

# This Word is Your Life: The Theology of ‘Life’ in Deuteronomy\*

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‘Life’ (the root חַיִּי) is one of the key theological concepts in the book of Deuteronomy, as this article will endeavour to outline.<sup>1</sup> The analysis will begin with an overview of the occurrence and distribution of the root within Deuteronomy and then consider the most significant contexts in which it appears. The argument aims at showing how the theme of life reaches its climax at the end of Moses’ Moab covenant speech (Deut 30), how it is transformed anew in the final equation of ‘this word’ with life (Deut 32:47) and how the theology of life is conceived as one of the theological and hermeneutical foundations of the framing passages of Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Georg Fischer has dedicated his life to learning and teaching the Biblical ‘word’, as Deuteronomy encourages its readers to do. He has also received great joy and fulfilment from his engagement with the Bible, in accordance with Deuteronomy’s promises. And, again according to Deuteronomy’s wish, he has strengthened the fervour for studying the ‘word’ in many ‘sons and daughters’—to which this book is a little testimony. I am delighted to dedicate this article to Georg—my teacher, confrère and friend. May his engagement be blessed and bear fruit in abundance ‘all the days of his life’. I am grateful to Norbert Lohfink, Eckart Otto and Jean-Pierre Sonnet for their kindness in reading a draft of this paper and for their inspiring comments.

1 As far as I am aware, no systematic analysis of this motif in Deuteronomy has been previously published. A few first observations were put together by BAUDISSIN, *Leben*, 147f. In his detailed analysis on Deut 8:3, PERLITT, *Mensch*, 423, had already sketched Deuteronomy’s theology of life. EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 233f, recently showed the distribution of the root within Deut and rightly pointed to its importance in the book. The most systematic analysis of the root within the Hebrew Bible is RINGGREN, *chāyāh*.

2 In analysing the canonical form of the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy I do not presuppose a homogenous genesis for the book. On the contrary, there are good reasons to assume that the book contains pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic material which was unified through compositional and redactional processes; how this happened is, of course, a highly disputed matter. (On the history of research and an exemplary theory see OTTO, *Deuteronomium 1,1–4,3*, 62–257.) However, previous investigations have presented evidence that many aspects of the canonical text suggest a systematic composition that functions as a complex product of literary art (some examples of which I collected in MARKL, *Gottes Volk*). It seems, therefore, that the authors, composers and redactors of the book took pains to work out a functioning literary whole despite the tensions that the material necessarily contains.

### 1. Occurrence, distribution, forms and formulations

The principal Hebrew root referring to the semantic field of life (חיה) occurs in Deuteronomy in the verb ‘to live, to make / keep alive’ (חיה, 18x),<sup>3</sup> the adjective ‘alive’ (חי, 8x)<sup>4</sup> and the noun ‘life’ (חיים, 12x).<sup>5</sup> The following table presents the distribution of these three lexemes within the book.

	Deut 4–8	Deut 12–20	Deut 28–33	total
Verb חיה	4:1, 33, 42; 5:24, 26, 33; 6:24; 8:1, 3 (twice)	16:20; 19:4, 5; 20:16	30:16, 19; 32:39; 33:6	18x
Adj. חי	4:4, 10; 5:3, 23	12:1	31:13, 27; 32:40	8x
Noun חיים	4:9; 6:2	16:3; 17:19	28:66 (twice); 30:6, 15, 19 (twice), 20; 32:47	12x
total	16x	7x	15x	38x

A first glance at the table shows that there are clear concentrations of the root חיה in the first part of Moses’ parenetical speeches in Deut 4–8 (16x)<sup>6</sup> and in the chapters towards the end of the book (Deut 28–33, 15x), while it appears quite infrequently within the legal code of Deuteronomy (just 7x in Deut 12–20). Moreover, one recognises a clear dominance of the verbal forms in Deut 4–8 (10x), while the noun is most frequently attested in Deut 28–32 (8x). We find the highest density of the root in Deut 4–5 (11x) and Deut 30 (7x).

These three chapters contain nearly half (18 out of 38) of the occurrences of the root.<sup>7</sup>

3 Most verbal forms occur in qal (‘to live’); just 6:24; 20:16 (according to the Masoretic vocalisation) and 32:39 are in piel (‘to make / keep alive’).

4 The masculine plural of the adjective looks identical to the absolute form of the noun (both חיים). The syntactical contexts, however, always allow us to distinguish clearly between the two in Deuteronomy. Compare the analysis in MANDELKERN, *Concordantiae*, 387–389.

5 Another noun derived from this root meaning ‘the (wild) animals’ (חיה, Deut 7:22) is not included in the following analysis. The table in GERLEMAN, חיה, 412f, shows the distribution of the root within the Hebrew Bible.

6 It is noteworthy that the root does not occur in Deut 9–11. One might suspect that the theme of the Golden Calf contaminates, as it were, the first half of this section (9:1–10:11) with a notion of ‘death’ (cf. 9:28). Against the backdrop of this paradigmatic story of life-destroying sin, the following parenthesis also (10:12–11:32) contains severe warnings (10:16; 11:3f, 6, 16f, 26–29). Could the promise of life be deliberately avoided in Deut 9–11?

7 This distribution is all the more noteworthy if we compare it with the distribution of מות ‘to (make) die / death’, which occurs most frequently in the Code:

The *verb* is used six times in final clauses that are always directed to the second person, usually expressed by 'in order that' (למען) + yiqtol (4:1; 5:33; 8:1; 16:20; 30:19) and once by w-qatal (וַחַיִּיתָ, 30:16). Moreover, there is a seventh final expression in the infinitive piel construction 'to keep us alive' (לְחַיֵּתֵנוּ, 6:24).

Six occurrences of 'and he shall / will live' (וַחַי, w-qatal, 4:42; 5:24; 19:4, 5) or 'and he survived' (וַיַּחַי, wayyiqtol, 4:33; 5:26) are concerned with the theme of survival in the context of the Horeb theophany (4:33; 5:24, 26) and the cities of refuge (4:42; 19:4, 5). These verbal forms always appear at the end of a syntactical construction. Three additional forms in the third person singular occur in the reflection of 8:3 (יַחַיֵּה 2x, 'he will live') and the blessing for Reuben (יַחַי, 'may he live', 33:6).

The remaining two verbal forms, both in piel, are exceptional: 'But as for the towns of these peoples that Yhwh your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive' (לֹא תַחַיֶּה, 20:16) is the only negative expression concerning life in Deuteronomy. And 'I kill and I make alive' (אֶחַיֶּה, 32:39) is the only form in the first person.

The *adjective* 'alive' occurs five times in the plural with reference to Israel. These constructions are worded in a formulaic style. The phrase 'all of you / us (who are) alive today' (4:4; 5:3) refers to Israel in Moab. In contrast, a relative clause employing the independent personal pronoun, 'all the days that they / you are alive upon the land' (4:10; 12:1; 31:13), refers to the future Israel after the occupation of the land. Once, the adjective in the plural is used for the 'living God' (5:26). The remaining two occurrences of 'alive' are in the singular: Moses' implicit allusion to his impending death 'as I am still alive (חַי) with you today' (31:27) creates a contrast with the quotation of God in the immediately following Song: 'alive (חַי) am I forever'.

The first four occurrences of the *noun* appear in the formulaic expressions 'all the days of your life' (כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ, 4:9; 6:2; 16:3) and 'all the days of his life' (כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו, 17:19, referring to the future king, כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו), which are not employed any more in the rest of the book. 'Your life' is used five more times for Israel's life (חַיֶּיךָ, 28:66 twice; 30:6, 20 and חַיֶּיכֶם, 32:47). Simply 'life' without suffix and definite article occurs exclusively in 30:15, 19 (twice).

	Deut 2–10	Deut 13–26	Deut 30–34	total
Verb מָוַת	2:16; 4:22; 5:25 (twice); 9:28; 10:6	13:6, 10, 11; 14:1; 17:5, 6 (3x), 7, 12; 18:11, 16, 20; 19:5, 11, 12; 20:5, 6, 7; 21:21, 22; 22:21, 22, 24, 25; 24:3, 7, 16 (3x); 25:5 (twice), 6; 26:14	31:14; 32:39, 50 (twice); 33:6; 34:5, 7	47x
Noun מָוַת	----	19:6; 21:22; 22:26	30:15, 19; 31:27, 29; 33:1	8x
total	6x	37x	12x	55x

This technical survey shows that the root  $\text{חיה}$  is frequently employed—like many other important expressions in Deuteronomy—in formulaic language.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there seem to be significant differences between the usage of the lexemes in the initial parenthesis of Deut 4–8 and the texts connected with the Moab covenant (esp. Deut 28; 30). Both observations suggest that the concept is deliberately and systematically used. This first impression will be corroborated by the following analysis, structured according to thematic clusters and along the lines of the formulaic expressions presented in this survey.

## 2. ‘So that you may live’ (Deut 4:1; 5:33; 6:24; 8:1; 16:20; 30:6, 16, 19)

Deuteronomy introduces the theme of ‘life’ at the very beginning of Moses’ first parenetical speech, which focuses on Israel’s observance of the law in Deut 4:1–40: ‘So now, hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may *live* ( $\text{לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶיךָ}$ )’ (4:1). This first token of the ‘parenetical scheme’ (see below) introduces the characteristic double expression, ‘statutes and ordinances’, which refers to the Deuteronomic law.<sup>9</sup> ‘So that you may live’ is the first indication of the aim and purpose of Moses’ teaching of the law.<sup>10</sup> ‘Living’ is the first consequence that the people should enjoy when they hear the law. This reviving effect even precedes the conquest of the land: ‘... so that you may *live* and enter and occupy the land that Yhwh, the God of your ancestors, is giving you’ (4:1).<sup>11</sup> In the situation before the conquest of the land, ‘to live’ may well have the connotation of ‘surviving’ impending threats (cf. 7:1, 17–21; 9:1–3).

The last occurrence of Deuteronomy’s typical cluster of legal terms occurs within the final rhetorical climax of Moses’ long discourses (30:15–20). It is followed by the same verb: ‘What I am commanding you today, to love Yhwh your God, to walk in his ways and to observe his commandments and his decrees and his ordinances, and you shall *live* ( $\text{וַחַיֶּיֶךָ}$ )’ (30:16).<sup>12</sup> Now, at the end of Moses’ parenetical speeches, the space of Israel’s ‘living’ is seen as the land (in perfect continuity with the logic of 4:1): ‘and you shall live and multiply, and Yhwh your God will bless you *in the land* ( $\text{אֶרֶץ}$ ) that you are entering to possess’ (30:16, cf. ‘your life and the length of your days to dwell *upon the soil* [ $\text{אֶרְמוֹה}$ ]’, 30:20). The choice

8 For classical analyses of formulaic expressions in Deuteronomy see LOHFINK, *Hauptgebot*, 51-136 and 295-306; WEINFELD, *School*, 320-365.

9 The double expression is used for structural inclusions in 5:1; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16, which shows its systematic importance: BRAULIK, *Ausdrücke*, esp. 34; LOHFINK, *Neubegrenzung*, esp. 240.

10 Comparable ideas are expressed in the wisdom literature: RINGGREN, *chāyāh*, 335.

11 In the light of 4:4, this may resound more specifically: ‘you, who have survived, may continue to live.’

12 This series of expressions refers, just like ‘statutes and ordinances’, to the Deuteronomic law as a whole (cf. BRAULIK, *Ausdrücke*, 32).

between life and death that Moses expounds in 30:15–18 is reinforced when Moses finally urges Israel, in the most powerful words, to make their decision: 'Choose life *so that you may live* (לִמְעַן תַּחֲיֶה)!' (30:19).

In addition to these pivotal passages, which enclose Moses' great law-related discourses in a big envelope,<sup>13</sup> there are four verbal clauses (5:33; 6:24; 8:1; 16:20) and a nominal formulation (30:6) that refer to life as an aim. All these passages are presented in the following table:

4:1	ובאתם וירשתם את־הארץ ...	למען תחיו	שמע אלה־החקים ואל־המשפטים ...
5:33	... וטוב לכם והארכתם ימים בארץ ...	למען תחיון	בכל־הדרך ... תלכו
6:24	כהיום הזה	לחיתנו	לעשות את־כל־החקים האלה ליראה את־יהוה אלהינו
8:1	ורביתם ובאתם וירשתם את־הארץ	למען תחיון	כל־המצוה ... תשמרון לעשות
16:20	וירשת את־הארץ	למען תחיה	צדק צדק תרדף
30:6		למען חיך	לאהבה את־יהוה אלהיך ...
30:16	ורבית וברכך יהוה אלהיך	וחיית	ולשמר מצותיו וחקתיו ומשפטיו
30:19	אתה זרעך	למען תחיה	ובחרת בחיים

All the passages in this list that employ 'to live' as a finite verb are examples of what Lohfink called the 'parenetical scheme', which consists of an admonition to 'keep commandments' and an 'indication of blessing' (4:1; 5:33; 8:1; 16:20; 30:16, 19).<sup>14</sup> The formulations in 6:24 (infinitive construct) and 30:6 (noun) are derived from the scheme, but are not parenetic themselves. The text of 6:24 professes that Yhwh has indeed brought the 'blessing' of life to Israel ('as it is at this day') as promised in the scheme, and 30:6 announces God's circumcision of the heart of the Israelites 'for the sake of their life'.

Lohfink provided a first analysis of the verbs employed in the 'indication of blessing' (limited to Deut 5–28). He distinguished between verbs that refer to the conquest of the Land (ירש, בוא, חזק) and expressions that refer to well-being in the

13 The thematic connection between 4:1–4 and 30:15–20 was already seen by WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 199.

14 On the parenetical scheme see LOHFINK, *Hauptgebot*, 90–97; on the 'indication of blessing' ('Segenshinweis') pp. 81–85 and 305–306. (WEINFELD, *School*, 307–313, treated the latter theme under the title 'doctrine of reward'.) The admonition is worded in exceptional ways in 16:20 and 30:19, but these passages belong to Moses' general rhetoric of admonition. Rhetorically, the 'indication of blessing' is a 'motive clause', which are frequent in the laws of Deuteronomy, and even more so in the parenesis. For a survey of types of motive clauses see SONSINO, *Motive Clauses*, 70–76; on motive clauses in Deut 12–26 pp. 92–95 and 250–253.

Land (ברך, חיה, טוב ל-, יטב ל-, רבה, יטב, ארך ימים).<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of our investigation, it should be noted that most of these verbs are employed in series connected with ‘to live’ (the only exceptions are חזק and יטב), whereby ‘to live’ is always the first verb, usually followed by others.<sup>16</sup> Only the last passage employs ‘to live’ alone (30:19). Well-being and a long life in the Land specify God’s gift for those who ‘live’. Moreover, we observe that the first and the last motive clauses with למען, the most prominent conjunction in Deuteronomy’s motive clauses, read ‘so that you may live’ (4:1; 30:19).<sup>17</sup>

I shall add just a few observations:<sup>18</sup>

‘You shall walk in all the ways ..., *so that you may live*, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land ...’ (5:33) is the last element of a parenetical framework (5:1, 32–33) that includes Moses’ retelling of the Horeb events (5:2–28).<sup>19</sup> Israel’s obedience, expressed here by the metaphor of the way (5:32–33), refers in the context of Deut 5 especially to the Decalogue, and aims at long life in the Land.

‘Then Yhwh commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear Yhwh our God, for our good [for] all days, *so as to keep us alive*, as it is at this day’ (6:24) is a decisive element in the catechetical speech of parents in response to their children’s questions about the commandments (6:20–25). Norbert Lohfink brought forward good reasons why the piel of חיה could be translated as ‘maintain’ in this context.<sup>20</sup> This translation is most appropriate if we presuppose (as Lohfink does)<sup>21</sup> that the catechetical speech is meant to be spoken in the Promised Land. It cannot be excluded, however, that this catechesis was (also) composed for addressees in Exile or diaspora,<sup>22</sup> and at some stage it was certainly used by ad-

15 LOHFINK, *Hauptgebot*, 81-85; רבה is employed with both ‘days’ and the people as subjects. The most recent analysis of the motive clauses with יטב / טוב is MICHEL, *Leben*.

16 In 4:1 follow בוא and ירש; in 5:33 טוב ל- and ארך ימים; in 8:1 רבה, בוא and ירש; in 16:20 ירש; in 30:16 רבה and ברך.

17 למען is used 44 times in Deuteronomy, more often than in any other book of the Hebrew Bible; after 30:19 it occurs in 31:12, 19, but not in motive clauses.

18 30:6 will be discussed below, pp. 81f.

19 Cf. MARKL, *Dekalog*, 181–182. Deut 5:32 begins by resuming the final words of 5:1 (ושמרתם לעשות) and thus forms an inclusion.

20 LOHFINK, *Deuteronomy 6:24*.

21 LOHFINK, *Deuteronomy 6:24*, 113, argues from the context in 6:21–23: ‘There is no reason why there should be a danger that God, after having given the promised land to his people, would plan to wipe them out.’ While this danger is not mentioned in the immediate context, it is a major theme of Deuteronomy, esp. 4; 28; 29–30, and even in 6:15: ‘... lest the anger of Yhwh your God be kindled against you and he destroy you from the face of the earth.’

22 Deut 6:21–25 does not mention Exile, nor does it necessarily presuppose a setting in the promised land. 6:23 could have been worded: ‘He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land ... *as it is at this day*’ (compare, in contrast, 29:27: ‘Yhwh

addressees in this situation. The question of the child (6:20) may become even more urgent there. In this situation, it may well make sense to understand the gift of the divine commandment as a means of 'keeping' Israel 'alive'.

'This entire commandment ... you must diligently observe, *so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land ...*' (8:1) introduces the parenthesis of Deut 8. It is not by chance that this parenthetic scheme employs 'to live', since in 8:3 there follows a prominent reflection on human living 'from everything that comes from the mouth of Yhwh' (see below).

'Justice, justice you shall pursue, *so that you may live and occupy the land ...*' (16:20) is a unique, emphatic ethical parenthesis within the Deuteronomistic Code. It concludes the institution of judges (16:18–20) and follows immediately the prohibition of taking bribes (16:19), which is reinforced by its prominent theological foundation with the parenthesis: 'For Yhwh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe' (10:17). The only parenthetical scheme within the Deuteronomistic Code with 'to live' thus occurs in a passage that is directed against corruption and is of vital importance to the juridical system. It thus underlines that avoiding corruption is an essential lifeline for Israel.

It should be mentioned here that the institution of the cities of refuge (19:1–13) is an example of how a law serves to preserve life. Twice it is stated that the cities of refuge are instituted 'so that he [i.e. an accidental homicide] may live' (יָחִי, 19:4, 5). Moreover, Moses sets apart three cities of refuge in the transjordan territory (according to 4:41–43), where the purpose of preserving life is also explicitly mentioned (4:42). This is the only action that Moses performs (apart from speech-acts) within Deut 1–30. This action thus symbolizes on a narrative level the life-preserving character of the Deuteronomistic law.

All these observations show that the verb 'to live' is employed systematically in Deuteronomy, and that it is given a high rank in the 'hierarchy' of verbs referring to the gift that Moses promises to those who observe the Deuteronomistic commandments.<sup>23</sup> The parenthetical framework of Deuteronomy (esp. 4:1, 30:15–20) clearly defines the aim of the Deuteronomistic law: to make Israel live. This is reinforced by several repetitions and variations of the same motif in the parenthetical discourses and within the law code itself. This indication of the law's purpose is

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uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, *as it is at this day*'). However, the formulation 'as it is at this day', which is of the greatest significance for the implied addressees, is not used in 6:23, but in 6:24 'so as to keep us alive, as it is at this day'. Moreover, 6:25 could have read '... to observe this entire commandment in the land...'; instead, it reads '... to observe this entire commandment before Yhwh our God...' These observations may suggest that the wording of 6:21–25 was indeed chosen in a way that could be used by addressees in Exile or diaspora.

23 WEINFELD, *School*, 307: "'Life' in the book of Deuteronomy... constitutes the framework of reward.'

of the greatest hermeneutical significance. If the law is meant to make Israel live, it must not be interpreted or applied in a manner that destroys Israel's life.

3. *'Alive today' (Deut 4:4; 5:3) and  
'all the days' (Deut 4:9, 10; 6:2; 12:1; 16:3; 17:19; 31:13)*

Three formulations with 'alive' and 'life' are systematically interconnected through the word 'day' (יום) and additional elements and will thus be discussed together here: 'all of you / us alive today' (4:4; 5:3), 'all the days that they / you are alive upon the earth' (4:10; 12:1; 31:13) and 'all the days of your / his life' (4:9; 6:2; 16:3; 17:19).<sup>24</sup>

The two formulations at the beginning of Moses' first parenetical discourse (4:4) and at the beginning of his second address (5:3) are closely interrelated:

4:4	חיים כלכם היום	... alive [are] all of you today.
5:3	היום כלנו חיים	... today all of us [who are] alive.

Both contexts create a contrast between the present (in the narrated time of Deuteronomy) living generation and an earlier situation.<sup>25</sup> In the first context, Moses points out that those who had committed idolatry in the desert (Num 25:1–5; Deut 4:3) had been destroyed by Yhwh. Faithfulness to God is, therefore, a matter of survival and the prohibition of idolatry is of the highest relevance even before Israel's entry into the Land (and thus also in exile or diaspora). In the second passage, Moses emphasizes that Yhwh did not make his covenant with Israel's ancestors, but 'with us, even us, who are here today, all of us [who are] alive' (5:3). The differences in wording between the passages show a development: 'alive [are] all of you today' (4:4) emphasises 'today', while 'today all of us [who are] alive' places the stress on 'alive'. The fact that the present generation is alive demonstrates that they have not committed idolatry with Baal Peor (4:4) nor mistrusted Yhwh in Kadesh-barnea (1:35; 2:14). With these, Moses states (now in the first person plural), has Yhwh made a covenant at Horeb. Being alive is a consequence of trust in and faithfulness to Yhwh, which also indicates how Israelites will be able to stay alive.

'All the days that they / you are alive upon the earth' (4:10; 12:1; 31:13) goes beyond the generation that is alive 'today' and about to enter the Land. It includes

24 These are not the only passages in which our motif is systematically connected with the word 'day' (יום). The opposition between life and death in 30:15, 19 is in both cases connected with 'today' (היום). 'He / this / it is your life' (30:20; 32:47) is in each verse combined with 'days' (ימים).

25 By way of contrast, Moses' word in the singular 'as I am yet alive (חי) with you today (היום)' (31:27) creates a tension between the present day and Israel's future after Moses' death.

all future generations who enjoy their possession of the Promised Land; at the same time, the formulation implies that the time in question may be limited. The three contexts create continuity between God's commission of Moses at Horeb (4:10), the beginning of Moses' presentation of the Deuteronomic laws (12:1)<sup>26</sup> and his commandment to the elders and Levites to teach them publicly (31:13).<sup>27</sup> The tradition of teaching and learning the commandments that is founded at Horeb, enacted in Moab and institutionalized for the Promised Land, is thus presented as an essential aspect of Israel's being *alive* in the Land.

'All the days of your / his life' is the only formulation in which the noun 'life' occurs in Deut 1–27 (only in Deut 28–32 it appears as an independent noun).<sup>28</sup> Just like the previously discussed formulation with 'alive', it denotes in each context the period of time in which a commandment of Moses should be fulfilled. Israel ('you') is supposed not to forget the Horeb events (4:9), fear Yhwh and keep the commandments (6:2)<sup>29</sup> and 'remember the day you went out of the land of Egypt' (16:3) 'all the days of their life'. Likewise, the future king is commanded to read the copy of the torah 'all the days of his life' (17:19). Obviously, the formulation is employed only regarding commandments that are of the greatest importance, and it places extraordinary emphasis on them. While 'all of you / us alive today' has only an implicit parenetical aspect, since being alive is a consequence of not having mistrusted Yhwh and not having committed idolatry, 'all the days that they / you are alive upon the earth' and 'all the days of your / his life' is always employed in directly parenetical contexts. All these formulations imply that a faithful relationship with Yhwh and obedience to his commandments is immediately related to being alive. Just as being alive *'today'* is proof of previous faithfulness (4:4; 5:3), this fundamental attitude and the awareness of the most important experiences and commandments is a matter of *daily* life (4:9; 10; 6:2; 12:1; 16:3; 17:19; 31:13).

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26 In 12:1, the formulation bears specific juridical weight: it limits the validity of the Deuteronomic Code geographically to the Land and temporally to the duration of Israel's presence in the Land: LOHFINK, *Neubegrenzung*, esp. 250-253.

27 Moreover, 4:10 and 31:12–13 are strongly connected through the sequence of verbs שָׁמַע - לָמַד - יָרָא. Cf. SONNET, *Book*, 143-144; on the complete sequence of verbs around 'to teach / learn' in Deuteronomy and its implied theory of didactics see MARKL, *Gottes Volk*, 62-66.

28 The expression 'all the days' (כָּל-הַיָּמִים) is typical of Deuteronomy, which contains 12 out of 46 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.

29 4:9 and 6:2 are connected in addition by the expression 'children and children of children' (three times בְּנֵי), which occurs only once more in Deuteronomy (4:25).

#### 4. *Surviving the presence of the living God (Deut 4:33; 5:24, 26)*

In terms of Deuteronomy's inner chronology, the question of Israel's life is rooted in the crucial experience of the theophany at Horeb. This motif appears twice in the two chapters that reflect on the Horeb theophany (Deut 4; 5).

Firstly, it opens the finale of Moses' first parenthesis (Deut 4:1–40). The doubled rhetorical figure in 4:32–40 emphasizes Israel's knowledge of Yhwh's uniqueness (4:35, 39) which is grounded in their experience of the Horeb theophany (4:33, 36) and the Exodus (4:34, 37–38).<sup>30</sup> Moses had introduced Horeb as a main theme of this speech in v10 and pointed out that Israel had heard Yhwh's voice without seeing any form in v12, which sets the tone for a large portion of this discourse dealing with the Second Commandment (v15–19, 23–28). The dramatic circumstances of hearing God speaking at Horeb 'out of the fire' (v12, 15) had already suggested the danger inherent in this experience, but Moses underlines only in the final rhetorical climax that this meant a life-threatening danger that one should not expect to survive: 'Has any people ever heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire, as you have heard, and survived?'

The people themselves had expressed their astonishment about this experience at Horeb according to Moses' account in Deut 5:22–28.<sup>31</sup> Perceiving Yhwh speaking out of the fire (5:22) and out of darkness (5:23), Israel's representatives approach Moses and acknowledge their experience in an elaborate rhetorical construction, in which the contrast between living and dying is unfolded in a chiasmic arrangement:

- A** v24 Today we have seen that God may speak to a human being  
and they may *live* (וַיִּחִי).
- B** v25 So now why should we *die*? For this great fire will devour us!
- B'** If we hear the voice of Yhwh our God any longer, we shall *die*.
- A'** v26 For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God  
speaking out of fire, as we have, and *lived* (וַיִּחִי)?

It is obviously not by chance that Yhwh is called the 'living God' (אלהים חיים) precisely in this context.<sup>32</sup> Its specific meaning becomes visible if we analyse the

30 On the elements of this rhetorical scheme and comparable arguments in 8:2–6; 29:1–8 see BRAULIK, *Geschichtserinnerung*, esp. 177; on the Exodus-motif in 4:34, 37 see SCHULMEISTER, *Befreiung*, 25–38 and 185–187.

31 On the relationship between this account and Israel's reaction according to Ex 20:18–19 see MARKL, *Dekalog*, 219f and 227f.

32 This is the only occurrence of this expression in the Pentateuch. In the rest of the Hebrew Bible it is attested in not more than eight additional verses: six times in connection with the verb 'defy' (דָּרַךְ); in the mouth of David in 1Sam 17:26, 36; and in quotations of Hezekiah in 2Kgs 19:4, 16, cf. Isa 37:4, 17); and twice in Jeremiah (10:10; 23:36; see FISCHER, *Jeremia*, 383 and 708). Cf. KRAUS, *Gott*; KREUZER, *Gott*; RINGGREN, *chāyāh*, 338f; GERLEMAN,

theological motifs in which the expression is embedded. Since God was 'speaking out of the fire' (4:12, 15, 33; 5:26), Moses draws a conclusion about the nature of God in 4:24: 'Yhwh your God is a devouring fire, a zealous God.' This resounds in 'this great fire will devour us' (5:25). The combination of 'fire' (אש) and 'devour' (אכל) occurs twice more in Deuteronomy. The clause 'a devouring fire is he' (4:24) is applied to God's assistance during the conquest of the Land in 9:3. A last resonance of the motif appears in the Song of Moses, which quotes God: 'A fire is kindled by my anger ... and it devours the earth and its increase' (32:22). Here the divine fire is related to anger about Israel's future apostasy (32:21).

The divine fire from Horeb is, therefore, seen in Deuteronomy as a metaphor for the intense presence of a God who may in the future fight for Israel (9:3), but also burn in anger against the people (32:22). Both aspects are expressions of the character of Israel's zealous God (4:24). The divine words from Horeb, especially the Ten Words (4:13), and in particular the first commandments, are spoken 'out of the fire' of the divine zeal (compare אלה קנא in both 4:24 and 5:9). It may therefore be deduced that the characterization of Yhwh as 'the living God' in combination with 'the voice... speaking out of the fire' relates the quality of the divine life to God's zealous, fiery character. This same character of the life-taking and life-giving 'living God' becomes visible again at the end of the Song of Moses, where he is quoted: 'I kill and I make alive (אחייה); I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and swear: As I am alive (חי) forever!'<sup>33</sup>

It is for this reason that the intensity of the divine life is a possible source of danger for human life and that Israel's surviving the encounter with the divine fire at Horeb is so surprising. Israel's life is grounded in the miracle of having survived the Horeb theophany and revelation. While Israel heard the divine words at Horeb out of the fire, they experienced God as 'a devouring fire' and as 'the living God' (5:26). Whenever Israel hears the words from Horeb, they must remember their fiery quality and be surprised that they are 'alive today'.

##### 5. 'Choose life!' 'For this is your life' or 'he is your life'? (Deut 30)

Deuteronomy's theology of life culminates at the end of Moses' great discourses (Deut 30). 'Life' and 'to live' are used precisely seven times within this chapter: the motif is introduced in the announcement of the circumcision of the heart (30:6) and unfolded in Moses' demand for a decision (30:15–20).<sup>34</sup>

Read in the canonical form of the Pentateuch, the prospect of Yhwh's circumcision of Israel's hearts 'for the sake of your life' (30:6) is a theological climax. It

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חיה, 415f. On the notion of the divine life and the gods as source of life in Akkadian texts see STEINER, *Leben*, 147.

33 On the formula חיה יהיה see RINGGREN, *chāyāh*, 339.

34 BRAULIK, *Säulen*, 94.

internalizes the sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17) and resolves the problem of the human heart (unfolded since Gen 6:5f).<sup>35</sup> It is the decisive act of divine grace that will enable Israel to be obedient after their gathering from exile (30:1–10). This passage clearly inverts curses from Deut 28, especially from their final section 28:58–68.<sup>36</sup> As the curses had announced that Yhwh would ‘scatter you’ (וּהַפִּיץ) ‘among all peoples’ (בְּכָל־הָעַמִּים), ‘from one end (קֶצֶה) of the earth to the other’ (28:64), Yhwh will gather Israel ‘from all the peoples (מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים) among whom Yhwh your God has scattered you (פִּיץ)’ (30:3), even if they were driven out ‘to the ends (קֶצֶה) of the heaven’ (30:4). And as Yhwh would take delight (שׂוֹשֵׁ) in bringing ruin to Israel according to the curses (28:63), he will return to take delight in doing them good (30:9).

In the light of these clearly intentional reversals, the motifs of ‘heart’ and ‘life’ may also operate in contrast to the final section of the curses. While Yhwh would give Israel in exile a ‘trembling heart’ (לֵב רֹנֵז, 28:65, compare פָּחַד לִבְבֶךָ ‘dread of your heart’ in 28:67) and a ‘languishing soul’ (נַפְשׁ, 28:65), he will circumcise their heart when they return from exile ‘so that you will love Yhwh your God with all your *heart* (לֵב) and with all your *soul* (נַפְשׁ)’ (30:6). While in exile ‘*your life* shall hang before you ... and you will not believe in *your life*’ (twice חַיִּךְ, 28:66), but on the return Yhwh will circumcise Israel’s heart ‘for the sake of *your life*’ (חַיִּךְ, 30:6).

The theme of life reaches its culmination in the most elaborate rhetorical climax of Deuteronomy at the end of Moses’ great speeches (30:15–20).<sup>37</sup> Only here in Deuteronomy ‘life’ appears as an independent, absolute and abstract motif (הַחַיִּים, 30:15, 19).<sup>38</sup> Rhetorically, the passage consists of two main sections, each of which sets forth the opposition between life and death at the beginning (v15, 19).<sup>39</sup> After its first proclamation (v15) Moses unfolds the alternative (v16 versus v17f). The second proclamation is reinforced by the preceding invocation of heaven and earth (v19) and prepares the demand to choose life. The keyword ‘life’ is a leading motif in the second part (v19–20): ‘I set before you *life* and death → choose *life* → for this / he is your *life*’. While life is first bracketed with

35 EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 156-200; EHRENREICH, *Tora*, 219-223; BRAULIK, *Glaubensgerechtigkeit*; BRAULIK, *Liebe*, 553.

36 Cf. STEYMANS, *Thronfolgeregelung*, 346f; BRAULIK, *Völkervernichtung*, 145-147; EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 193, and on the reversal of the curses related to ‘fruit’ (פֵּרִי) in 28:18, 33, 42, 51, 53 in 30:9 pp. 190-191.

37 LENCHAK, *Choose*, 202, calls 30:15–20 ‘the culmination’ of Deut 29–30. Moreover, by referring back the commandments (30:16) and to the blessings and curses (30:19), this passage brings the entire dynamics of Deut 1–30 to its final climax (cf. MARKL, *Gottes Volk*, 116-118). The alternative between life and death bundles the if-plots that characterize Deuteronomy as a whole into a single decision; cf. SONNET, *If-Plots*, esp. 466.

38 Similarly הַמּוֹת (‘death’ with definite article) occurs only in 30:15, 19.

39 Cf. LENCHAK, *Choose*, 201f.

'good' (הטוב) as death is with 'evil' (הרע, v15),<sup>40</sup> which may refer to both attitudes or actions and their consequences,<sup>41</sup> life and death are then equated with the 'blessing and course' (v19) that had been unfolded in Deut 28.<sup>42</sup> Life is thus seen as the sum of divine blessing that follows the obedience to Yhwh's voice (28:1–14).

The theme of life reaches its greatest intensity and urgency in Deuteronomy in the last two verses of Moses' monumental discourses (Deut 1–30). At this point, Moses declares the decision that is to be made 'today' a matter of heaven and earth, of life and death (30:19). 'Choose life' is the final directive that Moses expresses in his great discourses, which had been laden with directives. This is the last and decisive demand. 'Choose life so that you may live, you and your children' is the most powerfully condensed version of the 'parenetical scheme' in its widest sense. 'Choose life' means both the ethical option to live according to life-giving commandments because of faithfulness to Yhwh (v16) and the option for all the promised blessings (v19). 'Choose life so that you may live' implies the promise that Israel, if it chooses 'life', the religious and ethical engagement as conceived and proposed by Moses, in fact will actively and dynamically experience the consequence of this decision and 'live'.<sup>43</sup> 'You and your children' implies that the responsibility of the Israelites regarding this decision is transgenerational – it affects the lives of their children.

What 'life' really means is once again explained in the final verse (30:20)—if in a puzzling manner. 'Loving Yhwh your God, listening to his voice, and holding fast to him' is followed by the ambivalent phrase כִּי הוּא חַיִּיךָ, which may be translated 'for *this* is your life' or 'for *he* is your life'. The problem has intrigued countless translators and interpreters. Since antiquity, they have alternately chosen one or the other option: '*this* is your life' (e.g. LXX, Luther, Buber / Rosenzweig, NRSV, JPS, Traduction Oecuménique)<sup>44</sup> or '*he* is your life' (e.g. Vulgate, KJV, Luzzatto, Einheitsübersetzung, Biblia del Peregrino).<sup>45</sup> Recently, Grazia Papola and Ernst Ehrenreich have presented some of the reasons that can be adduced for

40 Within Deuteronomy, this opposition has its only parallels in 1:35, 39 and therefore recalls the failure of the first generation in the desert; 30:15–20, therefore, means a second chance: EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 270.

41 הטוב is used for the goods, bounty and well-being that follow obedience in 26:11, while הרע refers to sinful behaviour e.g. in 4:25.

42 For a list of contrastive correspondences between blessings and curses in Deut 28 see ZEHNDER, *Fluch*, 200f.

43 Cf. PAGANINI, *Deuteronomio*, 411: 'La 'vita' ... rappresenta il fine dell'obbedienza e, allo stesso tempo, anche la sua motivazione.'

44 LXX: τούτο ἡ ζωὴ σου; Luther und Buber / Rosenzweig: 'das ist dein Leben'; NRSV: 'that means life for you'; JPS: 'thereby you shall have life'; Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible: 'C'est ainsi que tu vivras'.

45 Vulgate: 'ipse est enim vita tua'; KJV: 'he is thy life'; Einheitsübersetzung: 'er ist dein Leben'; Biblia del Peregrino: 'él es tu vida'; LUZZATTO, *Commentary*, 558: ה' הוּא חַיִּיךָ.

each option.<sup>46</sup> Considering both the weight of scholarly reasoning and of traditional interpretation, one may easily arrive at a laconic conclusion like that of Richard Elliott Friedman: ‘I do not know which is correct.’<sup>47</sup>

The question, however, implies considerable theological weight: the verse either means ‘that God is the people’s life and the source of their being in their land a long time’ or ‘that the people’s choice to love, listen, and cling to God is their life and the source of lengthy time in the land.’<sup>48</sup> Is human activity, the engagement and obedience in the relationship with God the ultimate source of life, or is it Yhwh himself?

Syntactically, none of the options can be excluded.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, both options can be made plausible from comparable formulations within Deuteronomy.<sup>50</sup> Similar

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46 Cf. PAPOLA, *Alleanza*, 251–252, and EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 54. The latter makes a strong argument for a personal interpretation (‘he’), while he also acknowledges that this decision cannot be made with final certainty (p. 261, n.88).

47 FRIEDMAN, *Commentary*, 660.

48 FRIEDMAN, *Commentary*, 660.

49 **אִיִּי** most frequently refers to previously mentioned persons or nouns. If the masculine form may also refer to phrases is a question that has, as far as I can see, not yet been tackled. Doubtlessly, the feminine form can refer to phrases. E.g. in Ez 21:17, **כִּי הָיָא** refers to two preceding imperatives. In Ps 77:11, **אִיִּי** refers to the following infinitive absolute. For comparable usages of **אִיִּי** see e.g. Isa 1:13; 14:24; Ps 118:23; Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 4:4. (On the feminine for comparable references see JOÜON - MURAOKA, *Grammar*, 558). The consonantal text of the Pentateuch, however, rarely (and that of Deuteronomy never!) distinguishes the feminine from the masculine form—both are spelt **אִיִּי** (**הָיָא** occurs not more than 18 times in the Pentateuch: Gen 14:2; 19:20; 20:5; 26:7; 38:25; 40:10; Ex 1:16; Lev 5:11; 11:39; 13:6, 10, 21; 16:31; 20:17, 18; 21:9; Num 5:13, 14; on spelling anomalies of **אִיִּי** in Qumranic Hebrew see MARKL, **אִיִּי**, 750). The Massoretic vocalization distinguishes the two forms by a *Qere perpetuum*. Most likely, the reason for the phenomenon is a process at some stage of the transmission history of the Pentateuch. (For the classical explanation see JOÜON - MURAOKA, *Grammar*, 122. RENDSBURG, Look, suggested to see the form as a ‘result of the Hurrian and Hittite substratum in the very area where Hebrew first appears as a distinct dialect of the Canaanite language’ [p. 353], which leads the author to assume ‘that the Pentateuch is early’ [p. 368]; this proposal seems very unlikely.) It is difficult to assess the value of the ancient versions for the issue at stake. Since LXX reads τοῦτο – does this suggest a *Vorlage* that read **הָיָא**? Or did LXX read **אִיִּי** and consider τοῦτο a correct translation of **הָיָא**? Moreover, it is noteworthy that Samaritanus reads what the vocalization of MT suggests in both Deut 4:6 (**הָיָא**, see the following note) and 30:20 (**אִיִּי**). In case Sam preserves (regarding this particular issue of spelling) a more ancient manuscript tradition than the Masoretic consonantal text, it would strongly support the Masoretic *Qere*. Again, the Masoretic could have used a manuscript tradition (possibly related to Sam) to create the *Qere perpetuum*, while they rejected adaption of their consonantal text.

50 **אִיִּי** may well refer to Yhwh as in 25 other, unequivocal occurrences in Deuteronomy: 1:30; 3:22; 4:24, 35, 39; 7:9; 8:18; 9:3 (three times); 10:9, 17, 21 (twice); 18:2; 29:12; 31:3 (twice), 6, 8 (twice); 32:4, 6 (twice), 39. The closest syntactical parallel is 8:18, in

phrases in different contexts cannot clarify the meaning in the present context, precisely since their meaning is determined by their different contexts.<sup>51</sup> We depend on understanding the meaning of the phrase in its concrete, immediate context. And again, both options can be supported by substantial arguments. It is very plausible to assume that 'this is your life' summarizes in nominal formulation all the preceding occurrences of the parenetic scheme with 'so that you may live' (see above) that clearly referred to human obedience as the reason for life. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the dynamic moving from obedience to the commandments (30:16) towards the emphasis on the relationship with God (esp. *לֵאמֹר* and *לְדַבְקָהּ* in 30:20)<sup>52</sup> may lead towards a final theological climax that declares Yhwh himself to be life for Israel—an idea that could be supported by other passages that present Yhwh as the source of life (see below on 8:3).<sup>53</sup> On the whole, the contextual evidence from the parenetical scheme in Deuteronomy may slightly favour human effort as the source of life, while the statistics on the usage of *הוּא* in Deuteronomy and its Masoretic interpretation as masculine tend to favour the personal interpretation – 'he, Yhwh, is Israel's life'. Although it is really impossible to know how *הוּא* was originally spelt, I would like to suggest considering the possibility that the author(s) deliberately chose a form with am-

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which *הוּא* refers to Yhwh in a nominal *כִּי*-clause, whereby Yhwh is the object of the preceding clause: 'Remember Yhwh your God, for *he* is the giver of strength for you...' (cf. EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 262; also on another close parallel in 10:20f). On the other hand, the other syntactical option has a close parallel in 4:6, where *הוּא* clearly refers to the preceding two verbal clauses and is equated with abstract nouns in some form of parenetic scheme: 'Keep and do (them), for *this* is your wisdom and your understanding.' The fact that the Masoretes vocalized *הוּא* in 4:6 as feminine, suggests that they assumed that a reference to preceding phrases should be expressed by the feminine form. Against this backdrop, the Masoretic vocalization of *הוּא* in 30:20 as masculine seems to suggest that they interpreted *הוּא* as referring to Yhwh. However, these observations relate to the interpretation of the Masoretes (or the reading tradition that they have documented). It cannot clarify the meaning of the phrase at the time of its original composition.

- 51 The closest parallel within Deuteronomy is 32:47 'for it (the word) is your life' expresses a new idea that is very different from both options in 30:20, and thus cannot be adduced as favouring either of the two. The same is true for the closest parallel in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, Prov 4:13: 'for it (*היא*, instruction) is your life'. *היא* refers to *מוֹסֵר*, which is usually masculine, but seems to be used as irregular feminine in analogy to *הַכְּבוֹדָה*, with a parallel in Sir 6:22, MS A; cf. FOX, *Proverbs*, 180; on the role of wisdom for life cf. Prov 3:22; 4:22; 8:35. Similarly, the choice between serving Yhwh and other gods in Josh 24:15–22 (which EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 54, adduces as a parallel) is a related, but different, choice.
- 52 EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 260: 'Während v16 die rechtliche Seite der Gottesliebe entfaltet, betont v20 die Beziehungsdimension. Diese Dynamik macht deutlich, dass das Recht und die Entscheidung für das Leben letztlich auf die Gottesbeziehung zielen.'
- 53 In any case, 30:20 shows 'daß der Text ... in religiöse Tiefenbereiche zielt' (LOHFINK, *Bundesschluß*, 66).

biguous reference.<sup>54</sup> If this is true, they may have created a theological synthesis at the final climax of Moses' great discourses. While it means life for Israel to engage actively in the relationship with Yhwh, which includes obedience, it is also true that finally the living God from Horeb (5:26) is the source of all human life (8:3, cf. 32:39). This would indeed be a great summary of Deuteronomy's theology of life.

It remains here to point to another twist that Deuteronomy's theology of life takes at the end of the Song of Moses, at the rhetorical climax of Yhwh's dramatic final speech (32:37–42): 'See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive!' (32:39).<sup>55</sup> Again in verbal, dynamic form, Israel's choice between life and death, which Moses had solemnly presented, is dramatically inverted by Yhwh's voice as a warrior fighting for Israel.<sup>56</sup> Israel's life depends, according to the Song, on God alone. Yhwh is going to fight to rescue Israel's life, although they have committed idolatry and evoked Yhwh's fury (32:15–21). According to the Song, the reason for Yhwh's intervention for the sake of Israel is not their conversion, which is not even mentioned by allusion, but simply their weakness (32:36). The Song clarifies that life is not just a matter of human obedience, but fundamentally of divine grace. The tension though between divine sovereignty over life and death and human access to life through Moses' word is recreated in Moses' brief, final parenetic speech (32:45–47).

### 6. *This word is your life (Deut 8:3; 32:47)*

Before looking at the last major statement of Deuteronomy's theology of life (32:47) we should consider the thematically related passage of Moses' interpretation of the manna story (8:1–3). The homily of Deut 8 was introduced by the parenetical scheme 'observe this entire commandment so that you may live' (8:1, see p.75 and 77). The following parenthesis to 'remember' (זכר) the way in the desert (8:2) and the manna experience to 'understand' (ידע)<sup>57</sup> can be read as a theological explanation of the parenetic introduction (8:1). The way in the desert had been a test phase for Israel's observance of Yhwh's 'commandments' (מצוות, 8:2),<sup>58</sup> and Yhwh fed Israel with manna to make them understand 'that humans do not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes from the mouth of

54 The classical assumption is that the original spelling was אה for both the masculine and the feminine: JOÜON - MURAOKA, *Grammar*, 122.

55 CLAASSENS, Kill, 35, notes that the 'contrasting metaphors for God' in Deut 32 'are captured well in God's declaration in verse 39 that in many ways serves as a summary statement of the poem.'

56 Cf. more elaborately on this connection and its theological import, MARKL, Blaming.

57 On the sequence of these verbs see BRAULIK, *Geschichtserinnerung*, esp. 177.

58 In this context, 'commandments' may specifically refer to the Decalogue: BRAULIK, *Ausdrücke*, 28 and 32. For additional considerations, however, see the following note.

Yhwh' (8:3). The immediate context clearly shows that the latter phrase refers especially to Yhwh's commandment.<sup>59</sup>

The theological emphasis of the passage is that Yhwh himself is the source of both his commandment and life.<sup>60</sup> Two observations may support this claim.

Firstly, the phrase employs a wordplay between 'Yhwh' and 'will live' that is easily visible in the consonantal text (יהוה יחיה) and which was clearly recognizable in the reading as long as the Tetragrammaton was pronounced. This paronomastic sequence of words suggests that the name of Yhwh itself is the source of dynamic human life. Possibly, we should hear another, more distant wordplay between 'all that comes from' and 'this entire commandment': כל-מוצא (8:3) / כל-המצוה (8:1).<sup>61</sup> Moses' commandment in Deuteronomy comes, in the end, from the mouth of Yhwh (cf. כל-המצוה in 5:31 and וזאת המצוה, 6:1).<sup>62</sup>

59 The key word 'commandments' reappears in the parenetical conclusion of 8:6; 8:3 thus appears in the centre of 8:1–6; cf. OTTO, *Deuteronomium 4,44–11,32*, 911f, with a thorough discussion of 8:3 pp. 908–912. WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 390, refers to the phrase 'to come out' (יצא) from the 'mouth' (פה) of God (see Isa 45:23; 48:3; 55:11), which emphasises the efficiency of the divine utterance. Moreover, A LAPIDE, *Commentaria*, 432, refers to passages with 'to come out from' (יצא מן) God such as Gen 24:50, which imply the irrevocability of a divine decision. TIGAY, *Deuteronomy*, 361, refers to the parallel Akkadian expression *šīt pī*. The classical note on Egyptian parallels is BRUNNER, Munde. – Read within the context of the Pentateuch, Deut 8:3 can be seen as a summarizing evaluation of the manna-story in Ex 16. The rare motif of Yhwh's testing Israel (נסה, in the Pentateuch Ex 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 8:2, 16; 13:4) connects Deut 8:3 via the introduction in Deut 8:2 with Ex 16:4, which interprets the manna-story as a divine test: '... I will test them if they walk according to my torah or not.' Both obedience with its positive consequences (Ex 16:16–18, 22–24) and disobedience with its negative consequences (Ex 16:19–20, 25–28) show, according to Moses' interpretation, that the manna keeps its life-giving quality only under the condition that Israel is obedient to 'all that comes out of the mouth of Yhwh'. Against the backdrop of Ex 16, it is not just obedience by which Israel stays alive, but also Yhwh's grace despite of disobedience. The 'commandments' of Deut 8:2 could be read in the sense of Ex 16:28: 'How long will you refuse to keep my commandments (מצוותי) and instructions?' Although the 'commandments' refer here to specific instructions given within the manna-story in Ex 16 (even before the revelation of the Decalogue), they are just a test-case for any divine commandment given in the future. 'A key presupposition of the Deuteronomic interpretation is that the significance of the story is not restricted to Israel's time in the wilderness ..., but is of enduring significance even when circumstances change': MOBERLY, *Learning*, 224.

60 In this context it should be noted that the agent of the only two positive occurrences of חיה piel 'to keep alive / maintain' 6:24; 32:39 is Yhwh.

61 LEEUWEN, *Wordplay*, 57, perceived a general pun between מוצא and מצוה in 8:1, 2, 6, 11; moreover, he pointed out the connection with the Exodus motif in 8:14 (המוציאך) and the Yhwh's bringing forth of water from the rock for Israel in 8:15 (המוציא לך, p. 56); VEIJOLA, *Deuteronomium*, 220, saw a connection between מוצא and מצות in 8:2, 6.

62 The connection between these two verses has great systematic weight within Deuteronomy: see MARKL, *Words*, esp. 20; cf. in the same line FINSTERBUSCH, *Weisung*, 169–171 and FINSTERBUSCH, *Deuteronomium*, 82.

Secondly, the phrase employs twice the universal reference to the ‘human being’ with ‘to live’ (יחיה האדם), which connects this passage closely with Israel’s reaction to the Horeb theophany: ‘Today we have seen that God may speak to a human being and they may live (אִתְּהֵאדָם וַחִי)’ (5:24).<sup>63</sup> The inverted word sequence emphasizes the contrast. While Israel’s speech at Horeb had expressed (according to Moses) their astonishment that a human being may be able to survive divine speaking, Moses teaches that it is precisely what Yhwh speaks that makes human beings live.<sup>64</sup>

LXX adds ‘word’ (ῥῆμα) – ‘every *word* that comes out from the mouth of God’,<sup>65</sup> which has had a fruitful history of reception since the New Testament (Mt 4:4 // Lk 4:4).<sup>66</sup> One may wonder why LXX chose ῥῆμα here, while λόγος could have created a perfect link with its version of 32:47: ‘For not an empty word (λόγος) is this for you, for this is your life.’ The most likely reason seems to be that LXX chose ῥῆμα whenever the ‘word’ was connected with the motif ‘mouth’ (στόμα, compare 18:18; 19:15; 30:14; 31:19; 32:1).<sup>67</sup> LXX thus creates a strong link between the ‘word’ that comes out of the ‘mouth’ of God (8:3) and the ‘word’ that is in ‘your mouth’ (30:14).

While the previously discussed passage from Moses’ parenesis that prepares the Deuteronomic Code had expressed in a verbal clause that humans will live from what comes out of the mouth of Yhwh, Moses’ final little parenesis in Deuteronomy makes a thematically closely related statement—now in nominal formulation: Israel shall ‘lay your hearts to all these words ... for not a vain word is it, away from you, for it is your *life*, and in this word you will make long your days upon the land...’ (32:46–47).<sup>68</sup> The final formulation systematically connects two ideas from the end of the Moab Covenant speech (Deut 30). ‘For (כִּי) very near to

63 PERLITT, *Mensch*, 414, saw the connection, but did not evaluate its meaning.

64 Moreover, the combination of ‘human being’ (אדם) with ‘to live’ (יחיה) establishes a link with Lev 18:5: ‘You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances which a human being will do and live through them (וַחִי הָאָדָם וַחִי)’ (cf. Ez 20:11, 13, 21; Neh 9:29). Cf. OTTO, *Deuteronomium* 4,44–11,32, 912.

65 WEVERS, *Deuteronomy*, 146, notes that LXX speaks about the ‘mouth’ θεοῦ (and not κυρίου) and suggests that ‘to the translator the feeding of the people with manna was ... a matter of divine sustenance, a display of power’. Indeed, the general reference to the human being (ἄνθρωπος) may have inspired the choice of θεός rather than κύριος.

66 Cf. MENKEN, *Deuteronomy*, 49; on other possible areas of influence of this passage in Philo and Origen see DOGNIEZ - HARL, *Deutéronome*, 169–170.

67 In the Pentateuch, λόγος and στόμα never go together. Moreover, ῥῆμα κυρίου serves regularly to translate the expression פִּי־יְהוָה in Deut 1:26, 43; 9:23; 34:5 (DOGNIEZ - HARL, *Deutéronome*, 41; on the variation between λόγος and ῥῆμα for דבר in general see pp. 41–43).

68 VON RAD, *Deuteronomy*, 201, calls 32:47 ‘a pregnant phrase rarely equalled.’ LXX translates דבר here with λόγος, preserving the systematic connection with דברים (λόγοι, twice in 32:46 and once in 32:44, which form an inclusion with λόγοι in 1:1).

you (קרוב אליך) is the word (הדבר)' (30:14) is precisely converted into the negative formulation 'for (כי) not a vain word (דבר רק) is it, away from you (מכם)'.<sup>69</sup> 'For it is your life (כי הוא חייכם)' draws on 'for he / this is your life (כי הוא חייך)' (30:20), and the following formulation reinforces the link.<sup>70</sup>

The context, however, is now significantly transformed. While Yhwh himself, or modes of Israel's relationship with him, were presented as Israel's life at the end of the great discourses (30:20), this final little statement does not even mention God. The subject now is simply 'the word'. Even the first major reflection on 'the word' (30:11–14) had not mentioned God. There, 'the word' (30:14) had been identified with 'this commandment' (המצוה הזאת, 30:11), which formed an inverted inclusion with the first occurrence of this expression 'this (is the) commandment' (זאת המצוה, 6:1) and thus refers to the entire legislation of Deuteronomy. Although God is not mentioned (in 30:11–14), the closeness of the word may be heard like an echo of the closeness of God (4:7).<sup>71</sup>

There cannot be any doubt, therefore, that 'the word' is identified with the 'commandment' that is grounded in Yhwh's revelation at Horeb (6:31), that proceeds from the mouth of Yhwh (8:1–3) and that is in Israel's heart and mouth (30:14). However, all this theological weight is now, at the very conclusion of Moses' words ('and he completed', 32:45) implicitly hidden in the unpretentious 'word'.

### 7. Evaluation and Perspectives

Having gone through several passages of Deuteronomy in which 'life' plays an important role, it remains here to evaluate the findings and draw out some perspectives.

Deuteronomy's theology of life is concentrated at strategic points at the beginning and the end of Moses' parenetical speeches. While at the beginning Moses puts much weight on keeping the commandments 'so that you may live' (4:1; 5:33; 6:2; 8:1), the emphasis shifts towards Yhwh's acting 'for the sake of your life' (30:6), towards Israel's fundamental decision between life and death (30:15, 19),

69 The two prepositional constructions 'to / away from you' (אליך / מכם) suggest contrastive movements: a word that approaches its addressees versus one that flees them. For the midrashic explanation of the unusual 'from' in 32:47 see TIGAY, *Deuteronomy*, 316.

70 'And in this word you will make long your days (ארך ימים) upon the land (על-הארמה)' (32:47) reflects 'the length of your days (ארך ימים) to dwell on the land (על-הארמה)' (30:20).

71 EHRENREICH, *Leben*, 217: 'Um die Vorstellung von der persönlichen Nähe Gottes mit der seines Wortes zu vermitteln, sind subtile Bezüge in der Leseabfolge von Dtn 4,2.7f über Dtn 30,14.20 zu Dtn 32,47 angelegt. Dtn 4 führt durch v2 in den Gebrauch von דבר im Singular für das ganze Gesetz ein und parallelisiert in v7f den verwandten Ausdruck 'Tora' mit JHWHs Nähe. 30,14 drückt dieselbe Nähe vom 'Wort aus' und konkretisiert sie weiter. Die Brücke zwischen JHWH und dem Wort schlagen dann die exklusiv aufeinander bezogenen Stellen 30,20 und 32,47 über den Schlüsselbegriff חיים 'Leben.'

and towards their relationship with Yhwh and the ‘word’, ‘for he / this / it is your life’ (30:20; 32:47). This general dynamics of (nominal) abstraction is broken by the poetic dramatization of the Song—‘I kill and I make alive!’ (32:39)—and by the blessing of Moses, with its last use of the motif in the book, ‘may Reuben live and may he not die!’ (33:6).<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, there seems to be a programmatic double inclusion between the beginning of Moses’ first parenetical speech (Deut 4:1–4) and the end of the Moab Covenant speech (30:19–20). They combine the first and the last parenetical scheme with ‘so that you may live’ (4:1; 30:19) with the first and the last use of ‘holding fast’ (דבק) to Yhwh, which is in both cases connected with the motif of life.<sup>73</sup>

4:1	למען תחיו <i>so that you may live (pl.)</i>
4:4	ואתם הדבקים ביהוה אלהיכם חיים כלכם היום But you who <i>held fast</i> to Yhwh your God <i>you are all alive today</i>
30:19	למען תחיה <i>so that you may live (sg.)</i>
30:20	ולדבקה-בו כי הוא חייד וארך ימיו and to <i>hold fast</i> to him for he / this is <i>your life</i> and the length of your <i>days</i>

Just as the episode with Baal of Peor had proved that obedience to Yhwh kept Israel alive ‘today’ (4:1–4), the decision for life is meant to bring life and ‘length of days’ in the Land (30:19–20). It seems unlikely that this major literary inclusion is a product of coincidence. Rather, it seems to be part of a literary programme that envelopes the Deuteronomic Code in a great number of literary inclusions forming a hermeneutical foundation for the Code.<sup>74</sup> Another parallel movement can be seen at the beginnings of the parenetical speeches in Deut 4:1–4; 8:1–3. In each case, the parenetical scheme presented at the beginning (4:1; 8:1) is supported by an example from previous experience. Those who did not follow Baal of Peor survived (4:3–4);<sup>75</sup> those who were fed with manna in the wilderness were supposed to learn that they depend on Yhwh’s life-giving maintenance (8:3).

72 Although this blessing concentrates on Reuben, רֵאוּבֵן is the very first word of the blessings of the tribes (after the hymnic introduction of 33:1–5) and thus a programmatic beginning. The blessing wishes Reuben to have made the right decision between life and death.

73 The connection between 4:4 and 30:20 was noted by LUZZATTO, *Commentary*, 558, and LUNDBOM, *Deuteronomy*, 237.

74 Cf. MARKL, *Frameworks*.

75 DRIVER, *Deuteronomy*, 63, has already pointed to the connection between 4:1 and 4:3–4: ‘In proof of the assertion that obedience brings with it life, the Writer appeals to Israel’s

These observations just underline what a first analysis of the formulae 'so that you may live' and 'all the days that you are alive / of your life' has already made clear. Deuteronomy employs the motif of life strategically as a hermeneutical foundation of its law. Divine law is meant to lead to life. The commandments of Deuteronomy are strictly defined as law 'in the service of life'.<sup>76</sup> This is all the more significant if it is true that the laws of Deuteronomy have more ancient origins and that the theological frameworks were composed at a late stage of the formation of the Pentateuch.<sup>77</sup> While death, frequently demanded as a penalty, plays a heavy role within the law (see above, p. 73), the theological frameworks form a contrastive hermeneutical foundation that concentrates on life.

If we focus on theology in its most concrete sense,<sup>78</sup> Deuteronomy uses subtle literary means to present God as the source of life: in the wordplay between 'Yhwh' and the human being 'will live' (8:3); in God's life-giving through the commandments (6:24) and at the dramatic final of the Song of Moses (32:39, both piel-forms); in the cryptic end and aim of Moses' speeches 'he / this is your life' (30:20). Moreover, Deuteronomy creates a dramatic tension between Israel's intense experience of the voice of the 'living God' (5:26), which they are astonished that a human being could survive (4:33; 5:24, 26), and the insight that precisely what comes from the mouth of God will make the human being live (8:3). Another dramatic tension lies between Moses' emphasis on Israel's decision between life and death (30:15–20) and Yhwh's sovereign dealing of life or death according to the Song (32:39). At the end of the book, God is hidden, but ostentatiously hidden, behind the 'word' that is 'life' (32:47).

This brief analysis has been limited to the book of Deuteronomy. It must at least be mentioned at the end that the motif of life in Deuteronomy cannot be fully appreciated isolated from the horizon of the Pentateuch as a whole. Deuteronomy concludes a dynamics of life that, in the canonical form of the Pentateuch, is initiated by creation (Gen 1–2) and is a leading motif of great narratives such as the Joseph story, which is finally shown to have been directed by a divine plan: 'God intended it for good, in order to keep a numerous people alive (לְהַחֲיִיתָ), as he is doing today' (Gen 50:20).<sup>79</sup> The way in which the notion of life develops from the accent on 'genealogical' immediacy of life in Genesis to the mediation of life

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recent experience.' BRAULIK, *Mittel*, 14, drew a structural conclusion: 'Der erste Abschnitt wird durch das Motiv des Lebens in den V. 1 und 4 zusammengeschlossen.'

76 FRETHEIM, *Law*, captured the significance of this idea (with reference to 5:33, p. 184) in the title of his article on the legal hermeneutics of Deuteronomy.

77 See, e.g., OTTO, *Deuteronomium im Pentateuch*; IDEM, *Deuteronomium 1,1–4,43*, 231–257.

78 On the notion of God in Deut see LOHFINK, *Gott*; FISCHER, *Theologien*, 46–54, concisely presents important aspects of theology in Deuteronomy.

79 FISCHER, *Jakobsweg*, 148, calls this verse a key message ('Schlüsselaussage') of the book of Genesis.

through the ‘word’ in Deuteronomy needs to be analysed.<sup>80</sup> Within the perspective of biblical theology, of course, the analysis of the motif would have to go much further; especially into its great unfolding in the Psalms,<sup>81</sup> wisdom literature and the prophets.<sup>82</sup> Christians may hear the echo of Deuteronomy resound in the gospel of John, for in the ‘logos’ is ‘life’ (Jn 1:1–4) and Jesus’ signs are written down ‘so that you may have life’ (Jn 20:31).<sup>83</sup> Moses unfolds the drama between Israel’s future life or death (blessing or curse) that is condensed in the decision to be made ‘today’ (three times in 30:16, 18, 19) amidst the existential tension of his own fate: ‘yet alive with you today’ (31:27), but from the beginning aware of his impending death (4:22).<sup>84</sup> Having laid down the word that is Israel’s life (32:47), he is immediately summoned by God to die (32:50). His last act for Israel ‘before his death’ (33:1) is the blessing, in which he wishes Reuben to live (33:6), before he finally ascends the mountain (34:1) and dies (34:5) at the age of 120 years—prematurely, for ‘in his death his eye was not dim and his vigour had not abated’ (34:7).

Moses, who had brought Israel to the border of the Land, incessantly referring to it as the destination of their journey and the place where they are supposed to live and flourish, testifies through his own fate that the Land is not a necessary end and aim of a life that is fulfilled in the relationship with God. He dies outside the Land ‘upon the mouth of Yhwh’ (34:5)—Israel’s prophet who, uniquely, was known by Yhwh ‘face to face’ (34:10). While Moses has died outside the Land, and even his burial place remains unknown (34:6), his word of life accompanies Israel into the Land,<sup>85</sup> and beyond: ‘even if you were driven out to the ends of heaven’ (30:4) this word is not ‘in heaven’ (30:12), but ‘in your mouth and in your heart’ (30:14). Thus, a subtle end and aim of Deuteronomy is to establish itself as the ‘word’ that is ‘your life’ (32:47). Unspectacular though the formulation is, it may mirror a decisive development in the history of religion. Such concentration on the medium of revealed religious text<sup>86</sup> as the decisive means of relat-

80 See the fine comparison between Moses and Jacob in Gen 49; Deut 32 in SONNET, *Book*, 208f.

81 VON RAD, *Righteousness*, 253f, pointed out that the decision between life and death in Deut 30 is made in a liturgical setting and relates it to the theology of life in the Psalms (p. 255–266). A prominent reflection on the word of God that is clearly influenced by Deuteronomic theology is found in Ps 119; for the connection between ‘word’ and ‘to live’ see v17, 25, 107; cf. HOSSFELD - ZENGER, *Psalms*, esp. 262f.

82 On Ez, e.g., see ZIMMERLI, *Leben*.

83 Cf. LABAHN, *Deuteronomy*; MARKL, *Rahmen*.

84 SONNET, *Fifth Book*, 214–220, presents a concise summary of the narrative development of the theme of Moses’ death in Deuteronomy; the importance of the theme had already been emphasised by OLSON, *Deuteronomy*, esp. 17–22.

85 For this contrast see SONNET, *Book*, 223–230.

86 On the role of writing for this process in Deuteronomy see SCHAPER, *Word*, esp. 21. SCHNIEDEWIND, *Book*, 135: ‘Fundamentally, it is Deuteronomy that makes the textuality

ing to the divine in the intimacy of the individual 'heart' (30:14; 32:46) lies at the origin of an abounding religious tradition of meditating on the revealed 'word of God' in Judaism, Christianity and Islam; a tradition that many have experienced as reviving their souls.

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of the Torah a centerpiece of Jewish religion. It is Deuteronomy that makes Judaism a religion of the book.' WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 84: 'The primary impetus for the crystallization of the sacred Scripture... was the sanctification of the book of Deuteronomy, and it was this impulse that changed the religion of Israel into the faith of the Book.' The practice of torah meditation is rooted in Deut 6:6f; 11:19: FISCHER - LOHFINK, *Worte*.

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