

PREACHING THE BOOK OF EXODUS:  
DEVELOPING SERVANTS, MISSIONARIES  
AND WORSHIPPERS

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Brent Lawrence Dunbar  
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PREACHING THE BOOK OF EXODUS:  
DEVELOPING SERVANTS, MISSIONARIES  
AND WORSHIPPERS

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Brent Dunbar

Montreal, Quebec

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Describing Biblical Theology**

The focus of this thesis was to exegete and exposit certain key texts from the Old Testament book of Exodus, applying the specific discipline of biblical theology. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin with a discussion of the definition, purpose, and necessity of biblical theology.

#### **Its Nature**

Biblical theology can be defined as a Bible-specific interpretive discipline that is historical, canonical, literary, Christological, and doxological in focus, different than systematic theology, but not its rival.<sup>1</sup> Next are brief expansions on six key elements of this definition.

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<sup>1</sup>The categories *historical*, *literary*, and *Christological* are borrowed from the definition of biblical theology written by Brian Rosner, who defines biblical theology as “theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.” Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 10. The definition offered herein for biblical theology is only one of a plethora of definitions that have been suggested. Indeed, biblical theology has been conceived of in a host of different ways. Evidence of this can be found in Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). Klink and Lockett outline five distinct types of biblical theology that have been championed by various personalities over the past one hundred years: (1) the strict historical approach connected with James Barr, (2) the redemptive-historical perspective represented by D. A. Carson, (3) the “worldview-story” story angle of N. T. Wright, (4) the canonical approach of Brevard Childs, and (5) the “theological construction” conception of Francis Watson. Scott Hafemann appropriately states, “It is well known . . . that students of biblical theology disagree over its methodology, not to mention its structure and content.” Scott J. Hafemann, “Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

First, biblical theology is an historical enterprise. That is, the biblical theologian engages in the historical study of the Bible, recognizing that history is a guiding category in the Bible itself; in the Bible, God reveals himself progressively in and through history. Another way to say this is that the very process of revelation in the Bible has history as its structure; therefore, biblical theology must concern itself with historical issues.

Second, the biblical theologian recognizes that the historical study of a given text is not the final destination. If a passage is to be understood maximally, its canonical context is ultimately the final interpretive context. For example, Jeremiah must be understood in light of Matthew, and vice versa. The final meaning of the story of David is located in the story of Christ. The final meaning of Amos's prophecy will only be discerned by allowing the New Testament to interpret it. In the words of Thomas Schreiner, "We always consider the perspective of the whole. . . . We read the Scriptures both from front to back and back to front."<sup>2</sup> The biblical theologian approaches his task in the confidence that despite the wide diversity found in the biblical materials, there is a unity of theme and purpose, divinely inspired. The Old Testament and the New are organically intermeshed; each informing, enlightening, and interpenetrating the other. One will not properly interpret the theology of either Testament in isolation from the other.<sup>3</sup>

Third, the biblical theologian is careful to assess the literary features of a given text. The biblical theologian takes appropriate time to determine such aspects as the genre, structure, syntax, and narrative viewpoint of a biblical text. Appropriate attention

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 28.

<sup>3</sup>Adolph Saphir, *The Divine Unity of Scripture* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892), 205, wrote, "To divide Old Testament and New Testament is to take away the life of both, for they are not merely connected, nor are they merely harmonious, but they *interpenetrate* one another. The same breath of life and the same covenant blood of Him that died for us pervades them all" (emphasis added).

must be given in this area, for most often “an author’s compositional methods communicate his intended message.”<sup>4</sup> The biblical-theological methodology of James Hamilton, in which he seeks “to interpret books and sections of books in light of their inherent literary features and structures as we have them in the canon,” is laudable.<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, biblical theology is also Christological in its aim, for it recognizes Christ as the centerpiece and star around which all biblical prophecies, institutions, types, themes, genres, and personalities orbit. Biblical theology must be “guided by Christological concern from start to finish,”<sup>6</sup> since Christ himself, as well as the apostles, declared that Christ is the hermeneutical key to the whole of the Bible (Luke 24:44-47; John 5:39, 46; Acts 3:18, 24; 7:52; 10:43; 13:29; 26:22-23; 28:23; 1 Pet 1:10-11).

Fifth, biblical theology issues forth in doxology. This aspect of the definition is best expanded upon by Jerry Shepherd: “The goal of biblical theology is doxology. Biblical theology seeks to trace God’s progressive revelation of his character in the Bible in such a way that his beauty shines forth and he receives the glory and praise he is so richly due.”<sup>7</sup> Biblical theology is a worshipful enterprise that seeks to encourage the worship of God in others.

Sixth, biblical theology is not systematic theology, yet the two disciplines are not opposed to one another, nor are they divorced. They work together; however, they approach the Bible’s content in two different ways. Where systematic theology is organized around “thematic or topical” categories, biblical theology is organized around

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<sup>4</sup>A. Philip Brown II, *Hope Amidst Ruin: A Literary and Theological Analysis of Ezra* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>5</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 44.

<sup>6</sup>Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 72.

<sup>7</sup>Jerry Shepherd, “What Is Biblical Theology?—Part Two,” *The Recapitulator*, September 4, 2013, accessed November 27, 2014, <http://www.therecapitulator.com/what-is-biblical-theology-part-two/>.

the “redemptive-historical” nature of the Bible itself.<sup>8</sup> Where systematic theology focuses on “atemporal” issues, biblical theology concentrates on the “biblical storyline.”<sup>9</sup> Yet each discipline informs the other, and each discipline provides important boundaries for the other.<sup>10</sup>

### **Its Purpose**

The purpose of biblical theology was just described as doxological. Hamilton claims that biblical theology’s purpose “is inductively to understand the canonical form of the Bible’s theology as it is progressively revealed in its own literary forms and salvation historical development.”<sup>11</sup> Pastorally speaking, the purpose of engaging biblical theology in the life of the church is to help congregants gain understanding of the whole sweep of the Bible’s narrative, and how that narrative speaks of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Biblical theology should be a controlling value in the local church, for it helps parishioners “see the complexity and simplicity of God . . . [and] sheer genius of the Spirit-inspired authors . . . [not to mention

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<sup>8</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (1961; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 16.

<sup>9</sup>Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 22.

<sup>10</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*, 46. Richard B. Gaffin, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 38, no. 3 (Spring 1976): 290, summarizes the insightful position of both Geerhardus Vos and John Murray concerning the relationship between systematic and biblical theology: “The approach of biblical theology is historical, while that of systematic theology is logical. The former deals with revelation as an activity or process, the latter deals with it as a finished product.” Gaffin also helpfully suggests how biblical theology both aids and sets boundaries for systematic theology: “In bringing to light the true, organic character of [Scripture’s] unity biblical theology discourages systematics from wresting passages from their scriptural and historical context or citing them as disjointed proof texts.” *Ibid.*, 291. “Biblical theology is indispensable to systematic theology because biblical theology is regulative of exegesis.” *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>11</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*, 46.

<sup>12</sup>Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 28, remarks, “We are not faithfully serving our congregations if they do not understand how the whole of scripture points to Christ, and if they do not gain a better understanding from us of the storyline of the Bible.”

the] world-encompassing metanarrative of cosmic scope.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, biblical theology should have freedom to shape preaching, counseling, evangelizing, and discipleship.<sup>14</sup>

### **Its Necessity**

In order to rightly understand Scripture, one must utilize the discipline of biblical theology. Brian Rosner is forceful on this point: “Biblical study is incomplete until biblical theology has been done.”<sup>15</sup> Unless one engages the passage being studied in light of the rest of the canon, one has not fully understood that passage; for the Bible is a divinely inspired organic unity. Bruce Waltke puts it memorably, “The intention of the Author is found not in the parts but in the whole.”<sup>16</sup> Using the Old Testament as his example, Schreiner has perceptively identified the homiletical danger of neglecting the discipline of biblical theology: “If we do not preach the OT in terms of the whole canon, we will either restrict ourselves to moral lessons from the OT, or, what is just as likely, is that we will rarely preach from the OT.”<sup>17</sup>

### **The Discipline of Biblical Theology Applied to the Preaching of Exodus**

Motor vehicles are equipped with several gear options. One may park a vehicle or allow it to sit idling in neutral, one may drive a vehicle backward, or proceed forward. If the Bible may be conceived of as a single, long highway, the biblical theologian’s happy adventure features regular employment of all gears of the (metaphorical) vehicle.

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<sup>13</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” in *Text-Driven Preaching*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 217.

<sup>14</sup>Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 15.

<sup>15</sup>Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 4.

<sup>16</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, “Is It Right to Read the New Testament into the Old?,” *Christianity Today*, September 2, 1983, 77.

<sup>17</sup>Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 27.

The biblical theologian parks, so to speak, on a certain section of the highway (or idles in neutral), taking time to survey his immediate surroundings: What is the context of this particular section of the Bible? What are its specific literary features? What are the historical details of the immediate theological horizon? What did God mean for the original audience to understand, in giving the words in this specific sentence, this particular paragraph, this unique book? The biblical theologian is concerned with discovering the immediate historical and theological topography of the book or passage he is exegeting.

However, in order to gain an even more holistic understanding of the passage or book, the biblical theologian must also put his metaphorical car into reverse. He must tour the sections of Scripture that came prior to his parking spot-passage. He must read his parking spot-passage “in the context of the total canon of Scripture available up to that time.”<sup>18</sup> Only in this way will he gain better understanding of the passage in question. The biblical theologian works under the true assumption that previous biblical material connects necessarily with the passage under consideration.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, to gain the fullest apprehension of his parking spot-passage, the biblical theologian must also proceed forward from it. He must allow later sections of redemptive history and revelation to inform the interpretation of his passage. In fact, the last words of the Bible must be given priority to interpret earlier ones. In the words of Waltke, the New Testament has “priority in ‘unpacking’ the meaning of the Old Testament.”<sup>19</sup> Thus in the preparation of sermons from the book of

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<sup>18</sup>Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 267. In this section I am largely following the biblical-theological suggestion of Poythress, who argues, “Any particular passage of the Bible is to be read in three progressively larger contexts,” namely, “the context of the particular book of the Bible in which it appears . . . the total canon of Scripture available up to that point in time . . . and the context of the entire Bible.” *Ibid.*, 267-68.

<sup>19</sup>Waltke, “Is It Right to Read the New Testament?,” 77.



Exodus, the Person of Jesus Christ will be given the final hermeneutical authority due him in the interpretation. Sidney Greidanus explains, “*God’s* story of bringing his kingdom on earth is centered in *Christ*: Christ the center of redemptive history, Christ the center of the Scriptures. In preaching any part of Scripture, one must understand the Old Testament in the light of Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

Vehicles are not made so that one can be in park, reverse, and drive at the same time. However, this is perhaps a legitimate conception for the biblical theologian: In interpreting a given passage, his ultimate ideal is to engage all three gears simultaneously. The whole of the highway should be his constant hermeneutical perspective. The biblical theologian views the Bible as an integral, intermeshed history with “organic progression from period to period as the plan of God is revealed.”<sup>21</sup> The biblical theologian disciplines himself to think in neutral, reverse, and drive, as simultaneously as possible.

What has been outlined briefly will serve as the hermeneutical grid in preparing sermons on passages in the book of Exodus. Proper interpretation, and hence, a strong result homiletically, will only arise if adequate attention is given to (1) the immediate historical, literary, and theological context of Exodus; (2) the canonical material preceding Exodus (namely, Genesis); (3) later Old Testament materials employing Exodus themes, types, and language; and (4) the light shone on Exodus from the New Testament and Christ. In sum, chosen passages from Exodus will be exegeted in their whole-canonical contexts and preached accordingly, with contemporary application stemming from the exegesis.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 227, emphasis original.

<sup>21</sup>Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 75.

<sup>22</sup>Hamilton, “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” 213, writes, “Biblical theology is exegesis of a particular passage in its canonical context.”

Particular emphasis will be attempted with regard to the fourth point above, for God’s last word (Heb 1:1-3) must be allowed to speak authoritatively to the interpretation of an earlier word such as Exodus.<sup>23</sup> If the exodus event itself, not to mention the giving of the law and the tabernacle, are ultimately about Jesus (Luke 24:44; John 5:46), then Jesus must be given full sway to cast his light on each of those aspects. Exodus can only be understood Christologically. As Christopher Wright contends, “The exodus, for all the comprehensiveness of what it achieved for Israel, points beyond itself to a greater need for deliverance from the totality of evil and restoration to relationship with God than it achieved by itself.”<sup>24</sup> The exodus event and the book of Exodus point beyond themselves to Jesus Christ, who is the hermeneutical key of the entire Bible.

The words of Edmund Clowney summarize the basic benefits of a biblical-theological approach to preaching the book of Exodus: “[The perspective of biblical theology] clarifies the meaning of the text, emphasizes its central message, and provides for sound application.”<sup>25</sup> Put succinctly, the concepts of biblical theology enable the preacher to do sound hermeneutics and homiletics.

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

In general terms, technical and/or semi-technical commentaries on the book of Exodus—written from a thoroughgoing evangelical perspective—are in short supply. Thus the reader will notice that some (though not all) of the volumes mentioned below are more expositional/applicatory and less technical, since the endeavor herein has been

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<sup>23</sup>Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” 267, writes, “The speech of God is not complete until the coming of Christ (Heb 1:1-3). We must, as it were, hear the end of the discourse before we are in a position to weigh the total context in terms of which we may achieve the most profound understanding of each part of the discourse.”

<sup>24</sup>Christopher, J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 29.

<sup>25</sup>Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 88.

to choose several volumes written from an evangelical perspective. The arrangement of what follows is chronological by date of publication.

Forty years ago, Brevard Childs penned his important commentary, *Exodus*, the aim of which was “to seek to interpret the book of Exodus as canonical scripture within the theological discipline of the Christian church.”<sup>26</sup> Childs divided the book of Exodus into twenty-four sections. For several of the sections, he provided all of the following six items: (1) a translation; (2) a discussion of textual history; (3) a discussion of Old Testament context; (4) a discussion of the New Testament’s treatment of the Old Testament; (5) a history of exegesis; and (6) some theological reflection on the text in its canonical context.<sup>27</sup> Particularly relevant for the exegesis of texts in the thesis are the third, fourth, and sixth items. Though Childs wrote from a critical perspective, the assessment of Tremper Longman is valid: “Although representing a critical perspective, this volume is valuable to evangelical ministers.”<sup>28</sup>

John Durham’s contribution to the Word Biblical Commentary series, *Exodus*, is also engaged for this thesis.<sup>29</sup> Written thirteen years after Childs’s volume, Durham’s strength is his attention to the theology of Exodus, most notably, how the theme of divine presence surfaces time and again in the book. However, as noted by both John Glynn and Tremper Longman, Durham is unsure about the historicity of Exodus, and this limits the

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<sup>26</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), xiii.

<sup>27</sup>For some of the twenty-four sections, Childs left out one or more of the six headings/discussions.

<sup>28</sup>Tremper Longman III, *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 27.

<sup>29</sup>John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987).

strength of his commentary.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Durham was consulted for his many perceptive theological insights.

Nahum Sarna's *Exodus* (part of the Jewish Publication Society's *Torah* series) appeared in 1991.<sup>31</sup> The format of this commentary, which includes the Hebrew text standing directly beside an English translation, is especially helpful. Sarna includes dialogue with rabbinic exegetes and discusses the relationship between Exodus and other portions of the Hebrew Bible. Though this commentary proved valuable in the interpretation of Exodus, both in its original context and in its wider Old Testament context, it was not useful as concerns whole-canonical interpretation since it does not interact with the New Testament.

Published in 1994, Donald Gowan's *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* proved particularly helpful in the exegesis of Exodus 1:1-14, 2:1-10 and 3:10-15, for the entire first half of Gowan's book is devoted only to Exodus 1-4.<sup>32</sup> Gowan's book "takes each of the major affirmations about God in Exodus and traces it through the rest of scripture and on into the theologies of Judaism and Christianity."<sup>33</sup> His focus on the biblical-theological import of Exodus themes proved beneficial.

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<sup>30</sup>John Glynn, *Commentary and Reference Survey: A Comprehensive Guide to Biblical and Theological Resources*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 53; and Longman, *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 27.

<sup>31</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

<sup>32</sup>Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, ix.

Peter Enns's *Exodus*<sup>34</sup> is the only commentary on Exodus to receive a five-star rating in Tremper Longman's *Old Testament Commentary Survey*.<sup>35</sup> Written fourteen years ago, the commentary represents a more theologically conservative Enns than is the case today.<sup>36</sup> The particular value of Enns's commentary lies in his insistence that Exodus be interpreted "from the point of view of Christ as the final word in the story of redemption."<sup>37</sup> Enns's reading of Exodus from the perspective of the New Testament was an invaluable aid in the completion of the thesis.

Douglas Stuart's *Exodus* maintains a commendable balance between scholarship and pastoral sensibility.<sup>38</sup> Included in Stuart's volume is a noteworthy section on the theology of Exodus, which is important for developing an understanding of the main theological contours of the book. Stuart's commentary provided valuable insight for the thesis because, in the words of John Glynn, Stuart "demonstrates the way the theology not only relates to Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch but to the entire biblical corpus."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

<sup>35</sup>Longman, *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 28.

<sup>36</sup>One of the most current examples of Enns's writing that suggests he has wandered somewhat from a more conservative theological position can be found at Peter Enns, "10 Things I Wish Everyone Knew about the Bible," *onFaith*, October 6, 2014, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2014/10/06/10-things-i-wish-everyone-knew-about-the-bible/3441>. Many of the ten points in Enns's article have been challenged effectively by the theologically conservative evangelical scholar (and also one of my former seminary professors, who further, was Enns's classmate), Jerry Shepherd, "Ten Commandments Which Turn Out Not to Be Very Helpful—You Should Probably Break Most of Them," *The Recapitulator*, October 17, 2014, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.therecapitulator.com/page/4/>.

<sup>37</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 19.

<sup>38</sup>Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006).

<sup>39</sup>Glynn, *Commentary and Reference Survey*, 53.

More recent than Stuart's contribution is John Oswalt's *Exodus*, which appeared in the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* in 2008.<sup>40</sup> Oswalt's strengths include some keen reflection on the theology of Exodus, as well as significant interaction with the work of scholars previous to him. The weakness of his commentary lies in its scant interaction with the New Testament. Oswalt's commentary was engaged for its careful treatment of the text of Exodus itself.

An even more recent commentary on Exodus is Victor Hamilton's *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*.<sup>41</sup> Appearing in 2011, this work is rich in exegetical insight. Hamilton's volume begins with a careful consideration of the narrative and theology of Exodus, and as the book unfolds, several significant suggestions are offered concerning the connections—both between Exodus and the rest of the Old Testament—and Exodus and the New Testament. Hamilton's volume proved indispensable for the thesis's whole-canonical content.

Another important contribution to the study of Exodus is W. Ross Blackburn's *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*.<sup>42</sup> A volume in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, Blackburn's book appeared in 2012. The thesis of the book, that "the Lord's missionary commitment to make himself known to the nations is the central theological concern of Exodus," was considered carefully in researching the thesis.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 259-560.

<sup>41</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

<sup>42</sup>W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

The most recent contribution to the study of Exodus that was employed for this thesis was from Duane Garrett.<sup>44</sup> Garrett's aim in writing his volume was to "fill certain gaps within the literature."<sup>45</sup> This volume was of particular use since it purposefully addresses the issues of Egyptology, Hebrew prose analysis, and the relationship between Exodus and the New Testament.<sup>46</sup>

### **Exodus and Renfrew Baptist Church**

The context of the thesis was Renfrew Baptist Church in Calgary, Canada. Four areas of deficiency were discerned within the Renfrew congregation, which a sermon series in Exodus would help address (1) a lack of theological comprehension concerning the proper motivation for Christian service; (2) a deficiency in vision concerning the content of Christian mission; (3) an unclear understanding of the nature and purpose of worship; and (4) a limited grasp of the biblical-theological approach to Bible reading. Each of these four areas will be unpacked next, with attention given to the role that Exodus may play in addressing them.

### **Fuel for Service**

True Christian service is a purposeful, doxological response to the one true God for his great redeeming grace.<sup>47</sup> At Renfrew Baptist Church, a keen desire existed to serve the neighborhood and broader city in which it was planted, and the church was engaged in a variety of missional activities. However, its service and mission seemed

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<sup>44</sup>Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>47</sup>Exod 19:4-5 is a key text in the book of Exodus and amply demonstrates the point. In that passage, God calls Israel to obedient service, but not before he reminds Israel of his saving action. The saving action of God is to be the wellspring out of which Israel will gratefully, doxologically respond in obedience to God.

more to flow from simple altruistic motives than from hearts overflowing with gratitude to a great God who has redeemed greatly. This tendency was discerned in the conversations regarding missional endeavor, which normally were colored less by theology and the greatness and goodness of God, and more by plain concerns for social action. The people of Renfrew Baptist, and the ministry itself, would benefit from an enhanced spiritual grasp of the nature of God and the distinct contours of his redeeming grace; for in this way, service borne more of praise and thanksgiving would arise, replacing what appeared to be merely a perceived ‘duty’ to engage in humanistic altruism. The book of Exodus—wielded by the Spirit—would help here. In Exodus the “wellspring of moral action” is the peoples’ experience of God’s redemption.<sup>48</sup> In Exodus, service arises as a keen, informed response to the redemption given by a great, redeeming God.<sup>49</sup>

### **Content of Mission**

Simply stated, the content of Christian mission is God. According to Blackburn, in Exodus, “the Lord’s missionary commitment to make himself known” is the “central concern.”<sup>50</sup> Because Renfrew Baptist had not experienced significant numerical growth over the past number of years, a growing concern amongst some in the leadership was to make the name and reputation of the *church* better-known in the hope that numerical values (and hence budget numbers) would improve. Mission, in this understanding, is more about spreading the church’s name and building church numbers than it is about declaring the fame and mission of God. Exodus can help local churches re-center

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<sup>48</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987), 4.

<sup>49</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*, ed. Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 97, writes, “Those who have been redeemed are called to live redemptively in response.”

<sup>50</sup>Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 15.



themselves on the idea that God and the spread of his glory must be the true content and aim of all missional strategies and action plans. Repeatedly in Exodus God's persistent goal is to be known personally amongst the nations.<sup>51</sup> Christopher Wright explains,

Clearly, the motivation [in Exodus] from God's point of view was not only the liberation of his enslaved people but this driving divine will to be known to all nations for who and what he truly is. The mission of God to be known is what drives this whole narrative.<sup>52</sup>

God desires to be known in order to receive the worship he is due, and worship is the third concern outlined.

### **Contours of Worship**

G. I. Davies has classified Exodus as "a theology of liberation for worship."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the subject of the worship of Yahweh surfaces early in the book (3:12), and the entire fifteenth chapter is a song of worship concerning God's deliverance, not to mention the fact that the latter portion of Exodus centers largely on tabernacle worship. The nature, purpose, and practice of worship were areas that required ongoing attention at Renfrew Baptist Church. Where Sunday morning worship was concerned, too often worship was (1) equated solely with music; (2) centered predominantly on personal experience and individualistic inwardness; and/or (3) lacking in sufficient declarations and pronouncements of the historical, saving actions of God. Preaching Exodus helps to address such unhealthy tendencies. Terence Fretheim argues that Exodus both raises and answers the question: "Of what does the proper worship of Yahweh consist?"<sup>54</sup> For the

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<sup>51</sup>See, for example, Exod 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:15-16, 29; 10:2; 14:18.

<sup>52</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 95.

<sup>53</sup>G. I. Davies, "The Theology of Exodus," in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, ed. E. Ball, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 300 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 149.

<sup>54</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 21.

church of Jesus Christ, a major catalyst in worship is Bible reading. The book of Exodus, preached through the lens of biblical theology, affords the congregation a pattern for enhanced Bible reading. Provided next is a brief outline of this aim.

### **How to Read the Bible**

Taking a biblical-theological approach to the preaching of Exodus also serves as a basic model or guideline for the congregation's Bible reading. Pastors must perceive themselves as missionaries for biblical theology, proactive champions of a whole-canonical, and Christological reading of Bible texts, "not discount[ing] the capacities of God's people" to handle such a hermeneutic.<sup>55</sup> The sad alternative is the common approach whereby verses are extracted and divorced from their contexts and reduced to 'personal promises'; the historical, literary, and Christological import(s) of those verses (and the passages in which they are found) being largely disregarded. This approach makes for a stunted appreciation of the glory that God has embedded in his Bible. Thus, throughout the sermon series included in this thesis, a biblical-theological approach to Bible reading is being encouraged, at least implicitly.

### **Overview of Sermon Passages**

The passages which follow have been chosen intentionally to address the areas of local-church concern identified in the previous section. The categories of mission, worship, and motivation for service are each engaged by the chosen pericopes. Yet, taken together, the passages also serve as a skeletal outline for the entire book of Exodus. They tell the story, in brief, of the greater Exodus narrative.

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<sup>55</sup>Hamilton, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," 217.

## **Exodus 1:1-14**

Exodus opens with unambiguous connections to the narratives of Jacob and Joseph found in Genesis (Exod 1:1, 5-6, 8). The mention of Israel's fruitfulness, multiplication, and increase in Egypt (Exod 1:7) also connect back to Genesis, specifically Genesis 1:28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:6, 20; 35:11; and 48:4. Israel's numerical growth in Egypt is a sign that God has been faithful to his promises to the patriarchs (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:2; 28:14; 46:3), but Pharaoh does not rejoice in the blessing (Exod 1:9-11, 13-14).

Burgeoning Israel is a new Adam, multiplying upon the earth. As Exodus opens, the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) who will bring blessing to the earth is threatened by the seed of the serpent, Pharaoh. From these descendants of Abraham, enslaved in Egypt, comes the true seed of the woman, the Christ. As true Israel and new Moses, Jesus will lead his people through a new exodus<sup>56</sup> to true freedom.

## **Exodus 2:1-10**

Exodus 2:1-10 concerns the birth of Moses and his "divinely ordained survival so that he can become the deliverer of Israel."<sup>57</sup> Near the beginning of Exodus 1, Pharaoh is depicted as concerned about the number of Hebrew people in his nation, and the chapter closes with Pharaoh's edict of infanticide, yet miraculously, Moses the Hebrew survives. Perhaps even more remarkably, Moses then grows up under Pharaoh's roof.

Connections between this passage and the material preceding Exodus (namely, Gen) are evident. For example, the infant Moses is saved through water, just as Noah (and family) had been saved through water in Genesis 7-8. Additionally, Moses is a

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<sup>56</sup>See Luke 9:31 and the use of ἔξοδος.

<sup>57</sup>John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 46.

“beautiful child” (v. 2), in a way reminiscent of Joseph (Gen 39:7). Joseph had delivered his people from famine, now Moses will deliver his people from Egypt.<sup>58</sup>

In a forward direction, Exodus 2:1-10 also connects to the New Testament narrative of Jesus’s birth. As Moses had escaped Pharaoh’s murderous campaign, so Jesus escapes the efforts of Herod, which are strikingly similar to those of Pharaoh.<sup>59</sup>

### **Exodus 3:10-15**

In Exodus 3:6, God speaks to Moses from the burning bush, identifying himself as the covenant God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At verse 10, Moses receives God’s commission to go to Pharaoh, and God tells Moses that he (Moses) will free the Hebrews. God promises his presence to Moses, and also forecasts that the outcome of the exodus from Egypt will be *worship* at Sinai (v. 12). The focus then shifts to the personal name of God: the name YHWH is “not a label but a theology.”<sup>60</sup> In declaring his name, God reveals himself as self-existent, immutable, and eternal.<sup>61</sup> Yet perhaps even more importantly, God in this self-revelation also declares his intent to be present with Moses and the people.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 75.

<sup>59</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 85. Hamilton writes, “Pharaoh tried to kill the baby Moses; Herod tried to kill the baby Jesus.”

<sup>60</sup>John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 333.

<sup>61</sup>As noted by John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:91.

<sup>62</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 66, claims that when God reveals himself in this passage in Exodus, “the dominant idea is presence.”

As T. Desmond Alexander has argued, a connection exists between Exodus 3:14 and the “I am” statements found in Isaiah (41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12). Similarly, argues Alexander, Exodus 3:14 also connects to the “I am” statements found on the lips of Jesus in the Gospel of John (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5-6, 8).<sup>63</sup>

**Exodus 5:1-2; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22;  
9:14-16, 29; 10:2; 14:4, 18;  
15:11, 18**

Taken together, these passages showcase God’s ongoing desire to be known where he is unknown.<sup>64</sup> In the first passage, Pharaoh asks who YHWH is, and each of the remaining passages—save the last two—have God declaring his intent to be known and proclaimed in all the earth. According to W. Ross Blackburn, “the Lord’s commitment to be known as God throughout the earth governs all the Lord does in the book of Exodus.”<sup>65</sup> The last two passages reflect Israel’s acknowledgement of YHWH’s global supremacy.

God’s desire to be known to the ends of the earth issued ultimately in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth. The mandate of Jesus to his disciples is to be witnesses of God to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), demonstrating that God’s desire to be known has not changed.

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<sup>63</sup>T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 199.

<sup>64</sup>“Ongoing” because God, even from the earliest days of the Genesis account, willed to be known throughout the entire earth. Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 29, writes concerning Gen 1:28: “When interpreted firmly within the context of Genesis 1, God’s mandate to be fruitful and exercise dominion has the distinctly missionary purpose of making himself known throughout creation. Because humanity is the image of God (1:26), the command calls for God’s image to spread throughout, and ultimately fill, the earth.”

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

### **Exodus 12:1-13**

As a kind of ‘answer’ to Pharaoh’s earlier maniacal edict of infanticide, God’s final plague concerns the firstborn sons of Egypt: by divine fiat they will die (11:5). Exodus 12:1-13 is the record of instructions for the first Passover, given just prior to the exodus event. As he passed over the land to destroy Egyptian male infants, YHWH would spare Israelite male babies, providing their homes were marked by the blood of a lamb without blemish (vv. 7, 13).

Exodus 12:1-13 is connected to the New Testament material in a number of significant ways. For example, the apostle Paul describes the crucified Christ as “our Passover Lamb” in 1 Corinthians 5:7. The Last Supper was a “Passover” meal (Luke 22:7, 8, 11, 13, 15). The unbroken bones of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:46—a verse slightly outside the confines of Exodus 12:1-13—become important in the Passion narrative (see John 19:33, 36). Further, Victor Hamilton has drawn attention to the echoes of Exodus 12:11 found throughout the New Testament.<sup>66</sup>

### **Exodus 14:15-31**

In Exodus 14:15-31 is found “one of the greatest stories of divine deliverance in all of Scripture, that of Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground and the drowning of the Egyptian chariot army when they attempted to pursue them.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, so significant was this climactic moment in the history of Israel that it reverberates repeatedly to the glory of God throughout the rest of the Bible.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 183, observes that the phrase “your loins girded” in Exod 12:11 is used by Jesus in Luke 12:35; by Paul in Eph 6:14; and by Peter in 1 Pet 1:13, in every case to suggest “readiness” either for service or for confrontation. Hamilton also suggests possible parallels between the same verse of Exod and Mark 6:8-11, where Jesus sends out the Twelve.

<sup>67</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 337.

<sup>68</sup>For example, in the New Testament alone, see Luke 1:68; Acts 13:17; 1 Cor 10:1-2; Heb 11:29; Rev 15:2-3.

Exodus 14:15-31 has numerous connections with the New Testament literature. Victor Hamilton sees a possible link with Mark 5:1-20, where a herd of swine rush headlong into water at the command of Jesus. Hamilton asks, “Might the swine’s going headlong into the lake (Luke 8:31) and drowning recall the Egyptians’ streaming headlong into the sea and drowning?”<sup>69</sup> Further, the passage connects significantly with 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, where, in warning the church against falling away from God, Paul rehearses Israel’s lapse into disobedience despite the great salvation wrought for them at the Red Sea. Finally, John Mackay not only observes the indissolubility of the Passover and Red Sea narratives, he also links those stories to the cross and resurrection of Christ:

Their departure from the land on the night of the Passover and their passage through the Red Sea have to be thought of as two parts of the one event in the same way as the crucifixion and the resurrection are both required to constitute the gospel message.<sup>70</sup>

### **Exodus 19:3-8**

Eugene Merrill trumpets the importance of Exodus 19:3-8 within the book of Exodus:

Without doubt Exodus 19:4-6 is the most theologically significant text in the book of Exodus, for it is the linchpin between the patriarchal promises of the sonship of Israel and the Sinaitic Covenant whereby Israel became the servant nation of Yahweh.<sup>71</sup>

Now at Sinai, the redeemed people of God are offered a covenant for the first time. Here God rehearses the staggering redemption he had just executed on behalf of his people, and then calls the people to obedience and service. What follows Exodus 19:3-8 is a

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<sup>69</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 220.

<sup>70</sup>Mackay, *Exodus*, 260.

<sup>71</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, “A Theology of the Pentateuch,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 32. In a similar vein are the words of R. W. Moberly, “Exodus,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 46, who writes that in this passage “we have keywords that sum up Exodus as a whole.”

lengthy legal section, including the Ten Words. The people must obey *because* they are redeemed; not *to be* redeemed.

The obvious connection between Exodus 19:3-8 and the New Testament is found in Peter's employment of the phrase "holy priesthood" in 1 Peter 2:5 (cf. Exod 19:6), where he is speaking concerning the identity of the church.

### **Exodus 25:8-9; 39:42-43; 40:34-35**

Exodus 25:8-9; 39:42-43; 40:34-35 describe: (1) God instructing the construction of the tabernacle; (2) the completion of the tabernacle; and (3) the glory of God filling the tabernacle. Taken together, these passages are a kind of 'skeleton' of the lengthy tabernacle narrative.

Israel was redeemed for service (Exod 19:5) and worship (Exod 3:12). God longed to be known among his people, and with the construction of the tabernacle, he would be present with them. The tabernacle would become the center of service and worship for the people of God.

The importance of the tabernacle to Old Testament worship cannot be overstated, and need not be rehearsed here. In the span of just two chapters in the New Testament, it is highly significant that Christ is described in terms of both tabernacle and temple (John 1:14, 2:21).<sup>72</sup> Christ becomes the location of God's presence, and in later New Testament literature, that honor is given to the church (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

Chapters 2-9 are eight sermon manuscripts which take as their basis the passages just discussed. The biblical-theological approach explored in this chapter is fleshed out and modeled in the sermons.

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<sup>72</sup>As noted by Enns, *Exodus*, 29.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE PREQUEL HELPS ONE GRASP THE SEQUEL: EXODUS 1:1-14

#### **The Prequel Comes Before the Sequel**

A trend in Hollywood has been to release prequel movies *after* their sequels.<sup>1</sup> For example, *Batman Forever* appeared in theatres in 1995, but its prequel, *Batman Begins*, was released ten years later, in 2005. The first six *Star Wars* movies are another example of this trend. The first three *Star Wars* movies—released several decades ago—were followed by a set of three prequel movies that were produced well after the initial three. It would seem that Hollywood has a fondness for relating chapter 1 well after viewers have been exposed to subsequent chapters.

Not so in the Bible. God gave chapter 1 before he gave succeeding chapters. God gave Genesis before Exodus. The prequel comes before the sequel, and it is vital to read and understand the prequel before engaging the sequel. The prequel, Genesis, provides crucial information for one seeking to grasp the content of Exodus.<sup>2</sup> If even the first chapter of Exodus is read without an understanding of what transpired in Genesis, there is a risk of making errant conclusions about the reading.

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<sup>1</sup>The idea for the illustration given in this paragraph (and employed throughout the wider chapter) arose from a sentence written by John Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 286, who comments concerning Exodus: “The narrator assumes that the reader has already read the ‘prequel,’ to use a neologism from the movie industry.”

<sup>2</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 3, writes, “The text [of Exodus] rests upon a knowledge of Genesis; it takes for granted that the reader knows the identity and experiences of Joseph, is aware of God’s promises to the patriarchs, and is familiar with the account of the migration of Jacob and his family to Egypt.”

The first fourteen verses of Exodus locate the descendants of Jacob in Egypt, and tell of the suffering of those people under the brutal regime of Pharaoh.<sup>3</sup> If those verses are read in a vacuum without any reference to the prequel, Genesis, the very lovingkindness of God might be called into question. One may question why God would allow the descendants of Jacob to languish as they did under the hard yoke of Pharaoh. One may also ask why there seems to be such a notable absence of God despite his people's suffering.<sup>4</sup>

The material in the prequel helps to address all those kinds of questions. For example, in Genesis 15:13-16, God himself had promised four hundred years of affliction for his people in a foreign land.<sup>5</sup> As Exodus opens, the people are simply living out the sovereign and inscrutable decree of God. God knew all about their suffering and how long it would last; he was not absent or aloof or deaf to their cries. Further, in Genesis 46:1-4, God himself told Jacob and his family to go down to Egypt in order to escape a famine.<sup>6</sup> God had promised Jacob that *in Egypt* he (God) would make a "great nation" of Jacob, and God also promised his presence with Jacob and the people both when they went into Egypt and when they came out of it. All of this indicates that God was certainly not surprised by

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<sup>3</sup>I credit Russell Fuller for drawing my attention to Josh 24:14, which says explicitly that while in Egypt, the Hebrew people served "gods" other than Yahweh. Thus, even though it is accurate to say that while in Egypt, the Hebrews suffered under Pharaoh and his brutal regime, it is also true to say that at least part of their suffering was probably a result of their own idolatry.

<sup>4</sup>Several commentators discuss God's apparent absence in the first chapter of Exodus, including Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 50-51; Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 1-24; J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 31-33; Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out: A Fresh Look at Exodus* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974), 9, and Sarna, *Exodus*, 3.

<sup>5</sup>As noted by Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 90-91.

<sup>6</sup>As noted by Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 32.

the situation of his people in Egypt and their being oppressed by the Egyptians. In fact, God willed it.

For their part, the people being afflicted in the opening verses of Exodus would have known well the story of their ancestor Abraham, who at one point in his life had gone down to Egypt because of a famine.<sup>7</sup> While in Egypt, Abraham's wife had been effectively incarcerated in the house of Pharaoh, which displeased God and caused God to strike Pharaoh with great plagues. Abraham and his wife had then left Egypt with great wealth. This was all like a detailed preview of the exodus.

The people aching under Pharaoh at the beginning of the book of Exodus would have remembered Abraham's story. They would have been aware of a God who in times past delivered Abraham from Pharaoh and Egypt, and this God was also their God. To be sure, their suffering under the new Pharaoh was very real and disturbingly painful, causing them to cry out in agony, but as a real solace they could remember in hope how God had delivered Abraham from Egypt. Would he do it again for them?

Understanding Genesis is necessary for a rounded reading of Exodus. The material in Genesis gives assurance that God was certainly aware and present and in sovereign control during the events of Exodus 1:1-14. He was working out his great purposes and had certainly not fallen asleep at the switch. Perhaps when difficult circumstances arise in life, one is tempted to doubt God's presence. Reading the sequel called Exodus through the lens of the prequel called Genesis can help one see that even in times when one is unsure about God's presence, he is still at work for the good of his children.

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<sup>7</sup>The idea for this paragraph originated from reading Peter Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 73. Interestingly, Leithart comments, "Like a preview at the movie theatre, the exodus of Abram is a preview of the Exodus of Israel" (emphasis added).

## Exodus 1:1-4: A Flashback to Genesis 46

In the Hebrew text, the very first word of the book of Exodus contains within it an indication that the story of Exodus is a continuation of the book of Genesis.<sup>8</sup> In the original Hebrew, Exodus begins with a conjunction—the word *and*: “*And* these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household.”<sup>9</sup> Walter Kaiser writes, “This feature indicates that the writer is conscious of the fact that he is contributing to an ongoing sequence of revelation and narration.”<sup>10</sup> The word *and* connects the opening of Exodus with the prequel that preceded it. However, rather than simply picking up precisely where the last verse of Genesis left off (with Joseph’s death), Exodus begins instead by briefly recounting events that transpired back in Genesis 46, some seventy years prior to Joseph’s death.<sup>11</sup> Genesis 46 related the story of Jacob and family traveling from Beersheba to Egypt, and this is precisely where Exodus 1:1 picks up. Exodus 1:1 is organically connected to the prequel called Genesis, but it connects back to that time seventy years before Joseph died, when the family had journeyed to Egypt.

Verses 2-4 then give a listing of the sons of Jacob who made that journey to Egypt: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.<sup>12</sup> Verse 5 of the passage says that “all of the descendants of

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<sup>8</sup>Several commentators note that the conjunction at the start of the initial word of Exodus (וְאֵלֶּיךָ) is an indication that the book is a continuation from where Genesis left off. For example, see R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 53; John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, vol. 1, *Chapters 1-18* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 41; Enns, *Exodus*, 40; and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 350.

<sup>9</sup>All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>10</sup>Kaiser, *Exodus*, 350.

<sup>11</sup>As noted by John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 28.

<sup>12</sup>I opted to exclude from the body of the discussion regarding the use of Gen 35:23-36 in Exod 1:2-4, although its use is indeed interesting. Sarna, *Exodus*, 3, writes, “The sons—that is, the tribes of

Jacob were seventy persons,” and that “Joseph was already in Egypt.”<sup>13</sup> Again in these statements is a clear allusion to the prequel called Genesis. Jacob had *seventy* descendants;<sup>14</sup> a special significance is being signaled with the number seventy. In the Bible, the number seventy is often more than simply a numerical figure. In Genesis 10, seventy nations were listed prior to the Tower of Babel incident. As Peter Leithart writes, “When we learn that there are seventy in the household of Jacob, we are learning that Israel replaces the ‘seventy nations’ that fell at the tower of Babel.”<sup>15</sup> So the descendants of Jacob in Exodus 1:5 are to be taken as a ‘whole,’ which replaces the seventy nations of Genesis 10. Soon in the text of Exodus a new creation moment is announced explicitly; here in Exodus 1:5 is a strong hint that God has been at work creating a new humanity in order to accomplish his purposes.<sup>16</sup>

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Israel—are listed within a formulaic framework (vv. 1,4) that is clearly adapted from Genesis 46:8, 26-27; yet the order does not follow the one given in that chapter. Instead, it is based on Genesis 35:23-26. There is good reason for this seeming anomaly, for this latter chapter contains the divine blessing to Jacob: ‘Be fertile and increase; / A nation, yea an assembly of nations, / Shall descend from you’ [v. 11]. Here, in this opening section of Exodus, the text affirms that the promise has been fulfilled.”

<sup>13</sup>In the interest of homiletical focus, the discussion of v. 5 does not include any analysis of the intriguing phrase: כָּל-נַפְשׁוֹת יִצְחָק יָרְדוּ-יַעֲקֹב (all the souls who went out from the thigh of Jacob). The reader should consult the commentaries for consideration of the word יָרַךְ (‘thigh’) and its use in this verse. Thought-provoking are the comments of Stephen G. Dempster, “Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 7: “The fact that Jacob’s children all came from his ‘thigh,’ recalls the broken and blessed Jacob, who was renamed Israel at Penuel, the one who fought with God and lived to tell about it (Exod 1:5; Gen 32). He was crippled but blessed: out of that crippled thigh had come a large family.”

<sup>14</sup>A range of interpretations exist concerning the use of ‘seventy’ in Exod 1:5. At one end of the scale are interpreters such as Kaiser, *Exodus*, 350, and Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 43, who—with Gen 46:26-27 in mind—do not see any special symbolic significance to the number seventy in Exod 1:5. At the other end of the spectrum are commentators such as Sarna, *Exodus*, 4, who claims a “typological” meaning for the number in Exod 1:5, and George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 2, who writes, “The number 70 is a specially significant number in biblical thinking rather than a mere mathematical count of Jacob’s offspring.” I opted to follow the latter group of commentators in my interpretation.

<sup>15</sup>Leithart, *A House for My Name*, 73-74.

<sup>16</sup>A “new creation moment will be announced explicitly” at Exod 1:7.

## Exodus 1:6-7: A Burgeoning Missionary People

Verse 6 is transitional.<sup>17</sup> If Exodus 1:1 began by recounting events that transpired in Genesis 46, now at Exodus 1:6 the reader is taken to the events of Genesis 50:26, where the notice was given that Joseph had died.<sup>18</sup> Exodus 1:6 reads, “Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation.” This verse is transitional because it marks the end of the history of the particular family of Jacob. Moving forward to Exodus 1:7 and following, the focus shifts to an entire people, the wider group of the descendants of Abraham, who eventually become the established nation of Israel.

With verse 7 comes perhaps the most central verse of the passage, and it would be hard to overstate the importance of reading Exodus 1:7 through the lens of the prequel called Genesis, since Exodus 1:7 is brimming with allusions to Genesis. The verse reads, “But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.” First, this verse is a direct fulfillment of Genesis 46:3, where God had promised Jacob that while in Egypt, Jacob and family would be made into a great nation.<sup>19</sup> Exodus 1:7 declares the new victory of super-fertility in the descendants of Jacob, wrought by God, which has overcome the infertility found in Genesis (in people like Sarah, Rachel and Rebekah).<sup>20</sup> Exodus 1:7

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<sup>17</sup>Commenting on vv. 6-7, Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 43, writes, “The author is attempting to move from a history centred on an individual (i.e., Abraham) or a family/clan (i.e., Jacob’s sons), as found in Genesis, to a history that will now focus on a people (eventually a nation).”

<sup>18</sup>Commenting on Exod 1:6 is Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1-11*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 16: “The true sequel to Gen 50:26 sets in only in verse 6.”

<sup>19</sup>As noted by Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 36.

<sup>20</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 5, comments, “In Genesis the problem is too much infertility. Here so much fertility will arouse the paranoid fears of Pharaoh. Apparently there are few, if any, Sarahs or Rebekahs or Rachels in Goshen.” Similar is the comment of John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 291: “Extraordinarily . . . the old couple who could not have children have become a multitude, enough to fill a land.”

declares that the mass of the descendants of Jacob is the new Adam; the group of people being fruitful and multiplying in keeping with the command of God that had been given to Adam in Genesis 1:28, to Noah in Genesis 9:1 and 7, and to Jacob in Genesis 35:11.<sup>21</sup> Exodus 1:7 announces that what God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in terms of making them fruitful and multiplying has come to pass.<sup>22</sup> The mustard seed called Abraham has now become the tree; and a new creation moment has arrived.<sup>23</sup>

Exodus 1:7 plainly alerts the arrival of a new creation because it repeats four Hebrew words found in the creation account of Genesis 1:20-22.<sup>24</sup> In Genesis 1:20-22, sea creatures and birds are commanded by God to “swarm” and be “fruitful” and “multiply” and “fill” their domains. In Exodus 1:7, the Hebrew literally indicates that the descendants of Abraham were “swarming” and being “fruitful” and “multiplying” and “filling” the land of Egypt. Thus Exodus 1:7 indicates a new creation moment. A new

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<sup>21</sup>A great many commentators and theologians have observed the correspondences between Exod 1:7 and (at least!) Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7; and 35:11. Among these commentators are Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 2-3; Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 44; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 93-94; William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 32; Enns, *Exodus*, 40; Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 256; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 25; Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 150; James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 90; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 5; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1993), 231, 233; Mackay, *Exodus*, 32; Sarna, *Exodus*, 4, and Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 61.

<sup>22</sup>Abraham: see Gen 17:2, 6; 22:17. Isaac: see Gen 26:4, 24. Jacob: see Gen 28:3; 35:11; 48:4.

<sup>23</sup>The idea in this sentence was gleaned from Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 150: “The unexpectedly rapid population increase recalls Jesus’ parables of the mustard seed and leaven (Luke 13:19, 21). The kingdom of God may look very small at a given time and place, but its destiny is to become a great multitude (Rev. 7:9).”

<sup>24</sup>The four words are פָּרָה (‘bear fruit’); שָׂרַץ (‘swarm, teem’); רָבָה (‘multiply’); and מָלֵא (‘fill’).

humanity has arisen in Egypt; a humanity whom God has purposed for his missionary purposes. Missionary purposes?<sup>25</sup>

Already noted is the fact that that Exodus 1:7 alludes directly to Genesis 1:28. Genesis 1:28 is God's commission to Adam to "be fruitful, multiply, and fill" the earth, and Exodus 1:7 tells that the descendants of Abraham were "fruitful, multiplied, and filled" the land of Egypt. So Exodus 1:7 and Genesis 1:28 are certainly connected. The descendants of Abraham are the new Adam in Egypt. However, it is interesting to consider that the two verses leading up to Genesis 1:28 are all about God's image. Genesis 1:26-27 are about God making humankind in his image. The reason God wanted Adam to "be fruitful, multiply and fill" the earth in Genesis 1:28 was for mission: specifically, that God's image and glory would spread across the globe. Adam failed, ultimately. So later in Genesis, when God commissioned Abraham, God reiterated his purpose to bless the globe through Abraham, the new Adam. In Genesis 12:3, God promised that through the descendants of Abraham, all the families of the earth would receive blessing. In Exodus 1:7, the descendants of Abraham are a teeming mass. Ross Blackburn explains, "Israel's fruitfulness indicates that God's missionary purposes were going forward in Egypt."<sup>26</sup> With this fact in mind, the attempt of Pharaoh to oppress the super-fertile descendants of Abraham looks all the more heinous.<sup>27</sup> In trying to damage the psyche of God's people

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<sup>25</sup>In the paragraph that follows I am indebted to the argument presented in W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 29-30.

<sup>26</sup>Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 30.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. Blackburn writes, "Pharaoh's opposition threatens God's purposes to be known throughout the world." Ibid. Enns, *Exodus*, 43, concurs, "The Egyptian king . . . is presented as an anti-God figure; he repeatedly places himself in direct opposition to God's redemptive plan." Peter Enns, "Exodus (Book)," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2000), 147, writes, "Pharaoh represents not only a force which is hostile to God's people and enslaves them (vv. 11-14), but also a force hostile to God himself, who wills that his people multiply."



and snuff out their numbers, Pharaoh is raging against God’s missionary purposes, which will always be a losing battle and a highly dangerous one at that.

### **Exodus 1:8-9: A New Pharaoh**

The Pharaoh of the exodus is introduced in verse 8: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” Worth noting is the fact that this “king” or “Pharaoh” presiding over Egypt is not named in Exodus, yet the two midwives who defy Pharaoh *are* named.<sup>28</sup> So the most powerful figure in the world at the time is not given the dignity of a name in the book of Exodus, yet two relatively powerless females are given names. Whichever specific Pharaoh this person was, one thing is clear: when he appeared in history as ruler over Egypt, there was an attendant change in policy toward the descendants of Abraham, and it is even possible that now a new dynasty emerged in Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

Many commentators argue that during the period when Joseph had risen to power in Egypt, a *Hyskos* Pharaoh had been in power.<sup>30</sup> The word *Hyskos* means “rulers of foreign lands.” A *Hyskos* Pharaoh was a citizen within a larger group of people with Semitic origin; this people group had invaded Egypt from the outside and by about 1720 BC they had taken control of the area. Being of Semitic origin himself, Joseph would have more easily risen to power under such a Pharaoh; however, there came a point at which the *Hyskos* people were driven out of the land, evicted back to Canaan from which

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<sup>28</sup>Here I am following Hamilton, *Exodus*, 7: “The Bible could easily have identified who this ‘new king’ was. It identifies the midwives by name (v. 15), but not this regal figure who more than likely was the most powerful person on the planet at that time.”

<sup>29</sup>Among commentators who subscribe to the view that a new dynasty emerged with the pharaoh of Exod 1:8 are Cole, *Exodus*, 54; Stuart, *Exodus*, 62-63, and John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 7, who writes, “This new king is the first king of a new dynasty, and, thus a king who has no obligation to respect, or even to inform himself of, any commitments to a non-native group within the territory of his reign.”

<sup>30</sup>Representative of this view is Stuart, *Exodus*, 62-63. See also Oswalt, *Exodus*, 287; and Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1996), 15-17. In this paragraph I am following such commentators.

they had come. At that time the native Egyptians took back control of their territory, and it is highly possible, though not altogether certain, that Exodus 1:8 represented the time of the *Hyskos* eviction. The new Pharaoh who arises in Exodus 1:8 could very well be a native Egyptian person who despised the *Hyskos* people and represents a brand new dynasty and with it a new policy. If this Pharaoh was in fact a born and bred Egyptian, he would certainly be less than sympathetic to the mass of the descendants of Abraham who were all of Semitic origin.

Exodus 1:8 says that this Pharaoh “did not know Joseph.” One wonders what this means. Perhaps this Pharaoh had simply never heard of Joseph.<sup>31</sup> Or perhaps this Pharaoh had no intimate, personal acquaintance with Joseph by virtue of the fact that he lived after Joseph.<sup>32</sup> Probably the idea is more forceful.<sup>33</sup> “Not knowing” Joseph may indicate that this Pharaoh refused to acknowledge any contribution that Joseph had made to the nation of Egypt. Again, if this Pharaoh was a native Egyptian who rose to power immediately after the *Hyskos* eviction, then he would certainly be sour concerning the subject of Semitic accomplishments in his land. “Not knowing” Joseph probably indicates a strong reticence on the part of this Pharaoh to celebrate any significance attributable to Joseph.

In verse 9, this Pharaoh becomes the first person to speak in the book of Exodus.<sup>34</sup> He speaks to “his people”; probably to a group of his royal advisors.<sup>35</sup> His

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<sup>31</sup>Virtually no commentator takes this approach.

<sup>32</sup>This seems to be the view of Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 46: “It is not that the new Pharaoh had not heard of Joseph, but that he had no personal acquaintance with him.”

<sup>33</sup>In the remainder of this paragraph I am following the basic view set forth by a number of commentators including Hamilton, *Exodus*, 7; Mackay, *Exodus*, 34; Houtman, *Exodus*, 234-36; and Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 151n12.

<sup>34</sup>As noted by Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreters Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 694.

<sup>35</sup>So Hamilton, *Exodus*, 8; and Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 157.

words in verse 9 reflect the reality and blessing recorded back in verse 7.<sup>36</sup> Pharaoh acknowledges the sheer volume of the descendants of Abraham who are living in his land. He says to his advisors, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.” Where verse 7 had been a happy celebration of God’s blessing and a joyous depiction of the super-fertility of God’s people, verse 9 represents an anxious and fearful Pharaoh viewing God’s blessing as a national problem.<sup>37</sup> Far from seeing the abundance of the Hebrew people as a new creation blessing worth celebrating, Pharaoh saw this abundance of Hebrews as a menace to his kingdom and a problem to be solved. Terence Fretheim remarks, “A sign of blessing for Israel is a sign of disaster for Pharaoh.”<sup>38</sup> Pharaoh and God are at odds in their respective understandings of what is indicated by hordes of Hebrew people. The blessing of God is never celebrated by the seed of the serpent.<sup>39</sup> Pharaoh wants to convince his advisors that if something is not done soon, the Egyptian people will soon find themselves in a minority position.<sup>40</sup> Cunningly, Pharaoh calls the mass of the descendants of Abraham a *people*: “The *people* of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.” In other words, the situation according to Pharaoh was that in the land of Egypt there were now two peoples or two separate nations: Israelites and

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<sup>36</sup>See also Ps 105:24-25; Acts 13:17.

<sup>37</sup>Mackay, *Exodus*, 35, comments, “Instead of rejoicing with those who were evidently enjoying the favour of God, he [Pharaoh] views it as a threat that he must handle.”

<sup>38</sup>Fretheim, *Exodus*, 27.

<sup>39</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 60-61 writes perceptively, “In a fallen world, the blessings of God are often so in conflict with the prevailing corrupt values of this world’s culture that they function as a threat to those who are not aligned with God’s will.” Similar is the thought of Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 137: “The reason that Pharaoh is on edge is because God is blessing his people. Wherever God’s unique blessing is on his own, someone somewhere is sure to squirm or get riled.”

<sup>40</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 64, writes of Pharaoh, “To portray his own people as somehow a minority, potentially dominated by the outsider majority, was a clever way to engender popular support for his plan.”

Egyptians.<sup>41</sup> For Pharaoh this situation was untenable; something had to be done! Just as Adolf Hitler spread propaganda—based on the false and insidious premise that the Jewish people were a threat to Germany and the world—so Pharaoh did before him in Exodus 1:9.<sup>42</sup>

### Exodus 1:10-11: A Scheming Pharaoh

In verse 10, Pharaoh begins to reveal his plan. Once again, knowledge of the prequel called Genesis aids tremendously in the reading of verse 10.<sup>43</sup> In Genesis 3:15 God had outlined the ongoing battle that would transpire between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Soon after creation, the serpent deceived the first couple and part of the result of that deception and fall into sin was that an ongoing struggle would ensue between the serpent’s offspring and Eve’s offspring. In Exodus 1:10, the desire of Pharaoh is to “deal shrewdly” concerning the numerous offspring of the woman. Pharaoh sounds like the serpent in this verse, who was described in Genesis 3:1 as “more shrewd than any of the wild animals.”<sup>44</sup> Pharaoh is the seed of the serpent who is planning horror for the numerous descendants of Abraham who are the new creation; the seed of the woman upon whom God’s blessing rests. Rikki Watts points out that the serpentine policy of Pharaoh will involve hard labor for the seed of the woman, just as the curse had

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>42</sup>Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 6, comments on the statement of Pharaoh in Exod 1:9: “His statement does not necessarily mean that they indeed were numerous. Antisemitic paranoia has expressed itself in a similar way throughout the ages. For example, in no way did the Jews pose any real threat to Hitler. Yet he depicted them as a mortal danger not only to Germany but to the whole world.”

<sup>43</sup>The remainder of this paragraph is an expansion on the following quote from R. E. Watts, “Exodus,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 479: “Pharaoh . . . with serpent-like cunning (Exod 1:10a), embarks on a policy resulting in hard service, pain in childbearing, and death, all of which are associated with life outside the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:16-19).”

<sup>44</sup>In Gen 3:1, the serpent is described as עָרִים (*‘shrewd, crafty’*), whereas in Exod 1:10, Pharaoh wants to ‘be shrewd’ (חָכֵם). Although the precise terminology between verses is different, the imagery matches.

involved hard labor for Adam in Genesis 3:19. The policy will also involve pain and suffering in the area of childbirth, just as the curse had included pain in childbirth for Eve in Genesis 3:16. The policy will also bring death on the Israelites, just as death came to a sinful Adam in Genesis 3:19.<sup>45</sup>

It is interesting and somewhat humorous that Pharaoh desires to deal “shrewdly.” The word translated “shrewdly” is literally *wisdom*: “Let us *make ourselves wise* concerning the Hebrews.”<sup>46</sup> Pharaoh is clearly an unbeliever. He is not interested in Yahweh, the true and living God of the Hebrews. In this situation Pharaoh can never be wise, for as Psalm 111:10 declares, “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>47</sup> Proud Pharaoh makes a pretense toward wisdom in verse 10, but shortly in the narrative he will be shown for the fool he is when two lowly midwives outsmart him.<sup>48</sup> Whatever wisdom Pharaoh pretends to have, God easily outstrips it. Today, the most powerful and intelligent (yet Godless) detractors and persecutors of the church are no match for God, in whom wisdom resides.

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<sup>45</sup>For the sake of space, I have not included still another connection between Exod 1:10 and Genesis, which is observed by Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 48; Enns, *Exodus*, 43n12; and Hamilton, *Exodus*, 8. In Exod 1:10 Pharaoh says to his advisors, “Come, let us deal shrewdly with them.” The phrase “come let us” is the same phrase found in the story of the Tower of Babel in Gen 11:3-4. The makers of the Tower of Babel had acted outside of the will of God, twice saying, “Come let us” as they baked bricks and constructed their tower. God put a stop to their plan. When Pharaoh says “come let us” deal shrewdly with the Hebrews, he is acting outside the will of God, and God will stop his plans also.

<sup>46</sup>נְתַחֲכֶמָה is the *hitpa'el* cohortative of חָכַם and is translated in the ESV as “let us deal shrewdly.” The word *wisely* (in place of *shrewdly*) is found in versions such as the JPS, KJV, and NASB.

<sup>47</sup>The comment of Gerald H. Wilson, “חָכַם,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:131-32, is apropos: “The Israelite narrator and reader would understand the irony of the circumstance. The Egyptians’ self-will to adopt a wisdom stance is no more than a pretense—wishful thinking—with no basis in reality, since it has no grounding in the will and purpose of Yahweh.”

<sup>48</sup>Childs, *Exodus*, 13, remarks, “Pharaoh thinks to act shrewdly, but is really the wicked fool who is duped by the clever midwives.”

## Serpentine Actions

The prequel called Genesis also helps one comprehend the concerns of Pharaoh in verse 10.<sup>49</sup> Pharaoh is worried about the possibility of further population growth in the Hebrews (he is worried “lest they multiply”), and is also concerned about the Hebrews “escaping the land.” To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God had promised numerous descendants and a land of their own. These are precisely the two promises that Pharaoh wants to terminate in Exodus 1:10. In this scheming, Pharaoh shows himself to be the consummate anti-God figure and seed of the serpent. Pharaoh wants to impose a moratorium on population increase and a barricade to the Hebrews’s departure out of Egypt (to take the land of Canaan). He wants to lessen the threat to his regime by enforcing a halt on the numbers of Hebrews, yet still he needs them to stay in Egypt so he can exploit them for his labor projects. After all, if they up and left, they might then join forces with the evicted *Hyskos* people, and then where would Egypt be? A new invasion of Egypt would become all too possible. So then, Pharaoh would like the Hebrews’s multiplying to cease, and he would also like to prevent the Hebrews from escaping his nation. In all of it he shows himself to be acting in total opposition to the purposes of God.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>In this paragraph I am following the basic literary argument of James K. Bruckner, *Exodus, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 21-22, who writes, “Pharaoh’s two concerns as an administrator (that they are ‘too numerous’ and might ‘leave the country’) set him in direct opposition to God’s two promises to Jacob: that ‘a company of nations’ would come from him and that God would give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 35:11-12). This sets the stage for the battle between the God of creation (‘be fruitful and multiply’) and of history (‘I will give you the land’) and the great and powerful Pharaoh.” I am aware of the ongoing debate concerning how to translate עָלָה in this verse (i.e., is it “escape” the land or “take over” the land?), and although commentators such as Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 151, and Stuart, *Exodus*, 65, make strong arguments in favor of the latter option, in the end I do not find their arguments as compelling as those for the former, argued persuasively by Bruckner (as above); Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 17-19, and Mackay, *Exodus*, 36. Arguing for the latter (“take over”) option, Stuart, *Exodus*, 66, comments, “With the proper translation of Exod 1:10, the Pharaoh’s speech makes sense; without it, it does not.” I hope, by the logic employed in the above paragraph in the body of this chapter to demonstrate that Stuart’s comment is overstated at minimum and perhaps even untrue.

<sup>50</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 43, observes, “This is not a battle of Israel versus Pharaoh, or even Moses versus Pharaoh, but of God versus Pharaoh.”

“Therefore,” as the beginning of verse 11 says, “they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens.” Now the plan of Pharaoh is implemented, and with that implementation, the next phase of God’s plan also came to pass.<sup>51</sup> God had sovereignly decreed back in Genesis 15:13 that the offspring of Abraham would be “afflicted for four hundred years,” and now that affliction was underway in Egypt. So unbeknownst to Pharaoh, he was acting within the parameters of God’s plan. God was very much present at this juncture of Israel’s story.

Pharaoh “set taskmasters” over the descendants of Abraham. “Taskmasters” were like bosses over labor gangs who compelled their subjects to work on projects of the state without pay.<sup>52</sup> These Egyptian bosses would have been ruthless in their tactics, because not only did they hate the Hebrew people, they also knew that their own livelihood depended on their subjects meeting quotas.<sup>53</sup> Verse 11 explains that these bosses were there to “afflict” the Hebrews with “heavy burdens.” Victor Hamilton translates the word “afflict” as “crush”; the bosses were there to ‘crush’ the people.<sup>54</sup> The original Hebrew word has to do with forcing, subjugating, wearing down.<sup>55</sup> The word translated “burdens” is about compulsory labor.<sup>56</sup> So the overall picture that begins to emerge is a picture of brutality, harassment, and little to no relief for the people of God.

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<sup>51</sup>Here I am following Fretheim, *Exodus*, 28, who writes, “[Pharaoh’s] acts of oppression confirm that God’s word to Abraham in Gen. 15:13 was on target.”

<sup>52</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 6.

<sup>53</sup>So Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 158.

<sup>54</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 9.

<sup>55</sup>The *pi<sup>e</sup>l* of עָנָה is used at Exod 1:11. The meaning “to force” is attested by Leonard J. Coppes, “עָנָה III,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:682. “To subjugate” is attested in Paul Wegner, “עָנָה,” in *New International Dictionary*, 3:450; and “to wear down” is affirmed by Oswalt, *Exodus*, 286.

<sup>56</sup>So Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 47-48.

The end of verse 11 says that the Hebrew people “built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.” Here at the beginning of Exodus, the people are pictured constructing buildings for Pharaoh, seed of the serpent; at the end of Exodus the people will be free from Pharaoh and building a tabernacle for God.<sup>57</sup> Victor Hamilton writes, “The first building project is imposed and harsh. The second building one is God-revealed and an honor with which to be involved.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Exodus 1:12-14: God over Pharaoh**

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to demonstrate that one’s apprehension of the initial verses of Exodus will not be as thoroughgoing as it might be unless one is reading the verses through the lens of the prequel called Genesis. This contention is certainly true for verse 12. In two ways the Genesis story of Jacob emerges in verse 12. First, in Genesis 31:6-13, Jacob catalogued the ways in which his uncle Laban had attempted to deceive and exploit him, yet at every turn, God successfully turned the efforts of Laban into blessing for Jacob. Similarly, as the descendants of Jacob labored under the exploitative pharaoh of Exodus, God was turning the oppression of Pharaoh into blessing. Exodus 1:12 says that “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad.” As John Mackay puts it, God “does not allow the might and stratagems of the Egyptian state to thwart his purposes.”<sup>59</sup> To paraphrase Walter Brueggemann, no matter how ‘advantaged’ Pharaoh and company may have perceived

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<sup>57</sup>T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 190, states, “[Pharaoh’s] city building stands in contrast to the temple-city that God desires to establish on earth. Later, freed from Pharaoh’s control, the Israelites devote themselves to constructing the tabernacle, a portable residence for God that marks the first stage toward the establishment of the temple-city.”

<sup>58</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 9.

<sup>59</sup>Mackay, *Exodus*, 39.



themselves, Israel still enjoyed a decisive advantage because of her God.<sup>60</sup> God turned the schemes of Laban into blessing for Jacob, now he was turning the tactics of Pharaoh into blessing for Israel. God can still do this. He can take the wrath of human beings and turn it into blessing and good.

The second way in which verse 12 echoes the story of Jacob is found in its terminology. Verse 12 says that the more the people were oppressed, the more they *spread abroad*. In Genesis 28:14, God promised Jacob that the offspring of Jacob would *spread abroad* in all directions. The same Hebrew word is used in both verses, and it has the sense of “breaking through” or “bursting out.”<sup>61</sup> Jacob was told that his offspring would “burst out,” and now Exodus 1:12 reports a population explosion in the descendants of Jacob, despite their being oppressed. God’s promise to Jacob would not be stymied by Pharaoh and his machinations.

The close of verse 12 tells of the terrified worry of the people of Egypt as they beheld the sheer numbers of the Hebrews.<sup>62</sup> Probably the sense of dread experienced by the Egyptians was a result of their fear of a war breaking out.<sup>63</sup> With so many Hebrews in their midst, how could Egypt remain safe? So what did the Egyptians do? They panicked and intensified their affliction of the Hebrews.<sup>64</sup> The last two verses of the passage say,

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<sup>60</sup>Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 695, writes, “Disadvantaged Israel has a decisive advantage in the narrative.”

<sup>61</sup>The verb in both verses is the *qal* of פָּרַץ. The meaning “break through” is attested in F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 829. Cornelis Van Dam, “פָּרַץ,” in *New International Dictionary*, 3:691, has “break through, burst out.” Knight, *Theology as Narration*, 5, suggests that the Israelites “burst out.”

<sup>62</sup>“Terrified worry” is the sense of קוֹץ in Exod 1:12, which appears in the *qal*. Oswalt, *Exodus*, 286, comments, “The Egyptians were not just worried, they were terrified.”

<sup>63</sup>So Michael A. Grisanti, “קוֹץ,” in *New International Dictionary*, 3:906, who writes, “The three instances in which *mipp<sup>e</sup>né* [מִפְּנֵי] follows *qws* [קוֹץ] (Exod 1:12; Num 22:3; Isa 7:16) denote a people’s fear of another people because of the potential outbreak of hostilities.”

<sup>64</sup>Houtman, *Exodus*, 223; Stuart, *Exodus*, 70; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 2.

“So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.” In other words, now the Egyptians made life intolerable for the Hebrews.<sup>65</sup>

Of special note in verses 13 and 14 is the fivefold repetition of a Hebrew word that at its most basic means “serve.”<sup>66</sup> The Egyptians ruthlessly made the Hebrews *serve* with hard *service* and all kinds of *service*. In all their *service* they ruthlessly made them *serve* as slaves. The next time the word “serve” is used in Exodus is in 3:20, where God promises Moses that the people ‘serving’ Pharaoh in affliction will one day escape to ‘serve’ God at Mount Sinai. Indeed, one of the great questions Exodus poses is the question of service: one must serve someone, but who will it be, God or Pharaoh? God or something else?<sup>67</sup>

### **The Good Sovereignty of God**

Having looked in some detail at the initial passage of the book of Exodus, it has become clear that the events recorded in these verses did not happen in a vacuum. In the prequel called Genesis God decreed the then-future affliction of his people in Egypt, and Exodus 1:1-14 simply describes the fruition of that decree (Gen 15:13). In the prequel called Genesis, it was God who commanded Jacob to go down to Egypt where God would make a great nation of his descendants, and the initial verses of Exodus

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<sup>65</sup>I am borrowing the description “intolerable” from Stuart, *Exodus*, 71.

<sup>66</sup>Bruckner, *Exodus*, 22, calls the fivefold repetition of עָבַד “the literary key” of vv. 13-14, and Fretheim, *Exodus*, 30, notes that עָבַד “provides one of the leading motifs in the book of Exodus.”

<sup>67</sup>Michael Goldberg, “Exodus 1:13-14,” *Interpretation* 37, no. 4 (October 1983): 390-91, writes, “In this narrative, being liberated from Egypt does not result in one being left free to one’s own devices. Instead, down the road in the Exodus, the Israelites go from being the servants of the Egyptians to being the servants of God,” and, “God’s call is not the call to let his people go so that they may be ‘free and independent’ in their ‘pursuit of happiness’ or whatever other ends or goals they individually happen to prefer. Instead, the call of God, issued repeatedly in Exodus and sent forth to us today as well, takes a markedly different form: ‘Let my people go *that they may serve Me.*’”

describe the actualization of that promise, even in the midst of the harsh conditions of Egyptian oppression (Gen 46:1-4, cf. Exod 1:7). God foresaw the affliction in Egypt, yet out of the affliction God would work glory.

Whenever the Jewish Passover meal is celebrated, one of the features of that meal is the serving of a hard-boiled egg.<sup>68</sup> The presence of this egg in the Passover meal has been interpreted in several different ways, but one of the most common interpretations is that the hard-boiled egg symbolizes the Hebrew people under Pharaoh in Exodus: The more an egg is boiled, the harder it becomes, and the more the Hebrew people were tested and afflicted under Pharaoh, the stronger they became under the sovereign hand of God. Could the situation be similar for today's church?

The Master of the church is Jesus Christ, who was hated by many and finally arrested, tried, tortured, and crucified; yet through that horror, God worked his redemptive masterpiece. The crucified and risen Master of the church says to his church, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Matt 10:22). The church must understand that she is not above her Master. The people of Christ's church should expect to be persecuted for naming the name of Jesus. In 1 Peter 4:12-13 the apostle Peter said, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

In 1 Timothy 3:12, Paul warns that if anyone desires to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus, that person *will* be persecuted. However, there is real hope in a verse like Exodus 1:12: "The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad." The God of the church is the same God who superintended the people in Egypt. He can still easily frustrate the evil plans of men. The God of the church is the same God who, despite the vicious persecution against the early church recorded in the

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<sup>68</sup>In this paragraph I am following Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 89.

book of Acts, continued to grow his church and give it the inner fortitude to boldly preach the gospel.<sup>69</sup> God can still boil eggs in the furnace of affliction and make them strong for His sake. The God of the prequel called biblical history is still God in the sequel in which the church lives; his power has not changed. May God’s church imbibe this hope, deep in its bones, and go forth in mission—despite the ‘static’ the church may receive—in the strength and enablement that he provides.

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<sup>69</sup>For example, see Acts 4:1-4; 5:14-18; 5:40-6:1; 6:7; 8:1-4.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DELIVERER DELIVERED: EXODUS 2:1-10

#### **Standing on the Promises of God**

As she sat gently stroking her burgeoning midsection, she was fretful. Her husband Amram did his best to encourage her. Lovingly he caressed her face and whispered,

My dear Jochebed! Is not the word of our God more sure and powerful than that of Pharaoh? Are we not the seed of Abraham?<sup>1</sup> Did God not promise us offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as plentiful as the sand on the seashore [Gen 22:17]? Has he not also promised our release from this very land [Gen 15:14]? With promises such as these, should we not expect the good hand of providence to be at work for us now?<sup>2</sup> Fret not, my love. If our baby is a boy, he will be safe in God's hands. Oh, how I wish I had shielded your ears from the decree of Pharaoh! Just remember that Pharaoh's plans must always bend to the higher plans of our God.<sup>3</sup>

According to Exodus 6:20, Amram and Jochebed were the parents of Moses.<sup>4</sup>

Moses was a Hebrew baby born into a land whose king had declared death on every

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<sup>1</sup>Amram and Jochebed must have experienced tension as they (1) listened to Pharaoh's deathly decree, but (2) recalled the promises of God to Abraham concerning life. The tension is best outlined by Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 37-38, who writes concerning Jochebed and Amram: "As members of Israel, they are vassals of Pharaoh who have received word that their children are destined to die. Yet as members of Israel, they are also the seed of Abraham who have received a promise of life for their children, assuring that one day their offspring will grow as numerous 'as the stars of the sky and as the sands of the seashore' (cf. Gen. 22:17)."

<sup>2</sup>Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out: A Fresh Look at Exodus* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974), 13, writes, "The whole story of Israel's sojourn, captivity, and return to Palestine was foretold to Abraham (Gen. 15:12-16). We should expect, then, providential acts of God throughout Exodus as He fulfilled His promises."

<sup>3</sup>I wrote this text as a monologue from Amram to Jochebed.

<sup>4</sup>See also Num 26:59, and further, both 1 Chr 6:3 and 1 Chr 23:13 list Moses as a son of Amram. Jochebed can be understood as Amram's aunt if (1) the phrase "daughter of Levi" in Num 26:59 is taken literally and (2) the phrase in Exod 6:20, "Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister," is taken literally. However, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 356, notes a potential problem

Hebrew male infant. The deathly decree of Pharaoh had been given in the very last verse of Exodus 1. Yet, the King *above* Pharaoh had promised both life and liberty to the Hebrews (Gen 15:14). God had decreed teeming life and release from Egypt to his people. The matter then, was which voice— which *king*—would rule the day.<sup>5</sup>

### **Exodus 2:1: A Generic Couple from a Specific Tribe**

As Exodus 2 opens, the focus narrows from descriptions of the wider “nation” of Hebrews living in Egypt to a single family, and ultimately to a single son.<sup>6</sup> The spotlight of Exodus shines chiefly on Moses, but the actions of several women in saving his young life receive attention. The actions of Jochebed (mother of Moses), Miriam (older sister of Moses), and Pharaoh’s daughter are given close consideration.<sup>7</sup> Somewhat ironic is the fact that the murderous decree of Pharaoh had exempted “daughters” of the Hebrews (Exod 1:22), and now two of those daughters will work alongside a Gentile “daughter” to

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with the “inbreeding” interpretation just outlined, and then suggests a solution. Kaiser writes, “Since Levi’s son Kohath was born before the family moved to Egypt (Ge 46:11), where they stayed for 430 years of bondage (Ex 12:40-41), and since Moses was eighty years old at the Exodus (7:7), he was born some 350 years after Kohath’s time. Hence, if Amram was Kohath’s ‘son’ (6:18) and Jochebed was Levi’s ‘daughter’ (Nu 26:59), the meaning of these terms must be in the permissible ancient Near Eastern sense of ‘ancestor’ or lineal descendant: otherwise the narrative becomes increasingly awkward. . . . It is best . . . to allow for several gaps in the four generations that spanned the almost four hundred years from Joseph to Moses.” Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence Boadt, “Divine Wonders Never Cease: The Birth of Moses in God’s Plan of Exodus,” in *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars*, ed. Fredrick C. Holmgren and Herman E. Schaalman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 57, writes, “The power of these chapters [Exod 1 and 2] is increased by the ominous note that lies hidden behind the text. It is not just Egyptians against Israelites; a contest is developing between Pharaoh’s will to control history and the promises of Israel’s God.”

<sup>6</sup>This ‘narrowing focus’ has been noted by both John N. Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2013), 28; and Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 36. Oswalt, *Exodus*, 28, notes that a similar narrowing of focus takes place in Genesis: “In Genesis 1-7, we are introduced to the *cosmic* problem of sin. Then in Genesis 12:1 we read ‘Now the Lord had said to *Abram*’” (emphasis added). Thus Genesis proceeds from the universal to the particular.

<sup>7</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 19, comments on the characterization of each of the three women: “One woman is a creative and nurturing mother; the second woman is a quick-thinking young girl and a protector of her baby brother; the third woman defies her father’s ultimatum and demonstrates compassionate maternity as more than merely a biological process.”

thwart Pharaoh and save the life of Moses.<sup>8</sup> Women play central roles in Exodus 2. They are the God-ordained agents who deliver the deliverer of Israel named Moses.<sup>9</sup>

Exodus 2:1 is both vague and specific at the same time. The verse is vague because it introduces two generic-sounding, unnamed people. It reads, “Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman.” No proper names are given in this verse to the two who are later identified as Amram and Jochebed; here they are simply “a man” and “a woman.” This pattern continues for eight more verses. The text introduces several characters, yet none of them are identified by their proper names until finally in verse 10 the name “Moses” appears. It would seem that the narrator of Exodus wished to place prominent emphasis on Moses; Moses is the centerpiece of the passage, thus the other characters are not given names.<sup>10</sup> The other characters function here as assistants or accomplices in the safe arrival (into the narrative) of Moses.

However, Exodus 2:1 is also specific because it names the precise tribal lineage of both unnamed individuals. Both the man and the woman of Exodus 2:1 are from the tribe of Levi, meaning that any progeny produced by this couple will be fully Levite, and Levites play a specific role in the Bible. As becomes clear in later portions of

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<sup>8</sup>James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 26. Also worthy of consideration is a fact observed by Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 18. Larsson points out that *twelve* women make appearances in the first two chapters of Exodus (two midwives, Jochebed, Miriam, Pharaoh’s daughter, and Jethro’s seven daughters). In their own ways, each of these twelve women plays a part in saving the Hebrew people, causing Larsson to ponder whether “the twelve tribes [of Israel] owe their deliverance to twelve daughters.”

<sup>9</sup>The phrase “deliver the deliverer” in this sentence, as well as the title of this chapter (“The Deliverer Delivered”) are both borrowed adaptations of phrases found in the works of others. Specifically, Bruckner, *Exodus*, 26, uses the phrase “salvation of a savior,” and the phrase “saved savior” is found in Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden, The Netherlands: Deo, 2005), 545.

<sup>10</sup>Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 166, comments, “By maintaining the anonymity of the other players, Moses, though entirely passive in the story (except for crying!) is made more prominent. In other words, the reader understands that this narrative is really about Moses and not about his parents, his sister, or the princess.”

the Pentateuch, priests only came from Levite stock.<sup>11</sup> Priests acted as mediators between God and people; they represented God to the people and the people to God. With the identification of a Levite couple in Exodus 2:1, one wonders if a son or sons will be produced by them; a son or sons who will function in a priestly role. Duane Garrett argues effectively that even before the exodus happened, Levites were already functioning as “scribes, teachers, and quasi-priests.”<sup>12</sup> Garrett contends that the sacral responsibilities of the Levites were not conferred at the point of the Golden Calf incident; rather those responsibilities antedated the exodus.<sup>13</sup> Thus as Moses is born as a Levite in Exodus 2, the reader should expect that the child will grow to assume a priestly role.

### **Exodus 2:2: The Birth of a Son**

Verse 2 reports that “the woman conceived and bore a son.” With the wider canon in view, it becomes clear that this baby son named Moses was not the firstborn in his family. Only two verses hence, an older sister appears in the story; and in Exodus 7:7 the reader is made aware that the brother of Moses, Aaron, was older than Moses. So Moses was not firstborn in his family, yet just as the parents of Moses had not been named in Exodus 2:1, so the elder siblings of Moses are given no mention in Exodus 2:2. This reticence to identify the siblings is undertaken so that the focus remains fixed on the birth notice of the baby Moses. Like Isaac and Jacob before him, and like David after him, Moses was not firstborn in his family, yet akin to those three, Moses is the one chosen for special leadership.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>See Exod 32:26-29; Num 3:12, 8:6-26; Deut 10:8-9, 21:5.

<sup>12</sup>Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 208, 210, 216-17.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 211, 216-17.

<sup>14</sup>Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 167.



“The woman conceived and bore a son.” Significant is the fact that in the book of Genesis, the Hebrew verbs translated “conceived” and “bore” are found grouped together fourteen times as the births of important figures are described, such as with Cain, Enoch, Isaac, Levi, Judah, and Joseph.<sup>15</sup> The fifteenth and final time that these verbs are found arranged together in the *entire Pentateuch* comes at Exodus 2:2 where they are used to describe the birth of Moses. Moses is the writer of the Pentateuch, and this last pairing of “conceived” with “bore” describes his own birth. Douglas Stuart is probably on target when he suggests that Moses “understood himself to be the final figure in a long line of persons through whom God had been preserving and preparing the formation of a nation—not merely the family—of Israel.”<sup>16</sup>

### The ‘Fine Child’ Hidden

Verse 2 continues by reporting that when Jochebed saw that her baby boy was a “fine child, she hid him three months.” The phrase “fine child” is curious.<sup>17</sup> One wonders if Jochebed observed some positive *moral* value in her infant Moses. Perhaps Jochebed could somehow detect that her baby was already gravitating away from evil and toward the good. Or perhaps “fine child” describes the good behavior or the notable moral potential of the baby. However, if not a *moral* observation, then perhaps “fine child”

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<sup>15</sup>I am claiming that Exod 2:2 gives the *fifteenth* and final combined use of הָרָה and יָלַד in the Pentateuch, but Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 86, claims that Exod 2:2 is the *sixteenth* and final use. I credit Stuart with alerting me to the phenomenon in question, but a search of the terms on Bibleworks yielded fifteen (not sixteen) uses.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>In commentaries on the book of Exodus, much discussion surrounds the phrase כִּי־טוֹב הוּא. Interpretations range from “healthy child,” e.g., John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:59; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 16; to “well-formed child,” e.g., Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1993), 271; to “longing to have/keep him,” Stuart, *Exodus* 87-88. Though it is difficult to arrive at a completely satisfactory English rendering for כִּי־טוֹב הוּא, the approach of biblical theology points in the right direction: the repeated use of טוֹב in Gen 1 in the context of creation colors the meaning of טוֹב in Exod 2:2.

was a *physical* perception of some sort. Perhaps Jochebed concluded by looking at her infant boy that he was particularly healthy. Perhaps Jochebed perceived that as opposed to so many other infants of the day, a certain strength or robust-ness about Moses would bode well for his future survival. Or perhaps “fine child” simply implies handsomeness: Jochebed observed the ‘strapping good looks’ of her boy.

While elements of these suggestions may be on track, better is the approach of biblical theology in discerning the import of the phrase “fine child.” Once again, the prequel to Exodus is Genesis, and in Genesis 39:6 Joseph had been described as “handsome.”<sup>18</sup> Maybe the descriptive word “fine” in Exodus 2:2 (in describing Moses) is meant to hearken back to the story of Joseph. Perhaps the reader is meant to understand “fine baby Moses” as a new Joseph. Joseph had delivered his people from famine by bringing them *into* Egypt; Moses will deliver his people from certain death by bringing them *out* of Egypt. Perhaps in Exodus 2:2 there is an allusion back to Genesis 39:6, but an even stronger connection takes the reader back to Genesis 1.<sup>19</sup>

The Hebrew word used to describe the baby Moses in Exodus 2:2 is the word *tôb*, which the English Standard Version has translated as the word “fine.” That same Hebrew word is used seven times in Genesis 1, where it translates in most English Bibles as the word “good”: God saw that his creative works were “good.” Jochebed sees that

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<sup>18</sup>The suggestion offered in this paragraph was made by Peter Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 75.

<sup>19</sup>Several scholars have noted the connection between טוב in Exod 2:2 and the same word in Gen 1. These scholars include Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 203; Bruckner, *Exodus*, 27; Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in vol.1 of *The New Interpreters Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 699; Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 59; Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 61-62; Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, in vol. 1 of *The Schocken Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 263; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 38; Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 167; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 17; John Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 292; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 28; and Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 9.

Moses is good, just as God had seen his creation as good.<sup>20</sup> The reader wonders if Exodus 2:2 signals a new creative moment. Perhaps the presence of the word *tôb* is a clue that a new beginning has arrived, even as the serpent-like Pharaoh presides over the deathly chaos waters of the Nile.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps life and a new beginning will arise from a dark and impossible situation. Perhaps the observation that Moses was *tôb* alerts the reader to the possibility that in some mysterious way Jochebed understood her baby to be what John Oswalt has called “a key part of God’s creative plan.”<sup>22</sup> Such a perception on the part of Jochebed would certainly explain why she “hid the baby three months.”

Like Rahab, who would hide the Hebrew spies at a later point in redemptive history, and like Michal, who would hide David from her murderous father even later, so Jochebed hid her infant son in order to protect him from imminent danger.<sup>23</sup> However, after three months, the cries of an infant grow stronger and louder. The baby becomes more difficult to conceal. Verse 3 reports that when Jochebed could hide Moses no longer, “she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She [then] put the child in [the basket] and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.” The irony here is that Jochebed effectively obeyed the decree that Pharaoh had given back at Exodus 1:22!<sup>24</sup> Jochebed “casts” her Hebrew son into the Nile, so to speak, but as Rolf Rendtorff observes, “The child is not thrown into the Nile to be killed, but is

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<sup>20</sup>Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 28.

<sup>21</sup>The Pharaoh of Egypt is “serpent-like” indeed, for Ezek 29:1-3 and 32:1-3 call him a “dragon.” On Pharaoh presiding “over the deathly chaos waters of the Nile,” Boadt, “Divine Wonders Never Cease,” 58, observes, “Pharaoh tries to harness the Nile waters like the chaos waters of Genesis 1:2 to destroy Israel, but God’s blessing continues on the people.”

<sup>22</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus*, 292.

<sup>23</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 20, notes that the “only two places in the Bible where a woman ‘hides’ a man from another man or men,” using the verb *ḥāṣ*, are Exod 2:2 and Josh 2:4.

<sup>24</sup>As noted by both John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 242; and Houtman, *Exodus*, 278.

consigned to the Nile to be saved.”<sup>25</sup> Tenderly and with motherly love and hope, Jochebed places Moses carefully in the basket, and then places the basket gently in the Nile.<sup>26</sup> Philip Ryken describes the scene beautifully: “When she gently laid her baby down, she was tucking her heart inside the basket.”<sup>27</sup> At this point, Jochebed could not have known for certain that things would go well for her infant, or even that she would see him again. “The most we can say,” writes John Currid, “is that God put [this plan] into her heart so that his plan would proceed and unfold.”<sup>28</sup>

### Exodus 2:3: An Ark, Some Tar, and Reeds

Akin to verse 2, verse 3 is also brimming with scriptural allusions that point the reader both backward and forward in the story.<sup>29</sup> Three words in particular are embedded purposefully into this verse to cause readers to reflect both backward and forward in redemptive history. The first word is the Hebrew word *tēbah*, which in Exodus 2:3 is normally translated into English as the word “basket.”<sup>30</sup> The word *tēbah* is used

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<sup>25</sup>Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 36. At this juncture it is perhaps worth stating that I am well aware of the debate concerning similarities between the birth story of Moses and the (Akkadian) *Sargon Birth Legend*. The debated question is whether one story relied on the other. I have chosen to omit discussion of the debate in the body of this chapter. Detailed and helpful considerations of both the parallels but also the major differences between the two stories can be found in Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 172-74; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 54-56; and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 30-31. In the end I am sympathetic with the conclusion of Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 174, who decides, “There is no formal basis for the argument that the Moses story has a relationship to the Sargon story.”

<sup>26</sup>Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 18, notes the twofold use of יָשָׁם (‘put,’ ‘place’) in Exod 2:3 and comments, “The repetition of the word ‘placed’ appears to imply that the mother put the ark down very gently, with the same tender care with which she had put the child into the ark.”

<sup>27</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 46.

<sup>28</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 61.

<sup>29</sup>As noted by both Enns, *Exodus*, 62; and Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 94.

<sup>30</sup>Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 168, observes that in the Old Testament, the “standard

over twenty-five times in Genesis 6-9, and in that portion of the Bible it normally translates into English as the word “ark,” as in Noah’s ark. However, after Genesis 9:18 the word does not appear again in the Bible until Exodus 2:3, where Moses is placed in a miniature *tēbah*, and set afloat on the water of the Nile. It is appropriate to ask what the writer Moses desired for his readers to understand by the use of this word in Exodus 2:3. It would seem that strong connecting points between the ark of Noah and the ark of Moses were intended.<sup>31</sup> One must consider that both Noah and Moses were set afloat in their respective arks on bodies of water that were agents of death to others. Both Noah and Moses survived their watery ordeals, and both figures were themselves human instruments of salvation to others. Peter Enns is keen with his observation that “both Noah and Moses . . . are re-creation figures. They serve as the vehicles through whom God ‘creates’ a new people for his own purposes.”<sup>32</sup> Further, in their respective arks both Moses and Noah were also entirely dependent on God to grant them protection.<sup>33</sup> So the use of the word *tēbah* in Exodus 2:3 appears pregnant, pointing readers backward to the story of Noah and thereby implying that the baby Moses would become a savior, like Noah. Indeed, looking forward in the story, the very circumstance of Moses surviving death waters in his ark appears as a precursor to the salvation in which he himself plays a part, when Israel is delivered through the death waters of the Red Sea.<sup>34</sup>

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word for ‘basket’ is סל,” and that in Exod 2:3, “the choice of the word תִּבְיָה is probably deliberate to make the connection to Noah.”

<sup>31</sup>In this paragraph I am largely following Enns, *Exodus*, 62.

<sup>32</sup>Peter Enns, “Exodus (Book),” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2000), 147.

<sup>33</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 9.

<sup>34</sup>As noted by Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 94; Enns, *Exodus*, 62; and Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 172.

The second term in verse 3 that alludes backward in the Exodus narrative is the word *ḥēmār*, which English Bibles usually translate as “tar” or “bitumen.” Jochebed daubed the ark of Moses with *ḥēmār*, tar. Prior to Exodus 2:3, the only other use of the term in Exodus is found at 1:14, where enslaved Hebrews were forced to work with *ḥōmer* (mortar). Thus in Exodus 1:14 *ḥōmer* is associated with oppression, while in Exodus 2:3 *ḥēmār* is connected with life. The comment of James Bruckner is apt: “The same substance Pharaoh used as a means of oppression, a mother’s hands spread as an agent of salvation.”<sup>35</sup>

The third term in verse 3 that points forward in the story is the term *sûp*. This term appears in English Bibles as the word “reeds.” Jochebed placed the basket among the “reeds.” From a purely practical perspective, Jochebed placed Moses among the reeds for two reasons: first, in order to ensure that Moses would not float away, and second, in order to keep Moses concealed amongst thick, tall vegetation.<sup>36</sup> However, aside from the practical implications associated with the reeds, the word *sûp* also points readers forward to Exodus 13:18. In that verse the geographical scene of the mighty deliverance of God is given: the Sea of *sûp*, or the Sea of Reeds. Peter Enns is astute in connecting the use of *sûp* in Exodus 2:3 with the use of the same word in Exodus 13:18:

The child once abandoned in the reeds . . . along the shore of the Nile . . . will later lead his people in triumph through the Reed Sea. . . . Moses’ redemption as an infant will be replayed later with respect to Israel at the very infancy of her existence as a nation.<sup>37</sup>

The infant Moses is a savior at the start of a new creation, protected in his miniature ark that has been daubed with tar. He sits concealed among the reeds, soon to lead his people away from their toil in tar by way of the Reed Sea. The Bible is an inspired, dazzling work of high art. Let the reader pause over its beauty!

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<sup>35</sup>Bruckner, *Exodus*, 27.

<sup>36</sup>The first reason is put forth by Oswalt, *Exodus*, 296; and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 29; and the second reason is argued by Stuart, *Exodus*, 89.

<sup>37</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 62. See also Oswalt, *Exodus*, 292-93; and Sarna, *Exodus*, 9.

### Exodus 2:4-5: Two More Women

Verse 4 provides the introduction of the second female in the passage. Now the sister of Moses appears, and—par for the course—she too is unnamed. “And *his sister* stood at a distance to know what would be done to him” (emphasis added). Once again, the characters surrounding Moses are unnamed in the passage in order that the primary focus remains on Moses. The wider canon of Scripture reveals that the sister in verse 4 was Miriam.<sup>38</sup> Scholars estimate that the Miriam of Exodus 2:4 was between six and twelve years of age, but because she is depicted as such an able accomplice in the plan of Jochebed her mother, perhaps Miriam was closer to twelve.<sup>39</sup> Nahum Sarna writes that Miriam stood at a distance from her infant brother in his ark “so as to be inconspicuous and not arouse suspicions that the child was not really abandoned.”<sup>40</sup> The adolescent Miriam positioned herself in a shrewd manner.

In verse 5, the third female character makes her appearance. A Gentile woman, the unnamed daughter of Pharaoh plays a pivotal role in the deliverance of the deliverer named Moses, a striking fact when one considers that the house of Pharaoh was bent on destroying every male infant of the Hebrew people. However, Pharaoh’s daughter breaks the mold. What becomes clear as the story progresses is that Pharaoh’s daughter had serious reservations concerning the evil program of her father.<sup>41</sup> She saves Moses, not destroys him; and in so doing a massive irony arises. The irony is well summarized by John Currid: “One of Pharaoh’s own children delivers a Hebrew child who would later

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<sup>38</sup>See Num 26:59 and 1 Chr 6:3.

<sup>39</sup>While Houtman, *Exodus*, 279, suggests that the Miriam of Exod 2:4 was six years of age, Stuart, *Exodus*, 90, argues, “She was perhaps between six and twelve years old. Her presence of mind and capable conversation with the daughter of Pharaoh in vv. 7-8 suggest she may have been closer to the upper limit of this age range.”

<sup>40</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 9.

<sup>41</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 91, comments concerning Pharaoh’s daughter, “Here was not a woman inclined toward her father’s cold-blooded population control program.”

save God's children from bondage to Pharaoh."<sup>42</sup> Pharaoh's daughter delivers Moses out of the Nile, and later Moses will deliver Israel from Pharaoh through the sea.<sup>43</sup>

The first sentence of verse 5 reads, "Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river." Certainly Pharaoh's daughter had access to a private indoor bathtub. One wonders why she bathed in the Nile. The reason is that for Egyptians, the Nile was a sacred river. Bernard Ramm explains, "The Nile was considered an emanation of the [Egyptian] god Osiris and therefore its waters were believed to have magical properties."<sup>44</sup> Pharaoh's daughter bathed in the river because of perceived religious benefits as her female attendants ensured her privacy from their position on the riverbank.<sup>45</sup> One wonders whether Jochebed chose this spot purposely as the place to set Moses afloat in the reeds. Perhaps Jochebed had witnessed the royal bath at this location before and placed Moses at this precise spot with the routine of the Egyptian princess in mind. Perhaps she *wanted* her infant to be discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 61.

<sup>43</sup>Houtman, *Exodus*, 268.

<sup>44</sup>Ramm, *His Way Out*, 14. See also Stuart, *Exodus*, 91; and Oswalt, *Exodus*, 296.

<sup>45</sup>Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:280. It is worth noting that in Exod 2:5 two separate terms are used to describe those attending Pharaoh's daughter. The first term, נְעֻרָה, is translated by the *English Standard Version* as "young women," while the second term, אֲנָקָה, is translated "servant woman." Hamilton, *Exodus*, 18, argues that the former term "connote[s] a higher status, female attendants who accompany their supervisor," while the latter term "may refer to women who do more servile work for their superior."

<sup>46</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 20, suggests that Jochebed was indeed purposeful in wanting Pharaoh's daughter to discover Moses (see also Oswalt, *Exodus*, 296). But Stuart, *Exodus*, 90; and Durham, *Exodus*, 16, disagree. Stuart writes, "There was surely no attempt to place Moses in his little ark at a location where he was likely to be discovered." While I am inclined to disagree with Stuart (and agree with Hamilton and Oswalt), in the body of this chapter I am merely raising the question and allowing readers to decide for themselves.



## Exodus 2:6-7: The Two Women Used by God

The remainder of verse 5 reports that when Pharaoh's daughter saw the little ark among the reeds, she sent her servant woman, and the servant woman took the ark. Verse 6 continues by saying that when Pharaoh's daughter opened the ark, she "saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'" Again, the reader of verse 6 should be surprised that a member of the house of Pharaoh acted in this fashion. What a reversal! But then, for the Egyptian princess to treat the Hebrew baby Moses with "pity" is not a reversal without precedence. Such reversals happened at least twice in the prequel to Exodus.<sup>47</sup> In Genesis 12:10-20, Abram had feared death at the hands of Egypt but was instead blessed with the wealth of Pharaoh. In Genesis 41, Joseph had been promoted to a lofty position in the Egyptian monarchy having begun in Egypt as a slave. So even before Exodus 2:6, God had demonstrated his ability to make surprising lemonade out of Egyptian lemons. In Exodus 2:6 God is working behind the scenes again, ensuring life in a potentially deadly moment. In fact, Terence Fretheim notes that the actions of Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:5-6 have a close parallel with the later actions of God himself.<sup>48</sup> In Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:7-8 God will *see* his people, *hear* their cry, and *come down* to deliver them, just as Pharaoh's daughter *comes down* to bathe, *sees* Moses in the basket, and *hears* him crying. Likewise, as Pharaoh's daughter spares Moses, drawing him out of the water so that she might then provide for him, so does God with Israel: in mercy he will lead his people through the water and later provide for them manna and quail.<sup>49</sup> In Exodus 2:5-6 the Gentile daughter

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<sup>47</sup>In much of this paragraph I am following Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 90.

<sup>48</sup>Fretheim, *Exodus*, 38.

<sup>49</sup>In this sentence, the phrase, "as the daughter of Pharaoh *spar*es Moses" is purposeful. In Exod 2:6, the English Standard Version translates the verb מָחַל as "took pity." Yet the basic meaning of this verb is "spare." Pharaoh's daughter *spar*ed the baby Moses.

of Pharaoh looks like God. God is at work in Exodus 2:5-6, even though he receives no explicit mention.

According to the latter part of verse 6, somehow Pharaoh's daughter was able immediately to identify the infant Moses as a Hebrew baby.<sup>50</sup> One wonders how such an efficient, confident perception was possible. Perhaps Pharaoh's daughter simply appraised the situation: here was a baby hidden in a basket on the very river in which other infants had been forced to drown. Surely only a Hebrew parent would attempt to save a child in this fashion. The child must then be of Hebrew descent. Or perhaps Pharaoh's daughter quickly checked the gender of the baby and discovered that he had been circumcised. Only Hebrew babies were circumcised. Whatever the case, the use of the word "Hebrew" in verse 6 connects naturally with the use of the same word in verse 7. In verse 6 Pharaoh's daughter classifies Moses as a "Hebrew," and in verse 7 Miriam the sister of Moses appears, asking Pharaoh's daughter whether a "Hebrew" wet nurse should be engaged in the care of the Hebrew baby.<sup>51</sup>

Both the general situation and the specific tact of Miriam worked to cause Pharaoh's daughter to respond to the request of Miriam favorably. The general situation was that many Hebrew mothers had already lost sons in the Nile, and thus these bereaved

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<sup>50</sup>This paragraph discusses two of the major options regarding how Pharaoh's daughter was able to identify Moses as a Hebrew: (1) circumstances and (2) circumcision. The former option has been argued by both Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 263; and Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1-11*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 34; while the latter option is preferred by Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 169. Not willing to settle on one option or the other, Stuart, *Exodus*, 91, writes concerning the daughter of Pharaoh, "Her recognition that Moses was a Hebrew boy . . . probably was predicated on four things at least: the general physical differences between Hebrews and Egyptians, the type of baby clothes used, the fact that her discovery occurred in an Israelite settlement area, and the general situation (the need to hide Israelite baby boys but not Egyptian baby boys)."

<sup>51</sup>The conversation between Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter raises the question of language. One wonders if Miriam spoke Hebrew or Egyptian as she spoke in Exod 2:7, and it is impossible to tell. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 21, is properly indecisive when he writes, "We cannot know for sure whether Miriam speaks as a Hebrewess about a Hebrew to an Egyptian lady, or whether she pretends herself to be an Egyptian."

mothers would be available to nurse other Hebrew babies still living.<sup>52</sup> Pharaoh's daughter had no shortage of Hebrew women available for this task. Second, the tact of adolescent Miriam made Pharaoh's daughter amenable to Miriam's request. John Currid notes that the original Hebrew of verse 7 contains a twofold repetition of a word translated into English as "for you": "Shall I go and call *for you* a nursing Hebrew woman so that she will nurse the child *for you*?"<sup>53</sup> Clearly Miriam emphasized purposely the personal interest of Pharaoh's daughter; an appeal that was surprisingly prudent coming from an adolescent.

### **Exodus 2:8-9: Compassion, Irony, Foreshadowing**

Verse 8 reports the affirmative answer of the daughter of Pharaoh. A Hebrew wet nurse was to be sought. Miriam departed and fetched, not just any generic Hebrew wet nurse,<sup>54</sup> but called Jochebed, her mother. Verse 9 reports how Pharaoh's daughter then commanded Jochebed, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." In this command of Pharaoh's daughter can be detected noteworthy *compassion*, a great *irony*, and significant *foreshadowing*.

Pharaoh's daughter was compassionate. This compassion is somewhat surprising because not only was Pharaoh's daughter an Egyptian, she was also an Egyptian of high stature, while Jochebed and the infant Moses were both lowly, enslaved Hebrews. For the daughter of Pharaoh to treat Jochebed with contempt would have been more natural.

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<sup>52</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 62-63; and Oswalt, *Exodus*, 297.

<sup>53</sup>See Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 63, for a discussion of the twofold repetition of אָנֹכִי in Exod 2:7.

<sup>54</sup>Bruce Wells, "Exodus," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 170, explains that "wet nurse" was an actual occupation in the time of Moses: "Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian records, mostly from the second millennium BC, indicate that a woman could have the occupation of wet nurse—someone who breast-feeds another woman's child. They were often employed after the adoption of an abandoned child and were typically paid with basic provisions such as food and clothing. The standard period of time for a wet nurse was about three years."

Genesis 43:32 provides a window into the distaste that Egyptians had for Hebrews in this period when it reports that Egyptians considered it an abomination even to eat with Hebrews.<sup>55</sup> Thus Pharaoh's daughter might well have approached Jochebed and the baby with antagonism, yet instead she matched Hebrew infant with Hebrew woman, and even offered wages for the task of nursing. In the providential arrangement of God, the early period of Moses's life would be spent in a native Hebrew environment.<sup>56</sup> Pharaoh's daughter exercised unusual compassion as she entrusted the Hebrew baby to Hebrew hands and paid wages, and it is precisely at the point of the wages where great irony may be found.

The irony of the situation is described succinctly by James Bruckner: “[Jochebed] would actually be paid to nurse her own son by the one who had ordered his death.”<sup>57</sup> Without doubt the special desire of Jochebed was to cradle her infant in her arms as he nursed. Not only would that now come to pass, Jochebed would also be paid for the task by the very administration that had sought Moses's demise. Terence Fretheim remarks, “The mother gets paid to do what she most wants to do, and from Pharaoh's own budget!”<sup>58</sup> Indeed the irony drips from the narrative, but the irony also hints forward in the story.

The offer of Pharaoh's daughter to pay wages to a Hebrew from Egyptian coffers foreshadows a later development in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 3:22, God foresees the time of the exodus proper, when the Hebrews would come out of Egypt. The specific word of God in Exodus 3:22 concerns plunder: the Hebrews will leave Egypt with Egyptian treasures. True to God's word, it happens. In Exodus 12:35-36 is the report

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<sup>55</sup>As noted by Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 35.

<sup>56</sup>See Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 63; and John L. Mackay, *Exodus: A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 51.

<sup>57</sup>Bruckner, *Exodus*, 28.

<sup>58</sup>Fretheim, *Exodus*, 37.

of Israel leaving Egypt, and it is the Egyptians who grant plunder to Israel as Israel departs. As the Egyptian daughter of Pharaoh apportioned wages to the Hebrew Jochebed in Exodus 2, so Egypt would later confer her treasures on masses of Hebrews departing from the land in Exodus 12. Exodus 2:9 foreshadows Exodus 12:36.

### **Exodus 2:10: Moses and His Beginnings**

At the time when Moses was weaned, which was perhaps at the age of three or so, he was brought back to Pharaoh's daughter.<sup>59</sup> The initial sentence of verse 10 reports that once Moses got big he was given back to Pharaoh's daughter to be raised in the Egyptian court.<sup>60</sup> Yet again there is irony. Later in his life Moses will be instrumental in the defeat of Pharaoh, yet his childhood is spent as a fully funded trainee in the house of Pharaoh.<sup>61</sup> The resources of the antagonist provide the upbringing of the protagonist who will end up overthrowing the antagonist. The pagan king Pharaoh saves the very one who will later free the slaves of Pharaoh, just as in later biblical history, God will use the pagan king Cyrus as the unwitting "savior" of God's people at the time of their Babylonian exile.<sup>62</sup> Göran Larsson provides acute reflection on the irony of Moses being reared in Pharaoh's house: "Here Moses could have used the same word in relation to

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<sup>59</sup>Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 264, comments concerning Moses, "His age is not mentioned, but weaning may be inferred (cf. Gen. 21:8) as the appropriate boundary, and hence the child was probably around three."

<sup>60</sup>The use of the phrase "got big" is purposeful and reflects the conclusion reached by Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 166, whose rendering of וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד in Exod 2:10 is "And the boy got big." Garrett explains, "This could be translated as 'and the boy grew up,' but this translation might suggest that he reached adulthood, which is not the point. Rather, the meaning is simply that he was big enough to be weaned and moved into the home of pharaoh's daughter."

<sup>61</sup>Ryken, *Exodus*, 53 comments, "[In Pharaoh's house] Moses was trained in linguistics, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, music, medicine, law, and the fine art of diplomacy. In other words, he was being trained for Pharaoh's overthrow right under Pharaoh's nose!"

<sup>62</sup>George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 11.

Pharaoh that Joseph spoke to his brothers [in Gen 50:20], ‘Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people.’”<sup>63</sup>

In verse 10 is the very first appearance of the name ‘Moses’ in the Bible. Pharaoh’s daughter named him “Moses.” The name Moses appears 767 times in the Old Testament and 78 times in the New Testament.<sup>64</sup> To be sure, Moses is a towering figure throughout the Bible. In Exodus 2:1-10 he is the only character who receives a proper name, which demonstrates that he is indeed the focus of the section.

The latter portion of verse 10 informs the reader that Pharaoh’s daughter chose the name Moses for the baby “‘because,’ she said, ‘I drew him out of the water.’” Whereas in today’s Western world parents normally choose names for babies *before* the babies are born, it was not so in the ancient world.<sup>65</sup> Only *after* the birth would a baby receive a name, and the name would be associated closely with some occurrence or fortuity that took place near the time of the birth. Moses is named, according to Pharaoh’s daughter, because well after Moses’s birth she had drawn him out of the Nile.

The connection between the name Moses and the action of Pharaoh’s daughter in drawing Moses out of the Nile is clear and very apparent in the original Hebrew text of Exodus 2:10.<sup>66</sup> The verb, which translates into English as “draw out,” is the Hebrew word

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<sup>63</sup>Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 19.

<sup>64</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 22, notes that 647 of the 767 Old Testament appearances of the name of Moses occur in the Pentateuch. Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 545, adds, “The greater part of the Pentateuch, from Ex 2 to its last section in Deut 34, is concerned with Moses. All the events reported in the four books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, and all the commandments and instructions imparted in these books, are more or less directly connected with this person.”

<sup>65</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 93, remarks, “Moses’ follows the typical pattern of ancient naming in which a name (usually an existing, known name) was not selected prior to birth, as in Western practice, but only after birth and suggested by some sort of circumstance or speech experienced or heard at the time of birth—in this case at the time of the child’s discovery.”

<sup>66</sup>In the discussion that ensues, I have chosen not to include consideration of how the name “Moses” may relate to the Egyptian verb *msy* (‘to be born’) and the Egyptian noun *ms* (‘son’). I am sympathetic to the focus of Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 139, who writes, “Apart from the connection of ‘Moses’ with the similar verbal element in Pharaonic names (Ahmose, Thutmose, Ramses, borne by Egyptian kings in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth

*māšāh*. Pharaoh’s daughter reports that she *māšāh*’d (drew out) the baby from the Nile. The name translated into English as “Moses” is the Hebrew *Mōšeh*, which is the active participle of the verb *māšāh*. If one were to translate the active participle *Mōšeh* into English, the word would be rendered as something like “one who draws out.” Concerning Moses’s name, Thomas Dozeman notes that the *passive* form of the verb of *māšāh* “would better conform to the details of [Moses’s] birth (i.e., [*Māšûy*] ‘one drawn from the water’).”<sup>67</sup> The passive *Māšûy* would be a more fitting name taking into account the circumstances of the birth, yet the name given in Exodus 2:10 is not the passive *Māšûy* but the active *Mōšeh*; “one who draws out.” The very name of this individual is a clear portent of his destiny. Later in his life, Moses will actively “draw out” his people from the clutches of Egypt. Moses will “draw out” his fellow Hebrews from the chaos waters of the Red Sea. Larsson puts it memorably: “The one who has been delivered out of the water will himself become the deliverer from the dangers of the water.”<sup>68</sup> His very name, then, is his destiny.<sup>69</sup> *Mōšeh*, “one who draws out,” will later draw out his people.

### **Conclusion: Ancient Hope for Modern People**

The ultimate focus of Exodus 2:1-10 is a baby. A baby is a small, vulnerable, weak, and dependent creature, yet a baby became central in the plan of God.<sup>70</sup> Amidst the

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Dynasties [from the sixteenth to the twelfth centuries B.C.], in which *-ms* or *-mss* reflects the Egyptian verb *msy*, ‘to be born (of),’ or the noun *ms*, ‘son, child of’), *we are interested in the meaning attached to ‘Moses’ by Scripture*” (emphasis added). I have chosen to focus only on the Hebrew wordplay that is made explicit in Exod 2:10.

<sup>67</sup>Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 82.

<sup>68</sup>Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 17.

<sup>69</sup>Speaking of Pharaoh’s daughter, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 33, writes, “She has given [Moses] a name that foreshadows his destiny.” Similarly, Hamilton, *Exodus*, 139 writes of Moses: “His name is his mission.”

<sup>70</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 29, remarks, “God did not devise some vast political or military strategy to deliver his people from bondage. Instead, he chose to use a baby—a creature so helpless

dark evil wrought by the most powerful human figure in that world, God chose to begin his saving plan with a feeble baby.<sup>71</sup> Compounded into the equation was the fact that the baby was under a death sentence. Only God was capable in such a situation. Only God could redeem such a seemingly impossible scenario and work marvels out of such inauspiciousness. Yet God is never mentioned explicitly in Exodus 2:1-10. On the surface of the passage, human agents appear as the actors. Three women collaborate to provide safety for the infant Moses. If God was at work, he was surely hidden behind human actions. Yet the prequel to the story of Exodus alerted readers to the possibility that God sometimes works unassumingly through human agents, quietly hidden yet still at work powerfully among the everyday affairs of people. The story of Joseph in the prequel to the book of Exodus had been the paradigmatic demonstration of that reality. All along God had been at work in Joseph's life (according to Gen 45:5-8 and 50:20), although along the way the narrative clues of that fact were remarkably sparing. If one has read Genesis, then one will understand that in subsequent narratives and times where God appears absent, this appearance may not necessarily indicate that such an absence is an actuality. God is not apparent on the surface of Exodus 2:1-10, yet there is little doubt that God was guiding every human action. Brevard Childs is helpful in bringing together the strands of the foregoing:

In the Joseph stories only twice is God referred to and then almost cryptically as ordering the affairs of men. The Moses birth story shares a similar perspective. Nowhere does God appear to rescue the child. In fact this reserve stands in striking contrast with the great bulk of the exodus traditions. Everything in the story has a natural cause. Yet it is clear that the writer sees the mystery of God's providence through the action of the humans involved.<sup>72</sup>

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that he could not exist for long away from his mother's breast, a baby so vulnerable that his parent had to hide him in a basket, in a swamp."

<sup>71</sup>Ryken, *Exodus*, 50.

<sup>72</sup>Brevard S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 2 (June 1965): 120.



Quietly, God worked the impossible deliverance of the infant Moses, who would later become Israel’s deliverer. In his astonishing way, God preserved a weak baby who would grow up to shame strong Pharaoh.<sup>73</sup> More than fifteen hundred years *after* the birth of Moses, another God-governed birth took place; a birth altogether striking in its similarities to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Moses.

Like Moses before him, Jesus was born under the shadow of a hostile ruler. Matthew 2:16 reports that Herod—in a fashion conspicuously parallel to the Pharaoh of Exodus 1:22—“killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under.” Herod, like the Pharaoh before him, engaged in infanticide in order to maintain power. Herod, like the Pharaoh before him, attempted to enlist help in his savage plan: Herod desired cooperation from the Magi, just as the Pharaoh before him had tried to employ the midwives. However, in both cases, the rulers were duped by the very people they tried to employ. As God spared the infant Moses in a breathtaking way, so God spared his infant Son Jesus.

The baby Moses grew up to become the one who would deliver Israel through the water of the Red Sea and save his people from bondage to Egypt. Moses brought his people away from Pharaoh and away from the sins committed against them in Egypt. However, after Moses released Israel from the clutches of Egypt, the people of Israel *themselves* remained enslaved to sin. What Israel needed—indeed, what the entire world needed—was a *true* “fine child” who would come to deliver sin-sick souls from captivity. Jesus was born. Jesus is that Savior. Hebrews 3:1-6 reveals the superiority of Jesus over Moses. The baby Jesus grew up to become, not the savior of any single nation, but the Savior of the world. The bondage that Jesus came to address was not bondage to any nation or political leader, but a far greater bondage: the universal bondage of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is far greater than Moses.

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<sup>73</sup>First Cor 1:27b reads, “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

The stories of both Moses's and Jesus's births are like notes of a melody that are restated, yet augmented markedly, in Revelation 12. Like Exodus 2:1-10 and Matthew 2, Revelation 12 narrates a birth that occurs under hopelessly threatening circumstances. With customary color, James Hamilton describes the scene: "A pregnant woman is in the process of giving birth, and she is threatened by a massive dragon who wants to eat her baby the moment he is born. She cannot run. She cannot hide. What hope does she have?"<sup>74</sup>

Both the dragon and the baby threatened by the dragon are identified clearly in Revelation 12: the dragon is Satan (according to Revelation 12:9), and in 12:5 it is discerned that the baby is none other than the Messiah, Jesus.<sup>75</sup> It turns out that the baby survived the assault of the dragon and was whisked up to heaven (Rev 12:5). Yet the dragon continued in his rage, making war on the rest of the woman's offspring, "on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). The dragon could not devour baby Jesus, so now his rage turned against Jesus's church.

The church may sometimes appear to be as vulnerable and weak as a baby. The church itself may sometimes wonder if God is off the scene; if the dragon huffing at her door will indeed succeed after all. During such times, the church must remember Exodus 2:1-10, Matthew 2, and Revelation 12. In dark situations that seem impossible, God is able to work miracles quietly yet powerfully. God has triumphed in the New Moses—his Son and Savior Jesus—and God will triumph in the end. The dragon is doomed because the baby he longed to eat has defeated him at the cross. That baby grew up to promise that the dragon's gates of hell would not prevail against his church (Matt 16:18). Duane Garrett encourages the church to maintain the true perspective when he writes, "When

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<sup>74</sup>James M. Hamilton, *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 245.

<sup>75</sup>Rev 12:5 contains a quote of Ps 2:7-9, which is applied to the "child" who is born. The Lord's Anointed in Ps 2:7-9 thus becomes the Messiah-child (Jesus) of Rev 12:5.

evil seems to have triumphed, the appearance that God has abandoned his people is altogether wrong. God is not absent, however much he may appear to be.”<sup>76</sup> In every season, may the church trust in the God who delivered both baby Moses and baby Jesus despite impossible odds.

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<sup>76</sup>Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 171.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WONDERFUL NAME: EXODUS 3:10-15

#### **The Gift of God's Name**

A former navy diver once described his experience diving so deep into the ocean that the darkness became disorienting.<sup>1</sup> For most people, the inability to sense up from down in such a situation would be altogether frightening, but the diver knew what to do. He felt for bubbles. Bubbles, said the diver, “always drift to the surface,” and thus even in the dark depths one can detect the path up.<sup>2</sup>

When God revealed his name (and thus his nature) to humanity it was, so to speak, as if life-saving bubbles emerged in the darkness.<sup>3</sup> If God had not provided such revelation, humanity would have remained in the dark—groping and disoriented, anxiously constructing names for fancied gods who would be no more than mere projections of human desire. God's revelation of his name is a great grace because, as Carl F. H. Henry once observed, outside of such revelation, fallen humanity has shown itself very adept at manufacturing false gods and dreaming up names for them:

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<sup>1</sup>Terry G. Carter, J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Preparing, Developing, and Delivering the Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 41-42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>3</sup>I have purposefully linked “name” with “nature” because in the ancient Near East the two ideas were inseparable. Consider the comments of Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 1:181-82: “According to ancient ideas, a name was not just ‘noise and smoke’: instead, there was a close and essential relationship between it and its subject. The subject is in the name, and on that account the name carries with it a statement about the nature of its subject or at least about the power appertaining to it.”

Apart from special revelation, mankind in sin articulates the divine Name in an alphabet of false gods (Ashtaroah, Judges 10:6; Baal, Judges 2:11; Chemosh, Num. 21:29; Dagon, Judges 16:23; and so on through Zeus, Acts 14:12)—a panorama of pagan divinities that biblical theology exposes to the lash of divine wrath in prophetic-apostolic denunciation.<sup>4</sup>

In Exodus 3 God began graciously to reveal his name and its significance.

Whereas in the initial two chapters of Exodus God had worked largely in the background, in Exodus 3 God arrives in prominence to take his place as the central character.<sup>5</sup> The primary reason that God takes center stage at this point of the narrative is given in Exodus 3:7 and 3:9. God had seen the affliction of his people, heard their cry, and knew their sufferings. Now was God's time to act. However, God would utilize human agency and human leadership in the deliverance of his people. God would call Moses, and should Moses quail at the enormity of the task before him, God's remedy for a frightened Moses was the explication of God's name.

### **Exodus 3:10-11: Call and Response**

When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Moses was already an elderly man working in the lowly position of shepherd on behalf of his father-in-law.<sup>6</sup> As the unlikely candidate Moses stood barefoot, wondering at how the voice of God could be emanating from the burning bush, Moses heard God declare that he (God) had come down to deliver his people from the Egyptians (Exod 3:8). God had now arrived to fulfill

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<sup>4</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 2, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses*, pt. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 171.

<sup>5</sup>As noted by Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 26.

<sup>6</sup>Michael P. Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name: The God of Sinai in Our Midst* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 32, well describes Moses's life situation when God came calling: "The God of Moses' ancestors appears to him and calls him to be an instrument of divine justice and deliverance at a point in his life when, for all intents and purposes, Moses has already failed utterly. He is no longer an Egyptian prince, no longer a defender of Israel, perhaps not even (if his marriage is any indication) overly scrupulous in his religious observances. . . . Moses is already eighty years old when God calls him to lead his people out of bondage into freedom in their own land."

the promise of Genesis 15:14. Finally, God would judge Egypt and redeem his people. According to Exodus 3:8, God would execute this glorious work on his own, and all Moses would have to do was stand back and applaud as God undertook his plan.<sup>7</sup> However, God was not yet finished speaking. Exodus 3:10 comes after Exodus 3:8-9.

In what has been called the “crux” and/or the “bottom line” of the entire burning bush narrative, Exodus 3:10 reports God calling Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> In Exodus 3:10, God said to Moses: “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” If the words God spoke in Exodus 3:8 had given Moses any hope that God would work alone in delivering God’s people out of Egypt, Exodus 3:10 dashed such a possibility. God now commanded that the elderly Moses be the human means by which the exodus would occur.<sup>9</sup> Walter Brueggemann writes insightfully on how Exodus 3:10 would have come as a shock to Moses after the self-commitment of God in Exodus 3:8: “In one brief utterance, the grand intention of God has become a specific human responsibility, human

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<sup>7</sup>With respect to Exod 3:7-9, Victor Hamilton comments, “God . . . consistently [talks] to Moses about himself and what he intends to do,” so that Moses “may think he is to be a spectator to the dynamic work of God.” Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 58.

<sup>8</sup>John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:87, calls Exod 3:10 the “crux” of the burning bush narrative. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 365, calls Exod 3:10 the “bottom line” of the same narrative. Although Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 114-19, labors over the parallels and differences between the call of Moses and those of Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jesus, in the end the comparisons—though interesting—do not produce much theological fruit that is relevant to Exodus 3.

<sup>9</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 99, writes, “Moses is the *means* by which God will work his own redemptive strength” (emphasis original). A further note concerns the word “commanded,” which has been chosen consciously. Although Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 191, argues that the opening phrase of Exod 3:10 (וַעֲתָה לָכֶּה) should be rendered in the more invitational sense of “come on” (rather than the more forceful “go”), he fails to mention that a second imperative (the *hip’il* of הוֹצֵא: “bring out!”) is found also in Exod 3:10, making it likely that God was commanding in this verse instead of inviting (so Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 87-88).

obligation, and human vocation. It is Moses who will do what Yahweh said, and Moses who will run the risks that Yahweh seemed ready to take.”<sup>10</sup> In a previous era God had sent Joseph to Egypt for the purpose of saving lives in a time of famine (Gen 45:5-8); now God was sending Moses to Egypt with the aim of saving lives in a time of oppression.<sup>11</sup>

Thus by divine fiat, the long dark night of Israel’s slavery to Egypt was drawing to a close. Moses need only respond to the call of God with hearty affirmation, and God’s plan would whirl into motion. However, Exodus 3:11 reports a Moses who hesitates. Upon hearing the call of God in verse 10, Moses replies to God: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Terence Fretheim has remarked aptly that the “Here am I” that Moses had spoken in Exodus 3:4 now becomes a “Who am I?” in Exodus 3:11.<sup>12</sup>

Probably the question asked by Moses in Exodus 3:11 should not be taken in an existential sense, as if he were asking about his very identity in the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> Rather, in context the “Who Am I?” of Moses seems intended to stress what Walter Kaiser has called “the magnitude of the inequity between the agent and the mission.”<sup>14</sup> As Gideon would later plead his inadequacy to execute the imposing call that God had laid on his life (Judg 6:15), and as Jeremiah would likewise wonder why God had called him to such

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<sup>10</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreters Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 713.

<sup>11</sup>Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2014), 25.

<sup>12</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 61.

<sup>13</sup>R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 68.

<sup>14</sup>Kaiser, *Exodus*, 368, lists Exod 6:12; 1 Sam 18:18; Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6; and 2 Cor 2:16 as other examples of questions similar to the question Moses was asking.

a mammoth prophetic task (Jer 1:6), so in Exodus 3:11 Moses puzzled over God's choosing him to lead the exodus. The question "Who am I?" was uttered because Moses felt wholly inadequate for the task that God was commanding, and both fear and humility played a part in the utterance.<sup>15</sup>

Fear lurked behind the question of Moses.<sup>16</sup> After all, Moses had come to Midian in the first place because Pharaoh had been seeking to kill him (Exod 2:15).<sup>17</sup> Moses was a fugitive in Midian who had murdered one of Pharaoh's countrymen (Exod 2:12). Surely God did not now expect Moses—of all people—to go back to Pharaoh.

Humility further funded the question of Moses.<sup>18</sup> Moses was now a humble elderly shepherd, and shepherds were an abomination to Egyptians (Gen 46:34).<sup>19</sup> For a lowly shepherd to gain an audience with the top Egyptian official was a most unlikely prospect: "Who am I?" may be Moses's way of questioning how much serious consideration God had given to socio-economic hierarchies. Further, there was Exodus 3:8, where God had declared *his* intention to save his people from Egypt.<sup>20</sup> Such a massive work of salvation was surely God's area of expertise, not Moses's. Peter Enns suggests, "Perhaps Moses' question is actually a show of true humility. He is not God,

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<sup>15</sup>Scholars are divided on the question of whether Moses's "Who am I?" was colored by fear (Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 88); humility (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 245); a combination of "true humility, an appreciation for the difficulties that will confront him in his role, and simple stubbornness" (Enns, *Exodus*, 114); or "polite *acceptance* of [the] honor rather than . . . an attempt to decline it" (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006], 118, emphasis original). My suspicion is that both fear and humility may have lurked behind Moses's question.

<sup>16</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 88; see also Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1993), 360.

<sup>17</sup>As noted by Houtman, *Exodus*, 360.

<sup>18</sup>Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 245.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>What follows in this paragraph is taken from Enns, *Exodus*, 100.



and hence *he* cannot bring the Israelites out of Egypt.”<sup>21</sup> Enns wonders if the question “Who am I?” reflects Moses’s refusal “to usurp God’s glory.”<sup>22</sup>

Whatever the reasons that Moses voiced his question, its basic focus was askew. As Victor Hamilton has well observed, the question “Who am I?” put the focus squarely on Moses and his inadequacies, whereas a better question might have been, “*Whose* am I?”<sup>23</sup> One may fixate on personal deficiencies (and thereby deny one’s capacity to fulfill God’s call), or one may concentrate on God and his abilities, God and his resources, God and his power. When God calls, he comes with the ability and the will to ensure the success of the calling. Everyone is inadequate on their own to fulfill God’s call, but God is able.

### **Exodus 3:12: The Presence and a Sign**

The divine reply to Moses’s claim of inadequacy is instructive, for God neither denied Moses’s claim, nor did God engage in the bolstering of Moses’s self-esteem.<sup>24</sup> Rather, God voiced assurance to Moses that the distinguishing characteristic of each step of his mission would be the divine presence. To Moses’s “Who am I?” God replied, “I will be with you.” John Sailhamer well summarizes the reply of God in Exodus 3:12: “God responded to Moses’ question not by building up Moses’ confidence in himself but by the reassurance that he would be with him in carrying out his task.”<sup>25</sup> Nothing could

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<sup>21</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 100, emphasis original.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 143. Hamilton points to Acts 27:23: “For this very night there stood before me an angel of *the God to whom I belong* and whom I worship” (emphasis added).

<sup>24</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 310. See also J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 65.

<sup>25</sup>Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 245.

be more heartening for Moses as he reeled at the command of Exodus 3:10 than the promise of Exodus 3:12: God would be with him.

In his valuable study of the many occurrences of the phrase “I will be with you” found across the pages of the Bible, Donald Gowan has concluded on the prevailing import of the phrase.<sup>26</sup> According to Gowan, “‘I will be with you’ is not a blessing in general, not simply reassurance that all is well, but is a promise of help in times of great danger, or when setting out on an undertaking that seems very likely to fail.”<sup>27</sup> Certainly the mission to which Moses had been called seemed unspeakably perilous, and Moses considered himself wholly unequal to the task. Yet God was putting Moses on notice that the unfathomable resources inherent in divine presence were now on offer. The reader of Exodus 3:12 should pause. A plea of gross inadequacy as God calls is trumped by the promised presence of God, which guarantees the success of the call. The observation of J. A. Motyer is discerning and worthy of close reflection: “The Lord does not call us because of our adequacy, nor is his presence conditional upon us becoming adequate, it is rather promised to those who are inadequate.”<sup>28</sup> The essential factor in the equation was God’s presence. Moses’s perceived lack was inconsequential.

Prior to Exodus 3:12, God had voiced his “I will be with you” to Jacob (Gen 31:3). After Exodus 3:12, God’s “I will be with you” was promised also to Joshua (Deut 31:23; Josh 1:5; 3:7), Gideon (Judg 6:16), and Jeremiah (Jer 1:8); and in Psalms 23:4 and 46:7 the Psalmist spoke from his assurance of the “with-ness” of God. Isaiah 7:14 promised the arrival of Immanuel (“God with us”) on earth, and Jesus fulfilled the prophecy. The Risen Christ promised his presence to the apostle Paul (Acts 18:10), and Christ has

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<sup>26</sup>See Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 54-75.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>28</sup>Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 66.

likewise promised to be “with” each of his disciples forever (Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5). Benedictory prayers for God’s abiding presence are common in the writings of Paul (Rom 15:33; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 2 Thess 3:16; 2 Tim 4:22), and the New Heaven and Earth will be characterized by the “with-ness” of God (Rev 21:3). Clearly a trajectory can be traced—from Genesis 31:3 through Exodus 3:12 up to Revelation 21:3—of God’s unbroken desire to be with his people. Following on the heels of Exodus 3:12 that desire sees immediate fulfillment in the pillar of cloud and fire, the tabernacle and the ark.<sup>29</sup>

In Exodus 3:12, the English phrase “I will be” translates from the single Hebrew word *’ehyeh*.<sup>30</sup> The same Hebrew word appears three times in Exodus 3:14, where it is usually translated into English as “I AM.”<sup>31</sup> Thus it appears that the single use of *’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:12 is meant to anticipate the threefold use of *’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14.<sup>32</sup> Since the use of *’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:12 is located in a phrase where God is

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<sup>29</sup>Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 4 (1961): 325.

<sup>30</sup>Several commentators have discerned a relationship between the word אֶהְיֶה and the Hebrew verb היה (or הוה in its archaic form), making אֶהְיֶה the *qal* imperfect, first common singular of היה. For scholars who make this verbal connection, see Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 324; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:189; J. Carl Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (2001): 42; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 104; Theodorus Christiaan Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Newton, MA: Charles T. Branford, 1970), 319; Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 117.

<sup>31</sup>For example, see the following English Bibles: ESV, JPS, KJV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT.

<sup>32</sup>Several scholars note the connection between the single use of *’ehyeh* in Exod 3:12 and the threefold use of the same word in Exod 3:14. Among these scholars are Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 325-26; W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 35; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 149; James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 43; Cole, *Exodus*, 68; Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 89; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); 39; Enns, *Exodus*, 101; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 335; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 371; Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 32-33; John L. MacKay, *Exodus*, *A Mentor*

expressing the promise of his presence, Joseph Blenkinsopp is probably correct in his suggestion that at least the first two occurrences of *'ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14 are “meant to convey something about presence and assistance in the uncertain events about to unfold.”<sup>33</sup> More reflection on this possibility will be discussed in the exposition of Exodus 3:14. For now it is enough to note the linguistic connection between Exodus 3:12 and 3:14.

After pledging his abiding presence to Moses, God tells Moses that a “sign” will be afforded to Moses that will confirm that God had sent him. “This shall be the sign for you,” says God in Exodus 3:12, “that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” While certain commentators confess uncertainty concerning the subject of the word “this” in Exodus 3:12c—unsure as to whether “*this . . . sign*” should be understood as the burning bush itself or some other thing—several other scholars argue that the content of the “sign” is spelled out explicitly in Exodus 3:12e.<sup>34</sup> For this latter group of scholars, the “sign” that God would give Moses (that would confirm Moses’s mission) was the moment—still future to Moses—when the Hebrew people would gather to worship God at Sinai.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the sign that God proffers to Moses in Exodus 3:12 is not fulfilled until Exodus 19:2. In the meantime, Moses had the promise of the unabated presence of God. Moses would see the sign fulfilled, but

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Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 77; and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden, The Netherlands: Deo, 2005), 40.

<sup>33</sup>Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 149.

<sup>34</sup>Those who express uncertainty concerning the identity of the sign include Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 273; and Enns, *Exodus*, 101. Included in the list of scholars who are more certain that the “content of the ‘sign’ is spelled out explicitly in Exodus 3:12e” are Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 89; Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 192; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 59; Houtman, *Exodus*, 362-63; Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 66; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 246; Stuart, *Exodus*, 119.

<sup>35</sup>“The Hebrew people,” not just Moses, would gather to worship God at Sinai. The choice of the phrase “Hebrew people” (indicating a *plurality* of people) reflects the second person plural form of עֲבָדָה that is found in Exod 3:12e: “*you all* will worship.”

in the meantime Moses was to exercise faith and rest in God's presence. Indeed, by its very nature the sign that God promised to Moses in Exodus 3:12 was faith-begging.

Duane Garrett provides an excellent summary of the nature of the sign and God's purpose in its promise:

It is probably that God was initially giving Moses a call to faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the proof of matters not seen" (Heb. 11:1). God wanted Moses to keep the vision of Israel gathered at Sinai to worship God as the "proof" that would sustain him as he embarked on his difficult mission. That is, the greatest sign one can have is a guiding vision.<sup>36</sup>

Noteworthy is the fact that the "guiding vision" for Moses was not simply a vision in his mind's eye of the Hebrew people stepping out of Egyptian territory. Rather, the exodus from Egypt was only the prelude to the greater goal, outlined in the latter portion of Exodus 3:12e: the people would gather for worship at the mountain.<sup>37</sup> Worship was the preeminent goal. Worship was the terminus of the promised sign. A picture of the Hebrew people worshipping at Sinai was the guiding vision. Moses could assess that the sign had been fulfilled when he observed Hebrew people praising Yahweh at the mountain.

John MacKay is insightful in his summation:

By coming to Sinai and worshipping God there, the Israelites will have moved from being under the control of Pharaoh to being under the control of the LORD and will yield total and all-encompassing obedience to him. Of this fealty to their covenant king and deliverer, worship will form a major part. Bringing the people out of Egypt was not an end in itself. It was the prelude to bringing them into a living, personal relationship with the LORD himself.<sup>38</sup>

One might think that the promise of unqualified divine presence, along with the assured fulfillment of God's sign, would provide ample warrant for Moses to pledge

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<sup>36</sup>Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 206.

<sup>37</sup>In Exod 3:12e, the ESV translates the verb עָבַד as "serve." However, Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 17, observes that the verb can mean both "to be in servitude" and "to worship," and in Exod 3:12 the NASB, NIV, NJB, and NLT each render עָבַד as "worship." Thus I have chosen to employ the word "worship" in this paragraph.

<sup>38</sup>MacKay, *Exodus*, 75.

unwavering commitment to God. However, in verse 13 Moses remains hesitant. Specifically, Moses now requires God to explain God's name and its significance.

### **Exodus 3:13: God before the Tribunal of Moses**

In Exodus 3:10, Moses received God's mandate to go to Pharaoh. However, in Exodus 3:13 Moses appears troubled by the prospect of meeting—not with Pharaoh—but with “the people of Israel.” One wonders why Moses fears a meeting which God has not mentioned. Perhaps Nahum Sarna is correct in his assertion: “Moses realized at once that he could not effectively represent Israel at the Egyptian court without first receiving a mandate from the people.”<sup>39</sup> Before Moses can confront Pharaoh he must visit the Hebrews to win their support.

In Exodus 3:13, Moses presents God with a hypothetical situation in which the Hebrews might ask for God's name.<sup>40</sup> Moses says to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” No doubt Moses remembered a past moment when he had been snubbed gruffly by a Hebrew man who had questioned Moses's leadership abilities (Exod 2:14).<sup>41</sup> Perhaps an underlying reason why Moses presented his hypothetical scenario to God in Exodus 3:13 was simple lack of confidence. Having been rebuffed by a Hebrew in days past, Moses wanted no stone left unturned: “If they question me, LORD, what shall I say in reply?”

The specifics of Moses's hypothetical conversation are noteworthy. Moses portrays himself declaring to the Hebrews, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you.”

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<sup>39</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987), 50.

<sup>40</sup>On the “hypothetical” nature of Exod 3:13, Hamilton, *Exodus*, 63, comments, “I like the way NIV begins v. 13 with ‘Suppose I go,’ as if Moses has said to God, ‘I'm not saying I'm going; I'm speaking only hypothetically, for argument's sake.’”

<sup>41</sup>MacKay, *Exodus*, 76.

The reader will notice that Moses desires to express to the Hebrews continuity between the God who now speaks to him through the bush and the God of their ancestry. In other words, the God who is now speaking to Moses, the God whom Moses will reveal to the Hebrews, is no new God. “Rather,” says John Oswalt, “[he] was the God who had revealed himself to the past generations of ancestors through promises that obligated him to intervene in the lives of the descendants of those ancestors.”<sup>42</sup>

To the claim that the God of the ancestral fathers had sent Moses, Moses pictures the Hebrews asking, “What is his [God’s] name?” Worthwhile is a careful meditation on the *why*, *how*, and *what* of that hypothetical question: *Why* might the Hebrews ask such a question, *how* does Moses frame the question (and does the very framing of the question bear on its interpretation), and *what* precisely is being asked.

#### “What Is His Name?”: Why?

The reason the Hebrews might ask, “What is [God’s] name?” can be discerned upon consideration of their context. Douglas Stuart has observed that although people were calling upon the name of Yahweh as early as Genesis 4:26, and although patriarchs such as Noah (Gen 9:26), Abraham (Gen 12:8), Isaac (Gen 26:25), Jacob (Gen 28:16), and Laban (Gen 30:27) all called upon the name Yahweh, the name “was not used, or not prominently used, by any of the children of Jacob, at least in terms of what is in the biblical record.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, after Jacob spoke the name Yahweh in Genesis 32:9, the name does not appear on the lips of any of Jacob’s sons. After Genesis 32:9, the only other time in Genesis where a character speaks the name Yahweh is Genesis 49:18 as Jacob is blessing Dan. Thus judging by the biblical record it would appear that the name Yahweh began to fall out of use after Jacob’s generation, and the book of Exodus began with the

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<sup>42</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus*, 303.

<sup>43</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 120.

notice that the generation of Jacob died once the Hebrew people were inside Egypt (Exod 1:6).<sup>44</sup> Victor Hamilton makes the astute observation that God is never “more than a generation away from being forgotten (Judg. 2:10).”<sup>45</sup> Thus one wonders if the hypothetical “what is his name?” in Exodus 3:13 can be taken as genuine ignorance of the name.<sup>46</sup> By the time Moses spoke with God at the burning bush, the Hebrew people were hundreds of years removed from Jacob and languishing in a foreign land where a host of other gods were worshipped. Perhaps the people were honestly oblivious to the name Yahweh.

The Hebrew people found themselves in an Egyptian context where the general populous lauded a multiplicity of gods. Indeed according to Joshua 24:14 and Ezekiel 20:7—both of which look back retrospectively at Israel’s time in Egypt—Israel herself served many gods and worshipped idols even while living in Egypt.<sup>47</sup> The many gods each needed a specific name in order that the people could keep straight their functions and abilities. One wonders whether “what is his name?” also reflects a basic desire to

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<sup>44</sup>As noted by Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 133.

<sup>45</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 63.

<sup>46</sup>My focus in this section concerns ignorance of God’s name that was (possibly) shared by the masses of Hebrew people living inside Egypt. However, the suggestion has been raised that the Hebrews *did* in fact know the name, whereas Moses did not. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 64, explains this possibility and its relevance to Moses’s question: “The Hebrews, thinks Moses, will inquire about God’s name not because they are ignorant of it. Rather, they will ask about the name because they know it and will not listen to somebody who cannot name the name of the God they know. . . . In effect, this makes God’s name a password, a badge of acceptance among his peers. It surely is possible that Moses might not know God’s special name, given that he has spent all of his postweaning years in Egypt or in Midian.” See also Houtman, *Exodus*, 366. Against this proposal is Enns, *Exodus*, 106. Enns wonders why no record of the question “What is God’s name, Moses?” is offered on the part of the Hebrews in their “initial meeting” with Moses in Exod 4:29-31. If the question, “What is God’s name, Moses?” was such a vital question for which the Hebrews must obtain an answer in order for them to accept Moses, Scripture gives no record of the question being asked.

<sup>47</sup>As noted by Houtman, *Exodus*, 366.



categorize this God amidst a pantheon of other gods. The comments of Duane Garrett are apropos:

In short, “What is his name?” implies a specific set of presuppositions about the deity whom Moses will claim to represent. It suggests that he is not unique but one of many gods; that he is geographically limited to his special place or cult; that he has certain areas of specialization, whether it be making babies or ruling over the dead; and it suggests that YHWH is somewhere in the hierarchy of deities, with some gods above and some below him. In short, his “name” is a way to distinguish him from all the other gods in the pantheon.<sup>48</sup>

To summarize, the reason the Hebrews might ask, “What is his name?” was twofold: (1) to ascertain a name of which they were ignorant, and (2) to have a label that would help them differentiate this God from various others. However, the way in which Moses framed the question of Exodus 3:13 suggests that a yet deeper inquiry was in view. Aside from access to a simple label, the people might also want to know the precise significance and meaning of the label.

#### **“What Is His Name?”: How and What?**

In biblical Hebrew, the interrogative pronoun *mī* (“who?”) is employed when one desires to ask a person’s name.<sup>49</sup> The best example is found in Judges 13:17 where the initial portion of Manoah’s question to the angel of Yahweh—rendered literally—is, “Who [*mī*] is your name?” In Judges 13:17, Manoah asked simply for the identity of the angel. However, when Moses asks, “What is your name?” in Exodus 3:13, he utilizes a different interrogative pronoun than *mī*, namely the pronoun *māh* (“what?”). The import of *māh* in Exodus 3:13 is best elucidated by Bruce Waltke:

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<sup>48</sup>Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 206. See also Stuart, *Exodus*, 120.

<sup>49</sup>See especially Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (1946; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 48. See also Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 323; Michael A. Grisanti, “היה,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:1024; Allan Harman, “Particles,” in *New International Dictionary*, 4:1034; and Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 365.

The inanimate pronoun *mah* is used when the focus is on the circumstance rather than the person. Thus, *mah š<sup>e</sup>mekā* (lit., “What is your name?”) seeks the meaning of the name (Gen. 32:28). It should not surprise us to find that Moses uses *mah* rather than *mī* in this pivotal text, asking *mah š<sup>e</sup>mō* (“What is the meaning of his name?”).<sup>50</sup>

Thus in Exodus 3:13, the very way in which Moses posed his question is suggestive. Moses asked not merely for a label but also for the implications of the label. Indeed, in his ancient Near Eastern context Moses assumed a much closer connection between name and the character of the name-bearer than is commonly assumed today.<sup>51</sup> The assessment of Roland deVaux is concise: “For a Semite, a proper name is itself a definition of the person who bears it.”<sup>52</sup> Nahum Sarna also helps the reader perceive the organic connection between name and being as understood by Moses: “The name is intended to connote character and nature, the totality of the intricate, interwoven, manifold forces that make up the whole personality of the bearer of the name.”<sup>53</sup> In asking, “What is his name?” Moses desired a revelation from God concerning God’s very nature,

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<sup>50</sup>Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 365. For the argument that in Exod 3:13 Moses asked for the *meaning* of the name, see also Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 323; Buber, *Moses*, 48; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 69, 75; William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 33; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 370; Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 17-18; and Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 246, who writes, “When Moses asked about the ‘name’ of God, he was inquiring about more than just the identity of God. He was asking a question about the very nature of God. Within the world of the biblical text, the name was the expression of the nature of its bearer (cf. 1Sa 25:25).”

<sup>51</sup>G. Ernest Wright, “The Divine Name and the Divine Nature,” *Perspective* 12 (1971): 179.

<sup>52</sup>Roland deVaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honor of Gwynne Henton Davies*, ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1970), 71.

<sup>53</sup>Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 52. See also T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 191; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 98-99; Lanier Burns, *The Nearness of God: His Presence with His People*, ed. Robert A. Peterson (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009), 68; Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 173-75; Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 32-33; Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” 40; Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 32; Oswalt, *Exodus*, 310-11; Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 140; Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 116; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:181-82; and Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 359.

character, and reputation. The answer that God provided is both revelatory yet mysterious.<sup>54</sup>

### Exodus 3:14-15: The Revelation of the Name

As concerns the general drift of Exodus 3:13-15, the comment of John Goldingay is perhaps most adroit: “Moses asks after God’s name so he can pass it on to the Israelites, and Yhwh responds by providing not a label but a theology.”<sup>55</sup> In Exodus 3:14-15, God responds to Moses with words that express God’s very self.

In the Hebrew text of Exodus 3:14, God’s speech begins with three words that have received enormous scholarly attention.<sup>56</sup> To Moses God declares, *’ehyeh ’ăšer ’ehyeh* (“I AM WHO I AM”).<sup>57</sup> As noted, the word *’ehyeh* is found also in Exodus 3:12, where it is translated “I will be” and is related directly to God’s presence. Probably the double use of *’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14b is intended to echo the earlier use of the term in

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<sup>54</sup>The comment of Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:337, seems on target: “The giving of the name and the spelling out of its implication is . . . both a revelation and a comment on the impossibility of offering a revelation.”

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 1:335.

<sup>56</sup>With regard to the appearance of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה in Exod 3:14, Enns, *Exodus*, 102, notes, “These three Hebrew words . . . are among the most discussed of any in the Old Testament.”

<sup>57</sup>A longstanding question is whether to translate אֶהְיֶה as “I AM” or as “I will be.” In favor of the latter is Fretheim, *Exodus*, 63, who argues, “The force is not simply that God is or that God is present but that God *will be* faithfully God for them” (emphasis added). Similar to Fretheim is Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology* 1:336, who observes, “Yhwh will often use this verb form again (beginning in Ex 4:12, 15), and every time it means ‘I will be,’ not ‘I am.’” Agreeing with both Fretheim and Goldingay is Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 84, who writes concerning אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה: “I believe the best translation of the three words is, ‘I will be whoever I will be.’” However, on the opposite side of the spectrum are Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 191; Durham, *Exodus*, 39; and John N. Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2013), 43. Durham, *Exodus*, 39, writes concerning אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה: “It is a reply that suggests that it is inappropriate to refer to God as ‘was’ or as ‘will be,’ for the reality of this active existence can be suggested only by the present: ‘is’ or ‘is-ing,’ ‘Always Is,’ or ‘Am.’” While I would agree with Goldingay’s contention that the אֶהְיֶה found in both Exod 4:12 and 4:15 should be translated “I will be,” the אֶהְיֶה which appears in Exod 3:14 is found in a very different context; that of God revealing his name. Thus on balance I side with Alexander, Durham, and Oswalt in preferring the translation “I AM.”

Exodus 3:12 and is likewise intended to connote presence.<sup>58</sup> Whatever else is implied in the phrase *'ehyeh 'āšer 'ehyeh*, the concept of God's presence is clearly being asserted.<sup>59</sup>

Victor Hamilton provides helpful commentary on the import of such an assertion:

God will always be there for his people, in a distant Egypt too, even if that divine presence is questioned and imperceptible. He will always be whatever his people need him to be in any given moment, in any given place. If they need a deliverer, that's YHWH. If they need grace and mercy and forgiveness, that's YHWH. If they need purifying and empowerment, that's YHWH. If they need rebuke and chastisement, that's YHWH. If they need guidance, that's YHWH.<sup>60</sup>

In moments of anxiety, uncertainty, fear, worry, and distress, nothing is better than to hear the assurance of God's presence.<sup>61</sup> For the cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy, or for the person who has lost a loved one, the assurance of God's presence

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<sup>58</sup>See n. 32 in this chapter for scholars who have noted the connection between the use of *'ehyeh* in Exod 3:12 and the uses of the same term in Exod 3:14.

<sup>59</sup>Some scholars have taken the phrase אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה as representing God's evasion of a clear answer to Moses's request for the name. For example, see Enns, *Exodus*, 102-3; and Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 33. Against Enns and Knowles is Fretheim, *Exodus*, 64, who writes concerning Exod 3:14-15, "It is difficult to believe that the thousands of uses of Yahweh in the Old Testament are only a testimony to God's holding back his name." Further, several scholars have cautioned against reading "I AM that I AM" in the metaphysical/philosophical sense of "aseity" (i.e., self-existence). For example, see deVaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," 70; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:190; Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 33; J. A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (1959; repr., London: Tyndale, 1970), 23; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:180. Some scholars, including von Rad (1:180); Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 40; and Seitz, *Figured Out*, 140, suggest that the Septuagint's rendering of אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν) was less than satisfactory. Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 40, remarks concerning אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה: "This is not a name; but neither is [it] a statement about who or how God is, as the Septuagint took it: ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, 'I am the being one.'" However, Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 51-52, cautions against a carte blanche dismissal of the concept of aseity in אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה: "It must not be supposed from the little grasp which the Israelites had of abstract ideas that they were incapable of understanding the reality of being and it is not attributing to them a metaphysics too highly developed when we imagine they could define God as 'he who is' over against things which are temporary—the succession of days and seasons, the verdure of the desert which grows and withers, flocks which are born and die, the successive generations, men whose bodies return to dust." Still, Jacob (52) goes on to admit that the *primary* idea in אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is not eternity but presence.

<sup>60</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 66.

<sup>61</sup>See Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 74.

brings tremendous comfort. In the opening phrase of Exodus 3:14, Moses was receiving a double pledge of God's presence—whatever Moses faced, God would be with him.

After the phrase *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*, Exodus 3:14 uses *'ehyeh* a third time. God instructs Moses saying, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM [*'ehyeh*] has sent me to you.” In this latter portion of Exodus 3:14, *'ehyeh* appears to be functioning more as an actual name, where the earlier phrase *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh* was less a name and more an assertion of presence.<sup>62</sup> The third use of *'ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14 is God beginning to voice his name. Because God names himself in Exodus 3:14e, he speaks in the first person: *'ehyeh* (“I AM”). However, in Exodus 3:15 God gives Moses the third person form of his name: *yhwh*, or Yahweh (which might be translated “He is”).<sup>63</sup> God commands Moses,

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<sup>62</sup>So Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 149; and Enns, *Exodus*, 103. Worth consideration is the possibility that יהוה in the last phrase of Hos 1:9 may be functioning as a name: וְאֶנְכִי לֹא־אֶהְיֶה לְכֶם (“and I am not ‘I AM’ to you”). If the third use of יהוה in Exod 3:14 is indeed to be read as a name, then the observation of Sarna, *Exodus*, 18 (and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 52), becomes crucial: only God can name himself, and Exod 3:14e is where this self-naming happens. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 52, writes, “Since in the ancient world there existed the notion that name-giving communicates superiority and power over the recipient of the name, it is self-evident that God’s name must proceed from Himself, and cannot be conferred by man. This explains why God uses the first person—‘*Ehyeh*—instead of the regular third-person form of his verbal name—YHWH.” When Adam named the animals (Gen 2:19-20), he did so as ruler over the animals. When during the exile the Babylonian eunuch Ashpenaz renamed Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan 1:7), Ashpenaz was acting out his role as superior over the exiles. Since no creature surpasses God in superiority, God must name himself, and God does so in Exod 3:14e.

<sup>63</sup>In Exod 3:15, the Hebrew word translated “the LORD” is יהוה, which Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 324, has argued is the *qal* imperfect third person singular form of הוה. deVaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 63, best explains the reason why a switch occurs in Exod 3:14-15 between the first person singular אֶהְיֶה and the third person singular יְהוה: “Speaking of himself [God] cannot say ‘he is’, which would be tantamount to recognizing a Being other than Himself. He must say ‘I am’, and it is ‘I am’ who will send Moses. But Moses cannot say ‘I am’, since he is not the One who Is: he says, therefore ‘he is.’” Thus both the first person אֶהְיֶה in Exod 3:14 and the third person singular יְהוה in Exod 3:15 are forms of the verb היה, whose basic range of meaning is “to be.” However, one should not think mistakenly that the verb behind the name of God implies mere static existence. The words of George A. F. Knight, *I AM, This Is My Name: The God of the Bible and the Religions of Man* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 30, are appropriately cautionary “The verb [היה] does not describe mere static being; so it is not merely ‘is.’ Within the verb there are both movement and vitality. ‘And it came to pass,’ a clause that uses this verb, is very common throughout the Old Testament; even our English rendering can show this sense of movement. ‘The word of the Lord that *came* to Hosea’ . . . is how that book begins. Movement, always movement; nothing static; so that when this verb of ‘being’ occurs it brings with it a vision of proceeding in a particular direction. Thus the English word ‘become’ must be added to the idea of ‘being’ when we meet this verb [היה].” Still another aspect of the discussion surrounding יהוה concerns whether the name derives from the *hip'il* form of היה, thus suggesting the translation “he who causes to

saying, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD [*yhwh*, “He is”] the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” All three appearances of *'ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14, plus the single use of *yhwh* in Exodus 3:15, are forms of the Hebrew verb *hyh*, which connotes being and presence.

The crux, then, of what God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15 (as God voiced God’s name) was presence. God promised a sort of mobile presence that would be constant and reliable yet willing to fit itself to Israel’s every morphing circumstance. Whatever situation Moses and Israel faced, God’s presence with them would be unchanging yet adaptive; fixed yet on the move. The name of God was an expression of this remarkable promise.

In Exodus 3:15c, God connects his name *yhwh* directly to the phrase “the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Two insights are worth mention. First, the inclusion of the patriarchal names implies that Yahweh is no distant, impersonal God. Rather the very identity of Yahweh is connected to specific, individual persons. Yahweh is the God who had been present with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Duane Garrett rightly detects an expression of God’s immanence in Exodus 3:15c, observing that God “has involved himself in a human family and story, and makes himself known through their names.”<sup>64</sup> One is humbled exceedingly upon consideration of so striking a fact.

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be.” William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1957), 16, 259-60, argued that יהוה is to be rendered in the *hip'il* /causative sense, but against Albright are scholars such as Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 325; deVaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name Yahweh,” 62; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:189; and Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 218. Garrett (218) points out the major reason that the *hip'il* /causative sense should be ruled out: “A causative form of this verb is not attested in any Semitic language.”

<sup>64</sup>Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 212.

Second, the mention of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” in Exodus 3:15c is a mention of characters many years prior to Moses, and hence points Moses to ponder the past faithfulness and presence of God.<sup>65</sup> As much as the terms *'ehyeh* and *yhwh* may point forward as assurances of God’s future presence and faithfulness, the names of the patriarchs in Exodus 3:15c point backward in time. God proved faithfully present in the past to the patriarchs, which implied a promise of the same faithfulness and presence for the present and future.

The last sentence in Exodus 3:15 reads, “This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” The name that God desired for people to memorialize and invoke for perpetuity was “Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>66</sup> The name and fame of God, says the Psalmist, endure through every age and generation (Pss 102:13; 135:13). In subsequent chapters of the book of Exodus, the meaning of God’s name will be ironed out in the crucible of Israel’s extraction from Egypt.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 135-36.

<sup>66</sup>The phrase “invoke for perpetuity” has been crafted intentionally. Enns, *Exodus*, 106, takes the word לְעֹלָם (ESV: “forever”) in Exod 3:15 in terms of perpetuity: “The phrase ‘forever’ . . . in verse 15 likely refers to perpetuity through all time, that is, backwards and forwards (see the similar use of ‘forever’ in 15:18).” Further, the word זָכַר (“my remembrance”) in Exod 3:15 has been taken by Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 364, in terms of “invocation.” Waltke (364) points to the use of the same word in Prov 10:7: “‘The righteous are invoked/remembered [translation mine]’ (*zeker*), denoting the active cognitive occupation with a person or situation by retaining and reviving impressions of the person and proclaiming him or her to others. One cannot invoke without remembering, and one cannot remember well without invoking/proclaiming.”

<sup>67</sup>Indeed, says Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 39, “The principal burden of Exodus 5-15 is to give meaning to that name.” At this juncture it is worth mentioning that following Exod 3:14-15, the book of Exodus records two major, subsequent revelations of God’s name. In Exod 6:2-3, God says to Moses, “I am the LORD [*yhwh*]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [*el šaddāy*], but by my name the LORD [*yhwh*] I did not make myself known to them.” The difficulty arising in reading Exod 6:3 is that the name Yahweh was in fact used as early as Gen 4:26 (see also Gen 9:26; 12:8; 26:25; 28:16; 30:27; 32:10; 49:18). For God to assert that he “did not make himself known” to the patriarchs by the name Yahweh seems incongruent with the witness of the Gen texts. The best solution to this quandary is offered by Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name*, 12, who translates Exod 6:3 in terms of “character”: “And I showed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob *in the character* of El Shaddai, but *in the character* expressed by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them”

While there is little doubt that Exodus 3:14-15 is a central text for any discussion on the subject of the name of God, it is not the final word on the matter. Indeed, the superlative, final revelation of God's name occurs not in the book of Exodus but in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus comes in the name of his Father (John 5:49) and manifests his Father's name (John 17:6). Ultimately the Father gives the divine name to the Son, granting Jesus the name that is above every name (John 17:11-12; Phil 2:9-11).

### Yahweh and Jesus

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes several weighty statements concerning the organic unity he shares with Yahweh his Father. For example, in John 10:30, Jesus declares explicitly, "I and the Father are one" (cf. John 17:11). In John 10:38, Jesus remarks, "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (cf. John 17:21), and in John 12:45 Jesus says, "Whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (cf. John 14:9). In John 14:7, Jesus

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(emphasis added). Years before Motyer, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:143, arrived at a similar conclusion: "The intent of Exodus 6:3 . . . has to be that now for the first time the Lord himself made known to Moses the *meaning* of his name" (emphasis added). The third major revelation of God's name in the book of Exodus comes at Exod 34:5-7. Where the revelation of Exod 3:14-15 had been somewhat ambiguous, Exod 34:5-7 provides greater detail concerning God's name and character. Arresting is the fact that God divulges such detail precisely during an exceedingly disgraceful moment in Israel's history, the period following the Golden Calf. The comment of Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 46, captures the profundity of the moment: "Divine revelation comes not because of their [the Israelites'] fidelity, but rather in light of its absence (cf. Deut 7:7-8)." Twice following the Golden Calf incident Moses interceded with God (Exod 32:11-14; 33:12-16). In the second of these intercessions Moses requested to be shown God's "ways" (Exod 33:13), and in v. 18 Moses asked to be shown God's "glory." In response to Moses, God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, 'The LORD' [*yhwh*]" (Exod 33:19). Thus the request to be shown God's "ways" and "glory" was met with a promise from God to display his "goodness" and declare his "name." Exod 34:5-7 is the fulfillment of Exod 33:19. On Mount Sinai, God passed before Moses and then provided Moses with what Fretheim, *Exodus*, 301, has called a "virtual exegesis" of God's name. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of Exod 34:6-7 for biblical theology. In addition to the texts which contain voluminous quotes from Exod 34:6-7 (i.e., Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; and Nah 1:3), traces of Exod 34:6-7 can also be found in Deut 4:31; 5:9-10; 1 Kgs 3:6; 2 Chr 30:9; Pss 78:38; 86:5; 11:4; 112:4; 116:5; Isa 48:9; Jer 32:18-19; Lam 3:32; and Dan 9:4. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 302, comments accurately on the centrality of Exod 34:6-7 to the rest of the Old Testament: "[Exod 34:6-7] cuts across the Old Testament as a statement of basic Israelite convictions regarding its God. It thus constitutes a kind of 'canon' of the kind of God Israel's God is, in the light of which God's ongoing involvement in its history is to be interpreted." Taken together, Exod 3:10-15; 6:2-3; and 34:5-7 contribute some of the most important revelation concerning the divine name to be found in the entire Bible.



further asserts that to know him is to know the Father. The will, purposes, mind, and characteristics of the Father are to be found in the Son. Later New Testament texts, such as Colossians 1:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:19, confirm Jesus's assertions by declaring Jesus as the "image of the invisible God" and affirming that "God was in Christ."<sup>68</sup>

Therefore it comes as no surprise to hear Jesus repeat words and phrases that his Father had spoken in centuries past through the Old Testament prophets, or better, it comes as no surprise to hear Jesus claim the lordship that had been claimed by Yahweh in centuries past. Especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself in no uncertain terms as the fleshly manifestation of the eternal, creative, powerful, redeeming Yahweh who had been revealed in Exodus 3:14-15 and Isaiah 40-55.<sup>69</sup> All that the name Yahweh meant for people living in Old Testament times was now fleshed out (quite literally) in the person of Jesus.

The latter half of the book of Isaiah is replete with declarations and descriptions of the name Yahweh, a great many of which come from the mouth of Yahweh himself. Phrases such as "I am he," "I am the LORD," and "I am God" pepper the text from Isaiah 40 through 55 (e.g., Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13-14; 43:25; 45:8, 18, 19, 22; 46:4, 9; 48:12, 17; 49:26; 51:12), and these declarations are surrounded by descriptions of Yahweh's nature, character, and works. The one named Yahweh is "everlasting" and "Creator" (Isa 40:28; 43:14; 45:18). He is "first and last" (Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). He only is God (Isa 43:10; 44:8; 45:14, 18, 22; 46:9). He is "redeemer," "savior" and "king" (Isa 43:14; 44:6; 45:22; 46:4; 49:6, 26), and he forgives (Isa 43:25).

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<sup>68</sup>Both the KJV and NASB renderings of 2 Cor 5:19 include the phrase "God was in Christ."

<sup>69</sup>As noted by Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 97-98; and Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 516.

These Isaiah texts connect both backward and forward in the Bible, backward to the “I AM” and “Yahweh” announcements of Exodus 3:14-15,<sup>70</sup> but also forward to words chosen by Jesus to speak of himself in the Gospel of John. In several of the Isaiah texts (41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:8, 18, 22; 46:4, 9; 48:12, 17; 51:12; 52:6), the Septuagint rendered the phrase “I am” (‘*ānî* or ‘*ānōkî* in Hebrew) with the Greek words *egō eimi*.<sup>71</sup> In several decisive moments in the earthly career of Jesus, Jesus employed the phrase *egō eimi*, clearly referencing the Isaiah texts and Exodus 3:14-15 before them.<sup>72</sup> The “I am” of Exodus 3 and the latter portion of Isaiah now spoke the words “I am” on earth using the vocal cords of his human body.<sup>73</sup>

Four texts from John’s Gospel are particularly noteworthy. John 6:20; 8:24, 58; and 18:4-6 each have Jesus speaking the phrase *egō eimi* in ways that declare his divinity and his connection with Yahweh. The phrase *egō eimi* (“It is I”) is spoken in John 6:20, as Jesus walks on water. Thomas Schreiner helpfully connects what Jesus says in John 6:20 to earlier statements made by Yahweh: “The ‘It is I’ statement probably harkens back to Exod. 3:14 and the ‘I am’ declarations of Yahweh in Isaiah (e.g., Isa.

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<sup>70</sup>Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 54, notes the connection between Exod 3:14-15 and Isa 41:4; 48:12 in particular. Concerning the Isaiah verses, Jacob (54), writes, “In these passages the expression ‘*ani-hu*, I am he, is, it would appear, the best commentary on Exodus 3.14 where the revelation of a God is found who in speaking of himself says: I am (‘*ehyeh*) and of whom men affirm: he is (*yihyeh*). With Second Isaiah, the most accomplished theologian amongst the writers of the Old Testament, we witness the full flowering of all the potentialities contained in the name Yahweh; the only genuine existence as over against that of idols which are nothing, a complete presence since the ends of the earth shall see him, an eternal presence since it knows no end (Is. 49.6, 26).”

<sup>71</sup>And of course, in Exod 3:14, the Septuagint rendered the initial יהוה as ἐγὼ εἰμι.

<sup>72</sup>See uses of ἐγὼ εἰμι in John 4:26; 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 12:46; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:4-6, 8. Grisanti, “היה,” 1026, says concerning ἐγὼ εἰμι: “Christ’s use of this title draws on two sources, Exod 3:14-15 and Isa 40-55.”

<sup>73</sup>Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 516, writes, “For Jesus to appropriate ‘I am’ statements and apply them to himself . . . is nothing short of astonishing. He is clearly identifying himself as God, indicating that the identity of the one God has a fuller dimension than was clear from the OT.”

41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:18, 22). This certainly would fit with walking on water, for such an act is possible only for the Lord (cf. Job 9:8).”<sup>74</sup>

John 8:24 provides another record of Jesus’s self-identification with Yahweh. Speaking to a group of Jews, Jesus declared, “Unless you believe that *I am he* [*egō eimi*], you will die in your sins.” The implication is that belief in Jesus means *not dying* in sins,<sup>75</sup> but the remarkable aspect of the verse is how Jesus employs *egō eimi*. D. A. Carson rightly perceives both Exodus 3:14-15 and the Isaiah texts as “background” to the “I am he” statement of John 8:24, and remarks that “for Jesus to apply such words to himself is tantamount to a claim to deity.”<sup>76</sup>

In John 8:58, Jesus employs *egō eimi* in a way that is both “absolute” and linked clearly with Isaiah 41:4 and 43:13.<sup>77</sup> Speaking again to some Jews, Jesus remarks, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, *I am* [*egō eimi*].” Because John 8:59 then reports that the Jews “picked up stones to throw at him,” plainly the reader is to understand that the Jews recognized Jesus’s use of *egō eimi* as what Carson has called “some kind of blasphemous claim to deity.”<sup>78</sup>

Finally, a profound response occurs when Jesus speaks the words *egō eimi* in John 18:4-6. Those who arrived to arrest Jesus “drew back and fell to the ground” upon hearing Jesus say “I am he” [*egō eimi*]. Colin Kruse is probably on target with his suggestion that “Jesus’ use of *egō eimi*, as well as being a means of self-identification (‘I

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<sup>74</sup>Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 464.

<sup>75</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 342.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 343-44.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

am he’) involved the application of the divine name to himself—a claim to be one with God.”<sup>79</sup>

Thus Jesus deliberately connects himself with Yahweh. Jesus is Yahweh-in-the-flesh; in some mysterious yet authentic way, Jesus is to be identified with both the Yahweh of Isaiah and the Yahweh who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush.

### The Name above All Names

Though Father and Son are two distinct persons within the Trinity, the Gospel writer John desired to present Jesus as organically and profoundly united to, and bound up with, Yahweh. Remarkably, the name Yahweh does not appear in the pages of the New Testament, but the name Jesus is ubiquitous.<sup>80</sup> In point of fact, Yahweh himself has exalted the name Jesus above his own.<sup>81</sup>

In Isaiah 45:14-25, the name Yahweh appears eight times. Isaiah 45:23 has Yahweh declaring, “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.” In the context of Isaiah it is *Yahweh the Lord*, revealed specially in Exodus 3:14-15, to whom every person shall perform obeisance. However, when the apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23 in his New Testament letter to the Philippians, remarkably he replaces the name Yahweh with the name Jesus. Philippians 2:9-11 reads,

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that *at the name of Jesus* every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father [emphasis added].

The comments of Christopher Seitz concerning the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:4-11 are worth quoting at length: “The name of Jesus Christ stands where the promise

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<sup>79</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 351.

<sup>80</sup>Seitz, *Figured Out*, 131.

<sup>81</sup>In what follows I am indebted to Seitz, *Figured Out*, 131-44.

[Isa 45] had said that the name of the LORD would stand. And this has taken place to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>82</sup> Seitz further stresses that a “handing over”<sup>83</sup> of the divine name is taking place in Philippians 2:9-11, and that

the giving of the name to Jesus is a complete vindication by God of Jesus, an acknowledgment that he has been perfect in his obedience and in complete congruence with God’s will. . . . The name of God is God’s very self, and by giving it to Jesus, maximal identity is affirmed.<sup>84</sup>

Seitz notes the pattern of “humility followed by exaltation” in Philippians 2:4-11, and argues,

The condescension of Jesus has its counterpart in the giving over of the name. God surrenders his name and himself to his Son and his name, *that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow*. The identification is two-way, of Jesus with YHWH and of YHWH with Jesus. The hymn concludes, however, that this identification of Jesus with YHWH is ‘to the glory of God the Father.’<sup>85</sup>

The name Jesus is now the name to extol (Acts 19:17), glorify (2 Thess 1:12), and call upon (1 Cor 1:2). The church assembles in the name of Jesus (1 Cor 5:4), believes in his name (John 1:12; 2:23; 1 John 3:23; 5:13), offers thanksgiving in his name (Eph 5:20), asks in his name (John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23), is commanded in his name (2 Thess 3:6), and is blessed to be insulted in his name (1 Pet 4:14). Repentance and forgiveness of sins are proclaimed in his name (Luke 24:47) and salvation is found in no other name (Acts 4:12).

In Exodus 3, Moses stood at the burning bush and heard God pronounce God’s name. The one named Yahweh was the only one reputable enough and capable enough to work the deliverance that Israel required. Today the world stands before the revelation of the New Testament and hears proclaimed the name Jesus. The one named Jesus is the

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<sup>82</sup>Seitz, *Figured Out*, 142.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

rescue for humanity sent from Yahweh's heart. The one named Jesus is the only one able to free people from their bondage to sin, death, and the devil, and this liberation has been secured by his cross and resurrection. May the wonderful name of Jesus be forever exalted and praised! May the fame of the Son of God advance through all generations!

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DIVINE DESIRE TO BE RECOGNIZED

#### **Knowing That He Is Yahweh**

Consider the following scenario: A person named Joe is completely ignorant of the game of hockey. Joe knows nothing about the rules of hockey, neither has he ever witnessed the game played recreationally (let alone professionally). Joe's friend Bill, who is a hockey aficionado, invites Joe to accompany him to a National Hockey League game, where superstar Connor McDavid will be playing.<sup>1</sup> Prior to attending the game, Bill tries to educate Joe on the basics of hockey, and Bill also regales Joe with stories of the amazing skill and statistical accomplishments of Connor McDavid. Once at the game, Joe watches in amazed fascination as Connor McDavid scores four goals. McDavid puts on a sublime display of sheer hockey brilliance, and Joe comes to recognize for himself the truth of what Bill had only described. Joe now *knows*, having witnessed firsthand, the greatness of McDavid as a hockey talent.

A similar scenario—yet infinitely more momentous (and not a fiction)—occurs in Exodus 5-15. In Exodus 5-15, human beings at varying levels of ignorance concerning Yahweh are invited to witness firsthand the astonishing wonders of Yahweh—so that

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<sup>1</sup>Although the story in this paragraph is only a fictitious scenario, Connor McDavid is a real athlete who plays the position of center for the Edmonton Oilers of the National Hockey League (NHL). McDavid was selected first overall in the 2015 NHL entry draft, and was one of three finalists for the 2016 Calder trophy (awarded to the top rookie in the NHL). An injury meant that McDavid could only play 45 games of the 82 game (2016) season, yet he still managed an astonishing 48 points. McDavid is the youngest player in NHL history to be named captain of a team (at the age of 19), and as of the writing of this footnote, he is a contender for the 2017 Art Ross Trophy (awarded to the NHL player who finishes a given season with the most points), with 94 points in 78 games.

they might come to recognize Yahweh and his incomparable power and greatness. The actions of Yahweh are undertaken by Yahweh in order to evoke acknowledgement of Yahweh. Walther Zimmerli is helpful in describing the divine motive behind Yahweh's display of divine wonders:

God's acts do not occur for their own sake, but rather are directed at human beings; they mean to influence human beings and to create knowledge in them—and that also means . . . to elicit from them acknowledgement of Yahweh. Yahweh acts because he wants to effect this acknowledgement among human beings.<sup>2</sup>

Within Exodus 5-15, the phrase “know that I am the LORD” occurs some seven times (Exod 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22[18]; 10:2; 14:4, 18).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the phrases “know that there is no one like the LORD our God” (8:10[6]), “know that there is none like me in all the earth” (9:14), and “know that the earth is the LORD's” (9:29) each appear within the same section.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that the dominant idea in Exodus 5-15 is the need for human beings to recognize Yahweh and his incomparable, almighty sway. John Oswalt is surely correct in his observation that “Scripture repeats certain statements in order to make a point,” and the point being stressed repeatedly in Exodus 5-15 is that Yahweh, God of Israel, deserves to be acknowledged as supreme Lord of all.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 37.

<sup>3</sup>Although all Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated, throughout this chapter, bracketed verse numbers (e.g., 8:22[18]) indicate verse locations in the Hebrew Bible, where those locations differ from those in the English Bible.

<sup>4</sup>See also Exod 11:7. Throughout *I Am Yahweh*, Zimmerli calls such phrases “statements of recognition.” Outside of Exod 5-15, but still within the book of Exodus, statements of recognition occur at 16:6, 12; and 29:46. Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 158, notes that outside the book of Exodus, the only other occurrence in the Pentateuch of the statement of recognition is Deut 29:6: “Beyond the Pentateuch its use is sporadic (1 Kings 20:13, 28; Isa. 45:3; 49:23, 26; 60:16; Hos. 2:20; Joel 2:27; 3:17).” However, Hamilton also notes the voluminous use of the statement of recognition in the book of Ezekiel, where it occurs over 30 times.

<sup>5</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2013), 79.



## The Nature of the Knowing

The acknowledgement which Yahweh seeks has specific contours. A brief consideration of just two of these contours will prove fruitful. First, the question of *how* one comes to acknowledge Yahweh deserves attention. In Exodus 5-15, a combination of divine speech and divine actions provides the basis for human beings to recognize Yahweh as Yahweh. In Exodus 5-15, Yahweh repeatedly expresses in words his desire to be known, and Yahweh accompanies that speech with mighty actions known as the plagues. This combination of divine words and actions is meant to create acknowledgement in human beings.<sup>6</sup> Not only is this combination commonplace in Exodus 5-15, it is also ordinary in the rest of the Bible. Christopher Wright explains,

It is something of a truism that in the Bible God is known through what God does and says. So the combination of the mighty acts of God and the words through which those acts were anticipated, explained and celebrated form the twin core of so much of the Old Testament literature.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the question of *how* one comes to acknowledge Yahweh, a second aspect worth investigation concerns the *character* of the acknowledgement. The Hebrew word *yāda*‘ (“know”) appears sixteen times in Exodus 5-15, and in the vast

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<sup>6</sup>On the organic unity of God’s words and God’s actions, V. R. Gordon, “Sign,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 4:506, writes, “It is important to note that God’s signs in the OT are not able to be understood on their own, but must be interpreted by a word from God. ‘This word declares in what or whom the sign is intended to motivate a person to believe. Therefore, there is no sign revelation without a corresponding word revelation interpreting the sign’ (*TDOT*, I, 177). This is in accord with the biblical doctrine of revelation, which sees the acts and words of God as being of one piece and views both as indispensable to the revelatory process.”

<sup>7</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 75. See also Elmer A. Martens, *God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 90; and Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 83. It cannot be stressed enough that human acknowledgement of Yahweh finds its impetus and cause in Yahweh. In other words, no one comes to recognize Yahweh apart from the words and actions of Yahweh. No one arrives at acknowledgment of Yahweh under his own steam, lacking the revelation of Yahweh. Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 89, elucidates skillfully: “Recognition of God cannot be attained along the path of conceptual reflection, an analysis of the world’s being and of its cause, an analysis of human existence, or that of an illumination of the world through myth. This knowledge emerges only from an encounter with Yahweh’s self-manifestation as authoritatively proclaimed by the emissary of the divine. There Yahweh introduces himself in his own action and calls one to worship.”

majority of those appearances, *yāda'* relates directly to acknowledgement of Yahweh.<sup>8</sup> Although the word *yāda'* can certainly imply cognitive, intellectual knowing that is based on factual information (e.g., Gen 42:23; 44:27), a further shade of the word deserves close consideration.<sup>9</sup>

In Genesis 4:1, “Adam knew [*yāda'*] Eve his wife, and she conceived.” In that verse, the word *yāda'* implies sexual intimacy: to “know” is to experience intimacy with another person. Further, in Genesis 25:27, Esau became a man “*knowing* [*yāda'*] hunting.”<sup>10</sup> That is, Esau became experienced and familiar with skills related to hunting: to “know” is to gain experience. Thus along with cognitive gain of data (an intellectual “knowing”), *yāda'* can also imply intimate experience; experiential familiarity.<sup>11</sup> To “know that he is Yahweh” in Exodus 5-15 was not simply an informational, intellectual exercise; it was also an experiential enterprise.

In addition, acknowledgement of God is joined to ethical action on the part of the knower.<sup>12</sup> To “know” Yahweh in the biblical sense is to act accordingly. The clearest example of knowledge bound up with action is found in Jeremiah 22:15-16:

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<sup>8</sup>In Exod 5-15, the word *יָדָעַ* appears in 5:2; 6:3, 7; 7:5, 17; 8:6, 18; 9:14, 29, 30; 10:2, 7, 26; 11:7; 14:4, 18. In every place except for three (9:30; 10:7; and 10:26), the “knowledge” in question is specifically knowledge of Yahweh.

<sup>9</sup>In what follows I am indebted to Martens, *God's Design*, 81-82.

<sup>10</sup>As noted by John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:122.

<sup>11</sup>Commenting on the use of *יָדָעַ* in Exod 7:5, Walter Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 13, writes, “There can be little mistaking that the word *know* . . . connotes more than a mere intellectual or cognitive awareness of who God is. It expresses a desire that the Egyptians might themselves come to a personal, experiential knowledge and appreciation of who Yahweh is.”

<sup>12</sup>So Martens, *God's Design*, 82. See also John M. Frame, *A Theology of Lordship*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 43-45; John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 105, 149-50; and Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 710.

Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to *know* [*da 'at*] me? declares the LORD.

In that passage, “knowing” Yahweh is tied directly to ethical behavior. Thus to “know that he is Yahweh” in Exodus 5-15—in addition to being intellectual apprehension and experiential intimacy—also meant that one was to act ethically in response.

In Exodus 5-15, the primary audience of Yahweh’s desire for recognition is Pharaoh of Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Pharaoh is to apprehend Yahweh in a mental sense; Pharaoh is to gain intimate experience of Yahweh, and Pharaoh is to submit in active obedience to Yahweh. The narrative impetus for Yahweh’s zeal to be recognized is a question voiced by Pharaoh in Exodus 5:2.

### **Exodus 5:1-2: A Springboard Text**

Because Exodus 5:1-2 serves as the theological starting point for all of Exodus 5-15, the passage deserves careful attention. W. Ross Blackburn observes correctly that in Exodus 5:2, “Pharaoh asks a question to which the rest of 5-15 will be the answer.”<sup>14</sup> The importance of Exodus 5:1-2 to Exodus 5-15 cannot be overstated.

### **Exodus 5:1: Declaring Yahweh**

Exodus 5:1 records what William Ford has called “the first contact between YHWH and Pharaoh, through the agency of Moses and Aaron.”<sup>15</sup> Prior to Exodus 5:1,

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<sup>13</sup>Although Pharaoh is the primary target of God’s desire, Israel, the world, and the reader are also targets. These ‘secondary’ audiences are discussed in what follows.

<sup>14</sup>W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 39.

<sup>15</sup>William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses: Explaining the Lord’s Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs, ed. I. Howard Marshall et al. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 46.

three significant events have occurred in the narrative.<sup>16</sup> First, God has acknowledged the cry of his people (Exod 2:23-25). Second, God has officially recruited Moses to lead the people out of Egypt (Exod 3:10-4:17). Third, Moses and Aaron have been well received by the Hebrews (Exod 4:18-31). Now was the time for Moses and his brother Aaron to confront Pharaoh with the word of Yahweh.<sup>17</sup>

Following their positive meeting with the elders of Israel (Exod 4:29-31), Moses and Aaron gained an audience with Pharaoh and—almost curtly—laid down for Pharaoh the demand of Yahweh.<sup>18</sup> Foregoing any of the niceties that may perhaps be expected in the presence of an Egyptian ruler, the brothers declared abruptly to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness’” (Exod 5:1).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 46.

<sup>17</sup>In connection with Exod 5:1, both Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 88; and J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 99, make reference to Exod 3:18, where God instructed Moses to take the “elders” with him as Moses approached Pharaoh. Both Hamilton (88) and Motyer (99) argue that because of that instruction in Exod 3:18, Exod 5:1 shows disobedience, because only Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh (without the elders). Both commentators make further arguments concerning the many ways they believe Moses was disobedient as he addressed Pharaoh in Exod 5:1. While the arguments may have some validity; the point of the passage is not to put the disobedience of Moses on display. Peter Enns, *Exodus*, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 153, seems on target: “The point of the narrative is certainly not how Moses is unfaithful to God’s initial instruction and the consequences thereof. Rather, the point is Pharaoh’s hardness of heart and God’s miraculous deliverance of his beloved people.”

<sup>18</sup>John I. Durham, *Exodus*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 64, calls the tone of Moses and Aaron in Exod 5:1 “almost arrogant confidence.” Terence Fretheim, *Exodus*, *Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 86, says that their tone is “demanding rather than properly deferential.”

<sup>19</sup>Three aspects of this declaration warrant attention. First, the declaration is prophetic in character, as indicated by its opening words: “Thus says the LORD” (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה). The assessment of Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, *Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 157, is accurate: “The clause ‘Thus said Yahweh’ is prophetic speech, indicating that the prophet is a spokesperson for God who brings an announcement to a king or to the people of Israel (e.g., Amos 5:3, 4).” Second, in their declaration, Moses and Aaron identify Yahweh in specific terms as the “God of Israel.” Lest Pharaoh confuse Yahweh with one of the gods of the Egyptian pantheon, the brothers connect Yahweh with the people of Israel, and the people of Israel with Yahweh. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 121. Third, several commentators have drawn special attention to the verb translated “hold a feast,” which is the

## Exodus 5:2: Dismissing Yahweh

In Exodus 5:2, Pharaoh provided his response to Moses and Aaron, and it is a response that—in the observant words of Paul House—“sets the stage for everything that happens in Exodus 5-15.”<sup>20</sup> Pharaoh answers the brothers, “Who is the LORD,<sup>21</sup> that I

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Hebrew *hāgag* (see, for example, R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973], 80; Durham, *Exodus*, 62; Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses* [New York: Schocken, 1995], 281; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 388; John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* [Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008], 320; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991], 27. See also Hendrik L. Bosman, “גָּג,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], 2:20-21). With accuracy, these commentators point out that the “feast” in view in Exod 5:1 was a sacrificial feast that included a pilgrimage.

Representative is Oswalt, *Exodus*, 320, who writes, “The verb used here, *khagag* . . . signifies making a sacrificial feast in connection with a pilgrimage. It is etymologically identical to the Arabic word for the pilgrimage all Muslims are to make to Mecca once in their lives, the hajj.” Undeniably, Moses and Aaron were requesting from Pharaoh a journey away from Egypt in order to worship their God Yahweh. As Pharaoh heard their request, at issue for him was the extent of his control and authority over the people of Israel. The summary offered by Mackay, *Exodus*, 104, is correct: “If Pharaoh permitted such a religious festival, then he was acknowledging that Israel were ‘my people’ ([Exod] 3:7), the people of the LORD, and that the worship of the LORD was something over which the Egyptian king had no jurisdiction. It is the essence of the clash between two systems. Who has the right to determine how these people will live?”

<sup>20</sup>Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 98.

<sup>21</sup>It is worth considering whether Pharaoh’s question, “Who is the LORD?” arose from honest ignorance, defiant disdain, or both (Hamilton, *Exodus*, 88, believes it may be both). On the side of “honest ignorance,” the observation of George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 59, is worth reflection: “Egypt was the most polytheistic nation of the ancient world. In Moses’ day its people worshipped some 80 gods.” Thus, as Pharaoh asked about the identity of Yahweh, it could be that he was simply ignorant of a new divine name and was inquiring in an honest fashion. However, at least two factors mitigate against taking Pharaoh’s question that way. First is the fact that in Exod 5:1, Yahweh had been identified clearly in Pharaoh’s hearing. Moses and Aaron had declared explicitly that Yahweh was “the God of Israel” just prior to Pharaoh asking his question, thus Pharaoh had fresh information concerning Yahweh before his question was even posed. Second, as noted by Ford, *Pharaoh, and Moses*, 46, the way that Pharaoh asked his question: “*Who* [מִי] is the LORD, *that* [אֲשֶׁר] . . .” is similar in grammatical structure to the rhetorical question posed in Jer 49:19 (cf. Jer 50:44): “*Who* is that shepherd *that* will stand before me?” (KJV). As Ford *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 46, rightly observes, the context of Jer 49:19 “suggests that [the] question arises not from ignorance, but rather out of [God’s] rejection of the idea that any could stand against him.” Thus, if Pharaoh’s question in Exod 5:2 may be read in the light of Jer 49:19, the question does not come from a place of honest ignorance, rather it is an insolent rhetorical question stressing Pharaoh’s rejection of the authority of God. In their discussion of the Hebrew animate pronoun, Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 322, state, “*Rhetorical* questions aim not to gain information but to give information with passion” (emphasis original), and they list Exod 5:2 as an example of speech meant to “insult.” Thus, the conclusion of Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreters Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 726, seems justified:

should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” Like Adam who had not listened to the voice of God, choosing instead to “listen to” (*šāma ‘ lē*: Gen 3:17) the voice of his wife, Pharaoh also refuses to “listen to” (*šāma ‘ bē*: Exod 5:2) the voice of Yahweh that had expressed itself through Moses and Aaron.<sup>22</sup> Setting the pattern for later tyrants such as Sennacherib (Isa 36:20) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3:15), Pharaoh of Egypt speaks with alarming hubris and rejects being cast in the role of subject under Yahweh.<sup>23</sup>

Pharaoh asserts, “I do not know the LORD.” In Exodus 1:8, Pharaoh’s claim to “not know” Joseph meant that Pharaoh did not acknowledge Joseph or any of Joseph’s contributions to Egypt.<sup>24</sup> A similar meaning may be assigned to Pharaoh’s assertion in Exodus 5:2: Pharaoh “not knowing” Yahweh meant that Pharaoh was unwilling to acknowledge Yahweh and/or to recognize Yahweh’s authority.<sup>25</sup> In terms of the wider canon of Scripture, “not knowing” Yahweh is connected with certain untoward characteristics.<sup>26</sup> In Hosea 5:4, the nation of Israel was indicted for “not knowing” Yahweh, and in Hosea 5:7, those indicted were characterized as “faithless.” Likewise, Isaiah 1:3 censured Israel for “not knowing,” and in the surrounding verses (Isa 1:2, 4)

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“Pharaoh’s defiant response . . . is not an inquiry. . . . It is, rather, a hostile, high-handed dismissal of Yahweh.”

<sup>22</sup>John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 340-41.

<sup>23</sup>Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1-11*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 100.

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of Pharaoh “not knowing” Joseph in Exod 1:8, see the heading “Exodus 1:8-9: A New Pharaoh,” in this thesis.

<sup>25</sup>Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 148; Oswalt, *Exodus*, 320; and Sarna, *Exodus*, 27.

<sup>26</sup>The references in the remainder of this paragraph were gleaned from G. Johannes Botterweck, “Knowledge of God,” in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology: The Complete Sacramentum Verbi*, ed. Johannes B. Bauer (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 473.

Israel was described as both rebellious and as those who had forsaken Yahweh.<sup>27</sup> Further, the people who “handle the law” in Jeremiah 2:8 “did not know” Yahweh, and were defined as transgressors. Finally, the sons of Eli “did not know the LORD” (1 Sam 2:12), a malady that was connected with their “despising” Yahweh (1 Sam 2:30).

Thus if canonical synthesis may be permitted, Pharaoh’s claim to “not know” Yahweh may indicate on Pharaoh’s part a faithless, disdainful repudiation of Yahweh—a repudiation that has echoed through all of (post-Gen 3) human history. The reflection of John Oswalt is perceptive and worth consideration:

Pharaoh spoke the fundamental question of the whole human race: “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him? Look, I am the god of my life. I make my own decisions. I choose what, when, where, and how. Who is this Yahweh that I should obey him?”<sup>28</sup>

For Yahweh’s part, he would not leave Pharaoh’s professed lack of knowledge unanswered. Beginning at Exodus 7:5 and lasting for several chapters, Yahweh mounts a sustained “knowledge campaign” to ensure that Pharaoh, Egypt, Israel, and even the reader of Exodus *know* that he is Yahweh. To create such knowledge, Yahweh employs a vehicle known as the plagues.

### **Knowing That He Is Yahweh by His Plagues**

Yahweh had at his disposal any number of media by which he might have communicated to Pharaoh, yet he chose the plagues.<sup>29</sup> Elmer Martens explains, “To this pagan king [Pharaoh] there were given not lengthy apologetic proofs through argument,

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<sup>27</sup>Similar is Hos 4:10, where the people have “forsaken the LORD”—a statement preceded by the phrases “no knowledge of God in the land” (4:1) and “lack of knowledge/rejected knowledge” (4:6).

<sup>28</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 62.

<sup>29</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 147-48, surmises, “In the abstract one can imagine God using a variety of other means to bring Egypt to its knees, ways that have biblical precedent. He could have sent an angel dressed for battle. He could have used a foreign army as his pawn to plunder the land. But he chose rather to fight with weapons that no one but he had, that only he could command, and against which there was no defence.”

but a communication which he could understand: signs. These signs, first as wonders and then as plagues, were to remedy the lack in Pharaoh's experience."<sup>30</sup> Signs are not ends unto themselves. In other words, signs point away from themselves to greater realities. In the learned words of F. J. Helfmeyer, signs are given to "mediate an understanding or to motivate a kind of behavior."<sup>31</sup> In the case of the signs reported in Exodus 5-15, their divinely ordered purpose was to invite Pharaoh to recognize Yahweh (who was behind the signs). One might assume that Yahweh's primary agenda in inundating Pharaoh with plague-signs was to judge Pharaoh or even to liberate Yahweh's people, but over and over again the narrative corrects such an assumption. The signs in Exodus 5-15 were intended principally to inculcate knowledge of Yahweh, and only secondarily were they purposed as acts of judgment on Egypt or works of delivering power for Israel.<sup>32</sup> In the main, the plague-signs played an educational role.<sup>33</sup>

The students enrolled in the educational process included Pharaoh and the people of Egypt (Exod 7:5, 17; 8:10[6], 22[18]; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18), the people of

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<sup>30</sup>Martens, *God's Design*, 88. Martens correctly categorizes the terms "wonders" and "plagues" under the broader classification of "signs," for in Exod 5-15, the word "sign" (Hebrew: 'ôṭ) is used more frequently (Exod 7:3; 8:23[19]; 10:1, 2) in describing God's special communication than is the word "plague" (Hebrew: *maggēpāh*; only at Exod 9:14); and the word "wonder" (Hebrew: *mōpēt*; Exod 7:3, 9; 11:9, 10) is construed by some scholars as being "complementary" to, or even "synonymous" with, the word "sign." Robert L. Alden, "תִּשְׁבָּע III," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 18, describes 'ôṭ and *mōpēt* as "complementary," while F. J. Helfmeyer, "תִּשְׁבָּע, 'ôṭh," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, rev. ed., trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 1:168, takes 'ôṭ and *mōpēt* as "synonyms."

<sup>31</sup>Helfmeyer, "תִּשְׁבָּע, 'ôṭh," 171.

<sup>32</sup>Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 40-41, explains, "If Israel's liberation was the controlling issue, the narrative might have quickly moved from 5:2 to 14:30a: 'Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.' Rather, it is the Lord's desire to be known throughout the land that accounts for the plagues, and therefore the narrative of chapters 5-14."

<sup>33</sup>As they describe the role of the plagues, both Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 159, and Sarna, *Exodus*, 38, use the word "educative." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 93, observes, "Numerous items [were] on the curriculum of Pharaoh's education."



Israel (Exod 6:3, 7; 10:2), and even the person who reads Exodus. In short, the plague-signs were given for the education of the nations in every era. Pharaoh had professed ignorance of Yahweh (Exod 5:2), so for his sake and that of his countrymen, Yahweh would provide an education concerning Yahweh's identity. Moses and Israel would also benefit from the curriculum, having languished in a pagan, polytheistic environment for four hundred years.<sup>34</sup> God would now give Israel opportunity to gain specific knowledge of their God. Further, in reading the Exodus account, the contemporary reader is encouraged to ascertain his (or her) answer to Pharaoh's question, "Who is Yahweh?" and respond with appropriate deference.<sup>35</sup> There are eleven essential "knowledge" passages: Exodus 7:5, 7:17, 8:10[6], 8:22[18], 9:14-16, 9:29, 10:2, 14:4, 14:18, 15:11, and 15:18.

### **Exodus 7:5**

In Exodus 7:5, God spoke with clarity concerning both his purpose and methodology in sending the plagues. The purpose of the plagues was knowledge: "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD," and this knowledge would arise via God's methodology: "When I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>As observed by Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 90-91.

<sup>35</sup>Fretheim, *Exodus*, 86, writes, "A goal of the narrator is the *readers'* knowing. The readers are invited, not to assume that the answer to Pharaoh's question is clear, but to build an answer as they read and ponder and explore the nuances of the narrative."

<sup>36</sup>Concerning the latter half of the methodology (i.e., "when I . . . bring out the people of Israel from among them"), the comments of James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 72, are perceptive: "The knowledge of these Gentiles depended on the Lord's rescue of the children of Israel. The Egyptians would only know the Lord when they were no longer benefiting from the oppression of the people of God. The Lord's action against them was necessary for their enlightenment."

## Exodus 7:17

Exodus 7:17 is set within the story of the initial plague, where the waters of the Nile were transformed into blood (Exod 7:14-24).<sup>37</sup> In Exodus 7:17, God instructs Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, ‘By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.’” Once again, Yahweh’s purpose is stated clearly. Yahweh desires that Pharaoh attain knowledge of Yahweh, and this knowledge will arise when Pharaoh observes the Nile turned to blood.<sup>38</sup>

If Exodus 7:14-24 can be interpreted through the lens of Ezekiel 29:3, its impact is enhanced. Ezekiel 29:3 reports a Pharaoh who credited himself with the creation of the Nile. When Yahweh turns the Nile to blood in Exodus 7, one wonders whether Yahweh is setting the record straight concerning lordship: only the true Creator and sustainer of the Nile can transform the Nile as he pleases.<sup>39</sup> Further, Pharaoh and the Egyptians considered the Nile as their source of life.<sup>40</sup> Yahweh transforms the life-giving Nile into

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<sup>37</sup>John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, Zondervan Charts, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 85, appears to suggest that each plague is to be associated with one or more of the gods of Egypt, as if Yahweh were aiming specific plagues at specific Egyptian gods. Caution against such an interpretation has been argued in thorough fashion by Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 291-301. Garrett concludes, “The point is not that each plague is directed against a specific god. Rather, Egypt was closely associated with her gods, so that a defeat of Egypt was in effect a defeat of her gods” (301). Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 43, has drawn attention to Exod 8:10; 9:14; 12:12; 15:11; 20:2-5; 22:20; 23:32; and 34:11-16 as places which show that “Exodus is aware of other gods,” but one is on shakier ground when one attempts to assign a specific Egyptian god as the addressee of each specific plague, especially since the text never labors to do so.

<sup>38</sup>Exod 7:20 says plainly that the Nile *turned into blood*. Contra Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 97-98; the Nile did not merely “resemble” blood due to non-miraculous, naturalistic phenomena. For arguments against “naturalistic” interpretations of the plague phenomena (such as Cassuto), see Durham, *Exodus*, 97; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 111; and Oswalt, *Exodus*, 339.

<sup>39</sup>Fretheim, *Exodus*, 116, remarks, “God’s action should show Pharaoh that the land of Egypt, its water, and its people are neither his creation nor his to do with as he pleases.”

<sup>40</sup>So Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 742; Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 282; Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection*

another liquid substance which itself is normally life-giving (blood), but the net result is death.<sup>41</sup> Only Yahweh is the source of life. To borrow from Oswalt, in turning the Nile to blood, it was as if Yahweh were saying to Pharaoh, “Don’t look to a river for your life. Don’t look to the world of nature, as beneficent as it can be. Yahweh is the one who holds life.”<sup>42</sup> Exodus 7:17 (cf. Exod 7:20) is the first biblical instance of the phrase “I am the LORD” being spoken into Gentile ears.<sup>43</sup> At this early stage of redemptive history, Yahweh was beginning to spread his fame to the nations.

### **Exodus 8:10[6]**

Exodus 8:10 is found within the narrative of the second plague (Exod 8:1-15); the plague of frogs.<sup>44</sup> Yahweh afflicted Egypt with hordes of unwelcome amphibious guests, a sign which Pharaoh’s magicians were able to reproduce. However, according to Exodus 8:8, Pharaoh recognized that the removal of the frogs was only in Yahweh’s

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(Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 73; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 124; Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 80-81; and Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 197-98.

<sup>41</sup>The meditation offered by Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 73, is astute: “Here are the waters of the Nile, normally Egypt’s source of life—its *lifeblood*. But now, the Nile’s waters flow red with blood that kills every living thing in it, leaving the stench of death in its wake. Water and blood, two signs of life, easily transformed into tokens of death” (emphasis original).

<sup>42</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 81.

<sup>43</sup>As noted by Stuart, *Exodus*, 199.

<sup>44</sup>Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 220, comments on the significance of “frogs” as a plague: “They are associated with the water, yet they are also mobile allowing for an invasion of water creatures on to the land of Egypt. The frogs are also unclean for consumption according to Israelite food laws (Leviticus 11), thus introducing the theme of defilement into the story. The invasion of frogs into ovens and on cooking utensils reinforces the theme of defilement, as does the conclusion in 8:8-11 that the land of Egypt ‘stunk’ from the frogs.” According to Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 173, the goddess Heket was “depicted as a human female with a frog’s head. . . . The Egyptians regarded the frog as a symbol of divine power and a representation of fertility.” Robert A. Armour, *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo, Egypt: The American University of Cairo Press, 1986), 192, writes that according to Egyptian belief, the goddess Heket “presided at births as mid-wife,” thus since for Egyptians, frogs were connected with fertility and their frog-headed goddess Heket was associated with births, it could be that when Yahweh sent the plague of voluminous frogs, he was demonstrating who it was, in fact, that was in charge of fertility and births.

power, so Pharaoh called upon Moses and Aaron to “plead with Yahweh” to take the frogs away. For the first time in the narrative, then, Pharaoh shows at least some recognition of Yahweh’s power; a power that clearly superseded that of Pharaoh’s magicians.<sup>45</sup>

In Exodus 8:9, Moses makes an ingenious move. Moses gives Pharaoh the freedom to choose the time of the removal of the frogs. The reason that this tactic was so astute on Moses’s part is well summarized by Douglas Stuart: “If the king could say when the frogs would go away, he would *personally* know that the timing was not due to the simple consequences of natural processes or a fiat of the gods of the Egyptians but the sovereignty of the God of Israel.”<sup>46</sup> Exodus 8:10 has Pharaoh choosing the next day for the removal of the frogs. Moses replies to Pharaoh, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.” Again the goal of Yahweh removing the frogs at the time of Pharaoh’s choosing is Pharaoh’s enlightenment to the reality of Yahweh, but in this case the enlightenment has specific contours: Pharaoh is to know that Yahweh is incomparable.<sup>47</sup> No one is like Yahweh.

The claim of Yahweh’s incomparability must have come into Pharaoh’s ears as a most unwelcome assertion. In Egypt, the sun-god Re was considered incomparable and without peer, and Pharaoh was believed to be the son of Re, thus also incomparable like

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<sup>45</sup>Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 75, writes, “No longer is Pharaoh personally unaffected. No longer can he remain oblivious to events around him—or to the power of the Lord. For the first time, even if but minimally, he *has to acknowledge* God: ‘Plead with the LORD to remove the frogs from me’” (emphasis original).

<sup>46</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 208, emphasis original. See also Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1993), 50.

<sup>47</sup>Aside from Exod 8:10, the notion of the incomparability of Yahweh can be found in Exod 9:14; 15:11; Deut 3:24; 4:7, 35, 39; 32:39; 33:26; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 7:22; 1 Kgs 8:23; Pss 35:10; 40:6; 71:19; 77:14; 86:8; 89:7-9; 113:5; Isa 40:18, 25; 44:6-7; 45:5-6, 21-22; 46:5, 9; Jer 10:6-7; 49:19 (cf. 50:44); Joel 2:27; Mic 7:18; Mark 12:32.

his “father.”<sup>48</sup> C. J. Labuschagne explains the subversive quality of Yahweh’s claim to incomparability:

It is certainly no accident that it was before the Pharaoh that the incomparability of Yahweh was emphasized. This becomes significant only when we recall that the Egyptian king was himself regarded as a god, with a claim to incomparability because of his relation with the sun-god.<sup>49</sup>

Pharaoh would know Yahweh’s incomparability when Yahweh removed the frogs on Pharaoh’s calendar. In witnessing Yahweh’s sovereign act of removal, Pharaoh would come to the realization that every god in the Egyptian pantheon was inferior to Yahweh, God of Israel.

### **Exodus 8:22[18]**

Located within the narration of the fourth plague of flies, Exodus 8:22 reads, “But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.”

In Exodus 8:21, Yahweh had promised that the result of Pharaoh’s refusal to release the people would be an inundation of flies in Egypt, but in Exodus 8:22 Yahweh pledged (astonishingly!) that Israelite slaves in Egypt would be immune from the plague. Yahweh would show himself as a God who acted in mercy on his embattled people, sparing them in miraculous fashion from the flies.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, in Pharaoh’s refusal to

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<sup>48</sup>C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, vol. 5, Pretoria Oriental Series, ed. A. Van Selms (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1966), 58, 60.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>50</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 215, comments on the miraculous nature of the “distinction” that Yahweh made with the flies: “Although flies and other swarming insects cannot naturally discriminate by nationality and political boundaries in deciding on whom they will land and whose skin they will bite, nationality/political boundary was exactly the basis for the plaguing or nonplaguing by the swarming insects. Here, then, is brought overtly to the reader’s attention the fact that the plagues, far from being natural phenomena naturally produced, were nature turned on its head: nature ordered by its Creator to act in abnormal ways that were ominously frightening for the Egyptians, wonderfully reassuring for the

let Israel go—a decision that would result in the plaguing of his own Egyptian people—Pharaoh showed that he was unmerciful toward his own. To be sure, Yahweh would distinguish Egyptians from Israelites when he sent the flies, but Yahweh would also distinguish his merciful self from unmerciful Pharaoh.<sup>51</sup>

Again, the main purpose of the distinction that Yahweh would manifest would be the enlightenment of Pharaoh. When Pharaoh saw his own people swarmed by flies while the Israelites enjoyed respite, the lesson of Yahweh (“I am the LORD in the midst of the earth”) would become clear. When one considers the common ancient Near Eastern assumption that a given god’s power was limited to his (or her) geographical territory, Yahweh’s claim to be at work “in the midst of the earth”—at work even in Egypt, though he was Israel’s God—becomes audacious.<sup>52</sup> Yahweh was not limited to local action only within Israel. Rather, in his sovereign freedom, Yahweh was quite capable of acting in any part of his globe.<sup>53</sup> No doubt this reality would unsettle Pharaoh, who assumed that the gods remained in their territories.

### **Exodus 9:14-16**

Exodus 9:14-16 is ensconced within the wider story of the seventh plague—the plague of hail (Exod 9:13-35)—and is of particular importance in the plague cycle. The significance of Exodus 9:14-16 is well summarized by Ford:

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Israelites, and clearly evidential (in this plague, even to Pharaoh) of a divine mighty act in service of a divine demand.”

<sup>51</sup>So Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 145.

<sup>52</sup>See James Henry Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 312; and Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 261.

<sup>53</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 213, writes that the Egyptians were to know that “the God of Israel is no foreigner on Egyptian soil, that he is here, in their country, and that he will divide it up as he pleases.”

[Exodus 9:14-16] is the clearest explanation set on the lips of YHWH of why he is acting *in the way that he does*, rather than in another way. Thus for an examination of YHWH's behavior in the plagues narrative, this passage is of fundamental importance.<sup>54</sup>

Further, within the narrative sequence, the seventh plague of hail can be viewed as a peak or apex, due simply to its “seventh” position. Labuschagne explains,

In the course of the events the seventh plague was regarded by both the narrator and his hearers as a natural culminating point, due to the idea of “fullness” connoted by the figure *seven*; therefore the sending of “all my plagues” is duly announced, but although Yahweh could have performed His last decisive deed at this stage, He does not do so.<sup>55</sup>

Exodus 9:14-16 reads,

For this time I will send all my plagues<sup>56</sup> on you yourself,<sup>57</sup> and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put<sup>58</sup> out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

Yahweh utters the words of Exodus 9:14-16 just prior to his sending “very heavy hail” (Exod 9:18, cf. Exod 9:23-24) upon Egypt.<sup>59</sup> In Job 38:22-23, Yahweh explains

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<sup>54</sup>Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 16-17, emphasis original.

<sup>55</sup>Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh*, 93-94.

<sup>56</sup>“All my plagues” in the Hebrew text is אֲתֵּי-כָּל-מִגְּפֹתַי, which is taken in the sense of “full force of my plagues.” Enns, *Exodus*, 220; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 414; and Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 117, 119. Durham, *Exodus*, 128, suggests, “Whole arsenal of blows.”

<sup>57</sup>“On you yourself” in the Hebrew text is אֶל-לִבְּךָ (literally: *on your heart*). Houtman, *Exodus*, 86 remarks, “Pharaoh will be struck in his heart of hearts, there where he makes his decisions, so that he loses his equilibrium and drops his intransigent attitude.”

<sup>58</sup>The phrase בְּיַד עֲתָהּ שְׁלַחְתִּי is rendered in the ESV as “For by now I could have put.” However, Durham, *Exodus*, 124, 127, disagrees with such a “past possibility” sense, opting instead for “indeed now I will let loose.” Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 54-57, disagrees with Durham’s conclusion. Ford cites 1 Sam 13:13 and Job 3:13 in support of the sense captured by the ESV. I am in alignment with the position of Ford, as are commentators such as Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 141; Enns, *Exodus*, 221; Houtman, *Exodus*, 86; Oswalt, *Exodus*, 354; and William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 333.

<sup>59</sup>Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 237, notes, “Most of the references to hail in the Hebrew

to Job that “hail” is reserved by Yahweh for “the day of battle and war,” and in Psalm 18:13-14 there is a description of Yahweh at war, using hail as a weapon.<sup>60</sup> Evidently readers are to view the seventh plague as what Dozeman has called “an invasion of Yahweh into the land of Egypt.”<sup>61</sup> Enns is correct in calling the seventh plague “an intensification of judgment on Egypt,” and this intensification is intended (the reader will note) for the purpose of teaching Pharaoh the incomparability of Yahweh (Exod 9:14).<sup>62</sup>

Yet, in the midst of intensification there is notable restraint. In Exodus 9:15-16 Yahweh refers to this restraint, informing Pharaoh that although he (Yahweh) might have decimated Pharaoh earlier, he had chosen instead to maintain Pharaoh alive. Any one of the six previous plagues might have been orchestrated to annihilate Pharaoh, but Yahweh had opted to keep Pharaoh drawing breath.

According to Exodus 9:16, the reason that Yahweh “raised up” Pharaoh in the first place, and the reason Yahweh was now allowing Pharaoh to remain alive, was to show Pharaoh his (Yahweh’s) power and make Yahweh’s name great “in all the earth.”<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, it is the name Yahweh that will receive international acclaim, while the specific pharaoh of the exodus is never named.<sup>64</sup>

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Bible occur in this plague (17 times) or in texts that refer to this event (Exod 10:5, 12, 15; Pss 78:48; 105:32).”

<sup>60</sup>Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 237.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 221. See discussion on Exod 8:20 for a discussion of “incomparability.”

<sup>63</sup>Concerning the question of whether to translate the three uses of ארץ in Exod 9:14-16 as “earth” or “land,” the conclusion of Stuart, *Exodus*, 239, seems prudent: “Although technically ארץ can refer to ‘land’ (i.e. the land of Egypt) and does not need to connote ‘earth’ in the sense of ‘the world,’ for an Egyptian to believe that Yahweh owned Egypt and not the rest of the world would make little sense; if he owned Egypt, the center of the world, he surely would be supreme in the rest as well.” Thus, in Exod 9:14-16, the ESV seems justified in translating each use of ארץ as “earth.”

<sup>64</sup>Wright, *Mission of God*, 94.



The restraint of Yahweh in sparing Pharaoh also demonstrated to Pharaoh the nature of Yahweh's power. Yahweh's was a power capable of moderation. By contrast, the preferred method of power for Pharaoh was unchecked, unrestrained, and dominating in nature.<sup>65</sup> By showing restraint, Yahweh was distinguishing himself and the nature of his power from that of Pharaoh.

### **Exodus 9:29**

Exodus 9:29 is set also within the narrative of the seventh plague. The verse comes two verses after Pharaoh makes the significant confession, "This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong" (Exod 9:27). In Exodus 9:28, Pharaoh asks Moses and Aaron to "plead with the LORD" to remove the hail, and Pharaoh promises to let the people go free. In Exodus 9:29, Moses replies, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's."<sup>66</sup>

In Exodus 9:29, the impetus for Pharaoh to "know that the earth is the LORD's" is the *removal* of the hail rather than the *sending*. Yahweh is a God who desires to be known by the restraint he performs. In the perceptive words of Ford,

Only twice is the sending of a plague announced to [Pharaoh] as the means of YHWH's revelation (7:17; 9:14). In other places the revelation is linked to the removal of the plague (8:6 [10]; 9:29), or the exemption of Israel or Goshen from it (8:18 [22]; 11:7). What Egypt and Pharaoh are learning is not, primarily, that YHWH sends plagues, but that he does not send them on his people, and that he ends them when asked.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 73.

<sup>66</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 239, has drawn particular attention to Moses's promise to pray for the cessation of the hail only once Moses had "gone out of the city." Moses would have to travel out to the perimeter of the city, through the severe hail, before praying for its end. Stuart rightly suggests that this action implied Moses's trust in Yahweh; a confidence that as Yahweh had differentiated Israelites from Egyptians in the plague of flies, so Yahweh would protect an exposed and vulnerable Moses from the hail that was intended for Pharaoh and Egypt.

<sup>67</sup>Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 80.

As Yahweh ended the plague of hail, Pharaoh would come to “know that the earth is the LORD’s.” In her later history, Israel would memorialize God’s ownership of the earth in a psalm: “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 24:1; cf. Ps 95:3-5).<sup>68</sup> For now, Pharaoh would come to recognize by the stay of hail that the Egyptian earth on which he stood was not the property of any Egyptian idol; rather it belonged to Yahweh.<sup>69</sup>

### **Exodus 10:2**

Exodus 10:2 is found in the story of the eighth plague; the plague of locusts (Exod 10:1-20). Yahweh instructs Moses to go to Pharaoh with yet another ultimatum concerning the release of Yahweh’s people (Exod 10:1). However, just prior to Moses’s audience with Pharaoh, Yahweh tells Moses that the “signs” Yahweh has been directing against Egypt have been happening (at least in part), “that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly<sup>70</sup> with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.” In other words, the plague-signs were for Israel’s benefit as much as they were for Egypt’s. Israel also needed to recognize Yahweh. The plague-signs were to be recited in every generation of Israel (i.e., “in the hearing of your son and of your grandson”), for the greater purpose of recognizing Yahweh (i.e. “that you may know that I am the LORD”). Ongoing rehearsal of Yahweh’s deeds would produce acknowledgment of Yahweh in Israel, and if the recital

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<sup>68</sup>As observed by Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 44.

<sup>69</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 13.

<sup>70</sup>The verb translated “dealt harshly” in the ESV is *hitpa’el* (הִטְפֵּאֵל). Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 133, prefers the translation “made sport of,” as does Kaiser, *Exodus*, 418. Durham, *Exodus*, 131, proposes, “I amused myself aggravating,” but this rendering is perhaps too suggestive of malice in God. At any rate, the comment of Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 336, seems accurate: “The word implies complete disregard for the dignity of Egypt, and it is very strong language.”

of the plagues in Psalms 78:11-12, 43-51; 105:27-36 is any indication, Israel obeyed the instruction of Exodus 10:2.<sup>71</sup> Generation by generation, the Israelites passed down the stories of the wonders in Egypt, which nurtured faith in Yahweh.

#### **Exodus 14:4**

The plagues having ended, the moment of Israel's departure from Egypt was now at hand. Exodus 14:4 is a single verse in the wider narrative of the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14:1-31). Brueggemann observes that the final confrontation between Pharaoh and Yahweh is "staged" by Yahweh from top to bottom, for the purpose that Yahweh will gain glory over Pharaoh.<sup>72</sup> In Exodus 14:4, Yahweh dictates near-future happenings with absolute certainty: "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." Brueggemann notes that, according to Exodus 14:4, "the final, decisive intention is not Israelite freedom, but Yahweh's glory, which is decisive."<sup>73</sup> It is perhaps worth reflecting on the fact that prior to Exodus 14:4, six times the Hebrew word *kābēd* ("heavy") was used to describe Pharaoh's obstinate heart (Exod 7:14; 8:11, 28; 9:7, 34; 10:1). The word *kābēd* gets re-employed in Exodus 14:4, where it is translated "glory." In the insightful words of John Currid, "Pharaoh's heart is 'heavy' so that 'heaviness' would be given to Yahweh!"<sup>74</sup> In gaining *kābēd* over Pharaoh, again Yahweh desired that the Egyptians would know that he was Yahweh. Acknowledgement of Yahweh would arise this time as the walls of the sea collapsed over Egypt.

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<sup>71</sup>As observed by Bruckner, *Exodus*, 97. Passages such as Deut 4:32; 7:19; Josh 24:5; 1 Sam 4:8; and Ps 135:9 indicate the presence of "plague-remembrance."

<sup>72</sup>Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 792.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 288.

### **Exodus 14:18**

Still in the Red Sea narrative, Exodus 14:18 is in some ways a mirror image of the final clauses of Exodus 14:4. Exodus 14:18 reads, “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” In their dying moments, the warring Egyptians would become a proclamation of the reality and greatness of Yahweh, and astonishingly, this proclamation would be for the benefit of Egypt. Common is the understanding that the events of the Red Sea were of primary benefit to Israel, but in this verse at least, Yahweh asserts that the advantage was Egypt’s.<sup>75</sup> The watery catastrophe on Egypt would be executed for the purpose of bringing Egypt to acknowledge Yahweh.

### **Exodus 15:11**

Exodus 14 is remarkable in that Yahweh is described as the sole actor in the miracle at the sea. All praise is due to Yahweh for the wonders he performed in drowning Pharaoh’s army while delivering Israel to safety. Exodus 15 is a fitting hymn of praise to Yahweh, following directly on the heels of the Red Sea deliverance. Göran Larsson explains,

[Exodus 15] is the song of praise and victory by a people saved. This song intones the same refrain sung by the apostle centuries later: ‘By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast’ (Eph. 2:8-9).<sup>76</sup>

Exodus 15:11 is sung by Israel and is comprised of two rhetorical questions that reflect the acknowledgement that Yahweh had been seeking all along: “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” In posing such rhetorical questions, Israel was in fact

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<sup>75</sup>As noted by Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 385.

<sup>76</sup>Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 103.

stating her firm conviction that Yahweh was incomparable.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, “among the gods” there was no one even remotely in the same league as Yahweh. Having lived through Yahweh’s plagues, and having been redeemed by Yahweh through the sea, the people of Israel—who, it must be remembered, had lived in a polytheistic environment for some four hundred years—now confessed that Yahweh was beyond compare and without peer. Israel was coming to “know” her God.

### **Exodus 15:18**

The concluding verse of the hymn of praise, Exodus 15:18 reads, “The LORD will reign forever and ever.” Two ideas dominate. First, with the word “reign,” Yahweh’s kingship is affirmed for the first time in the Bible.<sup>78</sup> William Propp is correct in his assessment that what Israel declares in Exodus 15:18 is that “Yahweh—not the gods, not Pharaoh, not the nations—will rule over Israel.”<sup>79</sup> This convictional declaration concerning Yahweh’s kingship is reiterated in many later places of the Old Testament (Num 23:21; Deut 33:5; Pss 10:16; 29:10; 45:6; 47:6-7; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1), and it was borne—it should be noted—by Israel hearing the words and witnessing the attendant actions of Yahweh in the plagues and the Red Sea. Israel was indeed coming to grapple with the reality that Yahweh was king.

Second, the kingship of Yahweh had an eternal character. Israel now “knew” that Yahweh would reign “forever and ever.” In great contrast to Pharaoh, who could only rule temporarily before he perished like any other mortal, Yahweh’s rule would never end. The eternity of Yahweh’s kingship was stressed in later centuries by the psalmist (Pss 10:16; 45:6).

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<sup>77</sup>See the discussion on Exod 8:10.

<sup>78</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 82.

<sup>79</sup>Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 545.

## The Effect of the Plagues and the Miracle at the Sea

The eleven passages just discussed show that Yahweh desired to be known by Pharaoh (Exod 7:17; 8:10[6], 22[18]; 9:14-16, 29); the Egyptian people (Exod 7:5; 14:4, 18); and the people of Israel (Exod 10:2). Soon after the events of the plagues and the Red Sea, the people of Israel evidenced that they had indeed learned the lessons that Yahweh had been trying to teach. In Exodus 15:11, 18, the Israelites demonstrated that they now understood Yahweh as the incomparable, eternal king. For Pharaoh's part, along the way he showed hints of his acknowledgement of Yahweh (e.g., Exod 8:8, 28; 9:27-28; 10:16-17; 12:32), but it is highly debatable whether Pharaoh ever came to *know* Yahweh in the way Yahweh required. As for the Egyptian people, it would appear that their experience of Yahweh through his plagues did have some lasting effect. Immediately prior to the implementation of the seventh plague, "whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses" (Exod 9:20, emphasis added). Further, as Kaiser has pointed out, during the exodus proper, a "mixed multitude" left Egypt "with" the people of Israel (Exod 12:37-38).<sup>80</sup> As Kaiser has surmised, the notice of Exodus 12:37-38 seems to suggest "that many Egyptians were more than merely impressed by what they saw and heard. Instead, they became some of the firstfruits of the work of God in their midst."<sup>81</sup> Last, the spoken and acted revelation of Yahweh during the events of the plagues and Red Sea has been inscripturated so that generations of readers will know that Yahweh is God above all gods, King above all kings, the owner of the earth. All who read Exodus 5-15 are called to this knowledge and to respond with appropriate worship.

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<sup>80</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 13. See also Kaiser, *Exodus*, 397; and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 104.

<sup>81</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 13.

## Knowing That He Is Jesus

In Exodus 5-15, an amalgam of divine speech and divine action was provided to bring human beings to recognize Yahweh. The argument might be made that the entire New Testament reflects the same pattern: God acts supremely in Jesus (birth, life, cross, resurrection, ascension, future coming) and alongside the record of that action, God provides voluminous speech which interprets it all.

As the gospel writers reported the words of Jesus, they sometimes connected his speech with the speech of Yahweh in Exodus 5-15. For example, one may recall that Yahweh's concern for Pharaoh in Exodus 8:22 was "that you [Pharaoh] may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth." Remarkably, as Jesus talked to some scribes who accused him of blaspheming (because Jesus had pronounced forgiveness of sins on a paralytic), Jesus's concern for the scribes was "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10; cf. Matt 9:6; Luke 5:24).<sup>82</sup> Mark 2:10 contains several words and phrases found in Exodus 8:22[18] (LXX), making it likely that Mark purposely echoed the earlier text.<sup>83</sup> Like Yahweh in Exodus 8:22, Jesus in Mark 2:10 declared his desire to be recognized for his divine authority on earth.

Jesus expressed a similar goal in John 8:28. Speaking to a group of Jews, Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he." This phrase from John 8:28 is a clear allusion to the story of the exodus in at least two ways. First, the words translated "you will know that" are the Greek phrase *gnōsesthe oti*, a phrase that appears only fifteen times in the entire Bible—four of which are important "recognition" statements in Exodus (Exod 6:7; 10:2; 16:6, 12, LXX). Second, with its use

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<sup>82</sup>The connection between Exod 8:22 and Mark 2:10 was brought to my attention by Hamilton, *Exodus*, 124-25.

<sup>83</sup>Exod 8:22[18] (LXX) contains the phrase *ἵνα εἰδῆς ὅτι* ("that you will know that"), and a strikingly similar construction—*ἵνα δὲ εἰδῆτε ὅτι* ("that you may know that")—is found in Mark 2:10. Further, the phrase *τῆς γῆς* ("the earth") is found in both Exod 8:22[18] (LXX) and Mark 2:10.

of the words “I am he” (*egō eimi*), John 8:28 appears to be an allusion also to Exodus 3:14 (LXX), where the same Greek words are translated “I AM.” Judging by these allusions, it would appear that John wanted his readers to connect the speech of Christ in John 8:28 with the speech of Yahweh in the early portions of Exodus.<sup>84</sup>

The two passages just discussed demonstrate that, like Yahweh in Exodus 5-15, Jesus desired to be recognized as Lord by those in whose midst he spoke and acted. As was the case in Exodus 5-15, at least some came to recognize Jesus for who he was during his time on earth. In John 4:42, some Samaritans confessed, “We know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” In John 6:69, Peter spoke to Jesus on behalf of the disciples: “We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” In Mark 15:39, a Gentile centurion witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and declared, “Truly this was the Son of God!” The centurion’s acknowledgement of the identity of Jesus is reminiscent of the recognition of Yahweh that was given eventually by the Gentile Egyptian army in Exodus 14:25.

Today, God in Christ still desires to be recognized for who he is by all who live on earth. The New Testament literature is awash with descriptions of the difference between “knowing” and “not knowing” that Jesus is the Son of God—the only one sent by God to save humanity from sin.

### **Knowing You, Jesus (or Not)**

The believer in Jesus recognizes that nothing can eclipse knowing him (Phil 3:8). The believer understands that the path to escaping the defilements of the world is through the knowledge of Jesus (2 Pet 2:20), and the believer grasps also that knowledge is the very environment in which he (or she) is being renewed (Col 3:10). However, this

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<sup>84</sup>Space does not permit an exploration of three other particularly pregnant “knowledge” passages where Jesus is the speaker: Matt 11:27 (cf. Luke 10:22); John 17:3; and Rev 2:23.



spiritual knowledge does not arrive all at once. The believer must “attain to” and “grow” in knowledge of Jesus (Eph 4:13; 2 Pet 3:18).

Conversely, the New Testament describes the unbeliever as one who does not know God (1 Cor 15:34; 1 Thess 4:5) and/or as one who lives in ignorance (Eph 4:18; 1 Pet 1:14). The one who does not know God is one who is enslaved to idolatry (Gal 4:8). In fact, the one who does not know God is like a new Pharaoh, not seeing fit to acknowledge God (Rom 1:28), and with a heart issue akin to Pharaoh (Rom 1:21, 24, 31), even though knowledge of God is readily available (Rom 1:19-20).<sup>85</sup>

### **New Plagues, New Song, New Exodus**

Unbelievers who persecute Christ’s church are like Pharaoh who persecuted Israel. According to Revelation 8:6-11:19, there is a day coming when the cry of Christ’s church (Rev 6:9-11; cf. Exod 2:23; 3:7, 9) will be acted upon, and the unbelieving persecutors of God’s people will be inundated with fresh plagues. Reminiscent of the Exodus plagues, God will send hail and fire, mixed with blood (Rev 8:7; cf. 11:19), and the sea will become blood (Rev 8:8).<sup>86</sup> Darkness (Rev 8:12; 9:2), as well as locusts (Rev 9:3, 7), will plague the earth, and just as Pharaoh’s heart hardened throughout the Exodus plague cycle, the unbelievers in that day will refuse to repent of their sin, despite God’s plagues (Rev 9:20-21). Then the final exodus will occur.

The church will exit the present decaying world and enter the new creation, and as it had been when Israel sang after Yahweh’s mighty deliverance at the sea (Exod 15), so the final exodus of the church will be an occasion for singing.<sup>87</sup> The name of the

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<sup>85</sup>The connection between Rom 1 and the Exodus plague story is discussed in brief span by Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 156-57.

<sup>86</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 466-67, writes, “The exodus plagues are both a literary and a theological model for the [Revelation] trumpets.”

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 467.

song that the church, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, will sing is “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:3). Like Israel after the conclusion of the plagues and the drowning of Pharaoh’s army, the church will sing the song next to the sea (Rev 15:2). They will sing it with robust *recognition*—not only of the One in days gone by who gained glory over “Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Exod 14:18)—but of the crucified Christ, who destroyed every rule, authority, and power that opposed him, and put his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-25). Lord, hasten the day!

## CHAPTER 6

### THE PASSOVER: LIFE IN THE SEAM

#### **The Contours of Passover**

At long last, the Hebrew people found themselves living in the seam between one place and time, and another place and time.<sup>1</sup> Their long years in the place called Egypt had been a time of brutal persecution, but imminent now were both an exit out of Egypt and an entrance into a long-awaited time of freedom. The main event that occupied the Hebrews in their significant “seam” moment was the Passover.<sup>2</sup>

William Dumbrell has noted that the Passover is “both a supreme judgment and a great deliverance.”<sup>3</sup> Passover is a severe judgment on Pharaoh and Egypt, because linked directly with Passover is Yahweh’s destruction of Egypt’s firstborn children. Yet at the same time, Passover is a mighty deliverance, for it is God’s way of sparing Israel from the plague of death, and it also signals the start of the exodus proper: that divinely orchestrated opportunity granted to the Hebrew people for their departure out of Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I borrowed this imagery from Thomas W. Mann, “Passover: The Time of Our Lives,” *Interpretation* 50, no. 3 (July 1996): 244-45.

<sup>2</sup>This chap. concentrates on the Bible’s initial Passover text (Exod 12:1-13) and connections to the Passover in the New Testament. Outside of Exod 12-13, the Old Testament discussion of Passover is limited to Lev 23:5-8; Num 9:1-14, 28:16-25; Deut 16:1-8; Josh 5:10-11; 2 Chr 30, 35 (cf. 2 Kgs 23:21-23); and Ezra 6:19-22. For developments in the Passover Feast from Old Testament times into the New Testament period and beyond, see Robin L. Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53, no. 2 (2002): 203-21; and J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover: From the Earliest Times to A. D. 70*, London Oriental Series 12 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 35.

<sup>4</sup>Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Leuven,

In Genesis 3:23, Adam had been sent (Hebrew: *šālah* [*pi'el*]) away from Eden because of his sin.<sup>5</sup> In sinning against God, Adam ceded his priestly status and was destined to die.<sup>6</sup> The divine curse pronounced over Adam included the reality of agricultural toil (Gen 3:17-19). Should Adam wish to survive in the world, he would now have to work the land in a way previously unknown. Passover and the accompanying exodus from Egypt signaled a reverse in Adam's curse. The new Adam (Israel) was being sent—not away from a fertile land into harsh toil in the world—but rather, Israel was being sent away from their unjust service to the “world” and toward a fertile land called Canaan.<sup>7</sup> The new Adam was leaving bondage and going to a new Eden, and as T. Desmond Alexander has observed astutely, the priestly status relinquished by Adam was also being regained.<sup>8</sup> Alexander notes that when the Aaronic priests are consecrated in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, the ritual includes the sacrifice of an animal, the sprinkling of blood, and the consumption of meat. The same three elements characterize the Passover.<sup>9</sup>

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Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1996), 144-45, highlights the operation of Yahweh's love during Passover: “According to Jewish belief, particularly in the Passover night YHWH manifested his love for Israel. Hence, it is not surprising that the Song of Songs, which through allegorical interpretation became applied to YHWH's love for Israel, became the festive scroll of the Passover.”

<sup>5</sup>This paragraph follows the work of T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 205-6; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 128-29; and Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 161.

<sup>6</sup>One indication that Adam enjoyed priestly status prior to the fall may be discerned in Gen 2:15, where both עָבַד (“work”) and שָׁמַר (“keep”) are used to describe Adam's divinely prescribed function in the Garden. Both terms appear later in Num 3:7-8 and again in Num 18:7, where they describe the priestly function of Levites in the tabernacle. An identification of Adam as a priest is at least possible when the texts are compared.

<sup>7</sup>In Gen 3:23, Yahweh “sends away” (שָׁלַח; *pi'el*) Adam from the Garden; in Exod 4:23 and 5:1, Yahweh's word to Pharaoh is to “send away” (שָׁלַח; both *pi'el*) Israel from Egypt.

<sup>8</sup>Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 128-29.

<sup>9</sup>Commenting on the parallels that exist between Exod 12 and Exod 29, Lev 8, Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 128-29, writes, “Although some differences in the details exist, there is

Thus, the Passover signaled that the new Adam was leaving cruel toil in Egypt for the fertility of Canaan, with recovered priestly status. Worthwhile is a leisurely exploration of both the mechanics of the first Passover (Exod 12:1-11) and the interpretation of those mechanics (Exod 12:12-13).

### **Exodus 12:1-2: Where and When**

The setting for the first (and true) Passover was not Israel, but Egypt.<sup>10</sup> Exodus 12:1 reports that Yahweh laid down instructions concerning the Passover “in the land of Egypt,” and then Moses, Aaron, and the people carried out those instructions in the same location.<sup>11</sup> Formerly, the people had planned a three-day journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yahweh (Exod 3:18; 5:3; 8:27), but now that venture was shelved in favor of a sacrificial rite that would happen within the land of Egypt.<sup>12</sup>

In Exodus 12:2, Yahweh declared to Moses and Aaron: “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.” Thus, even as he began disclosing instructions for the Passover, Yahweh revealed that a new

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good reason to believe that the Passover ritual is about consecrating the people as ‘priests.’ The sacrifice of the animal atones for the sin of the people, the blood smeared on the doorpost purifies those within the house, and the sacrificial meat sanctifies or makes holy, all who eat it. Understood in this way, the Passover ritual enables all of the Israelites to obtain a holy status, an important requisite for becoming a royal priesthood (Exod. 19:6).”

<sup>10</sup>I identified the initial Passover as “true,” following the observation of J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 129: “The Passover was intended specifically as a rite for Israel *in Egypt*. Once they had left Egypt, the Passover could not be repeated, only recalled and memorialized” (emphasis original).

<sup>11</sup>Both John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:238; and George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary in the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 86; note that the designation “Egypt” in Exod 12:1 and Yahweh’s subsequent instruction in Exod 12:2 f. alerts the reader to the fact that not all Torah was given at Sinai.

<sup>12</sup>Noted by Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 46.

calendar had taken effect. Whatever calendar had been used by the Hebrews up to this point was now obsolete.<sup>13</sup> A new beginning was underway, and the springtime month of Abib (so named in Exod 13:4; 23:15; and 34:18) was now “the first month of the year.”<sup>14</sup> This new beginning in springtime would see the Hebrew people released from centuries of bondage in Egypt. This moment was the springtime of their existence as a nation; a Genesis moment of being recreated for future service to Yahweh.<sup>15</sup>

### **Exodus 12:3-6: A Lamb for Each House**

In Exodus 12:3 there is a clear indication that Genesis 12:3 had been at least partially fulfilled.<sup>16</sup> In Genesis 12:3, Yahweh had promised Abram that in Abram’s descendants, a “great nation” would arise, and in Exodus 12:3, those descendants are called a “congregation” (Hebrew: *‘ēdā*) for the first time in the Bible. In Exodus 12:3, Yahweh says to Moses and Aaron: “Tell all the congregation [ *‘ēdā* ] of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a

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<sup>13</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987), 81, writes, “We know nothing of Israel’s earlier calendar, but the phrasing unmistakably points to an innovation, to a break with the past.”

<sup>14</sup>According to R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 104, the name “Abib” is Canaanite in origin and means “newly ripened corn.” Abib spanned March and April and was later called Nisan (Neh 2:1; Esth 3:7). Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 179, notes potential significance in the fact that both the time of the exodus and the return from Babylonian exile fell “in the first month of the year” (Exod 12:2; cf. Ezra 7:9).

<sup>15</sup>See Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 247; Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 314; and John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 259.

<sup>16</sup>Here I am following the suggestion of Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 105.

lamb for a household.”<sup>17</sup> The ‘*ēdā* that had arisen from Abram’s loins was now called to unite around a common purpose in worship.<sup>18</sup>

On the tenth day of the first month, the men were to “take” a lamb. Whereas in the previous plagues the people of Israel had played a relatively passive role, now they were commanded to respond with action.<sup>19</sup> If Israel wished to have their firstborn spared from the coming judgment, activity on their part was now required. As Noah had acted in building the ark in order to escape looming death, so the people of Israel now needed to act, should they desire to enjoy additional days with their firstborn.<sup>20</sup>

The animal to be taken was a lamb (Hebrew: *śeh*).<sup>21</sup> Prior to Exodus 12:3, the word *śeh* occurs only four times in the Hebrew Bible: twice in Genesis 22:7-8, and twice in Genesis 30:32. The two uses of *śeh* in the former passage are especially interesting, for there Abraham expresses confidence that a *śeh* will be substituted sacrificially for his

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<sup>17</sup>Concerning the possible significance of “tenth day” in Exod 12:3, later biblical history may be important. Joshua and the people of Israel crossed into the Promised Land on the tenth day of the first month (Josh 4:19), and the tenth day of the seventh month was reserved for the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27). Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:239, proposes a still weightier meaning for “tenth” in Exod 12:3: “The number ten often symbolizes completion in the Bible: for example, the Ten Commandments, the ten plagues, etc. Here it may signify the complete redemption of Israel out of Egypt.”

<sup>18</sup>John L. Mackay, *Exodus, A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 205, argues that the word עֲדָה “refers to the people gathered together at an appointed time, particularly for religious purposes, but [in Exod 12:3] it has the wider sense of the people united in common worship.”

<sup>19</sup>See William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses: Explaining the Lord’s Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs, ed. I. Howard Marshall et al. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 168. Noteworthy is the fact that up to this point in the plague cycle, “signs” were orchestrated only by Yahweh (see Exod 8:23[19]; 10:1, 2). In the Passover, however, the people of God were to execute the “sign” themselves by slaying the lamb and applying its blood to their doorframes. As Ford (171) points out, in a very real way the people were to enter into the sign, which was, in fact, to enter into the work of Yahweh and participate in his plan.

<sup>20</sup>Mackay, *Exodus*, 201.

<sup>21</sup>John E. Hartley, “הֶשֶׁת,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 871, notes that a הֶשֶׁת can be either a sheep or a goat. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:240; argues similarly, and in Exod 12:5, Yahweh allows for either a sheep or a goat.

only son Isaac. The *seh* of Exodus 12:3 will likewise act as a substitute for the *firstborn* of Israel—all young people, it must be noted, who had descended from Abraham and Isaac. The lamb dies so that the flock of Israel might remain intact and be brought out of Egypt like sheep (Ps 78:51-52).

In its original setting, Passover was purposed as a family-oriented event. The lamb was to be taken “according to [the] fathers’ houses.” That is, a single animal was to be used for each subunit of a tribe.<sup>22</sup> The families gathered in their homes to consume the lamb. No journey to any centralized sanctuary and no necessity of priestly intervention were required.<sup>23</sup>

The family setting of the Passover meal provided an opportunity to strengthen bonds and unify kinship prior to the exodus proper.<sup>24</sup> Exodus 12:4 brims with language showing how the lamb brought families and even neighbors together: “And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.” Ideally, the lamb would be eaten fully in a single evening (Exod 12:10). Thus if a small family determined that they could not eat the whole animal in one night, that family was to invite neighbors to the feast, so that the whole lamb would be consumed.

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<sup>22</sup>According to Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 54, at this point in ancient history such subunits were comprised of “a man, his wife or wives, unmarried daughters, and sons with their wives and unmarried children.”

<sup>23</sup>Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 265. Of course, in the later history of ancient Israel, Passover became more institutionalized and was centered at the temple. See 2 Chr 30 (Passover under Hezekiah) and 2 Chr 35 (Passover under Josiah).

<sup>24</sup>Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 83, comments, “The paschal lambs were to unite all the households of Israel around the same destiny.” See also Sarna, *Exodus*, 55.



Douglas Stuart puts the matter memorably: “Everyone had to eat the meat, and all the meat had to be eaten.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Exodus 12:5: The Lamb Defined**

In Exodus 12:5, Yahweh describes specific requirements for the selection of the *seh*. Yahweh declares, “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.” Perhaps of central importance, the *seh* must be “without blemish” (Hebrew: *tāmim*). At its most basic level, *tāmim* means whole, complete, and perfect.<sup>26</sup> John Mackay contends that in the context of Exodus 12:5, *tāmim* “refers to the absence of physical blemishes which would render [the animal] inappropriate to offer to the LORD.”<sup>27</sup> Certainly, at one level God commanded the choice of a *tāmim* animal simply because God himself deserved the best.<sup>28</sup> In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, God’s work and ways (Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:31; cf. Ps 18:30[31]); God’s knowledge (Job 37:16); and God’s law (Ps 19:7[8]) are all described as *tāmim*. Thus, the one who is himself *tāmim* demands offerings that are *tāmim*.<sup>29</sup> Yet at another level, a *tāmim* animal was commanded, perhaps, to serve as a symbolic reminder. As often as Israel would

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<sup>25</sup>Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 274.

<sup>26</sup>See J. Barton Payne, “תָּמִים,” in *Theological Wordbook*, 973; and J. P. J. Olivier, “תָּמִים,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:307. At a later point in the chap., it will be observed that *tāmim* can apply to the moral sphere: for example, see its use in Ps 18:23[24]; 101:2; Job 1:1.

<sup>27</sup>Mackay, *Exodus*, 206.

<sup>28</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 247.

<sup>29</sup>In texts later than Exod 12:5, God stipulated that other sacrifices be *tāmim* (Lev 1:3; 22:18-25). Mackay, *Exodus*, 206, observes that at one point in late Old Testament history God expressed disdain for the fact that his people were bringing blemished animals for sacrifice, when the people would never consider giving such animals to the Judean governor (Mal 1:8).

observe Passover in future years, they would be reminded of the *whole, complete, and perfect* deliverance that Yahweh wrought for them when he brought them out of Egypt.<sup>30</sup>

### **Exodus 12:6: The Lamb Prepared**

One of the primary tasks given to the first man, Adam, was to “keep” (Hebrew: *šāmar*) the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). In Exodus 12:6, Yahweh commands the people to “keep” (Hebrew: *mišmeret*) the Passover lamb until the fourteenth day. The noun *mišmeret* is derived from the verb *šāmar*,<sup>31</sup> and both *mišmeret* and *šāmar* are employed voluminously in Numbers 3 and 18, where the duties of Levites and priests are described.<sup>32</sup> By sinning, Adam had endangered his divinely-ordained role as a priest. Perhaps because the root *šmr* is used in Exodus 12:6, in connection with “keeping” creation (i.e., keeping the Passover lamb), the writer is indicating that Abraham’s descendants are taking back the creational role of priests.

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<sup>30</sup>Suggested by Stuart, *Exodus*, 275. The second and third requirements for the chosen *seh* were “male” and “a year old.” Perhaps the male gender was specified because, as Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 142, has observed, “Male animals, like male human beings, were regarded as less liable to ritual uncleanness” (and see Lev 15:19-30). The lamb was to be a year old because it would act as a representative substitute for the young, firstborn children of Israel. Therefore, it was appropriate that the animal not be old and unhealthy. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 425, writes, “The lamb must be a one-year-old male because it is taking the place of Israel’s firstborn males, who are young and fresh with the vigor of life.” Concerning the specification of a “year old” lamb, some commentators, such as Cole, *Exodus*, 105; and Sarna, *Exodus*, 55, have suggested that the Hebrew of Exod 12:5 can yield the sense *within the first year of life*, and need not necessarily imply that the lamb had reached a full year of life. However, the observation of Stuart, *Exodus*, 274, is persuasive and difficult to contest: “Since lambing and goat kidding took place in the spring in ancient times (before modern artificial breeding allowed for other lambing/kidding schedules) and the Passover took place in the spring, there is every reason to take literally the language indicating that the animal to be eaten would be a year old, not merely within its first year of life.”

<sup>31</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 176.

<sup>32</sup>The verb *שמר* gets used in Num 3:7, 8, 10, 28, 32, 38; 18:3, 4, 5, 7; and the noun *מְשִׁמֵרֶת* is employed in Num 3:7 [x2], 8, 25, 28, 31, 32, 36, 38; 18:3, 4, 5, 8.

The Passover lamb was to be kept until the fourteenth day.<sup>33</sup> On this same day, the “whole assembly of the congregation of Israel” was to “kill their lambs at twilight.”<sup>34</sup> The verb translated “kill” is the Hebrew verb *šāḥaṭ*. Over half of the uses of *šāḥaṭ* in the Old Testament are found in the priestly literature, in the context of sacrifice.<sup>35</sup> The suggestion was made previously that the use of *šmr* (“keep”) in Exodus 12:6 had a priestly resonance. If true, then the employment of *šāḥaṭ* in the same verse only adds to the priestly atmosphere. The assembly of Israel was taking back the priestly role that had been forfeited by Adam, and as descendants of Abraham, they now purposed to *šāḥaṭ* their lambs, just as Abraham had once purposed to *šāḥaṭ* his firstborn son (Gen 22:10).

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<sup>33</sup>Several reasons have been suggested as to why there is an interval between the “taking” of the lamb on the tenth day (Exod 12:3) and the “keeping” of the lamb until the fourteenth (slaughter) day (Exod 12:6). Proposals range. Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross: Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 55, wonders if such a period of time was required so that the animal might be properly inspected for blemishes. James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 110, has suggested that the time interval might have been necessary in order to “control the animal’s diet,” noting that Yahweh’s instruction was to roast the animal intact with its entrails (Exod 12:9). Other suggestions have included the avoidance of a “last minute rush” and a multi-day period for the purpose of healing the animals after circumcision (Mackay, *Exodus*, 205; and Bruckner, *Exodus*, 110; respectively). With Exod 10:22 in mind, Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1992), 301, has argued that the three days in between day 10 and day 14 were the three days of the plague of darkness. Jacob (301) contends that the animal was chosen during the light of the tenth day and then slaughtered when light returned on the fourteenth day. Whatever the case, the writer of Exodus is reticent with details concerning the reason for the interval, and thus the issue may be of lesser importance.

<sup>34</sup>The phrase “assembly of the congregation” is translated from קהל עדת. According to Jack P. Lewis, “עֵדָה,” in *Theological Wordbook*, 388, the word קהל (“assembly”) is roughly synonymous with עדת (“congregation”).

<sup>35</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 176. According to Exod 12:27, the slaughter of the Passover Lamb was a “sacrifice.” The sacrificial nature of Passover is recognized and promoted by authors such as Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 112; Robert L. Reymond, *The Lamb of God: The Bible’s Unfolding Revelation of Sacrifice* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006), 24; and Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 120. With the clear identification of Passover as a “sacrifice,” it is strange that Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 267, argues against its sacrificial character.

## Exodus 12:7: The Blood

The careful selection and preparation of the Passover lambs were antecedent to the tenth plague—the climactic death of the firstborn in Egypt. One may wonder why Yahweh did not simply take aim at the Egyptian firstborn to begin with. To focus attention on Israel and her need for meticulous care as she chose her lambs could be taken as somewhat diversionary. Yet one is reminded that at this juncture the people of Israel were in just as much danger as the Egyptians.<sup>36</sup> William Barrick puts the matter succinctly: “Just like the Egyptians, the Israelites came under the sentence of death.”<sup>37</sup> If not for Yahweh’s provision of the lamb and its sacrificial blood, the Israelites would face the same horror of judgment as the Egyptians. Both Joshua 24:14 and Ezekiel 20:7-8 provide retrospective accounts of Israel’s idolatry while living in Egypt. If not for the shed blood of the substitutionary Passover lamb, for her unfaithfulness Israel would face the wrath of Yahweh.

Exodus 12:7 has Yahweh commanding that the blood of the lamb be taken and smeared on the two doorposts and lintel of each Israelite home.<sup>38</sup> Before the roasting of the lamb, and before the consumption of the lamb, the blood of the lamb was to be applied

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<sup>36</sup>On this point, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 33-34; Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 381; and R. E. Watts, “Exodus,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 480.

<sup>37</sup>William D. Barrick, “Penal Substitution in the Old Testament,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 157.

<sup>38</sup>Both Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 267; and Houtman, *Exodus*, 176, find significance in the “doorway” where the blood is applied. Dozeman (267) writes, “Recall the warning of God to Cain: sin crouches at the doorway. It desires to enter (Gen 4:7). The doorway is the point of vulnerability, the threshold into a home.” Houtman (2:176) adds, “To understand what is going on here it is important to realize that in the minds of the ancients the door-opening constituted the boundary between two worlds, the dweller-friendly, protective atmosphere of the house and the outside world with its threatening evil powers.”

to the doorposts and lintels. First things first.<sup>39</sup> The blood and what it signified were of such monumental importance that it was administered prior to any further activity.

The blood applied to the doorposts and lintel was significant for at least five reasons. First, in keeping with the priestly resonances of Exodus 12:6, to make use of an animal's blood was ordinarily the domain of priests.<sup>40</sup> Thus again, the pre-exodus Israel is associated with priesthood as they daub the blood of the Passover lamb onto their doorposts.<sup>41</sup> Remarkably, this association emerges long before the official, institutional inauguration of priesthood in Israel.

Second, the application of the blood was symbolic of the faith of those who dwelt inside the homes.<sup>42</sup> This aspect of faith is confirmed in Hebrews 11:28: "By faith he [Moses] kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them." By smearing on the blood, the people were proclaiming their trust in the one who had commanded the blood's application.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>The phrase "first things first" is taken from Stuart, *Exodus*, 276, and in this paragraph I am following his argument. He writes, "Note that the blood was smeared on the doorframe even before the Passover meal was eaten; this may be an instance of first things first, that is, that deliverance from death is the primary interest of these instructions and proper memorializing of the exodus the less crucial concern."

<sup>40</sup>For example, see Exod 29:16, 20; Lev 1:11, 15; 3:8, 13; 4:25, 30, 34; 16:15, etc.

<sup>41</sup>Cole, *Exodus*, 106, finds it remarkable "that there is no association of priests with a rite of a type later strictly limited to them." However, I am arguing that the pre-exodus Israelites are acting as priests, even if they are not yet formally a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6).

<sup>42</sup>On this point, see James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 95; Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out: A Fresh Look at Exodus* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974), 75; and Stuart, *Exodus*, 276.

<sup>43</sup>It may be important to point out that both the external, physical action of smearing the blood, and the internal attitude of faith—bound organically and inseparably together—were necessary. John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 370-71, comments adroitly on the binding of action with faith in the Old Testament: "On the one hand, actions done merely because they will have some supposed effect on metaphysical realities are roundly condemned. Examples abound in the Hebrew prophets (e.g. Isa 1:1-15; Hos 5:6-7; Amos 5:18-24). On the other hand, certain attitudes can only be adequately symbolized by certain actions. The person who refused to sacrifice in the way God had directed could hardly say he or she truly was trusting in, believing, and obeying God (Mal 1:6-14). Thus, while it is true that it is the attitude with which the

Exodus 12:22 says that “a bunch of hyssop” was to serve as a kind of paintbrush, as the lamb’s blood was applied to the houses. Here, the third significance of the blood may be discerned. Alexander notes that hyssop “is elsewhere associated with ritual purification (e.g. Lev. 14:4, 6, 49, 51, 52; Num. 19:6, 18).”<sup>44</sup> Thus, as the blood was applied to the doorposts and lintels of each Israelite home, it may be an indication that the “purification” of each home was being effected.

The fourth significance of the lamb’s blood was its apotropaic character. That is to say that the blood on the doorposts and lintel served the function of warding off the Destroyer, or turning him away.<sup>45</sup> Those inside the marked homes were protected by the blood (Exod 12:23). On seeing the blood, the Destroyer would be turned away.

Perhaps one of the primary significances of the lamb’s blood is the fifth. The presence of blood on the doorposts and lintel meant that a life had been laid down.<sup>46</sup> The blood was an advertisement that a life had been offered up, and for a very specific purpose. The lamb was slain in order that life might continue for the firstborn inside the home.<sup>47</sup> The death of the Passover lamb was substitutionary.<sup>48</sup> The lamb perished in place of the firstborn sons of Israel. The conclusion of Herbert Wolf seems on target:

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Israelites carried out the actions prescribed in [Exod] 12:1-13 that was most important, the nature of the action prescribed was important too.”

<sup>44</sup>Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 204. See also Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 128; Paul M. Hoskins, “Deliverance from Death by the True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect of the Fulfillment of the Passover in the Gospel of John,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 52, no. 2 (June 2009): 288; Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 93; and Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 120.

<sup>45</sup>Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 128. See also Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 267; and Henri Cazelles, “Passover (Easter),” in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology: The Complete Sacramentum Verbi*, ed. Johannes B. Bauer (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 642; contra Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 92, who sees “no apotropaic role” in the lamb’s blood.

<sup>46</sup>Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 137.

<sup>47</sup>See Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 56.

<sup>48</sup>Following Barrick, “Penal Substitution,” 149; Mackay, *Exodus*, 210; and Leon Morris, *The*

As in the case of the ram that was sacrificed in place of Isaac (cf. Gen. 22:13), the substitutionary nature of the Passover lamb must have been quite clear to the firstborn sons and their families. They knew that if the lamb was not killed, the oldest son would die, a son who had a privileged position in the family.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, at the very least, the blood of the Passover lambs signified priesthood, faith, purification, protection, and substitution. Yet more symbolism can be found in the instructions for the Passover feast.

### **Exodus 12:8: Meat, Bread, and Herbs**

The Hebrew people were soon to embark on their journey away from Egypt. Interestingly, Yahweh commanded a barbecue—complete with side dishes—prior to that trek.<sup>50</sup> Exodus 12:8 records the command: “They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.”

In addition to the barbecued lamb, Yahweh prescribed the side dishes of the Passover feast as “unleavened bread” and “bitter herbs.” The symbolism of unleavened bread is multi-faceted. Like the roasted meat that was prepared with efficiency and

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*Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 117.

<sup>49</sup>Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 138. A sixth significance of the lamb’s blood may be that it had covenantal connotations. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:241, notes that centuries prior to the first Passover, blood had played a role in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:9-17; 17:9-14). Not many days after the initial Passover, blood would also play a starring role in the covenant forged at Sinai (Exod 24:6, 8). The blood of the Passover lambs is suggestive of covenant. Larsson notes that just as the Passover meal followed the application of the blood on the doorposts, so at Sinai, a meal followed the sprinkling of blood on the altar and people (see Exod 24:6, 8, 11). Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 82, best summarizes the covenantal aspect of Passover (together with its link to Sinai): “The blood of the lambs powerfully symbolizes the bond between God and Israel and between every member of the people, a bond late sealed through the covenantal blood at Sinai.”

<sup>50</sup>Cole, *Exodus*, 106, suggests “barbecued” as the meaning of *לֶחֶם*. Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 56, observes how the ingested meat would be a “nutriment” that would give “energy to all the family,” energy that would be needed for the long journey out of Egypt. Stuart, *Exodus*, 277, explains why Yahweh required the lamb to be “roasted,” instead of calling for some other method of preparation: “Roasting over a fire required no setup or washup of pots and other utensils, no additional drawing of water, and no waiting time for the water to boil; thus it was the fastest, simplest way to cook the meat.” Indeed, the feast of Passover is characterized by haste (Exod 12:39; Deut 16:3). Lengthy, involved methods of food preparation would impede the people in their effort to depart from Egypt on a moment’s notice.

alacrity in mind, unleavened bread also signified haste.<sup>51</sup> To leaven bread took time; time that the Hebrews could not afford since a departure from Egypt was imminent.

Second, as Nahum Sarna has suggested, an association between leaven and corruption was at least possible in the minds of the ancients, and thus the presence of leaven in the holy festival of Passover was entirely unsuitable. Sarna explains,

Because the prohibition on leaven has wider application than the Passover, it is likely that the process of fermentation was associated with decomposition and putrefaction, and so became emblematic of corruption. Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to associate such a symbol with a sacrificial ritual whose function was to effect conciliation between man and God and to raise man to a higher level of spirituality.<sup>52</sup>

The bread of Passover was to be unleavened, perhaps because leavened bread was less than sacrosanct for such a sacred occasion.

A third possible symbolic value of the unleavened bread was its suggestion of newness. Without leaven as an ingredient, this bread was a physical testimony to a new day; a fresh start. The comments of Robin Routledge are instructive:

In ancient times, the leaven that caused bread to rise was prepared by leaving dough lightened by grape and other juices in a warm place to ferment. Because this process took several days, and because it was seen as something of a mystery, old leaven was preserved and added to successive batches of dough. The leaven thus provided a link with the past; and the absence of leaven symbolized a break from the past and the desire for a new beginning.<sup>53</sup>

The Hebrew people were moments away from leaving Egypt. A new day was dawning. It is plausible that at least part of the significance of the unleavened bread was this “newness” that had come at last.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>See Exod 12:34, 39; Deut 16:3. Several scholars note the connection between “unleavened bread” and “haste,” including Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:242; Knight, *Theology as Narration*, 88; Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 169; and Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 382. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 85, draws attention to Gen 19:3 (a text earlier than Exod 12:8), where Lot hurriedly made *maṣāh* (“unleavened bread”) for his two angelic visitors.

<sup>52</sup>Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 90. See also Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 169.

<sup>53</sup>Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” 209. See also Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 131.

<sup>54</sup>Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” 212, also observes that in some manner not spelled



The second accompaniment to the Passover lamb was the bitter herbs (Hebrew: *mĕrōrîm*).<sup>55</sup> The root letters of the Hebrew word *mĕrōrîm* are *mrr*. Only once before Exodus 12:8 does the root *mrr* occur in the book of Exodus, at 1:14, where the Hebrews' lives are described as *mārar* ("bitter") because of Egyptian oppression.<sup>56</sup> Thus it seems natural to take the *mĕrōrîm* ("bitter herbs") of Exodus 12:8 as a literary allusion back to the bitter service described in Exodus 1:14. The eating of the herbs was to be a perpetual reminder of the cruel servitude that the people had endured in Egypt.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, Yahweh's instructions for meat, bread, and herbs were specific and full of meaning. Exodus 12:9-11 completes the instructions concerning the lamb and its consumption, and is a passage where still more symbolic weight may be discerned.

### **Exodus 12:9-11: Methods and Manner**

Exodus 12:9 provides Yahweh's rationale for the prescribed method of roasting the lamb: "Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts." As the verse opens, Yahweh expresses concern both for the

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out in the text of Scripture, the unleavened bread was to serve as a symbolic reminder of the pain that the Hebrew people had experienced while in Egypt, for after all, in Deut 16:3 the bread is called "the bread of affliction" (emphasis added).

<sup>55</sup>I simply assume that the bitter herbs have a symbolic significance. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 91, comments, "It may be taken for granted . . . that unless the bitter herbs (*merorim*) were invested with some particular significance, they would hardly have merited special mention as a mere popular condiment among the solemn instructions about the paschal lamb." As to the precise identification of the "bitter herbs," commentators vary. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 269, writes that they are "most likely a variety of lettuce." Kaiser, *Exodus*, 425-26, prefers "lettuce and endive." Mackay, *Exodus*, 208, suggests "endives and chicory," while Segal proposes "bitter lettuce or chicory."

<sup>56</sup>See Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 91.

<sup>57</sup>Several commentators see a connection between the "bitter herbs" in Exod 12:8 and the "bitter" service of Exod 1:14. These commentators include Bruckner, *Exodus*, 111; Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 242; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 425; Mackay, *Exodus*, 208; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 1:259; and Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 382. Less convincing are Theodor Herzl Gaster, *Passover: Its History and Traditions* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1949), 18, who contends that the inclusion of bitter herbs in the Passover meal was to simply "neutralize impurities" in the food, and Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 170, who suggests that the bitter herbs served as a "prophylactic against evil spirits."

enjoyment of the feast and the welfare of his people. As Stuart has noted, to eat meat that was raw (or insufficiently cooked) would be “both distasteful and dangerous to health.”<sup>58</sup> Roasting the meat thoroughly would prevent untoward possibilities, such as food poisoning. Further, the lamb was not to be “boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.” To boil the animal in water would surely mean dissecting its parts in order to fit it into a cooking vessel, and Yahweh wanted the animal whole.<sup>59</sup> Since boiling was a more lengthy and inconvenient process it would not align with the tenor of the Passover feast, which was haste.<sup>60</sup>

In Exodus 12:10, the reader is given hints concerning the sacred nature of the lamb and its meat.<sup>61</sup> Yahweh commands, “And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn” (cf. Num 9:12; Deut 16:4b). The comment of Alexander is sensible: “The sacred nature of the meat explains why the Israelites are to burn any that is left over, after first ensuring that they roast only as much as they can eat.”<sup>62</sup> Barbecued meat is delicious on the second day, but in the case

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<sup>58</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 277. With Segal, I have included the possibility that the word  $\text{סָרַח}$ , in Exod 12:9, might be translated “insufficiently cooked” (instead of “raw”). He points out that  $\text{סָרַח}$  in Exod 12:9 is a hapax legomenon, and that a different (more common) Hebrew word was available to express the idea of “raw” (namely,  $\text{רָח}$ ; see Lev 13:10, 14, 15, 16; 1 Sam 2:15). Thus perhaps a slightly different shade of meaning than “raw” is intended in Exod 12:9. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 166.

<sup>59</sup>Houtman, *Exodus*, 180.

<sup>60</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 277. Both Segal, *The Hebrew Passover*, 171; and Larsson, *Bound for Freedom* 83, suggest that Yahweh commanded undivided, non-dissected, whole animals because such animals would symbolize the unity and unbroken wholeness of the people. Houtman, *Exodus*, 181, also concurs, “Those eating the meal constitute a complete unity by completely consuming the in-one-piece animal.” The whole people were about to tread out of Egypt *en masse*, and dining on a lamb left whole was perhaps symbolic of their unity.

<sup>61</sup>So Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 134; Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:243; and Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel’s Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 189.

<sup>62</sup>Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 134.

of Passover, to consume the meat on the day following would be inappropriate and a violation of Yahweh's instruction.

In Exodus 12:11, the focus shifts from what is eaten to the diners themselves and what must characterize their eating. Yahweh declares, "In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover." First, all those eating the Passover feast were to be dressed ready to leave Egypt; sandals on, staff in hand, belt fastened.

Victor Hamilton is helpful in his description of the phrase "belt fastened":

The reference here is to a long, ankle-length tunic or robe, which needs to be tied at the waist with a girdle or belt when one is (a) setting out on a journey (Exod. 12:11; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1), (b) beginning to run (1 Kings 18:46), or (c) engaging in war and spiritual warfare (Jer. 1:17; Ezek. 23:15). The common denominator is that the phrase underscores preparation for anything strenuous or difficult.<sup>63</sup>

Those eating were to come to the table dressed for the occasion; prepared to set out on the long journey out of Egypt and toward the land promised to Abraham. Their eating was to be done in "haste" (Hebrew: *ḥippāzôn*). The noun *ḥippāzôn* derives from the root *ḥpz*, and often the concept of "fear" or "trepidation" is conveyed when words of that root appear.<sup>64</sup> It is hardly a stretch to detect the element of "trepidation" or "alarm" in the use of *ḥippāzôn* in Exodus 12:11.<sup>65</sup> After all, for God's people the feasting was to commence while just outside their walls human beings were dropping dead in divine judgment. The reflection offered by James Bruckner is apropos:

This was not a celebratory feast. The people were not to be indifferent to the suffering outside the walls of their homes, even the suffering of their enslavers

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<sup>63</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 183.

<sup>64</sup>For example, consider the following ways in which the ESV translates the verb *ḥpṣ* in the *qal* stem: "panic" (Deut 20:3); "frightened" (Job 40:23); "alarm" (Ps 31:22[23]; 116:11). With regard to *ḥpṣ*, Jack P. Lewis, "*ḥpṣ*," in *Theological Wordbook*, 310, writes, "'Flee in terror' may summarize its meanings."

<sup>65</sup>Contra Anthony Tomasino, "*ḥpṣ*," in *New International Dictionary*, 310, who says that the use of *ḥippāzôn* in Exod 12:11 "implies no fear on the Israelites' part . . . but only anticipation of their imminent departure."

(Prov. 24:17). They should eat with the haste of alarm, since their deliverance was purchased at such a cost of human and animal life.<sup>66</sup>

The last sentence of Exodus 12:11 reads, “It is the LORD’s Passover.” The word “it” in this final sentence of Exodus 12:11 refers primarily to the slain, roasted, eaten lamb.<sup>67</sup> “It” (the lamb) is Yahweh’s “Passover.” The English word “Passover” is translated from the Hebrew noun *pesah*, but the English term seems not to capture the precise meaning of the Hebrew.<sup>68</sup> In the verses leading up to Exodus 12:11, what has been described is a divine provision of *protection* for Israel: a lamb is to bleed and die, providing everything necessary for the people to be protected from God’s wrath. Thus, context would suggest that the phrase “Yahweh’s *pesah*” (i.e. Yahweh’s lamb victim) meant “Yahweh’s *protection*.”<sup>69</sup> Further, in Isaiah 31:5, the verb *pāsaḥ* carries the sense of “protection,” and both Exodus 12:23 and 12:27 reflect Yahweh protecting Israel while Egypt is judged. Yahweh was providing protection for Israel in the form of a lamb slain, and the reason why such protection was essential is laid out in Exodus 12:12-13.

### Exodus 12:12-13: Yahweh’s Plan

In Exodus 12:12, Yahweh outlines the proportional justice he will soon undertake on Egypt, and Yahweh also declares his intent to expose the bankruptcy of Egyptian belief. Israel will be spared divine judgment because of the lamb. Exodus 12:12

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<sup>66</sup>Bruckner, *Exodus*, 111.

<sup>67</sup>So Cole, *Exodus*, 107; and Mackay, *Exodus*, 209.

<sup>68</sup>Commenting on the meaning of the related verb פָּסַח, and how the English word “Passover” seems an inadequate rendering, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 87, writes, “In brief, the verb *p-s-ḥ* has been understood in three different ways: ‘to protect,’ ‘to have compassion,’ and ‘to pass over.’ It was through the influence of the Latin Vulgate version that ‘pass over’ became the predominant English rendering, even though it seems to be the least likely of the three possibilities.”

<sup>69</sup>So Bruckner, *Exodus*, 112; Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 168; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 185; Victor P. Hamilton, “פָּסַח,” in *Theological Wordbook*, 729; and Bruce Wells, “Exodus,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 205.

reads, “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.”

Proportional justice would be meted out on Egypt for her crimes.<sup>70</sup> Not only had Pharaoh attempted to decimate every Israelite son (Exod 1:22), Pharaoh had also sought to retain Yahweh’s “firstborn son” (i.e., the nation of Israel; see Exod 4:22) for his own egregious purposes. A penalty fitting the crimes is announced in Exodus 12:12. Yahweh would now kill every firstborn belonging to any and all classes of the Egyptians.

Additionally, Yahweh would expose the bankruptcy of Egyptian belief. The fact that Exodus 12:12 mentions firstborn “beasts”—as well as firstborn humans—as receptors of Yahweh’s judgment may be significant. Walter Kaiser lists “bulls, cows, goats, jackals, lions, baboons, rams, etc.” as “beasts” in Egypt that were linked with various deities.<sup>71</sup> When Yahweh dispatches such beasts, says Kaiser, “it will undoubtedly be interpreted as a direct blow to the gods of Egypt themselves.”<sup>72</sup>

In point of fact, Exodus 12:12 reports explicitly that Yahweh will “execute judgments” on “all the gods of Egypt.” Stuart argues cogently that the Egyptians believed in the ability of their gods to sustain life.<sup>73</sup> Yahweh’s killing of the firstborn in Egypt would be a statement, says Stuart, of “who held the power of life and death and who, by

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<sup>70</sup>In this paragraph I am following the work of Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 112; Enns, *Exodus*, 254, 256; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 320-21; Mackay, *Exodus*, 209; Oswalt, *Exodus*, 367; and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 94.

<sup>71</sup>Kaiser, *Exodus*, 426.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 280.

implication, did not. The gods did not. Yahweh did.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed. The final plague would expose the folly of trusting in pretend gods who could not even sustain the life of a ram or baboon, let alone a human being. Stuart concludes,

The consistent witness of Scripture is that [the gods] are nothings, nonbeings, imaginary deities from whom no response can ever be expected because they do not exist. Therefore, ‘judgment on the gods of Egypt’ is practically speaking a judgment on *belief in those gods*, trusting in what cannot save as opposed to the only one who can.<sup>75</sup>

As Exodus 12:12 closes, Yahweh pronounces “I am the LORD” for the tenth time in the book of Exodus.<sup>76</sup> In the context of Exodus 12:12, “I am the LORD” is Yahweh’s declaration of his unparalleled divine reality. In stark contrast with the non-existent “gods” of Exodus 12:12, Yahweh is the one and only, true and living God.

Traditionally, married people wear wedding rings to indicate that they are married. The wedding ring is not the marriage itself; it is merely a sign of the greater reality, which is the marriage. Exodus 12:13 reads, “The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.” The blood daubed on the doorposts and lintel of each Israelite home would act like a wedding ring. The blood would be a “sign” that pointed to a more significant reality. Namely, the applied blood would be a sign that the people inside the marked homes trusted Yahweh.<sup>77</sup> The smeared

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<sup>74</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 280.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., emphasis original.

<sup>76</sup>The nine previous occasions are Exod 6:2, 6, 7, 8, 29; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2.

<sup>77</sup>With regard to the remarkable trust and faith of the Israelites who marked their homes with the blood, the meditation of Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 100, is profitable: “By being required to mark their houses, the Israelites are thereby required as well to mark themselves for either life or death. For if they fail to smear their doorposts and the plague *does* come to pass, then it will strike them that night with the same deadliness as it will strike the rest of Egypt. And alternatively, if they do mark their homes but the plague *fails* to come to pass, then they will have marked themselves as easy targets for an Egyptian reprisal next morning. In other words, either Israel stakes her life on God—or she stakes it on someone

blood would be a sign that the new Adam—this burgeoning kingdom of priests about to journey toward Canaan—had believed and obeyed God, where Adam had failed in that department.<sup>78</sup>

A brief exploration of Exodus 12:1-13 is now complete. The passage provides the initial set of instructions concerning the Passover, and additionally, it contains interpretive material regarding those instructions.<sup>79</sup> The first Passover happened within Egypt, just prior to the exodus proper when God's people would taste freedom after their grueling centuries of servitude. However, true and lasting freedom did not emerge with the exodus.<sup>80</sup> The kind of freedom that Israel needed could not be realized in a simple geographical journey. Thomas Schreiner explains,

The political liberation of a nation is not the essence of freedom. True freedom comes when human beings are freed from their sin, and such freedom is rooted in Jesus' sacrifice as the lamb of God, the one who takes the wrath upon himself that Israel deserved.<sup>81</sup>

Attention turns, then, to Jesus, for as Stuart has written rightly,

The ultimate purpose of the Old Testament Passover instruction is to point forward to Christ, to the purpose of his death, memorialized in the ritual of the Lord's

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else. As a result, the risk of Israel's faith inevitably involves the risk of Israel's life. Can she afford—or can she *not* afford—to proclaim her identity to the world as a people identified with God?" (emphasis original).

<sup>78</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus*, 372, writes that the presence of the blood "was a sign that those within the house, unlike their first parents, Adam and Eve, trusted, believed, and obeyed God."

<sup>79</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 776.

<sup>80</sup>Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 522.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 522-23. Similar is Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004), 98, who explains, "The old relationship established in Adam's disobedience had not been cancelled by the Exodus. Their privileged status had not brought them out of the kingdom of darkness. A greater Exodus must take place to bring about freedom from the tyranny of Sin."

Supper that now replaces the Passover, and also to the unity of those accepted by him as his people, his body.<sup>82</sup>

### Contours of a New Exodus

Francis Foulkes has written persuasively concerning the pattern of escalation that is apparent in the Bible, as one proceeds from type to antitype.<sup>83</sup> In other words, ancient Israel did not hope that Yahweh would simply repeat his previous actions in the future. Instead, they hoped for something more glorious to occur; an escalation of Yahweh's previous patterns. Derek Tidball has described Passover (in its Old Testament context) as being like a manual typewriter when compared to the escalated, more glorious antitype (word processor!) that is Christ, his cross, and the Lord's Supper.<sup>84</sup> G. K. Beale has likened the original Passover to the seed form of the greater apple tree that is Christ our Passover Lamb.<sup>85</sup> Without doubt, the New Testament presents a momentous amplification of what was only embryonic in the Old Testament Passover.

Where in the original exodus moment one nation had been held captive by a human Pharaoh and his nation of Egypt, in the new exodus moment it is the whole world that is held in slavery to sin and the devil.<sup>86</sup> Whereas in the original exodus moment the nation of Hebrews needed physical freedom from their exile in Egypt, in the time of the

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<sup>82</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 274.

<sup>83</sup>See Francis Foulkes, "The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 356-65.

<sup>84</sup>Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 66.

<sup>85</sup>G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 955.

<sup>86</sup>The thoughts in this paragraph owe a debt to four authors: Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 168; Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 170; Hoskins, "Deliverance from Death," 56-57; and Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 60.



new exodus every human being needs spiritual liberation from eternal exile from God.<sup>87</sup> In the original Passover moment, it was the death of a lamb combined with the death of the Egyptian firstborn that served to break the hold of oppression, and the gods of Egypt were judged. Praise God: in the second exodus, the lamb and the firstborn are the same person, and that person's death breaks the hold of the devil while making a spectacle of idols and powers.<sup>88</sup>

### **Christ: Both Lamb and Firstborn**

The discussion of Exodus 12:5 included a consideration of the Hebrew adjective *tāmim*, which translates into English as “without blemish.” The word conveys the ideas of wholeness, completeness, and perfection. God himself is described as *tāmim* (Deut 32:4; Job 37:16; Ps 19:7[8], etc.), and therefore demands offerings that are *tāmim*.

The word *tāmim* is sometimes used to describe a moral quality. For example, Noah was described as *tāmim* (“blameless”) in Genesis 6:9, and Abram was called to be *tāmim* (“blameless”) in Genesis 17:1. The psalmist also strove to be *tāmim* (“blameless”) in Psalms 18:23[24] and 101:2. When the apostle Peter uses the phrase “lamb without blemish or spot” in connection with Christ (1 Pet 1:19), he is not describing the mere physical characteristics of Christ. Rather, Peter is asserting the “blamelessness” of Christ; a blamelessness and moral perfection that had been applied by prophecy to the antitypical, supreme Passover lamb (Isa 11:5; 53:7-9).<sup>89</sup>

Jesus is the young, male, *tāmim* (in the sense of morally perfect) Passover lamb (John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6).<sup>90</sup> As the Passover lamb, Jesus dies during

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<sup>87</sup>Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 170.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 238. Christ as “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος: Luke 2:7; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; 12:23; Rev 1:5) receives attention in what follows.

<sup>89</sup>On the “blamelessness” of Jesus, see Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22, 41, 47; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 2:22.

<sup>90</sup>Some have also proposed that as the Passover Lamb, Jesus was also chosen “four days”

Passover season (Matt 26:18-20; John 18:28, 39; 19:14). The presence of hyssop (John 19:29; cf. Exod 12:22), shed blood (John 19:34; cf. Exod 12:7), and unbroken bones (John 19:36; cf. Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20), which surrounded his death, all add to the Passover atmosphere. Jesus is the lamb “slain” (Greek: σφάζω, used of the Passover lamb in Exod 12:6 [LXX]; and used of the lamb Jesus in Rev 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8), whose death is substitutionary in nature (1 Pet 3:18), and whose blood saves—not merely from a plague of physical death, but from the specter of eternal death (John 3:36; 8:24, 51).<sup>91</sup> Further, where Yahweh had “executed judgments” on the gods as the Passover lamb was slain (Exod 12:12), so Jesus as the lamb slain has “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame” (Col 2:15). Jesus is the all-glorious, divine lamb.

Yet at the very same time, Jesus is also the “firstborn” (Greek: πρωτότοκος; in Luke 2:7; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; 12:23; Rev 1:5).<sup>92</sup> Whereas in Exodus 12,

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before slaughter (see Exod 12:6). Mark A. Throntveit, “The Lord’s Supper as New Testament, Not New Passover,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (August 1997): 282, argues that Jesus was crucified on Thursday of Holy Week, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. Throntveit (282-83) writes, “Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But if the crucifixion took place on Thursday, then Palm Sunday is the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, which is the day the lambs selected for sacrifice on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan were taken to Jerusalem and ‘kept’ for three days according to Exodus 12:3-6. Jesus, ‘our paschal lamb’ (1 Cor. 5:7), enters Jerusalem surrounded by thousands of Passover lambs. The acclamation, with waving palms and cries of ‘Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord,’ functions as his ‘selection,’ and the fact that he does not leave the environs of Jerusalem, spending the nights in Bethany, serves as his being ‘kept’ until the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.” Taking a more “cosmic” approach to the idea of Jesus being chosen “four days” prior to his crucifixion is Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 60, who writes, “It may be significant that in Peter’s reckoning (2 Pe 3:8), ‘a day is like a thousand years.’ If Peter worked within the traditional chronology of the Bible, which reckons the coming of Christ at four thousand years after Creation, then his concept of Christ, the Passover lamb ‘chosen before the creation of the world,’ would fit the requirement of the lamb chosen four days before the Passover.” While there may indeed be merit in the proposals of both Throntveit and Sailhamer, the suggestion of Reymond, *The Lamb of God*, 25, which tries to attach allegorical significance to the terms “raw,” “boiled,” and “roasted” in Exod 12:9, seems altogether dubious and guilty of special pleading. Reymond (25) proposes (1) that a “raw Christ” would be “the liberal’s Christ whose bloody death is viewed simply as that of a martyr with no intrinsic saving benefits at all,” (2) that a “boiled Christ” is “the Arminian’s Christ whose death, while intended for all, is so weak and lacking in power to accomplish that for which it was intended,” and (3) that a “Christ roasted with fire” is “the biblical and Reformed Christ whose Lamb work on the cross entailed in a figure even his enduring the pains of hell fire for his people, thereby intrinsically saving them to the uttermost.”

<sup>91</sup>Hoskins, “Deliverance from Death,” 285, 291-93.

<sup>92</sup>The perspective of biblical theology informs one’s interpretation of the term πρωτότοκος in the New Testament. Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 174-75, explains, “The expression ‘the

the lamb's death served to protect Israelite sons, in the New Testament revelation, the firstborn son of Israel is no longer protected.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, God demands the death of his firstborn son in order that he might protect and save sinners.<sup>94</sup> Whereas in Exodus 12, each firstborn represented his biological Israelite family, in escalated fashion, the New Testament writers have the firstborn representing "all creation": Christ is the "firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15).<sup>95</sup> In Romans 8, the *whole creation* is described as needing redemption, and the firstborn, Christ, is the only one who can redeem it.<sup>96</sup> He is the firstborn, not simply over a single family, but he is the firstborn king (Ps 89:27) and lamb who dies to redeem the entire creation.

### Awaiting the Last Exodus

The lamb and firstborn of creation deserves the highest praise. The Christian is a person who has embraced and trusted the lamb and firstborn, Jesus, and the Christian is a person who lives an anticipatory life. Like those who lived in Egypt, in the seam moment between their bondage and freedom, the Christian lives in eager expectation of the final exodus. Henry Law captured this expectation well when he wrote, "Here is the believer waiting for his summons, with wings expanded towards his far-off home. Earth's ties are

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firstborn of all creation' is not a hierarchical or ontological description . . . it comes from the Passover where the firstborn was the designated victim bearing the judgment of the family's sin."

<sup>93</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 258.

<sup>94</sup>Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 165.

<sup>95</sup>On the assertion that "each firstborn represented his biological Israelite family," see Hoskins, "Deliverance from Death," 291; and Holland; *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 238-39. Concerning the phrase "firstborn of all creation" in Col 1:15, Holland, writes, "In calling Christ the *prōtotokos* of all creation Paul is attributing to the death of Christ, the only begotten or only beloved Son, something that no other firstborn's death ever achieved. His death has achieved the redemption of the whole of creation" (281).

<sup>96</sup>Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 239.

all severed. Anchors are weighed. The eye is strained for the signal. ‘Come up hither.’”<sup>97</sup> As believers await the final departure from the old age of sin, death, and the devil, at least four things should occupy their attention.

The first and most basic thing is that the believer must live an Exodus 12:7 existence. In other words, just as those who awaited the exodus from Egypt applied the lamb’s blood to their doorframes, trusting God, so the Christian must trust God and the power of Christ’s shed blood.<sup>98</sup> The final divine judgment is surely coming, and if one has not applied the blood of Christ, one will face eternal death.

Second (taking a cue from 1 Cor 5:7-9), in the power of the Spirit, Christians must work to purge sin from the church and from life in general.<sup>99</sup> As leaven was to be eradicated from each home during the Passover, so today the believer who awaits the final exodus must work to mortify the flesh and live holy. One is reminded to pay heed to Hebrews 12:14: “Strive for peace with everyone, *and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*”<sup>100</sup>

Third, the believer must obey the command of the lamb and firstborn, to feast regularly on his body and blood. Indeed, the Lord’s Supper is what Beale has called the “antitypical correspondence” to the Passover feast.<sup>101</sup> When celebrating the Lord’s Supper, the believer is nourished by symbolic representations of the lamb’s body and blood in the living presence of the crucified, Risen Jesus himself. The meal sustains the believer in preparation for the final exodus.

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<sup>97</sup>Henry Law, *The Gospel in Exodus* (1855; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 24.

<sup>98</sup>Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 171.

<sup>99</sup>Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 231.

<sup>100</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>101</sup>Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 818, 927.

Finally, the believer must also live an Exodus 12:11 existence. That is, the Christian must live with “belt fastened;” prepared for departure but also cognizant of the difficult journey that must be undertaken before reaching the final destination. The Greek words ὄσφῦς (“belt”) and περιζώννυμι (“fastened”) are both used in the Septuagint version of Exodus 12:11, and both terms are picked up by the New Testament writers in Luke 12:35, Ephesians 6:14, and 1 Peter 1:13. In those New Testament passages, ὄσφῦς and περιζώννυμι describe the preparedness of the believer. The Christian believer is a person whose mind is prepared for action (1 Pet 1:13), who fastens on the belt of truth (Eph 6:14), and who stands dressed for action (Luke 12:35).

The final exodus is coming. The new Pharaoh, the devil, has been defeated by Christ the Passover lamb; the firstborn of all creation. Protected by the blood of Jesus, may each believer purge out the leaven of sin by the power of the Spirit. May each Christian continue to keep the holy feast, being nourished by the body and blood of Jesus. May we be prepared for our final departure from the old age of sin, death, and the devil. Come quickly, O Risen Lamb of God!

## CHAPTER 7

### SPECTACLE AT THE SEA

#### A Seminal Occurrence

Some events are so momentous that they warrant more than one telling. For example, the Bible preserves a fourfold description of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each provide their own unique, book-length records of the seminal historical moment when God sent his Son into the world. Four distinct remembrances of Jesus were doubtless justified, since in him, the apex toward which the Old Testament pointed had arrived.

Long before the time of Jesus, there came the moment when God liberated his people from the clutches of Egypt. That redemptive occasion was so pivotal that multiple attestations were appropriate. Thus, Exodus 14 provides a prose account of the deliverance at the Red Sea, while Exodus 15 gives a poetic reflection on the same event.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, later Old Testament texts such as Psalms 66:6; 77:14-20; 78:13; 106:9-10; 136:10-15; and Isaiah 51:10; 63:12 each rehearse the Red Sea story in order to inculcate hope during later trials in which Israel found herself. Judging only by the amount of space devoted by the biblical authors to narrating the Red Sea events, one may safely conclude with John Currid: “The Red Sea crossing is the salient incident in the history of Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As noted by Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 337.

<sup>2</sup>John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:296. James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 130, adds that the Red Sea crossing “was the Lord’s greatest self-revelation to humanity up to that historical moment.”

At the Red Sea, life and deliverance were concurrent with death and judgment.<sup>3</sup> That is, in simultaneous fashion, Israel was liberated in order to complete further steps toward the Promised Land (Gen 12:7; 15:18-21), while Egypt suffered the judgment of a watery death in apt retribution for attempting to drown Israel's seed (Exod 1:22).<sup>4</sup> Just as Noah and his family had been brought to safety through the same water that had been employed to destroy all other living beings, now Moses and the Hebrew people would be protected through the same sea that would bring an end to their Egyptian oppressors.<sup>5</sup>

What follows is a journey through the prose account of the Red Sea events. Along the way, attention is given to the clear canonical connections—both backward to earlier parts of Exodus and to the book of Genesis, and forward to later parts of the Bible. In addition, applicatory comments are provided where appropriate.

### **Exodus 14:15-18: Yahweh Commands**

In Exodus 14:15, God directed some censure at Moses: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.’” Curiously, the verses preceding Exodus 14:15 record no “cry” on the part of Moses, but Exodus 14:10-12 does contain the “cry” of the people whom Moses was leading. The cry of the people was directed toward Yahweh (Exod 14:10) and was a response to the frightening, nearing proximity of the Egyptian army. If one wonders why the censure of Exodus 14:15 was

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<sup>3</sup>The comment of Bruckner, *Exodus*, 134, is on target: “Salvation and destruction came together. The sea of protection from evil was also the sea of destruction for evil forces.”

<sup>4</sup>On Yahweh using the Red Sea to drown the Egyptians in retribution for Egypt's attempt to drown Israelite boys, see Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:304; Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 272, 274; and Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1993), 274.

<sup>5</sup>So James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 96.

directed at Moses, and not at the people who had cried out, the conclusion of Peter Enns seems valid: “There is a close identification between Moses and the people he is leading,” and “what we see in 14:15 . . . is one reflex of this close identification between Moses and the Israelites: Their guilt becomes his.”<sup>6</sup> The one who represented the crying people is told by Yahweh to stop crying; a directive aimed ultimately at the crying people.<sup>7</sup> The time for complaint had passed—now was the time to act. Even though fearfully disheartened, the people had to move forward. Sometimes God will command forward movement even in the midst of what seems like impossible odds.

In the Hebrew text, the initial word of Exodus 14:16 is an emphatic “you!” “*You*, Moses, lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.”<sup>8</sup> The next verse of the Hebrew text begins with an emphatic “I,” as Yahweh says, “*I, behold I*, will harden the hearts of the Egyptians” (Exod 14:17).<sup>9</sup> Thus, the job description of Moses is enunciated

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<sup>6</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 274. See also Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:298; John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 390; and Stuart, *Exodus*, 338. A different argument has been presented by John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 192, who thinks that v. 15 represents a response to some actual complaint that Moses himself made, that is now lost to contemporary readers.

<sup>7</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus*, 390, concurs with the conclusion of Enns, writing, “[Moses] did not exist in some bubble apart from [the people]. If they were crying out, then in a real sense Moses was crying out too.”

<sup>8</sup>The debate concerning the precise location of the “Red Sea” of the exodus continues, and here is not the place to engage the discussion. Suffice it to say that some contemporary evangelical scholars, such as Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 171-72; and John N. Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2013), 107; conclude that the Israelites likely crossed on dry ground in a freshwater lake in northern Egypt. However, in a persuasive article, R. Larry Overstreet, “Exegetical and Contextual Facets of Israel’s Red Sea Crossing,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 63-86, argues against the lakes of northern Egypt as the location of the crossing, contending that the Gulf of Suez better matches the historical and geographical indicators presented in Scripture.

<sup>9</sup>The contrast between the emphatic אַתָּה of v. 16 and the emphatic אֲנִי הִנְנִי of v. 17 has been noted by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 443; and William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 497.



emphatically in verse 16, followed in verse 17 by an equally emphatic statement of what Yahweh will do. At the Red Sea, both Moses and Yahweh would play a distinct and important role.

Moses is commanded to raise his staff and stretch his hand over the water, a command that clearly echoes an earlier directive given to Aaron in connection with the first plague (Exod 7:19).<sup>10</sup> Aaron had been instructed to “take his staff and stretch out his hand over the waters” of Egypt, the result of which had been a curse upon Egypt. At the Red Sea, the action of the staff and hand of Moses over the waters issues further trouble for Egypt, but concurrently, the same action flowers into blessing for Israel.<sup>11</sup>

The staff and hand of Moses are to “divide” the sea. The word translated “divide” (Hebrew: *bāqa'*) is a deliberate echo of the flood narrative in Genesis. In Genesis 7:11, God caused the fountains of the great deep to “burst forth” (*bāqa'*) in his judgment on all living things. The re-employment of the verb at Exodus 14:16 appears as a conscious allusion to Genesis 7:11, and therefore to the motif of judgment: Moses is to *bāqa'* the sea, the eventuality of which will be judgment on Egypt.

A further allusion to the text of Genesis is found at the close of Exodus 14:16. Yahweh commands Moses to divide the sea so that the people might travel through it on “dry ground.” The word translated “dry ground” is the Hebrew *yabbāšâ*, a word found in the Hebrew Bible only three times prior to Exodus 14:16.<sup>12</sup> Two of those three instances occur in the creation narrative when God separated the waters from “dry land” (Gen 1:9-10). Since this relatively rare word gets re-employed in Exodus 14:16, it is not impossible to conceive that the writer of the Red Sea narrative would like his story to be read as a

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<sup>10</sup>Noted by Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:298; John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 253; and Stuart, *Exodus*, 338.

<sup>11</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:298.

<sup>12</sup>The three instances are Gen 1:9, 10, and Exod 4:9.

reworking of the creation story.<sup>13</sup> God will work with his servant Moses to divide the waters from the *yabbāšâ*, and in so doing will engage in some sort of fresh, creative enterprise.

If Exodus 14:15-16 is concentrated on the job description of Moses, Exodus 14:17 centers on God: his action and its result. In the Hebrew text, Exodus 14:17 begins with a phrase found previously in only two other places (Gen 6:17 and 9:9).<sup>14</sup> The phrase *wa`ānî hinēnî* (“and I, behold I”) is used in Genesis 6:17 as God declares, “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life,” and the same phrase is used in Genesis 9:9 as God declares to Noah and his sons, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you.” Thus, both uses in Genesis are connected with the flood narrative. When one reads *wa`ānî hinēnî* in Exodus 14:17, it seems clear that a connection is being made back to the flood story: at the Red Sea, God will once again employ the waters in cataclysmic fashion (for Egypt), but for blessing toward the new Noah and his sons—Moses and the Hebrew people.

Yahweh’s “I, behold I” invites readers in all eras to focus squarely on him. Facing the seeming impossibility of escape from the mighty Egyptian army—now approaching with venomous intent—Yahweh called upon his beleaguered people to look solely and exclusively upon him. When confronted with frightening circumstances, the optimum direction in which to look is only toward God.

In Exodus 14:17-18, Yahweh declares,

And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.

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<sup>13</sup>See Terence Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 159.

<sup>14</sup>Noted by Bruckner, *Exodus*, 135-36.

If, after Exodus 14:16, one expected Yahweh to say, “And I will liberate you all from Egypt,” one is disappointed. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Yahweh’s focus in Exodus 14:17-18 is not so much Israel’s deliverance as the securing of his own fame and glory.<sup>15</sup> In orchestrating events at the Red Sea, the primary purpose of God was to fashion honor for himself. Pharaoh forced “hard” (Hebrew: *kābēd*) work on God’s people (Exod 5:9), and Pharaoh “hardened” (*kābēd*) his own heart (Exod 7:14; 8:11 [15], 28 [32]; 9:34) toward God. In reply, God sent “heavy” (*kābēd*) plagues (Exod 8:20 [24]; 9:3, 18, 24; 10:14), and now Yahweh would gain “glory” (*kābēd*) over Pharaoh and his entourage at the Red Sea (Exod 14:17-18).<sup>16</sup> Pharaoh’s cutting-edge chariots would be a beggarly match for the God who wielded sun, sea, wind, and fire; the God who was determined to win himself glory.<sup>17</sup>

The plans having been laid out, God then engaged in final positioning, prior to his spectacle at the sea. It is this tactical maneuvering that occupies Exodus 14:19-20.

### **Exodus 14:19-20: Final Preparations**

Exodus 14:19-20 reads,

Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

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<sup>15</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 794, writes, “The real crisis is not the emancipation or survival of Israel, but the triumph of Yahweh over Pharaoh.” See also Fretheim, *Exodus*, 154.

<sup>16</sup>This sentence owes a debt of gratitude to the observations of William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses: Explaining the Lord’s Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs, ed. I. Howard Marshall et al. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 200.

<sup>17</sup>Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:230, describes Yahweh as the God who is “able to mobilize the cosmic powers, water and wind, cloud and fire, to set his people free and rout his adversaries.” Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 107, describes the chariots of Egypt as “the ancient equivalent of modern tanks,” and observes that the “Egyptians had the best chariot army in the world.” Even so, compared to Yahweh, the Egyptians with their chariots were pathetic.

Exodus 13:21 organically linked the “pillar of cloud” with Yahweh: “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them.” As noted by Enns, the “angel” of Exodus 14:19 functions essentially the same way Yahweh functioned in Exodus 13:21; therefore, it seems best to understand the “angel of God” in Exodus 14:19 as what Enns calls “a concrete manifestation of God’s presence with his people.”<sup>18</sup> Exodus 14:19 thus has God moving from front to back; from before his people to behind them.

The Hebrew of Exodus 14:20 is difficult, invariably yielding uncertain English translations. Yet despite incertitude, the reader can discern the function of God and his cloud: a separation between the Hebrews and the Egyptians was effected.<sup>19</sup> As recorded in Joshua 24:7, darkness was placed in between the two peoples—a darkness that hampered visibility of, and access to, one another.<sup>20</sup> The divine installation of darkness had at least three connotations. First, for the Egyptians, the presence of darkness was Yahweh’s suggestion that Ra, their sun-god, stood impotent, seemingly unable or unwilling to bring light.<sup>21</sup> Second (also for the Egyptians), darkness at the sea portended fresh woe, for in recent days darkness had preceded the awful events of the tenth plague (Exod 10:22-23).<sup>22</sup> Third (and perhaps most important), for the one who knew and believed the Genesis narrative of creation, the coming of darkness was a hopeful sign that a new creative moment was afoot. Darkness (Hebrew: *hōšek*) had been present just prior to the creation of the world (Gen 1:2), and now in Exodus 14:20, darkness (*hōšek*) was

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<sup>18</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 275. See also Stuart, *Exodus*, 340. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:300, understands the angel as a “pre-incarnate appearance of the Messiah.”

<sup>19</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 341. See also Durham, *Exodus*, 193.

<sup>20</sup>So Durham, *Exodus*, 193.

<sup>21</sup>So Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:300.

<sup>22</sup>Noted by Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 108. Also see Enns, *Exodus*, 275.

the precursor to something momentous.<sup>23</sup> Now Yahweh would work again for his people in creative power.

### Exodus 14:21: A Genesis Moment

That Exodus 14:21 is portraying a moment of new creation is evident from the language of the text: “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.” The terms “sea” (*yām*), “wind” (*rúah*), “night” (*laylāh*), and “waters” (*mayim*) appear as direct echoes of the creation narrative (respectively, these terms allude back to Gen 1:10, 2, 5, 2). Additionally, the separation of water from dry land in Exodus 14:21 is a conscious allusion to Genesis 1:9. Thus, Bernard Och is not overstating the case when he asserts that “the crossing of the sea is a microcosmic re-enactment of the original act of creation.”<sup>24</sup> As Yahweh had organized his creation out of a state of chaotic *tōhū wābōhū* (Gen 1:2), so now, in the chaos of Israel’s fearful expectation of re-capture, Yahweh would work fresh creative wonders.<sup>25</sup> At the original moment of creation, life

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<sup>23</sup>Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 108, summarizes, “Darkness coming here before the crossing of the sea, a darkness reminiscent of both the culmination of the plagues and the commencement of the world, augurs an impending and momentous change: the end of life for some, the beginning of life for others.”

<sup>24</sup>Bernard Och, “Creation and Redemption: Towards a Theology of Creation,” *Judaism* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 236. See also Bruckner, *Exodus*, 132; Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 794; Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 217; Robin Routledge, “The Exodus and Biblical Theology,” in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, ed. R. Michael Fox (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 204; Rikk E. Watts, “Exodus,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2000), 480. One may also note biblical texts in which creation and redemption appear overlaid (or fused together), such as Ps 74:12-14 and Isa 51:9-10. Concerning the close relationship between creation and redemption, Och, “Creation and Redemption,” 230, is compelling: “Creation and redemption belong together as the obverse and reverse of the same theological coin; they are dynamically interrelated aspects of God’s plan for the world. Creation is the end; redemption is the means. Redemption serves the creational goal by enabling humanity to live the life it was created to live. God’s redemptive activity liberates humankind from the earthly forces of decreation so that humanity can reengage itself in the realization of God’s creational plan. Redemption frees the creation to become what God had originally intended.”

<sup>25</sup>Commenting on Exod 14:21, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 159 writes, “The effect is *an act of creation*. Dry land appears in the midst of chaos, just as in Gen. 1:9-10 (cf. 8:13) at the separation of the waters”

had teemed on the land after its separation from the waters (Gen 1:11-13). Now at the Red Sea, as Yahweh detached sea from seabed, he was ensuring life for his people.<sup>26</sup> Like Jonah who faced terror by water but who was (miraculously) granted new life, so God's people would escape their ordeal at the Red Sea as God's new, liberated creation.<sup>27</sup> God's purpose in delivering Israel through the birth canal of the Red Sea was to create a people who, in the words of Och, would "mediate the presence of God to the world."<sup>28</sup>

Exodus 14:21 makes clear that the main actor in the Red Sea miracle was Yahweh: "The LORD drove the sea back."<sup>29</sup> Isaiah 63:12 confirms this truth, and texts such as Psalms 65:7, 89:9, and 107:25-30 affirm Yahweh's sovereign power over the waters. The God who can control the oceans and heap them into walls (should he desire), is a God who must be worshipped and trusted. Currid poses some penetrating questions to the reader of Exodus: "Dare we think that the God who divided the Red Sea is powerless to intervene in our lives, that he is unable to care for us? Do we think that he is

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(emphasis original). See also Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 102.

<sup>26</sup>In this observation I am indebted to Enns, *Exodus*, 274, who comments, "In Genesis 1, the dry land brings forth the myriad of creatures who will live there. So too in Exodus, the dry land will give life to the Israelites." See also Peter Enns, "Exodus (Book)," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Alexander and Rosner, 148.

<sup>27</sup>So Bruckner, *Exodus*, 134.

<sup>28</sup>Och, "Creation and Redemption," 234.

<sup>29</sup>Yet, while it is true that Exod 14:21 attributes the mastery of the sea to Yahweh, the verse also indicates the means by which Yahweh mastered the sea. Yahweh enlisted the hand of Moses, and Yahweh drove back the sea "by a strong east wind all night." Yahweh is not above utilizing the natural world ("wind") combined with time ("all night") to accomplish his ends. As has been pointed out by Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 42, in later Old Testament history Yahweh would use hail to defeat the Canaanites (Josh 10:9-11). At the Red Sea he was using wind in his campaign against Egypt.

somehow shackled?”<sup>30</sup> When circumstances appear frightening and hopeless, one must run to the God who drove back the sea.

### Exodus 14:22-23: One Seabed, Two Attitudes

Perhaps one of the best and most concise summaries of Exodus 14:22-23 was offered by Henry Law: “Faith walks dry-shod. Presumption drowns.”<sup>31</sup> In crossing the parted Red Sea, the faith-filled were the people of God (a fact confirmed by Heb 11:29), while the presumptuous ones were the Egyptians. Yahweh’s people trusted Yahweh for safe passage through the cleaved sea, while Egypt trusted only in their own ability to apprehend the fleeing slaves.

Exodus 14:22 reads, “And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” As in Exodus 14:16, the Hebrew term translated “dry ground” in Exodus 14:22 is *yabbāšā* (cf. Gen 1:9-10), once again highlighting the creational motif. Israel was becoming a new creation through their trial by water. For its part, by the power of Yahweh, the water stood like a “wall” (Hebrew: *hômāh*) on either side of the journeying Hebrews. Texts such as Leviticus 25:29-30 and Joshua 6:5 use the word *hômāh* in conjunction with *‘ir* (“city”), while texts such as Deuteronomy 3:5; 28:52 combine *hômāh* with *gābōah* (“high”). An argument can thus be made that the liquid *hômāh* in question in Exodus 14:22 is to be understood as substantial and massive; a high wall that would surround a city. Helpful is the description provided by Douglas Stuart:

The term used for ‘wall’ [in Exod 14:22] . . . connotes a very large wall—not a small stone wall or retaining wall but always a massively large (usually a city) wall, towering above the Israelites, who marched on dry land with walls of water on either side of them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:308.

<sup>31</sup>Henry Law, *The Gospel in Exodus* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 44.

<sup>32</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 342.

With noteworthy faith, the people of God ventured through the seabed while giant walls of water stood suspended to their right and left. The reflection offered by John Oswalt is apt: “Faith forever calls us to live through the nights of uncertainty and fear, with no assurance of a good outcome apart from the word of God and the signs of his presence.”<sup>33</sup> God had commanded movement, and the sign of his presence was the walls of water. These assurances were enough. The people ventured forth in faith.

Very different was the seaward approach of the Egyptians. Exodus 14:23 reads: “The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.” Presumption drowns. The narration provided by Nahum Sarna is colorful and accurate: “Impelled by evil purposes, their judgment deranged by their brutal obstinacy, the Egyptian forces plunge headlong into the turbulent waters.”<sup>34</sup> Where Israel had set foot onto the seabed in faith, Egypt scrambled forward in hubris, galloping in oblivious haste toward their ruin.

The repetition in Exodus 14:23 of the phrase, “Pharaoh, chariots, and horsemen” (see Exod 14:17; also 14:26, 28), serves to underscore a military mismatch. Even with their impressive, innovative, formidable military technology, the Egyptians were unequal to the task of overcoming the God who controlled nature. Moreover, the divine sway, even over their action in rushing after the Israelites (see Exod 14:17), meant that the Egyptians were fighting a battle they could never hope to win.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in the verses that follow, the fortunes of Egypt descend from bad to worse.

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<sup>33</sup>Oswalt, *Exodus*, 390.

<sup>34</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 73.

<sup>35</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 339-40, notes the connection between God’s declaration in Exod 14:17 and Egypt’s action in Exod 14:23, as does Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 499.



### Exodus 14:24-25: In Wheel Trouble

At some point between 2:00 and 6:00 a.m., Yahweh fixed his gaze upon the Egyptian army, and the result for Egypt was abject discomfiture.<sup>36</sup> Exodus 14:24 reads, “And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptians forces into a panic.” Certainly it is plausible to understand the “look” of Yahweh in light of the description of Red Sea events given in Psalm 77:17-18.<sup>37</sup> That passage chronicles a terrific electrical storm; a storm that happened as the people made their way through the Red Sea. Perhaps the “look” of Yahweh in Exodus 14:24 may be tethered to the storm of Psalm 77, thus helping to explain the “panic” borne in the Egyptians. Regardless, what is clear in Exodus 14:24 is that the “look” of Yahweh—however one understands it—produced “panic” within the ranks of Egypt.<sup>38</sup>

The Hebrew word translated “panic” is *hāmam*. According to Walter Kaiser, the verb *hāmam* is often used “to describe the panic and disarray of an army before a superior challenger, especially when God enters the battle.”<sup>39</sup> Where only fourteen verses prior the people of Israel had been fearfully vexed because of Egypt (Exod 14:10), now, because of Yahweh, Egypt became the victim of agitated dismay.<sup>40</sup> One can only imagine the scene. Soldiers frightened, horses anxious, commanders confused, order undone. The Divine Warrior had arrived, and the enemy found himself gravely outclassed.

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<sup>36</sup>Both Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:303, and Sarna, *Exodus*, 74, identify the “morning watch” of Exod 14:24 as the period between 2:00 and 6:00 a.m.

<sup>37</sup>A possibility suggested by both Kaiser, *Exodus*, 444, and Mackay, *Exodus*, 257.

<sup>38</sup>Kaiser, *Exodus*, 443, argues that Yahweh’s “look is never just ocular but [is] also a demonstration of some wrath or mercy.” Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 380, suggests a parallel between the “look” of Yahweh in Exod 14:24 and the “look” of the angelic figures in Gen 18:16, just prior to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

<sup>39</sup>Kaiser, *Exodus*, 443. In support, Kaiser (443-44) mentions the use of מַחֲמָה in Exod 23:27; Josh 10:10, Jdg 4:15; 1 Sam 7:10, and Ps 18:14.

<sup>40</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 227.

Effortlessly, Yahweh struck Egypt where Egypt was recognized as most powerful: its chariots.<sup>41</sup> In Exodus 14:25, Egypt's wheel trouble is attributed to Yahweh. Yahweh set about "clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily." The verb translated "clogging" (Hebrew: *sûr*) has been understood in three general senses. Some scholars render the verb as "removed," contending that perhaps the axles of the chariots broke off or were sufficiently damaged to prevent movement.<sup>42</sup> Others argue that *sûr* should be understood in the sense of "clog" or "bind" or "bog down."<sup>43</sup> Representative is Stuart:

The binding of chariot wheels would seem most naturally to refer to bogging down—most likely because the sea floor was soft and sandy/silty so that even though it was dry, it was not a suitable surface for narrow, metal-bound chariot wheels bearing the weight of a chariot and two or three armed men.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, it is entirely possible that Yahweh caused the wheels to lock or clog because of stubborn sand and/or problematic strands of seaweed. However, the third possibility, that *sûr* should be rendered "turning aside," appears to have the best connections to the wider text of Exodus.<sup>45</sup> Yahweh "turned aside" the wheels of the

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<sup>41</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 277.

<sup>42</sup>See Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:304, Hamilton, *Exodus*, 213; Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:272.

<sup>43</sup>See Oswalt, *Exodus*, 387; Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out: A Fresh Look at Exodus* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974), 90-91; Sarna, *Exodus*, 74; and Stuart, *Exodus*, 343. John H. Stek, "What Happened to the Chariot Wheels of Exod 14:25?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (June 1986): 293, acknowledges that סור can certainly mean "turn aside" (instead of "clog"), and for Exod 14:25, recommends a reading of אסר ("bind") instead of סור. With reference to the argument of Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 500, a reading of אסר in Exod 14:25 would connect the verse directly to Exod 14:6: As Pharaoh had "harnessed" (אסר) his chariots in preparation for battle (Exod 14:6), now Yahweh was "harnessing" (אסר) the wheels of those same chariots, causing them to be useless (Exod 14:25).

<sup>44</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 343.

<sup>45</sup>This third position is promoted by Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 318; and Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 380.

chariots, perhaps making them swerve into one another.<sup>46</sup> This “turning aside” of wheels was a judgment on Egypt, just as the plagues had been judgments on Egypt that on two occasions had prompted Pharaoh to beg for their “turning aside” (*sûr*: Exod 8:8 [4]; 10:17). If Yahweh had graciously “turned aside” former judgments (see the use *sûr* of in Exod 8:31 [27]), now the “turning aside” of Yahweh was *for* judgment. Quite possibly then, one is to understand the use of *sûr* in Exodus 14:25 in the same sense as the previous uses in Exodus 8:8 [4], 31 [27] (where the meaning “clogged” can hardly be intended). The wheels “turned aside” or “swerved,” perhaps because of ruts on the seabed, the result of which was “heavy” (Hebrew: *kēbēdūt*) driving.

At the end of Exodus 14:25, one finds a rather startling confession on the part of the panicked Egyptians: “And the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.’”<sup>47</sup> Now at last, the nation of Egypt came to recognize the identity and power of Yahweh, in fulfilment of Exodus 14:4, 18, and Yahweh was glorified.<sup>48</sup> At the Red Sea, pagan Egypt acknowledged the insuperable power of Yahweh, God of Israel. The irony, of course, is that scant verses prior, Israel had not quite agreed with Egypt’s assessment that Yahweh “fought for them” (see Exod 14:11-12). Not until Exodus 15:3 would Israel confess that Yahweh was a “man of war.” The comment of Walter Brueggemann is wry, yet insightful: “When one hears the

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<sup>46</sup>So Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 380.

<sup>47</sup>Noteworthy is the fact that the phrase translated “and the Egyptians said” is וַיִּאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם lit. “and Egypt said.” Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 380, argues that the phrase should be rendered in the literal sense, commenting, “Symbolically, the Egyptian army is Egypt. The idea is not just that the individual Egyptians soldiers were terrified, but that Egypt as a whole was thrown into a panic.”

<sup>48</sup>Centuries later, a pagan Roman centurion standing before the cross would acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 15:39). Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 796, writes that the confession made by Egypt in Exod 14:25 is “a grudging admission of defeat, [and] anticipates the parallel statement in Mark 15:39, whereby the power of Rome at long concedes the power of Jesus.”

Egyptian confession, one may conclude that we have not seen such faith in all of Israel (cf. Matt 8:10).”<sup>49</sup>

The confession of Egypt did not issue in their freedom from Yahweh. Rather, the final chapter of their oceanic ordeal was imminent. Exodus 14:26-28 gives the account of Egypt’s demise by water.

### **Exodus 14:26-28: Shaking Off Insects**

In the very moment when Egypt faced problems with their technology and panic within their ranks, Yahweh commanded Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen” (Exod 14:26). Exodus 14:27 reports the immediate obedience of Moses, the result of which was that “the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea.” When morning appeared, the help (Ps 46:5), joy (Ps 30:5), and light (Isa 58:8) of Yahweh came for Israel, but simultaneously, for Egypt the terror of Yahweh descended as her forces were inundated by an overwhelming abundance of water.<sup>50</sup> In vivid terms, Cornelis Houtman describes Egypt’s situation: “The Egyptians fled pell-mell; colliding with the onrushing waves, they are knocked over and pulled along, and later their bodies wash up on shore.”<sup>51</sup> In what Victor Hamilton has called “an anticipation of how the walls of Jericho fall inward on the residents of Jericho,” Exodus 14:27 records the collapse of liquid walls that tumbled over and drowned the hapless Egyptians.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 795.

<sup>50</sup>The motif of “morning” in Exod 14:27, and its connection to the passages cited, was noted by Mackay, *Exodus*, 258.

<sup>51</sup>Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:274-75.

<sup>52</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 219. See also Fretheim, *Exodus*, 160. Concerning the question of whether Pharaoh died in the waters of the Red Sea, both Kaiser, *Exodus*, 444; and Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:275, note

Yahweh “threw” the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The verb translated “threw” is the Hebrew word *nā‘ar*. In Nehemiah 5:13, the word *nā‘ar* describes the “shaking” of a garment, as if one took his coat or blanket onto the porch in order to shake off dust. In similar fashion, in other places the word *nā‘ar* depicts the “shaking” or “shaking off” of the wicked (Job 38:12-13), leaves (Isa 33:9), or hands (Isa 33:15). Several commentators thus argue that the use of *nā‘ar* in Exodus 14:27 implies a “shaking off.”<sup>53</sup> At the Red Sea, Yahweh “shook off” Egypt as one would shake debris from a rug.

With reference to Egypt, the close of Exodus 14:28 reports, “Not one of them remained.” In the original Hebrew text, the language of the phrase “not one of them remained” is striking in its similarity to both Exodus 8:31 [27] and 10:19, where during the plagues, flies and locusts were removed so that “not one of them remained.”<sup>54</sup> The close connection between the language in all three passages may suggest that in Exodus 14:28, the Egyptians are to be regarded like flies and/or locusts; insects that Yahweh shakes off easily at the sea.<sup>55</sup>

A great boomerang effect can be discerned in Exodus 14:28. When one recalls that early in the book of Exodus, Egypt had desired to drown what Rikk Watts has called “a potential Israelite army,” the poetic justice of Exodus 14:28 becomes palpable.<sup>56</sup> For

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that Ps 136:15 provides an affirmative answer.

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 1:305; M. V. VanPelt and W. C. Kaiser, “נער,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:123; George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 106; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 213; and Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 227.

<sup>54</sup>See Overstreet, “Exegetical and Contextual Facets,” 69. In the book of Exodus, the phrase לא־נשאַר (“not left”) used in conjunction with אֶחָד (“one”) is a combination found only at Exod 8:27; 10:19; and 14:28, which leads one to believe that the use of such language at 14:28 is a conscious echo of the two earlier passages.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Watts, “Exodus,” 480. Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 101, notes that the phrase כָּל־עֲבָדוֹת (“all the armies/ divisions”) is used in reference to the people of God in Exod 12:41, and comments, “The

now it is the Egyptian army who are “covered” (Hebrew: *kāsāh*) by water, while Israel—like baby Moses had done—passes safely through the water.<sup>57</sup> One pauses to reflect on the connection between the scene of Exodus 14:28 (cf. Exod 1:22), and the retributive justice described in Psalm 7:14-16:

Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.<sup>58</sup>

The demise of Egypt happened by the same method that the Egyptians had earlier chosen to annihilate Israel. With the oppressor drowned, a final reflection on the Red Sea spectacle was appropriate. Exodus 14:29-31 contains a summary statement of events, together with some contemplation of their effect on Israel.

### **Exodus 14:29-31: Epilogue to the Spectacle**

In terms of chronology, the events described in Exodus 14:29 are not subsequent to those outlined in Exodus 14:28.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the depiction of the people of Israel walking on dry ground through the sea in Exodus 14:29, which comes *after* the report of Egypt’s drowning in Exodus 14:28, is not to be understood in chronological terms. Rather, Exodus 14:29 must be taken as a narrative summary: that day at the Red Sea, “the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left”—even though for Egypt the story was very different! Israel survived an impossible situation—all praise to Yahweh!—while Egypt drowned.

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people bound for freedom is God’s army, and Moses is God’s commander (see also 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 51).”

<sup>57</sup>See the use of כָּסָה (“cover”) at Gen 7:19, 20, where the waters of the Flood “covered” the earth.

<sup>58</sup>In making the connection between Exod 14:28 and Ps 7:14-16, I am indebted to Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 101.

<sup>59</sup>In this paragraph I am following the suggestion of Stuart, *Exodus*, 345.

Exodus 14:30 continues the summation: “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.”

Exodus 14:30 contains an allusion, an assertion, and an appraisal. First, the verse alludes backward to Exodus 14:13, where Moses had beckoned the people to “see the salvation of Yahweh.”<sup>60</sup> Now as the people “saw” the corpses of Egyptian soldiers on the shore, the salvation of Yahweh became clear and apparent.

The assertion of Exodus 14:30 can be found in the phrase, “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.” John Durham writes of the import of the assertion:

*Yahweh* rescued Israel that day from the power of the Egyptians. The manner of his doing it is incidental to the fact that *Yahweh* is the one who made the rescue. Not tides, not storms, not bad planning, not tactical error, not bad luck, or good luck, but *Yahweh*.<sup>61</sup>

There is no savior besides Yahweh (Isa 43:11) and his only Son (Matt 1:21; 2 Cor 5:19). As concerned the staggering salvific power exercised at the Red Sea, every shred of praise was due to Yahweh.

The appraisal in Exodus 14:30 may be found in the words, “Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.” The estimation made by Israel in this moment is best summarized by Walter Brueggemann: “All that is visible are dead Egyptians: Egyptian soldiers, Egyptian horses, Egyptian chariots, Egyptian power, and Egyptian arrogance.”<sup>62</sup> In the original Hebrew, the text reads literally, “Israel saw *Egypt* dead.”<sup>63</sup> Israel looked

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<sup>60</sup>So Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 227.

<sup>61</sup>Durham, *Exodus*, 197, emphasis original.

<sup>62</sup>Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 795.

<sup>63</sup>As in Exod 14:25, Garrett, *Exodus*, 381, argues that in Exod 14:30, the word מִצְרַיִם should be translated in the singular (“Egypt”) instead of the plural (“Egyptians”).

and appraised the situation with fear and wonder. Because of Yahweh, the nation of Egypt was now dead to Israel, and thus her new life was just beginning.<sup>64</sup> All praise to Yahweh!

Exodus 14:31 concludes both the epilogue and the chapter itself: “Israel saw the great power<sup>65</sup> that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.” Thus the episode ends with faith. The people of Israel believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses. Judging by the wider text of Exodus (see especially Exod 32:8), the faith of Israel at Exodus 14:31 was by no means unassailable.<sup>66</sup> However, for the time being the faith of those rescued at the Red Sea was sufficient to issue in God-centered praise (Exod 15).

Important is the observation that Exodus 15 *does* center praise on God, and never on Moses, despite the rather startling mention (in Exod 14:31) of the corporate belief in Moses. One must understand “belief in Moses” in terms of trust in one who represents God. Moses could only be “believed in” by the people because Moses had been commissioned by God to speak in God’s name.<sup>67</sup>

Having journeyed through the prose narration of the Red Sea spectacle, attention now turns to its connection to the New Testament. Valid links may be found between Exodus 14:15-31 and both the person of Jesus and the believer in him.

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<sup>64</sup>Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 795, forges a connection between the death of Egypt in Exod 14:30 and Egypt’s comment in Exod 12:33, that they would “all be dead” because of Israel’s presence among them.

<sup>65</sup>“Great power” is אֲתֵּי־יָד הַגְּדֹלָה (lit., “great hand”). The word יָד (“hand”) occurs seven times in Exod 14. Israel leaves Egypt with “raised hand” (Exod 14:8); Moses is commanded twice to stretch his “hand” over the Red Sea (Exod 14:16, 26), and does so twice (Exod 14:21, 27); Yahweh saves Israel from the “hand” of Egypt (Exod 14:30), doing so by his own great “hand” (Exod 14:31).

<sup>66</sup>For the thought in this sentence and the next I am indebted to Mackay, *Exodus*, 260.

<sup>67</sup>So Fretheim, *Exodus*, 161; and Mackay, *Exodus*, 260.



## The Red Sea, the Savior, and the Saved

Jesus is the true and obedient Israel who comes out of Egypt (Matt 2:15). Jesus is the new Moses who has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses (Heb 3:3). Where Moses led his people toward a physical land in which they would stay for a temporary period, Jesus leads his people to an eternal, unfading inheritance. Where Moses led God's people out of a nation (Egypt) with a human ruler (Pharaoh), Jesus leads God's people out of what Enns rightly calls "a country more oppressive than Egypt (the present world order characterized by sin, death, and eternal separation from God) and governed by a ruler far worse than Pharaoh (Satan)."<sup>68</sup>

Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh. Along the path toward his *ἐξόδος* (Luke 9:31), Jesus drowned oppressors in the sea in order to create anew the oppressed (Mark 5:1-20).<sup>69</sup> Like Yahweh who worked the spectacle at the sea on behalf of his enslaved people, Jesus is the Redeemer who by the power of the cross liberates captives from their enslavement (Luke 1:68; Gal 4:3-5).

The one who has put faith and trust in Jesus has—in Exodus-styled language—"crossed over" from death to life (John 5:24 NIV).<sup>70</sup> In obedience to the command of Jesus, the believer has experienced his or her Red Sea event in the waters of baptism (1 Cor 10), leaving behind enslavement to sin, death, and the devil; burying the old in order to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4) as God's new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).<sup>71</sup>

The believer is aware that he or she now lives in the company of other saints, somewhere in between the Red Sea of baptism and the Promised Land of eternal Sabbath

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<sup>68</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 287.

<sup>69</sup>On Mark 5:11-20 and its possible connection to Exod 14 and 15, see Hamilton, *Exodus*, 220.

<sup>70</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 289.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 287.

rest.<sup>72</sup> In the perceptive words of Brevard Childs, the church “now lives still in the desert somewhere between the Red Sea and the Jordan.”<sup>73</sup> In fact, the Bible promises that a final seaside exultation of the Lamb of God awaits all those who will “conquer the beast and its image and the number of its name” (Rev 15:2-3). May those who have been washed by the blood of the Passover Lamb and drenched in the Red Sea of baptism persevere in their wilderness, living holy lives in anticipation of that great day. May the church occupy its wilderness moment reiterating the news of God’s saving power in Christ; news so momentous that it warrants the most fervent, repeated expressions.

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<sup>72</sup>Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 239.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

CHAPTER 8  
REDEEMED FOR MISSION

**Married at the Mountain**

The wedding day was fast approaching, but the bride-to-be displayed an alarming disappointment with her future husband.<sup>1</sup> The constancy of the bride's vocal displeasure in the days leading up to the wedding was especially concerning, since her fiancé had shown nothing but love and tender affection toward her. Yet amazingly, despite the gripes and ingratitude of the bride, with determination the groom forged ahead and married her. Still more astonishing was the groom's speech during the wedding service, in which he described his bride as his special treasure.

Israel journeyed toward Mount Sinai. Along the way, the people repeatedly voiced their dissatisfaction with Yahweh (Exod 15:24; 16:2-3, 8; 17:2-3; 7), who in great power and love had redeemed them out of Egypt. With tender, selfless care, Yahweh listened to the thankless complaints of Israel and provided them with fresh water, quail, and manna (Exod 15:25, 27; 16:13-14). Finally, the grumbling people arrived at the mountain. There, because of the astonishing determination of Yahweh, malcontent Israel was married to her affectionate Husband (Exod 19-24).<sup>2</sup> As Yahweh declared his vows, he described Israel as his *səgūllâ*; his "treasured possession" amongst the world of nations.

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<sup>1</sup>The idea for both this paragraph and the next arose after reading Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1993), 424, who writes, "Notwithstanding Israel's disobedience in the wilderness (15:22-17:7), YHWH shows himself willing to continue with Israel [beginning in Exod 19]; he even offers Israel a lasting relationship: Israel will occupy an exclusive position among the nations, be the only people granted a personal bond with him, provided it be faithful to him, heeding his precepts (19:5, 6)."

<sup>2</sup>Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon,

The marriage would bring glory to the Husband and benefit to the bride.<sup>3</sup>

Yahweh's original plan, to have his image-bearers flourish and spread his glory throughout the world (Gen 1:28), had never changed. The ones standing before Yahweh at Mount Sinai were those descended from Abraham, and through them, the promise of Genesis 12:3 would be realized. Israel would serve as the divinely chosen vehicle through which Yahweh would spread his blessing to the nations. As the new Adam, Israel would be taught the contours of human flourishing (Exod 20-24) and thereby become a showcase to the nations of God's glory, ways, and purposes.

Exodus 19 begins the Sinai narrative, a narrative that then proceeds through the remainder of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and the initial ten chapters of Numbers (up to Num 10:10). The Sinai narrative is thus fifty-nine chapters long, and when one recognizes that sixty-eight chapters of Scripture exist prior to the Sinai narrative, and fifty-nine chapters

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2000), 78-79, provides one of the best descriptions of the "wedding" that is Exod 19-24: "The wedding service goes from Exodus 19-24. Moses is the minister officiating at the wedding. He goes up on the mountain to hear the Lord's word and then brings it back down to the people. The Husband's part of the wedding service begins with the Lord reminding His bride of what He has done for her (Exodus 20:1-2). Then Yahweh tells Israel how they are to live as His holy people (Exodus 20-23). When Moses brings these words to the people they say, basically, 'I do': 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!' (Exodus 24:3). The wedding ceremony ends with a wedding reception, a feast in the Lord's presence (Exodus 24:9-11). Now that Yahweh and Israel are married, Yahweh decides to move in with His bride. Most of the rest of Exodus is about the kind of house He wants Israel to build for Him (Exodus 25-40)." It should be stressed that long before Israel's appointment with Yahweh at Mount Sinai, the Hebrew people already enjoyed a relationship with Yahweh. As Terence E. Fretheim, "Because the Whole Earth Is Mine: Theme and Narrative in Exodus," *Interpretation* 50, no. 3 (July 1996): 234, has noted, as far back as Gen 17:9-10; 22:18; and 26:5, Yahweh had been using the language of *keeping his covenant* and *obeying his voice*—precisely the same language that he uses during the initial phase of the mountain meeting (Exod 19:5). A prior relationship had already been established. Indeed, long before Israel's meeting with Yahweh at the mountain, Yahweh had already called the people "my people" (Exod 3:7, 10), and "my son" (Exod 4:22, 23). Therefore one might say that in Exod 19-24, Yahweh and Israel move from betrothal to marriage.

<sup>3</sup>The thought in this paragraph is an amalgamation of the observations made by T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 84; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 101; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 304; and Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 110.

after it (to round out the Torah), one notices the centrality of this narrative to the Torah.<sup>4</sup> Almost one-third of the Torah is devoted to the Sinai narrative, a remarkable fact when one considers that the Torah covers a time-period of nearly three millennia, but Israel spent only eleven months at Sinai.<sup>5</sup> Since Exodus 19 marks the beginning of this larger, momentous section of Scripture, careful consideration of its initial verses is both important and advantageous.

### Exodus 19:1-3: Arrival at the Mountain

Exodus 19:1-2 reports that the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai within three months of their departure from the land of Egypt.<sup>6</sup> The mountain locale was significant for at least two reasons.<sup>7</sup> First, Moses would remember the breathtaking experience that had happened years prior at the burning bush. There, Yahweh had promised Moses that once the Hebrew people departed Egypt, they would one day arrive to serve

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<sup>4</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 100.

<sup>5</sup>According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 48, the Pentateuch covers a period of 2,706 years.

<sup>6</sup>I have chosen the phrase “within three months” instead of “exactly three months” because the Hebrew that begins Exod 19:1 (בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי) can be translated “three months to the day” (so both Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006], 420, and the New Jerusalem Bible); or it can indicate that the Israelites arrived *within* the third month (“in the third month”: so the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible). Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 458, concludes, “The most reasonable interpretation is that they arrived on the fifteenth day of the third calendar month, that is, two months to the day after their departure from Egypt.”

<sup>7</sup>With regard to the precise location of the mountain, debate continues. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 471, lists several contenders for the site, including Gebel Musa, Ras es-Safsafah, Gebel Serbal, and a “mountain near Al-Hrob.” Kaiser argues that Gebel Musa is the most likely location, but others, such as Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 299; and Bruce Wells, “Exodus,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 228-29, confess uncertainty. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 299, suggests that perhaps to prevent the worship of a certain site (i.e., “mountainolatry”), the Lord has allowed the precise identification of the site to elude readers.

Yahweh at Mount Sinai (Exod 3:12).<sup>8</sup> Now the promise was fulfilled. Moses and the people stood before the mountain, redeemed miraculously from the grip of Egypt. How stirring it must have been for Moses that day; how awe-inspiring and faith-building.

The second significance of the mountain can be ascertained when considering the symbolic weight of mountains in the minds of ancient peoples. Walter Brueggemann explains, “The mountain is the place where earth touches heaven, where the human realm makes contact with the abode of God (or the gods). The place thus is laden with holy presence.”<sup>9</sup> Israel had now arrived at this mountain; this conduit between earth and heaven. After a voyage of many weeks, the people had stopped for an extended break at this holy place—and it is sometimes in stopping that one can best hear the voice of the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

Exodus 19:3 has Moses ascending the mountain, his heart no doubt brimming with expectation, and Yahweh speaks. Yahweh wants Moses to address “the house of Jacob and . . . the people of Israel”—a dual identification that stresses both an unassuming start (they are the offspring of Jacob: Gen 28:13; 35:11), and an achieved

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<sup>8</sup>The connection between Exod 3:12 and Israel’s arrival at the “mountain” in Exod 19:2 has been made by several commentators, including James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 171; Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 385; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 208; Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 119; House, *Old Testament Theology*, 109; Houtman, *Exodus*, 424; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 471; Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 126; John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 323; John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 431; and Stuart, *Exodus*, 420.

<sup>9</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, The New Interpreters Bible, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 834.

<sup>10</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 298, writes, “It is when Israel halts the travels and puts down stakes in the ground, at least for a while, that the Lord’s word to Israel becomes most extensive and most compelling.”

status (they are now a full-fledged nation: the “people of Israel”).<sup>11</sup> In Exodus 19:4, Yahweh begins his speech by rehearsing the three stages of grace that he had just lavished on Israel.<sup>12</sup>

### **Exodus 19:4: The Priority of Grace**

Both the Old Testament and the New assert an inflexible sequence concerning grace and law; grace precedes law.<sup>13</sup> Two examples of Old Testament texts where this unchanging sequence is most apparent are Exodus 20:2-3 and Deuteronomy 11:7-8.<sup>14</sup> In both passages, the gracious, redeeming work of Yahweh is rehearsed before law is pronounced, and especially in the latter passage, the grace of God appears as an explicit impetus for law-keeping. In the New Testament, both the letter to the Ephesians and the sequence presented in Colossians 1-2 suffice as examples of said sequence. The first three chapters of Ephesians recall the redemptive work of God in Christ, and only when this remembrance has been afforded is one given words of command, in chapters 4-6. Likewise, Colossians 1:1-2:5 is a lengthy indicative section lacking a single imperative (command). Not until Colossians 2:6 does one find the first imperative of the letter. Grace precedes law, and the impulse for law-keeping is the experience of grace.

This outlined pattern is epitomized in Exodus 19:4-6. God’s grace (v. 4) is celebrated before the call is given to obey God’s law (v. 5). Graeme Goldsworthy well expresses the import of the sequence: “The law is given to those who have already

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<sup>11</sup>So Kaiser, *Exodus*, 472.

<sup>12</sup>Bruckner, *Exodus*, 172, explains that Exod 19:4 contains a “description of God’s grace in three stages.”

<sup>13</sup>The phrase “priority of grace” in this section, used in connection with Exod 19:4, has been borrowed from Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 142.

<sup>14</sup>A similar pattern may be detected in Deut 4:37-40.

experienced the grace of God in salvation, and it is not the basis upon which they will be saved.”<sup>15</sup>

Exodus 19:4 is a recital of God’s gracious salvation: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” Three stages of grace are recounted. First, Yahweh “did” something “to the Egyptians.” Probably the phrase “what I did to the Egyptians” means “how I devastated the Egyptians by plagues and water.”<sup>16</sup> Israel had been helpless, imprisoned in the cruel fist of Egypt, and Yahweh had decimated the Egyptians on Israel’s behalf: grace.

The second stage of grace for Israel is summarized in the phrase: “how I bore you on eagles’ wings.” Following his victory over the Egyptians, God “bore” or “carried” the people as they traveled through the wilderness on their way to the mountain. Pointing to Isaiah 46:1, Victor Hamilton opines, “Either God/god(s) carry the people, or else the people have to carry their god(s).”<sup>17</sup> Yahweh rightly credits himself with carrying Israel safely through the wilderness, like a mother eagle who watches over her fledglings.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup>Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 142. In a similar vein, Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*, ed. Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 117, notes that in Exodus “we have 18 chapters of salvation before we get a single chapter of law. Law is the response to grace, not the means of earning it.”

<sup>16</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 422, explains that the initial words of Exod 19:4 “encapsulate the entire story of the humiliation of Pharaoh and Egypt and the Egyptians through the plagues.”

<sup>17</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 302.

<sup>18</sup>The Hebrew word that is translated “eagle” in Exod 19:4 is נָשֹׂר. Milton C. Fisher, “נָשֹׂר,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 607, notes that each of the twenty-six occurrences of נָשֹׂר in the Hebrew Bible (plus the two Aramaic occurrences in Daniel) are translated in the King James Version as “eagle.” However, both Kaiser, *Exodus*, 472, and R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 144, conclude that the bird in view in Exod 19:4 is probably the “Palestinian vulture.” According to Eric Hosking and David Hosking, *Eric Hosking’s Birds of Prey of the World* (London: Pelham, 1987), 108, 112, old world vultures, with wingspans between 6.5 and 9.75 feet, may have had “eagle-like ancestors,” and similarities between old world vultures and fish eagles have been noted. Certainly the נָשֹׂר of Exod 19:4 is not a bald eagle, since such birds never existed in the ancient Near East. As one reads Exod 19:4, probably it is best to think that God is comparing himself to an old world vulture with eagle-like qualities.



correspondence suggested in this verse, between Yahweh and a large bird of prey, is not exceptional in the Hebrew Bible. Psalms 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; and 91:4 each speak of the “wings” of God providing protection for his people, and Deuteronomy 32:11 is even more explicit: Yahweh is “like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions.” Like a powerful mother eagle who tenderly helps her hatchlings learn to fly, Yahweh had guided his children through the wilderness after freeing them from Egypt<sup>19</sup>: grace.

The third stage of grace for Israel is described in the phrase “brought you to myself.” Yahweh might have said: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings *and freed you from your slavery*,” but that is not what Exodus 19:4 records. Rather, the defeat of Egypt and safe passage through the wilderness had been orchestrated by Yahweh in order that the people might be brought close to Yahweh himself.<sup>20</sup> One might say that the redemption at the Red Sea and the provision of manna in the wilderness had been means toward a greater good, which was covenantal relationship with Yahweh; a bringing of the people to himself at Mount Sinai. The comment of W. Ross Blackburn is apt: “While Israel’s physical destination remains the land of Canaan, their ultimate destination is the Lord himself.”<sup>21</sup> Fellowship with Yahweh was Yahweh’s purpose in extracting Israel from Egypt and sustaining Israel in their journey toward the mountain. Exodus 29:46 affirms such a perspective. Yahweh explains that the reason Israel was brought out of Egypt was not ultimately or simply for their own freedom, but rather “that I might dwell among them.”

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<sup>19</sup>See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 210; and MacKay, *Exodus*, 326.

<sup>20</sup>Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 233, writes, “God’s intentions for Israel are not simply that the people will be delivered from all that has enslaved them, as important as that is. They are now to be ushered into the divine presence, and Yahweh ‘will be their God’ (cf. 6:7).”

<sup>21</sup>W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 88-89.

In the New Testament, Jesus appointed twelve disciples “so that they might be with him” (Mark 3:14), and even the death of Jesus—like the Red Sea deliverance—was the *means* by which his people might be “brought to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Intimacy and fellowship with God are God’s ultimate end game: grace.

Thus, the initial word of Yahweh at Mount Sinai is a threefold rehearsal of grace. Exodus 19:4 is a rich meditation on God’s gracious actions for Israel. However, as verse 4 gives way to verse 5, the receptors of grace will begin to hear their marching orders.<sup>22</sup>

### **Exodus 19:5-6: Relationship and Role by Grace**

Exodus 19:5-6 is replete with first-person pronouns. Yahweh’s deliberation contains references to “my voice,” “my covenant,” “my treasured possession,” “my earth,” and “my kingdom of priests and holy nation.”<sup>23</sup> The significance of such a preponderance of personal pronouns, appearing at the start of a long legal section (Exod 19-24), is well expressed by Terence Fretheim:

Experience has shown that obedience to the law can easily become an impersonal matter, manifested especially in debilitating legalism. Law can become a ‘law unto itself,’ dissociated from the personal, and hence living and dynamic, will of the law-giver.<sup>24</sup>

The voluminous first-person language of Exodus 19:5-6 strongly suggests that the law-giver is to be Israel’s focal point in their efforts to keep the law, an orientation that is perhaps important as the Book of the Covenant (Exod 19-24) commences. Exodus 19:5-6 reads,

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you

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<sup>22</sup>In the words of Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 837, “The gospel premise of v. 4 is matched by a massive gospel demand of v. 5a.”

<sup>23</sup>Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 233.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

One notes immediately the conditional clause in Exodus 19:5: “If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant.” The question of consequence must be posed. The text spells out the positive consequence if Israel obeyed the voice of Yahweh and kept Yahweh’s covenant: Israel would be Yahweh’s treasured possession among all peoples, his kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. In other words, if Israel proved faithful to Yahweh, it would mean that Israel would successfully execute her vocational role amongst the nations and be the effective missional vehicle that Yahweh had intended.<sup>25</sup> Heeding God’s voice and obeying the covenant were conditions that, if kept, would assure successful mission amongst the nations. To disobey God’s voice and break his covenant would not mean a loss of salvation for Israel, but it would certainly entail a loss of vocational potency. Christopher Wright’s succinct sentence well summarizes the matter: “Obedience to the covenant was not a condition of *salvation* but a condition of their *mission*.”<sup>26</sup>

Yahweh urges faithfulness to his “covenant.” The language used in Exodus 19:5 (“keep my covenant” and “obey my voice”) is found in God’s earlier communication with Abraham (see Gen 17:9-10; 22:18 [cf. 26:5]).<sup>27</sup> Thus even though the reference to “covenant” in Exodus 19:5 may be pointing ahead to the detailed statutes which will be forthcoming at Sinai, the reference also shows a linguistic connection backward to the

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<sup>25</sup>Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 235.

<sup>26</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 333. See also Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 111; and Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 269. The connection between obedience to the covenant and success in vocational mission can also be detected in Deut 26:18-19, where God promises that if Israel keeps all of God’s commandments, then he would set them high in praise, honor, and fame amidst all nations.

<sup>27</sup>For this observation I am indebted to Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 234.

covenant made with Abraham. The covenant that Israel was to keep, at Exodus 19:5, was indeed rooted organically in the Abrahamic covenant, yet in contrast to that earlier covenant, now it was an entire nation—not just an individual named Abraham—who were to keep covenant.<sup>28</sup> For the sake of God’s mission to the world, the entire nation of Israel was to listen and obey. The reason Yahweh brought Israel to himself was so Israel would become an obedient people whose obedience would draw the nations to Yahweh.

### **Brought Close to Bring Close**

If Israel listened to Yahweh and obeyed him, Israel would be Yahweh’s “treasured possession among all peoples” (Exod 19:5). The Abrahamic covenant had already described Israel as God’s unique instrument in God’s world: amongst all peoples, Yahweh had chosen the descendants of Abraham to be the vehicle of Yahweh’s blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3). Exodus 19:5 reiterates the promise of Genesis 12:3 in new language.<sup>29</sup> The descendants of Abraham, now positioned at Mount Sinai, had been chosen as God’s “treasured possession” among all nations to display God’s rule before the world, in God’s interest of reconciling the world to himself.<sup>30</sup> Out of all nations, Israel had been brought close to God for the mission of bringing the nations close to God.

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<sup>28</sup>House, *Old Testament Theology*, 109.

<sup>29</sup>William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1984), 89.

<sup>30</sup>I have been deliberate in choosing the phrase “among all nations,” having been convinced by Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 130, that the word מן in Exod 19:5’s phrase מְלִי־הָעַמִּים should be translated as “among” as opposed to “above” (i.e., I am arguing that the *English Standard Version*’s “among all peoples” is a better rendering than the *King James Version*’s “above all people”). Larsson (130) writes, “It is precisely because God cares so much for ‘all the earth’ that he elects Israel as a special people. This people consequently are called to serve—not to dominate—other nations. Israel is elected for the sake of the world. That is why it is so important not to translate ‘above’ the other peoples. Israel is elected to become God’s servants, not the master of others. This is what God’s election always means: one is elected to serve and not to be served (cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45).”

Yahweh desired that Israel be his *sĕgūllā* (“treasured possession”) amongst the nations. The word *sĕgūllā* is used eight times in the Old Testament, both concretely and metaphorically. Concretely, it describes the private wealth or treasure of royalty (1 Chron 29:3; Eccl 2:8). Metaphorically, the word is used to describe Israel’s unique status in the eyes of Yahweh (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17). According to Daniel Block, the word’s “concrete usage . . . provides the key to its metaphorical significance.”<sup>31</sup> The summation provided by Bruce Waltke seems accurate:

[*Sĕgūllā*] in 1 Chronicles 29:3 and Ecclesiastes 2:8 denotes a private royal fortune to be used according to the king’s own discretion and interests in contradistinction to the general reserves needed for governing his realm (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). In other words, Israel will be the King’s “private property,” personally owned for his personal use.<sup>32</sup>

A “treasured possession” in one’s art collection is often framed in glass and hung in a secure place where no hands will touch it. The art is to be admired but not handled, by owner and patron alike. However, this is not so with Israel, God’s “treasured possession.”<sup>33</sup> God would *use* Israel as his missional instrument. Israel was to act out God’s ways and declare God’s praises before a watching world, serving as the link between God and the nations. The treasured possession was to spend itself in the enterprise of drawing God’s other, treasured nations to himself.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Daniel I. Block, “The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deut 26:16-19),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (October-December 2005): 397.

<sup>32</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 407.

<sup>33</sup>Block, “The Privilege of Calling,” 401, writes, “God did not separate Israel from the nations so that He might merely lavish His attention on her as if she were a pet kitten or a china dish on a shelf. Just as the Levitical priests were set apart to serve as the Lord’s agents of grace between Him and Israel, so Israel collectively was to serve as a link between God and the world.”

<sup>34</sup>The phrase “other, treasured nations” seems to be an appropriate way to describe God’s affection for the world outside Israel. Oswalt, *Exodus*, 436 explains, “God did not choose Israel out of all the nations because he considered the other nations worthless. Rather he chose Israel precisely because those other nations belong to him and he cares about them. Israel is chosen so that they may be his vehicle for reaching them (cf. Isa 60:1-3; 66:18-24; Matt 12:18; Luke 2:32; Acts 15:15-18; Eph 3:1-13).”

In Exodus 19:5, the descriptions of the particular nation Israel (obedient covenant-keepers, treasured possession) are found in close proximity to phrases describing the broader world (“all peoples,” “all the earth”). The rationale for choosing the particular was the redemption of the universal.<sup>35</sup> Already in Exodus, God had desired recognition for his supremacy over all the earth (Exod 8:22; 9:14, 16, 29), and the phrases “all peoples” and “all the earth” in Exodus 19:5 reinforce God’s concern. Israel, the particular, would be the conduit of God’s glory and grace to the universal—the peoples of the earth.

### **Holy Mediators**

In Exodus 19:6, the parallel phrases “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” serve together to unfurl the meaning of “treasured possession” from Exodus 19:5.<sup>36</sup> That the phrases in Exodus 19:6 are parallel is apparent from the close association of the terms found in both. The word *mamleket* (“kingdom”) is parallel with *gôy* (“nation”), and the term *kōhānīm* (“priests”) has an evident connection with *qādoš* (“holy”).<sup>37</sup> The concept that links all three phrases together (i.e., which links “treasured possession,” “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation” together) is that of distinction or uniqueness. William Dumbrell explains,

The common factor in all three terms is the note of separateness of Israel from her world which they strike, a position which is made clear not only by the terms themselves . . . but by the additional separate note of choice from “among all peoples” which is referred to in v. 5.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>So Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 131; and Wright, *Mission of God*, 257.

<sup>36</sup>So Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 318; and Peter J. Gentry, “The Meaning of ‘Holy’ in the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170 (October-December 2013): 407.

<sup>37</sup>Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 90, writes, “*Mamleket* and *gôy* are often used elsewhere synonymously [1 Kgs 18:10; 1 Chron 16:20; 2 Chron 20:6; 32:15; Pss 46:7; 79:6; 105:13; Isa 13:4; 60:12; Jer 1:10; 18:7; Ezek 29:15; Nah 3:5], and priest and holy have obvious parallels with one another.”

<sup>38</sup>Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 85. See also David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 28.

Israel was called to be a “kingdom” of priests. Already in Exodus 15:18, Yahweh had been declared the reigning king of the universe.<sup>39</sup> Kings rule kingdoms, and Israel—freed as they had been from an oppressive human king—would now constitute a kingdom ruled by King Yahweh. Corporately, the people of Israel were also called to be “priests.”<sup>40</sup> Priests are consecrated to God for service, and as such they appear distinct in the midst of a wider population.<sup>41</sup> Priests are also like marriage counselors who work to reconcile parties. Israel’s role as “priests” would involve mediating between Yahweh and the world of nations (who needed the redemption of Yahweh).<sup>42</sup> Israel was to attract the nations to God by displaying God to the nations. Concerning Israel’s role as “priests,” the estimation of Wright bears repeating: “As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and of bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God.”<sup>43</sup> The word “priests” carries with it an assumption

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<sup>39</sup>A point made by John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 373.

<sup>40</sup>The concept of Israel’s corporate priesthood is discussed in Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 236.

<sup>41</sup>See Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987), 131.

<sup>42</sup>Many theologians and commentators attach a *mediatorial* role to Israel’s identity as “priests,” including G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 115, 117, 304; Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 92; Bruckner, *Exodus*, 173; Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 236; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 212; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 303; Kaiser, *Exodus*, 473; Mackay, *Exodus*, 328; James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament*, *America Society of Missiology Series* 39 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 62; Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 172-73; Stuart, *Exodus*, 423; Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 407; and Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 120. J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 199, seems to stand in the minority among commentators who would challenge the mediatorial view.

<sup>43</sup>Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 121. Some scholars such as Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 90; William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 38; and Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 36, have argued that Israel’s call to be “priests” was less a call to go out actively to the nations (centrifugal mission), and more a call to passive

that non-priests would be observing the actions, words, and traditions of those called to be priests. As the world of nations watched the lives of the “kingdom of priests,” the nations would become curious about the King.

Yahweh also identified Israel as a “holy nation.” According to Peter Gentry, the word “holy” (*qādoš*) does not mean “set apart” or “separated” (popular misunderstandings, in Gentry’s estimation), but “consecrated,” or “devoted.”<sup>44</sup> Gentry argues, “A holy nation . . . is one prepared and consecrated for fellowship with God and one completely devoted to him.”<sup>45</sup> While Gentry’s argument may indeed be accurate, one might claim nonetheless that any nation that is “consecrated for fellowship with God and completely devoted to him” is automatically set apart/separated from other nations by virtue of its exclusive devotion. Thus Israel, devoted to Yahweh, would appear distinct and set apart from surrounding nations, in the interest of displaying Yahweh to those nations.<sup>46</sup> Eugene Merrill is incisive in his summary of the goal of Israel’s holiness: “For Israel to be a holy nation called for a deportment that would cause the peoples of the earth to see in Israel’s behavior a reflection of the God they professed to serve.”<sup>47</sup>

Prior to Exodus 19:6, the Hebrew word *gôy* (“nation”) is used only once in the book of Exodus—in Exodus 9:24, where it is used in connection with Egypt. Indeed, in the vast majority of cases where *gôy* is found in the Hebrew Bible, the reference concerns

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dedication to Yahweh within Israel (centripetal mission). This argument has much to commend it, and in this section I tried to choose my wording carefully so as to avoid being construed as an argument for the centrifugal responsibility of ancient Israel.

<sup>44</sup>Gentry, “The Meaning of ‘Holy,’” 416-17; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 324-325.

<sup>45</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 325.

<sup>46</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 101, writes, “A ‘holy nation’ means a nation set apart by its holiness or its service to God. If Israel becomes a holy nation, it will ‘image’ God to the nations.”

<sup>47</sup>Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 271-72.



nations that are foreign to Israel.<sup>48</sup> Thus the use of *gôy* in Exodus 19:6 to describe Israel may serve to offset “holy”: though set apart through their unique devotion to Yahweh (“holy”), the people of Israel must always remember that they are essentially no different than other *gôyim* (nations). It is only their consecration and devotion to Yahweh that sets them apart from the broader world of nations.<sup>49</sup>

Yet for all that, *gôy* is employed in Exodus 19:6 for still another important purpose, namely, to make a conscious allusion to Genesis 12:2. In Genesis 12:2, Yahweh had sworn that he would make Abraham into a great “nation” (*gôy*). The people of Israel, poised as they were at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, were the manifested outworking of that promise to Abraham. The *gôy gādôl* (“great nation”) that had been pledged to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 was the *gôy qādoš* (“holy nation”) of Exodus 19:6, constituted to bless the nations of the earth.

To keep God’s covenant and obey his voice would mean vocational success for Israel. Fidelity to Yahweh would cause Israel to shine in the world as Yahweh’s crown jewel, his kingdom of priests and holy nation, a living display of Yahweh’s glory in view of the nations. Now Moses was to convey the weighty discourse of Exodus 19:5-6 to the people of Israel. Verses 7 and 8 give the record of Moses’s report to the people and their consequent response.

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<sup>48</sup>Concerning the word *gôy*, Jo Bailey Wells, “The Book of Exodus,” in *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture*, ed. Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 76-77, observes, “The term is almost always used to denote foreign nations, *hagoyim* (the nations), that is, those from which the subject (usually Israel) commonly distances itself.” In the Pentateuch alone, *gôy* refers to foreign nations in the majority of its uses (e.g., Gen 10:20; 15:14; 17:20; Exod 9:24; 34:24; Lev 18:24; 25:44; 26:33, 38, 45; Num 14:15; 24:8, 20; Deut 4:27, 38; 7:1, 17, 22; 8:20; 9:1, 5; 11:23; 12:2, 29, 30; 15:6; 17:14; 18:9, 14; 19:1; 20:15; 26:19; 28:1, 12, 49, 65; 29:16, 18, 23; 30:1; 31:3; 32:8).

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 77. See also Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 93.

### Exodus 19:7-8: Saying Yes to Yahweh

In Exodus 19:7, “Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.” One notes that the “elders” are the recipients of the report of Yahweh’s speech, however, in verse 8, it is “all the people” who respond to the report, saying, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” Probably the elders heard what Moses had to say, and then conveyed the report to the wider congregation of Israel, prompting their affirmative response.<sup>50</sup> The elders then brought word of the congregational response to Moses, so that Moses could then “report the words of the people to the LORD”—a statement found at the close of verse 8.

One pauses over what seems like a naïve and rather heedless pledge: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” Just thirteen chapters after making this vow, Israel would fail catastrophically in the area of obedience to Yahweh (Exod 32; the Golden Calf). Like Peter who had sworn an unending fidelity to Jesus that he would not keep (Matt 26:35), Israel at Sinai promised holistic obedience but would soon fall.<sup>51</sup> The “we do” at the Sinai wedding would turn out to be a bogus assurance, and beyond the failure of Exodus 32, Israel would continue to display an ongoing penchant for covenant transgression, for which God’s gracious exodus deliverance would be held up as a reproach (see 1 Kgs 12:28; Deut 9:7, 12; Jdg 2:1-2; 1 Sam 8:8; 10:18-19; 2 Kgs 17:35-41; Pss. 78:12-17, 44-58; 81:11-12; 106:7, 21; Jer 2:6; 7:22-26; 11:4-8; Mic 6:3-4).<sup>52</sup> As one reads the checkered history of ancient Israel, one is forced to conclude with John Sailhamer: “Any hope for the future would have to rest in the establishment of a new

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<sup>50</sup>In this sentence and the next I am following the suggestion of Stuart, *Exodus*, 424.

<sup>51</sup>So Cole, *Exodus*, 146.

<sup>52</sup>So William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses: Explaining the Lord’s Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 182.

covenant (Dt 30; Jer 31:31-34; Eze 36).<sup>53</sup> Attention turns, then, to a contemplation of the historical aftermath of Exodus 19:4-6.

### **Exodus 19:4-6: Israel's Failure, Christ's Success, and the Calling of the Church**

Seth Postell has argued effectively that failure frames the Pentateuch.<sup>54</sup> That is, the Pentateuch begins with a portrayal of Adam's inability—even in the best of all possible circumstances—to obey God (Gen 3), and the Pentateuch ends with Moses expressing his complete confidence that Israel will end up (1) violating God's covenant (Deut 31:28-29) and (2) descending into exile (Deut 30:1-6).<sup>55</sup> According to Postell, this sobering presentation of failure frames the Pentateuch—at least in part—to lay the “groundwork . . . for the expectation of another ‘Adam’ (another priest-king) to arise from among the people of Israel who will ultimately fulfill the creation mandate in the ‘last days.’”<sup>56</sup> Despite Israel's optimistic promise in Exodus 19:8, that its people would obey the entirety of God's covenant, her national history would prove otherwise. In fact, the people redeemed for mission amongst the nations would become a disgrace among the nations because of their transgressions, a situation that surfaces as early as Exodus 32:25 and is subsequently described in passages such as Psalm 44:13-14; Ezekiel 22:4; and Ezekiel 36:20-23.<sup>57</sup> Despite laudable intentions (Exod 19:8), Israel was destined for thorough failure in the area of keeping the covenant, and the spread of God's glory and praise among the nations was

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<sup>53</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 282.

<sup>54</sup>See Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 3-4; 141-42.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>57</sup>See Enns, *Exodus*, 396-97.

thereby jeopardized. Requisite was a new “son” (Exod 4:22-23) who would keep the covenant perfectly and be the light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6) that Israel had not been.

Enter Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1; cf. Exod 4:22-23); “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32; cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6); the wholly obedient priest-king (Heb 3:1; 1 Tim 6:15) and last Adam (1 Cor 15:45) who by his crucifixion “draws all people to himself” (John 12:32).<sup>58</sup> Jesus descends from Abraham (Matt 1:1) and, in his atoning death and justifying resurrection, is the supremely resplendent blessing to all families of the earth (Gen 12:3). Jesus fulfills Exodus 19:5-6, for in the astute words of Peter Enns, Jesus is “God’s ‘treasured possession,’ his ‘kingdom of priests,’ and his ‘holy nation’ in the sense that through him the universal call to the nations is finally and fully put into effect.”<sup>59</sup> Far from profaning God’s name amongst the nations (as Israel had done by transgressing God’s law [Ezek 36:20-23]), the concern of Jesus was ever to hallow God’s name (Matt 6:9), and always to say and do whatever the Father commanded him (John 12:49-50; 14:31).

The blood of Jesus has brought believing Jews and Gentiles together into nothing less than a new, unified humanity (Eph 2:13-15). This new “Man” is called the church, a people who have been redeemed from slavery to sin, death, and the devil, in order to be brought into intimate fellowship with God (1 Pet 3:18) and married to him (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7; 21:9). The church has received the blessing promised through Abraham (Gen 12:3; cf. Gal 3:8-9), and the church is itself God’s new vehicle to bring blessing to the nations (Mark 13:10; Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47). God has redeemed the church to be “a people for his own possession” (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9) and a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9), doing God’s missionary bidding in the midst

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<sup>58</sup>See Enns, *Exodus*, 397. See also Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 37.

<sup>59</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 397.

of the nations. As the new Israel, the church has taken over the role of “kingdom and priests” in God’s world (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).<sup>60</sup> Like Israel who had been brought out of Egypt in grace, only to receive marching orders (Exod 19:5-8), the people of the church are those redeemed under the New Covenant and commanded to “walk in a manner worthy of God’s *call*” (Eph 4:1; 2 Thess 1:11)—a call of grace which has liberated believers efficaciously from the tyranny of darkness.

Indeed, as God’s Bride, the church has been redeemed mightily and assigned a lofty calling. The church is God’s missionary strategy in the world, birthed in order to bless the nations with the gospel and fame of Jesus. May the people of God, the church, embrace their calling and walk humbly before God, pursuing vigorously their mission. May God be glorified as the church lives out her vocation in faithful obedience, bringing the blessing of God to the nations in the hours before the Bridegroom returns.

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<sup>60</sup>Interestingly enough, in Rom 15:16, the apostle Paul describes himself as being “in the *priestly service* of the gospel of God” (emphasis added).

CHAPTER 9  
GOD'S MOBILE HOME

**The Tabernacle: Narrative Bearings**

At the commencement of the book of Exodus, the Hebrew people are involved in the forced construction of cities at the behest of their overlord, Pharaoh (Exod 1:11).<sup>1</sup> A noteworthy absence of the divine presence, combined with a perceptible darkness, characterize the initial stages of the Exodus story. Enslaved and unable to extract themselves from their dire situation, the Hebrew people appear helpless and doomed.

However, as the book of Exodus closes, the circumstances have changed in dramatic fashion. Now freed from Egypt by the mighty arm of Yahweh, the people of Israel are once again engaged in a building project, but this time they are a glad and willing party to the wishes of a very different Architect. The tabernacle that Israel produces under the direction of Yahweh signifies Yahweh's presence in their camp; the tabernacle is the place of Yahweh's dwelling amongst them.

One may discern the significance of the tabernacle narrative for the book of Exodus by observing the voluminous space allotted to the tabernacle's design and

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<sup>1</sup>The observations contained in this paragraph and the next, concerning the beginning and end of Exodus, are not original to me. For example, see Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, vol. 1 of *The Schocken Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 395; Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 451; Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 214-15; Daniel R. Hyde, *God in Our Midst: The Tabernacle and Our Relationship with God* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 211; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 141; and John N. Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2013), 253-54.

construction.<sup>2</sup> Victor Hamilton has noted that almost one-third of the book of Exodus is devoted to the tabernacle (Exod 25-31 and 35-40), while other aspects of Exodus that are normally understood as holding a high degree of importance (i.e., the exodus from Egypt and the Decalogue) are given considerably shorter treatments.<sup>3</sup> This fact being the case, it seems clear that the reader of Exodus is being beckoned to grasp the momentousness of God's manifest presence, connected with the tabernacle.<sup>4</sup>

The Exodus tabernacle narrative may be divided into three sections. If the focus of Exodus 25-31 can be described as instructional, wherein God reveals his blueprint for the tabernacle structure, the core of Exodus 35-40 is executional: these latter chapters of Exodus narrate the actual construction of the tabernacle.<sup>5</sup> In between the instructional and executional chapters of Exodus is a notable disturbance: Exodus 32-34 are chapters largely concerned with describing Israel's transgression in engaging an unauthorized building project, that of the Golden Calf. A thorough discussion of every aspect of the tabernacle narrative would require a book-length exploration.<sup>6</sup> The focus in what follows is decidedly more modest, highlighting three brief passages found within the tabernacle narrative. Exodus 25:8-9 is a foundational pericope located near the beginning of the instructional section, while Exodus 39:42-43 and 40:34-35 are passages found in the executional

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<sup>2</sup>So Gordon J. Wenham, *A Guide to the Pentateuch*, in vol. 1 of *Exploring the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 74.

<sup>3</sup>Hamilton, *Exodus*, 449, notes that only two chapters of Exodus narrate the exodus from Egypt, while a mere two-thirds of one chapter is devoted to the Decalogue.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 394, identifies Exod 25-31 as "blueprint" chapters, while he labels Exod 35-40 the "construction chapters." Hamilton, *Exodus*, 451, outlines Exod 25-40 in the following terms: "The flow in these last chapters is from instruction (25-31) to interruption (32-34) to implementation (35-40)."

<sup>6</sup>An excellent, thoroughgoing, recent treatment of the tabernacle can be found in J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God's Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

chapters. These latter two passages are significant because they describe the completion of the tabernacle (Exod 39:42-43) and the subsequent infilling of the divine presence (Exod 40:34-35). In addition to providing brief inquiries into each of the three passages, attention is given to select aspects of the broader tabernacle story.

### **Exodus 25:8-9: God Commands a Home**

Four words found in Exodus 25:8-9 merit particular study. Indeed, when scrutinized, the terms rendered in English as “sanctuary,” “dwell,” “tabernacle,” and “pattern” yield crucial clues into the meaning, purpose, and character of the tabernacle. Exodus 25:8-9 reads, “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and all of its furniture, so you shall make it.”

#### ***Miqdāš* (Sanctuary)**

In Exodus 25:8, the word “sanctuary” is translated from the Hebrew *miqdāš*. Because *miqdāš* derives from the word *qādaš* (“holy”), “sanctuary” is an appropriate translation, since the word “sanctuary” comes, in turn, from the Latin *sancer/sanctus*, meaning “sacred, holy.”<sup>7</sup> Thomas Dozeman observes, “The word *miqdāš* underscores the holy quality” of the tabernacle complex.<sup>8</sup> Thomas McComiskey concurs, noting that *miqdāš* “denotes that which has been devoted to the sphere of the sacred . . . [and] connotes the physical area devoted to the worship of God.”<sup>9</sup> The entire area devoted to the tabernacle, including fence, courtyard, tabernacle proper, and all furniture, was holy

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<sup>7</sup>See Richard E. Averbeck, “מִקְדָּשׁ,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997), 2:1079.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 609.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas E. McComiskey, “מִקְדָּשׁ,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 789.



ground.<sup>10</sup> Its holy nature was to be respected and not profaned (see Lev 12:4; 19:30; 20:3; 21:12, 23; 26:2). After all (and most importantly), the one who would occupy the *miqdāš* was holy, and in the prudent words of Terence Fretheim, Yahweh’s “divine presence [was] not to be presumed upon.”<sup>11</sup> Yahweh had called Israel to be a “holy nation” (Exod 19:6); the tabernacle was Israel’s opportunity to act holy and respect carefully the holiness of their redeeming king.<sup>12</sup> No cavalier approaches to Yahweh, and no neglecting the prescriptions for entrance into his presence, would be accepted. The people must always bear in mind the transcendence, otherness, and holiness of Yahweh, and conduct themselves accordingly.

### ***Šākan* and *Miškān* (Dwell and Dwelling Place)**

The governing purpose of the tabernacle is expressed in Exodus 25:8. The structure was to be built so that Yahweh might “dwell” (*šākan*) in the midst of the people of Israel. As Yahweh had once “walked” (*hālak*) with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8), enjoying the fellowship of his creatures, now Yahweh desired to “dwell”—not in some isolated area outlying the camp of Israel—but directly “in the midst” of his people (Exod 25:8).<sup>13</sup> Yahweh would indeed live with those descended from Shem, in their tents (Gen 9:27), at once identifying himself with the austere, temporal atmosphere of Israel’s camp, while simultaneously showing himself more mobile than

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<sup>10</sup>Averbeck, “שִׁבְדָּה,” 1079, notes that שִׁבְדָּה “commonly designates the entire worship complex,” not just the tabernacle tent itself.

<sup>11</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 275.

<sup>12</sup>R. E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 809.

<sup>13</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 158, notes an important nuance in Exod 25:8, namely that God will dwell *in the midst of people*, rather than *in the tabernacle*. For God “walking” with Israel in the tabernacle, see Lev 26:11-12.; 2 Sam 7:6-7.

other ancient Near Eastern gods, who seemed unable to venture from the specific locations assigned to them.<sup>14</sup> This immanent presence of Almighty God with the frail, vulnerable, temporal people of Israel was of monumental importance as they traveled toward Canaan, just as today, the same presence is incomparably decisive for every human being who recognizes the vulnerability and ephemerality of the human condition.<sup>15</sup> The real presence of Yahweh in the tabernacle was the emphatic answer to the question posed by Israel in Exodus 17:7: “Is the LORD among us or not?”<sup>16</sup> The incalculable benefits for Israel, and for anyone today who experiences God’s presence, are the joy (Isa 12:6), protection and confidence (Ps 27), provision, life, and light (Ps 36:8-9), and goodness and holiness (Ps 65:4) that such presence brings.

In Exodus 25:9, Yahweh expressed his desire that a “tabernacle” (Hebrew: *miškān*) be constructed. The noun *miškān* is directly related to the verb *šākan* (“dwell”), being derived from the verb.<sup>17</sup> Thus, “dwelling place” is an appropriate rendering of *miškān*, and as J. Daniel Hays observes, the stress lays not so much on the physical

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<sup>14</sup>The association of Yahweh’s tabernacle dwelling and Gen 9:27 was brought to my attention by Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 82. Concerning the observation that Yahweh shows himself “more mobile than other ancient Near Eastern gods, who seemed unable to venture from the specific locations assigned to them,” I am indebted to Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 178, who writes, “This idea that God dwelt *among his people* was very different from the common view that gods were associated with particular places and that their power was restricted to that domain” (emphasis original).

<sup>15</sup>See Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 980.

<sup>16</sup>Noted by Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 393.

<sup>17</sup>Noted by several commentators, including Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 888; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 598; and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 512.

building as on the “presence of the occupant.”<sup>18</sup> It is Yahweh who comes to dwell (*šākan*) in his earthly dwelling place (*miškān*), to make Yahweh’s presence known to Israel.<sup>19</sup> Like the verb *šākan*, the noun *miškān* carries the flavor of immanence. God was really and tangibly present with Israel, even while the sanctuary (*miqdāš*) asserted his holy transcendence. Indeed, in the span of just two verses (Exod 25:8-9), both the immanence (real presence) and transcendence (holy otherness) of Yahweh are asserted.<sup>20</sup> An astounding, blessed tension is thus presented to the reader of Exodus: the holy, eternal, uncreated God who spoke the very universe into being, accommodated himself to encamp in desert dust with a group of former slaves. The God who cannot be contained in heaven and the highest heaven (1 Kgs 8:27), whose presence is everywhere (Ps 139:7), and who himself fills heaven and earth (Jer 23:24), stooped low to dwell in a specific, unremarkable location with his people. One pauses over this picture in wonder and praise.

### ***Tabnît (Pattern)***

Both the Old and New Testament indicate the existence of a heavenly sanctuary or temple in which God resides (see Ps 11:4; 150:1; Isa 6:1-8; Mic 1:2-3; Heb 8:5; 9:23-24). In Exodus 25:9, Yahweh mandates that the earthly tabernacle is to be made exactly according to the “pattern” (*tabnît*) that he will “show” (*rā’āh*). The word *tabnît* has been the subject of ongoing debate. The question concerns whether one is to understand *tabnît*

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<sup>18</sup>Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 14. See also John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 440.

<sup>19</sup>Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 598-99, suggests that there is a definite, discernible difference between two particular terms that are used for the tabernacle: מִשְׁכָּן (“tabernacle”) and אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (“tent of meeting”). Dozeman (598-99) observes that the former term is employed for the “Deity entering the sanctuary,” while the latter term “describes the cultic site from the perspective of humans who participate in rituals,” noting further that “when humans enter the sanctuary it becomes a tent of meeting, not a tabernacle.” Dozeman (765) notes Exod 40:35-36, where a discernible switch in the two terms occurs: מִשְׁכָּן, when God descends in glory, and אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, when Moses tries to enter.

<sup>20</sup>So Elmer A. Martens, *God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal, 1998), 107; also see Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 809-10.

as referring to some sort of “blueprint” or small-scale “model” that Yahweh shows Moses, or whether *tabnît* refers to the actual heavenly sanctuary: perhaps Yahweh allowed Moses to see the heavenly sanctuary, and Moses was to fashion the earthly tabernacle according to what he saw.<sup>21</sup> “In either case,” writes W. Ross Blackburn wisely, “*tabnît* implies that there is a heavenly sanctuary in which the Lord resides which serves as the structure or pattern for the earthly tabernacle.”<sup>22</sup> The important point is to observe that the tabernacle was wholly conceived in the divine mind and was to be constructed on earth according to precise divine instruction.<sup>23</sup> No guesswork or human improvisation was allowed. Daniel Block is perceptive and accurate when he comments that the tabernacle was “indeed a sacred structure, sanctioned, designed, and legitimized by the One who would reside in it.”<sup>24</sup> Israel would engage the construction of this mobile worship center on God’s terms, not theirs, and in the process the people would learn from God the proper approach to his holy presence.

Thus Exodus 25:8-9 teaches that Yahweh desired a Holy Place (*miqdāš*) in which to live (*šākan*); a dwelling place (*miškān*) that was to be fabricated according to his

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<sup>21</sup>Representative of those who hold that תבנית refers to a “blueprint” or “model” are Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 888; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 610; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 3 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters-Leuven, 1999), 323; and Bruce Wells, “Exodus,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 247-48. Representative of those who favor תבנית as referring to an actual heavenly reality are John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 395; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 299; and Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 455.

<sup>22</sup>W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 143.

<sup>23</sup>See Exod 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8; 31:11; 36:1; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31-32, 42-43; 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32; Num 8:4; 1 Chr 28:19; Acts 7:44; Heb 8:5. As Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 131, notes, there is something indecorous about human beings who launch campaigns to build a Holy Place for God, as David found out later in Israel’s history (2 Sam 7:5-7).

<sup>24</sup>Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 302.

exacting pattern (*tabnît*). Israel would indeed build the tabernacle, but before that happened, a different construction project was undertaken—a tragic, unauthorized project.

### Eden, New Eden, Catastrophe, and Construction

The first two chapters of Genesis detail the creation of the world. Attending the creational moment was the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2), and God brought the material world into being in six days, resting on the seventh. The narrative of Genesis punctuates the six days of creation with the phrase “and God said” (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28-29), before describing God’s rest, on day seven, from his “work” (*mēlā`kā*: Gen 2:2-3). Among other things, the Edenic landscape that God created included a variety of arboreal specimens (Gen 2:9) and beautiful minerals (Gen 2:11-12). In the moment when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden because of their sin, cherubim were stationed at the east entrance of the garden to guard the tree of life (Gen 3:23-24).

Point by point, Exodus 25-31 presents the tabernacle as a new creation.<sup>25</sup> The Spirit of God attends the creation of the tabernacle, filling a specific craftsman named Bezalel (Exod 31:2-3), and in Exodus 31:3, God gives Bezalel “wisdom” (*hōkmā*), “understanding” (*tēbūnā*), and “knowledge” (*da`at*)—precisely the same trio of attributes

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<sup>25</sup>On the connections between creation and tabernacle, see, e.g., T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 34-35; Block, *For the Glory of God*, 303; James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 231-32; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 102-3; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 268-72; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 451-52; Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 22-25; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 298-99; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987), 213-14; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 41-42; R. E. Watts, “Exodus,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 481; and Wenham, *A Guide to the Pentateuch*, 76. Although such a chorus of commentators have argued that parallels between Eden and the tabernacle are obvious and were intended by the biblical author, Daniel Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3-29, has offered a recent contrarian position, even arguing against earlier conclusions that he himself made.

that characterized God himself as he created the world (Prov 3:19-20).<sup>26</sup> Bezalel is also gifted in “crafts” (*mēlā`kā*: Exod 31:3, 5), paralleling the fact that God had “crafted” (*mēlā`kā*: Gen 2:2-3) the creation.<sup>27</sup> Further, as the narrative of the Genesis creation moment had been interspersed with repeated use of the phrase “and God said” (prior to its description of God’s Sabbath), so the tabernacle instructions are peppered with seven occurrences of the phrase “And the LORD said” (Exod 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12); the seventh introducing a focus on Sabbath. Still further, as an abundance of trees and precious stones characterized the Edenic world, with cherubim positioned at the east entrance, so God commanded the tabernacle to include a tree-like lampstand (Exod 25:31-36), precious stones (Exod 25:7, 11, 17, 31), cherubim (Exod 25:18-22; 26:1, 31), and an east-facing entrance (Exod 27:13). Most vitally, the tabernacle’s purpose was the indwelling of God, a reality which characterized the original situation in Eden. Bearing all these parallels in mind, the conclusion of Vern Poythress seems very much on target: “The tabernacle is a renewed version of the garden of Eden.”<sup>28</sup> The peace and fellowship between God and humanity, ruptured in Genesis 3, was being restored by God in the revelation and implementation of the tabernacle.<sup>29</sup> The tabernacle is a new creation that parallels the original creation of Genesis 1-2. Yet, the consonance between the Genesis narrative and the tabernacle narrative is still greater. If Exodus 25-31 hearkens back to Genesis 1-2, Exodus 32 can be shown to run parallel with Genesis 3.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>For this important observation I am indebted to J. R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 87.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 19.

<sup>29</sup>Wenham, *A Guide to the Pentateuch*, 76.

<sup>30</sup>For the paragraph that follows (most notably, the parallels between Gen 1-3 and Exod 25-40), I am indebted to the suggestions put forth by Hamilton, *Exodus*, 452; and Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 299.

Following the creation of the world (Gen 1-2), Adam and Eve rebelled against God by breaking his commandment and eating what they should have avoided (Gen 3). Genesis 3 describes Adam and Eve acting in clear violation of what God had instructed. To be sure, God pronounced punishments on the mutinous couple (Gen 3:16-19) and drove them out of the garden (Gen 3:24), but God also acted in grace to clothe Adam and Eve since they had become ashamed of their nakedness (Gen 3:21; cf. Gen 3:7). In similar fashion, Israel deviated blatantly from God on the heels of God's new creational tabernacle instruction (Exod 25-31). Exodus 32 provides the record of Israel falling into sin, engaged in a building project that God did not authorize and that brought him offense. The story of the Golden Calf is like a new Genesis 3, complete with the emergence of death resulting from the transgression (Exod 32:28; cf. Gen 2:17; 3:6). However, as grace was given to Adam and Eve after their fatal lapse, so God shows grace to Israel after the Golden Calf episode: Exodus 35-40 is the detailed, leisurely record of the construction of the tabernacle—a bulky portion of Scripture that should be perceived as a grace, for instead of simply annihilating an idolatrous, wayward people, God now “green lighted” the implementation of what he had blueprinted in Exodus 25-31. Willem VanGemen's summary is accurate: “The detailed description of the construction of the tabernacle (chaps. 35-40), which follows Israel's apostasy, is clear evidence of the grace and the patience of the Lord. He knows the frailty of his people, and still plans to dwell in their midst.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Exodus 39:42-43: The Tabernacle Completed**

Exodus 39:42-43 reports the completion of the tabernacle, and again, several similarities exist between these verses and the creation narrative (Gen 1-2).<sup>32</sup> Exodus

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<sup>31</sup>VanGemen, *The Progress of Redemption*, 137.

<sup>32</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 235, writes that Exod 39:42-43 is “patterned after the Creation narrative of Genesis.”

39:42-43 reads, “According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them.” In Genesis 1:31, God “saw [*rā`āh*] everything that he had made, and behold [*hinnēh*], it was very good.” Likewise, Moses, in Exodus 39:43, “saw [*rā`āh*] all the work [of the tabernacle], and behold [*hinnēh*], they had done it.”<sup>33</sup> Further, where in the original creation God had blessed (*bāarak*) birds and sea creatures (Gen 1:22), people (Gen 1:28), and the seventh day (Gen 2:3), so at the completion of the tabernacle, Moses blesses (*bāarak*) the people of Israel (Exod 39:43).<sup>34</sup> Add to these two parallels the further correspondence between Exodus 39:32, where the tabernacle is “finished” (*kālā*), and Genesis 2:1-2, where the heavens and earth are “finished” (*kālā*).<sup>35</sup> It would appear that a deliberate coordination was intended between the Genesis creation story, and the narration of the tabernacle’s completion. If, as has been argued, the tabernacle is to be understood as a new creation, then such a “deliberate coordination” at the tabernacle’s completion is not surprising.<sup>36</sup> The manifest presence of God that had been lost in the first creation due to the appearance of sin was being regained in this new creation: the finished tabernacle.

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<sup>33</sup>Several commentators have noted similarities between Exod 39:43 and Gen 1:31, including R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 238; Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 550; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 614; and Kaiser, *Exodus*, 559.

<sup>34</sup>So Enns, *Exodus*, 550; and Hamilton, *Exodus*, 614.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>A further parallel may exist between Exod 39:42-43 and another story in Genesis. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 268-69, notes correspondences between the story of the tabernacle’s completion, and the story of Moses. Fretheim (268-69) writes, “Both [Noah’s ark] and tabernacle are commanded by God, whose precise directions are communicated to the human leader, who proceeds to carry out the directions in obedient detail. Both Noah and Moses found favor in God’s sight ([Exod] 33:12-17; Gen 6:8). At the end of the building of each ([Exod] 39:42-43; Gen 6:22) it is said that they did just as God had commanded. . . . Both ‘sanctuaries’ are portable, one on sea, one on land; they are used to carry the people through the waters/sands of chaos. . . . It is on the first day of the new year that the floodwaters abate and the covering of the ark is taken off (Gen 8:13), the same day that the tabernacle is set up and dedicated ([Exod 40:2]).”



## The Tabernacle: Materials, Structure, Furniture

Before proceeding to the last main passage under discussion (Exod 40:34-35), it is worth pausing to linger over certain details of the tabernacle's construction and appearance. An initial question concerns how recent slaves of Egypt could amass the one ton of gold, four tons of silver, and two-and-one-half tons of bronze necessary to fabricate the tabernacle (Exod 38:21-31). As an answer, it should be remembered that on their departure from Egypt, the Israelites "plundered" the Egyptians of precious metals (Exod 12:35-36).<sup>37</sup> Yet even if all the metal, wood, and fabric was not taken from Egypt, Israel still had opportunity, while traveling to Sinai, to plunder other peoples (i.e., the Amalekites: see Exod 17:8-16), or to barter with other nations whom they may have encountered.<sup>38</sup> Further, some construction materials—most notably acacia wood—would have been available in the Sinai area.<sup>39</sup> Thus Israel used plundered material, as well as local material, to build the tabernacle. Further, to complete the construction project, Israel utilized the skills they had no doubt honed while living in what Nahum Sarna has called "the most materially advanced civilization of antiquity," the nation of Egypt.<sup>40</sup>

The tabernacle structure was located in the center of Israel's camp. Timothy Pierce outlines the import of such a location:

The placement of the tent in the center of the camp (Num 2:17) had important significance. . . . [S]uch a placement was comparable to the tent of the king in a military camp of New Kingdom Egypt (c. 1600-1100 BC). In this tent the king would meet foreign dignitaries and direct the plans and goals of his army. Yahweh had just destroyed the gods of Egypt through the plagues and the crossing of the sea,

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<sup>37</sup>So Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 58; Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 132; Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 27-28.

<sup>38</sup>So Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 558.

<sup>39</sup>Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 563.

<sup>40</sup>Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 197.

and He was about to lead the children of Israel into warfare in Canaan, so such a placement speaks volumes.<sup>41</sup>

The tabernacle itself was a sizable, rectangular tent, with forty-five foot edges on the north and south sides, and fifteen foot edges on the east and west.<sup>42</sup> Its height was fifteen feet. Inside this large tent were two basic zones, separated by a curtain: (1) the Holy Place, which was thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide, and (2) the Most Holy Place, which was cubical in shape, measuring fifteen feet on all sides. One entered the Holy Place on the eastern side of the tent, and inside were found three items: the altar of incense (Exod 30:27); the table of the bread of the presence (Num 4:7); and the lampstand (Exod 25:31). On the western side, the Most Holy Place was isolated by means of the curtain, and was home to only one item: the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 25:22; Num 10:33). On the eastern side of the tabernacle complex, and outside of the tent, was a fenced courtyard wherein two items were located: the bronze basin and the altar for burnt offering.

Many commentators have noted a clear demarcation of zones in the tabernacle.<sup>43</sup> In other words, as one moved from the tabernacle courtyard, then into the Holy Place, and finally into the Most Holy Place, there was a notable progression of heightened holiness, signified by the increased value of metals and textiles—the most expensive being employed in the Most Holy Place. From courtyard to Most Holy Place, the metals advanced from bronze to silver to gold, and finally to pure gold (Exod 25:3),

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<sup>41</sup>Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008), 68.

<sup>42</sup>The information in this paragraph was gleaned from Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 807; Garrett, *Exodus*, 552; and Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 51.

<sup>43</sup>For the content of this paragraph I am indebted to the work of several authors, including Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 127-29; Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 160; Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 55; Hyde, *God in Our Midst*, 48; Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 209; Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 135-36; Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 191-92; and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 191.

and the fabrics proceeded from goat's hair to crimson to purple to blue (Exod 25:4).<sup>44</sup> Even the workmanship itself seems to proceed from good to better to best, depending on the work being done (e.g., see 39:22: "woven," versus 26:36: "needlework," and finally 26:1: "skillfully worked"). Further, Tremper Longman has observed that the closer a person came to the Most Holy Place, the more restricted was the access.<sup>45</sup> Longman writes,

Gentiles and unclean Israelites live outside the camp. Israel lives inside the camp, but only Levites encamp in the immediate vicinity of the tabernacle and they also have the easiest access to its holy precincts. But even the priests have restrictions. Indeed, according to Leviticus 16, only one man, the high priest, only once a year could enter the Holy of Holies, indicating just how holy (set apart) it was.<sup>46</sup>

The gradations of holiness were a further reminder of the holiness of the one who occupied the Most Holy Place. Reverence, care, and sober respect were appropriate as one approached the tabernacle.

As concerns the furniture inside the tabernacle, a discussion of the significance and meaning of each item is not possible here.<sup>47</sup> However, two items—one located in the

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<sup>44</sup>So, e.g., Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 135; Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 209.

<sup>45</sup>Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 136. See also Hyde, *God in Our Midst*, 48.

<sup>46</sup>Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 136.

<sup>47</sup>What follows might be called a "conservative" hermeneutic as regards two items of tabernacle furniture. The tendency amongst certain commentators to over-interpret details of the tabernacle has been noted by Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 61, who writes, "Occasionally various writers and speakers will simply let their imaginations run free and look for *any* kind of similarity between even the smallest details of the tabernacle and Christ." An example from within my lifetime of such strained hermeneutics is Stephen F. Olford, *The Tabernacle: Camping with God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 111, who contends, e.g., that (1) the smallness of the manna inside the Ark of the Covenant signifies the humility of Christ, (2) the roundness of the same manna represents the perfection of Christ, (3) the whiteness of the manna bespeaks the holiness of Christ, (4) the description "as the hoar frost" (Exod 16:14) for the manna describes the freshness of Christ; (5) the description "like coriander seed" (Exod 16:31) for the manna represents the fragrance of Christ, (6) the description "as the taste of fresh oil" (Num 11:8) for the manna speaks of the authority of Christ, (7) the description "like wafers made with honey" (Exod 16:31) for the manna is descriptive of the sweetness of Christ, and (8) the description "as the color of bdellium" (Num 11:7) for the manna speaks of the preciousness of Christ. Olford's conjecture strains the limits of credulity, and hangs significance on manna with which no New Testament writer concurs. For needful calls to moderation in interpreting the details of the tabernacle, see Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 538-39; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 265-66;

Holy Place, and the other positioned in the Most Holy Place—have been selected for brief consideration.

### **The Lampstand**

The instructions for the manufacture of the “lampstand” (*mĕnôrāh*) of the Holy Place are found in Exodus 25:31-39, and the execution of those instructions can be found in Exodus 37:17-24. As God had provided light in the original creation (Gen 1:3-5); so God commanded the *mĕnôrāh* in the new creation tabernacle, which was the only means of light for the structure.<sup>48</sup> The lampstand was patterned in heaven (Exod 25:40; Num 8:4), and it featured seven branches, probably to signify what Bruce Waltke has called “the complete light of [God’s] presence.”<sup>49</sup> The lampstand included significant arboreal artwork: flowers, almond blossoms, branches (Exod 25:31-39; 37:17-24), apparently meant to recall Eden’s tree of life and the attendant presence of God.<sup>50</sup> The lamps which were lit on each of the seven branches of the lampstand diffused their light on the table of bread opposite the lampstand, upon which were twelve loaves, representing the tribes of Israel.<sup>51</sup> Thus the twelve loaves “lived” in the light shone on them from the lampstand, all to symbolize the blessing of God’s light and presence.<sup>52</sup>

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Hamilton, *Handbook*, 219; Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 60-62; Hyde, *God in Our Midst*, 15; Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 31-32; and Martens, *God’s Design*, 107-8.

<sup>48</sup>MacKay, *Exodus*, 456.

<sup>49</sup>Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 460.

<sup>50</sup>So Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 47; Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 57; Mackay, *Exodus*, 453; Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 193-94. If not the tree of life, Garrett, *Exodus*, 560, suggests that the lampstand may represent “Israel as a tree standing before God (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6; Ps. 52:8).”

<sup>51</sup>Longman, *How to Read Exodus*, 138; Oswalt, *Exodus: The Way Out*, 247.

<sup>52</sup>Wenham, *A Guide to the Pentateuch*, 76. See also L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 16-17.

## The Ark

The first piece of tabernacle furniture outlined by Yahweh is the “ark” or “chest” (*’ārôn*) made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold (Exod 25:10-11), which was to be located in the Most Holy Place.<sup>53</sup> That this box is discussed first in the instructions for the tabernacle furniture has not escaped the notice of Peter Enns, who writes,

By placing the ark first, the reader’s attention is drawn to the central concern of the tabernacle narrative. The ark is the focus of God’s presence with his people, the central point of contact between heaven and the tabernacle, the earthly symbol of heaven.<sup>54</sup>

The most important item in the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant was of humble size, a little less than four feet in length, and only twenty-nine inches in height and width.<sup>55</sup> The ark was outfitted with gold-covered carrying poles on both sides, which were fitted through gold rings, and the poles were never to be removed (Exod 25:13-15; 37:4-5). The purpose of these permanent carry poles was to prevent human beings from touching the ark, since the ark was unique in its holiness (see Num 4:15).<sup>56</sup> On top of the ark sat the “mercy seat” or “atonement cover” (*kappōret*)—an item separate from the ark but fashioned to fit overtop as a cover.<sup>57</sup> Bernard Ramm’s succinct description of the *kappōret* can hardly be improved upon: “The mercy seat (Hebrew, *kapporeth*; Greek, *hilasterion*; Latin, *propitiatorium*) was a slab of gold with cherubim fashioned from the ends with

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<sup>53</sup>Cole, *Exodus*, 190, writes, “‘Chest’ (rather like a small seaman’s chest, or a Chinese camphorwood box) gives the meaning of *’ārôn* better than the older translation ‘ark.’”

<sup>54</sup>Enns, *Exodus*, 511.

<sup>55</sup>That the Ark of the Covenant was the “most important item in the tabernacle” is affirmed by both Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 814; and Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 158. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 459, writes, “It is impossible to imagine OT religion without the ark. In some ways what the ark is to the old covenant, the cross is to the new covenant.” On the measurements of the Ark, see Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 211.

<sup>56</sup>So Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 211; and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 211.

<sup>57</sup>Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 153, writes, “The ark and the *kappōret* are considered to be two fundamentally distinct objects, although they are joined together.”

wings hovering back over the golden slab.”<sup>58</sup> Old Testament literature (later than Exodus) shows an understanding that Yahweh was “enthroned on the cherubim” that graced the top of the *kappōret* (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chron 13:6; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). Indeed, in Exodus 25:22, Yahweh reveals that the meeting place between himself and Moses was “above the *kappōret*, between the two cherubim.” In Numbers 7:89, the voice of Yahweh speaks to Moses “from above the *kappōret* that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim.” In the tabernacle, the primary focal point of the presence and voice of Yahweh was between the cherubim, on the *kappōret*.

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron was to sprinkle the blood of both a bull and a goat on the *kappōret* (Lev 16:14-15). Sacrificial animal blood applied to the covering (*kappōret*) of the ark signified the “covering” (*kāpar*: Lev 16:16) of sin. The precise sin being covered by the blood was the breach of the law, and the law in question was engraved on the stone tablets which lay inside the ark (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut 10:1-5), just below the *kappōret*.<sup>59</sup> Along with the tablets containing the Ten Words, the Ark of the Covenant also contained a jar of manna (Exod 16:33-34; Heb 9:4) and Aaron’s budding rod (Num 17:10; Heb 9:4). The manna was a reminder that God had sustained life in the desert, and the budding rod symbolized new life—both items contrasting the death, which was conveyed by the blood.<sup>60</sup>

Exodus 25:19-20 records the positioning of the two golden cherubim of the *kappōret*. The cherubim were to face toward one another, with their heads turned downward toward the *kappōret* covering (and hence, toward the tablets of the law which lay just underneath the *kappōret*). Before Exodus 25:18, the only other mention of

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<sup>58</sup>Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out: A Fresh Look at Exodus* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974), 154.

<sup>59</sup>See MacKay, *Exodus*, 448.

<sup>60</sup>Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 195.

“cherubim” is found at Genesis 3:24, where actual cherubim were positioned at the east entrance of the Garden of Eden, to guard access to that place where the presence of God had been most palpable. It would seem, then, that the golden cherubim of the *kappōret* signified a “guarding” of the presence of God—a presence which was most apparent in that particular location of the tabernacle.<sup>61</sup> With their heads situated toward both the lid of the *kappōret* (where blood was sprinkled annually), and also toward the tablets of the law which were underneath the lid, the implication may have been that access to God came only through atonement (blood) and the law (tablets).<sup>62</sup> Indeed, even before the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to behold the *kappōret* cherubim, he would see cherubim embroidered on the tabernacle curtains (Exod 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35). As Peter Leithart puts it, the preponderance of cherubim that were observable in the tabernacle would remind the High Priest that “like the garden and land of Eden, the tabernacle was mostly off-limits.”<sup>63</sup> After all, God had called the tabernacle his *miqdāš* (“holy place”), and the cherubim were a sobering reminder of the weight and fearfulness of God’s holy presence.

The Ark of the Covenant was the most vital accoutrement in the tabernacle. The ark was God’s royal throne (Pss 80; 99:1; Jer 3:16-17), and God’s royal footstool (1 Chron 28:2; Pss 99:5; 132:7-8). The *kappōret* of the ark was the place of atonement, granting access to the Royal King. These two ideas, “royal throne” and “place of

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<sup>61</sup>On this “guarding” aspect of the *kappōret* cherubim, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 70-71; Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 37-38; and Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 212.

<sup>62</sup>So Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 41.

<sup>63</sup>Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 85.

atonement,” are married and made inseparable in the ark. Eugene Merrill writes, “The only way the Holy One of Israel could be approached as Israel’s King was by an act of atonement requiring sacrifices that satisfied his justice and effected the cleansing of those who would come to pay homage to him.”<sup>64</sup>

### **Exodus 40:34-35: God Moves In**

At last, the climactic moment of the entire tabernacle narrative came to pass.<sup>65</sup> Exodus 40:34-35 records what had been anticipated in Exodus 25:8, when God expressed his desire to “dwell” (*šākan*) in a building set in the midst of his people. Exodus 40:34-35 reads, “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” In tremendous grace, God now came to dwell amongst the very people who had only recently betrayed him (Exod 32). The glorious, overwhelming presence of God in the tabernacle was nothing less than God moving in with his people—a confirmation that the marriage ratified at Sinai had not been annulled due to the adultery of the bride.<sup>66</sup>

### **Exodus 40:34-35 and Genesis**

Ever since Adam and Eve had enjoyed the presence of God in the Garden of Eden, God had been moving history toward the moment described in Exodus 40:34-35.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 353.

<sup>65</sup>Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 59, writes, “The climax of the tabernacle story in Exodus is the actual occupation of the tabernacle by God (Exod. 40:34-38).”

<sup>66</sup>Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 221, explains, “The tabernacle completes Mount Sinai. Sinai is a marriage, the start of a new relationship. Now the partners must start to live together.”

<sup>67</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Exodus*, in vol. 1 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 557.



God's presence now "settled" (*šākan*; Exod 40:34) on this new creation called the tabernacle, just as at the creation of the world, God's Spirit had hovered over the proceedings (Gen 1:2).<sup>68</sup> The tabernacle was a new creational moment; a recovery of the blessing of God's presence that had been forfeited in Genesis 3.

### **Exodus 40:34-35 and the Rest of Exodus**

The burning bush (Exod 3) and the Red Sea event (Exod 14) were but preludes to the magnificent moment described in Exodus 40:34-35, when God came to dwell in the tabernacle.<sup>69</sup> The "cloud," which had been so prominent in the pages of Exodus (Exod 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15-18; 33:9-10; 34:5), and which signified the protecting, guiding presence of God, now came to cover the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-35).<sup>70</sup> On Mount Sinai, the cloud (*ʿānān*) covered (*kāšā*) the mountain for six days, and was connected directly to God's glory (*kābôd*), which dwelt (*šākan*) there (Exod 24:16).<sup>71</sup> Remarkably, in Exodus 40:34-35, the cloud (*ʿānān*) covers (*kāšā*) the tabernacle, and is connected directly to God's glory (*kābôd*) that settles (*šākan*) there. Further, just as Mount Sinai was divided into three zones: (1) the base, where Israel camped, (2) the mid-section, where only elders and priests went (Exod 24:1-8), and (3) the summit, where God dwelt and where only Moses could go; so the tabernacle was divided into three areas.<sup>72</sup> The outer court of the tabernacle could be accessed by Israelites, the Holy Place only by priests,

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<sup>68</sup>So Hyde, *God in Our Midst*, 206.

<sup>69</sup>Oswalt *Exodus*, 557.

<sup>70</sup>See John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 500; Enns, *Exodus*, 598; Sarna, *Exodus*, 237; and Stuart, *Exodus*, 791.

<sup>71</sup>For the observations in this sentence and the next, I am indebted to Hamilton, *Exodus*, 620.

<sup>72</sup>The similarities between the three zones of Sinai and the three zones of the tabernacle are commonly noted. See, e.g., Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 131-32; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 450-51; Hamilton, *Handbook*, 220-22; Leithart, *A House for My Name*, 84; Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain?*, 96-97; and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 203-4.

and the Most Holy Place only by the High Priest (and that once per year). Further, parallels between Mount Sinai and the tabernacle concern the fact that each featured the tablets of stone, and each were also characterized by the dual concepts of immanence and transcendence: God was tangibly present on both mountain and *kappōret*, but the way of approach on both edifices was designed to teach his holiness and transcendence.<sup>73</sup> All things considered, it would appear that the tabernacle was intended to be what Sarna has called a “portable Sinai.”<sup>74</sup> Where Sinai had been the means of God’s communication with Israel, it was not feasible or possible to take Sinai to Canaan. Thus the tabernacle became God’s portable communication vehicle.

#### **Exodus 40:34-35 and Leviticus**

Noteworthy is the fact that the book of Exodus ends with Moses being repelled at the entrance to the tabernacle: “Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:35). Almost like the north pole of the world’s strongest magnet would resist another such pole, so the conspicuous presence of God in the tabernacle withstood the access of Moses. Perhaps the situation is as simple as that suggested by Douglas Stuart, who argues that it would be inappropriate for the builder of a house (i.e., Moses) to “retain a key and enter at will a house that he had built once it was sold to its occupying owner.”<sup>75</sup> God was simply asserting his ownership of the home that Moses had built, and thus Moses was denied entrance. While Stuart’s suggestion may have merit, the observations of L. Michael Morales seem more narratively astute. Morales notes that Exodus ends with Moses unable to enter “through Eden’s gates into the glory of the divine Presence,” and observes that

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<sup>73</sup>See Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 447.

<sup>74</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 237.

<sup>75</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 792-93.

“Leviticus begins with Israel, God’s second firstborn son (or second Adam), standing outside the cherubim-guarded entry of Eden.”<sup>76</sup> Morales argues that the tension created at the close of Exodus “propels the content of Leviticus 1-10 toward its dramatic resolution.”<sup>77</sup> Even Moses—of all people—was unable to approach the Presence. Sacrificial offerings and a formal priesthood were needed, issues which are addressed in the pages of Leviticus.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Exodus 40:34-35 looks backward to Genesis, gathers together strands from the wider book of Exodus, and reaches forward into Leviticus. As a whole, the lengthy Exodus tabernacle narrative also connects in organic fashion with the greater canon of Scripture. Attention turns, finally, to a brief, concluding consideration of the trajectory from tabernacle, to temple, to Jesus, to church.

### **Tabernacle, Temple, Jesus, Church**

When David was king of Israel, and when Yahweh had secured rest for Israel in the land, giving Israel peace from the enemies that surrounded them (2 Sam 7:1), David announced his desire to transition God’s house from a mobile tent to a permanent temple (2 Sam 7:2, 5).<sup>79</sup> According to the author of Chronicles, God gave David the temple blueprint (1 Chron 28:11-19), and David amassed a profusion of materials for the project (1 Chron 22:14). David also recruited suitable craftsmen (1 Chron 22:15-16) and identified a work force for the temple (1 Chron 23-26). Yet the record of Scripture shows that it was not David who built the tabernacle’s replacement, but rather, his son Solomon.

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<sup>76</sup>Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain?*, 111.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 121. See also Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 765-66; and Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 322.

<sup>79</sup>The remainder of this paragraph, as well as the next, follows the observations made by Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 825; and Block, *For the Glory of God*, 306.

First Kings 8 records the dedication of Solomon's temple, a lavish edifice that would stand for centuries until its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 BC. Shortly before that cataclysmic destruction, the glory of Yahweh departed from Solomon's temple (Ezek 10:18-19; 11:22-25). A return of Yahweh's glory to a future temple was prophesied (Ezek 43:1-9), but at the dedication of the second temple (Ezra 6:13-18) no record of God's infilling glory is reported. The Old Testament thus ends with a second temple raised, but no explicit or implicit notice that God occupied the building.

How mammoth is the import, then, of the notices one finds near the beginning of the gospel records. The Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is applied to the person of Jesus (Matt 1:23), who is "God with us;" the real presence of God, come to earth in human flesh. What Yahweh had promised all along, namely, that he would dwell or walk among people and be their God (Exod 29:45; Lev 26:12); that he would dwell in the midst of his people (Exod 25:8; Zech 2:10); now came to pass with the Advent of Jesus Christ, who "tabernacled" among people (John 1:14; Greek: *skēnoō*).<sup>80</sup> In true tabernacling fashion, it is the person of Jesus who "abides" with people (John 6:56; 15:4-5) and "makes a home" with them (John 14:23). Like the presence of God in the Exodus tabernacle, which moved about with the people as they journeyed toward the land, the tabernacling presence of Jesus is a mobile presence, sojourning with people who are "on the way" (Mark 10:32). The same "glory" of God that filled the Exodus tabernacle at its completion (Exod 40:34; LXX: *doxa*) characterizes the person of Jesus at his appearance (John 1:14; Greek: *doxa*).<sup>81</sup> With the infant Jesus, not only does the presence of God return to the physical

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<sup>80</sup>Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 210, notes a connection between John 1:14 and Exod 25:8, writing, "It is as if [John] the evangelist makes the statement with a smile of recognition and thinks of the word in [Exod] 25:8, 'I will dwell [in a tent] in their midst,' and exclaims: now it has happened again!"

<sup>81</sup>In connection with the mention of "glory" in John 1:14, Thomas N. Willoughby, "The Word Became Flesh and Tabernacled Among Us": A Primer for the Exodus in John's Gospel," in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, ed. Michael Fox (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 124, notes Exod 33, where Yahweh only allowed Moses to look at Yahweh's back whilst Moses hid in the cleft of the rock: "In light of [Exod 33], it is an overwhelmingly powerful statement that the author of John makes when he says

temple (Luke 2:27), Jesus pronounces that he is the replacement of Herod's temple (John 2:19-21; cf. Rev 21:22), and in another place, Jesus declares his superiority to the old, physical temple (Matt 12:6).<sup>82</sup>

In Old Testament times, only once annually was the High Priest permitted to enter behind the curtain that separated the Holy Place of the tabernacle from the Most Holy Place (Lev 16:34; cf. Heb 9:7).<sup>83</sup> The "curtain" in question was the *katapetasma* (Lev 16:2 LXX), a holy barrier between human beings and God's holy presence. Hebrews 10:20 trumpets the astonishing news that "a new and living way" into the presence of God has been opened by the *katapetasma*, which is Christ's flesh. The church now has confidence to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:19) to seek mercy and grace at God's throne (Heb 4:16).

Because of the union that the church shares with the true temple, Jesus, the church too is overshadowed by the glorious presence of God (Acts 2:1-4; cf. Exod 40:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:10-11), and is itself the "temple" of God (1 Cor 3:10-17; 6:19; Eph 2:22; 1 Pet 2:4-10), which is characterized by God's glory (John 17:22; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). The presence of God now indwells the church (Rom 5:5; Gal 4:6; Tit 3:5-6), just as his presence had filled tabernacle and temple.

One day the full measure of God's tabernacling presence, lost in Genesis 3, will saturate all the earth (Rev 21:3).<sup>84</sup> Until then, the church of the one who is temple

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'we beheld His glory . . . full of grace and truth. . . Suffice it to say that the ability to behold the fullness of the divine glory, is without precedent in biblical literature since the Garden narrative of Genesis apart from other encounters with Jesus.'

<sup>82</sup>For an excellent meditation on the significance of Matt 12:6, see Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 178.

<sup>83</sup>For the thought in this paragraph I am indebted to Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 178.

<sup>84</sup>Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 981, comments, "What Moses . . . made possible locally will in the end be true cosmically. The earth shall be filled with the glory of God, and all creation shall be fully inhabited by God's glory."

sacrifice (Heb 9:26; 10:12), *kappōret* place of propitiation (Rom 3:25), temple High Priest (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, etc.), temple curtain (Heb 10:20), temple light (John 1:9; 8:12; Rev 21:23), temple bread (John 6:35, 48), temple presence (John 1:14), and temple itself (John 2:21), must display to the nations the reality of its nature as the indwelt, mobile residence of God. At stake is nothing less than the eternal destiny of souls. May the church understand its high and blessed calling, and may God be glorified by its witness.

## CHAPTER 10

### EPILOGUE

A longer, more comprehensive study of the book of Exodus would certainly include treatments of various texts and major events that, because of space, have been omitted here. For instance, not included in this thesis is a thoroughgoing reflection on the plagues; nor have chapters been incorporated on the Ten Commandments, Golden Calf, or Book of the Covenant. These omissions notwithstanding, it is hoped that the content supplied herein provides a sufficient example of what a biblical-theological approach to preaching the book of Exodus might look like.

A close reading of Exodus texts has been attempted here, paying due attention not only to the context of Exodus itself, but also to the wider context of the Christian canon.<sup>1</sup> To borrow the schema of Stephen Dempster, an effort has been made to read certain *texts* of Exodus, giving careful attention to the *Text*.<sup>2</sup> Further, the exegetical direction of each Exodus passage has been decidedly Christ-ward, since every Exodus promise finds its “yes” in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). The reader will judge whether appropriate attention has been given—not only to the Christological and canonical aspects just

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<sup>1</sup>Charles H. H. Scobie, “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” in *Out of Egypt*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 5, ed. Craig Bartholomew and Anthony C. Thistleton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 454, contends, “Every passage that is the subject of a sermon must be seen ‘in context’—this means not just in the context of the book of the Bible of which it is a part, but also in the context of canonical Scripture as a whole. This does not mean denying or ignoring the meaning of the text in its original historical context, but it does involve going beyond that and discerning deeper dimensions of meaning that only become apparent when the text is read in the context of the entire canon.”

<sup>2</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 27-28, argues, “There is . . . a theological imperative for believers to view texts in the more holistic framework of the Text. . . . [The] hermeneutical myopia of the last few centuries [which] magnifies texts and minimize[s] the Text.”

mentioned—but also to the literary, historical, and doxological elements that must be present in any robust biblical-theological exploration.

To write such an extended, detailed study of the book of Exodus has been a true delight. May God be glorified in this labor, and may the readership of this thesis, however modest, be helped in some small way to better comprehend this magnificent portion of the Bible. When one immerses oneself in the book of Exodus, the result is an emergence of doxology and worship. The one who reads Exodus with care and prayerful reverence will not hesitate to answer the queries posed in Exodus 15:11 with confidence and joyful praise: among the gods there is none like Yahweh! No god holds a candle to the majestic holiness, awesome might, and breathtaking splendor of the God of the exodus, who has revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ!



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## ABSTRACT

### PREACHING THE BOOK OF EXODUS: DEVELOPING SERVANTS, MISSIONARIES AND WORSHIPPERS

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The primary purpose of this project was to provide eight examples of biblical-theological sermon manuscripts on key texts from the Old Testament book of Exodus. The opening chapter of the project includes (1) a brief discussion of the nature, purpose, and necessity of biblical theology; (2) a description of how the discipline of biblical theology can be applied to the book of Exodus; (3) a demonstration of familiarity with literature on the book of Exodus; and (4) overviews of the texts chosen for the sermon manuscripts. Chapters 2 through 9 are the sermon manuscripts, which demonstrate employment of the discipline of biblical theology. Chapter 10 is a brief epilogue recapping the focus and aims of the project.

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