Abstract

The goal of this study is to provide a literary analysis of the complaints pericope in Exodus (15:22–17:16) and to identify the pericope’s intent in light of the relations among the smaller units of which it is composed. Each chapter of this thesis offers a discussion of an individual unit, incorporating a literary analysis of the unit and an inquiry into its purpose. The final chapter addresses the full pericope’s intention, drawing conclusions from the preceding chapters.

The **Introduction** discusses three central questions: subdividing the book of Exodus, defining the boundaries of the pericope in question, and identifying the interrelationships among the units it comprises. These questions are foundational for understanding the literary intent of the pericope. Many scholars have grappled with the question of where to place the complaints section within Exodus. It is suspended between the book’s two great narratives: the exodus from Egypt and Sinaitic revelation. The story of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the Jethro story led to different opinions about where to define the boundaries of this section. Because the story of the splitting of the sea contains different plot materials from the complaints pericope, and because the story of Jethro already takes place at Mt. Sinai, it seems that one should not include those stories in the complaints pericope. Most significantly, one must admit that in those stories we find no use of the roots לו״ן and נס״ה, which appear repeatedly in the other units (לו״ן in 15:24, 16:2, and 17:2; נס״ה in 15:25, 16:4, and 17:3) and constitute the shared plot features common to the other three units.

**Chapter 1** comprises a literary analysis of the Marah and Elim story (15:22–27). Scholars have raised two central questions regarding the Marah story. The first is the relationship between the central story and the exhortatory speech (vv. 25b–26). Many scholars have assumed that the speech is a secondary addition by the Deuteronomist, but a literary analysis reveals the unifying connection between the speech and the central action of the story. The second question relates to the entire Marah story and to the report on finding water at Elim (v. 27). Contra the view of scholars who regarded this as an unconnected report, or as a description opening the story of the granting of the manna in Chapter 16, it seems that the report at Elim creates an antithesis between it and the description of the bitterness of the waters at Marah. The juxtaposition of the exhortatory speech and the report of finding water at Elim creates a concentric and harmonious structure for the story. Literary analysis reveals that the Marah story creates literary connections with the Egypt story, making the point that the redemption and beneficence provided by Israel’s God for His people are not given “with no strings attached” but rather are conditioned upon Israel’s scrupulous adherence to God’s laws, even though, at this stage, no details have been provided of the laws and commandments to which the people are supposed to adhere.

**Chapter 2** is devoted to the story of the provision of the manna (Ch. 16). Unlike the previous story, with regard to this one there is no consensus among scholars regarding the process of its formation. Nonetheless, scholars have assumed that the story includes Priestly parts and non-Priestly parts, and the debate among scholars is mainly about the relationship between them. Our study raises the suggestion that the story has three sections: the complaint and divine revelation (vv. 1–12), the laws of the manna and the Sabbath (vv. 13–30), and addenda (vv. 31–36). An analysis of the story reveals that the central intent of the story is the status of the law. The main point of the story deals with the first granting of law to the people and testing whether they will obey it. The resolution of Israel’s complaint is the gift of the manna, on condition of obeying the laws of the manna and the Sabbath, which are mentioned in brief at the beginning of the story and later elaborated at length. The core of the story describes how Israel first dealt with new laws and by trial and error succeeded in keeping them. The story of giving the manna provides a concrete example of the condition mentioned in the Marah story, according to which the gift of manna was made conditional upon Israel’s obedience to the law and that obedience was defined as knowledge of the Lord.

**Chapter 3** includes a discussion of two stories that, on the surface, should not be the subject of a joint discussion: the story of Masa and the story of the war with Amalek. The two Rephidim stories are usually regarding as separate tales, in light of an examination of their plot materials, which are different from one another. Each story has a different problem, resolution and conclusion, and they are apparently independent stories. Nevertheless, it appears that there is a conscious intent in juxtaposing the two stories and creating a thread connecting them. The two stories occur in the same place, Rephidim, and in addition the story of the war with Amalek does not have its own opening. Literary analysis shows that the story of Masa and Meribah is built from two strata, the frame story (vv. 1–2, 7) and the central story (vv. 3–6), which have been intertwined in literary and artistic fashion. The frame story focuses on Israel’s test of the Lord and their challenge to Him, while the focus of the central story is the resolution of their complaint and Moses’ status vis-à-vis the people. Because the unit in question does not deal only with complaint narratives but primarily relays an educational or theological message, the redactor tried to weave the two stories into the complaints pericope. The integration of the frame story with the inner story contributes to the overall direction of the story and presents the story as dealing with relations among Israel, the Lord, and Moses: Israel casts doubt upon relations with the Lord, and Moses questions the relations between himself and Israel. The story concludes with Israel’s challenging question, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” and seems to call for an answer to be received, one that will arrive with the Amalek story. Unlike the preceding stories, the story of Amalek is, by consensus, a unified story. Literary analysis tells us that while the story does indeed contain two descriptions of war—the war in the field under the command of Joshua and the war on the hill under the command of Moses—the story as a whole is not constructed according to a classic structure. God is absent from the descriptions of battle until the stage at which He bursts forth, after the conclusion of the war, when He takes responsibility for the continued battle with Amalek into the future. The Amalek story provides an answer to the question with which the story of Masa and Meribah ended, “Is God among us, or not?” Even though it sometimes appears that God is not present and the crisis must be managed in human fashion, Israel needs to know that the Lord accompanies them all along the way.

**The final chapter** examines the conclusions that emerged from the analysis of the smaller units, in order to infer the intent of the pericope as a whole. In the first part of the chapter we find that the three units in the pericope have been redacted and organized in the same manner. Each unit has two parts, of which the first part is the central one and includes the main theme of each unit, and the second part stands on its own, is clearly separate from the previous story and responds to the central theme in the first part. Thus the report about Elim, which takes place elsewhere, responds to the Mara story; the addenda in the story of the manna, which sound, from the description there, as though they belong to the period after the revelation at Sinai and the erection of the Tabernacle, strengthen and emphasize the importance of the law mentioned in the central story; and the story of Amalek, scraped from other plot materials, gives an appropriate answer to the question that concludes the story of Masa and Meribah. The common foundation of the units indicates that one can discern a consistent intent behind the pericope.

Examination of the stories reveals that the pericope can be divided into two parts. In the first part (Masa, the manna), Israel’s obligation toward the Lord is emphasized, since they must obey the Lord and heed His voice. In the second part (Masa and Meribah, and Amalek) the obligation is examined in another light: the Lord undertakes commitments to Israel, even though they test Him and deny divine providence, and He himself commits to battling Israel’s enemies forever.

Thus, the literary intent of the pericope is not limited to the beneficence shown by God toward His people, but instead includes a theological intent that touches on the dual covenant of the Lord and His people. The complaints pericope summarizes the essence of the covenant, which had not yet been sealed, between the Lord and the people Israel. That covenant about to be concluded between the Lord and Israel is two-sided and based on mutual trust and obligation.