

ABSTRACT

THE LAND OF GOD TO THE SONS OF GOD:
DEUTERONOMY 32: 8-9 AND THE INHERITANCE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

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In the Song of Moses, the verses of Deut. 32:8-9 point to an ancient division among the nations, that created a unique bond between God and Israel. In this article we wish to trace an early understanding of these verses in Second Temple and Rabbinic literature as intended to establish Israel's right to the Land of Israel, even though the Land of Israel is not mentioned in the song. On the basis of sources from the Ancient Near East and Greek literature it is possible to infer that the Song of Moses included a territorial aspect from the beginning. However, this aspect became more central and concrete after the Babylonian Exile, and especially once the version 'the sons of Israel' was introduced to replace 'the sons of God'. One can discern two main exegetical trajectories that identified the event in these verses as the inheritance of the Land of Israel. According to the first, these verses allude to the myth of the division of the world by Noah among his three sons, which was inspired by an earlier myth of the tripartite division of the cosmos among the gods. Noah's division allotted the Land of Israel to Israel even before their existence as a nation. According to the second trajectory, which seems to be based on the identification of 'the sons of Israel' with 'the sons of God', the verses describe the inheritance of the Land of God by the sons of God. That is, the conquering of the land by Israel and the expulsion of the sinful nations living there.

The exegetical efforts to anchor in these verses foundational myths concerning the inheritance of the Land of Israel highlight the central position these verses held in the eyes of various writers in antiquity.