained or humane treatment of the others. While Polzin’s point is well taken as an important hermeneutical insight, I judge, nonetheless, that hostility toward the other that issues in legitimated violence against the other is the main story line.

And if we can more fully consider the ideological struggle that Polzin discusses—an ideological struggle that may have been ancient in the memory of Israel and is “contemporary” in the exilic or postexilic contestation of Israel—we may ask a theological question about the character of YHWH and how YHWH is disclosed and portrayed in this ideology-laden narrative. As a theological possibility, I dare to suggest that the text witnesses to a “clash” within the character of YHWH, a clash that is endlessly adjudicated in the witness of Israel. On the one hand, YHWH has concern for the other peoples who are entitled to life and to land. Patrick Miller has found evidence of this allowance in Deuteronomy 2, where the text concerns the land of Israel’s “kin.” Thus Miller judges, “The Lord’s stories with other peoples are made a part of Israel’s story” (Miller 2000: 599). The extreme articulation of this trajectory is the promissory oracle of Isaiah 19, in which it is assured that a peaceable Fertile Crescent will include many peoples blessed by YHWH:

On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage. (Isa. 19:23–25).

Indeed, the text goes so far as to distribute YHWH's pet names for chosen Israel to other peoples, so that in anticipation YHWH has many chosen peoples. The prophetic oracle goes well beyond the narrative of Deuteronomy 2, but that entire trajectory is against exclusionary chosenness.

However, it is clear that in the book of Joshua the exceptions of Rahab, the Gibeonites, and the northern cattle are only that—exceptions—to the general resolve of YHWH. The several traditions attest distinctly and differently and do not, on their own, perform the “clash.” When the traditions are taken in sum, however, there is clearly an unresolved clash in the tradition that is given to us as an unresolved clash in the character of YHWH. Nussbaum proposes that what counts is that pervasive “oscillation” in how one handles the options toward the other in particular circumstance. Clearly the traditionists are not of a single mind concerning the other, and one may dare to see that YHWH is not single-minded either. Given that, insofar as chosenness propels the book of Joshua, the “clash” is resolved in an exclusionary direction, with consequent violence. I judge that the noted exceptions only call attention to the wholesale enactment of covenantal violence to which YHWH is here committed. The struggle for the legitimacy of the other is an ongoing project in the Bible, and the clash runs on in the text and, not surprisingly, in our long tradition of interpretation. That unsettled question, however, is rooted in the clash within YHWH, who occupies the text.

### PROBE 3

The practice of chosenness that violently excludes the other is exacerbated by the absence of dissent that one might expect in a lively, dialogical, covenantal tradition. But, of course, a tradition that is deeply set in an exclusionary ideology is not a welcoming matrix for dissent. Now it may be unreasonable and inappropriate to expect that there should be dissent to the program of chosenness that issues in violence, because revolutionary movements will not tolerate such “weakening of the hands” of their force.

I have had two thoughts about this question. First, YHWH, in YHWH's wholesale command to destroy the other, indicates no misgiving or second thought or reservation, no large dissent from violence in a way of mercy. That is because YHWH is here totally committed to the enterprise, passionate for the exclusiveness of the chosen, and zealous to deliver on the land promise that goes with chosenness. Perhaps that is all we might have expected.

But I am also thinking, to the contrary, for example, of YHWH's reflective, self-critical soliloquy in Hosea 11:8-9:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
     How can I hand you over, O Israel?  
 How can I make you like Admah?  
     How can I treat you like Zeboiim?  
 My heart recoils within me;  
     my compassion grows warm and tender.  
 I will not execute my fierce anger;  
     I will not again destroy Ephraim;  
 for I am God and no mortal,  
     the Holy One in your midst,  
     and I will not come in wrath.

Gerald Janzen has made the case that these questions are not rhetorical but are serious questions posed by YHWH about YHWH's knee-jerk reaction to Israel's disobedience (Janzen 1982). YHWH is caught up short at the edge of violent destructiveness. YHWH reverses field and makes a new resolve out of compassion, a deeply moved emotive reversal. That astonishing fresh resolve is echoed with an infinitive absolute in Jer. 31:20:

Is Ephraim my dear son?  
     Is he the child I delight in?  
 As often as I speak against him  
     I still remember him.  
 Therefore I am deeply moved for him;  
     I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.

Both statements are about divine compassion that radically undercuts more ferocious resolve to enact a violent response to disobedience. Admittedly, a divine response to covenantal disobedience on the part of Israel is not the same as divine violence against an outsider to covenantal chosenness; but the parallel is enough to notice that, in these two cases in the Latter Prophets, YHWH has enough individuated freedom, so that YHWH need not react to disobedience according to the harsh sanctions of the Torah. As I have followed Gitlin and Leibovitz concerning chosenness and Nussbaum about otherness, now I suggest following D. W. Winnicott (1965), that YHWH in the book of Joshua is an agent of unqualified exclusionary violence; YHWH has not enough of an individuated self to have freedom to step outside of the reaction mandated by covenantal symmetry. In the prophetic poetry I have cited, YHWH does exhibit that individuated freedom. By contrast, in the book of Joshua, YHWH

has no freedom beyond the mandates of chosenness. Without this self-critical freedom that introspection requires, YHWH must, perforce, be completely defined by, and summoned to act by, the uncompromising ideological force of the land promise. Thus there is not in the book of Joshua any hint of self-critical capacity on the part of YHWH that might cause an interruption of violence on behalf of the chosen against the other.

But second and more important, there is no dissent against violence voiced by Israel. I came to this awareness by appeal to the way in which Moses is narrated as a dissenting voice to the destructive resolve of YHWH against Israel. In Exod. 32:11–13, Moses vigorously protests against YHWH's resolve to consume Israel in the wake of the incident of the golden calf. Moses appeals to YHWH's self-interest and self-regard and to the tradition of the ancestors in order to motivate YHWH to an alternative decision. At the center of his intervention, in v. 12, is the triple imperative of petition:

Turn . . .  
Change . . .  
Do not bring evil.

The dissent of Moses interrupts YHWH's resolve, which seems to have been an emotive reaction rather than a considered decision. The dissent of Moses creates space for YHWH that YHWH could not, from YHWH's self, entertain. Thus Moses acts in a daring way to summon, for an instant, YHWH's best self.

That same transaction is narrated in Numbers 14. Again YHWH has resolved to disinherit Israel (v. 12). And again, Moses dissents from the divine resolve and persuades YHWH otherwise. Moses reminds YHWH of what is at stake for YHWH's own reputation (vv. 13–16). In an appeal to YHWH's power (vanity?), he quotes back YHWH's self-announcement from Exod. 34:6–7:

The Lord is slow to anger,  
and abounding in steadfast love,  
Forgiving iniquity and transgression  
but by no means clearing the guilty,  
visiting the iniquity of the parents on the children  
to the third and the fourth generation. (Num. 14:18)

Finally, after the quote comes the big imperative (v. 19): “forgive,” with an appeal to the memory of Exodus 32. In both narrative instances, Moses boldly pushes into a divine resolve of destructive punishment and mitigates that

resolve. In Num. 11:11–15, the matter is somewhat different, but Moses' boldness against divine anger is the same.

What strikes me is that there is no such protest or dissent in the book of Joshua against the divine resolve to destroy the inhabitants of the land. To be sure, as I recognize, it would be a very different matter to protest divine resolve against the Canaanites rather than against Israel, as Moses has done. But the analogue is close enough to note. Thus Joshua is narrated and the characters in it are fully ensconced in the ideology of chosenness, with its implications for land seizure. The difference is that Moses was not so fully ensconced in the ideology of obedience so that he could protest the divine violence. Here there is no such restraint against the divine violence that is an enactment of the ideology of chosenness. To paraphrase Senator Lloyd Bentsen against candidate Dan Quayle, "Joshua, you are no Moses." Such a dissent might have not worked. But it is nonetheless striking that such a note is absent in the narrative. And in the ideology of chosenness, such a dissent will remain mostly absent for a very long time to come. Perhaps in our belated retrospect on this text, it becomes the task of interpretation to issue a dissent against YHWH's evident proclivity to partisan violence, a dissent that Joshua could not and did not undertake.

### III

I suggest that these three propositions on divine violence are at the center of the interpretive work that may yet be undertaken in the book of Joshua:

1. Following Gitlin and Leibovitz (2010) on chosenness: The violent seizure of the land is a function of chosenness.
2. Following Nussbaum (2007) on otherness: The violence perpetrated for the sake of chosenness consists in the negation of the other.
3. Following Winnicott (1965) on individuation: The practice of chosenness that violently excludes the other is exacerbated by the absence of dissent that one might have expected in a largely dialogical tradition. Neither YHWH nor Joshua is differentiated enough to stake out any freedom in the face of the totalizing ideology of chosenness.

I finish with an appreciative reflection on the distinction made by Robert Polzin, plus a couple of concluding observations. In his programmatic appeal to V. N. Voloshinov (aka Mikhail Bakhtin), Polzin, in his three important books, posits a dialogic quality for the narrative books of ancient Israel, including

of course the book of Joshua.<sup>1</sup> He sets up that dialogical transaction as an interpretive tension between what he terms “authoritarian dogmatism” and “critical traditionalism.” By the former, he means the hard-nosed, nonnegotiable command for absolute obedience voiced in the tradition of Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup> By “critical traditionalism,” Polzin means the evidence of the text itself that exercises interpretive freedom and imagination in order to soften or break the absoluteness of Deuteronomy. It is the intent and burden of Polzin’s argument to show that critical traditionalism is an enterprise of immense importance that precludes taking the tradition as flat and one-dimensional. It is the case that I happen to think that the evidence for critical traditionalism in the book of Joshua is much less substantial than Polzin does, but that is not at all my point here.

Rather, I want to take up Polzin’s analysis in an appreciative way, and connect his categories to the force of violence that is evident in so much of the narrative of Joshua. Polzin makes his case around the flat command of the ban (*herem*), and then shows that critical traditionalism relaxes that divine insistence. I wish to transpose Polzin’s “authoritarian dogmatism” into the absoluteness of chosenness that is intrinsically violent and that brooks no dissent, and to take his “critical traditionalism” as a softening of radical chosenness that interrupts the commanded violence. In this way, Polzin’s critical traditionalism amounts to a mode of dissent, the very dissent of which I find no evidence in the book of Joshua. Polzin keeps his argument at a more formal level, and I wish to bring his formal argument down to the actual reality of divinely legitimated violence.

Given that transposition that I believe is faithful to and congruent with Polzin’s argument, the critical traditionalism finds such divinely authorized violence to be unacceptable and unbearable and begins to enact loopholes in that radical ideology. I suggest, moreover, that one cannot soften or relax the command to violence without—at the same time—softening the claim of chosenness so that the outcome, in a particular circumstance, may be an exemption from the systemic violence that otherwise pertains to all of the unchosen. Thus I judge that Polzin’s categories constitute a modest dissent, a first step against the ideology of chosenness and consequently a first mitigation of divine violence. No character in the book of Joshua gives voice to this mitigation. But the traditionalists who hide in the text set in motion a trajectory, in modest and cautious ways, that can indeed become a place from which to interpret outside the ideology of chosenness, with its indispensable complement of violence.

From that extrapolation from Polzin’s work, I draw two conclusions. First, the critical traditionalism concerning the book of Joshua has made a

beginning, but did not go very far in its critique of the ideology of chosenness and violence championed by authoritarian dogmatism. It did not go very far, perhaps, because that ideology of chosenness was and is so powerful. Or perhaps it did not go very far because the exilic or postexilic reprise on chosenness, and its reclamation of the land, was so compelling in that circumstance. Or at a theological level, it did not go very far because YHWH is a recalcitrant character who has not yet reached an individuated capacity for free action, beyond the reactive possibilities permitted by the inherited dogmatism.

Second, in the face not having yet gone very far, it follows, I suggest, that the ongoing work of interpretation must extend Polzin's critical traditionalism much further against the authoritarian dogmatism that still occupies the text. That is, interpretive work might be to imagine how the stay in the land might be enacted differently. If the chosen were less vigorously chosen, if the violent counterpoint of chosenness were rejected, and if dissent were more energetically voiced to YHWH, a different tale might be told. YHWH, with accompanying chosenness and violence, is to some extent a product and construct of Israel's testimony; and so to bear alternative testimony may be to permit YHWH to become a different, more credible character with a more individuated sense of free agency that is not captivated by authoritarian dogmatism.

The outcome of such work will be to continue the dissent: not only to expose ideology that overrides the facts on the ground but also to bear witness to God, who may yet occupy the textual tradition (and, therefore, occupy the land) differently. If that is a continuing possibility, then "criticism" in our society is not simply a rational project of conforming the Bible to Enlightenment categories; it is to participate in the theological, dialogical exchange already evident in the text, a process whereby the past and the future may be reimagined short of self-serving, violence-generating ideology.

I do not need to tell you that this enterprise (already evident in the daring work of critical traditionalism) is of huge urgency among us now. It is urgent because every chosen people—Israel and the United States among them—imagines God as singularly committed to the reassuring violence that serves the maintenance of privilege, entitlement, and preeminence in the world. The God who may be sketched differently in critical traditionalism may be a God who continues to make more room for the unchosen, who keeps free from overcommitted violence, and who takes dissent seriously as the offer of a credible alternative in touch with the facts on the ground.

The dialogic transaction of interpretation that Polzin has located in the text indicates that our interpretation, like that of the antecedent authoritarian

dogmatism, remains always under negotiation and well short of finality. To remain short of finality is urgent both for the character of God and for the life of the world. We know very well that final readings lead to final solutions. The authoritarian dogmatism voiced in the book of Joshua offers a final solution to “Canaanite problem” (see Levenson 1985). If we are unthinking, as easily happens among chosen people, we can be taken in by the continual attractiveness of such finality. The insistence of critical traditionalism is that it need not be so, and it continues to need not to be so.

## Notes

1. In addition to *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, already cited (1980), see also Polzin’s *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (1989), and *David and the Deuteronomist* (1993).

2. Polzin regards the commands of Deuteronomy so absolute as to constitute “authoritarian dogmatism.” Note should be taken, however, of Bernard Levinson in *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (2008), who proposes that Deuteronomy represents an imaginative interpretive move beyond Sinai. If one considers the arguments of both Polzin and Levinson, we may see a recurring dynamism between old established tradition and new interpretation. In the long run, the new interpretation becomes part of the settled authoritative tradition.