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# The “Kabod Yahweh” in the Priestly Wilderness Traditions

Numbers 14:10 as a Case Study

*Mathew Olickal*

## 1 Introduction

At the centre of Israel’s identity and self-understanding as the chosen people of God lies the story of exodus which is renewed each year in the Passover celebration. Israel’s exodus from Egypt is foundational to the Sinai covenant, but the theophany (appearance of the **כבוד יהוה**) and Moses’ direct meetings with God on Sinai serve as the basis for the Law and a new covenant with Israel. Next to the exodus, the wilderness wandering traditions appear central to the historical consciousness of Israel which chronicle the movements of the Israelites from Egypt to the entrance and conquest of the Promised Land. Central thematic elements of the wilderness wanderings include the revelation of God’s name, the establishment of the covenant, giving of the Law, the divine provision, the complaints and rebellions of the people and leaders etc., which play an essential role in the theology of the Pentateuch.

The priestly (hereafter P) narration of the wilderness wandering period is preponderantly characterised by the appearance of the **כבוד יהוה** which helps the author to connect the wilderness wandering period to the exodus event and the Sinai covenant and to guarantee the presence of God among the people. The purpose of the P author in ingeminating the appearance of the **כבוד יהוה** is to link the wilderness period to the cluster of exodus-Sinai theophanies. In some places, especially in the priestly corpus of the Pentateuch, the appearance of the **כבוד יהוה** resolves problems incited by leaders and people, and thus the jeopardised relationship of Israel with their God is restored and strengthened. The scope of this article is to discuss the role of **כבוד יהוה** in the P wilderness traditions, presenting its role and relevance in the Scout story (Num 13–14) as a case study.

## 2 כבוד יהוה in the Priestly Wilderness Tradition

Glory (כבוד) is essentially and primarily a divine quality, which ultimately belongs to God, and often signifies his self-manifestation in a visible sign of his presence. “It represented God’s glorious presence: awesome, multifaceted, partly mysterious but also protective and encompassing.”<sup>1</sup> The phrase “the glory of Yahweh” (כבוד יהוה) occurs frequently in the OT<sup>2</sup> which is suggestive of his visible and active presence in the midst of his covenant people (Exod 16:7). Etymologically, the phrase כבוד יהוה indicates the power, authority and honour of God, the revelation of his power and characteristics, which is often conceived as the manifestation of Yahweh to the people of God. The noun כבוד is generally used of an external appearance of splendour or wealth<sup>3</sup> and in the P section of the Pentateuch the כבוד “is depicted as a visible shining splendor which accompanies Yahweh when he draws near to reveal himself to Israel (Exod 14:4,17-18; 16:10; Num 17:7)”<sup>4</sup>. In the P tradition, the presence of כבוד יהוה is often felt in terms of fear, awe, amazement, and it is worthy of worship and adoration<sup>5</sup>.

As maintained by the P school the כבוד יהוה is the majestic appearance of Yahweh in the fire (cf. Exod 24:16-18). It is the only form in which Yahweh’s presence can be visibly apprehended in the P tradition. It is the self-manifestation of the Lord which reveals his majesty and glory, not a mere “fire phenomenon” as such<sup>6</sup>. The noun כבוד acquires central significance in P, a concept that is definitive of P’s theology in the combination כבוד יהוה. P uses the noun כבוד to describe the glory and splendour of Yahweh encountered for the first time at the

<sup>1</sup> STUART, *Exodus*, 560.

<sup>2</sup> The word כבוד appears around 200 times in the Hebrew Bible. In the MT כבוד appears in various contexts. One of the most important uses of כבוד is to explain God’s revelation to Israel which describes the visible manifestation of the presence of God. כבוד יהוה appears almost 37 times in the MT. It is seen by Moses (Exod 33:13-23), by Israel (Exod 16:7, 24:17) and appears to the elders (Deut 5:24; Isa 24:23); it is seen in the sanctuary (Ps 26:8) and in the clouds (Exod 16:10; Num 14:22, Ps 97:6). For a detailed study of כבוד יהוה, see STRUPPE, *Die Herrlichkeit*; WESTERMANN, *Die Herrlichkeit*, 115-137.

<sup>3</sup> It is used of riches in Gen 31:1; Isa 10:3; Hag 2:7; Ps 49:17, of success in Gen 45:13; 1 Kgs 3:13, and of beauty in Isa 35:2; cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 156.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. STUART, *Exodus*, 376.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ELLIGER, *Leviticus*, 131; VON RAD, *כבוד*, 240; ZIMMERLI, *Ezekiel*, 123f.; GRAY, *Numbers*, 154; BERNINI, *Numeri*, 154; BUDD, *Numbers*, 156.

summit of Sinai (cf. Exod 24:15-18) which celebrates the distinctiveness of the Sinai event over against everything that Israel had previously experienced or encountered. That which is revealed at Sinai will be described thenceforth as כבוד יהוה<sup>7</sup>.

### ***2.1 Cultic and Historic Perspectives of כבוד יהוה in the P Tradition***

In the P section of the Pentateuch the כבוד יהוה occurs in two different contexts: Firstly, it appears in the passages connected to Sinai that treat the establishment of the cult (e.g., Exod 24:16; 40:34; Lev 9:6,23) and secondly, the combination is found in the narrative section of the wilderness wandering (e.g., Exod 16:7; Num 14:10; 16:19; 17:7; 20:6). The use of כבוד יהוה in the first context is connected to Mount Sinai, where the cult is established. Everything that follows participates in both structures, the inaugural and the continuation. Israel becomes a religious assembly united around the divine presence<sup>8</sup>, i.e., the כבוד יהוה, with the establishment of the covenant on Mount Sinai. Israel has to maintain this privileged relationship by being a holy people. During the wilderness wandering כבוד יהוה appears at threatening moments to resolve the problems caused by the leaders or people. Thus, through the use of כבוד יהוה, the P author connects the wilderness events with the experience at Sinai and, in this way, the כבוד יהוה assumes a cultic and historic perspective in P wilderness tradition<sup>9</sup>.

P's conception of the glory of God is markedly different from that of other pentateuchal sources. Theophany as the symbol of divine intervention at some critical points in the history of Israel was important to the P school. We find such a situation in many places where the people or the leaders murmur and rebel against God and Yahweh intervenes to resolve the problem. Such an intervention of God by way of a theophany is mainly seen during Israel's wilderness wandering period where the כבוד יהוה appears at critical points to resolve the crisis occasioned by the murmuring of individuals or community. "In priestly narratives, God's glorious presence appears at critical junctures,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. WESTERMANN, כבוד, 808-810.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. SKA, Reading the Pentateuch, 190.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. WESTERMANN, כבוד, 811.

dramatically quells rebellion, and restores order (Num 16:19; 17:7; 20:26).”<sup>10</sup> There are five such episodes related in the OT and all five are found in the P wilderness wandering tradition: Exod 16 (the manna), Num 14 (the scouts), Num 16:1-35 (Korah’s rebellion), Num 17:6-15 (people’s grumbling), and Num 20:1-13 (the water at Meribah).

## 2.2 *Protective and Disciplinary Functions of כבוד יהוה*

The intervention of God by way of the appearance of the כבוד יהוה is oriented towards two directions: one that resolves the problem without punishing the leaders or the people and the other which resolves the threatening moment of rebellion by judging (punishing) the unruly leaders and/or the people. “Israel’s grumbling thus becomes occasion for a response of Yahweh that gives further proof of his Presence.”<sup>11</sup>

The manifestation of God’s glory in the P stratum at times had a salvific and protective role. On their way from Egypt, the Israelites grumbled for food and, while Aaron was telling the people that God had heard their complaints, the כבוד יהוה appeared in a cloud. Yahweh spoke to Moses promising the people plenty of meat and bread that very evening (Exod 16:10-12) and thus this visible display of God’s presence proved to the people that Yahweh was with them in times of need. Another occasion in which the glory of God resolves the problem is at Meribah when the people complained about water and the כבוד יהוה appeared to suggest a solution to the problem (Num 20:1-13).

The כבוד יהוה also manifested itself when God punished the people for their disobedient and rebellious behaviour. When the Israelites refused to go up and take the Promised Land, the כבוד יהוה appeared at the tent of meeting and announced judgment on the congregation (Num 14:10-25). When Korah and his company rebelled against Moses’ leadership, it appeared and punished the rebellious group (16:19-33). Again, the very next day after the dramatic demise of Korah and his friends, the whole congregation grumbled against Moses and Aaron that they were responsible for the deaths of the “the Lord’s people” (עם יהוה) and this complaint of the people brought another theophany to protect Moses and Aaron and punish the people by a plague (17:9-15).

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<sup>10</sup> LEVINE, *Numbers*, 364.

<sup>11</sup> DURHAM, *Exodus*, 221.

In both these instances the manifestation of the כבוד יהוה gives further proof of Yahweh's presence, his active and continuous presence among the covenant people. The stories of grumbling and rebellion during the wilderness wandering period thus becomes occasions for the P author to establish beyond doubt that Yahweh is truly and actually present as he had promised before. In the following section the role and function of the כבוד יהוה in the scout story is analysed.

### 3 כבוד יהוה in the Scout Story (Num 14:10)

The scout expedition in Num 13–14 and the resultant rejection of the Promised Land is one of the fascinating narrations in the OT. The scout expedition begins on a positive note, but culminates in the forty-years' wandering of the exodus generation in the wilderness and the misfortune of being prevented from entering the land of promise. It forms even one of the most grievous incidents in the history of the chosen people of God and is classified as the most consequential rebellion in the Pentateuch, especially in the book of Numbers. It also drew attention from various corners owing to the heterogeneous character and the presence of redundancies and inconsistencies, especially due to the severity of the divine judgement on the people of God that deprived them of the Promised Land.

The scout narrative answers some vital questions related to the people of Israel and their entry into the Promised Land: Why the Israelites were not able to enter the Promised Land immediately after leaving Sinai? Why they had to wander in the desert for forty years? Why they had to enter the Promised Land from east, through the Transjordan areas, not from the south? The scout story with its details helps the reader to understand these fundamental questions and thus the reader is prepared for the subsequent sections of the book of Numbers<sup>12</sup>. It is not impossible to recognize the pivotal and crucial role of the scout narrative in Num 13–14 in the overall structure of the book of Numbers<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> LEE, *Punishment*, 121-123, divides Num 10:11–36:13 into thirty-six individual units. He maintains that “the spy story is related to the substantive content of the thirty-six units and thus signals a structurally decisive break within Numbers 10:11–36:13 ... Its thirty-six units are structured by the concept of Israel's failed campaign to conquer the promised land from the south”. (LEE, *Punishment*, 216.)

<sup>13</sup> Many commentators have figured out this pivotal function of Num 13–14: LEVINE, *Numbers*, 372, notes that Num 13–14 plays “... pivotal function within the overall historiography of Numbers, and within Torah literature as a whole.”; OLSON, *Numbers*, 86,

Numbers 13–14 occur in the section where the people of Israel march in the desert towards the Promised Land, i.e., in the unit 10:11–21:20 where the chosen people of God are marching with Yahweh in the wilderness<sup>14</sup>. He always helps the people; but, at the same time, he punishes all the rebellious behaviour of the people. Thus, there are many rebellions narrated in this section: complaining in the desert (ch. 11); Aaron and Miriam speaking against Moses (ch. 12); the rebellion of the scouts and the people (chs. 13–14); the revolt of

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remarks that “the spy story in Numbers 13–14 plays a crucial role within the unifying literary and theological structure of the book of Numbers”.

<sup>14</sup> Authors throughout the centuries found it difficult to arrive at a definitive structure of the book of Numbers. Consequently, many attempted to find out some kind of solutions to the structural problem of the book. Thus, different proposals are offered by scholars. Based on the geographical signals indicated in the book Numbers is divided as follows: Num 1–10 the desert of Sinai; Num 11–21 from Sinai to Moab and Num 22–36 in the plains of Moab. Plaut goes for a four-part division of the book of Numbers: (1) 1:1–10:10 – the regulations promulgated at Sinai, (2) 10:11–20:1 – highlights of the early days of the march, (3) 22:2–24:25 – the book of Balaam, and (4) 25:1–36:13, the events immediately preceding the invasion of Canaan; cf. PLAUT, *The Torah*, 1011. Wenham observed that there are certain “bridge passages” of narrative nature which are inserted between the three important legislative blocks (which he names as the three law-givings), namely, chs. 1–10 Sinai, 12:16–20:1 Kadesh and chs. 22–36 Moab. Between these blocks there are certain bridge passages: from Sinai to Kadesh (10:11–12:16) and from Kadesh to Moab (20:1–22:1); cf. WENHAM, *Numbers*, 14–18. OLSON, *The Death of the Old*, 35, divides the book into two parts considering the genealogies presented in the book: chs. 1–25 present the death of a rebellious generation and chs. 26–36 present the story of the new generation that enters the Promised Land. Douglas has offered a ring structure analysis of Numbers. In her opinion the narrative flow of the book is interrupted by six blocks, which she names as the “blocks of law”. These blocks are 5:1–6:27; 10:1–10; ch. 15; chs. 18–19; chs. 28–30; 33:50–35:34; cf. DOUGLAS, *In the Wilderness*, 118–126. For Knierim the fundamental structure of the book of Numbers is based on the pattern of plan and execution of the plan. In his opinion, Numbers has a conceptual unity of its own, it is a saga of a migratory campaign and therefore its structure is based on the campaign preparation and the campaign execution. Thus, the book of Numbers exhibits two principal divisions: (1) Num 1:1–10:10 – the preparation of the campaign and (2) 10:11–36:13 – the campaign itself; cf. KNIERIM, *Numbers*, 155–164). Ska offers an improved version of the proposal of Knierim. He subdivides further the second division of Knierim into two subsections: (1) the march in the wilderness (10:11–21:20) and (2) the beginning of the conquest (21:21–36:13). He offers the following division of the book:

- (1) 1:1–10:10 – Preparation for the campaign,
- (2) 10:11–36:13 – Execution of the campaign,
  - (a) 10:11–21:20 – The march in the wilderness,
  - (b) 21:21–36:13 – The beginning of the conquest.

The author prefers the proposal of Ska, which is primarily based on the structural division of Knierim; cf. SKA, *Reading the Pentateuch*, 37–38.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (chs. 16–17); the waters of Meribah (20:1-13); the bronze serpent (21:4-9); the worship of Baal Peor (ch. 25). The most important rebellion among these is the rebellion of the scouts and the people narrated in chs. 13–14, where they refuse to conquer the land which resulted in their wandering in the wilderness for a long forty years period and in their exclusion from entering the Promised Land. Moreover, the rebellion of the scouts and the people is depicted more serious than the golden-calf apostasy (Exod 32) because here all the exodus generation is punished to death due to their rebellious behaviour.

The scout story narrative in Num 13–14 includes two separate story layers, exhibiting, at the same time, some inconsistencies and redundancies. Two separate scout narratives, namely, JE and P, are incorporated in Num 13–14 which are blended together in a later period by a P editor forming a single narrative<sup>15</sup>. The P version is not just a reworking of the JE material; it has its own structure and coherence. It is evident that most of the basic story elements are found in both versions; but it does not provide the justification to deny the presence of more than one source in the scout story<sup>16</sup>.

In our analysis of the pivotal role of the כבד יהוה in the scout story, the responses (i. e., of people, Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb) to the report of the scouts will be examined first, followed by an investigation of the riposte of Yahweh to the rebellion of the people. Secondly, the decisive role of the כבד יהוה in resolving the crisis caused by the refusal of the people to conquer the Land will be elucidated.

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<sup>15</sup> The author proposes the following source division of the scout story based on the literary clues (inconsistencies, repetitions and doublets, the stylistic differences and the vocabulary) that would lead one to unravel various strands of materials and discover the existence of different sources within the narrative: JE story – Num 13:17b-20.22-24. 26bβ-31; 14:1b.7bβ-9.11-25.39b-45; P story – 13:1-17a.21.25-26ba (excluding the reference to Kadesh in v. 26).32-33; 14:1a.2-7ba.10.26-39a. The JE story layer exhibits consistency and it is concluded that there existed once an account that formed a parallel version to the P account. It is also held that there existed an earlier narrative prior to the present JE version, since in the JE layer some later additions are identified. The unit 14:13-19, where Moses' intercession is narrated, could be taken as a later addition to the first JE scout story layer. The JE version of the scout story is considered older than the P version.

<sup>16</sup> The P story was composed as a separate and independent narrative and it exhibits a continuous narrative flow even with the JE material removed. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the P material was transmitted as an independent story, not just a mere reworking of the JE material, since several elements in the P material do not evidence any JE influence.

### 3.1 Responses to the Report of the Scouts

The P author expressly mentions that the scouts returned to Moses and Aaron, and to the whole people of Israel after exploring the land (Num 13:26). The report of the scouts is narrated in v. 32 with an introduction that the scouts brought to the people “a bad report” (דַּבַּת הָאָרֶץ) about the land. This preliminary and preparatory statement itself announces that what is going to follow is something contrary to what is expected and anticipates the justification of the punishment of the scouts. The author specifies that the bad report was about the land they explored and thus focuses attention on the sin of rejecting the land. The report of the scouts consists of four separate announcements: The land that they have gone through is a land that devours its inhabitants (v. 32), the people that they saw in the land are of great size (v. 32), they saw the Nephilim there (v. 33), and they felt like grasshoppers before them (v. 33).

Four responses to the report of the scouts are narrated: the response (a) of the people, (b) of Moses and Aaron, (c) of Joshua and Caleb, and (d) the riposte of Yahweh. The כָּבֵד יְהוָה appears at the beginning of the response of Yahweh to the rebellion of the people and thus it functions as a theophanic moment that heightens the seriousness of the rebellion of the people which ends up in the judgement of the whole exodus generation.

#### 3.1.1 Open Rebellion of the People (14:1-4)

The response of the people consists of unexpected reactions from the people of God<sup>17</sup>: The people first lament of their situation and then question the good intentions of Yahweh<sup>18</sup> and, finally, decide against all the promises and plan of Yahweh for Israel as the covenant people. They choose the land of slavery instead of the land of freedom.

The P author is very attentive to portray a double face of rebellion, i.e., against Yahweh and against Moses. The people expressed their disapproval of bringing them out of Egypt and wished to die in the wilderness. The author highlights with a special emphasis that “all the congregation” (כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל)

<sup>17</sup> Seven reactions are narrated by the author: all the congregation raised a loud cry (14:1); all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron (v. 2); they wished to die (v. 2); they accused Yahweh of bringing them out of Egypt to the promised land to be killed by the enemies (v. 3); anxiety about their wives and children (v. 3); they wished to return to Egypt (v. 3); finally, they decided to elect a new leader who would take them back to Egypt (v. 4).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 151.

murmured against Moses and Aaron. They also accuse Yahweh of evil intentions, i.e., he brought them out of Egypt to kill them in the wilderness (14:3). It is climaxed in their decision to choose a new leader who would take them back to Egypt (v. 4), which, at the same time, becomes a rebellion against Yahweh and Moses. It is against Yahweh because it is the Lord who chose and appointed Moses as their leader; it is a rebellion against Moses since he is the one who led them out of Egypt. The Israelites themselves wanted to choose a new leader as opposed to Moses, whom Yahweh had chosen<sup>19</sup>.

The scouts committed sin by speaking evil report against the land which led the people to murmur (לון, תלנות) and thus they end up in rebellion against the Lord. In the P story the use of the verb לון and its noun form תלנות explain the nature of the response of the people and these terms signify much more than its simple meaning “to murmur” or “murmuring”<sup>20</sup>. It indicates a rebellion against Yahweh where the scouts and the people reject the Promised Land, and thereby incur punishment for their rebellious behaviour. The true nature of this murmuring is seen as an open act of rebellion against Yahweh (v. 9) and an obstinate refusal to believe his words and trust in his power. The people are repudiating the faithfulness of their God and questioning the capability of Yahweh in fulfilling the promises (v. 3) and, consequently, they reject Yahweh and his covenant<sup>21</sup>.

The term lûn consequently discloses at the center of OT theology a type of sin in which God’s people as a whole rejects the liberation effected by him and thereby its own redemptive future in the dangers of the interim (wilderness), between liberation (exodus) and fulfillment (conquest) out of blindness and impatience, misunderstanding its God. This type of rebellion calls the deliverer God into court (a pretrial charge that leads to trial) and rejects salvation as a whole. It is therefore deadly for the rebels (Num 14:27ff.).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Leaders (שׂר) are generally those men who headed up the tribal units in the book of Numbers (e.g. 1:4,16; 10:4; 13:3; 14:4; 17:18; 25:4,15; 30:2; 31:26; 32:28; 36:1). They are chosen either directly by Yahweh (1:4) or through Moses (13:3). The selection of a leader is based on God’s choice, and presumably some competence on the part of the potential leader; cf. BARTLETT, *The Use*, 1-10; ASHLEY, *Numbers*, 246.

<sup>20</sup> The verb לון “to murmur” and its noun form תלנות “murmuring” is used many times (לון: vv. 27,29,36; תלנות: v. 27) in the scout story and emanate a special significance in the P story layer. This verb is used specifically to point out the fact that the people grumbled against Yahweh and it eventually led to the chastisement.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. OLSON, *The Death of the Old*, 146.

<sup>22</sup> KNIERIM, לון, 645-646.

### 3.1.2 Act of Prostration and the Appearance of כבוד יהוה

Alarmed by the murmuring of the people Moses and Aaron fall on their faces before all the congregation (14:5). The act of prostration by Moses and Aaron is typical of P in the book of Numbers (e.g., 16:4,22; 17:10; 20:6)<sup>23</sup> and it usually appears in the priestly author’s stories of disaffection.

To fall on one’s face can indicate many things in the OT: pleading for life, an act of religious worship, a sign of respect to God in a situation of theophany, etc. The authors debate on the role and meaning of the act of prostration in the scout story: Some are of the opinion that the action of prostration is before the people since there is a threat to the life of Moses and Aaron and they are pleading to the people for their lives<sup>24</sup>. Some others claim that prostration is a normal response to the theophany in P<sup>25</sup>. Coats suggests that prostration points out that both Moses and Aaron stand aside and let Yahweh react as he chooses<sup>26</sup>. Ashley thinks that the motives of intercession and worship are probably present in Num 14:5<sup>27</sup>. Budd holds that prostration is clearly intercessory as in 17:6-15, aimed at averting divine wrath and in the P scout story it averts immediate wrath of Yahweh and as a result of that Joshua and Caleb get an opportunity to intervene<sup>28</sup>.

Generally, the action of “falling on face” denotes a gesture of self-abasement or esteem before one of higher rank (e.g., Lev 9:24; Josh 7:6; 1 Sam 25:3; 2 Sam 9:6; Ruth 2:10). It is an act expressive of awe, or entreaty, or contrition before Yahweh<sup>29</sup>. But here the action of “falling on face” is before the people (לפני כל קהל עדת בני ישראל). But it does not denote that the prostration is before the people and, in this case, לפני must mean “in front of” not “before”<sup>30</sup>. It should be surmised that their act of prostration is before Yahweh, which is to be understood from the sudden and unexpected appearance of the כבוד יהוה, and the prostration before Yahweh, however, is not merely an act of reverence.

<sup>23</sup> The act of prostration is described many places in the OT: Gen 17:17; 24:64; Lev 9:24; Josh 7:10; 1 Sam 25:23; 2 Sam 9:6; 1 Kgs 18:7; Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 11:13; 43:3; 44:4; Dan 8:17; cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 156.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. DE VAULX, *Les Nombres*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy*, 205.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. COATS, *Rebellion*, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ASHLEY, *Numbers*, 247.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 156.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. GRAY, *Numbers*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 156.

It is not clear, however, from the context whether the gesture of prostration is an attitude of intercession. Moses' and Aaron's prostration cannot be taken as a counterpart of the JE narration of the long intercession of Moses. In the JE story the complier narrates the long intercessory prayer of Moses on behalf of the people. But in P we note that Moses does not intercede for the people and the gesture of "falling on face" is difficult to take as a gesture of intercession since there are no textual evidences in the P scout story to consider it as an act of intercession. One thing is certain: their prostration anticipates the appearance of יהוה. "כבוד יהוה. "It anticipates the appearance of God to the rebellious people and shows the leaders' submission, not to the rebels, but to God."<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1.3 The Response of Joshua and Caleb

Following the negative response of the people and the silent prostration of Moses and Aaron the P author introduces the two faithful scouts, Joshua and Caleb<sup>32</sup> who respond positively to the scout report. They make a persuasive but vain appeal to the people, exhorting them to trust Yahweh who is able to fulfil his promises to them. In fact, they try to persuade the people to conquer the land in obedience to God.

They both tear their clothes (14:6) in a show of grief and distress over this refusal to enter the land<sup>33</sup>. Tearing of garments in the Bible is presented as a sign of distress (see Gen 37:29; 1 Kgs 21:27; Isa 19:1; 22:11; 36:22; Jer 36:24; Joel 2:13; Esth 4:1) or as a symbol of mourning for the dead (see Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 1:3.11; 3:31; 13:31; Jer 41:5)<sup>34</sup>. Their act of rending the clothes, in our context, means that they oppose their fellow scouts who spoke evil of the land and resist the people who rebelled by their decision to abandon Yahweh and Moses by deciding to return to Egypt. They separate themselves from the other scouts and insist on the need to trust in the power of Yahweh.

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<sup>31</sup> KNIERIM, *Numbers*, 187.

<sup>32</sup> In the JE story the only faithful scout is Caleb, whereas the P also includes Joshua along with Caleb as the faithful and obedient scout. Both Caleb (representative of Judah) and Joshua (representative of Ephraim) and their descendants will enter the Promised Land. Thus, the P author emphasizes that the promise continues to affect Israel as a whole; cf. WIDMER, *Moses*, 252.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. OLSON, *Numbers*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. ASHLEY, *Numbers*, 248.

### 3.2 *Resolution of the Crisis through a Theophany*

The response of the Lord is narrated in Num 14:10.26-35 which begins with the appearance of the כבוד יהוה in the Tent of Meeting. Then the author mentions the fault of the people that sparked the anger of Yahweh (v. 27) which is followed by the swearing formula (v. 28) that introduces the judgement (v. 29) and the exclusion from the Promised Land (v. 30a). Joshua and Caleb are exempted from the punishment (v. 30b) and is followed by the promise of the new generation that will conquer the land (v. 31). The death of the exodus generation (v. 32) and the forty-years’ wandering in the wilderness (vv. 33-34) are mentioned, and finally, the section is concluded with the reaffirmation of the punishment (v. 35). In this section we deal only three important fields of the divine response, namely, the theophany that resolves the problem, the oath formula that introduces the judgement and the divine judgement.

#### 3.2.1 *Appearance of the כבוד יהוה*

While in the JE version Moses reminds the people of the protection and guidance of Yahweh in conquering the land at the face of the distrust of the people in the Lord (14:8-9), the P author narrates the appearance of the כבוד יהוה as a divine response to the three-fold responses of the people and leaders (v. 10). It is Yahweh himself who resolves the problem through a theophany and, instead of resolving the tension caused by the rebellious behaviour of the people, the theophany heightens it<sup>35</sup>; the כבוד יהוה appears to judge and punish the rebellious people, not to save or deliver them.

As we have mentioned earlier, in the P stratum the appearance of the Glory of God put an end to a rebellion or a crisis (e.g., 16:19; 17:7; 20:26). Normally, the appearance of the כבוד יהוה is a sign of divine favour to the people; but in 14:10, the כבוד יהוה becomes a sign of judgement and punishment. For the P author the theophany helps to resolve the climactic confrontation between the faithful to the Lord (Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb) on the one hand and the rest of the people on the other, which comes to an end with the intervention of the כבוד יהוה. For the P scout story, the intervention of the כבוד יהוה is an action or event serving as an introduction to the punishment of the rebellious generation. The appearance of the כבוד יהוה serves a two-fold purpose for the P author:

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. SHERWOOD, *Numbers*, 161.

Firstly, it saves the leaders from the wrath of the people who wants to stone them, and, secondly, it introduces the divine intervention which announces the chastisement for the rebellious people<sup>36</sup>. Resolution of the murmuring crisis is introduced with the appearance of the כבוד יהוה. “This judgment is the pinnacle, not only for the murmuring scene described in this pericope, but for the entire sequence of murmuring scenes beginning with Exod 14:11.”<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2.2 Oath Formula

Immediately after the appearance of the כבוד יהוה, the P author speaks of a divine oath (14:28 חִי אֲנִי נְאֻם יְהוָה) which announces the judgement and punishment of the wilderness generation. In Num 14:28 we find the phrase נְאֻם יְהוָה “the utterance of the Lord” which is used only twice in the Pentateuch (Gen 22:16; Num 14:28)<sup>38</sup>. In the P scout story, it introduces Yahweh’s declaration of

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 160.

<sup>37</sup> KNIERIM, *Numbers*, 188.

<sup>38</sup> The root נְאֻם in its noun form appears 376 times in the MT; 365 times it is used as a formula of divine utterance and eleven times to designate human utterance; cf. EISING, נְאֻם, 110. The verbal form of the root appears only once in Jer 23:31 and is possibly a denominative verb. In Jer 23:31, the meaning of the noun appears perspicuously where Yahweh declares his opposition to the false prophets who add to their statements נְאֻם which means that “God said it”. This emphasis is correspondingly clear in Ezek 13:7 where God discredits the false prophets by announcing that they saw no true visions and claimed divine authority when God had not spoken. It is interesting to note that, in Jer 9:21, Yahweh asked the prophet to preface his oracle with נְאֻם יְהוָה כֹּה דְבַר “this is a נְאֻם of Yahweh” which guarantees the divine authority of the message from God coming through the prophet. The noun appears almost always in formulaic expression which declares the divine authority of what is uttered. In MT נְאֻם appears in parallel or in variation with דְבַר (e.g., Jer 23:31; Ezek 37:14; Zech 12:1) and hence it simply means “to speak”; cf. EISING, נְאֻם, 110. The LXX consistently uses λέγειν to translate נְאֻם. The original form and function of the formula is found in the ancient sayings in the oracles of Balaam as an old visionary formula; cf. ALBRIGHT, *Oracles of Balaam*, 207-233. This expression did not originally belong to the prophetic style; cf. LINDBLOM, *Die literarische Gattung*, 67. The modification from an old visionary utterance to a Yahweh pronouncement formula is believed to be first found in Amos; cf. BAUMGÄRTEL, *Die Formel ne’um jahwe*, 287-289. The phrase is used frequently in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is used in Jeremiah 5 times as concluding the speech of Yahweh, 31 times as introduction to the prophecy and 42 times in other functions; cf. RENDTORFF, *Zum Gebrauch der Formel ne’um jahwe*, 27-37. In Ezekiel, it is used about 40 times in the final position, 20 times in other formulas, 13 times is used in connection with the oath formula חִי אֲנִי and 9 times as prophetic formulaic expression. Later the formula is employed more frequently in Haggai and Zechariah; cf. BAUMGÄRTEL, *Die Formel ne’um jahwe*, 286.

the chastisement for the disloyalty of the people of Israel. The etymology of this word is not clear and certain. This root is used almost exclusively for divine speaking and therefore its usage invites a special consideration of the authority of what is said as a divine oracle<sup>39</sup>. Rinaldi attempts to differentiate the meaning of the noun נאם with דבר: In his opinion נאם means an active revelation of God, while דבר indicates an inspired utterance of a prophet<sup>40</sup>. Thus, the divine oath introduced by יהוה נאם implies an active revelation of God which is thematically connected to the appearance of יהוה כבוד.

The formula יהוה נאם is augmented by the divine oath חי אני “as I live” and thus draws attention to the seriousness of the utterance (see also Ezek 20:3,31; 33:11). The occurrence of נאם in the P scout story, outside the prophetic books, exposes the gravity of the situation and the severity of the punishment. It conveys a prophetic dimension to what is declared by Yahweh. It introduces Yahweh’s declaration of the chastisement for the disobedience and distrust of the people of Israel who refused to begin the conquest and thus rejected the Promised Land.

### 3.2.3 Judgement

The divine oath introduces the judgement of the people. The people of God are called עדה הרעה “evil congregation” twice (Num 14:27.35)<sup>41</sup> by Yahweh himself; the “holy people” of God have become an “evil congregation” because they have murmured against the Lord and refused to obey him. The divine judgement is expressed in two subtle statements in v. 34, namely, תשא את עונתיכם “you shall bear your iniquity” and וידעתם את תנואתי “you shall know my opposition”.

a) *You shall bear your iniquity*: The divine judgement first and foremost is mentioned in the statement of Yahweh that the people shall bear their iniquity (תשא את עונתיכם). It denotes the sum of the past misdeeds against Yahweh, especially, that is connected to the scout story. Twice is mentioned this

<sup>39</sup> Many associate the root נאם to Arabic *n'm* (cf. GKC § 477). Some consider נאם either as a Qal passive participle of *n'm* (“something whispered”) or as a *qutūl* form; cf. BARTH, *Die Nominalbildung*, 129.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. RINALDI, *Alcuni termini ebraici*, 271-273.

<sup>41</sup> MILGROM, *Numbers*, 114, claims that in Num 14:27 the expression עדה הרעה refers to the scouts and in v. 35 it is used for Israel. There is no solid basis for claiming that the reference in v. 27 is used for the scouts. Moreover, v. 27b refers to the Israelites as a whole.

expression (vv. 33-34) in the P story, which is linked to the chastisement imposed upon the people by Yahweh. Despite the diversity of opinions among the scholars, the noun עון is unquestionably connected to guilt and punishment, at least in the P scout story in Num 13–14. The noun עון which means “iniquity”, “guilt” or “punishment for guilt” is a collective noun that points out the guilt caused by sin and its consequences<sup>42</sup>. The verdict of Yahweh “you shall bear your iniquity” evidently expresses an assertion of iniquity which leads to the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

b) *You shall know my opposition*: The second part of the divine judgement is that the people of God shall know the “opposition” of the Lord. In the P scout story, the expression וידעתם את תנואתי (14:34) explains the result of the disobedience and unfaithfulness of the scouts and the people of Israel. The word תנואתי “my opposition” expresses an active opposition from God’s side to Israel<sup>43</sup>. The noun תנואה is found only twice in the MT, here and in Job 33:10<sup>44</sup>. The exact meaning of תנואה in Num 14:34 remains difficult and puzzling. The theological difficulties inherent in the translation of this phrase<sup>45</sup> are reflected in

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<sup>42</sup> The use of the noun in singular can have a collective meaning: for, e.g., God says of the Amorite about their misdeeds: “The perversion (singular) of the Amorite is not complete” (Gen 15:16). The collective meaning is found when the widow of Zarephath complains to Elijah that he came to “bring my perversion/iniquity (singular) to remembrance” (1 Kgs 17:18); cf. KNIERIM, *Die Hauptbegriffe*, 186, 236, 238, 242.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. SNAITH, *Numbers*, 247-248; MCEVENUE, *Source-Critical Problem*, 458.

<sup>44</sup> It is a derivative from the verbal root נוא which represents a negative reaction to a planned action. The same root is not attested in other semitic languages, though it is found in Akkadian (In Akkadian, the same root means “to turn back” or “to turn away”.); cf. BAKER, *תנואה*, 312.

<sup>45</sup> Loewe, based on the root נוא, translates the noun תנואה as “frustration”. He also notes that this noun could be rendered objectively or subjectively. The objective rendering of תנואתי would mean “my being frustrated (by Israel’s contrariness)” which would suggest that God can be thwarted in his plans and purposes; cf. LOEWE, *Divine Frustration*, 141. The first shade of meaning in the subjective understanding would mean “my denying you the entrance to Canaan”. This would become meaningful in the scenario of the punishment of forty years of wandering in the wilderness, though it calls into question the divine omnipotence. In the second shade of meaning, in the subjective understanding, the expression may mean then: (1) my frustrating of my own purpose concerning you (this interpretation would harm the understanding of divine prescience) or (2) my frustrating of my covenant or oath with you (this understanding would be contrary to the divine immutability); cf. LOEWE, *Divine Frustration*, 141-142.

the translation of this תנואתי in v. 34 in various languages<sup>46</sup>. In our pericope, the phrase תנואתי implies an “opposition” or “displeasure” and the context of our pericope compels us to think that it is something more than just a general opposition from the part of Yahweh. The noun תנואה “opposition” is also central to the understanding of the P story and is inherently connected to the appearance of the כבוד יהוה. Its appearance in the scout story is to highlight Yahweh’s opposition (תנואה) to the rebellion of the people.

### 3.3 *Reversal of the Exodus and the Covenant*

The rebellion of the people is grounded in a misinterpretation of the exodus event and the Sinai covenant as a total failure and aims at its reversal. The exodus generation is guilty of challenging both exodus and the conquest, which form two major confessional elements in Israel’s history and religious heritage of the people of God<sup>47</sup>. The Israelites wish to return to Egypt (Num 14:3) and decide to elect a new leader who would take them back to Egypt (v. 4), which is portrayed as a rebellion against Yahweh and Moses. The Latter Prophets consider “returning to Egypt” a synonym for rebellion against God (see Isa 30:1-7; 31:1-3; Jer 2:18; Ezek 17:15)<sup>48</sup>. There are a few occasions in the wilderness sojourn, after coming out from Egypt, that the people looked back to Egypt and voiced their appreciation for their life in Egypt because they had abundant food or thought they were safe and probably wished to return (see Exod 14:11-12; 16:3; Num 11:4ff.). But, in all these instances, they never decided to return to Egypt nor wanted to elect a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. But in the scout narrative they rebelliously decide to return and determined to elect a new leader.

Here for the first time, the murmuring is followed by a move to return to Egypt. The murmuring tradition therefore involves not simply an expression of a wish that the Exodus had not occurred or a challenge of Moses’ authority in executing the Exodus, but now an overt move to reverse the Exodus. Yahweh is the God “who brought Israel out of

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<sup>46</sup> “And ye shall know my breach of promise” (KJV); “and you will know My opposition” (NASB); “and learn what it means to reject me” (NJB); “Thus you will realize what it means to oppose me” (NAB); “and know what it is like to have me against you” (NIV); “and you shall know my displeasure” (NRSV); “e conoscerete la mia ostilità” (CEI).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. BURDEN, *The Kerygma*, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ASHLEY, *Numbers*, 247.

Egypt.” The murmuring results in a rejection of this deity and a move to elect a new leader to take the people back to Egypt.<sup>49</sup>

In the P story, the decision to return to Egypt is rendered more than a mere rebellion; it is amounted to be a reversal of the exodus. It, in effect, denies and nullifies all the promises and salvific plans of Yahweh for his chosen people. The exodus from Egypt is viewed as the powerful manifestation of Yahweh’s power and the confirmation of the fact that Israel is the chosen people of God, which is further corroborated in the Sinai covenant. Hence, the decision to return to Egypt is essentially a decision to reverse the exodus and invalidate the Sinai covenant. In this context, the appearance of the כבד יהוה in the P scout tradition calls attention to the seriousness of the rebellion which, in fact, is the overturning of the exodus event and the repudiation of the Sinai covenant.

## 4 Conclusion

The wilderness wandering period includes several incidents in which the people murmured about water, food and leaders, and they form part of a larger picture of the Israelites failing in their relationship with God. As we have noted above, the appearance of the כבד יהוה is important and decisive in the P layer of the wilderness wandering tradition. Normally, the appearance of the כבד יהוה is a sign of divine favour to the people; but strangely in Num 14:10 the appearance of the כבד יהוה becomes a sign of punishment, which aims at resolving the climactic confrontation between the leaders and the people.

It is commonly held that the P author reworked the earlier tradition supplementing it with materials to highlight its own theological concerns<sup>50</sup>. The writings of the priestly school, to which a major part of the book of Numbers is ascribed, are formed mainly from the religious life of the post-exilic community<sup>51</sup>. The hierocratic structuring of that society is very well reflected in

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<sup>49</sup> COATS, *Rebellion*, 146.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. COLLINS, *Introduction*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> The final mould of the P scout story might have been shaped in the post-exilic times. Some of the possible traits of this post-exilic date and situation of the P scout story are: the portrayal of the land as “evil” perhaps prefigures an unwillingness to engage in the return in post-exilic times; the forty years of wandering in the wilderness might be considered as an echo of the exilic experience; the hope in the new generation may also prefigure God’s purpose in post-exilic times; the reference to the people of God as “evil community” and the

the narration of the scout story<sup>52</sup>. The portrayal of the double face of rebellion, i.e., against Yahweh and against Moses and Aaron, is typically a P interpretation of the scout story. The introduction of Aaron and Joshua in the scout story unveils the special P interest, even though they do not play any distinct role in the scout story. The final priestly redactor has heightened the seriousness of the rebellion by introducing the appearance of the *כבוד יהוה*.

A three-fold purpose in narrating the appearance of the *כבוד יהוה* can be verified in the P layer of the wilderness wandering traditions, especially in the scout story. Firstly, the manifestation of the *כבוד יהוה* connects the wilderness wandering period with the exodus event and the Sinai covenant, which forms the conclusion of the exodus event. The same *כבוד יהוה* that appears at the inauguration of the cult continues to be present in the history of Israel. Secondly, the appearance of the *כבוד יהוה* is a proof of Yahweh’s active and continuous presence among the chosen people in the wilderness wandering period, even when the people rebelled against their God. Finally, it is the *כבוד יהוה* that formed Israel a religious assembly and a covenant community, which has its beginning in the exodus event, and is continued through the wilderness period. Even when Yahweh punished Israel when they rebelled by refusing to begin the conquest and by deciding to go back to Egypt (Num 13–14), he has not abandoned them, nor has he taken away the status of the covenant community, neither has nullified the covenant. Thus, the God experience at Mount Sinai continues to dominate the history of Israel, although in a different manner.

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rebellion characterized as “whoredoms” might be the interpretation of the exile by the P author; cf. BUDD, *Numbers*, 160.

<sup>52</sup> In the case of the scout story the hierocratic structuring is evident: e.g., importance is given to the divine command to scout the land, Aaron appears along with Moses, the appearance of the Lord resolves the problem, importance to the tribal scouts, etc.; cf. GRAY, *Numbers*, li.

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### Summary

The appearance of כבוד יהוה, whether for salvation or judgement, is a prominent theme in the OT, especially in the decisive moments of Israel's history like exodus, the institution of the monarchy and the consecration of the temple, the exile and return from the exile. It acquires a vital role in the P wilderness wandering narrations where its appearance resolves problems and sustains the endangered relationship of Israel with their God. At the same time, on some other occasions its manifestation heightens the tension in the narration which culminates in the punishment of the people involved. The author studies the role and function of the manifestation of the כבוד יהוה in the P wilderness wandering traditions, examining Num 14:10 as a case study.

*Keywords:* Num 13-14, scout story, כבוד יהוה, theophany, wilderness wandering traditions.

*Zhrnutie*

Zjavenie כבוד יהוה, či už kvôli záchrane alebo súdu, je poprednou témou v SZ, najmä v rozhodujúcich okamihoch dejín Izraela ako exodus, ustanovenie monarchie a posvätenie chrámu, exil a návrat z neho. Téma získava dôležitú úlohu v kňazských tradíciách o putovaní púšťou, kde zjavenie PÁNOVEJ slávy rieši problémy a zachováva ohrozený vzťah Izraela s jeho Bohom. Zároveň však v niektorých prípadoch objavenie PÁNOVEJ slávy zvyšuje napätie v príbehu s vyvrcholením v potrestaní ľudu. Autor príspevku skúma úlohu a funkciu zjavenia sa כבוד יהוה v kňazských tradíciách o putovaní púšťou na prípade Nm 14,10.

*Kľúčové slová:* Nm 13–14, príbeh o prieskume, כבוד יהוה, teofánia, tradície o putovaní púšťou.

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