

**MARITAL SUSPICION: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NUMBERS
5:11-31 AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
MARI AND HAMMURABI CODES**

ELISHA KWABENA MARFO¹

ABSTRACT

Through a comparative analysis, this study attempted to address the problem of the relationship between Numbers 5:11-31 and the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) concept of adultery. Diverse answers from different perspective have evolved from the question of the relationship between ANE adultery ordeal and that of Numbers 5:11-31. This Study investigates the concept of adultery in Number 5 with the ANE by bringing together the comparative relationship between the two. It is argued that the trial by ordeal in Number 5:11-31 provides the assurance that judgment and

¹*ELISHA KWABENA MARFO is affiliated to the School of Theology and Missions Valley View University, Accra, Ghana. Elisha holds a Master of Arts in Old Testament from Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines, where he is currently a PhD candidate specializing in Old Testament languages and exegesis.*

its related punishment would not be in the hands of the people, but that through this instruction God provides the assurance that He would continue serving as Israel's judge. However, the ANE account have the punishment solely in the hand of the magical person who official the trial. Both accounts, therefore, may point to a single source in the eyes of critical scholars, only that each account focuses mainly on different divine figure which is a crucial element of the ordeal—YHWH or the gods.

Introduction

Scholarly literature on the Old Testament concept of adultery is legion, yet a scholarly consensus seems

impossible with reference to its composition, purpose, and nature as found in Numbers 5:11-31.² The complex nature of the issue and the passage has led some scholars to argue that it is “an evident proof against the doctrine of inspiration.”³ However, the passage irrespective of its interpretations is a

² Thomas B. Dozeman, “The book of Numbers,” *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Lender E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 67;

Jaeyoung Jeon, “Two Laws in the Sotah Passage (Num. v 11-31),” *Vetus Testamentum* 57 (2007): 181; Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*,

³ John Peter Lange, “Numbers,” *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical*, vol. 3, Numbers-Ruth, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Samuel T. Lowrie and A. Gosman (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 36.

divinely inspired text. The text (vv. 11-12a) וַיִּנְדְּבֵם לְאֹרֶב מִבְּרֵיתֵם לְאֶרֶץ אֵלֹהִים suggest divine instruction.

The pericope outlines the procedure to be adopted by a husband who suspects that his wife has committed adultery and has no concrete evidence, and therefore cannot initiate legal charges against her in the courts.⁴

Diverse answers from different perspective have evolved from the question of the relationship between Ancient Near East (ANE) adultery ordeal and that of Numbers 5:11-31. Source criticism scholars generally argue that the Moses' account is a later theological construct⁵ and that Numbers 5:11:31 is a variant and reworking of ANE traditions/practices.⁶

Timothy R. Ashley has pointed out that because Numbers 5:11-13 emanates from the cultural life ANE which was different from the modern societal roles that life presents, modern people and readers should refrain from making the text and practice "into something it is not just because what it is grates on our twentieth-century consciences."⁷ His context comes as there have been attempts to place the origin of Numbers 5:11-31 in the ANE context.⁸ In relation to this, discussions continue to grow on the assertion that Moses

⁴ Samuel Greengus, "A Textbook Case of Adultery in Ancient Mesopotamia," *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-70): 33-44.

⁵ Samuel Greengus, "A Textbook Case of Adultery in Ancient Mesopotamia," *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-70): 33-44.

⁶ A. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts," *Biblica* 51 (1970): 307-318.

⁷ Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 122.

⁸ Richard S. Briggs, "Reading the Sotah Text (Numbers 5:11-31): Holiness and a Hermeneutic Fit for Suspicion," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (2009): 288.

borrowed the ordeal concept from ancient polytheistic nations or not.⁹ For example F. C. Cook argues that Moses adopted the ordeal of Numbers 5:11-31 from already “existing and probably very ancient and widely spread institution,”¹⁰ he does not prove this but further refute his own argument that there is no particular evidence. These assertions are from mere conjecture. While some of these scholars consider both Numbers 5 and the ANE practice as variant account sharing a common tradition,¹¹ others suggest that the accounts are disparate, alternative documents.¹²

On the other hand, scholars from the synchronic perspective maintain that the practices of Numbers 5:11-31 are related in the sense to the ANE ordeals, or the two are complementary, but not from the same source.¹³ For the reason for the similarity of the ordeal in Numbers 5, some also hold that in Numbers 5:11-31 only God commits himself to the proper adjudication while in the ANE conveys a mystic responsibility in the practice carried out by the pagan priest.¹⁴ Therefore,

⁹ Frederick L. Moriarty, “Numbers,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, The Old Testament, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy (London, UK: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 88; E. J. Ciuba, “Ordeal,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), 10:719-720.

¹⁰ F. C. Cook, *The Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 669.

¹¹ John H. Walton, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, vol. 1, Genesis-Deuteronomy (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 347-348.

¹² Julian Morgenstern, “Trial by Ordeal among the Semites and in Ancient Israel,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2a (1925): 129.

¹³ Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background*, 347-348.

¹⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis-Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 284.

though a single practice and source is in view, ANE is particularly meant to give the readers a sign of the authentic practice. Julian Morgenstern would suggest that because all references to the practice or sacrifice were not part of the trail-by-ordeal in Numbers 5:11-31 in its original state, the passage becomes similar to ancient southern Arabian ordeals with which it share the same cultural like-mindedness.¹⁵ To state it differently, Number 5 focuses on God's way of dealing with adultery and ANE practice focuses on rituals with a cultural undertone. Others also argue that the ordeal categorized in Number 5 would have a polytheistic and magical in character which is associated with the cult and sanctuary of God or other deities.¹⁶

Further, while some of these scholars see both accounts (Num 5 and ANE) as referring to a single story tradition in a unified ordeal⁵³¹⁷ others see in them as two distinct but related accounts in concepts due to considerable differences in terms of their nature and procedure.¹⁸ This justifies a critical look at the ANE adultery and the one that pervades in Numbers 5:11-31. Relevant questions in this direction include the following: What is the relationship between Numbers 5 and the ANE concept of adultery? Is Numbers 5 a different ordeal from ANE? How should adultery in both Numbers 5 and ANE be understood? It is

¹⁵Morgenstern, "Trial by Ordeal," 129-131.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷G. R. Drivers and J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1935), 86. See also G. R. Drivers and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, 2 vols. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1956), 53.

¹⁸John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 156.

in search of satisfactory answer to this problem that a comparative analysis is conducted.

Historical Background of Numbers 5:11-31

In the history and culture of the people of Israel, adultery was regarded as a major crime that one commits not against his or her spouse but also against the God of Israel and therefore could not be neglected.¹⁹ Offenders of the act were punished. Adultery was among the offenses for which God could banish the Israelites from the Promised Land and execute them (cf. Lev 18:20, 25). Also the prohibition against adultery was inscribed into the national covenant at Mount Sinai to which every Israelite swore allegiance (Exod 24:1-8) and the following generations were equally to adhere to it (Deut 29:9-14). Subsequently in Israel's history most of the prophets drew the attention of the people to the sin of adultery as a violation of the Sinai covenant (cf. Hos 4:2; Jer 7:9). Jeremiah even emphatically stressed that adultery was the cause of Israel's doom and thus God's rejection of them (cf. Jer 5:7-9; 7:9-15; 29:23a). Jacob Milgrom posits that Israel were of the belief that "adultery was an affront to the deity

. . . unless it was punished with death, God would destroy the malefactors and indeed the entire community that had allowed it to go unpunished."²⁰

In resolving the complexity attached the adultery and not to accuse and treat people falsely of the act, many

¹⁹Baruch J. Schwart, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. "Ordeal of Jealousy."

²⁰Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 348-349.

civilization resorted to ordeals to solve the perplexing issues in their nations. George W. Gilmore has pointed out that the purpose and essence of the ordeal has in itself an “appeal to a deity to give a decision in a doubtful case; it assumes that God will bring innocence to light, if need be even by a miracle.”²¹ This ordeal in a way was instituted as “an evident desire to do justice, and in recognition of the fallibility of human knowledge, and discernment.”²² It can be seen that such a trial method came to being due to the lack of substantial evidence to fairly judge an accused person.²³

Several scholars agree that upon marital suspicion, the practice of trial-by-ordeal is used to find out the truth in that regards. Tikva Simone Frymer, Dario Sabbatucci, and Timothy R. Ashley affirms that the ordeal trial was not operating in a vacuum but rather it was used by the people when they could not solve difficult and baffling situation through the normal rules.²⁴ It served its importance in bring a lasting solution to suspicion.

²¹ George William Gilmore, “Ordeal,” *The New Schaff-Heerzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge* (1977), 8:249.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ John L. McKenzie, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee, WI:

²⁴ Dario Sabbatucci, “Ordeal,” *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (1987), 11:92; McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Ordeal”; Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 48-49; Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 13; Tikva Simone Frymer, “Ordeal, Judicial,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Supplementary vol., ed. Keith Crim (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 638-340.

As many have linked magic to this trial-by-ordeal practice, several scholars as well have denied that fact. The punishment and the associated superstition were not initially part of the practice but were associated with it later as the magic concept crept in²⁵ also the magic ideal became connected with the practice by the notion of chance since magic came later as a secondary reinforcing agent. Crawley has pointed out that “the ordeal in its appeal to the supernatural or to chance made a great step towards practical justice.”²⁶ By refuting the magic concept of the ordeal, Tikva Frymer-Kensky indicates that the practice was undertaken through a divine agent serving as a jury to pronounce someone with the verdict of being guilty or innocent during and after the process of the ordeal.²⁷

In the common practice of the ordeal both the verdict and the associated punishment of the guilty were at the reserve of God as in the case of Numbers 5:11-31. Contrary to this, in the surrounding background the punishment was carried out by human judiciary as the verdict of the divine agent proclaims. Van der Toorn posits that “once the deity has manifested his verdict in the ordeal, the human judges decide the measure to be taken in consequence.”²⁸ This shows that the verdict and the

²⁵ Gilmore, “Ordeal,” 8:249.

²⁶ Alfred E. Crawley, “Ordeal,” *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethic* (1974), 9:511-512.

²⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Suspected Sotah (Number v 11-31),” *Vetus Testamentum* 34 (1984): 24.

²⁸ Karel van der Toorn, “Ordeal,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. Davidson Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5:40.

punishment are not mixed up or confused in the process of the ordeal trial.

The element mostly employed in these ordeals were fire, water, or the combination of the two. Either the accused person is immersed in water or is asked to drink a potion. In other instances, the person is to retrieve an object in a boiling water or to touch, walk, or carry a heated object.²⁹

Literary Context

The Masoretic parameters (of the Hebrew text) of division confined the chapter to three main units. The chapter can be divided into three pericopes/paragraphs (vv. 1-4; 5-10; 11-31) using the division marking of the *petûhā'* (פ) and *setûmā'* (ס) in Hebrew. The *petûhā'* opens a paragraph or the starting line while the *setûmā'* closes the paragraph. Therefore the *petûhā'* which precedes v. 11 and follows v. 31 indicates that Num 5:11-31 has been considered as a distinct pericope traditionally.

Uniquely, each of the pericopes is introduced by the phrase

מִן־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִבְדֹּקְתֶּם לְ (vv. 11, 5, 1.8). The phrase is repeated

severally in the book of Numbers which general shows the beginning of new topical units.⁵⁴³⁰ It also shows a connection of the book of Numbers with the rest of the Pentateuch. This

²⁹Frymer, "Ordeal, Judicial," 639.

³⁰ For the occurrences of the phrase in the book of Numbers see Num 1:1, ; 2:1; 3:5, 11, 14, 44; 4:1, 17, 21; 5 ;1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22; 7 ;89; 8 ;1, 5, 23; 9:1, 4, 9; 10:1; 11:24, 25; 13:1; 14:26, 39; 15:1, 17; 16:20, 23, 26; 17:1, 9, 16, 21; 18:8, 25; 19:1; 20:7; 21:5; 25:10, 16; 26:3, 52; 27:15; 28:1; 30:2; 31:1, 3; 33:50; 34:1, 16; 35:1, 9.

is because as an introductory formula is used throughout the Pentateuch.³¹ The phrase begins the pericope in v. 11 and occurs after the end of the unit in 6:1. This is a way that makes the pericope an inclusion which shows a divinely authentic instruction by God to Moses.

Also the theme of holiness and the law/legal text is recurrent issues in the chapter which is related to the Pentateuch. The observance of purity among the Israelites people is seen as a common denominator in all the three pericopes of Num 5. Holiness was valued in Israel due to the fact that the community was “organized around the tabernacle, which is the place of the holy divine presence.”³² The holiness of God was to take prominence upon the people of Israel and they were to approach Him as such. The legal material found in the Numbers 5 can be seen as interconnected and linked with other legal text in the entire book. Numbers 5-6, 15, 17-19, 27-30, 32-36 are identified as legal material that permeates the book.³³ These laws were to enhance the relationship and mutual co-existence of God and His people. This has led William W. Hallo to assert that the form of law in Numbers is significantly found in the book.³⁴

³¹For the occurrences of the phrase in the Pentateuch see Gen 8:15; 17:3; Exod 6:2, 10, 13, 29; 13:1; 14:1; 16:11; 20:1; 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22; 31:1; 32:7; 33:1; 40:1; Lev 1:1; 4:1; 5:14, 20; 6:1, 12, 17; 7:22, 28; 8:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:14, 16; 22:1, 16, 26; 23:1, 9, 23, 26, 33; 24:1, 13; 25:1; 27:1; Deut 2:17; 4:12; 32:44, 48.

³²W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Leviticus and Numbers*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 173, 198.

³³Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, ix.

Recurrent Words and Terms in Numbers 5

Some recurrent words or terms are found in Numbers 5.

These include טָמֵא “to be unclean or defiled” (5:2, 3, 13, 14, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29), לַעֲבֹד “to act unfaithfully” (5:6, 12, 27), אִנְקָה “to be jealous” (5:14, 15, 18, 25, 29, 30), כֹּהֵן “the priest” (5:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 30), יְהוָה “Yahweh” (5:11, 16, 18, 21, 25, 30), and מַיִם “water” (5:17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27). As David

A. Dorsey has pointed out “biblical authors employed structured repetition to convey meaning . . . as . . . it enables an author to make a point subtly, without explicitly saying it.”³⁵ Thus these repetitions of the Hebrew words or terms in a way provide some thematic thoughts to understanding the message of the author and the passage as well.

The use of טָמֵא and לַעֲבֹד can be seen as showing how God wants His people to do away with unclean situation and to maintain purity in their midst.³⁶ Due to God’s dwelling within His people He required the highest level of cleanliness and holiness. B. Maarsingh contends that the holiness of God calls for any uncleanliness in the physical and spiritual realm to be done away with from His presence.³⁷ Also in vv. 11-31 the terms are used probably in

³⁵ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 37.

³⁶ Paluku Mwendambio, “The Function of the Mosaic Water Drinking Ordeal of Num 5:11-31” (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2010), 48.

³⁷ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers: A Practical Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 21. The same idea is conveyed by Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary*, 100; Budd, *Numbers*, 132.

marital uncleanness. Two key aspects are highlighted in the passage in this direction. The first has to do with breaking of faith against a spouse (particularly husband) as found in vv. 12, 27. The second concerns the discharge from the body as indicated in v. 13. The use of the expression

וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ עָלָיו מִדַּם הַיָּדָיו suggests that the discharge occurs from the lying of a man with a woman and ejaculating as a result.³⁸ These acts caused serious health and holiness concerns that needed to be addressed by God. The Lord was using such an ordeal to deal with such situation (cf. vv. 16, 18, 21, 30).

The ten times repetition of the term אָנָּק “to be jealous, jealousy, jealous” as used in Numbers 5:11-31 for what comes to the heart of the husband and nature ordeal of the ordeal suggest that, the passage is intended to bring a lasting solution to the problem of jealousy. The reference to the ordeal as accentuates this claim. Also the reference to the אָנָּק suggests

that the key/major player in the ordeal is the priest. He leads out the majority of the process or activities on the ordeal trial. His service as just a bridge between the suspecting couple and God.

In a unique way, the expression אָנָּק occurs seven times. YHWH begins and ends the ordeal as the passage indicates (vv. 11, 30). The suspicious wife and the offering are brought before Him (vv. 16, 18, 25, 30). He punishes and set free the woman if either found liable or innocent. The

³⁸B. Maarsingh, *Numbers: A Practical Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 21. The same idea is conveyed by Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary*, 100; Budd, *Numbers*, 132.

judgment rest on Him. Also the term **יָדָה** is used eleven times. It is what the priest prepares and give to the suspected wife to drink. It is **יָדָה** and not the **יָדָה** that finds her guilty or innocent. As Paluku Mwendambio has pointed out “the Lord is the author of the punishment while the water serves as His means to implement it. . . . the Lord, not the water is responsible for what happen to the woman.”³⁹

Structure of Numbers 5:11-31

A brief outline of Numbers 5:11-31 may be helpful here before establishing the literary aspect. Jacob Milgrom has proposed a symmetric chiasmic structure that highlights the unity of the passage as follows.⁴⁰

A. The Case (vv. 11-14)

1. introduction (vv. 11-12a)
2. the wife has strayed (vv. 12b-14a)
3. she is innocent (v. 14b)

B. Preparation of the Ritual Ordeal (vv. 15-18)

1. minnah (v. 15)
2. water (v. 17)
3. Woman (vv. 18[16])

C The Oath-Imprecation (vv. 19-24)

³⁹Mwendambio, “The Function of the Mosaic,” 66.

⁴⁰Milgrom, *Numbers*, 354.

1. oral adjuration (vv. 19-22)

[interpolation, v. 21]

2. written adjuration dissolved
and to be imbibed (vv. 23-24)

B'. *Execution of the Ritual Ordeal* (vv. 25-28)

1. minhah (vv. 25-26a)

2. water (v. 26b)

3. woman, effect on (vv. 27-28)

A'. *The Case* (vv. 29-30)

1. introduction (v. 29a)

2. the wife has strayed (v. 29b)

3. the is innocent (v. 30)

[postscript, v. 31]

Although some scholars regard the passage as coming from two main sources, the structure by Milgrom suggest a unity of the text. Milgrom, however, through the use of interpolation asserts that the vv. 21, 31 were originally "an ancient Near Eastern incantation for an ordeal employing magical water that did not invoke the name of any deity."⁴¹ He further postulate that the inclusion of the name of God, יהוה, was done by the priest of Israel who wanted to attribute the trial to YHWH instead of the water.⁴² This assertion cannot be considered as true. Several

⁴¹Milgrom, *Numbers*, 354.

⁴²Milgrom, *Numbers*, 351.

references to אֵשׁ־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ in passage (vv. 11, 16, 18, 25), the chapter, and the entire book were not attributed to ANE source by Milgrom. This seems to suggest that his claim cannot be substantiated by the interpolation. The coherence and unity of the passage even without the interpolations shows that the original Hebrew text is authentic and without any ANE addition or redaction. Also a look at the critical apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* suggest that the editors maintains the text as authentic in disregard to the interpolation of ANE as suggested by Milgrom.⁴³

Purpose of Numbers 5:11-31

There have being much discussions on the purpose of the trial-by-ordeal of Numbers 5:11-31. While some assert that the import of the ordeal is “ambiguous,”⁴⁴ other posits that there are no agreement in purpose of the ritual.⁴⁵ However several purposes have been suggested to the Numbers 5:11-31 ritual:

- To serve as a protection of wives from the abuse of

⁴³K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 219.

⁴⁴Fishbane, “Accusations of Adultery,” 37.

⁴⁵Bonna Devora Haberman, “The Suspected Adulteress: A Study of Textual Embodiment,” *Prooftexts* 20 (2000): 16.

their husbands.⁴⁶

- To promote fidelity in marriage, it was to put fear in women and to deter them from adultery.⁴⁷
- To abort the birth of illegitimate child.⁴⁸
- To showcase a metaphorical expression of the relationship between God and the Israelites.
- To serve to secure control over the bodies of wives by their husbands.⁴⁹

In addition to these proposed purposes, it can be seen from the literary analysis that Numbers 5:11-31 probably highlights that jealousy comes about as a result of sexual misconduct or adultery which should be reported to the priest. He upon receiving the allegation is required to transfer the matter to God who will settle it with the drinking of water in the trial by ordeal process. If the woman is innocent or guilty, the Lord will deal with it. Thus in the ordeal God was to distinguish

⁴⁶Herbert Chanan Brichto, "The Case of the Sota and a Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law,'" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 55-70. See also Milgrom, *Numbers*, 349-350.

⁴⁷ John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 116; Roland K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 117.

⁴⁸ W. McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath," *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 474; Jeon, "Two Laws in the Sotah," 198.

⁴⁹Budd, *Numbers*, 133; Haberman, "The Suspected Adulteress," 16.

the guilty from the innocent. This also in way deal with the issue of punishing before one is found guilty of an offence.

Concept of the Ordeal in Ancient Near East

Adultery was considered as a dangerous act which to some degree valued as a sin of weightier or greater magnitude committed against the gods of the cult in most of the ANE societies.⁵⁰ The act was also seen as a treat to the stability of the society most of which were “a civil and a religious crime.”⁵¹ In Babylon and Egypt, the act was expressed as a “great sin” as many ANE nations equally called it. As a crime in Egypt it was punishable by death or sometimes by emasculation of the offender.⁵² Victor H. Matthew asserts that it was seen as “a crime that Pharaoh and the gods will vindicate.”⁵³ Therefore this act was punished. But in order to ascertain the truthfulness of the matter before judgement is given several ANE communities had a trial process that dealt with the issue.

⁵⁰Jeffrey Howard Tigay, “Adultery,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007), 1:424; Martha Roth, “‘She Will Die by the Iron Dagger’: Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31 (1988): 186-206.

⁵¹Milgrom, *Numbers*, 349.

⁵²C. J. Eyre, “Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt” *The Journal of Egyptian Archeology* 70 (1984): 96-103; J. J. Robinowitz, “The ‘Great Sin’ in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18 (1959): 73; Isaac Mendelsohn, “Family in the Ancient Near East,” *The Biblical Archeologist* 11 (1948): 24-40.

⁵³Victor H. Matthew, “Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East,” in *Marriage and Family in Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003), 23.

In the ANE world two main trial-by-ordeals were employed by the people. These are the water ordeals and the fire ordeals.⁵⁴ However, the water ordeals were prominent and numerous due to the various forms of which water can be used. The text of Mari should be one of these ordeals. The text is a fragment letter that reports a vision a prophet had in the heavenly court of the gods.⁵⁵ An aspect of the text has to do with the drinking of water as a trial of an ordeal. The fragment indicates,

What Asumum [said to Ea] I did not hear. He
ar[ose and thus] he spoke saying: “[*Before*] we
pronounce [the oath], let them take the di[rt]
and door-frame of the gate [of Mari] . . . , and
then [*let us pronounce*] the oath.” They took the
dirt and the door-frame of the ga[te] of Mari
and they dissolved (them) in water. Then the
gods and goddesses drank. Thus (spoke) Ea:
“swear to the gods that [you will not] harm the
brickwork the *commissioner* [<of Mari>].”

The gods and goddesses [swore]: “we will not
harm the brickwork or the *commissioner* of

⁵⁴ Norman H. Snaith, “Numbers,” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (London, UK: Nelson, 1962), 256.

See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 349; Gilmore, “Ordeal,” 8:249.

⁵⁵ Jimmy J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 125; Jack M. Sasson, “An Apocalyptic Vision from Mari? Speculations on ARM X 9,” *MARI* 1 (1982): 151-167; Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, With Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 253.

Mari.”⁵⁶

This inscription indicates that the ordeal was a way of settling disputed issues and finding lasting solution to them. In the Mari text water is mixed with dirt and the people in conflict or misunderstanding are directed to drink. The drinking of the mixture is seen as preceding the taking of the oath.

Among the Assyrians, the drinking of water was done in addition to taking an oath. Milgrom asserts that in the ordeal involving water, “they will draw [water], drink, swear and be pure.”⁵⁷This also confirms what Karen van der Toorn has pointed out that the swearing of an oath was done primarily because they understood it as “an act that linked it to threats of punishment in case of noncompliance.”⁵⁸ This shows that the Assyrians used ordeals in solving complex disputes that came their way.

In Babylon, the practice of ordeal by water was a very common phenomenon. The Babylonian code of Hammurabi, named for the Babylonian king believed to have reigned during 1728-1686 BC, give an account of the practice.⁵⁹Here, the water was not for drinking as the Assyrians and Mari text supports. Rather, the river was used for the

⁵⁶James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969),

632 (italic and emphasis his).

⁵⁷Milgrom, *Numbers*, 349.

⁵⁸van der Toorn, “Ordeal,” 5:41.

⁵⁹“The Code of Hammurabi,” translated by Theophile Meek (*ANET*, 138). This code was engraved on a stele discovered in 1901-1902. They are laws that represent the oldest extant legal code of Western civilization.

ordeal. The main import of the river ordeal was to resolve complex issues relating to suspicion of adultery and witchcraft. The codes or laws that relates to adultery reads,

If a husband accuses his own wife (of adultery), although she has not seized lying with another male, she shall swear (to her innocence by) an oath by the god, and return to her house.

If a man's wife should have a finger pointed against her in accusation involving another male, although she has not been seized lying with another male, she shall submit to the divine River Ordeal for her husband.⁶⁰

If a seignior has said to a(nother) seignior, "People have lain repeatedly with your wife," since there were no witnesses, they shall make an agreement (and) go to the river (for the water ordeal).⁶¹

The Hammurabi law that dealt with the issue of witchcraft that is resolved by the water ordeal reads,

If a man charges another man with practicing witchcraft but cannot bring proof against him,

⁶⁰Martha Roth, "The Laws of Hammurabi," in *the Context of Scripture: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, vol. 2, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 344. See also Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 171.

⁶¹Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 181.

he who is charged with witchcraft shall go to the divine River Ordeal, he shall indeed submit to the divine River Ordeal; if the divine River Ordeal should overwhelm him, his accuser shall take full legal possession of his estate; if the divine River Ordeal should clear that man and should he survive, he who made the charge of witchcraft against him shall be killed; he who submitted to the divine River Ordeal shall take full legal possession of his accuser's estate.⁶²

The code gives instances where a woman can be subject to the ordeal, either she being accused by the husband or someone other than the husband. However, the husband has the privilege to either pardon the adulterous wife or cause her death as the law implied in the case of real adultery seen by either the husband or a second person. In the ordeal here, the accused is not subject to any kind of punishment until she is either proved guilty or innocent. The judge in the Babylonian trial is the gods which the code refers to as the river. The reference to the river is commonly considered the Euphrates. It was considered the divine judge in their understanding. The suspects were thrown into the river and the human jury judged the accused following the results that followed, either by the victim drowning or floating on the water.⁶³ However, one cannot attest to the accuracy of the ordeal in the ANE as it is possible that several people might have died from the ordeal either guilty or innocent.

⁶²Roth, "The Laws of Hammurabi," 337.

⁶³Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 166, 171.

Structural and Content Relationship Between Numbers 5:11-31 and Mari Text

Unlike ANE texts, in Numbers 5:11-31 the ordeal and its procedure covers the whole pericope. The content of the ANE texts and Numbers 5:11-31 may be structured differently. It will feature elements that are deemed visible in both text and not by inferring or imagination. The content of the Mari texts and Numbers 5:11-31 may be structured around the following elements: "material for the ordeal," "reporter/Accuser," "procedure taken by the arbiter," "mode of reporting," "issue at stake," "people involved," "nature of text," "outcome after the ordeal," "means/medium/arbiter," and "divine judge."⁶⁴

Structural Elements	Numbers	Mari Text
	5:11-31	

⁶⁴In the Bible it appears that each of the biblical concept is structured around some elements, though there are also semblances in structure between biblical concepts and Ancient Near Eastern counterpart. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 347-349.

for the

Material ordeal	Mixture of holy water in earthenware vessel and dust on the floor of the tabernacle (v. 17)	Mixture of dirt, door-frame of the gate of Mari, and water
--------------------	---	---

Reporter/Accuser	Husband (vv. 12-14, 30)	unknown
------------------	-------------------------	---------

Procedure by the arbiter	taken Taking an oath before the drinking of the mixture (vv. 19-26)	Drinking of the mixture before the taking of an oath
-----------------------------	---	---

Mode of reporting	Taking the suspected wife to the priest with an offering (vv. 15-18).	A god or goddess to the other
----------------------	--	----------------------------------

Issue at stake	Suspicion of Causing harm adultery (vv. to brickwork 11-14, 30) or the commissioner of Mari
People involved	Husband gods and and wife goddesses
Nature of text	Marital issue Vision taking taking place on place in the earth (vv. 11- court of gods 14, 30)
Outcome after the ordeal	Unknown The woman have swelled womb, flatten thigh, infertility (vv. 21, 22, 27, 28)
Means/medium/arbiter	The Priest Unknown (vv. 18, 20, 21, 30)

It can be seen that though there is drinking of a potion or mixture in Mari's trial by ordeal along with an oath taking process, the sequence of the actions (trial and oath taking) is different from the ordeal in Numbers 5:11-31. The Mari's account has the oath preceding the drinking of the potion while in Numbers 5:11-31 it is the opposite. Also in the Mari's trial the issue at stake is not clear and its import concerns a disputation between gods. However, in Numbers 5:11-31, the problem is a husband having suspicion on the wife concerning adultery.

In the same vein, the Mari's account is said to be a vision occurring in the heavenly realm's court of gods where certain gods swear not to threaten Mari in the future. However, in the Numbers 5:11-31 narrative the trial by ordeal is about a marital issue happening on earth regarding a past activity of a wife. Therefore, it can be said

that the Mari and the Numbers 5:11-31 trial by ordeal accounts are different and has no correlation.

Structural and Content Relationship Between Numbers 5:11-31 and Hammurabi Code

The content of the Hammurabi code and Numbers 5:11-31 may be structured around the following elements: "materials for the

ordeal," "pressing of charges," "judicial procedure," "mode of punishment," "mode of accusation," "nature of ordeal," "protasis," and "apodosis."

Structural Elements	Numbers 5:11-31	Hammurabi Code (131 and 132)
Material for the ordeal	Mixture of holy water in earthenware vessel and dust on the floor of the tabernacle (v. 17)	oath (CH 131), the river (CH 132)
Pressing of Charges Judicial Procedure	Only the husband (vv. 15) combined	Anybody Separated (the oath, then the ordeal)
Mode of punishment	Swelling of womb, flatten	death

thigh, sterility

(vv. 27, 28)

Mode of accusation		Both suspected and apprehended adulteress
Nature of ordeal	Drinking of mixture of water and dust, then swearing an oath	Swearing an oath, the submission to river ordeal
Protasis		If a man suspects his wife of infidelity without proof . . . (CH131)
	(If) ⁶⁵ any man suspects his wife of infidelity without proof . . . (vv. 12b-15a)	If someone accuses another man's wife of
	If you did not commit adultery . . . (v. 19)	

⁶⁵ Unlike the other protases in the ordeal pericope, the opening protasis does not employ the particle ~a. However, Fishbane point out that the construction yk vya vya, rendered here as “if any man” (v. 12b), commonly functions in the OT as the marker of the protasis (cf. Num 5:6, 8; 6:2, 9). See Fishbane, “Accusations of Adultery,” 30.

	If you did commit adultery . . . (v. 27)
	adultery . . . (vv. 20, 22)
	If the woman did not commit adultery . . . (v. 28)
	If the woman committed adultery without proof . . . (CH 132)
Apodosis	. . . the man shall bring her to the priest, have her swear an oath, and have her drink bitter water (vv. 15b, 28)
	. . . she shall swear an oath and return home (CH 131) . . . she shall throw herself into the divine river for the sake of her husband (CH 132)

. . . be unaffected by
the bitter water (v.
19) . . . be rendered
sterile by the bitter
water (vv. 20, 22)
. . . she will be
rendered sterile by
the bitter water (v.
27) . . . she will be
fertile (v. 28)

The summary of the structure and content of Numbers 5:11-31 and the Hammurabi codes 131 and 132 in the table above, indicates that there is some resemblance or parallelism of the two passages. Looking at the parallels of Numbers 5:11-31 with other ANE texts, it seems probable that Numbers 5:11-31 fits the genre of trial by ordeal.⁶⁶In terms of the content and form, the Num 5:11-31 pericope especially resembles the Hammurabi Codes statutes (CH131-32). In regard to content, it can be seen and as pointed out in the chapter 2 of the study Numbers 5:11-31 deals primary with accusation on adultery and here both texts (Num 5:11-31 and the Hammurabi codes) treat unsubstantiated allegations about female infidelity, incorporating an oath (cf. 5:19, 21; compare CH131), a water ordeal (cf. 5:24, 26-27; compare CH132), and an expectation of divine intervention to show guilt or innocence (cf. 5:16, 18, 21, 30; compare CH

⁶⁶Grey, *Numbers*, 44-45.

In regard to form, both texts are casuistic possessing protasis and apodosis. The matter of suspected adulteress is shown in the protasis clause, which is followed by the procedure of adjudication in the apodosis clause. As highlighted in the table above, the protasis is the “if... such and such has happened” statement, while the apodosis is the “then... perform such and such an act” statements.

It can be seen that the remarkable parallels of the Hammurabi Codes 131-132 texts to Numbers 5:11-31 suggest that, at least in regard to trials by ordeal, ANE tradition and the biblical account shows some similarities. However, as Odil Hannes Steck has highlighted in the tradition-historical criteria, the history of a concept comes into view when the same concept is located in different texts in different times without indication of literary dependence.⁶⁷ Like these ANE texts, the Numbers 5:11-31 pericope functions in the absence of witnesses and invokes a deity through an oath and a water ordeal.⁶⁸ Although a tradent cannot be determined in regard to *traditio*, the

⁶⁷Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to Methodology* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1998), 133.

⁶⁸See Frymer-Kensky, “The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah,” 2425. Frymer-Kensky observes that two key features of trials by ordeal are (1) immediate effects demonstrating the deity’s decision—effects that (2) serve as the built-in punishment in the event of a guilty verdict.

similarities in *traditum* present a “most compelling” case for a similar conceptual orbit as Fishbane puts it.⁶⁹

This is not to suggest that the author of Numbers copied from the Hammurabi code. It rather seems to suggest that similar adultery situations were common during each of the writing periods of the texts and the author addressed it accordingly, with one emanating from magic and the other being a revelation from YHWH. In the biblical, the trial by ordeal takes place when there is a lack of witnesses as to a woman’s unfaithfulness. This makes it difficult to assess the accusation as either true or false. Therefore, the outcome was handed over in the hands of YHWH. The jealous husband brings his wife before a priest, where the accused swears an oath in the presence of YHWH that she has been faithful to her marriage vow and to her husband. The priest presents the wife with a concoction of holy water, dust from the Tabernacle floor, and a piece of paper upon which a curse is written. The curse then dissolves in the water, and the woman is mandated to drink it. In the event of the guiltiness of the woman, YHWH causes the mixture to make the woman’s thighs to flatten and her belly to swell. The result of the trial as seen in a form of a divine judgment is carried out.

As indicated in the content and structure table, in the Babylonian texts, the accusation of adultery can come from another person aside the husband of the accused. This suspicion arising from a third person is not accounted or indicated for in the biblical passage. This shows that the biblical injunction did not follow the Babylonian precedent as some critical scholars assert. From the Numbers 5:11-31 account it can be understood

⁶⁹Fishbane, “Accusations,” 38. See also George B. Grey, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, International Critical Commentary (New York, NY: Scribner’s, 1903), 47.

that in the event of rumour or accusation coming from the community or other persons, it was only the husband who was mandated and could press charges (v. 15).

It can also be seen that the introductory part of Numbers 5:11-31 indicates two things. The guiltiness of the woman or her innocence is undecided in the first. The ordeal is to serve this purpose of proving of guilt and innocence. The second is that the jealousy of the husband is the one that drives the entire ordeal trial. The husband's jealousy has significant implications to the nature of God, and establishing the central role that jealousy plays in the ritual. As Deborah L. Ellens has observed "the original, primary concern of the ritual is to instruct the audience on the execution of a procedure, which has the power to rescue a single male from this condition."⁷⁰ The initiation of the ritual is not caused by any action or inaction of the wife, but is rather forced to occur by the husband's jealousy. The husband's jealousy is thus the operative force of the entire ordeal trial. However, in the Hammurabi code account, the woman is guilty unless she is proven innocent through the oath taking. The driving force is not jealousy but any mere allegation coming from any man irrespective of his relationship with the woman.

Also in the trial or judicial procedures made up of the oath and ordeal, the Biblical account presents both being carried out in a combined manner. On the other hand, that of the Babylonian texts occurred separately. This clearly shows

⁷⁰Deborah L. Ellens, "Numbers 5.11-31: Valuing Male Suspicion," in *God's Word for Our World*, 2 vols., ed. Deborah L. Ellens J. Harold Ellens, Rolf P. Knienm and Isaac Kalimi. Journal for the study of the Old Testament. Supplement series (New York, NY: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 55.

variance in the two ordeals as not emanating from one source. Again in both texts, the trial by ordeal took another form. Whereas the punishment of the guilty adulteress was in the form of sterility or bareness, that of the Hammurabi code was death. This contrasting differences evidently shows the disparity in the two accounts.

The similarities in both text does not suggest that the author of Numbers borrowed the trial by ordeal concept or practice from the ANE. The issue of adultery as indicated was common within the ANE region and all biblical sources agree that the prohibition against adultery was incorporated into the national covenant at Sinai to which every Israelite swore allegiance (cf. Exod 24:1-8; Duet 5:24-26). Also latter generations of Israel were bound (cf. Deut 29:9-14). Prophets like Hosea and Jeremiah spoke vehemently against the sin of adultery and called Israel to respect the Sinaitic covenant and desist from its violations (cf. Hos 4:2; Jer 7:9). Most of Jeremiah prophesy and rebuke of Israel largely centered and highlighted the issue of adultery as the curse of Israel's national doom (Jer 5:7-9; 7:9-15; 29:23a).⁷¹

It may therefore be conjectured that originally the present ordeal was not an ANE incantation for an ordeal employing magical water that did not invoke the name of any deity. The ordeal should be seen as God's revelation to Moses and the people of Israel to deal with the issue of adultery and to

⁷¹See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 349. Also the crime is described throughout the HB, such as Gen 20:6; Lev 18:20; Ezek 18:6; Ps 51:6; and Mal 3:5. Also a number of texts discuss the evil of adultery. The Israelites held the act in such harsh light, that a commandment against committing adultery is found in the Ten Commandments. This certainly indicates that extra-marital affairs were viewed in a severe manner.

curtail capital punishment and unnecessary divorces. The import was to inform the people that if an adulteress is convicted by the ordeal, her punishment rests not with them but solely with God.

Furthermore, as Baruch A. Levine has indicated “the Babylonian evidence provides only a partial parallel, but more needs to be said about the relevance of these Old Babylonian laws to the priestly legislation of the Torah.”⁷² This is difference in the treatment of the suspected woman in relation to the accuser in both texts. This seems to separate the two.

In summary, the trial by ordeal in Numbers 5:11-31 provided the assurance that judgment and its related punishment would not be in the hands of the people, but that through this instruction God provided the assurance that He would continue serving as Israel’s judge. He fights for the innocent and punishes the offender. The ANE account rather have the punishment solely in the hand of the magical person who official the trial. Both accounts, therefore, may point to a single source in the eyes of critical scholars, only that each account focuses mainly on different divine figure which is a crucial element of the ordeal— YHWH or the gods. In Numbers 5:11-31, YHWH solemnly reiterated two essential elements made earlier in the study, namely holiness and judgment. Both parts of the ordeal, then, are not rooted substantially from one source as critical scholars initially has outlined. One is from the gods made of human hand with magical inference and the other is from YHWH—the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is a divine judge who witnesses everything and can therefore reach a fair verdict.

⁷²Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, Anchor Bible. Vol. 4a. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 204.

Therefore, Numbers 5:11-31 may be seen as a key conceptual issue for the theological stream that depicts Israel's relationship with YHWH in terms of jealousy, adultery motifs, and threats of violence, which culminate with Israel drinking a cup of divine wrath or judgment. Theologically, the passage informs both jealous husbands and vengeful communities that jurisdiction of the case of adultery lies completely with YHWH, protecting the woman from further human punishment.⁷³

Conclusion

The ordeal in its appeal to the supernatural makes a great step towards practical justice. The practice was undertaken through a divine agent serving as a jury to pronounce someone with the verdict of being guilty or innocent during and after the process of the ordeal. In the practice of the ordeal both the verdict and the associated punishment of the guilty were at the reserve of God as in the case of Numbers 5:11-31. The use of לעֲשֶׂה and לְעֵשֶׂה can be seen as showing how God wants His people to do away with unclean situation and to maintain purity in their midst. Due to God's dwelling within His people He required the highest level of cleanliness and holiness. The repetition (10 times) of אֵקָם "to be jealous, jealousy, jealous" in Numbers 5:11-31 for what comes to the heart of the husband and nature of the ordeal suggest that, the passage is intended to bring a lasting solution to the problem of jealousy. The reference to the אֱלֹהִים suggest that the major player

⁷³Milgrom, *Numbers*, 354. Milgrom observes that לְעֵשֶׂה is an idiom for punishment through divine agency.

in the ordeal is the priest. He leads out the majority of the activities on the ordeal trial. His service as just a bridge between the suspecting couple and God.

The expression יְהוָה יִשְׁפֹּט begins and ends the ordeal as the passage indicates (vv. 11, 30). The suspicious wife and the offering are brought before Him (vv. 16, 18, 25, 30). He punishes and set free the woman if either found liable or innocent. The judgment rest on Him. The Lord is the author of the punishment while the water serves as His means to implement it. Thus, YHWH, not the water is responsible for what happen to the woman.

In order to maintain and live a holy life in the marital home, the holiness codes were given to Moses for the Israelites to follow. The ordeal of Numbers 5:11-31 is one code that played a positive aspect in the people's marriages. This ordeal was in its intend to protect the accused woman from wrongful trail and humiliation from the husband. In a communal sense, it was a practice for protection. The role of both the human and divine participation in the process as well as the transferral of the accused wife to God's jurisprudence are essential in understanding the ordeal to the Israelite society. Contrary to the actors in the Hammurabi code text which can be said to be trivial and resulting to magic, that of Numbers 5:11-31 places the process and trail by ordeal in the tabernacle in God's hands and realm thereby giving it a sacred character and backing. God used this ordeal as a means of judgment to prevent immoral activities in the Israelite community where He is at the center of their dwelling. Also in order not to have rampant divorce and marital related offences, God served as the ultimate judge in all the affairs and especially in the marriage related issues. Because of His stand against adultery, the offender was punished and the innocent set free. He welcomes all married partners to constantly

come to His to moral redress and to keep the moral purity of all marriages.

Though there is drinking of a potion or mixture in Mari's trial by ordeal along with an oath taking process, the sequence of the actions (trial and oath taking) is different from the ordeal in Numbers 5:11-31. The Mari's account has the oath preceding the drinking of the potion while in

Numbers 5:11-31 it is the opposite. Also in the Mari's trial the issue at stake is not clear and its import concerns a disputation between gods. However, in Numbers 5:11-31, the problem is a husband having suspicion on the wife concerning adultery.

In the Hammurabi code ordeal, the innocent woman has to survive something harmful, because of the fact of surviving the trial was the proof of innocence. Being injured by an inherently harmful agent (such as throwing the accused in a river or drinking of a concoction) was determined to be proof of guilt, so that the accused woman was guilty until otherwise proven innocent, whereas the Numbers 5:11-31 ordeal trial offered a presumption of innocence. Also in the Numbers 5:11-31 account the woman is not subjected to any form of harm while she is innocent, which differs importantly from the Hammurabi ordeals where the wife is exposed to harm by mostly being plunged into a river.

Bibliography

Ashley, Timothy R. *The Book of Numbers*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.

Bellinger, W. H., Jr. *Leviticus and Numbers*. New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001.

- Brichto, Herbert Chanan. "The Case of the Sota and Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law.'" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 55-70.
- Briggs, Richard S. "Reading the Sotah Text (Numbers 5:1131): Holiness and a Hermeneutic Fit for Suspicion." *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (2009): 288.
- Budd, Philip J. *Numbers*. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 5. Waco, TX: Word, 1984.
- Ciuba, E. J. "Ordeal," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. (1967). 10:719-720.
- Cook, F. C. *The Bible Commentary*. Vol. 1. *Genesis to Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981.
- Crawley, Alfred E. "Ordeal." *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethic* (1974). 9:511-512.
- Dorsey, David A. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999.
- Dozeman, Thomas B. "The book of Numbers." *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by Lender E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998.
- Drivers, G. R., and J. C. Miles. *The Assyrian Laws*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1935.
- _____. *The Babylonian Laws*. 2 vols. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1956.
- Elliger, K., and W. Rudolph, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.

- Eyre, C. J. "Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt." *The Journal of Egyptian Archeology* 70 (1984): 96-103.
- Fishbane, Michael. "Accusations of Adultery: A Study of Law and Scribal Practice in Numbers 5:11-31." *HUCA* 45 (1974): 35.
- Frymer, Tikva Simone. "Ordeal, Judicial." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Supplement vol. Edited by Keith Crim. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976.
- Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. "The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11-31)." *Vetus Testamentum* 34 (1984): 11-27.
- Gilmore, George William. "Ordeal." *The New Schaff-Heerzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*. (1977). 8:249.
- Greengus, Samuel. "A Textbook Case of Adultery in Ancient Mesopotamia." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40-41 (1969-70): 33-44.
- Grey, George B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*. International Critical Commentary. New York, NY: Scribners, 1903.
- Haberman, Bonna Devora. "The Suspected Adulteress: A Study of Textual Embodiment." *Prooftexts* 20 (2000): 16.
- Hallo, William W. *The Book of the People*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1991.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis-Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982.

- Harrison, Roland K. *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992.
- Heimpel, Wolfgang. *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, With Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.
- Heslop, William G. *Nuggets from Numbers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1958.
- Isaac Mendelsohn, "Family in the Ancient Near East." *The Biblical Archeologist* 11(1948): 24-40.
- Jeon, Jaeyoung. "Two Laws in the Sotah Passage (Num. v 11-31)." *Vetus Testamentum* 57 (2007): 181.
- Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Vols. 1-5 combined. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994-2000.
- Lange, John Peter. "Numbers." *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical*. Vol. 3. Numbers-Ruth. Edited by Philip Schaff. Translated by Samuel T. Lowrie and A. Gosman. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960.
- Levine, Baruch A. *Numbers 1-20*. Anchor Bible. Vol. 4a. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993.
- Maarsingh, B. *Numbers: A Practical Commentary*. Translated

- by John Vriend. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Matthew, Victor H. "Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East." In *Marriage and Family in Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003.
- McKane, W. "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath." *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 474.
- McKenzie, John L., ed. *Dictionary of the Bible*. Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1965. s.v. "Ordeal."
- Milgrom, Jacob. *Numbers*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish, 1990.
- Morgenstern, Julian. "Trial by Ordeal among the Semites and in Ancient Israel." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2a (1925): 129.
- Moriarty, Frederick L. "Numbers." *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 1. The Old Testament. Edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy. London, UK: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968.
- Mwendambio, Paluku. "The Function of the Mosaic Water Drinking Ordeal of Num 5:11-31." PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2010.
- Pritchard, James B. ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Rainey, A. "The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts." *Biblica* 51 (1970): 307-318.

- Roberts, Jimmy J. M. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002.
- Robinowitz, J. J. "The 'Great Sin' in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18 (1959): 73.
- Roth, Martha "'She Will Die by the Iron Dagger': Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31 (1988): 186-206.
- _____. "The Laws of Hammurabi." In *the Context of Scripture: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*. Vol. 2. Edited by William W. Hallo. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000.
- Sabbatucci, Dario. "Ordeal." *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (1987). 11:92.
- Sailhamer, John H. *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.
- Sasson, Jack M. "An Apocalyptic Vision from Mari? Speculations on ARM X 9." *MARI* 1 (1982): 151-167.
- Schwartz, Baruch J. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*. Edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997. s.v. "Ordeal of Jealousy."
- Snaith, Norman H. "Numbers." *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*. Edited by Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley. London, UK: Nelson, 1962.
- Steck, Odil Hannes. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to Methodology*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1998.
- The Code of Hammurabi*. Translated by Theophile Meek

(ANET, 138).

Tigay, Jeffrey Howard "Adultery," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

2nd ed. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007.

1:421-424.

van der Toorn, Karel. "Ordeal." *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

Edited by Davidson Noel Freedman. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992.

Walton, John H., ed. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Vol. 1. Genesis-Deuteronomy. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009

Wesley, John. *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI:

Zondervan, 1987.