

Structure and Rhetorical Aim of Deut 4:32–40: Blending of Historical, Universal, Sensorial and Relational Motifs

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ABSTRACT

Various scholars view Deuteronomy 4:32–40 as the climax of Moses' first speech. While the passage has received considerable attention on the literary-critical front and in terms of its theology, the structure of the passage has not received as much scholarly attention, possibly because the structure seems quite simple (Deut 4:32–35, 36–39, 40). The question, however, that has not been adequately addressed is: why does Deut 4:36–39 repeat Deut 4:32–35 in part and what can be deduced from this repetition? The article attempts to answer this question by investigating the occurrence of four primary themes found in the text, namely historical, universal, sensorial and relational themes, each made up of various motifs. It is argued that the blending of these motifs indicates a deliberate development in the structure of the passage. The article concludes by reflecting on the multifaceted rhetorical aim of the text in light of its structure.

KEYWORDS: Deuteronomy 4:32–40, structure, themes, historical motifs, universal motifs, sensorial motifs, relational motifs, blending of motifs, rhetorical aim

A INTRODUCTION

Although there are differences of opinion, most scholars view Deut 4:1–40 as a unit.¹ The most basic view is that the passage is made up of three parts, namely

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¹ Norbert Lohfink, "Auslegung deuteronomischer Texte: IV. Verkündigung des Hauptgebots in der jüngsten Schicht des Deuteronomiums (Dt 4,1–40)," *BibL* 5 (1964): 247–256; Georg Braulik, *Die Mittel deuteronomischer Rhetorik: Erhoben aus Deuteronomium 4,1–40* (Analecta Biblica 68; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978); Andrew D.H. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy," *JBL* 100/1 (1981): 24–30; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 73–75; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 41–42. Note that Marc Z. Brettler, "A 'Literary Sermon' in Deuteronomy 4," in *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*

Deut 4:1–8,² which functions as an introduction, 4:9–31, which forms the prescriptive core and 4:32–40, functioning as an epilogue or conclusion.³ The primary purpose of the passage is to exhort Israel to refrain from idolatry (4:16, 23, 25).⁴ If the chapter is dated later, it contains the additional message of repentance in exile.⁵

The conclusion of 4:1–40, namely 4:32–40, is a significant passage within the structure and theology of Deuteronomy, as various scholars point out.⁶ Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the passage has received considerable attention, especially on the literary-critical front, either on its own⁷ or in

(ed. S.M. Olyan and R.C. Culley; Providence: Brown University Press, 2000), 43 refers to Deut 4:1–40 as a "compositional unity." See Stephen A. Geller, "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4," *Prooftexts* 14/2 (1994): 137–138 (n. 8) for references to scholarly discussions of the unity of the passage.

² All biblical references are to Deuteronomy, unless otherwise indicated.

³ Braulik, *Mittel deuteronomischer Rhetorik*, 78; Daniel I. Block, Deuteronomy (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115; Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 232; Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 51–59; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 222; Christopher J.H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 45. Cf. J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 101–102; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 41. These three subdivisions are recognised by various scholars. There are, of course, other ways in which scholars understand the structure of Deut 4:1–40. See, for example, the views of Christopher Begg, "The Literary Criticism of Deut 4,1–40: Contributions to a Continuing Discussion," *ETL* 56 (1980): 55; Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4," 25–26; Geller, "Fiery Wisdom," 109; Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 73–75; Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 1,1–4,43* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012), 528 and 532; Eep Talstra and Christo H.J. van der Merwe, "Analysis, Retrieval and the Demand for More Data: Integrating the Results of a Formal Textlinguistic and Cognitive Based Pragmatic Approach to the Analysis of Deut 4:1–40," in *Bible and Computer: The Stellenbosch AIBI–6 Conference. Proceedings of the Association Internationale Bible et Informatique* (ed. J.A. Cook; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43–78.

⁴ Cf. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4," 26–27; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 215.

⁵ Cf. Brettler, "Literary Sermon," 47; Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 532.

⁶ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 142; Alexander Rofé, "The Monotheistic Argumentation in Deuteronomy IV 32–40: Contents, Composition and Text," *VT* XXXV/4 (1985): 436; Donald G. Dawe, "Deuteronomy 4:32–40," *Interpretation* 47/2 (1993): 159; Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 130; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 54; Block, *Deuteronomy*, 141 and 145.

⁷ See, for example, Rofé, "Monotheistic Argumentation," 434–445.

connection to the rest of Deut 4⁸ and in terms of its theology, specifically, the concepts of monotheism and the uniqueness of YHWH.⁹

The structure of 4:32–40, however, has not received as much scholarly attention. Often investigations of the structure of the passage are limited to the structure of 4:1–40 as a whole or how 4:32–40 fits into the structure of the chapter by means of concentric design,¹⁰ the occurrence of keywords or literary-critical analysis.¹¹ The reason for the gap may be that the structure of the structure of 4:32–40 itself seems quite simple. Various commentators are of the opinion (and fittingly we should add) that the general structure of 4:32–40 can be captured in three movements:¹²

- 4:32–35, which contains historical reflection in 4:32–34, and a theological conclusion in 4:35.
- 4:36–39, which reiterates and expounds on the content of 4:32–35, and, as with the previous movement, contains historical reflection in 4:36–38 and a theological conclusion in 4:39.
- 4:40, which forms the overall conclusion of the passage.

Consequently, many may consider the interpretation of the structure of the passage to be evident.¹³ However, the question that has not been addressed adequately is why 4:36–39 seems to repeat 4:32–35 in part and what can be deduced from this repetition.¹⁴

Working with the final form of 4:32–40 in the MT and viewing Moses as the implied speaker and Israel as the addressees in the text,¹⁵ this article argues

⁸ Cf. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4," 26; Begg, "Literary Criticism," 54; Rofé, "Monotheistic Argumentation," 442.

⁹ Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism* (2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 130.

¹⁰ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 73–75.

¹¹ Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4," 25–27.

¹² Cf. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 142–144; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 56–57; Block, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

¹³ Rofé, "Monotheistic Argumentation," 437, for example, comments that "[t]he ideological structure of this passage is clear in its general outlines." For other, yet less common, ways of viewing the structure, see Geller, "Fiery Wisdom," 109 and Talstra and van der Merwe, "Analysis," 74–75.

¹⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 144 does refer to the "slightly different emphasis" of Deut 4:36–39 from Deut 4:32–35, but, as will be argued below, more can be deduced from the progression within the structure.

¹⁵ The article interprets Deut 4 as words spoken by Moses to the generation about to enter the promised land. Cf. Brettler, "Literary Sermon," 46; Frank H. Polak, "Speaker, Addressee, and Positioning: Dialogue Structure and Pragmatics in Biblical Narrative," in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J.A. Clines* (ed. J.K. Aitken, J.M.S. Clines and C.M. Maier; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature,

that 4:32–40 contains a number of primary themes, most notably historical, universal, sensorial and relational themes, each consisting of various motifs.¹⁶ While some scholars point out the occurrence of these motifs in the passage, the novelty of this article is its hypothesis that 4:32–40 deliberately blends these motifs in order to facilitate development within the structure of the passage and to emphasise its rhetorical aim.

The article starts with a brief overview of scholarly discussions related to the structure of 4:32–40, which should be kept in mind when analysing the structure of the text. Next, the article investigates the occurrence and use of historical, universal, sensorial and relational motifs within the structure of 4:32–40. This is done by identifying the occurrences of these motifs and their use within 4:32–40. The advantage of this approach is that it enables the reader to identify possible thematic developments within the passage.¹⁷ In light of the previous findings, the article argues that there is a deliberate development within the structure of the passage based on the blending of motifs related to the four primary themes mentioned above. Thus, a new analysis of the structure of the passage is offered. The article concludes by reflecting on the multifaceted rhetorical aim of the passage in the light of its structure.

2013), 359–372. Moses can be viewed as the implied speaker based on the reference to מֹשֶׁה in 1:5 and Israel as addressees in the text based on the reference to יִשְׂרָאֵל in 4:1. Israel is addressed as a corporate unity, expected to respond in the same fashion. For discussion of the formation of Israelite ethnic identity in Deuteronomy, see Carly L. Crouch, *The Making of Israel: Cultural Diversity in the Southern Levant and the Formation of Ethnic Identity in Deuteronomy* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 162; Leiden: Brill, 2014). Who the addressees of the text are, depends on how you view the redactional history of Deuteronomy. For relatively recent discussion of the possible literary works in Genesis through Kings, see Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid, eds., *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). The aim of this article is to investigate the structure of 4:32–40 and, as such, does not get involved with in discussion of the possible redactional layers of the text. Where relevant for the sake of argumentation, brief discussion of the possible redactional matters will be presented.

¹⁶ For the distinction between “theme” and “motif,” see David L. Petersen, “A Thrice-told Tale: Genre, Theme, and Motif,” *BR* 18 (1973): 35–36. This definition, amongst others, is recently followed by Joshua J. Spoelstra, “An Inverted Type-scene? Setting Parameters around a Jacob Cycle Sister-wife Story,” *OTE* 34/3 (2021): 681–695. Following Peterson, this article views “motif” as a simple element within a literary work, while “theme” is a central or dominating idea.

¹⁷ This is not to say that this is the only or best approach to the structure of 4:32–40. Other approaches (e.g., incorporating the findings of archaeology) can also be fruitful for the interpretation of the structure of the passage. This, however, is not done here. The article limits its scope to identifying thematic development due to space restrictions and the novelty of this approach.

B OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF 4:32–40

Scholars have noted a number of issues relating to the structure of 4:32–40. When analysing the structure of the passage, cognisance should be taken of the following helpful findings.

1 The inclusio formed by 4:1–2 and 4:40

Deuteronomy 4:1–2 forms an inclusio with 4:40. The passage starts and ends with the exhortation to “heed/keep” (שָׁמַרְתֶּם; 4:1, 40) the “statutes” (חֻקֵּי; 4:1, 40) and “commands” (מִצְוֹתַי; 4:2, 40) that Moses is “teaching” (לְמַדְתִּי; 4:1) or “commanding” (צִוִּיתִי; 4:2, 40) the Israelites to obey, with the promise that such obedience will result in the entrance-occupation of (בְּיָדֵינוּ; 4:1) and long-term residence in (אֶרֶץ; 4:40) the promised land that the YHWH is “giving” (נֹתֵן; 4:1, 40) them.

A number of scholars indicate that 4:1–8 forms a parallel with 4:32–40. Wright argues that 4:32–40 “mirrors the opening eight verses,”¹⁸ while Christensen, with his concentric analysis of 4:1–40, argues that 4:1–4 and 4:39–40 go together as well as 4:5–8 and 4:32–38.¹⁹ As to the latter, Christensen states that 4:5–8 indicates Israel’s uniqueness, while 4:32–38 indicates YHWH’s uniqueness.²⁰

2 Deut 4:32–40 forms the conclusion of 4:1–31

Deuteronomy 4:32 begins with the conjunction “for” (כִּי), indicating a causal relationship,²¹ and suggesting that 4:32–40 forms the conclusion of the preceding verses, specifically 4:1–31, 4:25–31 or 4:29–31. Taking the parallels between 4:1–31 and 4:32–40 into account, it seems best to view 4:32–40 as the conclusion of the whole of 4:1–31. Deuteronomy 4:32–40 returns to the primary exhortation of 4:1–31 to keep YHWH’s commandments (e.g., 4:1, 2, 5, 6, 14), and, by emphasising the uniqueness of YHWH, the prohibition of idolatry (4:16–19, 23, 25).²²

3 The possible inclusio formed by 4:32 and 4:40

The use of the word “day” (יּוֹם) at the beginning of 4:32 and the end of 4:40 may be considered an inclusio, bracketing 4:32–40 as a passage. The word “day,” however, is a keyword of the passage, and is found frequently in 4:1–31, which cautions against reading too much into the possible inclusio. Nonetheless, this

¹⁸ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 54.

¹⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 74.

²⁰ Ibid. Cf. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 233; Yitzhaq Feder, “The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4, and the Politics of Israelite Identity,” *JBL* 132/2 (2013): 267.

²¹ Cf. Talstra and van der Merwe, “Analysis,” 74.

²² Cf. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 94–95.

possible inclusio is one of the cumulative arguments for regarding 4:32–40 as a unit.

4 Deuteronomy 4:32–34 opens with three rhetorical questions

Deuteronomy 4:32–34 invites the addressees to inquire about their unique experiences by means of three rhetorical questions:

- “[H]as anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of?” (4:32).²³
- “Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived?” (4:33).
- “Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation ... as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?” (4:34).

All three questions imply a negative answer²⁴ and emphasise Israel’s unique experiences and special status.²⁵ Lundbom indicates that these rhetorical questions form a parallel with those in 4:7–8, with the former stressing the uniqueness of Israel and the latter the uniqueness of Israel’s God.²⁶

5 Deuteronomy 4:32–40 contains three driving verbs

Block suggests that 4:32–40 contains “[t]hree dominant imperatives” that “trace the logic of the passage”:²⁷

- “For ask (לִשְׁאֹל) now about former ages ...” (4:32).
- “So acknowledge (עֲדַן) today ...” (4:39).
- “Keep (שָׁמַר) his statutes and his commandments ...” (4:40).

On closer inspection, the first verb is a *qal* imperative (followed by the particle אַךְ), while the second and third are *qal* perfects. These perfects, however, have the nuance of imperatives.²⁸ These verbs indeed direct the flow of the

²³ All English quotations from Deuteronomy are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

²⁴ See Manfred Kraus, “Theories and Practice of the Enthymeme in the First Centuries B.C.E. and C.E.,” in *Rhetorical Argumentations in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* (ed. A. Eriksson, T.H. Olbricht and W. Übelacker; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 99 and 105, who refers to a rhetorical question as being “tantamount to a negation.”

²⁵ Cf. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 57.

²⁶ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 233. Brettler, “Literary Sermon,” 44, refers to 4:7–8 and 4:32b–34 as “two long rhetorical questions.” In my view, it is best to interpret 4:32b–34 as containing three interlocking rhetorical questions.

²⁷ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

²⁸ Cf. Friedrich W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch and A.E. Cowley; 2d ed.; Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910), 335.

argument of 4:32–40 but, in my view, they are but one piece of the puzzle when it comes to the structure of the passage.

6 Deuteronomy 4:32–35 forms a parallel with 4:36–39

As indicated above, 4:36–39 seems to reiterate and expound 4:32–35:

- The historical reflection in 4:32–34 and 4:36–38 refer to God speaking out of the fire (4:33, 36)²⁹ and bringing Israel out of Egypt with great power (4:34, 37).
- Both paragraphs end with the conclusion that the addressees should acknowledge that YHWH is God, “there is no other” (אֵין עֹד; 4:35, 39).

These sections, however, are not exactly similar in terms of content and, as will be argued below, in terms of emphasis.

7 Deuteronomy 4:37–38 and 4:39–40 might form a protasis and apodosis

Some commentators view 4:37–38 as an extended protasis and 4:39–40 as its apodosis.³⁰ According to this view, “because” (כִּי) YHWH loved and chose Israel and brought them out of Egypt into the promised land (4:37–38), Israel should acknowledge YHWH as God and keep his statutes and commandments (4:39–40). Interpreting 4:37–40 in this manner is exegetically possible but not a necessity.

8 The passage ends at 4:40

The change of subject in 4:41–43 to cities of refuge as well as the *petuha* marker at the end of 4:40³¹ indicates that 4:40 is the end of the passage and that 4:32–40 can be taken as a unit.

9 Keywords of 4:32–40 and 4:1–40 as a whole

A number of words appear three times or more in 4:32–40, which could be considered keywords. In descending order, they are “day” (יּוֹם; 7x), “God/god” (אֱלֹהִים; 7x), “great” (גָּדוֹל; 5x), “hear” (שָׁמַע; 5x), “earth” (אֶרֶץ; 4x), “heavens” (שָׁמַיִם; 4x), “LORD” (יהוה; 4x), “face” (פָּנָה; 3x), “word/speak” (דָּבַר / דְּבַר; 3x), “fire” (אֵשׁ; 3x) and “nation” (גּוֹי; 3x). Strikingly, all of these words are also keywords of 4:1–31.

²⁹ The parallel between 4:33 and 4:36 is noted by some scholars for its possible indication of the redactional history of the passage; cf. Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 111.

³⁰ Cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 213; Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 587.

³¹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 94.

C HISTORICAL, UNIVERSAL, SENSORIAL AND RELATIONAL MOTIFS IN 4:32–40

Having determined general issues concerning the structure of 4:32–40, the article now investigates the occurrence and use of historical, universal, sensorial and relational motifs within 4:32–40 for its possible contribution to the structure of the passage.

1 Historical motifs

Of the four themes investigated in this analysis, historical motifs form the bedrock of the passage. The historical motifs found in 4:32–40 are creation, the Horeb theophany, the exodus events and the conquest.

1a Creation (4:32)

As determined above, 4:32–40 begins with a series of three rhetorical questions in which the addressees are invited to reflect on their unique experiences and their special status. The first rhetorical question is whether “anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of” (4:32). This rhetorical question is introduced with the invitation to the addressees to make the field of investigation as broad as possible, including all space and time.³² With regard to time, Moses invites them to inquire about “former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth.”³³ This is one of only three occurrences of the verb *בָּרָא* outside the Universal History (Gen 1–11) in the Pentateuch (cf. Exod 34:10; Num 16:30)³⁴ and the only occurrence of the verb in Deuteronomy-Kings.³⁵

This reference takes Israel back in time to the moment of creation. While 4:29–31 looks into Israel’s far future by reflecting on their return to YHWH during the exile, 4:32, on the other hand, looks back to Israel’s distant past with the creation of human beings.³⁶ Moreover, 4:32–40’s first reference to time is the “day” of creation (*הַיּוֹם*; 4:32) and its last reference is to “today” (*הַיּוֹם*; 4:40), the present in which the people are exhorted to keep YHWH’s statutes and commandments, “thus neatly bracketing all history between that day and ‘today’.”³⁷ The reference to creation also relates to 4:16–19, which alludes to

³² Gerhard von Rad, *Das fünfte Buch Mose: Deuteronomium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 38; Block, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

³³ A similar invitation to reflect on the days of long ago is found in 32:7; cf. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 252.

³⁴ John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel* (Old Testament Theology, vol. 1; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 423.

³⁵ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 112.

³⁶ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 96; cf. Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 582.

³⁷ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 112.

Genesis 1.³⁸ Theologically, these words not only emphasise God’s role “as Creator, but also as the Lord of history.”³⁹

1b The Horeb theophany and exodus events (4:33, 36 and 4:34, 37)

The initial rhetorical question of 4:32 invites Israel to investigate whether “anything so great as this” (כִּי־כִּי־גָדוֹל־הָיָה־לָּךְ) ever happened or whether such has ever been heard. This question is followed by two rhetorical questions that clarify what “this” refers to, indicating that “the second and third are really just subdivisions of the first”.⁴⁰

- With “has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire,” Moses refers to the Horeb theophany (4:33).
- With “has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation ... as the LORD did for you in Egypt,” Moses refers to the exodus events (4:34).

The Horeb theophany and exodus events are referred to as a single “great thing” in the MT,⁴¹ emphasising their interrelatedness within the history of Israel. Weinfeld fittingly captures 4:33 and 4:34 as descriptions of revelation and redemption which are inseparable.⁴² McConville, on the other hand, indicates that the exodus events and Horeb theophany are “the twin themes of the entire argument from 1:1 to this point,”⁴³ once more underscoring the close connection between the two. Deuteronomy 4:32–34 emphasises that the Horeb theophany and exodus events are without parallel. In all of time and space, no god has ever attempted to do what YHWH has done in these events.

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 contains two explicit references to the Horeb theophany. The first reference is found in 4:33, which asks the addressees whether “any people ever heard the voice of a god⁴⁴ speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived” (4:33). Along with 5:24–26, 4:33 emphasises the people’s amazement at the fact that they heard the voice of God speaking from

³⁸ Brettler, “Literary Sermon,” 44.

³⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

⁴⁰ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

⁴¹ Cf. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 142; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

⁴² Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 212.

⁴³ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 111.

⁴⁴ Instead of “the voice of a god/God” (קוֹל־אֱלֹהִים), the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX have “the voice of the living God” (φωνήν θεοῦ ζῶντος). The reason for the change may be due to assimilation between this verse and 5:26, which refers to “the voice of the living God” (קוֹל־אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים).

the fire at Horeb and yet remained alive.⁴⁵ Within the context of 4:32–34, the Horeb theophany highlights Israel’s unique experiences and special status.

The second explicit reference to the Horeb theophany is found in the dichotomy between heaven and earth in 4:36 (see discussion below), which states that YHWH made the Israelites hear his voice from heaven, while on earth he showed them his great fire, with the people hearing his words coming out of the fire.

Deuteronomy 4:33 and 4:36 form a parallel. Both verses in their totality refer to the Horeb theophany, specifically to the voice/words of God coming out of the fire. Turning to 4:1–31, references to the Horeb theophany are also found (4:9–15; cf. the use of *בָּרָח* in 4:10, 15 specifically), indicating that it forms the backdrop of 4:1–40 as a whole.

As with the Horeb theophany, the exodus events are mentioned twice explicitly in 4:32–40.

Deuteronomy 4:34 states that YHWH “went” and “took” Israel as his nation “from the midst of another nation.” The means by which YHWH did this is explained in 4:34 by a series of seven phrases, which can be described as a “catalogue of divine actions”⁴⁶ or “a concatenation of terms for his great acts in saving Israel from Egypt.”⁴⁷ YHWH delivered Israel from Egypt “by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power”⁴⁸ (4:34).⁴⁹ Theologically, these expressions emphasise that YHWH alone delivered Israel from Egypt, with no mention of human activity. It also suggests the powerlessness of the Egyptian gods⁵⁰ and, according to Rofé, indicates that YHWH is not limited to a particular people or geographical setting.⁵¹

The second explicit reference to the exodus events is found in 4:37 where Moses states that YHWH “brought you out of Egypt.” Once again, reference is made to “his great power” with which YHWH brought them out. Consequently,

⁴⁵ Albert J. Coetsee, “YHWH and Israel in Terms of the Concept of Life in Deuteronomy,” *OTE* 32/1 (2019): 115.

⁴⁶ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 143.

⁴⁷ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 112.

⁴⁸ Instead of “great terror” (*וּבְמִוְרָאִים גְּדֹלִים*), the LXX, Peshitta and Samaritan Pentateuch has “great visions” (*ὁράμασιν μεγάλοις*), which seem to be due to confusion between the verbs “see” (*הִרְאָה*) and “fear” (*יָרָא*); cf. Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 523.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of these seven expressions, see Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 253–254.

⁵⁰ Cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 212; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 143; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 56.

⁵¹ Rofé, “Monotheistic Argumentation,” 438–441.

on a structural level, 4:34 and 4:37 form a parallel. These two verses link with 4:20, which explicitly mentions YHWH taking Israel out of Egypt (מִצְרַיִם).

1c The conquest of the promised land (4:38)

Deuteronomy 4:38 refers to YHWH "driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today." While some may view this as an anachronistic or prophetic reference to the conquest of the promised land, it seems best to take these words as a reference to the initial conquest with the defeat of King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan (2:26–3:22).⁵²

Read as the words of Moses on the plains of Moab, 4:40 mentions the future conquest of the promised land *in toto*, referring to the "land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time." The future conquest is also in view in 4:1–31, as indicated by the references to crossing over the "Jordan" (יַרְדֵּן; cf. 4:21, 22, 26).

Consequently, there is a parallel between 4:38 and 4:40, with the former referring to the initial conquest and the latter to the future conquest.

1d Preliminary findings

The first and last historical motifs in 4:32–40 are employed in chronological order, starting with a reference to creation (4:32) and ending with a reference to future conquest of the promised land (4:40). The two historical motifs in the middle, however, namely the Horeb theophany and exodus events, are referred to in reverse order.⁵³ The parallel formed by 4:33–34 and 4:36–37 indicates that this is deliberate. The order seems to emphasise the exodus events as "the determinative moment" in Israel's history.⁵⁴ The number and variety of words used to describe the exodus events also attest to this point.

2 Universal motifs

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 contains several phrases that indicate universality or inclusiveness such as references to time, space, events, peoples and gods.

2a Time (4:32)

As indicated above, the first rhetorical question in 4:32 invites Israel to reflect on its unique experiences and special status. The reflection should include

⁵² Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 255; cf. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

⁵³ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 111.

⁵⁴ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 115. MacDonald, *Monotheism*, 190, suggests that the unusual order Horeb-Egypt may "be explained by the fact that it is Horeb that is the primary focus of the chapter as a whole."

“former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth” (4:32).

Within this clause, the preposition לְמִן indicates *terminus a quo*.⁵⁵ The rhetorical aim of these words is to take the addressees as far back in time as humanly possible. Their investigation of their unique experiences should include the whole sweep of time from creation to the time the words of 4:32–40 came to the people. The question is whether anything like the Horeb theophany and exodus events ever happened or whether anything similar has even been heard of. The implied answer is a resounding no. Israel’s experience is unique in time.⁵⁶

2b Space (4:32, 36, 39)

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 contains three references to space.

Apart from time, Israel’s inquisitive investigation in 4:32 should include all space. The verse exhorts them to “ask from one end of heaven to the other” (וּלְמִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד־קִצְּהַ שָׁמַיִם). In OT thought, the heavens were “pictured as a dome standing atop pillars situated at the ends of the earth.”⁵⁷ By referring to one end of the heavens to the other, Moses invites the addressees to include all space beneath the heavens from one end to the other, namely the whole earth.⁵⁸ Consequently, their investigation is to include all time and inhabited space.

Deuteronomy 4:36’s description of the Horeb theophany states: “From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire.” Clearly “heaven” (שָׁמַיִם) and “earth” (אֲרֶץ) form a parallelism (specifically, a *merismus*), albeit “a rather rigidly constructed literary parallelism.”⁵⁹ The distinction between heaven and earth, however, has sparked debate among scholars.⁶⁰ Is Deuteronomy trying to resolve an inconsistency in the book of Exodus, which, on the one hand indicates that YHWH came down to the mountain before speaking (Exod 19:11, 18, 20) and on the other hand states that he spoke from heaven (Exod 20:19)?⁶¹ Did God descend on the mountain or merely his fire? The conclusion of most scholars is that Deuteronomy indicates that YHWH

⁵⁵ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 198; Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 94.

⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 58.

⁵⁷ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

⁵⁸ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 252.

⁵⁹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 132.

⁶⁰ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 213; Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 523.

⁶¹ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 56; Steven D. Fraade, “Hearing and Seeing at Sinai: Interpretive Trajectories,” in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. G.J. Brooke, H. Najman and L.T. Stuckenbruck; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 252.

remained in heaven and that only his voice was heard on earth, thus emphasising his transcendence.⁶²

The second theological conclusion of 4:32–40, namely 4:39, contains another reference to both heaven and earth and again the word pair is used in relation to YHWH: “So acknowledge today and take to heart that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.” Amongst others, the verse indicates that YHWH has dominion over both heaven and earth. There is no spatial limitation to his sovereignty; “He is God everywhere.”⁶³

After lengthy discussion of the occurrence and use of “heaven” and “earth” in Deut 4, Geller concludes that the word pair indicates that YHWH “is both immanent *and* transcendent; more specifically, immanent in historical acts of redemption and at the same time absolutely transcendent as regards His person” (emphasis his).⁶⁴

2c Events (4:32)

The primary rhetorical question of 4:32 not only invites the addressees to include all time and space in their investigation but also all events. This is suggested by the question whether “anything so great as this,” namely, the Horeb theophany and exodus events, ever “happened” (הִיָּחַד; *nip ‘al*) or whether such has been heard of. The phrase includes all events that ever happened on earth. Moses is confident that the addressees will conclude that the Horeb theophany and exodus events – and their experience of these events – are truly unique.⁶⁵

2d Peoples (4:33)

The second rhetorical question includes all peoples, asking whether “any people ever heard” (הִשְׁמַע עַם) the Horeb theophany like the addressees heard (4:33). The reference is meant to include all peoples everywhere and throughout time and, once more, emphasises the addressees’ unique experiences.

2e Gods (4:34, 35, 39)

The third rhetorical question includes all gods, asking whether “any god ever attempted” (הִגִּסָּה אֱלֹהִים) what YHWH attempted with the exodus events (4:34).

⁶² Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 252; cf. Marc Z. Brettler, “‘Fire, Cloud, and Deep Darkness’ (Deuteronomy 5:22): Deuteronomy’s Recasting of Revelation,” in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. G.J. Brooke, H. Najman and L.T. Stuckenbruck; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 24; Feder, “Aniconic Tradition,” 251–274.

⁶³ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 57.

⁶⁴ Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 130; cf. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 113.

⁶⁵ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 58; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

Not only has no other god ever liberated a people like YHWH did but none of them attempted to do so,⁶⁶ indicating that he is incomparable.⁶⁷

This reference to other gods seems to be “purely hypothetical”⁶⁸ in the light of 4:35, which concludes that the Horeb theophany and exodus events were shown to Israel so that they would acknowledge that “the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.” This is robustly repeated and emphasised in 4:39: “So acknowledge today and take to heart⁶⁹ that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.”

While there are some scholars who interpret 4:35 and 4:39 as monolatric comparatives rather than monotheistic⁷⁰ or exclusive statements,⁷¹ the strong language of both statements and the broader context of Deut 4 supports the interpretation of these two verses as “categorically” saying that there are no other gods.⁷² Weinfeld points out that “absolute monotheism is characteristic of Deuteronomy.”⁷³ This is supported by similar expressions indicating the uniqueness of YHWH and consequently monotheistic worship elsewhere in Deuteronomy (cf. 3:24;⁷⁴ 6:4; 7:9; 10:17; 32:12, 17, 39; 33:26). Deuteronomy 4:35 and 4:39, however, are “the preeminent statement[s] of monotheistic belief

⁶⁶ Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 583.

⁶⁷ Casper J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 73, 92, 103 and 121.

⁶⁸ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

⁶⁹ The concept of “taking to heart” (וְהִשְׁבֹּתָ אֶל־לִבְךָ) indicates the action of considering or reflecting. Cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 214; McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 113.

⁷⁰ This article notes the difficulties surrounding the concepts of “monotheism” and “monolatry” when referring to an ancient text, as the concepts originate from modern western philosophy and do not necessarily reflect the ancient text itself. Along with Jaap Dekker, “‘To Whom Will You Liken Me and Make Me Equal’: The Isaianic Message of the Uniqueness of YHWH in the Context of Religious Pluralism,” in *Reading and Listening: Meeting One God in Many Texts, Festschrift Eric Peels* (eds. J. Dekker and G. Kwakkel; Bergambacht: Uitgeverij 2VM, 2018), 102, this article uses the concept “monotheism” as a “heuristic category for the religious conviction that only one God exists,” and the concept “monolatry” as a heuristic category for the worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods.

⁷¹ MacDonald, *Monotheism*, 78–85 views 4:35, 39 to be monolatric, claiming YHWH’s unique position without denying the existence of other deities, and calling Israel to recognise and acknowledge that YHWH is “the only god for them” (p. 85).

⁷² McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 112–113. Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 584 indicates that a monolatric view nullifies the exclusive language of Deut 4:35 and 4:39, and does not sufficiently take into account the context of Deut 4:28.

⁷³ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 212.

⁷⁴ For the uniqueness of YHWH as indicated in Moses’ prayer in Deuteronomy 3:24, see Albert J. Coetsee, “YHWH’s ‘Greatness,’ ‘Mighty Hand,’ ‘Deeds’ and ‘Mighty Acts’ in Deuteronomy 3:24,” *OTE* 34/1 (2021): 114–140.

in Deuteronomy.”⁷⁵ Unlike the first commandment that prohibits Israel from worshipping other gods (5:6–7), 4:35 and 4:39 states that there are no other gods. Within the broader context of 4:1–40, this monotheistic confession is the greatest reason why the addressees should refrain from idolatry (4:26–28) and obey YHWH’s commandments.⁷⁶

Consequently, while 4:34 is all-inclusive in its reference to gods, 4:35 and 4:39 are exclusive in their claim that YHWH alone is God. For Israel, the proof of monotheism was not confined to philosophical arguments but was based on YHWH’s revelation in history, specifically in the Horeb theophany and exodus events.⁷⁷ Within the context of 4:32–34, the conclusion the addressees were to reach is that “history proves that the Lord is the only true God,”⁷⁸ that “history demonstrates the truth of monotheism”⁷⁹ and that YHWH is “*sui generis*.”⁸⁰

2f Preliminary findings

The universal motifs found in 4:32–40 stress the uniqueness of Israel’s experiences at the Horeb theophany and exodus events and the uniqueness of Israel’s God, YHWH.

3 Sensorial motifs

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 is replete with references to both auditory and visual perception, which can be viewed as sensorial motifs.

3a Auditory perception (4:32, 33, 36)

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 contains various references to auditory perception by means of the words “hear” (שָׁמַע), “voice” (קוֹל) and “speak/words” (דָּבַר / דְּבַר):

- The first rhetorical question of 4:32 asks whether anything so great as “this,” the Horeb theophany and the exodus events, have ever been heard of (שָׁמַע), implying that these events are unique.

⁷⁵ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 254; cf. John Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith* (Old Testament Theology, vol. 2; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 38.

⁷⁶ Cf. Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 527. For a discussion of the view that Deut 4 is a decisive post-exilic step in updating Deuteronomy from monolatric conception of God to a monotheistic one, see Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 583–584; Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 146; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 56; Domink Markl, “Divine Law and the Emergence of Monotheism in Deuteronomy,” in *Israel and the Cosmological Empires of the Ancient Orient* (ed. I. Carbajosa and N.S. Muth; Leiden: Brill, 2021), 193–222.

⁷⁷ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 143–144. Cf. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 97; Dawe, “Deuteronomy 4:32–40,” 159–160; Von Rad, *Das fünfte Buch Mose*, 38.

⁷⁸ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 41.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁰ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 143.

- The second rhetorical question in 4:33 asks whether “any people ever heard (שמע) the voice (קול) of a god speaking (דבר) out of a fire, as you have heard (שמע), and lived?,” highlighting the unique occasion and unique experience of the exodus generation.
- Deuteronomy 4:36, which forms a parallel with 4:33 in its reflection on the Horeb theophany, states that YHWH made the addressees hear (שמע) his voice (קול) from heaven and that they heard (שמע) his words (דבר) coming out of the fire on earth.

3b Visual perception (4:34, 35, 36)

References to visual perception are found throughout 4:32–40 by means of the verb “see” (ראה), the noun “eyes” (עין) and other sight related nouns:

- The list of divine actions accompanying the exodus events in 4:34 include references to “signs” (אות) and “wonders” (מופת) and “awe-inspiring spectacles” (מורא)⁸¹ that YHWH did before their “eyes” (עין).
- The conclusion of 4:35 states that the exodus events (and per implication the Horeb theophany) was “shown” (ראה) to the addressees so that they would acknowledge that YHWH is God.
- Deuteronomy 4:36 states that YHWH “showed” (ראה) the addressees his great fire on earth at the Horeb theophany.

3c Preliminary findings

Several preliminary findings can be reached:

- Deuteronomy 4:32–40 contains no reference to olfactory, gustatory or tactile perception (cf. 4:28 for the sense of smell [of idols; ריח] and 14:8 for the sense of touch). The passage only refers to auditory and visual perception.
- The text seems to place visual and auditory perception on the same level or, if anything, based on the number of occurrences of each, to emphasise auditory perception. This is striking, as visual perception would naturally be considered to be more authoritative.⁸²
- The Horeb theophany is primarily referred to by means of auditory perception (cf. 4:12, 15).⁸³ Despite the threefold references to the fire at

⁸¹ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 421.

⁸² Michael Carasik, “To See a Sound: A Deuteronomic Rereading of Exodus 20:15,” *Prooftexts* 19 (1999): 261 argues that Deut 4 attempts to legitimate the role of hearing, specifically, to make hearing equivalent to sight. According to Carasik, 4:12 achieves this with a subtle midrash on Exod 20:15. Brettler, “Literary Sermon,” 48 and “Fire, Cloud, and Deep Darkness,” 24 also notes Deuteronomy 4’s emphasis on hearing and argues that the chapter indicates “that hearing, rather than seeing, is believing.”

⁸³ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 253.

the theophany and, per implication its glow, it is referred to only once by means of visual perception (4:36b).⁸⁴ First and foremost, the Horeb theophany was heard. The addressees heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire (4:33,² 36c).

- The exodus events, conversely, is referred to primarily by means of visual perception. The addressees saw what YHWH did for them in Egypt.
- Deuteronomy 4:32–40 emphasises that the Horeb theophany and exodus events are perceived first-hand by the addressees and, therefore, they know the truth of things Moses refers to, and the implications thereof, especially the acknowledgement that YHWH alone is God.⁸⁵
- Strikingly, there are no references to either auditory or visual perception after 4:36. Neither the initial nor future conquest of the promised land is referred to by means of sensorial motifs, suggesting that the conquest is not complete and that the addressees will “perceive” the fulfilment of this event in the future.

4 Relational motifs

Fourth and lastly, relational motifs are found throughout 4:32–40. This is expressed by several phrases and concepts:

4a Taking a nation “for himself”; doing this “for you” (4:34)

The exodus events are seen as the calculated removal of the addressees from Egypt by YHWH. Deuteronomy 4:34 explicitly refers to YHWH taking a nation “for himself” (יָלַד) from the midst of another nation, doing what no other god has ever attempted; this he did “for you” (לְכַלְכֵּל) in Egypt. The first phrase highlights an intentional act by YHWH to procure Israel as his special people, while the latter indicates that Israel is the beneficiary of his conduct. Both phrases relate to the concepts of love and election discussed below.

4b In order “to discipline you” (4:36)

Deuteronomy 4:36 states that the purpose of the auditory perception of the Horeb theophany was to “discipline you” (cf. 8:5). The verb “discipline” (יָסַד) in this context does not refer to punishment or chastisement but rather to training and education,⁸⁶ especially in connection with the being and person of YHWH and Israel’s expected obedience.⁸⁷ Once again, this points to a deliberate action of YHWH in relation to the addressees.

⁸⁴ Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 128.

⁸⁵ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 143; Talstra and van der Merwe, “Analysis,” 75.

⁸⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 132; Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 255.

⁸⁷ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 144.

4c Love and election (4:37)

Deuteronomy 4:37 contains the most profound statement regarding YHWH’s relationship with Israel: “because he loved (אַהֲבָה) your ancestors, he chose (בָּחַר) their descendants after them.” The verse expresses the deepest reason for YHWH’s commitment to the addressees as expressed in the Horeb theophany and the exodus events: his love for their forebears and his election of the generations to follow.⁸⁸

This is the first reference to YHWH’s love and election of Israel in Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch as a whole. The dual concepts of love and election also appear in 7:7 and 10:15. The parallelism between “loving ancestors” and “choosing future generations” points to the synonymous nature of the verbs “love” and “choose.”⁸⁹ Deuteronomy 7 explains the reason YHWH chose Israel as his people and concludes that it is not because of Israel’s merit.⁹⁰ His choice is a mystery; he chose them because he wanted to, thus, removing any illusion of superiority on the part of Israel (cf. 9:4–6).⁹¹

For the sake of the current investigation, it should be noted that YHWH’s Horeb theophany and his deliverance of Israel from Egypt are based on his prior election and love for the addressees as a people,⁹² signifying relationship. Israel, as several passages in Deuteronomy state (cf. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18), is YHWH’s special “possession” (חֵן), “a kind of small trove of gold and pearls which a rich man keeps in his innermost chambers, to admire and enjoy.”⁹³

4d Presence (4:37)

Deuteronomy 4:37 is similar to 4:34, which expresses the manner in which YHWH delivered Israel from Egypt. While 4:37 does not contain a catalogue of divine actions, it states that YHWH brought the addressees out of Egypt “with his own presence.” Literally, the MT states that YHWH brought them out “by his face” (בְּפָנָיו; cf. Exod 33:14),⁹⁴ which is “the Hebrew equivalent of ‘in person’.”⁹⁵

The phrase emphasises the personal involvement of YHWH in the exodus events. Deuteronomy contains no reference to mediators or angels in describing

⁸⁸ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 113.

⁸⁹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 132.

⁹⁰ Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 215.

⁹¹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 56; cf. Alexander Rofé, “The Book of Deuteronomy: A Summary,” in *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretation* (ed. *Idem.*; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 10; “Monotheistic Argumentation,” 439.

⁹² Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 133.

⁹³ Rofé, “Monotheistic Argumentation,” 440; cf. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 56.

⁹⁴ The LXX has ἐξήγαγέν σε αὐτός, with αὐτός indicating “he himself.”

⁹⁵ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 57.

YHWH’s acts of deliverance (cf. Exod 23:20, 23; Num 20:16) but it states that he delivered them personally (cf. 4:19–20; 32:8–9). This is a profound statement indicating the immanence of YHWH in the deliverance of the addressees,⁹⁶ once more “emphasiz[ing] the close relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a whole.”⁹⁷

4e Entrance (4:38)

The description of the initial conquest of the promised land in 4:38 contains various relational phrases. It states that YHWH brought them from Egypt, “driving out before *you* (מִלְּפָנֶיךָ מִלְּמִנִּיּוֹת) nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring *you* in (לְהָבִיכָם), giving *you* (לְתַתֵּן־לְךָ) their land for a possession, as it is still today” (emphasis mine). Once more this is explicitly referred to as an act of YHWH for the sake of the addressees.

The future conquest in 4:40 is also characterised by a relational phrase indicating that YHWH is giving “you” (לְךָ) the land for all time.

4f Obedience (4:40)

Deuteronomy 4:40 concludes with the expected reaction of the addressees towards YHWH based on the content of 4:32–39, especially, the claims that YHWH alone is God (4:35, 39):⁹⁸ they are to keep his statutes and commandments. This is one of the most oft-repeated exhortations in Deuteronomy (unifying Deuteronomy as a whole),⁹⁹ calling Israel to covenant fidelity.¹⁰⁰ The urgency of the passage is highlighted by the insertion of the word “today,” which, in the words of Block, “turns out to be a perpetual ‘today,’”¹⁰¹ calling for a response every time these words are heard. Doing this will result in YHWH’s blessing in the form of well-being (בִּטְוָה) and the retention (אֲרָרְךָ) of the promised land.

4g Preliminary findings

⁹⁶ Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 128.

⁹⁷ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 113.

⁹⁸ Cf. Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 531.

⁹⁹ See Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 256 for references.

¹⁰⁰ The emphasis on obedience relates to one of the typical elements of an ANE covenant vassalage document, which some scholars take Deuteronomy to be. The people of Israel are to acknowledge YHWH as their God and vassal and obey his stipulations. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 35–37; Scott W. Hahn, *Kingship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 62–82.

¹⁰¹ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 115.

The occurrence and use of relational motifs in 4:32–40 indicates deliberate action from the side of YHWH for the sake of the addressees and, ultimately, the proper response of the addressees towards YHWH.

D DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OF 4:32–40 BASED ON THE BLENDING OF MOTIFS

It is clear that historical, universal, sensorial and relational motifs are present throughout 4:32–40. Tracing the occurrence of these motifs in the passage reveals that they frequently appear together. It seems that the author(s) deliberately blended these motifs to convey the rhetorical aim of the passage and its various parts, as discussed below in more detail. In order to assist readers, a schematic overview of the flow of the passage based on the occurrence and blending of these motifs is provided in Table 1.

As various scholars have indicated, 4:32–40 can best be explained as containing three movements, namely 4:32–35, 4:36–39 and 4:40, with the first two movements consisting of historical reflection (4:32–34, 36–38) and theological conclusions (4:35, 39).

The first movement of the passage exhorts the addressees to reflect on YHWH's unique revelation at the Horeb theophany and his unique redemption through the exodus events. This the author does with the aid of three rhetorical questions, guiding the addressees to reach the conclusion that their experiences of YHWH's revelation and redemption are utterly unique. While this movement contains the historical motifs of creation, the Horeb theophany and the exodus events, of which the latter two are expressed with the sensorial motifs of auditory and visual perception and one relational motif, the emphasis falls on universal motifs. Israel is invited to include all time (4:32), space (4:32), events (4:32), peoples (4:33) and gods (4:34) in their rhetorical investigation. This should lead them to the conclusion that the "empirical" evidence experienced at the Horeb theophany and exodus events prove not only that their experiences are unique but that their God is unique. This is the explicit conclusion the addressees are to reach in the theological conclusion of the movement (4:35).

The second movement is very similar to the first. It also contains references to the Horeb theophany and the exodus events, in the same order, and a similar theological conclusion. While this passage contains an almost equal distribution of the four motifs investigated, it contains the greatest concentration of relational motifs in the passage. This movement seems to guide the addressees in reflection on the reason for and personal nature of YHWH's unique revelation and redemption. He revealed himself to them in order to discipline them (4:36) and he redeemed them from Egypt because he loved and chose them as his people (4:37). The latter he did by taking Israel out of Egypt in person (4:37), emphasising the immanence of this unique and transcendent God in the deliverance of his people.

Besides the reason for and personal nature of YHWH’s unique revelation and redemption, the second movement also seems to deliberately introduce a new historical motif, namely that of the conquest. By referring to the initial conquest of the promised land (4:38), the second movement paves the way for the reference to the future conquest in the final, overall conclusion of the passage (4:40). This is supported by the fact that 4:32–40 does not refer to the Horeb theophany and exodus events after 4:37. The initial conquest of the promised land proves the unique and personal involvement of YHWH in the execution of his plan for his people and guarantees YHWH’s unique and personal involvement in the future conquest.

Similar to the first movement, the second movement ends with a theological conclusion about the uniqueness of YHWH. This time, however, the conclusion has an imperatival force: Israel should both acknowledge and take to heart that YHWH alone is God everywhere (4:39). Structurally, the theological conclusions of 4:35 and 4:39 form the climax of the passage.¹⁰²

The final movement of the passage contains the overall conclusion that the addressees should reach. The proper response in light of all of the above is to keep YHWH’s statutes and commandments. This is Israel’s unique calling based on the unique revelation and redemption of YHWH. Doing this will result in the retention of the promised land. With the conquest being the next major historical event on Israel’s horizon, the final conclusion calls them to covenant fidelity and gives them the assurance that YHWH who acted for them up to this point and who promises to act for them in the future is giving them the land.

Table 1 below reflects the movements in the text:

¹⁰² See MacDonald, *Monotheism*, 189, who views 4:35, 39 “as a significant climax to the entire chapter.”

	<p>Movement 1 (4:32–35)</p> <p><u>Reflection on YHWH’s unique revelation and redemption (4:32–34)</u></p> <p><i>Invitation to an investigation spanning time and space</i></p> <p>³²For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day [UM 1: time] that God created human beings on the earth [HM 1: creation]; ask from one end of heaven to the other [UM 2: space]:</p> <p><i>Rhetorical question 1 (Introduction)</i></p> <p>has anything so great as this ever happened [UM 3: events] or has its like ever been heard of [SM 1: auditory]?</p> <p><i>Rhetorical question 2 (Horeb theophany)</i></p> <p>³³Has any people [UM 4: peoples] ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard [SM 1: auditory], and lived [HM 2: Horeb]?</p> <p><i>Rhetorical question 3 (Exodus events)</i></p> <p>³⁴Or has any god [UM 5: gods] ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself [RM 1] from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders [SM 2: visual], by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power [SM 2: visual], as the LORD your God did for you [RM 1] in Egypt [HM 3: exodus] before your very eyes [SM 2: visual]?</p> <p><u>Theological conclusion about the uniqueness of YHWH (4:35)</u></p> <p>³⁵To you it was shown [SM 2: visual] so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God [UM 5: gods]; there is no other besides him.</p> <p>Movement 2 (4:36–39)</p> <p><u>Reflection on the reason for and personal nature of YHWH’s unique revelation and redemption (4:36–38)</u></p> <p><i>Horeb theophany</i></p> <p>³⁶From heaven he made you hear his voice [SM 1: auditory] to discipline you [RM 2]. On earth [UM 2: space] he showed you his great fire [SM 2: visual], while you heard his words [SM 1: auditory] coming out of the fire [HM 2: Horeb].</p> <p><i>Exodus events</i></p> <p>³⁷And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them [RM 3]. He brought you out of Egypt [HM 3: exodus] with his own presence [RM 4], by his great power,</p> <p><i>Initial conquest</i></p> <p>³⁸driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you [RM 5¹] their land for a possession [HM 4: conquest], as it is still today.</p> <p><u>Theological conclusion about and exhortation to acknowledge the uniqueness of YHWH (4:39)</u></p> <p>³⁹So acknowledge today and take to heart that the LORD is God [UM 5: gods] in heaven above and on the earth beneath [UM 2: space]; there is no other.</p> <p>Overall conclusion (4:40)</p> <p><u>A call to the proper response in light of the above and in view of the future conquest (4:40)</u></p> <p>⁴⁰Keep his statutes and his commandments [RM 6], which I am commanding you today for your own well-being and that of your descendants after you, so that you may long remain in the land [HM 4: conquest] that the LORD your God is giving you [RM 5²] for all time.</p>
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Table 1: Structure of 4:32–40 (own compilation; UM = universal motif; HM = historical motif; SM = sensorial motif; RM = relational motif)

In retrospect, it seems that the four themes investigated in this article are employed in the following fashion in the passage:

- **Historical motifs:** 4:32–40 deliberately seems to move from past historical events to the future conquest, the new historical event on Israel's horizon.
- **Universal motifs:** The majority of universal motifs are found in the first movement. Israel is invited to make an exhaustive investigation, concluding that their experiences of YHWH's revelation and redemption are unique. Universal motifs are also employed in 4:35 and 4:39, supporting the claim that YHWH alone is God.
- **Sensorial motifs:** The auditory and visual perception of the Horeb theophany and the exodus events are used to supply the addressees with "empirical" evidence of their unique experiences of YHWH's revelation and redemption. Sensorial motifs are not employed to refer to creation, which the addressees did not personally experience, or the conquest, since the complete conquest is yet to be realised.
- **Relational motifs:** While relational motifs are found throughout the passage, they occur especially in the second movement, which reflects on the reason for YHWH's unique revelation and redemption and the personal nature of his revelation and redemption.

E CONCLUSION

Taking all the above into account, the article concludes by reflecting on the multifaceted rhetorical aim of the passage in the light of the proposed structure.

Along with others, this article concludes that the primary aim of 4:32–40 is to emphasise the uniqueness of both YHWH and Israel.¹⁰³ As such, a watertight distinction between 4:5–8 stressing Israel's uniqueness and 4:32–40 stressing YHWH's uniqueness, should not be made. Deuteronomy 4:32–40 emphasises both the uniqueness of YHWH and Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 guides Israel in renewed reflection and acknowledgement of their unique experiences of YHWH's revelation and redemption. The Horeb theophany (which was primarily heard) and the exodus events (which was primarily seen) are without parallel in or among all time, space, events, peoples and gods, "proving" that YHWH alone is God. He is *sui generis*, immanent in his acts of redemption and transcendent as regards his person.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ MacDonald, *Monotheism*, 191 too interprets Deut 4:32–40 as expressing both the uniqueness of YHWH and Israel.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Geller, "Fiery Wisdom," 130.

The implication of this is twofold. On the one hand, Israel is exhorted explicitly to keep YHWH's statutes and commandments (4:40). If YHWH alone is God, Israel cannot but do what he commands. Only by doing this will the people continue to possess the land. Obedience is also the primary exhortation in 4:1–40 as a whole. On the other hand, 4:32–40 indirectly exhorts Israel to refrain from idolatry, another primary theme of 4:1–40, since YHWH alone is God.

That being said, the structure provided above suggests two additional rhetorical aims, namely, (1) to help the addressees to realise the reason for YHWH's unique revelation and redemption and the personal nature thereof and (2) to prepare them for the next big moment in their history with the conquest of the promised land. Realising the former should lead the addressees to a greater amazement of who YHWH is and what he has done, and exhort them to a more profound obedience in the present and faithful covenant commitment to YHWH in the future with the conquest of the promised land.

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