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THE MISSIONARY HEART OF EXODUS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY IN CANDIDACY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (REVISION)

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## Abstract

One of the characteristics of modern Old Testament scholarship has been the tendency to neglect the canonical context in favor of other contexts for interpretation, such as sources, traditions, a particular *Sitz im Leben*, and the like. One practical effect of such a tendency is a loss of confidence that the OT exhibits any discernable theological unity or coherence, a skepticism that remains among many despite an increasing appreciation of the canonical form of the text in the last 40 years. This thesis seeks to address that issue on a smaller level, through an investigation of the canonical form of the book of Exodus, by arguing that Exodus has a governing theological trajectory which unites the various materials in the book. The argument will examine each of the major sections of the book of Exodus in an effort to discern the theological burden of each: the exodus from Egypt (1:1—15:21), the wilderness wandering (15:22—18:27), the giving of the Law (19—24), the tabernacle instructions (25—31), the golden calf (32—34), and the tabernacle construction (35—40). We will argue that YHWH's missionary commitment to be known as God among the nations is the impulse that drives YHWH's actions in each section of the book, and thereby unites, theologically, its various materials. We will conclude with a brief discussion concerning the implications of the study for the wider discipline of Biblical Theology.

## Declarations

- (i) I, William Ross Blackburn, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 98,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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- (ii) I was admitted as a research student in January 2000 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in August 2002; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2002 and 2005.

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Sola Dei Gloria

## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>Biblica</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CJ	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
EBC	Expositors Bible Commentary
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>

FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>HALOT</i>	Kohler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-99.
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HTKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JANESCU</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>NCB</i>	<i>New Century Bible</i>

NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i>
<i>ThR</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>NF</i>	<i>Neue Folge</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeithschrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

WUNT

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZAW

*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

## PREFACE

The following thesis will argue that YHWH's missionary commitment to the nations is the central theological burden of Exodus. Therefore, before beginning the argument, a word about the use of the term *mission* is warranted. One of the dangers of using such a well-known term is that ideas commonly connected with the term are often read into the argument, sometimes bringing in unintended associations. For instance, despite its definition as "a remedial enterprise undertaken with zeal and enthusiasm,"<sup>1</sup> it is difficult for the term "crusade" to be divorced in the minds of many readers from violence and coercion. Likewise, despite its definition as "a specific task with which a person or a group is charged,"<sup>2</sup> mission also carries with it meaning (e.g. direct, usually Christian, evangelistic endeavor) which falls outside the present discussion. There are, however, important reasons for using the term. First, the contemporary use of the term *mission*, particularly as defined above, fits the following argument. Many contemporary institutions, whether religious or secular, use the term mission to speak of their purpose, hence the popular use of the term *mission statement*. However, while the terms *mission* and *purpose* overlap, the former has a distinctively proactive sense that the latter often does not. Sunglasses serve the purpose of reducing glare, but one would hardly speak of the mission of a pair of sunglasses. Mission, on the other hand, implies both purpose and

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<sup>1</sup> "Crusade," in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> "Mission," in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1971).

the corresponding effort and strategy to achieve that purpose. The word *mission* therefore fits the following argument, which addresses both YHWH's purpose in Exodus and the means by which YHWH pursues that purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The second reason for using the term *mission* lies in a context in which I think the argument is appropriately considered. Using the term *mission* has the effect of positioning the following argument in the wider discussion of Biblical mission. Too often the concept of mission in the OT has either been generally denied, as if the OT has nothing to say concerning mission, or the OT has been used as a short prologue to a discussion of Biblical mission, which usually means mission according to the New Testament. Books on Biblical mission that relegate the OT to one chapter before moving to the NT abound.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in the few discussions of mission in the OT, the tendency seems to be to focus on a handful of texts that seem to address more explicitly missionary themes, texts such as Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 19:4-6, and the book of Jonah.<sup>5</sup> While the importance of these texts cannot be denied, such a treatment has the effect of reading the OT as a collection of proof-texts concerning mission. When this happens, the underlying logic of the OT can be missed, which ultimately weakens the witness of the

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<sup>3</sup> The notion that Israel is called to a mission is common to Jewish thought as well. See, e.g., the introduction to Jewish life by Herman Wouk, *This Is My God* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1987), 18: [o]ur history, in the Scriptures and afterward, is in the main a melancholy account of our failure to live up to this high election, and the catastrophes that come from that failure. But the election stands, the mission remains, and we live because these things are so. That is what our faith teaches."

<sup>4</sup> A recent example of this tendency is Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter Thomas O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2001). Despite the acknowledgement that "[t]he theme of missions in the Old Testament...is a vast subject" (28, n.8), Köstenberger and O'Brien nonetheless give the OT only one of ten chapters, a curious lack of attention in "a biblical theology of mission." Likewise, although he states that "the Old Testament is fundamental to the understanding of mission in the New," David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, vol. 16, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), gives only 4 of his 587 pages in separately discussing the OT. Exceptions include the older treatment of H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Press, 1945) and, more recently, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Kaiser, *Mission*.

OT in this area. Biblical mission in its fullness cannot be appropriately appreciated if the OT is appealed to primarily through several more explicit proof texts.

Two recent publications help lend definition to the term, at least as used in the following discussion. First, Seitz has suggested that mission, Biblically understood, fundamentally involves God seeking to put right what has gone awry, i.e., the evil inclination of the human heart. Christian evangelistic proclamation, with which mission is commonly associated, may be understood as one means by which God sets right what is wrong, but it is only part of that larger concern:

*Mission means getting at the something awry, when we look at the issue theologically and not sociologically. Stated differently, the notion of missionary "sending" is an earthly subset of a theological reality, and it is this theological reality that makes mission have a divine and not a natural or simply human mandate. Mission is God's address to humanity's forfeit. Understood in this way, it is an Old Testament theme as well as a New Testament theme. Indeed, it could be said to be *the* theme of the Old Testament as such.<sup>6</sup>*

If Seitz' understanding is applied to Exodus, that which has gone awry is a condition in which the world does not know YHWH, who is portrayed in Exodus as supreme above all gods. Egypt presumably does not know YHWH (5:2), and even Israel herself, although some fear God (1:17), does not know YHWH as YHWH (6:3).<sup>7</sup> The movement of the book goes from ignorance of YHWH among Israel and Egypt to Israel having finished the tabernacle (40:34-38), a microcosm of YHWH's rule over the universe, with the commission to be a priestly kingdom for the purpose of communicating YHWH to the nations (19:4-6). "Getting at the something awry," for Exodus, is simply YHWH's commitment to make himself known among the nations for who he is, the supreme God over the universe. The goal of the following, then, will be to demonstrate that this

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, "The Old Testament, Mission, and Christian Scripture," in *Figured Out* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 147, italics original.

<sup>7</sup> The implications of 6:3 will be discussed in chapter 2.

commitment to right what is awry, or to move Israel and the nations from ignorance to knowledge of YHWH, is YHWH's motivation behind his actions in Exodus. In this way, the theme is missionary. Whether or not mission, thus understood, is "*the* theme of the Old Testament," as Seitz suggests, is beyond the scope of this paper, but I do intend to argue that it is the governing theme of the book of Exodus.

The second work, Bauckham's *Bible and Mission*,<sup>8</sup> examines Biblical mission in terms of the relationship between the particular and the universal in the Bible. Bauckham understands mission in both the OT and the NT in light of this movement. YHWH particularly chose Abraham for the universal purpose that all families of the earth might be blessed. YHWH particularly chose Israel for the universal purpose that the nations might acknowledge that YHWH is God. YHWH particularly chose Zion, with its Davidic king, for the universal purpose of extending YHWH's rule throughout the earth. In each case, the particular always moves to the universal, leading Bauckham to argue that YHWH never chooses a particular person or people for its own sake, but for the sake of the world.<sup>9</sup> This movement, for Bauckham, is Biblical mission.

The relationship between particularity and universality is of crucial importance in understanding the book of Exodus, especially in arguing that the central concern of Exodus is missionary. One of the chief burdens of the following argument, then, is to demonstrate that the particular existence of Israel has a universal goal, and that Israel's existence is unintelligible apart from her mission to the nations. In other words, the

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<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Although he concedes his argument is about election, Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 284, does not use the term "since it raises other theological expectations I did not want to be distracted by."

following argument will seek to demonstrate that the existence and nature of Israel cannot be rightly understood apart from YHWH's universal mission.

Finally, a point about the language used to express YHWH's mission. Exodus expresses this missionary burden in different ways. Often, it is expressed in terms of knowing YHWH or knowing YHWH's name, such as in the oft-repeated formula "they shall know that I am YHWH." Sometimes it is expressed in terms of YHWH being glorified or honored (e.g., 14:4, 18), and other passages suggest that YHWH acts as he does for the sake of his name (e.g., 32:12). While each of these expressions may have different nuances, they all work together and convey the same general meaning. As we shall see, YHWH desires to be known as God, and, further, as a particular kind of God, a God who is both supreme and good. Knowing YHWH implies honoring him as such. Or, to say it another way, if YHWH is not honored for who he makes himself known to be, then he is not really known. The terms honored, glorified, and known (or acknowledged) will be used at different points in the discussion, depending on which seems to fit best in relation to a given passage. It bears mention, however, that they all point in the same direction.

## THE MISSIONARY HEART OF EXODUS

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM AND THE APPROACH

#### THE PROBLEM

In the opening of his work on Numbers, Dennis Olson writes, “[a] major obstacle to the appreciation and interpretation of any literary work is a perceived lack of coherence or organization.”<sup>1</sup> While the issues at stake in Numbers are in some ways different from those in Exodus, Olson’s comment might well be made with reference to the theology of the book of Exodus. In its concern for differing sources, forms, and traditions lying behind the Biblical text, modern critical scholarship has often approached the text in a fragmentary manner.<sup>2</sup> As Childs comments, “[t]he concentration of critical scholars on form-critical and source analysis has tended to fragment the text and leave the reader with only bits and pieces.”<sup>3</sup> The effort to isolate sources and to trace the development of the text has often been done at the expense of understanding the canonical whole. At the peak of enthusiasm for critical inquiry in 1938, von Rad commented that various types of critical scholarship

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, vol. 71, BJS (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Following John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 87-88, the term “critical” is used to speak broadly of the various types of historical, source, literary and form criticism which base their theological judgments upon historical or literary reconstructions, rather than on the final canonical form of the OT text.

<sup>3</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus* (London: SCM Press, 1974), xiv-xv.

led inevitably further and further away from the final form of the text as we have it.... Indeed, even those who are fully prepared to recognize that it was both necessary and important to traverse these paths cannot ignore the profoundly disintegrating effect which has been one result of this method of hexateuchal criticism. On almost all sides the final form of the Hexateuch has come to be regarded as a starting-point barely worthy of discussion, from which the debate should move away as rapidly as possible in order to reach the real problems underlying it.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the landscape of Pentateuchal studies has changed significantly since 1938. One of the most important differences between Biblical scholarship of the last 40 years and that which preceded it is an increasing theological appreciation for the final form of the text.<sup>5</sup> However, the weight of the long history of fragmentation in modern Biblical scholarship is still felt, and many questions of a theological nature have yet to be addressed. Over the last century, the study of the book of Exodus has, predictably, followed the trajectory of Pentateuchal studies. Graham Davies' recent comment that the work of Walter Moberly, at the time one of his doctoral students, first suggested to him the possibility of reading Exodus 32—34 as a coherent whole provides a good example of how strong the tendency of Biblical scholarship has been to read texts according to a particular critical theory rather than in their final form.<sup>6</sup>

The tendency to read Exodus in a fragmentary manner, however, is not only a characteristic of critical scholarship. Exodus manifests major themes which have often been interpreted in relative isolation from one another, even by interpreters who are not

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<sup>4</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 1.

<sup>5</sup> A word concerning "Biblical scholarship" warrants mention. Study of the OT, of course, has been going on for thousands of years, largely within Jewish and Christian communities, which often ask different questions and approach the OT in a different manner. However, any discussion must have a context, and Western academic Biblical scholarship in the modern era is the context of this work. The study proceeds with an acknowledgement of the narrowness of the community with which it chiefly interacts.

<sup>6</sup> "It was [Moberly] who drew my attention to these chapters and to the possibility of reading them as a coherent whole." Graham Davies, "The Theology of Exodus," in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in the Old Testament in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, ed. Edward Ball, vol. 300, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 143.

mainly interested in critical questions. For instance, some liberation theologians, in rightly seeing the theme of deliverance in Exodus, have given disproportionate weight to 1:1—15:21 in relation to the latter half of the book, which not only misses the main concern of Exodus as a whole, but also leads to a misinterpretation of 1:1—15:21.<sup>7</sup> Despite much good work on the tabernacle, the tabernacle material is often left unintegrated theologically with the rest of Exodus, due to its style, its concern with cultic matters, and the widespread assessment that (as a part of P) it was written much later.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it has been common to see Exodus 19—Numbers 10 as a literary unit, which, while there may be merit in so doing, nonetheless obscures the possibility that Exodus 1—40 might be a theologically meaningful unit. Given that many scholars have seen Exodus 19—40 separated from 1—18 and best grouped with Leviticus and Numbers 1—10, is there any compelling theological reason to examine Exodus according to its canonical boundaries? Reacting to the tendency of much modern scholarship to fragment the final text, thereby encumbering theological enquiry, Childs wrote in the introduction to his 1974 Exodus commentary, “[f]rom a literary point of view, there is a great need to understand the [book of Exodus] as a piece of literature with its own integrity.”<sup>9</sup>

This thesis seeks to address that need: the lack of a sustained, unified theological interpretation of Exodus which adequately accounts for all its sections and thereby respects its literary and canonical integrity. The following thesis will seek to demonstrate that YHWH’s missionary commitment to be known as God among the nations is the central theme of Exodus, which provides a theological framework for understanding

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<sup>7</sup> See “Exodus and Liberation” in Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 127-59.

<sup>8</sup> Davies, “Theology,” 142.

<sup>9</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, xiv. John Durham, *Exodus* (Waco: Word, 1987), xxi, gave a similar assessment in 1987.

Exodus as a literary and theological whole. In so doing, the thesis will also raise the larger hermeneutical question concerning context by offering an example of how Exodus can be interpreted according to its canonical form. It will be argued that, unless the canonical form is appreciated, interpretations of smaller sections of Exodus run the risk of going astray.

Before approaching the book of Exodus, however, the question must be asked: given the immense interest in Exodus, why has this kind of work been so rarely done? Perhaps the rarity of such work is an indication that such an approach is not particularly compelling. Is the attempt to discern a theme that governs a biblical book a legitimate enterprise? Why would a look at Exodus within its canonical boundaries necessarily be important theologically, as opposed to other contexts in which the material in Exodus might be located? In other words, is there a problem here?

The nature of the problem can be seen on two fronts. First, as the literary critic insists, one must know the whole in order to understand the parts. Granted, there is an inevitable circularity in the relationship between the whole and the parts of any given work. This circularity, however, does not invalidate the need to understand both the parts and the whole, allowing each to influence the interpretation of the other. As mentioned above, the general thrust of modern Biblical studies has been to fragment Biblical texts, often interpreting them apart from their canonical and literary context in favor of another, whether that be a particular *Sitz im Leben*, a source, or a stream of tradition. While it continues to be debated whether the final canonical form is the most appropriate context in which to interpret a given passage,<sup>10</sup> it is difficult to deny the general tendency of

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<sup>10</sup> The work of Gerstenberger and Childs is representative of this debate. On the one hand, Gerstenberger rigorously protests against any kind of holistic exegesis, arguing that the final form of any text has no

much modern Biblical criticism to neglect the (canonical) whole in its preoccupation with the parts.

Secondly, the scant attention given to the canonical form of Exodus is a problem because fragmenting the text often fails to relate various themes present in the book. Exodus presents important theological themes which continue to be addressed and developed throughout the OT: e.g., liberation, law, trials and testing, God's wrath, God's mercy, and God's presence. Without the commitment to understand Exodus as a theological whole, it becomes easier to neglect the relationships of the various theological themes and perspectives in the book. For instance, how does the liberation from Egypt relate to the giving of the law at Sinai? Is there a dichotomy between law and grace presented in Exodus (or the Pentateuch)? Is there a distinct theology of the tabernacle, and, if so, how does it relate to the rest of the book? Is there a conflict or contradiction between YHWH's wrath and his mercy (particularly as expressed in the golden calf narrative)? Such biblical concepts cannot be understood separately if they are to be understood in their depth and complexity. In other words, if one does not understand the *correspondence* between A and B, then it cannot be said that one truly understands either A or B.

Whether by critical or thematic criteria, identifying the fragmentation of Exodus as a problem implies is that there is a theological unity to the book of Exodus. Whether or not such theological unity exists is vigorously contested in OT Theology. Many

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special significance, but is noteworthy only insofar as it reflects the theology of the community at the time it was composed. For Gerstenberger, all stages of a text's development are equally important theologically. On the other hand, Childs has just as rigorously argued that earlier stages of a text are important only insofar as they help illuminate the final form of the text, which alone has "normative status." See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 216, and Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 75.

scholars see theological diversity, even contradiction, as inherent in the Biblical text, while others see the search for theological coherence or unity not only as desirable, but imperative. The introductory comments of Gerstenberger and Knierim in their respective OT theologies illustrate the point. Gerstenberger writes:

I in no way regard the plurality and the clearly recognizable syncretism of the OT tradition as a disaster, but as an extraordinary stroke of good fortune. The diversity of the theologies opens up for us a view of other peoples, times and ideas of God; it relieves us of any pressure to look anxiously for the one, unhistorical, immutable, absolutely obligatory notion and guideline in the ups and downs of histories and theologies. It frees us for the honest, relaxed assessment of the theological achievement of our spiritual forbears that they deserve, and it makes us capable, in dialogue with them and with the religions of the world, of finding and formulating the 'right' faith in God, i.e. a faith to be expressed here and now, for an age which represents a turning point and perhaps an end.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Knierim defines the diversity of theological perspectives as problem which it is the task of OT Theology to resolve:

The OT contains a plurality of theologies... the theological problem of the OT, and the discipline of OT theology is constituted by the task of addressing this problem. The theological problem of the OT does not arise from the separate existence of its particular theologies. It arises from their coexistence. The coexistence of these theologies in the OT demands the interpretation of their relationship or correspondence.<sup>12</sup>

In short, what for Gerstenberger constitutes a happy virtue, for Knierim constitutes the central theological problem of the OT. Applying this logic to Exodus, Gerstenberger would see no need to relate the various theological perspectives (and would question the legitimacy of such an effort), while Knierim would strive to understand how those perspectives correspond to each other.

So how is one to proceed? Does the diverse theological material in Exodus present a problem or not? The question ultimately concerns the nature of the text, which

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<sup>11</sup> Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1-2.

cannot be demonstrated without attention to the text. In other words, the question cannot be approached theoretically, but must be addressed exegetically, through practical proposals that seek to demonstrate theological coherence, or unity. Therefore, one can perhaps best argue that there is a problem *after* a positive proposal has been offered. If a positive proposal can be offered that demonstrates theological unity in Exodus, incorporating all its material and theological themes, then a failure to recognize that unity indeed constitutes a problem. If no convincing proposals concerning theological unity are offered, then perhaps there is no unity to be found. The problem, in that case, would lie in seeking unity where there is none, attempting to force an outside schema upon the Biblical text, thereby muting the theological diversity of the OT and distorting proper theological interpretation. In either case, the issue must be joined at the exegetical level, with practical proposals being offered and subsequently evaluated. In the end, whether the lack of theological unity in Exodus is understood as a problem depends upon the outcome of the study.

The following thesis, however, pushes further than simply suggesting that Exodus exhibits theological unity, but argues that Exodus has a governing theological theme that unites the various sections of the book. Given that there has been much debate concerning the legitimacy of seeking a governing theme, or center, a discussion of the issues at stake is warranted. What is usually meant by the term *center* is a governing theme or idea that unites the various parts of a particular piece of literature. Helpful is the discussion of Clines, who discusses the nature of a theme in a variety of ways: a central or controlling idea, an account of the rationale of a given work, a proposal of how

a particular work should be read.<sup>13</sup> While he does not use the term center, Clines' statement that there can be only one theme, which must take account for any divergent or contradictory sub-themes in a given work, is precisely what is meant by the term center as understood in modern OT scholarship, and well describes what I am arguing for in Exodus.<sup>14</sup> The following remarks will address objections raised against the search for a governing theme in the wider field of OT Theology, look at several proposals for a governing theme in Exodus, and end with a general discussion of the canonical approach taken in the thesis.

#### THE THEOLOGICAL CENTER IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

The issue of whether or not the OT exhibits a unifying theme, or center, has been much debated in OT Theology.<sup>15</sup> In an effort to discern theological coherence in the OT, but wary of organizing the OT material in such a way that appeared to impose an outside schema upon the text (such as God-man-salvation), several scholars proposed a center as a way of organizing the OT material that came from the OT itself. The search for a center had both structural and theological dynamics: structural in that finding a center was deemed by some to be the most natural way of organizing the OT material in a manner that did not impose an outside schema upon the text, and theological in that the search for a center implied a literary and/or theological judgment upon the nature of the

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<sup>13</sup> David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed., vol. 10, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 19-26.

<sup>14</sup> This understanding of theme is different from understanding theme as a stream of tradition (Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernard W. Anderson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981)) or as a summary statement of the contents of a narrative (Arie C. Leder, "Reading Exodus to Learn and Learning to Read Exodus," *CTJ* 34 (1999): 11-35).

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the quest for a center of the OT, and the issues involved, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 139-71.

OT literature itself. The concept of a center for OT Theology came to the fore in the work of Eichrodt, who in his *Theology of the Old Testament* proposed covenant as the central and organizing principle of the OT.<sup>16</sup> Since Eichrodt's work, proposals have abounded. Vriezen proposed *communion* with God to be the central theme of the OT,<sup>17</sup> and while Walter Kaiser has argued for *promise* as the center of the OT.<sup>18</sup> Köhler makes an unusually explicit case for a center: "*God is the ruling Lord: that is the one fundamental statement in the theology of the OT... Everything else derives from it. Everything else leans upon it. Everything else can be understood with reference to it and only to it. Everything else subordinates itself to it.*"<sup>19</sup> For H.H. Schmid, "the doctrine of creation... is plainly the "fundamental theme" [of the OT]."<sup>20</sup> Otto Kaiser confidently claims of the OT that "one may easily conclude that the Law is its center."<sup>21</sup> Labuschagne proposed that the essential characteristic of Israel's religion could be found by looking at statements of YHWH's incomparability.<sup>22</sup> Preuss has argued for a dual focus, YHWH's election of Israel for communion with the world and the obedience required of Israel and the nations,<sup>23</sup> while Schmidt (Exodus 20:2), Herrmann

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<sup>16</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Theodorus C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, trans. S. Neuijen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 131.

<sup>18</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 32-35.

<sup>19</sup> Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 3rd ed. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), 30.

<sup>20</sup> H. H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 111.

<sup>21</sup> Otto Kaiser, "The Law as Center of the Hebrew Bible," in "*Sha'arei Talmon*", ed. Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov, and Weston W. Fields (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 94.

<sup>22</sup> C.J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, vol. 5, Pretoria Oriental Series (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 1:25. Preuss argues that a comprehensive approach to OT Theology is imperative.

(Deuteronomy), and Martens (Exodus 5:22—6:8) have argued for Biblical texts as the unifying center of the OT.<sup>24</sup>

Many, however, are not convinced that searching for a center is an appropriate way to approach the OT. The arguments against a center fall into two general categories: those who find the OT too diverse or contradictory to exhibit theological unity, and those who acknowledge theological unity in the OT, but do not see that unity in a single central concept.<sup>25</sup> For instance, von Rad, largely in response to Eichrodt's proposal, spoke of "the illusory idea of the unity of the OT, an idea which must now be refounded."<sup>26</sup> For von Rad, the theology of the OT was to be found in the different streams of tradition, streams that, when considered alongside one another, exhibited a heterogeneity that could not be neatly harmonized: "[t]he unity of the Old Testament will be called in question, because the Old Testament contains not merely one, but quite a number of theologies which are widely divergent both in structure and method of argument."<sup>27</sup> Although content to see the NT as unified in Jesus Christ, von Rad denied that the OT suggested a unified center.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Werner H. Schmidt, *Das Erste Gebot: Seine Bedeutung für das AT* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1969), 11, Siegfried Herrmann, "Die Konstruktive Restauration, Das Deuteronomium als Mitte Biblischer Theologie," in *Probleme Biblischer Theologie*, ed. Hans Walter Wolff (München: C. Kaiser, 1971), E. A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Dennis T. Olson, "Deuteronomy as De-Centering Center: Reflections on Postmodernism and the Quest for a Theological Center of the Hebrew Scriptures," *Semeia* 71 (1995): 119-32, has recently pointed out the postmodern objection to a center, which has less to do with the Bible per se than a general suspicion of any attempt to find a foundational structure: "[p]ostmodernists claim that the search for an authoritative and universal center participates in the human desire (fueled by modernity and the Enlightenment) to define, control, master, and manipulate everything from nature to technology, from history to texts" (120).

<sup>26</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:415.

<sup>27</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:414.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick C. Prussner and John H. Hayes, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 259-60, have argued that von Rad unwittingly recognized a center, which (in von Rad's words) was "one unifying principle towards which Israel's theological thinking strove, and with reference to which it ordered its material and thought; this was 'Israel,' the people of God, which always acts as a unit, and with which God always deals as a unit." Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:118. Cf. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 145-51.

More recent work likewise finds the quest for a center problematic. Whybray, who found OT Theology to be a “non-existent beast,” argued that “[t]he religion of Israel was a mixture of diverse and even contradictory elements *which, however, constituted a unity in the minds of those who practiced it.*”<sup>29</sup> Collins finds the quest for a theological center “invariably reductive.”<sup>30</sup> The title of his 2002 work, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, shows Gerstenberger’s skepticism that such a quest is valid. In his preliminary remarks, Gerstenberger writes,

[t]raditionally, the authors of ‘Theologies of the Old Testament’ use the singular in the title as if in the many layers of the texts and compositions of the Hebrew Bible with skill and patience one could in fact bring out a single doctrinal structure, a scarlet thread, a theological ground base, a hidden ‘centre’, etc. But because most modern theologians have been trained in historical criticism and cannot overlook the exciting diversity of the collections of writings, such unification cannot be achieved without violent means. Those who want to depict *the* theology of the OT must declare that one element, one stratum, one idea of their choice is the dominant voice of the great OT chorus of faith. All other elements then have to be made subordinate to it.<sup>31</sup>

The assumption under which Gerstenberger operates is that “exciting diversity” leads to theological contradiction, or at least serious theological dissonance. In other words, diversity means that different voices in the OT compete against one another, rendering illegitimate any attempt to find unity, an attempt which cannot succeed without ignoring parts of the OT, or twisting passages to mean what they do not. The language Gerstenberger uses, that the theologian must “declare” a centre under which everything else is “made subordinate,” shows that Gerstenberger sees all attempts at discerning a

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<sup>29</sup> R.N. Whybray, “Old Testament Theology—a Non-Existent Beast?” in *Scripture: Meaning and Method*, ed. Barry P. Thompson (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987), 176, italics original.

<sup>30</sup> John J. Collins, “The Exodus and Biblical Theology,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice O. Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, vol. 8, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 247.

<sup>31</sup> Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 2. Cf. the comments of Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 56, who recognizes Gerstenberger’s concern not to force the OT into an artificial unity, but who nevertheless argues for the need for focal points for understanding the OT.

theological center are necessarily imposed upon the text. For Gerstenberger, unity is an impossibility, for the nature of the Biblical text is too diverse: “the OT cannot of itself offer any unitary theological or ethical view.”<sup>32</sup>

Levenson shares the skepticism for the search for a center, finding it “spurious” and largely driven by (Protestant) theologians with prior theological commitments.<sup>33</sup> Levenson’s main objection, however, lies elsewhere. The Jewish exegetical tradition, argues Levenson, does not lend itself to a search for unity, for two main reasons. First, Jews, in the main, do not interpret the Hebrew Bible independently of subsequent rabbinic tradition. In other words, the Protestant conception of *sola scriptura*, holding Scripture as a standard by which subsequent tradition is judged, is foreign to Jewish exegesis. Secondly, the very nature of Jewish interpretation resists the search for unity. As Levenson points out, Jewish interpretation is characterized by internal debate, with many viewpoints being set alongside one another, often with no attempt to adjudicate between competing views.<sup>34</sup> To search for a center, according to Levenson, would be to repudiate their own textual and exegetical traditions:

A tradition whose sacred texts are internally argumentative will have a far higher tolerance for theological polydoxy (within limits) and far less motivation to flatten the polyphony of the sources into a monotony. It is not only that Jews have less motivation than Christians to find a unity or center in their Bible: if they did find one, they would have trouble integrating it with their most traditional modes of textual reasoning. What Christians may perceive as a gain, Jews may perceive as a loss.<sup>35</sup>

Another line of argument against a center comes from scholars who acknowledge *theological* unity in the OT, but who deny that the OT exhibits any *structural* unity. In

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<sup>32</sup> Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 56.

other words, the OT may be theologically coherent without being organized around a single structuring concept. Those who hold this position argue against a center on two main grounds: organizing around a center mutes the richness and diversity of the OT, and the lack of consensus concerning the identity of that center is evidence that there is none to be discerned. Baker repudiates the idea of a center, arguing that “a more genuinely ‘biblical’ approach is to recognize the value of the diversity in the Bible and to refuse to force that diversity into the mould of an artificial unity. We should not be afraid of diversity: it does not stand in contradiction to the unity of the Bible but is complementary to it.”<sup>36</sup> Even Rowley, known for his concern to acknowledge the unity of the Bible, did not seek a center: “I do not propose to single out one key idea in terms of which to construct the whole, such as the covenant, or election, or salvation, partly because I think no one of these, or even all together, adequate, and partly because it is of the essence of the OT to deal not so much in abstract ideas as in ideas which are embodied in concrete history.”<sup>37</sup> Hasel’s rhetorical question well sums up the argument against a center: “Can the various proposals and the richness of themes of the Old Testament not be recognized for what they are, expressions of the Old Testament that manifest in one respect or another the richness and multiplicity of ways in which God has communicated with humanity and Israel in all his relations with them?”<sup>38</sup>

While the above objections to a center are important, and not easily discounted, it must be noted that they cannot be final as long as the OT is studied. It is one thing to

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<sup>36</sup> David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, revised ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 243.

<sup>37</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1956), 20.

<sup>38</sup> Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 167. Despite Hasel’s skepticism that there is such thing as a center, he seems to acknowledge the possibility: “[d]oes not God manifest himself in the variety and richness of all parts of the OT, all of which contribute to a knowledge of the divine purpose for Israel, the nations, and the universe?” (p. 55). While Hasel formally denies a center, his language suggests that the variety of the OT material points in the same direction—a knowledge of God’s divine purpose for the world.

believe that the OT has no center because one has not found a workable proposal, it is quite another to declare flatly that center does not exist, thereby declaring the search for such as, at best, misguided. And, unless we have arrived at a complete understanding of the theology of the OT, it is premature to declare attempts to argue for a center as artificial or stubbornly driven by prior commitments. It is, of course, a logical fallacy to declare that something does not exist because one is not aware of its existence. The search for a center, contra Baker, does not have to be fueled by a “fear of diversity,” but may be driven by a goal common to all scholarship: to understand more fully the text before us.

#### EXODUS AND THE THEOLOGICAL CENTER

On a smaller scale, Exodus scholarship mirrors the concerns debated in the larger context of OT Theology. While the debate concerning a theological center of Exodus is more implicit than in the larger discussion concerning OT Theology, it is no less real. The works of Gowan and Durham well illustrate the point. Revealing his skepticism that theological unity can be discovered in Exodus (hence his title *Theology in Exodus*), Gowan comments that his approach “attempts to take seriously the variety of voices in scripture, aiming not to harmonize by taking a synchronic approach.”<sup>39</sup> Much in line with Gerstenberger’s rejection of a center, Gowan finds the attempt to establish theological unity a manifestation of not taking the Scriptures seriously enough. For Gowan, listening to Exodus theologically means listening to the different voices therein

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<sup>39</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), x.

and letting them stand alongside one another.<sup>40</sup> Durham, on the other hand, makes a concerted case, not only for theological unity, but also for a theological center for Exodus, arguing that the theme of God's presence unites all the diverse materials therein.

Rather than speaking of a center, most interpreters of Exodus are more comfortable in speaking of theological themes, without attempting to draw them together into a larger theological framework. For Brueggemann, the major theological themes are Liberation, Law, Covenant, and Presence.<sup>41</sup> Cole cites several major themes in Exodus, each speaking of a different characteristic of God found in Exodus: "The God Who Controls History," "I Am YHWH," "The God Who Is Holy," "The God Who Remembers," "The God Who Acts in Salvation," "The God Who Acts in Judgment," "The God Whose Anger May Be Averted," "The God Who Speaks," "The God Who is Transcendent," and "The God who Lives among His People."<sup>42</sup> Fretheim finds the following leading themes: "A Theology of Creation," "The Knowledge of God," "The Meaning of Liberation and Exodus as Paradigm," "Israel's Worship and Yahweh's Presence," "Law, Covenant, and Israel's Identity."<sup>43</sup> Kaiser sees the three major themes as deliverance from Egypt, God's self-revelation (covenant, law, and tabernacle), and the wilderness wanderings.<sup>44</sup>

There have been, however, several works that have offered a unified theological perspective on Exodus. Although his work focuses on the latter part of Exodus, Dohmen

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<sup>40</sup> The major themes Gowan sees in Exodus are revealed in his chapter titles: "the Absence of God," "the Numinous," "I will be with you," "Name," "Promise," "the Divine Destroyer," "God of Grace and God of Glory," and "the Distancing of God. See the table of contents in Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, vol. 1, *NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 678-80.

<sup>42</sup> Cole, *Exodus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 19-40.

<sup>43</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 12-22.

<sup>44</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, vol. 2, *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 287.

has suggested how the book as a whole fits together.<sup>45</sup> Although dividing Exodus into two central parts, the Exodus (1—18) and Sinai (19—40), he is not content to see the two parts as thematically distinct. Dohmen sees the land, not Sinai, as the goal of the Exodus, which raises the question of the function of Sinai between the Exodus and the entry into the land. For Dohmen, Sinai serves to prepare Israel for her life in the land. Israel's life in the land is not simply her residence there, but rather her life there in covenant relationship with God. Sinai gives Israel her constitution, providing the contours of her service to God in that land. Thus, while he can speak of the two parts distinctly, Dohmen nonetheless sees the two as inseparably intertwined, and ultimately serving the same goal of Israel's living in the land. Dohmen is not concerned to deny that the two parts reflect separate traditions, but rather to demonstrate that, in their present relationship, they are inextricably bound to one another:

So wird am Anfang des Exodusbuches schon festgehalten, dass der »Sinai« *der* Kristallisationspunkt des »Exodus« im Sinne des Gesamtgeschehens ist, nicht in Konkurrenz zum Ziel »Land« und auch nicht *vor* diesem, sondern *für* dieses Ziel. Am Sinai wird Israel als Volk Gottes konstituiert und erhält die Voraussetzungen für das Leben als solches im verheißenen Land in einzigartiger Verbindung mit seinem Gott JHWH.<sup>46</sup>

So, while Dohmen might speak of distinct sections, he sees the two working together in a common trajectory, thus giving Exodus unity in its different parts.

There is little to quibble with here, particularly since Dohmen's focus on 19—40 is not primarily concerned with looking with Exodus as a whole. Dohmen's analysis is helpful, and he is surely correct in seeing the both the Exodus and Sinai as having to do with Israel's life in the land. If there is criticism, it is not in the connections that Dohmen sees, but rather that he could push further in asking the question of *why* YHWH acts as he

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<sup>45</sup> Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, HTKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, 37, italics original.

does in Exodus. Exodus has much to say concerning YHWH's motives in both the Exodus and Sinai, motives which extend beyond Israel's life in the land, which are vital in understanding the relationship between the two sections. However, given the scope of his commentary, this may be beyond his concerns.

Durham makes a determined case for YHWH's presence as the governing theme of Exodus:

The centerpiece of this unity is the theology of Yahweh present with and in the midst of his people Israel. Throughout the Book of Exodus in its canonical form, this theme is constantly in evidence, serving as a theological anchor and also as a kind of compass indicating the directions in which the book is to go.<sup>47</sup>

While he cites two other controlling themes, deliverance and covenant, as extensions of this primary concern with presence, for Durham the theme of presence is a true center, accounting for all the material of the book, and rendering Exodus "a one-track book" and "theologically single-minded."<sup>48</sup> In a manner unusual for a Biblical commentary, Durham keeps the theological center in view throughout his discussion.

While Durham's analysis has much to commend it, there are two difficulties with Durham's center. First, the theme of presence is a difficult theme to control. Difficulty in controlling a theme does not, of course, rule out a particular theme as a plausible possibility, but it does require particularly careful handling. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the difficulty:

the multiplication of the sons of Jacob in the Egyptian delta, a fulfillment of the covenant promise to the fathers (Gen 17:1-8; 28:10-15, etc.) is effected by the Presence of God among them (Exod 1:7, 20); the dramatic series of the mighty

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<sup>47</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xxi. The theme of presence is likewise strongly emphasized in Davies' commentary: "[t]he book of Exodus is above all else in the OT the book of the presence of the Lord.... The constant witness of the book to the theophanic presence and the theocentric thinking and art of these writers thus suggest that the religious teaching of the book, whether it be providence or revelation or redemption, must be related to that presentation of the personal Presence of the Lord which underlies the book and bestows a unity upon it." G. Henton Davies, *Exodus*, TBC (London: SCM Press, 1967), 48.

<sup>48</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xxiii.

acts in Egypt, by which first Israel, then the Egyptian people... are convinced of the power of Yahweh, is represented repeatedly as the action of Yahweh on the scene.<sup>49</sup>

Durham argues that both Israel's multiplication and the plagues highlight YHWH's presence with Israel. Recognizing YHWH's activity in multiplying Israel or bringing disaster upon Egypt is different, however, than arguing that each points to YHWH's presence. One does not have to be present in order to act. In fact, the verses that Durham cites to make his point regarding the multiplication (Exod 1:7, 20) say nothing about YHWH's presence. Recognizing that the book of Exodus is about YHWH's interaction with Israel (and Egypt) is different than saying that Exodus is about YHWH's presence. Furthermore, even if YHWH's actions indicated above indirectly bear upon the issue of YHWH's presence, which they may well do, they surely do not address the theme of presence with the same intention and depth as does the Tabernacle material or the account of the golden calf, where the issue of YHWH *dwelling* among Israel is explicitly at stake. To make an argument that Exodus is primarily about YHWH's presence would require one to honor the differences in the way presence is handled in each section. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to call the theme of presence the unifying theme suggests a further question: why does YHWH desire to be present with Israel? Now it may well be that the book of Exodus does not supply an answer, but if it does, then surely this underlying reason or reasons must be important in understanding the theme of the book. This is not to deny that presence is a major theme in the book, or even the central theme of the book. However, Durham does not sufficiently explore why YHWH's presence is so important in Exodus, and how YHWH's presence fits into his larger purposes.

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<sup>49</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xxii.

Graham Davies has recently offered a suggestion concerning the theme of Exodus. In his article "The Theology of Exodus," Davies argues that the common approach of seeing Exodus in the terms salvation and/or law can obscure what may be the primary theme of Exodus. For Davies, that primary theme, which he does not identify explicitly, is composed of the four related themes worship, divine presence, encounter with God, and holiness.<sup>50</sup> Davies begins with the tabernacle, and finds all four linked themes apparent. The tabernacle was a place of sacrificial worship, the context in which the law of Leviticus is meant to be read. Suggesting presence, Davies points to the tabernacle as the "dwelling place" of YHWH, citing both the meaning of משכן as dwelling place, and 25:8 which explicitly states that the tabernacle is for dwelling. The other designation of the tabernacle, אהל מועד, suggests the tabernacle as a place of divine encounter (25:22, 40:34-35). Finally, the meaning of sanctuary (מקדש), along with the concentration of the root שָׁקַד point to the tabernacle as a holy place. Davies gives the remainder of his article to pointing out how these themes are present in the rest of the book. In this way, Davies demonstrates that these related themes cover the entire book of Exodus, enabling him to seek the theology of Exodus.

While being a very helpful theological reflection on the book of Exodus, Davies' article raises the question of how the different theological perspectives he isolates are related. As we have argued above, to understand A and B requires an understanding of the relationship or correspondence between A and B. While Davies helpfully draws attention to four interrelated themes that are surely present in Exodus, he does not seek to integrate them, or discuss how these four themes work together in a unified manner. Again, it cannot be assumed that there is a relationship between the several aspects that

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<sup>50</sup> Davies, "Theology," 142.

Davies suggests, but if there were a relationship, then an exploration of the theology of Exodus would require a more sustained effort to relate them. If there were no relationship, such would likewise need to be stated, particularly in a discussion of the theology (singular) of Exodus. Going back to the perspective of Clines, if ultimately there is only one theme, then Davies' suggestions need further investigation.

While not primarily concerned with the book of Exodus alone, the work of Clines on the Pentateuch is relevant here, since in arguing for a governing theme in the Pentateuch he seeks to do on a larger level what we seek to do in Exodus. In Clines' words, the governing theme of the Pentateuch is

the partial fulfillment—which implies the partial non-fulfillment—of the promise to or the blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and are an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity.<sup>51</sup>

Clines finds the promise to cohere in three basic elements: descendants, relationship to God, and land. Clines arrives at this theme by observing the preponderance of texts that address one or more aspects of the promise. For Clines, the sheer number of times the patriarchal promise is mentioned suggests the promise as the central theme of the Pentateuch. Clines argues for a partial fulfillment theme by looking at how each of these aspects of the promise are handled in the Pentateuch. The aspect of descendants is particularly at stake in Genesis 12—50, the aspect of relationship between God and Israel is predominant in Exodus and Leviticus, and the land stands as the central concern in Numbers and Deuteronomy. In each of these cases, elements of the promise stand fulfilled, but the complete realization of the promise lies in the future. Clines sees

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<sup>51</sup> Clines, *Theme*, 30.

Genesis 1—11 serving this theme by arguing that the promise of blessing to Abram is a divine response to the sin of the nations culminating in Genesis 11:1-9.

Clines' treatment of Exodus finds the element of relationship between God and Israel to be the central theme of Exodus, which is the contribution of Exodus to the larger theme of the Pentateuch. In the early chapters, emphasis falls upon Israel's relationship with YHWH as his own people, a people who he will deliver from Egypt that they may serve him. That the relationship between YHWH and Israel will involve Israel's obedience begins to be brought out in the account of Israel's leaving Egypt. The wilderness material (15:22—19:2) addresses the theme of relationship from the angle of Israel: will Israel take YHWH, who has taken Israel as his people, as her God? The Sinai material further explores the nature of the relationship between Israel and YHWH, showing that Israel is special to YHWH (19:5-6), with a relationship characterized by such actions as seeing, talking, and eating with, as well as obeying YHWH's commands. The crisis of the golden calf brings the importance of relationship into clearer focus. Despite the gravity of Israel's sin, Moses will be content with nothing short of a relationship between Israel and YHWH that involves YHWH going with Israel into the land.

As helpful as Clines' analysis is, the theme of relationship does not sufficiently account for the material in Exodus. First, and perhaps most importantly, Clines' work does not address the tabernacle material, which is of course crucial in any case made for the theme of Exodus, given that the tabernacle material comprises roughly one third of the book. Secondly, while the relationship between Israel and YHWH in Exodus is certainly important, even crucial, his suggestion of relationship as the theme of Exodus fails to appreciate the larger role that Israel plays in YHWH's universal purposes. In the

early chapters of Exodus, the emphasis of YHWH's relationship with Israel is surely matched by the emphasis placed upon Pharaoh and Egypt's acknowledging YHWH as God. Clines' only comment on 19:5-6, particularly Israel's charge to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" is that Israel is special to YHWH in a way that other nations are not.<sup>52</sup> True enough, but what is not addressed is the important way that YHWH's charge to Israel is *related* to the nations, specifically in Israel's priestly role to those nations. Similarly, his brief discussion of 33:17 likewise leaves out the wider purposes of YHWH for Israel. Clines implies that it is Moses' demand that YHWH have a certain kind of relationship with Israel that YHWH relents from his stated intention not to accompany Israel into the land.<sup>53</sup> Again, while certainly true, the observation does not go far enough. It is not for the sake of YHWH's relationship with Israel alone that YHWH concedes to accompany Israel into the land, but rather for the sake of YHWH's purpose with regard to the nations, a point which we will seek to demonstrate in chapter 6.

This neglect of the importance of the nations similarly weakens Clines' overall contention that the Pentateuch is about the partial fulfillment of the patriarchal promises, precisely because he fails to appreciate the relationship between the patriarchal promises and YHWH's intention to bless the nations. This can be seen in Clines' treatment of Genesis 12:1-3. Clines suggests that YHWH's words to Abram in Genesis 12 can be seen as a useful starting point to speak of the threefold nature of the patriarchal promises, and goes on to show how descendants, relationship, and land are a part of those promises.<sup>54</sup> Notably absent, however, is a similar treatment of the fourth aspect of YHWH's words to Abram. Clines is not unaware of the blessing of 12:3, but is unsure the nature or extent

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<sup>52</sup> Clines, *Theme*, 52.

<sup>53</sup> Clines, *Theme*, 53.

<sup>54</sup> Clines, *Theme*, 29.

of that blessing.<sup>55</sup> Nor is he unaware that the patriarchal promises have a more universal scope as YHWH's answer to human sin manifested at the tower of Babel. Perhaps the reason for Clines' oversight is that the nations are not as explicitly manifest as the other aspects of the promise in the rest of the Pentateuch, the sheer number of references to aspects of the patriarchal promises being important to Clines in his assessment of the theme of the Pentateuch. It is curious, however, that although he speaks of the promise as "an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity," he does not attend to what those primal intentions were. In other words, while Clines offers helpful reflection on aspects of the patriarchal promise, and demonstrates convincingly the importance of the promise in the Pentateuch, he does not press into the question of the purpose of the promise.

In reaction to the modern approaches that tend to fragment the text, Kürle's study looks at the final form of Exodus in its entirety. Kürle approaches Exodus from a rhetorical-critical perspective, asking the question of how the present text of Exodus is meant to persuade the implied reader to a particular point of view. The means of access to the whole of Exodus is a discussion of the three major characters in Exodus: YHWH, Moses, and Israel. At the beginning of his work, Kürle states his purpose:

my main objective will be to follow the description of the text and to evaluate the emerging portrait in terms of its literary function in the narrative and its communicative purpose. Or in other words: I want to study the way in which the texts shape the reader's response to the characters and the events linked with them.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Concerning the nations, the most Clines will say of 12:3 is that "however interpreted, [12:3] envisages some kind of overflow of blessing beyond the Abrahamic family" (*Theme*, 85-86).

<sup>56</sup> Stefan Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters of God, Moses, and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Gloucestershire, 2005), 7.

There are obvious points of contact between Kürle's work and the work of those who have argued for a governing theme in Exodus, particularly his commitment to the final form of the text, his commitment to embracing the whole of Exodus, and his insistence that Exodus as it stands has a unified message.<sup>57</sup> There are important differences, however. First, arguing for a particular way that a text should be read is different than arguing for a governing theme. While Kürle has much to say about the author's rhetorical purpose, he does not attempt to argue for a governing theme, at least as we have defined it above. He does isolate themes that are essential for a proper reading of the text, such as the kingly position of YHWH, or the difference between the ideal and the real in Israel's response to YHWH (the ideal of the law vs. the sinful disposition of Israel), or the fear of God leading to blessing and opposition to defeat.<sup>58</sup> His real goal, however, is to argue for a particular way that the text was intended to be read. For Kürle, this persuasive purpose, to convince the reader to abide by the law and thereby take his part within the covenant people of God, is that which unites the various themes and thereby gives unity to the text. In this way, Kürle does argue for a theme of sorts, but on a different level, the level of authorial intention. Secondly, his emphasis on characterization, while it enables him to range widely through the final text of Exodus, does not allow him to press deeply into places where characterization is not as apparent, particularly the tabernacle material.<sup>59</sup> While he does briefly discuss aspects of the tabernacle material in places, his discussion does not touch upon the details of the tabernacle material, the aspect of the tabernacle which is most prominent in the text itself.

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<sup>57</sup> Kürle, *Appeal*, 1-17.

<sup>58</sup> Kürle, *Appeal*, 46.

<sup>59</sup> Although Kürle does relate the law to the character of God and Israel, arguing that the law reflects the character of God and thus sets out the ideal for Israel (and in so doing brings the reader to a point of decision), his focus is on 19—24, not the detail of the tabernacle material so important in 19—40.

Neither of these observations detracts from the contribution of his work, but they do indicate how his approach differs from an attempt to discern a governing theme in the whole of Exodus.

Leder has made a theological argument which not only demonstrates the theological coherence of Exodus, but also shows how Exodus is theologically rooted in Genesis.<sup>60</sup> For Leder, Exodus has a coherent meaning within its canonical boundaries, but also makes a crucial contribution to the Pentateuch, the wider context in which Exodus is meant to be understood. Leder finds that Exodus coheres in a series of three conflicts. The first is Pharaoh's rule over Israel, which is raised at the beginning of Exodus and resolved in 14:30-31 with the destruction of the Egyptian army (15:1-21 being a celebration of that resolution). The question raised in this first conflict is "whom will Israel serve?"<sup>61</sup> The second conflict is Israel's complaining against YHWH in the desert, and raises the question "how will Israel survive outside Egypt?"<sup>62</sup> The answer is Israel's obedience to the law. The conflict, therefore, is resolved with Israel's pledge of submission to the law (19:8; 24:3,7). The third conflict is again between Israel and YHWH, this time triggered by Israel's rebellion in making the golden calf. The recognition of the golden calf as an anti-tabernacle project (also recalling Pharaoh's building projects) raises the question "who determines Israel's construction projects?"<sup>63</sup> This conflict is resolved by God's forgiveness (through Moses' mediation), with the ground thereby cleared for Israel to undertake the construction of tabernacle. Looking at the sequence of these three conflicts and resolutions, Leder sees a narrative movement

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<sup>60</sup> Arie C. Leder, "The Coherence of Exodus: Narrative Unity and Meaning," *CTJ* 36 (2001): 251-69.

<sup>61</sup> Leder, "Coherence," 259.

<sup>62</sup> Leder, "Coherence," 259.

<sup>63</sup> Leder, "Coherence," 261.

between different masters and construction projects. Released from one master and his project (the first conflict), Israel must acknowledge another master (the second conflict) and take part in his building project (the third conflict). This narrative coherence is further underscored in the kingship pattern that “depicts a king who, when confronted with disorder in his kingdom, seeks out the enemy, defeats him, and upon his return to the imperial capital builds a structure emblematic of his victory.”<sup>64</sup> Leder finds that the kingship pattern strengthens the theological unity of Exodus in three ways: Exodus employs all the elements of the kingship pattern in the account, the kingship pattern covers all the material in Exodus, and the pattern links the tabernacle to the preceding narrative beginning in Egypt, the tabernacle functioning as a fitting conclusion to the what has gone before.

Leder extends his argument by rooting the theology of Exodus into the larger world of the Pentateuch, particularly Genesis. Looking particularly at the parallels between the tabernacle and creation,<sup>65</sup> Leder argues that Exodus addresses the deficit of Genesis 1—3. The communion intended between God and humanity in Genesis 1—2 is destroyed in Genesis 3 by humankind’s unwillingness to submit to God’s rule. Exodus resolves this problem finally in the account of the tabernacle, where YHWH dwells in Israel’s midst, made possible through the mediation of the priests and Israel’s submission to YHWH as king. Leder’s conclusion suggests how his findings contribute to the overall theology of the OT.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Leder, “Coherence,” 262. Leder cites extrabiblical parallels of the kingship pattern, particularly in *Enuma Elish* and the Baal epics (for sources, see his bibliography, n. 32–42). Leder is not concerned with literary dependency, but points out the pattern as a helpful means of making sense of the material of Exodus.

<sup>65</sup> These parallels will be explored in chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> While he does not argue for a theological center, the work of Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, vol. 239, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), deserves mention here. His concerns both literary and theological, Smith finds an overarching structure to Exodus revolving around

Of all the attempts to seek theological coherence in Exodus, Leder's is the most satisfying. Not only does it account for all the material in Exodus (including the tabernacle), it demonstrates how each of the various themes or units are related to one another and to the larger whole. And, while he does not explicitly use the word missionary, he is aware of the universal implications of YHWH's actions in Exodus. If there is anything lacking in Leder's treatment, the brevity of his argument precludes him from examining the different parts of Exodus more carefully. This is, of course, not a weakness, but rather reflects the constraints of an article versus a more sustained treatment. While using different language, proceeding along different lines, and often treating different passages, the following argument has a general similarity to Leder's, and is in large part a more detailed argument concerning the theology of Exodus that leads to a comparable conclusion.

#### A CANONICAL APPROACH

Before moving to Exodus itself, a few words concerning method are in order. Articulating the problem as I have above suggests the approach of the following thesis: to examine the final form of Exodus in an effort to discern its meaning. As has been noted by many, questions of method are perhaps best understood as descriptions of the way one looks at a text, rather than a prescription concerning how one should read that text.<sup>67</sup> Of the methodological categories broadly recognized in OT studies, a canonical approach

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pilgrimage. Examining the theme of pilgrimage, largely from the psalms, Smith argues that Israel's experience of pilgrimage became a lens through which the priestly redactor structured Exodus. While Smith might not speak of pilgrimage as the theological center of Exodus, he finds that the pilgrimage pattern gives Exodus its form, and informs how Exodus is to be read theologically.

<sup>67</sup> E.g., John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996), 6.

most closely describes the way I have handled the text.<sup>68</sup> It must be acknowledged, however, that not all interpreters who use the term handle the text in the same manner. For instance, part of Childs' canonical approach included the Christian church as the appropriate context for OT Theology, whereas Rendtorff is more explicitly concerned with the participation of Jewish scholars in OT scholarship. Or, in another direction, Rendtorff and Childs are more interested in the place of historical-critical enquiry in canonical interpretation than Sailhamer or House. However, there are broad similarities between those who seek to approach the OT canonically. In his survey of different canonical approaches, Schultz cites five: 1) canonical approaches focus on the final form of books, rather than reconstructed histories, 2) theological reflections are based on the canonical presentation of history (regardless of the assessment of historical validity), 3) the Bible is viewed as theologically normative, 4) theological unity is emphasized, and 5) an effort is made to preserve the distinctive voice of the OT so as not to be silenced by the NT.<sup>69</sup> Of these five, the most important is the commitment to the final form of the text, which is generally seen by canonical interpreters as a more stable starting point than

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<sup>68</sup> The name most closely associated with canonical interpretation is, of course, Brevard Childs. The impact of Childs' work has been enormous, drawing both significant appreciation and criticism. Not only has it generated extended discussion and evaluation of his method (e.g. Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs*, vol. 16, *BibInt* (Leiden: Brill, 1995)), but several monographs have sought to follow Childs' proposals exegetically (e.g., William J. Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis: Canonical Praxis and the Sodom Narrative*, vol. 352, *JSOTSup* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People*, vol. 305, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000)). Important criticisms of Childs' proposal include James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 75-104, Barton, *Reading*, 77-103, and, for a summary of objections to Childs' proposal, Prussner and Hayes, *Old Testament Theology*, 268-73. For a defense and assessment of Childs' potential contribution to contemporary Biblical Theology in the church, see "We Are Not Prophets or Apostles: The Biblical Theology of B.S. Childs" in Christopher R. Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 102-12. For Childs' own description of his canonical method, see Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 6-19.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Schultz, "What Is 'Canonical' About a Canonical Biblical Theology?" in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J Hafemann (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 96. Schultz assesses the canonical approaches of Clements, Childs, Lothar-Hossfeld, Sailhamer, Rendtorff, House, Dumbrell, and Birch (and co-authors Fretheim, Brueggemann, and Petersen).

reconstructed sources or traditions, which are ultimately hypothetical. As Rendtorff has commented, “[t]he exegetical task is not to reconstruct earlier levels that always will remain hypothetical and dependent on the respective methodological approach of the interpreter. Rather exegetes have to try to understand the biblical text in its given form and shape.”<sup>70</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with Rendtorff’s assessment of the task of the exegete, the final form of the text is ultimately the point of departure for all OT scholarship. It is true, of course, that in the progression of modern OT scholarship much has been increasingly assumed, such as the existence and boundaries of various sources which are sometimes taken to be self-evident and therefore used as the starting point for OT inquiry. But even if such assumptions are taken for granted, they ultimately must be discerned by attention to the final form. As Barton writes,

Literary criticism begins with the attempt to understand and make sense of the text; and its conclusions about the composite character of many texts arise from noticing that the text actually cannot *be* understood as it stands, because it is full of inconsistencies, inexplicable dislocations of theme, form, style, and so on, which make it impossible to know what to read it as.<sup>71</sup>

While we would take issue with Barton’s confidence that the text as it stands is incomprehensible (for what may be incomprehensible to Barton or another literary critic may not be incomprehensible to another reader), he is clear that investigation must ultimately begin with the final form. One of the impulses behind Davies’ recent theological exploration of the final form of Exodus is that such a look at the final form of

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<sup>70</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, “Is It Possible to Read *Leviticus* as a Separate Book?” in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer, vol. 227, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 34. Cf., e.g., the acknowledgment of Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 3: “frequently it will be impossible to go beyond probabilities or even possibilities, as must necessarily be the case when one moves back from a literary witness, which is often difficult to analyze, into the dark and impenetrable area of the preliterary oral tradition.”

<sup>71</sup> Barton, *Reading*, 24, italics original.

the book may help in the historical-critical task: "I remain fully convinced of the importance and value of the various kinds of historical criticism, but I also recognize the usefulness of attempting a more synthetic account of Old Testament books, particularly at the theological level, and there can be value in doing this before (or as if before) the historical questions are raised."<sup>72</sup> Davies' comment is, of course, true. It is interesting, however, that he feels the need to defend a theological look at the final form as a worthwhile endeavor, as if critical decisions could be made on any other basis than the final form of the text. A look at the final form, and an attempt to appreciate it as it stands, is not merely a help, but the foundation for the historical critical task.

This recognition is especially important when it is recognized that critical decisions are often made on theological grounds. The general approach of the historical critic is to look for inconsistencies and dislocations in a text, and then seek to explain their presence in the final form, often in terms of differing sources or stages in an editorial process. However, this simply begs the question: how is one to determine whether an apparent dislocation is inconsistent or contradictory, or whether a passage requires more sustained reflection in order to come to terms with its overall unity? For instance, is Van Seters' judgment that Exodus 33:18-23 is "so entirely out of character with [33:12-17] that it must be considered an addition"<sup>73</sup> an accurate reading of the text, or might there be a connection between the two sections that Van Seters misses? It is noteworthy that Van Seters' assessment closes down theological discussion, for he simply argues for 33:18-23 as an addition without inquiring as to its theological function.

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<sup>72</sup> Davies, "Theology," 139-40. Likewise, Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 176: "the accurate assessment of a work on the synchronic level remains a valuable enterprise even for historians who wish to understand their written sources."

<sup>73</sup> John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers*, vol. 10, CBET (Kampen: Kok, 1994), 323.

One of Van Seters' criteria for assuming an addition is the relationship between 33:11 ("and YHWH spoke to Moses face to face") and 33:20 ("you [Moses] cannot see my face, for a man cannot see my face and live"). Van Seters calls it a simple contradiction and assigns the verses to different sources, again with no comment as to its meaning.<sup>74</sup> Moberly, however, argues that a theological issue is at stake. For Moberly, assuming two traditions between 33:11 and 33:20 is unnecessary because the text is wrestling with the issues of God's transcendence and his immanence, both of which must be affirmed. Grappling with such issues stretches language, but does not mean that affirming both is a contradiction: "what matters is not to dissolve the tension but to recognize it as a paradox and to describe it correctly."<sup>75</sup>

The above discussion need not concern itself with whether or not Van Seters or Moberly is correct concerning Exodus 33, but may simply point out two issues. First, the disagreement is rooted ultimately in different perspectives on the final form of the text, perspectives crucial to how one sees the hermeneutical task. Barton's comment on Childs' canonical method is pertinent:

But doesn't this all amount simply to a return to pre-critical exegesis? If we are going to read Scripture as a unified work, doesn't that mean that we are going back to all the old abuses—allegory, harmonization, typology, and even downright falsification of the text—from which the historical critical method has freed us?<sup>76</sup>

While Barton here is raising the theoretical question, his allusion to the historical critical method as a type of hermeneutical savior from pre-critical abuse suggests a deep

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<sup>74</sup> Van Seters, *Life of Moses*, 323.

<sup>75</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34*, vol. 22, *JSOTSup* (JSOT Press, 1983), 65-66. Richard E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 288, sees no tension, arguing that 33:11 is figurative and that Moses never sees God's face.

<sup>76</sup> Barton, *Reading*, 84.

skepticism of attempts to read the OT as a unified whole. It should be no surprise that differing perspectives concerning the coherence (or lack thereof) of the OT will lead to differing hermeneutical approaches and, therefore, conclusions. Secondly, assigning passages to different sources often has the effect of eliminating tensions with which the interpreter is meant to wrestle, since (for some, at least) wrestling with theological tensions ends when different sources are invoked. In some cases, if plausible theological solutions can be offered, the need to assign passages to different sources diminishes. While this does not rule out the legitimacy of source-critical enquiry, it does recognize that dividing texts into sources can be a premature, and therefore superficial, way of dealing with theological tensions.

Recent interpreters, particularly those with theological concerns, have sought to interpret Exodus in its final, canonical form.<sup>77</sup> In fact, it was largely a concern for theological interpretation that led to many affirming the final form of the text as the primary context of interpretation. For instance, the concepts of canon and theology were closely wedded for Childs, for it was precisely theological concerns that led Childs to affirm the canon as the primary context of Biblical interpretation. Childs' aim in his Exodus commentary is plain from the first sentence: "to interpret the book of Exodus as canonical scripture within the theological discipline of the Christian church."<sup>78</sup>

While perhaps not following Childs in all the particulars of his approach (subsequent canonical interpreters of Exodus usually give less attention to the varying

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<sup>77</sup> One major exception among recent Exodus commentaries is the work of Propp, whose interests in Exodus are anthropological (Israelite social customs and assessments of reality), cultural (Israel's relationship to other ancient Near Eastern cultures and peoples), and linguistic (the meanings and etymologies of words). Notably absent given the trajectory of recent Exodus commentaries is any explicit mention made of theology. See his programmatic comments in William C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, vol. 2, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 39.

<sup>78</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, xiii.

forms of higher criticism than did Childs), others have likewise sought the theological fruit of Exodus in its canonical shape. Durham argues that because Exodus is primarily theological in nature, it must be read as a whole, according to its canonical form.<sup>79</sup> Durham does not deny sources, but, like Childs, argues that the composition of the book, from its preliminary stages to its final form, was driven by theological concerns, and is therefore meant to be read as a theological whole.<sup>80</sup> In his theological commentary on Exodus, Gowan explicitly follows Childs in both his commitment to interpreting Exodus according to its canonical boundaries, and in light of the wider context of Christian Scripture.<sup>81</sup> Fretheim's *Exodus* also reveals a close relationship between theological concerns and canonical context. For Fretheim, the purpose of the book is explicitly theological: "it seeks to confront the reader with the word of God,"<sup>82</sup> which comes through the vehicle of the present text. Uninterested in identifying the theology of sources behind the text (which he calls a "precarious enterprise"), Fretheim is interested only in the theology of the final form.<sup>83</sup> Although less theologically oriented than the above interpreters, Houtman writes that the book of Exodus "is intended to be a unity and wishes to be understood as a whole" and that "[t]he point of departure for exegesis in this commentary is therefore the text as we have it, the product of its final editing."<sup>84</sup> Like the others mentioned above, Houtman acknowledges unevenness in the text due to sources, but does not feel the need to reconstruct the sources in an effort to establish

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<sup>79</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xxi.

<sup>80</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xx-xxi.

<sup>81</sup> Gowan, *Theology*, x-xi.

<sup>82</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra and Johan Rebel, 3 vols., HCOT (Kampen: Kok, 1993-2000), 1:2.

another context.<sup>85</sup> Despite certain reservations Brueggemann has about the canonical approach to Biblical interpretation, he nonetheless seeks to interpret Exodus in its final form, with particular attention to socio-critical readings.<sup>86</sup>

There are, to be sure, places of overlap between a canonical approach to the OT and other final form approaches. Save concentrating on the final form, rather than critical reconstructions of the text, it is not my concern to play one kind of final form approach against another, or to limit myself to one particular way of looking at Exodus. While the following study is not overly concerned with the kinds of issues that concern literary critics (e.g., investigations of plot, characterization, setting, techniques by which an implied author sought to convey his message), the following argument will call attention to certain literary features of the text.<sup>87</sup> For instance, I will argue that recognizing the *inclusio* of 6:6-8 is important in grasping the theological import of the passage, or that the repetition of the tabernacle material in 35—40 is crucial in understanding Israel's repentance after the golden calf. What has been called rhetorical criticism, the investigation of how a text persuades the reader to a particular point of view, has much in common with what I see at work in Exodus, although the following work is not as

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<sup>85</sup> Many shorter works on Exodus likewise reflect a concern for the final form. See, e.g., Eugene E. Carpenter, "Exodus 18: Its Structure, Style, Motifs," in *A Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form and Content: Essays in Honor of George W. Coats*, ed. Eugene E. Carpenter, vol. 240, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 91-108, Moberly, *Mountain*, Herbert Chanan Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry," *HUCA* 74 (1983): 1-44, Dennis T. Olson, "The Jagged Cliffs of Mount Sinai: A Theological Reading of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22--23:19)," *Int* 50 (1996): 251-63, Davies, "Theology," Dale Ralph Davis, "Rebellion, Presence, Covenant," *WTJ* 44 (1982): 71-87.

<sup>86</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 680-83.

<sup>87</sup> For an example of an intentional and consistent literary approach to Exodus, see Chulhyun Park, *From Mount Sinai to the Tabernacle: A Reading of Exodus 24:12-40:38 as a Case of Intercalated Double Plot* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Gloucestershire, 2002).

concerned with authorial intention as the rhetorical critic.<sup>88</sup> Unsystematic as they may sound, McEvenue's words are apt:

The fact is that method is nothing more than a description and systematization of acts of understanding. When one begins to examine a new object, one may determine a general approach, but clearly it is self-contradictory to hope to predetermine the acts of understanding which will follow! It is, of course, helpful to have seen various methods successfully used on other texts. But ultimately the researcher must simply stare at his text, or fumble with it, until acts of understanding begin to take place.<sup>89</sup>

A canonical approach to the OT has, unsurprisingly, come under significant criticism, perhaps the most significant of which (leveled particularly against Childs) is that such an approach is governed by prior dogmatic commitments.<sup>90</sup> The extent to which this charge is true probably varies from interpreter to interpreter, since forcing a text to conform to one's prior commitments is always a danger. However, it must be realized that prior commitments are unavoidable in all interpretation. This is even true of the academic community, which to a certain degree has tried to separate itself from other specific communities in an effort to interpret the Bible more objectively. For instance, John Collins has argued for the academic community as the most appropriate place to practice Biblical Theology.<sup>91</sup> Largely in reaction to what he calls Childs' confessional approach, Collins writes "[w]e are shaped by the rational humanism that underlies our technological culture and political institutions, no less than by the Bible (usually far more so). It is possible to have critical dialogue between our modern world view and the Bible,

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<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Kürle, *Appeal*, and the summary of rhetorical criticism in Barton, *Reading*, 198-219.

<sup>89</sup> Sean E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer*, vol. 50, AnBib (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 11.

<sup>90</sup> Regarding Childs' work, James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 401, writes that "in many respects this book is neither a work of biblical theology nor one of canonical theology; it is more like a personal dogmatic statement provided with biblical proofs." The particular book to which Barr refers is unclear.

<sup>91</sup> The general assent of the scholarly community is, for Collins, one of the prerequisites for Biblical Theology. For an extended critique of Collins' position, see Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 106-26.

but we cannot simply abandon the twentieth century for the ancient world.”<sup>92</sup> In referring to “the twentieth century” Collins speaks not of an epoch in time as much as a worldview informed by rational humanism. However, it cannot be said that all people in the twentieth century (or all people living in the West) hold that particular worldview, as Collins seems to assume. The “we” to whom Collins refers, is a particular community, the academic community, which, by his definition, holds the presuppositions (or dogma) of rational humanism. The particular context, then, from which Collins operates is a specific community, which, like other communities, is governed by specific assumptions and concerned with specific questions.<sup>93</sup> While the danger of conforming one’s interpretation to a particular system of belief is perhaps more readily apparent in canonical interpretation, the danger is by no means peculiar to canonical interpretation alone.

The different presuppositions or belief systems underlying between historical criticism and a canonical theology rooted in the context of the Christian or Jewish faith makes for significant tension in the discipline of Biblical Theology. The tension between a so-called confessional theology and the historical critical method is not the pursuit of biblical history *per se*, but rather the manner in which biblical history is pursued, and the presuppositions involved in that pursuit. Historical criticism, as generally practiced on

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<sup>92</sup> John J. Collins, "Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed. William Henry Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David Noel Freedman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 8.

<sup>93</sup> For a discussion of the potential pitfalls of reading the Bible within a specific community, see Levenson’s essay “The Perils of Engaged Scholarship: a Rejoinder to Jorge Pixley,” in Alice O. Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 8, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 239-46.

the terms of Enlightenment rationalism, relies on the criteria of doubt, analogy, and correlation.<sup>94</sup>

While these principles, strictly speaking, do not necessarily pose a problem for a theology rooted in the Christian or Jewish community, the manner in which they are typically put into practice has the effect of ruling God out of the equation. As Levenson writes,

Historical critics rightly insist that the tribunal before which interpretations are argued cannot be confessional or dogmatic: the arguments offered must be historically valid, able, that is, to compel the assent of *historians*, whatever their religion or lack thereof, whatever their backgrounds, spiritual experiences, or personal beliefs, and without privileging any claim of revelation.<sup>95</sup>

According to Levenson's conception, God is excluded by definition. For example, historical critical scholarship might readily accede to the historicity of the plagues if such could be explained as a result of natural causes.<sup>96</sup> Otherwise the claim is deemed suspect, for the historical critical enterprise has *a priori* ruled out the supernatural (God) as a possible cause.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, despite the desire of some to hold together naturalistic presuppositions and theology, naturalistic explanations do not solve the theological

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<sup>94</sup> The principle of *methodological doubt* leaves any theory, historical or otherwise, open to revision, thereby precluding notions of certainty. According to the principle of *analogy*, the world operates in the same manner, and according to the same laws, in the past as in the present. The principle of *correlation* argues that all phenomena come about in an historical sequence.

<sup>95</sup> Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 109.

<sup>96</sup> E.g., G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 54. The classic treatment of the plagues from this perspective are the two essays by Greta Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt," *ZAW* 69 (1957): 84-103, and idem, "The Plagues of Egypt," *ZAW* 70 (1958): 48-59. More broadly, this tendency is particularly apparent in Noth, who finds naturalistic explanations as the kernel of historical occurrence behind many of the seemingly miraculous traditions. See, e.g., his discussion of the wilderness wanderings in Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 115-22.

<sup>97</sup> Hence Collins' comment that "[c]ritical method is incompatible with confessional faith insofar as the latter requires us to accept specific conclusions on dogmatic grounds" ("Critical," 8) is, at best, shortsighted, since Collins fails to recognize how his own presuppositions (pre)determine his conclusions. For instance, for one open to the possibility of God working in historical circumstances, the supernatural character of the exodus need not pose historical difficulty, even according to the well accepted principles of doubt, analogy, and correlation. However, if God is excluded as a presupposition, then the historical character of the exodus is already decided, before any evidence can be considered.

problem, for explaining an event naturalistically calls into question the OT's interpretation of a given event as either misunderstanding or human imagination.<sup>98</sup> The difficulties are apparent. If the task of theology is conceived as having to do with speaking about God in any normative way, the elimination of God as an actor in biblical history has, to say the least, a significantly reductive effect on the OT's theological message. No longer understood as revealing something of God in any normative sense, the Bible becomes a record of how Israel perceived their world and their religion.<sup>99</sup>

Seeking to speak about God while adhering to methodological criteria that dismisses God shows the difficulty much modern historical criticism faces in the theological enterprise, at least if Biblical Theology is considered to have any normative value. Collins' argument illustrates the point well:

Historical criticism, consistently understood, is not compatible with a confessional theology that is committed to specific doctrines on the basis of faith. It is, however, quite compatible with theology, understood as an open-ended and critical inquiry into the meaning and function of God language.<sup>100</sup>

For Collins to find a point of contact between historical criticism and theology, he must redefine theology in terms consistent with his rationalistic presuppositions. Rather than the pursuit of God as revealed or portrayed in the OT, Collins defines theology in terms of God-language. God has been replaced by God-language as the subject of theology.

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 347: "[t]he modern historian's method precludes acknowledgment of supernatural phenomena, onetime suspensions of physical law. When considering prodigies recorded in ancient texts—texts younger than the events they purportedly chronicle—it is only prudent to credit human imagination with the majority of 'miracles.' In addition, a small proportion may be based on direct observation or secondhand knowledge of real events—misunderstood natural phenomena or ordinary occurrences of unusual magnitude or timeliness."

<sup>99</sup> For a look at the philosophical presuppositions of the historical critical method over and against confessional faith, see Alvin Plantinga's essay "Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship" in Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 374-421. See also Langdon B. Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *JR* 41 (1961), where Gilkey describes the difficulty that modern Biblical theology encounters when seeking to understand Biblical language in light of Enlightenment presuppositions.

<sup>100</sup> Collins, "Critical," 14.

The move is significant, for its effect is to remove God from the picture. Gerstenberger's comment illustrates well the difference between God and God-language: "the justification of speaking of the one and only God" is that "the one world stands under a destiny which is common to all beings, everything that exists."<sup>101</sup> In other words, the use of the word "God" does not refer to a divine being in any sense, but is simply a convenient way of grappling with the common destiny of man. Again, God is removed from the picture. It is doubtful, however, that this conception of theology would be acceptable to many who undertake the task of Biblical Theology, at least those concerned with normative questions. The point here, however, is not to argue in favor of historical criticism or confessional theology, but to point out that the tension between the two is grounded in the differing presuppositions that strongly influence both their approaches and their respective conclusions.<sup>102</sup>

Regarding the present work, all five of the positions which Schultz cites as characteristic of canonical readings well describe my approach. Save for the commitment to the final form, most important for the present argument is the assumption that the OT can be read as a theologically coherent whole. Believing as I do that the OT is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), I am inclined to seek theological unity. This does not mean that I expect that all tensions can be understood and neatly ironed out. It does mean, however, that I find seeking theological coherence an important task and a reasonable expectation. All theological work is, of course, undertaken with certain presuppositions about the nature of the material. Moberly, for instance, assumes unity

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<sup>101</sup> Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 285.

<sup>102</sup> Concerning the difficult relationship between historical criticism and theology, see Dennis J. McCarthy, "Exodus 3:14: History, Philology and Theology," *CBQ* 40 (1978), and "The Historical-Critical Endeavor as Theology" in Seitz, *Word without End*, 28-40. Seitz considers the issue through the work of von Rad, who he considers to be among the best OT scholars who sought to use historical criticism to a theological end.

unless compelling evidence for disunity is available.<sup>103</sup> Smith, on the other hand, takes Moberly to task, arguing that there is no more warrant for assuming unity than disunity.<sup>104</sup> It is difficult, however, to see how Smith's implied objectivity is really possible, as if one could come to a text with no presuppositions that influence how one views it. Leaving aside the question of whether or not he is right in his basic assumptions, Moberly's position seems to me more realistic in that he lays bare the presuppositions upon which he makes his judgments. Even if those judgments turn out to be wrong, they can be more readily assessed and challenged if the presuppositions underlying them are made plain.

#### REMARKS CONCERNING PRACTICAL APPROACH

As suggested above, one of the effects of much modern critical study of the Old Testament has been a loss of confidence that the text can be read as a canonical and theological whole. Even though canonical enquiry enjoys a greater acceptance today than it did 40 years ago, the weight of critical scholarship over the past two centuries is substantial, and the legitimacy of canonical enquiry is by no means self-evident to all.

The following argument, however, pushes further. Not only will we argue for the legitimacy of looking at the text canonically, but we will argue that appreciating the final form is hermeneutically decisive in many instances. As is well known, one's choice of context has everything to do with one's interpretation of any given text. As we seek to make the case that Exodus has a governing theological trajectory, we will also examine particular texts or issues that have been hermeneutically troublesome precisely due to a

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<sup>103</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 39.

<sup>104</sup> Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 179.

lack of appreciation for the canonical context. In so doing, the justification of canonical context above becomes an appeal for that context in the remainder of the argument. This thesis seeks to argue, through exegetical examples, for the importance of the canonical context in the interpretation of smaller sections and individual passages. One of the criticisms of Childs' canonical method was that it was not sufficiently illustrated with exegetical examples.<sup>105</sup> In positive response to this charge, several monographs have been presented which have stated explicitly an intention to follow Childs' proposals exegetically.<sup>106</sup> While not assuming that Childs would agree with the results of this study, it is nonetheless an attempt to try to follow exegetically some of his larger concerns.

The course we will take in making this appeal will be, in each chapter, to take a particular hermeneutical problem as our point of departure, then to argue how an appreciation of the wider canonical context of Exodus helps in interpreting that problem. The problems raised are not uniform. Sometimes it will be a source-critical issue (chapter 2), sometimes a theological issue (chapters 4 and 6), sometimes simply an observation that a particular section has been largely neglected (chapters 3 and 5/7). The selection of these particular difficulties is not to suggest that they are the only, or even the most important, hermeneutical difficulties to be encountered in Exodus. Rather, they have been chosen simply by way of illustration of how interpretation can go awry when the canonical context is not appreciated.

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<sup>105</sup> E.g., R. W. L. Moberly, "Theology of the Old Testament," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Apollos, 1999), 469.

<sup>106</sup> See footnote 69 above.

The organization of the thesis is relatively simple. The thesis will address, in order, each of the major sections of Exodus. I have divided Exodus into six generally accepted divisions: the exodus (1:1—15:21), the wilderness wanderings (15:22—18:27), the giving of the law (19—24), the tabernacle instructions (25—31),<sup>107</sup> the golden calf (32—34), and the tabernacle construction (35—40).<sup>108</sup> Of course, the boundaries one assigns are in large part dependent upon the interpreter's sense of the controlling theme or themes of a given section.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, while I have tried to maintain some level of objectivity by using divisions that are widely accepted,<sup>110</sup> my choice of those divisions is in no small part a reflection of my own interpretive judgments. The purpose of each chapter is the same: to investigate the governing theological burden of each section in Exodus.

One important guideline I have sought to follow in interpreting Exodus canonically warrants mention. In an effort to honor the final form of the text itself, and

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<sup>107</sup> Although see Park, *From Mount Sinai*, 139-45, who argues for 24:12 as the beginning of the tabernacle material on the grounds that the tabernacle material exhibits a symmetrical macrostructure when 24:12-18 is understood as the introduction, that it introduces a new theme, and that there is an ellipsis between 24:11 and 24:12.

<sup>108</sup> Whether or not Exodus 1—40 is a meaningful unit for interpretation has been debated. Some have argued against recognizing the significance of the canonical boundaries (e.g., Henry Jackson Flanders Jr., Robert Wilson Crapps, and David Anthony Smith, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 152-53, Martin Noth, *Exodus* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 10, John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992)). Several, however, have argued on thematic grounds for the importance of canonical boundaries of Exodus (e.g., Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 184-86, Kürle, *Appeal*, 17—23, Leder, "Reading Exodus"). Rendtorff, "Leviticus as a Separate Book," has argued that Leviticus can be read as a unit, which has obvious implications both for the legitimacy of reading a Pentateuchal book according to its boundaries, as well as for one's perspective on the break between Exodus and Leviticus. Arguing for the significance of the canonical boundaries of Exodus is more important from a historical critical perspective, and less so for the canonical interpreter who seeks to work within the structure of the canon.

<sup>109</sup> For instance, Coats limits the first section from 1:1—13:16, breaking the section before the itinerary marker that records Israel leaving Egypt (13:17). Coats' division is based not simply on the itinerary marker, but on the literary/theological judgment that Israel's oppression is the dominant theme and the major crisis of this first section. Because this crisis is resolved with Israel leaving Egypt, Coats finds the itinerary notice 13:16/13:17 a natural break (Coats, "Exposition"). If, however, one sees the major tension as the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh concerning who is to be acknowledged as sovereign over Egypt, then 1:1—15:21 is an appropriate unit.

<sup>110</sup> These divisions conform exactly to those of Brueggemann, *Exodus* and Leder, "Reading Exodus."

the wider Pentateuch in which Exodus is set, I have sought to stay within the canonical boundaries of Exodus, and tried to avoid reading (canonically) later material back into the book. For instance, to make theological judgments concerning the ark as the footstool of God (e.g. Ps 99:5, 132:7; 1 Chr 28:2), or as that which led Israel into battle (Num 10:35-36; Josh 3-4), while important for understanding the ark from the wider theological viewpoint of the OT, nonetheless goes beyond what Exodus offers concerning the ark. On the other hand, seeing the construction of the tabernacle related to creation is legitimate in Exodus, since Exodus assumes knowledge of Genesis.<sup>111</sup> In other words, the form, or order, of the canon is important in seeking to interpret Exodus canonically.<sup>112</sup> While there may be occasional exceptions where going beyond the canonical boundaries of Exodus is warranted, even inevitable,<sup>113</sup> as a general principle we will try to limit the inquiry to the book of Exodus itself.<sup>114</sup> Comments that do go beyond the canonical boundaries of Exodus will generally appear in the footnotes.

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<sup>111</sup> Examples of how Exodus assumes knowledge of Genesis will be addressed throughout the paper. Concerning the theological significance of the canonical priority of Genesis in reading Exodus, see Terence E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus," *Int* 45 (1991) and Leder, "Coherence." For connections between Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, see Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 63-64. A practical example of such an approach can be found in Rendtorff, "Leviticus as a Separate Book," which makes much of intertextual relationships with (canonically prior) Genesis and Exodus, but not Numbers and Deuteronomy.

<sup>112</sup> Assigning importance to canonical order does not assume that it is easy to discern the order of particular books, particularly given that there are significant differences in order between the LXX and the MT. The difficulties inherent in such an approach are not as keenly felt in the case of Exodus as they would be elsewhere (e.g. the minor prophets, or Book of the Twelve), since there is universal agreement concerning the canonical order of Exodus within the Pentateuch.

<sup>113</sup> That our knowledge of classical Hebrew comes almost exclusively from the OT testifies that, in the end, it is hermeneutically impossible to stay exclusively within the canonical boundaries of a particular book.

<sup>114</sup> Concerning Exodus itself, while dividing Exodus into sections serves the useful purpose of organizing the argument, it is not possible (or desirable) always to stay within those boundaries. Although we have divided the text into sections, Exodus has no explicit internal divisions. Discussions of one section will often be informed by other sections. For instance, in order to explore the meaning of "priestly kingdom" in 19:6, it will be necessary to refer to the ordinances concerning priests in Exodus 28—29. To understand the gravity of the sin of the golden calf, and the character description of YHWH given ultimately in response to Israel's apostasy, it will be important to examine carefully 20:4-6. So while dividing Exodus into sections provides a good practical means of moving through the text, adhering too rigidly to those boundaries would be exegetically disadvantageous. As Rolf P. Knierim, "Conceptual aspects in Exodus

This approach, however, does not exclude the use of other OT material that illuminates the material in Exodus itself. For instance, Deuteronomy interprets the wilderness wanderings as YHWH's way of training Israel unto obedience: "he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna ... that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Deut 8:3). That YHWH's intention for Israel in the wilderness was training is apparent in Exodus itself (as will be argued in chapter 3), but is strengthened when looking at Deuteronomy's interpretation of Israel's wilderness experience. By recognizing the wilderness period as a time of training, we are not reading Deuteronomy back into Exodus, but rather showing how Deuteronomy makes sense of material already in Exodus.<sup>115</sup> Hopefully such an approach will respect the canonical boundaries of Exodus while also acknowledging its relationship to the canonical context of the OT of which Exodus is a part.<sup>116</sup>

There is, of course, a cost to limiting one's scope to a particular book. Jenson's argument that taking a broader perspective is a theologically richer enterprise than

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25:1-9," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 114, writes, "the practicality of delimiting a passage for the sake of convenience" is "a choice (however practical) that does not belong to exegetical work."

<sup>115</sup> For a discussion of the danger of reading a canonically later text back into an earlier text, see Brevard S. Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation," *ZAW* 115 (2003): 178-81. Of course, appealing to later texts to support one's interpretation of an earlier text is a sensitive issue, even if done from a canonical perspective, since later Biblical interpretation of a particular text may vary. See, e.g., the differing perspectives on Israel's time in the wilderness given in Jeremiah 2:2 and Ezekiel 20:13.

<sup>116</sup> I am aware that the specific canon of which Exodus is a part is not universally agreed. Not only do Jews and Christians differ in the extent of their canon, but Christians themselves are not unified concerning the extent of the OT canon, particularly in differing assessments of the books contained in the LXX but absent from the MT. Not only is that discussion beyond the scope of this paper, but the "problem" of multiple canons may be better addressed not by insisting upon a proper canon, but in acknowledging the canon in which one interprets any given portion of the Bible. The canon in which I interpret Exodus in this paper is the MT. Limiting the inquiry to the MT does not come from a belief that the OT can ultimately be separated from the NT, but rather from a conviction that the OT must be read on its own terms before it can be meaningfully understood in relationship to the NT.

limiting oneself to an individual book is well taken.<sup>117</sup> The broader perspective, of course, needs to be pursued. While honoring the canonical boundaries of Exodus may at times come at the cost of theological depth, it nevertheless may well illuminate matters that have at times been overlooked in a broader perspective. Seeing the broader perspective is the task of OT Theology more generally, and can only be done when smaller sections are given due attention. This discussion, it is hoped, will be a helpful contribution to that larger discussion.

Arguing for a governing missionary trajectory in Exodus does not mean that there must be explicit references to mission in every passage, or that the nations are mentioned in every section. For instance, the weight of the YHWH's impulse to be known among the nations is felt differently (and more explicitly) in the exodus material (1:1—15:21) than it is in the wilderness material (15:22—18:27), where the missionary impulse behind the wilderness section is only evident in the greater context of the giving of the law at Sinai (19—24). The tabernacle material does not have a direct missionary function vis-à-vis the nations, but its function in Israel's international purpose is indispensable. In addition, the very structure and details of the tabernacle itself (and the accompanying priesthood) are symbolic of YHWH's position as God over the nations and, more broadly, the universe. Although the weight of the missionary impulse in different sections is felt differently, I do hope to demonstrate that the motivating impulse behind YHWH's actions in each of the major sections of Exodus is YHWH's commitment to be known as God throughout the world.

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<sup>117</sup> P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, vol. 106, JSOTSup (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 213.

This intended goal of the thesis leads to a final point. The following argument ultimately concerns purposes. Or, put another way, the central question the thesis seeks to answer is *why?* Why does YHWH deliver Israel as he does from Egypt? Why does YHWH forgive Israel's idolatry with the golden calf? Why does YHWH give the law, or command the tabernacle be built with such specific detail? The argument for a governing theological trajectory comes not primarily from a desire to discover an underlying thematic unity in Exodus, but rather from recognizing that the answers to the above questions are one. YHWH does what he does in Exodus because he desires to be known as God throughout the world. Thus, the missionary "heart" of Exodus speaks to both YHWH's governing commitment to be known as God throughout the world and the way that YHWH's missionary commitment unites the various materials in the book.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT (EXODUS 1:1—15:21)

The contention of this chapter is that YHWH's missionary concern to be known throughout the earth is the governing theological concern of Exodus 1—15:21. To say it simply, YHWH's missionary commitment is primarily what Exodus 1—15:21 is about.<sup>1</sup> Our point of departure will be the well-known source-critical problem of Exodus 6:3. We take this approach for two reasons. First, the concern of 6:3, the revelation (or making known) of the divine name, directly addresses the argument of this thesis, that YHWH's missionary commitment to be known amongst the nations is the governing theological burden of Exodus. Secondly, 6:3 addresses our larger hermeneutical concerns by providing a helpful example of how the interpretation of a passage turns on the context in which it is located. The goal, then, is to demonstrate how an appreciation of YHWH's central missionary concern helps make sense of a traditionally difficult passage. After a brief discussion concerning the theological problem of 6:3, we will seek

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<sup>1</sup> What Exodus 1—15:21 is about has, of course, been debated. See, e.g., the recent exchange between Jon Levenson, Jorge Pixley, and John Collins concerning the meaning of the exodus (in Bellis and Kaminsky, *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*). Pixley interprets the exodus universally, arguing that the exodus is primarily concerned with God's "preferential option for the poor." Levenson, on the other hand, insists that the canonical text demands that God's concern for the poor be understood alongside Israel's election.

to establish the primacy of YHWH's concern for his name in 1:1—15:21, which will establish a theological context from which to return to 6:3.

#### THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF EXODUS 6:3

Among the most important theological problems in the book of Exodus is the revelation of the divine name. Modern biblical scholarship has given much attention to two particular issues: when the divine name was revealed to Israel and the meaning of the divine name.<sup>2</sup> The problem stems from the well-known fact that Exodus 6:3, which states that “by my name YHWH I was not known to [the patriarchs],” appears to contradict the frequent use of the name YHWH in Genesis, particularly the plain sense of Genesis 4:26. Rowley put the matter most starkly: “[o]bviously it cannot be true that God was not known to Abraham by the name Yahweh [Exod 6:3] and that He was known to him by that name [Gen 15:2, 7]. To this extent there is a flat contradiction that cannot be resolved by any shift.”<sup>3</sup> The traditional critical solution, which would become the foundation of the documentary hypothesis, argued that different sources reflected different understandings of when the name was revealed to Israel. Whether the sources directly contradicted one another, or whether different sources reflected the varying historical contexts of different tribes, in either case the apparent inconsistency lay with the sources. Although widely acknowledged that the presence (or absence) of the divine name does not perfectly match the typically accepted source divisions, the theory has

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 17-21, who focuses his discussion of the divine name around these two concerns.

<sup>3</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), 25.

nonetheless held.<sup>4</sup> Noth's words concerning the call narratives of Exodus 3 and Exodus 6 reflected the perspective of many: "regardless of scholarly ingenuity, no one has offered a more plausible explanation of the usage of the divine names than the view that these were two originally independent narrative works, the 'Yahwist' and the 'Elohist,' which were later combined."<sup>5</sup>

Some, however, often conservative Christians and Jews, remained unconvinced by the source critical hypothesis.<sup>6</sup> Many of these scholars took another tack and argued that the obvious contrast implied in 6:3 between the patriarchal and Mosaic eras had not to do with when the name was revealed, but rather concerned the meaning of the name.<sup>7</sup> It was argued that it was not the name YHWH *per se* that was new, but that a new and more complete understanding of the name was being revealed. In other words, the emphasis fell not upon the label by which YHWH was called, but rather upon the nature and character of YHWH which was now being revealed as something new in the experience of Israel. Motyer's translation of 6:2-3 reflects this sense: "[a]nd God spoke to Moses, and said to him: I am Yahweh. And I showed myself to Abraham, to Isaac,

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<sup>4</sup> For a survey of the strengths and weaknesses of the documentary solution, see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 39-52.

<sup>5</sup> Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 23. McNeile's confidence extended a bit further: "[t]he question cannot be answered except by the recognition that varying traditions have been incorporated from different sources." A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 34.

<sup>6</sup> For a survey of the traditional conservative approach, see again Moberly, *Old Testament*, 52-59. Although in broad sympathy with critical concerns, McCarthy, "Exodus 3:14," 320-21, has argued that, theologically, when the name was revealed is unimportant, and that 6:3 must be interpreted in the context of the final form.

<sup>7</sup> A few have sought to resolve the problem linguistically, arguing that לֹא may function idiomatically as an affirmative statement (cf. G. R. Driver, "Affirmation by Explanatory Negation," *JANESCU* 5 (1973), Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 102, and, for a critique of both positions, Moberly, *Old Testament*, 52-53). G. E. Whitney, "Alternative Interpretations of לֹא in Exodus 6:3 and Jeremiah 7:22," *WJT* 48 (1986): 151-59, has offered the interesting proposal that לֹא sometimes functions as an idiom meaning "not only," arguing from parallels in Gen 45:7-8, Exod 16:8, Josh 17:17, 1 Sam 8:7, 20:14-15, Job 2:10, Jer 16:14-15, Ezek 16:47, and Hos 6:6. However, even if linguistically possible, applied to 6:3 the emphasis would fall upon El Shaddai, not YHWH, which runs decidedly against the narrative context which is so concerned with the name YHWH.

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.”<sup>8</sup>

Those who see the divine name YHWH as having a different significance from that realized by the patriarchs most commonly understand the name referring to the fulfillment of the patriarchal promises. Childs expresses it well:

for the biblical writer the revelation of different names is important because it made known the character of God. He had made a covenant with the patriarchs as El Shaddai, but they had not experienced the fulfillment of that promise. Now God reveals himself through his name as the God who fulfills his promise and redeems Israel from Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

According to this view, the period prior to the Egyptian deliverance was a time of anticipation, for the promises made to the patriarchs had yet to be fulfilled. The character of YHWH as expressed in 6:3 is one who is faithful to his covenant commitments. The fulfillment of the promises will bring with it an understanding of God as YHWH, the one who fulfills his word.<sup>10</sup>

In looking at 1:1—15:21 canonically, this chapter follows Childs and others in taking the position that what is new in 6:3 is an interpretation of the divine name, and not

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<sup>8</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (London: Tyndale Press, 1959), 12. Scholars supporting this view include Raymond Abba, "The Divine Name Yahweh," *JBL* 80 (1961): 323-24, Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 49, David Noel Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses," *JBL* 79 (1960), Charles R. Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *BSac* 142 (1985): 39, Martens, *God's Design*, 19, n.6. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 271-72, argues that the Hebrew syntax suggests both options, that Israel knew neither the proper name YHWH nor had experienced him in the character of YHWH.

<sup>9</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 115. Cf., e.g. Pierre Auffret, "The Literary Structure of Exodus 6.2-8," *JSOT* 27 (1983): 42-54, Jonathan Magonet, "The Rhetoric of God: Exodus 6.2-8," *JSOT* 27 (1983): 66, Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 272, Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 79, Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 31, W. Randall Garr, "The Grammar and Interpretation of Exodus 6:3," *JBL* 111 (1992): 385-408, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 92. Moberly, *Old Testament*, 28-31, likewise sees 6:3 closely related to the promises, although he denies that the name YHWH was known to the patriarchs.

<sup>10</sup> So the paraphrase of Kürle, *Appeal*, 59: "Just as you *now* have access to my name 'Yhwh', you will *now* experience the fulfillment of my land-promise to the fathers!" (italics original).

the name itself.<sup>11</sup> However, we will argue that the fulfillment of the patriarchal promises, while important, is not what ultimately distinguishes the significance of the name YHWH from Genesis to Exodus, but rather that, in light of the narrative context of 1:1—15:21, what is new in 6:3 is the revelation that YHWH is supreme over all creation, and above all gods. To make the argument, we will begin by seeking to demonstrate that the driving theological concern of 1:1—15:21 is that YHWH's supremacy be revealed to Egypt, Israel, and beyond.

## EXEGESIS OF EXODUS 1:1—15:21

### *The Beginnings of the Conflict (Exodus 1—2)*

The very beginning of Exodus introduces a conflict between the king of Egypt and YHWH, a conflict which dominates 1:1—15:21.<sup>12</sup> After 1:1-6 connects Exodus to Genesis by listing the names of Jacob and his sons, 1:7 presents the circumstance for the coming struggle: Israel's multiplication. Israel's rapid growth calls to mind God's command at creation for mankind to be fruitful and multiply. The similarity of language is striking.

Genesis 1:28: ויברך אתם אלהים ויאמר להם אלהים פרו ורבו ומלו את הארץ  
Exodus 1:7: ובנו ישראל פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו במאד מאד תמלא הארץ אתם

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<sup>11</sup> Approaching the difficulty of 6:3 through the meaning of the name need not be driven by canonical concerns. For linguistic arguments that 6:3 is better understood as referring to the meaning of the name, see Motyer, *Revelation*.

<sup>12</sup> Contra, e.g., Gowan, *Theology*, 131, who finds the conflict spanning 5:1—15:21. For a discussion of the thematic links that tie chapters 1—4 to 5—19, see Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 63-76.

The effect of the parallel is twofold. First, it shows that the Israelites were obedient to God's command, and therefore were fulfilling his will in Egypt. Secondly, Israel was under God's blessing as they carried out his will. In fact, the abundant language of 1:7 shows that Israel was flourishing under the blessing of God: "they were fruitful and they teemed and they multiplied and they grew strong, with exceeding excess, and the earth was filled with them."<sup>13</sup>

It is precisely this state of affairs, Israel's multiplication, that Pharaoh (who did not know Joseph) recognizes and seeks to restrain: "behold, the people of Israel are many (רבו) and stronger (ויעצמו) than us" (1:9, cf. 1:7, וירבו ויעצמו). Responding to the perceived threat Israel poses, Pharaoh institutes increasingly repressive measures to stem Israel's growth. The conflict becomes clear. God's blessing of Israel, and her obedience to his will, causes Pharaoh to seek to stem Israel's growth, in effect an effort to thwart Israel from carrying out God's will. In other words, at this precise point God's will and Pharaoh's will come into direct conflict.<sup>14</sup> The account of the midwives, commanded by Pharaoh to kill the male children (1:16), encapsulates the conflict. Caught between the will of God and the will of Pharaoh, they are forced to choose sides. The midwives disobey Pharaoh for the explicit reason that they feared God (1:17). In response (and in a hint of God's eventual triumph over Pharaoh), God rewards the midwives with families, further extending his will that Israel be fruitful and multiply.

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<sup>13</sup> See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 24-26. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 290, n. 15, connects the language of 1:7 more broadly to YHWH's commission and promises throughout Genesis.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 106-7.

*The Revelation of the Name YHWH (Exodus 3:14)*

Our investigation of the divine name will begin with Exodus 3:14. Aside from the fact that its importance is universally acknowledged, there are three reasons for starting with 3:14. The first is simply that 3:14 is where the divine name first appears in the canonical form of Exodus. The second concerns content, for 3:14 provides a rare explanation of the name YHWH, and is therefore, despite its difficulties, essential in any discussion of the meaning of the name. The third reason concerns the manner in which the name is revealed, for the ambiguous nature of 3:14 in effect points beyond itself, thereby suggesting that the manner in which YHWH reveals himself in Exodus lies, in part, in the future. From the perspective of position, content, and manner, 3:14 serves as the foundation upon which an understanding of the divine name in Exodus is built.

The revelation of the name YHWH in 3:14-15 comes in response to Moses' hypothetical question of 3:13: what if the people ask Moses "what is his [God's] name?" The text is as follows.

And God said (ויאמר) to Moses, "I am who I am" (אהיה אשר אהיה). And he said (ויאמר), thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: "I am" has sent me to you. And God said again (ויאמר) to Moses, "thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'YHWH (יהוה), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (3:14-15).

Much modern scholarship has seen this response, particularly with its threefold ויאמר, as "garbled," "overcrowded," or "swollen."<sup>15</sup> Another possibility is that these statements actually work together to reveal the meaning of the name YHWH, articulated in 3:15. If so, how are these statements related? The following will suggest that YHWH's answer to

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<sup>15</sup> See, respectively, Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 67, Noth, *Exodus*, 43, and William R. Arnold, "The Divine Name in Exodus iii. 14," *JBL* 24 (1905): 130.

Moses is given in three stages, or statements, each building upon the one before, together giving an interpretation of the name YHWH that addresses Israel's hypothetical concern of 3:13.

As has been noted by many, אהיה אשר אהיה in 3:14 looks back to עמך אהיה in 3:12. The relationship with 3:12 therefore provides a good starting point for understanding 3:14 in its present literary context. YHWH has appeared to Moses and has informed him that he [Moses] will go to Pharaoh and bring Israel out from Egypt. Anxious concerning his inadequacy, Moses inquires "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt?" (3:11). The question is not an existential one (Moses knows who he is), but rather an expression of doubt concerning his success in accomplishing YHWH's charge. Responding to Moses' real concern, YHWH answers "I am with you" (אהיה עמך), an answer that says nothing about Moses, but much about YHWH. Implied in YHWH's answer are both YHWH's presence with Moses in his task, and YHWH's power to enable Moses to succeed.<sup>16</sup>

Moses then asks what he should answer should Israel ask him the name of the "God of your fathers." YHWH responds with אהיה אשר אהיה, a reply which has engendered great discussion.<sup>17</sup> For the present purpose two issues are particularly relevant: the meaning of אהיה אשר אהיה and its relationship to יהוה in 3:15. Regarding the first, several translations are linguistically possible, which accounts for the multitude of suggestions.<sup>18</sup> Citing the flexibility of the imperfect tense, Brichto argues for the

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<sup>16</sup> The two other appearances of אהיה in Exodus (4:12, 15) carry the same sense.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent and extensive bibliography, see Magne Sæbø, "God's Name in Exodus 3.13-15: An Expression of Revelation or of Veiling?," in *On the Way to Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament*, vol. 191, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 78-79.

<sup>18</sup> Most proposals follow the traditional pattern "I am/will be who/what I am/will be." Proposals offered as an alternative to the traditional possibilities fall into two broad categories. One alternative, offered by William F. Albright, "The Name *Yahweh*," *JBL* 43 (1924), finds יהוה a *hiphil* of הוה, "to be," and supports

legitimacy of multiple translations, each of which suggests important nuances of the name.<sup>19</sup> The linguistic flexibility of אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה suggests that a more fruitful approach would be to examine a particular interpretation in light of the immediate canonical context, and then to rule out certain readings, rather than to insist on a precise English translation. Two elements are important in understanding אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה. First, the relationship between 3:12 and 3:14 suggests that the meaning of אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה is related to the promise of YHWH's effective presence in the upcoming task for which he is commissioning Moses. Secondly, the ambiguity of אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה must be honored. While not a rebuff or refusal to answer, YHWH's response in 3:14a is nonetheless vague, and certainly not a complete answer. As Zimmerli has written, 3:14 "refuses to 'explain' the name in a way that would confine it within the cage of a definition."<sup>20</sup> One effect of this is to give the divine name a future orientation, opening the possibility of further revelation.<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann has gone so far to suggest that "it is plausible that the entire

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the emendation אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה, rendering a translation "I cause to be what comes into existence." Freedman, "Name," largely follows Albright, translating the phrase "I am the creator," although he argues the parallel between 3:14 and 33:19 makes the emendation unnecessary. The weakness of the above proposals, however, is that each ultimately relies upon conjecture, either upon textual emendation or a hypothetical *hiphil* form of הָיָה that occurs nowhere else in the MT (the causative stem for הָיָה being the *piel*). The other alternative, proposed by E. Schild, "On Exodus iii 14 -- 'I Am That I Am'," *VT* 4 (1954):296-302, and Johannes Lindblom, "Noch Einmal Die Deutung des Jahwe-Names in Ex. 3, 14," in *ASTI*, ed. Hans Kosmala (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 4-15, suggests that the relative clause אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר is governed by the first אֱהִיָּה, rendering the translation "I am he who is" (Lindblom: "ich bin derjenige, der ist"). Bertil Albrektson, "On the Syntax Of אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה," in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Wynton Thomas*, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 15-28, argues for a return to the traditional possibilities, convincingly demonstrating that the parallels upon which Schild's and Lindblom's proposals are based are not adequate parallels to 3:14a. Following Albrektson, the present argument will work with the understanding that the Hebrew phrase is best rendered according to the traditional pattern.

<sup>19</sup> Brichto, "Worship," 29, n. 20, argues for every combination of I was/I am/I will be that I was/I am/I will be, saying "[t]he multivalence and ambiguity of the imperfect tense in biblical Hebrew is often exploited by Scripture's authors to make a statement in a broadly inclusive sense even while it is addressed to a particular context."

<sup>20</sup> Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*, 21.

<sup>21</sup> So Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:95. It is generally acknowledged that אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה is an example of the *idem per idem* construction, which S. R. Driver, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 363, defined as a rhetorical device used "where the means or the desire to be more explicit does not exist." If

Exodus narrative is an exposition of the name of Exod 3:14, requiring all its powerful verbs for an adequate expression."<sup>22</sup>

The second stage in the revelation echoes 3:14a: "and he said [ויאמר], thus you shall say to Israel, יהוה has sent me to you." Whereas 3:14a was given for Moses, 3:14b is given for Moses to speak to Israel, in response to Israel's hypothetical question. The nature of Israel's question has been much discussed, mostly along the lines of whether Israel was asking for a name previously known, in order to test Moses' claim to speak for their God,<sup>23</sup> whether Israel was enquiring concerning the character of God,<sup>24</sup> or whether Israel was enquiring concerning a previously unknown name.<sup>25</sup> While the literary context may suggest Israel testing Moses,<sup>26</sup> another element is important in understanding YHWH's answer. The similarity between YHWH's answer to Israel (יהוה) and YHWH's answer to Moses (אהיה אשר אהיה) suggests a similarity between the questions of Israel and Moses. In other words, a similar answer may indicate a similar question. In a manner comparable to Moses' own need for assurance in going before Pharaoh, Moses envisions

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used to terminate debate, as argued by Jack R. Lundbom, "God's Use of *Idem Per Idem* to Terminate Debate," *HTR* 71 (1978), then 3:14a might well be seen as a rebuff (cf. Arnold, "Divine Name," 129, and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:182, who finds an element of censure in YHWH's answer). If, however, the vagueness of the construction functions to keep open further revelation of the name, as will be argued below, then the construction need not be seen as a rebuff.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 124, n. 17. Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 194, offers the translation "I will be with whomever I will be." In explanation, Smith writes "[t]he pressing theological issue often voiced in Israelite literature is whether or not Yahweh will be or can be present on behalf of Israel. Perhaps this theological understanding informs the interpretation of the divine name in this context as expressed by Yahweh's message to Moses in 3.12." Smith's translation is helpful in emphasizing the primary issue of presence, but in so doing closes off other important aspects of YHWH's character which will be revealed later in Exodus. Cf. Buber, *Moses*, 51-55, who renders the sense of 3:14 as "I will be present."

<sup>23</sup> So Seitz, *Word without End*, 236-37, Sigmund Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *HUCA* 32 (1961): 126, Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:366-67. Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 23.

<sup>24</sup> So Abba, "Divine Name," Buber, *Moses*, 48ff., Gianotti, "Meaning," 39.

<sup>25</sup> So Moberly, *Old Testament*, 24-26, Roland deVaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*, ed. John Durham and Joshua R. Porter (London: SCM Press, 1970), 49, Noth, *Exodus*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> See Seitz, *Word without End*, 229-47.

Israel having similar misgivings, and therefore needing similar assurance.<sup>27</sup> Like Moses, Israel would want to be assured that Moses' mission would be successful. In response to this desire for assurance, YHWH tells Moses to answer Israel in a manner that would reflect the promise of his presence: "אהיה sent me to you."<sup>28</sup> Assuring Israel of the presence of Moses' God would help assure Israel of the ultimate success of the upcoming exodus.

Assurance of the presence of Moses' God, however, would not be enough for Israel. While 3:14b gives Israel assurance of the presence of Moses' God, it has not formally answered the question that Moses envisions Israel asking. This necessitates YHWH's third reply to Moses, where the name יהוה is specifically given. The giving of the name YHWH completes Moses' answer to Israel, assuring Israel that the God of Moses is the God of Israel. Particularly notable is the almost identical wording of 3:14b and 3:15a:

Exod 3:14b: כה תאמר לבני ישראל אהיה שלחני אליהם

Exod 3:15a: כה תאמר לבני ישראל יהוה אלהי אבותיהם אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב שלחני אליהם

Except for the rendering of the divine name, where אהוה in 3:14b directly parallels יהוה in 3:15a, the above sentences are identical.

<sup>27</sup> Buber, *Moses*, 48ff. has argued that מה שמו is not a question specifically for a name, which would use the interrogative מי, but rather a question concerning the character of the God of whom Moses speaks. Cf. Abba, "Divine Name," 323, and especially Motyer, *Revelation*, 17ff., who has tested Buber's suggestion throughout the OT.

<sup>28</sup> In favor of such a reading is the sense it makes of the sequence between 3:14a and 3:14b. It has been widely recognized that אהיה אשר אהיה is not a direct answer to Moses question, leading some (e.g. Arnold, "Divine Name," 129ff., cf. K. H. Bernhardt, "היה," *TDOT* 3: 376-81, Noth, *Exodus*, 43-44, Anthony Phillips and Lucy Phillips, "The Origin of 'I Am' In Exodus 3.14," *JSOT* 78 (1998): 81-83), to assume that it is an interpolation. However, if the function of 3:14b is to provide assurance to Israel that Moses anticipates will be needed, then 3:14b becomes dependent upon 3:14a, thereby eliminating the need for an interpolater. Furthermore, it also addresses Arnold's contention that אהיה was substituted for יהוה in 3:14b due to respect for the divine name, for an introduction of the divine name YHWH without the prior explanation of 3:14 would have yielded a much different sense. Rather than being a problem, the threefold אהיה marks a logical progression leading to an understanding of YHWH in 3:15.

Considering that אֱהִיָּה is not, strictly speaking, the divine name itself, the parallel suggests that אֱהִיָּה is an interpretation, or explanation, of the divine name YHWH, who is the God of their fathers. To put it another way, the linguistic similarity between 3:14b and 3:15a suggests that the meaning of אֱהִיָּה is equivalent to the meaning of YHWH, who is the God of the patriarchs. Given what we have discovered concerning the significance of אֱהִיָּה in 3:12 and 3:14, then, the name YHWH in 3:15a carries with it the notion of both the promise of God's presence with Israel as they leave Egypt, with the corresponding assurance of success, as well as a future orientation that leaves the understanding of the name YHWH open to further revelation.<sup>29</sup> Understood in this way, the apparent incongruity of YHWH's answer to Moses' question becomes less problematic. Each stage of the answer builds upon the previous one, with the answer that Moses was seeking, both the name and the meaning of the name, given in 3:15a.

### *The Acknowledgment Formula: "I am YHWH"*

The future orientation of the name YHWH, hinted at in Exodus 3:14, is filled with content in the acknowledgment formula "I am YHWH."<sup>30</sup> The statement runs through Exodus from its introduction in 4:11 to its last appearance in 31:13. In 1:1—15:21, the acknowledgment formula comes in a very specific context: the defiance of Pharaoh. The conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh hinted at from Exodus 1 becomes explicit in the

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<sup>29</sup> deVaux, "Revelation," 71-75, translates 3:14 as "I am He who Exists," making an argument from the wider context of Exodus that the name directs Israel to a "practical monotheism," whereby Israel acknowledges YHWH alone as her God. While exclusive worship is a paramount concern in Exodus, such a translation misses the important issue of chapter 3, where Moses is concerned not with worship primarily, but with misgivings concerning the outcome of the task he has been given.

<sup>30</sup> See particularly "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name" in Seitz, *Word without End*, 229-47. This work will use the phrase "acknowledgement formula" instead of the more common phrase "recognition formula," since the former preserves the root יָדַע, "know." (The German *Erkenntnisaussage* likewise better preserves the Hebrew sense).

first encounter between Moses and Pharaoh. The conflict of authority is set from the beginning when Moses commands Pharaoh with the words “thus says YHWH,” thereby addressing Pharaoh as YHWH’s subject, language which Pharaoh uses to speak to Israel in 5:10. Pharaoh’s response in 5:2 is one of defiance, not ignorance, captured nicely by Goldingay’s translation: “Who is Yhwh that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not acknowledge Yhwh. No, I will not let Israel go.”<sup>31</sup> In a further comment on 5:2, Goldingay comments that Pharaoh “is declining to recognize Yhwh’s authority. He is laying down his own gauntlet for the fight that Yhwh also wishes to have.”<sup>32</sup> As others have noted, the remainder of the exodus account is the answer to Pharaoh’s question.<sup>33</sup> Pharaoh’s defiant response, then, serves as the theological context for the section.<sup>34</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of “I am YHWH” in the exodus narrative, since the acknowledgment of YHWH is the theme and the ultimate goal of the plagues.<sup>35</sup> As Zimmerli has argued in his broader study of the acknowledgment formula, “the phrase ‘I am Yahweh’ carries all the weight and becomes the denominator upon which all else rests.... [E]verything Yahweh has to announce to his people appears

<sup>31</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 340. While Exodus gives no indication that Pharaoh knew the name YHWH prior to 5:1, that his response is primarily one of defiance and not ignorance can be seen subsequently in Pharaoh’s persistent disobedience, long after he has heard the name YHWH. Cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 153-54, and Walter Brueggemann, “Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor,” *CBQ* 57 (1995): 36.

<sup>32</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 341. Kürle, *Appeal*, 57, finds Pharaoh’s response to be one of ridicule, while Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:486, argues it was insulting and blasphemous.

<sup>33</sup> Commenting on 5:2, Werner H. Schmidt, “Die Intention der Beiden Plagenerzählungen (Exodus 7-10) in Ihrem Kontext,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 241, writes: “Das Urteil enthält eine Frage, die eine Antwort verlangt, bricht damit die Spannung auf, die die Folgenhandlung durchzieht, oder formuliert gar das Grundproblem, für das die Plagenerzählungen—in ihrer jaswistischen Darstellung—eine Lösung suchen.” Cf. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 234.

<sup>34</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 249. Carpenter, “Exodus 18,” 102, likewise finds 5:1-2 central: “Exod. 5:1-2 is a programmatic piece that illustrates the concerns to be dealt with throughout chs. 5—17.”

<sup>35</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 387, observes that, rather than plagues, the language of Exodus most often refers to signs (אֵימֹת, 4:17; 7:3; 8:17; 10:1-2) or wonders (מוֹפְתִים, 4:21; 7:3, 9; 11:9-10), an emphasis more in keeping with the ultimate goal of communication in the plague narratives.

as an amplification of the fundamental statement, ‘I am Yahweh.’”<sup>36</sup> Applied to the exodus narrative, Zimmerli’s statement is most strongly supported by YHWH’s words to Pharaoh:

For in this time I am sending all my plagues upon your heart and that of your servants and that of your people, in order that you may know that there is none like me in all the land. For by now I have sent my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence and you would have been cut off from the land. But for this reason I have raised you up, that I might display in you my power, in order that my name be declared in all the land (9:14-16).

The above statement is critical for understanding the purpose of the plagues. While Israel’s liberation is important in Exodus, even crucial, YHWH’s words make it clear that liberation is not the reason for the succession of plagues. This is not to discount YHWH’s compassion for Israel or his remembering his covenant, but simply to say that neither of those things account for the *manner* in which YHWH overcame Egypt and released Israel. If Israel’s liberation was the controlling issue, the narrative might have quickly moved from 5:2 to 14:30a: “thus YHWH saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.” Rather, it is YHWH’s desire to be known throughout the land that accounts for the plagues, and therefore the narrative of chapters 5—14. Further, 9:16 suggests YHWH engineered the plagues in order to make this point (“for this reason I have raised you [Pharaoh] up”). Acknowledgement of YHWH is likewise the reason that YHWH told Israel to turn back to Pi-hahiroth, in order to lure Pharaoh to pursue Israel one final time and thereby set up YHWH’s final and decisive victory at the sea (14:1-4). The effect of

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<sup>36</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 9. Cf. Eslinger, “Freedom.”

YHWH's hemming Israel in between the Egyptian army and the sea serves the purpose of YHWH gaining glory, both amongst Egypt (14:4, 18) and Israel (14:31; cf. 15:1-21).<sup>37</sup>

Knierim pushes this line of argument back a step further, suggesting that not only the manner of the deliverance (the plagues), but the deliverance itself was at the service of a larger purpose. With particular reference to 3:7-8 (cf. 2:23-25; 6:5), Knierim suggests the possibility that, while the oppression was the immediate cause of YHWH's intervention, in the larger context of the Pentateuch, the deliverance was the cause of the oppression. In Knierim's words,

Yahweh's knowledge of Israel's oppression is the cause for his intervention. His decision to liberate them is the effect. However, in the larger context of the Pentateuch, it is equally obvious that the oppression itself had to happen or else Israel's liberation would not have been necessary. Their oppression is the immediate, contingent cause for their liberation. Whether oppression also is the reason or ground for the entire liberation story, as well as its immediate cause, is a different question. It could be that the need for Israel's exodus is in the first place the reason for their oppression, i.e., that Israel, according to the entire Pentateuchal narrative, had to be oppressed in order to be led out of Egypt.<sup>38</sup>

Knierim further supports his suggestion with the observation that although Israel's leaving Egypt was not the only, or even the most obvious, means of dealing with Israel's suffering, no alternatives to Israel's deliverance are even considered.<sup>39</sup> While Knierim finds a theology of the land governing 3:7-8 (rather than a theology of the revelation of the name YHWH), the issues that Knierim raises are pertinent as well to the present argument.

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<sup>37</sup> Given the particular importance of this "itinerary notice" in the narrative, it is curious that Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 44, concludes that the differences between 14:2 and the other notices must indicate that 14:2 is a later insertion. The unique theological function of 14:2 among the itinerary notices suggests that it might exhibit some differences from the other itinerary notices.

<sup>38</sup> Knierim, *Task*, 131.

<sup>39</sup> Knierim, *Task*, 131-32. Cf. Eslinger, "Freedom."

## The Acknowledgment Formula: Its Meaning

As mentioned above, YHWH's answer to Moses' question in 3:14 suggests the meaning of the name YHWH has a future orientation. The "I am YHWH" statements are particularly important insofar as they give further content to the name YHWH, and thereby show what kind of God YHWH is. The following survey of the acknowledgment formula in 1:1—15:21, along with several related statements,<sup>40</sup> will suggest that the formula conveys YHWH's unrivalled superiority over creation, which can be divided into three areas: supremacy over mankind, over nature, and over other gods.

*Supremacy over Mankind.* YHWH's supremacy over man is first seen in YHWH's claim to be the creator of mankind. The first appearance of the acknowledgment formula is easily missed in English translations: "who made the mouth of a man?... Am I not YHWH?" (הלֹא אֲנִי יְהוָה, Exod 4:11). Although the formula is readily apparent in Hebrew, the presence of the interrogative makes the formula difficult to render into English and preserve intact. YHWH's question is a rhetorical response to Moses' misgivings concerning his ability to speak. YHWH assures Moses that his difficulties of speech will not be a hindrance to the task to which YHWH is calling him, for the one who made Moses' mouth can give him the ability to speak. YHWH's assurance to Moses is grounded in YHWH's being the creator of mankind.

YHWH's supremacy over man is further apparent in YHWH's interaction with Pharaoh, perhaps best represented by 14:4: "[t]hus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am YHWH." This verse speaks to YHWH's supremacy over mankind in two different ways. First, 14:4 alludes to YHWH's supremacy over Pharaoh.

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<sup>40</sup> Exod 8:6[10]; 9:14-16; 9:29; 11:7.

This supremacy is evident in YHWH's control over Pharaoh, demonstrated starkly by YHWH's ability to harden Pharaoh's heart, a term indicating YHWH's ability to render Pharaoh stubborn so that he will not obey YHWH's command.<sup>41</sup> Although there has been much discussion concerning the relationship between YHWH's hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh's hardening his own heart,<sup>42</sup> the narrative makes it clear that YHWH ultimately controls Pharaoh's heart.<sup>43</sup> YHWH's control over Pharaoh is pronounced to the point where several scholars have objected that Pharaoh is portrayed as nothing more than a helpless pawn in the hands of YHWH. For instance, Fretheim writes

the struggle with Pharaoh would not redound much to the glory of God if it were only a matter of God's outwitting a wind-up toy. For God's victory to mean something, the opposition cannot be a pushover. If Pharaoh is a puppet in the hands of God, then God's renown is not particularly enhanced, one of the divine objectives of the narrative.<sup>44</sup>

Fretheim's interpretation of the conflict misses the point. The weight of the narrative falls not upon Pharaoh being a pushover, but rather on the incomparability of YHWH, against whom no human being, even the ruler of Egypt, can stand. YHWH's renown is not enhanced by participating in a fair fight, as Fretheim suggests, but rather by showing

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<sup>41</sup> The traditional English rendering "to harden" translates three different verbs: חזק (4:21; 7:13, 22; 8:15 [19]; 9:12; 9:35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), כבד (7:14; 8:11[15], 28[32]; 9:34; 10:1) and קשה (7:3; 13:15).

<sup>42</sup> It is, of course, well recognized that Exodus attributes Pharaoh's hardening both to Pharaoh (8:11[15]; 8:28[32]; 9:34; 13:15) and to YHWH (4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:4, 14:7, 14:17), and often simply comments that Pharaoh's heart was hardened (7:13, 7:14, 7:22, 8:15[19], 9:7, 9:35). For recent attempts to relate these differing conceptions, see particularly G.K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9," *TJ* 5 (1984), Childs, *Exodus*, 170-5, Cassuto, *Exodus*, 54-58, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 96-103, David M. Gunn, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart: Plot, Character and Theology in Exodus 1-14," in *Art and Meaning*, ed. David J. A. Clines, vol. 19, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), Heikki Raisanen, *The Idea of Divine Hardening* (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 1976), and Robert R. Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41 (1979).

<sup>43</sup> See particularly 4:21 and 7:3, both of which suggest beforehand that it is YHWH who hardens Pharaoh's heart. Cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 68, who contends that, based on 7:3, "we shall have to assume the narrator to mean that right from the beginning it was only Yahweh who was really at work."

<sup>44</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "Suffering God and Sovereign God in Exodus: A Collision of Images," *HBT* 11 (1989): 43. See also Eslinger, "Freedom," 57.

himself to be unequivocally superior to even the most powerful opponents. The implication of Fretheim's comment is that YHWH would somehow be more glorious if the distance between YHWH and Pharaoh were not so great. While the theological ramifications of the distance between YHWH and Pharaoh may be unsettling, the plague narratives make it clear that the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh is a foregone conclusion, demonstrated most emphatically in YHWH's foretelling of the events beforehand (e.g. 3:19-22; 4:21-23; 6:1; 7:1-5). The irony of the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh is that as Pharaoh refused to acknowledge YHWH's power and authority, YHWH used him unwittingly to display publicly that very power and authority in Egypt.

Secondly, 14:4 addresses YHWH's supremacy over the Egyptian army. Whereas YHWH was able to personally control Pharaoh, here YHWH speaks to his military superiority over Egypt. Despite allusions to military conflict between Egypt and Israel,<sup>45</sup> Exodus portrays the crossing of the sea as a military conflict between Egypt and YHWH in which YHWH triumphs without Israel's help (cf. the discussion of Exod 15 below). In a manner similar to YHWH's one-sided control over Pharaoh, Exodus gives no hint that YHWH suffers at all in the battle, or that the outcome is ever in doubt. Not only is YHWH supreme over an individual ruler, he is supreme over that ruler's army. "I am YHWH" would convey that even the armies of nations cannot withstand YHWH's power to exercise his will.

*Supremacy over Nature.* "I am YHWH" is also intended to communicate YHWH's mastery over nature. This mastery can be seen most explicitly where the

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<sup>45</sup> Such as Israel's leaving Egypt "arrayed for battle" (13:18), and the camps of Egypt and Israel opposite one another (14:20). While מִחָנָה is not necessarily a military term, Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Israel* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980), 54, observes that the use of מִחָנָה for Egypt's army suggests a parallel use for Israel's מִחָנָה.

acknowledgment formula is given as an intended result of a particular plague (7:17; 8:18[22]; cf. 8:6[10]; 9:14, 29). Moreover, the goal of acknowledgment is apparent even beyond the use of the “I am YHWH” formula, for the plague narrative is fraught with indications that YHWH, not Pharaoh, is supreme over nature. For instance, dramatic actions serve to demonstrate unambiguously that the plagues were YHWH’s doing: the river became blood after Aaron smote the Nile with a rod,<sup>46</sup> Moses threw dust into the air to inaugurate the plague of boils in Pharaoh’s presence (9:10), he stretched out his hands over the land to bring the locusts (10:13) and the darkness (10:22), and toward the heavens to bring the hail (9:23). Precise predictions concerning an upcoming plague, including its beginning and/or ending also demonstrate YHWH’s precise control over nature. The plague of flies (8:19[23]), the death of the livestock (9:5), and the hail (9:18) began precisely when YHWH promised. Not only could YHWH stop the disasters he brought about, but was able to stop them at the exact time that Moses indicated, as in the plagues of the frogs (8:5[9]), the flies (8:25[29]), and the hail (9:29). YHWH further demonstrates his control over nature by controlling precisely the extent of a particular plague by making a distinction between Israel and Egypt (8:18-19[22-23]; 9:26; 11:7: 10:23; 12:23). While still refusing to submit to YHWH’s command to release Israel, even Pharaoh acknowledged YHWH’s power in his repeated petitions that Moses stop the plagues (8:4[8], 24[28]; 9:27-28; 10:16-17; 12:31-32).

As has been noted by several interpreters, this demonstration of control over nature points to YHWH as the creator.<sup>47</sup> Zevit has drawn connections between the

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<sup>46</sup> Note that YHWH tells Pharaoh that YHWH himself will strike the river with the staff “in my hand” (בִּידִי), even though the river was struck by Aaron (7:19-20).

<sup>47</sup> Fretheim, “Ecological Signs,” Dozeman, *God at War*, 101-52, Peter Enns, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 192-239, Ziony Zevit, “The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague

plagues and the creation material in Genesis 1—2, arguing that the plague account is carefully structured to teach that YHWH is the creator. The end of the plague narrative, he argues, shows a land without people, animals, and vegetation, “[a] land in which creation was undone.”<sup>48</sup> Fretheim likewise sees creation as the fundamental background of the plagues, arguing that the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh comes from the fact that Pharaoh’s sin is “antcreation,” i.e. Pharaoh’s attempt to curb Israel’s growth goes against God’s creational purposes.<sup>49</sup> Because Pharaoh’s sin is anti-creational, YHWH’s response to judge Egypt by subverting creation to a pre-creation state is possible because, as the creator, he can. Or, in Dozeman’s words, “the [acknowledgment] motif...transforms the exodus into a polemical story whose goal is to confront Pharaoh and the Egyptians with Yahweh’s power as a creator God, who controls all land, including Egypt.”<sup>50</sup>

*Supremacy over Other Gods.* Finally, “I am YHWH” was intended to communicate that YHWH has unrivalled power over all other gods. “I am YHWH” is explicitly connected to YHWH’s supremacy over other gods only in 12:12,<sup>51</sup> where YHWH declared that, in bringing death upon the firstborn, “against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.” The sense of אָעַשָׂה שְׁפָטִים has been debated. The phrase has often been understood in the sense of “mete out punishments,” with the idea that YHWH was

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Narrative in Exodus," *JQR* 66 (1976): 193-211. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 345-46, is unconvinced of the connection to creation, particularly as conceived by Fretheim and Zevit.

<sup>48</sup> Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," 210.

<sup>49</sup> Fretheim, "Ecological Signs," 385, cf. idem, *Exodus*, 106-7.

<sup>50</sup> Dozeman, *God at War*, 119.

<sup>51</sup> The silence concerning other gods to this point in Exodus is curious. Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1992), 312, contends that Egyptian gods were in view throughout the plagues, but mention of them was deliberately deferred until 12:12, where their powerlessness would be demonstrated before the final plague. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 148, argues that Egyptian gods have been largely ignored due to the scorn Exodus has, not for their existence, but for their significance compared to YHWH.

punishing Egypt's gods for their cruel oppression of Israel.<sup>52</sup> It may mean that Egypt's gods were powerless to intervene during the final plague, as Noth suggests.<sup>53</sup> With particular reference to 6:6 and 7:4, Goldingay has argued that both etymology and context suggest that אֵלֵי מִצְרַיִם in 12:12 refers to a display of divine power, rather than judicial punishment,<sup>54</sup> a reading consistent with our examination of the purposes of the plagues. There may be, of course, some overlap of these different interpretations, which should serve as a caution against viewing the possibilities too exclusively.<sup>55</sup> The common thread running through all, however, is the notion that YHWH is supreme over the gods of Egypt, whether it be in YHWH's authority to punish, the powerlessness of Egypt's gods, or YHWH's display of power. While Sarna's comment on 12:12 that YHWH "exposes the deities of Egypt as nongods"<sup>56</sup> needs to be qualified, the text is clearly suggesting that none of the gods of Egypt compare to YHWH. In all likelihood, "[t]he real meaning of 12:12 is more likely that Yahweh will humiliate the Egyptian gods by having his way with their land and people."<sup>57</sup> The humiliation of the gods of Egypt is simultaneously the exaltation of YHWH, clearly recognized by Israel in response to her deliverance (15:11). Israel's acknowledgment of YHWH's superiority over Egypt's gods lays the groundwork for what would become a central pillar in Israel's relationship with YHWH: "you shall have no other gods before me" (20:3).

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<sup>52</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 399-400.

<sup>53</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 96. Cf. Cole, *Exodus*, 108.

<sup>54</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 321. Cf. Gowan, *Theology*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," 198: "the fact that plagues did affect the Egyptians adversely led to an intertwining of the two motives, but, as has been mentioned above, for Pr their significance did not lie in their destructive aspect but in their heuristic one." Cf. Moshe Greenberg, "The Redaction of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 243-52.

<sup>56</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 56. Sarna goes on to argue that "the expression of God's uniqueness in comparative terms, and the mention of other celestial beings, cannot be interpreted literally to imply recognition of the existence of divinities other than the one God" (79-80). Cf. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 140.

<sup>57</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 400.

While 12:12 is the only verse that explicitly mentions other gods in connection with the acknowledgment formula, several related passages imply YHWH's superiority over other gods. For instance, in 8:6[10] Moses pledged to remove the frogs that "you may know that there is none like YHWH our God" (למען תדע כי אין כיהוה אלהינו). In 9:14 the signs were sent that "you may know there is none like me in all the land" (תדע כי אין כמני בכל הארץ). The lack of a specific referent in each verse gives the contrast with other beings the widest possible scope, which would include other gods among those who cannot compare to YHWH. The explicit reference to other gods in 12:12 and 15:11 (cf. 20:2-5; 22:20; 23:32; 34:11-16) shows that Exodus is aware of other gods, thus providing solid warrant to see 8:6[10] and 9:14 as including other gods as among those who cannot compare to YHWH.

### **The Acknowledgment Formula: its Intended Recipients**

Having explored the meaning of the acknowledgment formula, we move to a consideration of the intended recipients of that knowledge. Of the occurrences of the "I am YHWH" formula and its variants, seven are used with reference to Moses and/or Israel (4:11; 6:2, 6-8, 29; 10:1-2), eight with reference to Pharaoh and/or Egypt (7:5, 17; 8:6, 18, 9:14, 11:7, 14:4, 18), while 9:16 may suggest that the whole earth (הארץ) is in view. Of those that conform more closely the acknowledgment formula "that they might know that I am YHWH," most refer to Egypt (7:5, 17; 8:18; 10:2; 14:4, 18).<sup>58</sup> However, even

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<sup>58</sup> However, too much should not be made of the fact that Egypt is most often the object of knowledge. In addition to 6:7, 10:1-2 makes clear that knowledge of YHWH through the plagues was the goal for Israel as well. Israel's recognition of YHWH's power (כח, 15:6) was precisely that which YHWH sought to reveal to Pharaoh (9:16). Although Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," 197, pushes too far in his suggestion that, based upon 14:30-31, "the lesson which Yahweh said he would teach the Egyptians was actually intended for Israel," he is certainly correct in his estimation that the confrontation with Pharaoh was intended as much for Israel as for Egypt. Cf. Georg Fischer, "Exodus 1-15: Eine Erzählung," in *Studies in the Book of*

though the message was similar, there are differences in what it meant for Israel and for Egypt to acknowledge “I am YHWH.”<sup>59</sup> For Israel, it meant not only that she acknowledged YHWH’s supremacy, but that she acknowledged YHWH as her God. The most explicit reference to the acknowledgment formula in relationship to Israel is 6:6-8, which can be arranged in the following chiasmic pattern:<sup>60</sup>

A: I am YHWH.

B: I will bring you from under the burdens of Egypt and I will deliver you from their bondage and redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

C: And I will take you to myself for my people and I will be for you a God, and you shall know that I am YHWH your God who brought you from under the burdens of Egypt.

B’: And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give you, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it for you as an inheritance.

A’: I am YHWH.

Working from the inside out, C concerns the special relationship between YHWH and Israel. “I am YHWH your God,” the first appearance of the acknowledgement formula appended with “your God,” is the structural center, and serves as the central statement and the theological center of the section. B and B’ each speak of what it means for YHWH to be Israel’s God: YHWH will protect and provide for Israel, both in delivering

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*Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 176.

<sup>59</sup> Schmidt, "Intention," 240.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 735. While Childs, *Exodus*, 115, does not speak of a chiasmic pattern, he nonetheless recognizes 6:6-8 as an important literary unit which “contains the essence of God’s purpose with Israel.” The chiasmic pattern of 6:6-8 is supported by the observation of Manuel Oliva, “Revelación Del Nombre De Yahweh in La «Historia Sacerdotal»: Ex 6, 2-8,” *Biblica* 52 (1971): 2, that the “I am YHWH” statements in 6:6-8 are each separated by 23 words. Others, e.g. Auffret, “Literary Structure,” and Magonet, “Rhetoric,” have suggested a chiasmic pattern that encompasses the larger section of 6:2-8. For examples of chiasmic structures in the Old Testament, with particular attention to how chiasmus affects interpretation, see Anthony R. Ceresko, “The Function of Chiasmus in Hebrew Poetry,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 1-10.

her from Egypt and in establishing her in the promised land. Finally, A and A', which bracket the section as an *inclusio*, bring the notion of YHWH's supremacy again to the fore, serving to assure Israel that YHWH has the power and the authority to fulfill his word. The effect of the chiasm is to affirm that YHWH is Israel's God, to be demonstrated by his provision of deliverance and land for Israel, which he is able to bring about because he is supreme. For Israel to acknowledge YHWH means to trust that YHWH, as her God, is able to provide for her and fulfill his promises. Sailhamer expresses it well: "this series of plagues need not intend any more than the general but all-important point that the God of the covenant, the Creator of the universe, is superior to the powers of the nations—whether those powers be merely political and military powers or powers that rely on magic and 'secret arts.'"<sup>61</sup> Such an understanding would have given Israel exactly what she needed in chapter 6, assurance that, despite the intensified persecution, YHWH was able to fulfill his promises.

While there is some overlap, Exodus suggests that acknowledging "I am YHWH" meant something different for Egypt. Egypt's acknowledgment is rooted in YHWH's authority in the land. "I am YHWH" is intended to establish both YHWH's supremacy and, consequently, his authority over Egypt. This is particularly evident in 8:18[22], where YHWH pledges to protect Israel from the plague of flies so that Pharaoh would know that "I am YHWH in the midst of the earth" (למען תדע אני יהוה בקרב הארץ). Not only could YHWH bring plagues upon the land, but his presence in the land enabled him to distinguish Israel from Egypt in a display of precise control over nature within Egypt itself. It is YHWH, not Pharaoh, who controlled affairs in Egypt. YHWH took the further step by claiming ownership over the earth, which was tantamount to claiming that Egypt

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<sup>61</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 253.

belonged to him: Moses' dramatic actions in stopping the hail was meant so that Pharaoh "may know that the earth is YHWH's" (9:29). Whereas Pharaoh had challenged YHWH's authority over Israel, YHWH challenged Pharaoh's rule over Egypt.

How then would Pharaoh have known "I am YHWH"? Exodus implies humble obedience to YHWH's command that he release Israel, which in effect would have been an acknowledgment of YHWH's sovereignty over Egypt. This expectation of obedience is implied particularly in YHWH's words to Pharaoh in 7:16, "behold, you have not yet obeyed," as well as in the fact that several plagues were stopped after Pharaoh pledged to release Israel. Further, YHWH's question "how long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?" (10:3) implies that humility on Pharaoh's part was essential in knowing "I am YHWH." McCarthy takes the position that the goal of the plagues was Pharaoh's repentance, a goal which McCarthy sees almost, but not quite, fulfilled.<sup>62</sup> This does not imply that Pharaoh would have entered into any type of covenant agreement with YHWH.<sup>63</sup> Nowhere in Exodus is the acknowledgement formula appended with "your God" with reference to Pharaoh or Egypt. Nor does Pharaoh's acknowledgment imply that he would have had to relinquish his throne. Brueggemann seems close to the mark when he contends that, for Pharaoh, knowing YHWH entails the acknowledgment of YHWH's sovereignty and the corresponding acknowledgment that he is YHWH's dependent, who only rules by YHWH's consent.<sup>64</sup>

This interpretation seems the most straightforward reading of what acknowledging YHWH meant for Pharaoh. There is, however, a tension present with the

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<sup>62</sup> Dennis J. McCarthy, "Moses' Dealings with Pharaoh: Ex 7:8-10:27," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 345-46.

<sup>63</sup> The account of Jethro, another non-Israelite, is instructive here. Jethro acknowledged that YHWH was God, and worshipped YHWH as such, yet still returned to his own land (18:9-12, 27).

<sup>64</sup> Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 35.

above interpretation. If Pharaoh's acknowledgement entailed his obedience, then Pharaoh never ultimately acknowledged YHWH, a stated purpose of the plagues. Furthermore, the hardening passages, particularly 4:21, indicate that the plagues were intended to *preclude* Pharaoh's obedience, even as they were simultaneously intended to bring Pharaoh to acknowledge YHWH. Clearly Pharaoh exhibits some level of acknowledgment, as shown by his repeated promises to release Israel (8:8[8], 24[28]; 9:28; 12:31-32), his statements of personal sin (9:27; 10:16), and his request for Moses to bless him (12:32). However, this acknowledgment falls short of full obedience. It is clear, nonetheless, that nothing else than humble obedience was required for Pharaoh to avert the destruction of Egypt.

*Israel's Continued Acknowledgement: Ceremonies of the Deliverance  
(Exodus 12—13)*

Before the death of the firstborn, YHWH's final judgment against Egypt, comes the institution of the Passover (12:1-13), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:14-20; 13:3-10), and the Consecration of the Firstborn (13:1-2, 11-16). This section marks a significant shift in the narrative. Rather than simply recounting the events of the Egyptian deliverance, 12:1—13:16 contains instructions concerning Israel's observance of future ceremonies, an orientation which many have found awkward in the present context of Exodus. Although there is a shift in perspective, the theological emphasis of the section is consistent with its narrative context, both preceding and following. As in the plague narratives, 12:1—13:16 point to YHWH's concern to make himself known to

Israel. The following remarks will focus on establishing this connection between the ceremonies and YHWH's revealing himself to Israel.<sup>65</sup>

Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the Consecration of the Firstborn not only support YHWH's intention to make himself known to Israel, but extend that intention to future generations. The three ceremonies have much in common. First, they are all connected with the night of the final plague, the death of the firstborn in Egypt. The Passover commemorates YHWH protecting Israel from the destroyer (of the firstborn in Egypt, 12:23), the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorates the hasty flight from Egypt on the same night (12:17), and the practice of redeeming the firstborn serves as a memorial of YHWH's killing the firstborn in Egypt (13:14-15). While there has been much discussion concerning the convergence of these festivals, the canonical presentation of the three festivals in Exodus points to the theological significance of the events of the exodus. The significance of these events is supported by the severity of punishment for eating leaven during Unleavened Bread (12:15, 19)<sup>66</sup> and in YHWH's declaring the month of the exodus to be the first month (ראש חדשים).<sup>67</sup> While nothing is mentioned concerning Israel's calendar prior to 12:2, the language clearly indicates a break with the past,<sup>68</sup> thereby pointing to the foundational importance of the exodus event.

Secondly, each ceremony serves as a memorial for future generations. For each, YHWH gives explicit instruction concerning how the feasts are to be explained to Israel's

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<sup>65</sup> For the critical difficulties concerning these ceremonies, see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 484-93.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Num 9:9-14 concerning the failure to celebrate Passover.

<sup>67</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 153, comments that a double entendre is intended, with ראש חדשים both signifying the start of the calendar year and the theological importance of the events associated with it.

<sup>68</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 81.

descendants, indicating the importance of their future interpretation. The interpretations of each ceremony are remarkably similar. In addition to each crediting YHWH with Israel's deliverance from Egypt, two explicitly recall the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (Passover, 12:25-27; Consecration of Firstborn, 13:14-15), while two make mention that YHWH delivered Israel with a strong hand (Unleavened Bread, 13:8-10; Consecration of Firstborn, 13:14-15).

The interpretations of the ceremonies are not designed, however, simply to impart information to generations removed from the events of the exodus. Rather, the intention of the ceremonies is to draw future generations and the events of the exodus together, so that Israel's descendants might, through ritual, participate in the Egyptian deliverance. In other words, as several have argued, the ceremonies are not simply memorials, but ritual reenactments of the Egyptian deliverance.<sup>69</sup> In each case, the Israelites are bidden to reenact an event that happened on the night of the exodus: Passover through the consumption of the lamb in haste (dressed accordingly), Unleavened Bread through the eating of unleavened bread akin to that which had not risen when Israel left in haste, and Consecration of the Firstborn through the sacrifice or redemption of the firstborn, because YHWH killed the firstborns of Egypt. The purpose of the reenactment, however, is not simply to remember a past event through dramatic action, but rather to bring the past and the present together for subsequent generations. Childs has argued that the noun זכרון, which describes both the Passover (12:14) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (13:9), has an active sense which points to something beyond itself as worthy of remembrance, in this case the exodus from Egypt.<sup>70</sup> The observance of Passover and

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<sup>69</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 428, Durham, *Exodus*, 158, Sarna, *Exodus*, 13, 57.

<sup>70</sup> See Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, vol. 37, SBT (London: SCM Press, 1962), 66-70.

Unleavened Bread are not observed simply that later generations might remember the exodus, but that they might participate in it. As Childs writes concerning 12:14: “[t]he particular concern of the P writer is not the reliving of a past historical event so much as the maintaining of a reality which indeed entered history, but is now an eternal ordinance.”<sup>71</sup> To observe the ceremonies was to participate in the events themselves. Applied to the rituals of the exodus, Hendel’s reference to Faulkner is apt: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”<sup>72</sup>

With this understanding of the ceremonies in mind, what they were meant to communicate becomes clearer. Israel’s continued ritual participation in the exodus has the effect of including subsequent generations not only in the exodus events, but also into the *meaning* of the events as well. In other words, what YHWH intended to communicate to Israel on the night she was delivered from Egypt is likewise the content of YHWH’s intended communication to Israel in future generations. While not, strictly speaking, a full instance of the acknowledgment formula, “I am YHWH” in 12:12 (which, of course, builds on the acknowledgment formula in connection with the former plagues) is the message that subsequent generations would receive in their participation of the events that displayed YHWH’s supremacy over the gods of Egypt. That YHWH intended this message for Israel is further supported by 10:1-2, where YHWH tells Moses that the purpose of the plagues for Israel was “in order that you may tell in the hearing of your children and your grandchildren that I made sport of the Egyptians, and what signs I have

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<sup>71</sup> Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 68. Thomas W. Mann, “Passover: The Time of Our Lives,” *Int* (1996): 242, goes a step further: “[t]he Passover narrative is arguably the most important section of the entire book because it is primarily here that the experience of exodus is communicated not simply as a moment in historical time (in the past) but as a perennially recurring moment in the present life of these for whom the story is sacred.... The Passover narrative elicits a communion between past and present, and joins past and present together in anticipation of the future.”

<sup>72</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 51, cited in Ronald S. Hendel, “The Exodus in Biblical Memory,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 601.

done among them, that you may know that I am YHWH.” YHWH’s supremacy over the gods of Egypt is explicitly one of the messages the Israelites took from the exodus (15:11). The observation of the three ceremonies, each connected to the night of the Egyptian deliverance, would serve as a vivid means whereby YHWH’s supremacy was revealed to subsequent generations.

*Israel’s Immediate Acknowledgment: the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15)*

Whereas Exodus 1 introduces the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh, Exodus 15 concludes it, thematically framing 1:1—15:21 in terms of YHWH’s conflict with Pharaoh. Despite the thematic continuity with the preceding narrative, questions concerning tradition history and dating have dominated the study of Exodus 15, while comparatively little attention has been given to the understanding of the theological function of the poem as it stands in its context in Exodus.<sup>73</sup> Noting the emphasis on critical questions, Childs writes, “an equally important and usually neglected exegetical task is to analyze the composition in its final stage. Regardless of its prehistory, the fundamental issue is to determine the effect of joining the poem to the preceding narrative.”<sup>74</sup> The following discussion will seek to do just that, with a particular focus in mind. As argued above, YHWH’s commitment to make himself known drives the narrative from 1—14. While the acknowledgement formula does not appear in chapter 15, that which YHWH sought to communicate to Israel in 1—14 through the formula is abundantly present in the song. As the conclusion of YHWH’s conflict with Pharaoh, the

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<sup>73</sup> Although see Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 205-18, James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, vol. 139, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 41-62, and Kürle, *Appeal*, 68-71.

<sup>74</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 248.

song serves as Israel's response to her deliverance, as well as a theological (rather than an historical or narrative) summary of 1—14.<sup>75</sup> The following discussion will focus upon Israel's response to YHWH's actions, examining Israel's interpretation of the events of the exodus and her subsequent understanding of YHWH. In other words, the song is not only an expression of praise, but an expression of what Israel learned of her God in the events of the exodus. Canonically speaking, chapter 15 is Israel's response to YHWH's intention that Israel know that "I am YHWH."

The first observation is that Israel understood her deliverance to be the sole work of YHWH. While there is abundant praise for YHWH in defeating the Egyptians, there is no hint in the poem that Israel contributed to YHWH's victory.<sup>76</sup> The east wind of 14:21 becomes the wind of YHWH's nostrils in 15:8, Moses plays no active role (it is the right hand of God extended over the waters, 15:12), and there is no mention of an angel, a cloud, or any other intermediary.<sup>77</sup> This understanding of ultimate agency renders curious Fretheim's reflections on the plagues:

The divine working in nature is usually in coordination with human activity. Hence, the use of the rod by Moses/Aaron in the plagues or at the sea crossing or in the wilderness is an integral element in what happens in the natural order.... There is a complex understanding of agency in connection with each of the plagues. Moses and Aaron would not be effective without God's power working in and through them, and God is dependent upon Moses and Aaron, working in the world of *nature* in and through that which is not divine.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Seeing Exodus 15 as a historical or narrative summary has led some to suggest contradictions between the song and the preceding narrative. For instance, Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *JNES* 14 (1955): 238-39, suggest that Exodus 15 describes a sudden storm, rather than the parting of the waters, thereby posing a difficulty beyond the concerns of the text. Cf. Watts, *Psalm and Story*, 47-48. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 116-17, finds the narrative of chapter 14 a composite historical reconstruction of Exodus 15. More consistent with the canonical presentation of Exodus itself is the comment of Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 252: "*it is prose that is the primary source and poetry that is the secondary celebration*" (italics original).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Deut 1:30. Fischer, "Exodus 1-15," 176: "Israels Rolle in Ex 1—15 ist die einer kleinen bedrohten, selbst hilflosen Gruppe, die höheren Schutzes bedarf."

<sup>77</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 75.

<sup>78</sup> Fretheim, "Suffering God," 36, italics original.

Aside from the logical fallacy that finds YHWH's *use* of human activity to indicate *dependence* upon human agency, the fact that Exodus 15 nowhere mentions human agency suggests that Israel understood her role in the exodus to be immaterial. The idea that YHWH was in any manner dependent upon human assistance in the exodus is foreign to the thought of both Exodus 15 as well as the plague narrative itself.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the lavish nature of the praise given YHWH is precisely due to the fact that Israel understood YHWH to be solely responsible for Pharaoh's defeat. As seen above, the conflict is portrayed from the beginning of Exodus as between YHWH (not Israel) and Pharaoh. That this conflict is resolved by YHWH alone is recognized by all parties: Moses exhorts Israel "YHWH will fight for you, you only have to be still" (14:14), the Egyptians recognize that "YHWH fights for them" (14:25), and the narrator comments that "YHWH routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea" (14:27). According to the song of Exodus 15, YHWH is the warrior (15:3), the Egyptians are YHWH's enemies (15:7), and it is YHWH's arm that wrought the victory (15:1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12).<sup>80</sup>

Secondly, and related to the above point, the song suggests that Israel understood the name of YHWH in terms of incomparable power, for the exclamation "YHWH is a man of war" (15:3a) is followed by an affirmation that "YHWH is his name" (15:3b). This emphasis is the fulfillment of 14:3-4, 17-18, where YHWH will get glory by destroying Egypt's army, and, more broadly, the fulfillment of YHWH's action in the plagues, where

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<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, it is not the case, as Fretheim suggests, that there is human participation in "each" of the plagues (cf. 8:20[24]; 9:6, where YHWH is the only agent).

<sup>80</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 418, contrasts Exodus 15 with its theocentric perspective with the victory song of Judges 5, which exalts human participation. Cf. Alan J. Hauser, "Two Songs of Victory: A Comparison of Exodus 15 and Judges 5," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. Elaine R. Follis, vol. 40, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987). On a broader level, Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 47, observes that, in Israel's faith-statement that God led Israel out of Egypt, "God is regularly the grammatical or, at least, the logical subject, and it is equally remarkable that 'Israel' as a totality always appears as the object."

YHWH made his name known by demonstrating his supremacy over Pharaoh. While not typically understood as a revelation of the name (as, e.g., 3:13-15; 34:6-7, 14), 15:3 nonetheless reveals something of Israel's understanding of the divine name. Israel understood the essential conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh, and acknowledged YHWH's supremacy in his victory over Egypt.

Thirdly, 15:11 shows that Israel understood YHWH to be supreme over all other gods: "Who is like you among the gods, YHWH? Who is like you, majestic in holiness,<sup>81</sup> fearful in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" The statement of incomparability is particularly important in light of the fact that other gods are only mentioned explicitly in 12:12 (and implicitly in 8:6[10] and 9:14). Israel's declaration of YHWH's supremacy over other gods in 15:11 demonstrates that YHWH's supremacy over other gods is at stake in 1—14, despite the fact other gods are rarely mentioned.<sup>82</sup> The events of the exodus communicated that YHWH was like no other (cf., e.g., Deut 4:34-35; Ps 135).

Fourthly, the song speaks of the nations responding to the mighty deeds of YHWH. This concern is voiced most explicitly in the preceding narrative in 9:14-16, where YHWH declares to Pharaoh that he prolonged the plagues "that my name may be declared throughout the earth." Noth well captures the function of 9:14-16:

Its purpose is to explain why hitherto Yahweh has allowed the divine signs and wonders to have no effect on Pharaoh: it was Yahweh's will to display his 'power' to Pharaoh in ever new ways and with ever mounting effect, and thus to know that his fame was spread over all the earth, as men would still tell everywhere of the wonders which he did in Egypt.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The phrase *שקדך בקדך* can be translated "majestic among the holy ones," (cf. Ps. 89:5; Job 5:1; 15:15) and may be another reference to other gods. See Sarna, *Exodus*, 80, 248 n. 48. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 527-28, suggests that both majestic holiness and supremacy over other gods is intended.

<sup>82</sup> This inference is further confirmed later in 18:11 in Jethro's confession upon hearing of YHWH's mighty deeds against Egypt: "now I know that YHWH is greater than all gods." Jethro's confession will be treated in greater detail in chapter 3.

<sup>83</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 80.

The outworking of YHWH's above purpose is addressed in 15:14-16, where the nations (Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan) tremble due to their hearing of YHWH's acts on Israel's behalf, the effect of which causes them to lose courage.<sup>84</sup> In fact, the envisioned response of the nations is consistent with what would have been a proper response for Egypt, allowing Israel to pass through unmolested (15:16). Exodus 15:14-16 suggests that YHWH's intention to make his name known extended beyond the peoples of Israel and Egypt to the surrounding nations (cf. Is 63:12).<sup>85</sup>

Fifthly, Israel's response in chapter 15 demonstrates that Israel learned that "I am YHWH your God," the intended goal of 6:7. While YHWH had been "the God of your fathers" (3:15), it is in Exodus 15 that Israel herself first acknowledges YHWH as her God (15:2, 13, 16).

Finally, the song ends with an affirmation of the eternal kingship of YHWH, finally resolving the conflict of legitimate authority at stake throughout 1—14. The issue that drives the first section of Exodus is being settled: the reign of YHWH, the rightful ruler of Egypt, Israel and beyond, is being acknowledged throughout the earth.

#### CONCLUSION: A PROPOSAL CONCERNING EXODUS 6:3

We now return to Exodus 6:3. As has been indicated above, if the source critical hypothesis is not taken, the apparent newness of the name YHWH must somehow be accounted for. The typical suggestion is that 6:3 has to do with the fulfillment of the

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<sup>84</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 46. Cf. Josh 2:10-11.

<sup>85</sup> Noting the apparent dislocation between 15:1-12 and 15:13-18, scholars (e.g. Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 205ff.) often divide the sections thematically, first section concerning Israel's deliverance and second concerning Israel's movement to the land. While the difference in the events ought not be disputed, the connection with YHWH's purposes articulated in 9:14-16 helps to make sense of the apparent dislocation by drawing attention to the fact that both sections of the poem are concerned with YHWH's renown.

patriarchal promises. In light of the foregoing, this understanding does not go far enough in accounting for what is new in 6:3. This chapter has made the case that the principle commitment driving YHWH's actions in 1:1—15:21 is his commitment to be known amongst the nations. As Fretheim argues, Israel's liberation is the primary, but not the ultimate, focus of divine activity.<sup>86</sup> YHWH's ultimate purpose in Israel's liberation is for the world to acknowledge him as supreme over all. It is in this context that the sense of 6:3 is best understood. Although YHWH's fulfilling his promise is certainly important, 6:3 is chiefly concerned with YHWH's supremacy.

That 6:3 is primarily concerned with YHWH's supremacy is supported by two considerations. First, the book of Exodus introduces a polemic against other gods that is absent in Genesis. While Genesis speaks of YHWH receiving worship, and being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nowhere in Genesis does YHWH explicitly demand exclusive worship. The book of Exodus exhibits a marked change in this perspective. The plague accounts in Exodus are explicitly designed to reveal YHWH as supreme not only over Pharaoh, but over all creation, and in so doing, to expose all else, including other gods, as inferior. In Exodus, to recognize YHWH as YHWH means acknowledging that he is like no other.

Secondly, the revelation of the name YHWH is concerned both with Israel and Egypt. The statement "in my name YHWH I was not known [*niphal*, נִפְּלָה] to them" states the condition of Israel's ignorance, a condition addressed in Exodus by the oft-repeated acknowledgment formula, "that they may know [*qal*, קָלָה] that I am YHWH." Given that 6:2-8 addresses Israel and refers explicitly to the covenant YHWH established with the patriarchs (6:4), it has been rightly recognized that 6:3 refers to the fulfillment of the

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<sup>86</sup> Fretheim, "Ecological Signs," 392.

patriarchal promises. In fact, if 6:2-8 was the only place where the acknowledgment formula appeared, then the thesis that the name YHWH is primarily connected to the patriarchal promises in Exodus might be unassailable. However, if the name YHWH was meant solely, or even chiefly, to signal the impending fulfillment of the promises, then Egypt's knowing YHWH would be unintelligible, for Egypt is never referred to as YHWH's people and was not included in (nor, it can be assumed, had any knowledge of) YHWH's promises to Israel. The chief significance of the name YHWH, then, must lie elsewhere. On the other hand, a name that indicated that YHWH was supreme amongst all gods would mean something both to Egypt, who worshipped other gods (12:12), and to Israel, who to this point acknowledged YHWH as the God of her fathers, but who did not yet know him as supreme over all other gods. The Song of the Sea, where Israel declares what she knows about YHWH, supports this notion. There is abundant mention of the supremacy and incomparability of YHWH, but no reference to the patriarchal promises. If the name YHWH referred primarily to the fulfillment of the promises, it is odd that Israel's theological reflection upon the exodus account fails to mention it. Rather, the primary emphasis of the name of YHWH, plain in both the acknowledgment formula and in Exodus 15, is YHWH's supremacy, revealed to both Egypt and Israel. Any understanding of the revelation of the name in Exodus must account for both Israel and Egypt.

To reiterate, this proposal does not exclude the fulfillment of the patriarchal promises as an important aspect of the revelation of the name YHWH to Israel. Clearly the patriarchal promises are at issue for 6:3 given the concern for those promises in 6:6-8. However, a subtle but important distinction needs to be made. Understanding that YHWH

will reveal himself through fulfilling his promises is quite different than saying that the character of YHWH is one who fulfills his promises. In the former, fulfillment functions as the *means* by which YHWH's character is revealed, for YHWH's character can be revealed as any number of things through the act of fulfilling the promises. In the latter, fulfillment (i.e. faithfulness) functions as the *content* of YHWH's character, the revelation of YHWH's character therefore being limited to the attributes associated with fulfilling the promises. To be sure, there is significant overlap, but the two conceptions of YHWH's character are nonetheless distinct. The fundamental reason that Israel can expect the fulfillment of the promises alluded to in 6:4-8 is precisely because YHWH is supreme over all, and therefore nothing, including Pharaoh and his armies, can thwart YHWH's will. In other words, the promises are secure because YHWH is supreme. The fulfillment of the promises is a corollary to the wider concern that this supremacy be acknowledged amongst the nations. Both aspects of supremacy and faithfulness to the promises are important. The above argument suggests that they belong in a particular order.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE WILDERNESS (EXODUS 15:22—18:27)<sup>1</sup>

#### THE PROBLEM

Despite the importance of the wilderness wanderings in later Old Testament reflection (e.g. Ps 78, 95, 106, 136:16, Amos 2:10), compared to other sections of Exodus, the wilderness material has not received a great deal of attention in Biblical scholarship.<sup>2</sup> This lack of attention is likely due to the perception that the wilderness material is of secondary importance. An illustration of this can be found in the work of Martin Noth. For Noth, the main blocks of tradition, which formed the foundation of the Pentateuch, were the guidance from Egypt and the guidance into the land. The wilderness material, which he understood as a compilation of somewhat unrelated narrative traditions, functioned as a bridge between these two main traditions.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Noth found the wilderness material to be subordinate to the other great themes of the Pentateuch, arguing that it is “obvious that this is not a very important or

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<sup>1</sup> While most scholars find the wilderness material in Exodus contained in 15:22—18:27, some have argued that wilderness material begins at 13:17. George W. Coats, "An Exposition for the Wilderness Traditions," *VT* 22 (1972) has argued the point most extensively, contending 13:17-22 serves as an introductory exposition of the wilderness traditions as a whole. For an overview of the debate, see Terry L. Burden, *The Kerygma of the Wilderness Traditions in the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 163, American University Studies (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 17-18, 20ff.. Concerning this division, see the comments in Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> See the comparatively scant attention given to wilderness studies in Exodus in Vervenne's comprehensive overview of recent Exodus scholarship. Marc Vervenne, "Current Tendencies and Developments in the Study of the Book of Exodus," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation: Redaction - Reception - Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 23-27.

<sup>3</sup> Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 115.

really independent theme.”<sup>4</sup> The paucity of independent work on the wilderness material, compared to other sections of Exodus, reflects a general (if implicit) agreement with the assessment of Noth.

While Noth’s observation that the wilderness section is not an independent theme is surely correct, its dependence need not imply that the wilderness material is therefore less important. In fact, it is largely because of its connection to, or dependence upon, both the exodus and the Sinai material that the wilderness material is so important, for it serves the important function of connecting the exodus and Sinai. As we have argued earlier, if the relationship between A and B is not understood, it is unlikely that either A or B is understood. The theological importance of the wilderness material lies in large part in the manner in which it helps the reader understand the relationship between the exodus material and Sinai, which, in turn, helps the reader understand both the exodus material and the Sinai material. If it can be said that this chapter addresses a particular problem, it would be the general lack of appreciation for how the wilderness functions in the theological movement of Exodus. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore the theological meaning and function of the wilderness material, particularly its role in connecting the exodus and Sinai material. In so doing, we will address the individual passages in the wilderness section according to their canonical presentation, then offer a proposal as to how they function together both to reinforce lessons Israel learned in the exodus from Egypt and to prepare Israel for the giving of the law at Sinai.

A comment concerning approach is relevant before proceeding. With the exception of Exodus commentaries, most modern study of the wilderness material in Exodus has been done in the wider context of the wilderness traditions elsewhere in the

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<sup>4</sup> Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 58.

OT, particularly in Numbers. What has not been sufficiently explored, however, is the function of the wilderness material in the context of Exodus itself. In order to do so, we will treat the wilderness material in Exodus apart from that in Numbers, and apart from subsequent biblical reflection on the wilderness narratives. One of the costs of such an approach is that many of the problems and insights that arise from a broader investigation of the wilderness material, particularly concerning the relationship between Exodus and Numbers (which often brings a different theological perspective), will not be discussed.<sup>5</sup> The corresponding value of such an approach, however, lies in investigating the manner in which 15:22—18:27 contributes to both the narrative movement of Exodus and its most basic theological concern, YHWH's missionary commitment to be known amongst the nations.

## EXEGESIS OF THE WILDERNESS SECTION

### *Exodus 15:22-27*

Exodus 15:22-27 is the first of three murmuring passages in the wilderness material and, perhaps due to its brevity, the most straightforward. The movement of the narrative is simple. Having traveled three days into the wilderness, the Israelites find only undrinkable water, which results in Israel's murmuring against Moses and the naming of the place Marah (bitterness). In response to Moses' cry, YHWH shows him a tree, which Moses casts into the water. The water then becomes drinkable.

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<sup>5</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 272-81, provides a good example of the fruitfulness of a such a comprehensive approach, calling attention to the macrostructures that become apparent when reading Exodus in conjunction with Numbers.

Theologically, the weight of the section falls on 15:25b-26, which gives the rationale behind YHWH's action:

There he made for them a statute and a judgment, and there he tested them, and said to them, if you listen diligently to the voice of YHWH your God and you do what is right in his eyes and you listen to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not set upon you any of the diseases which I set upon the Egyptians, for I am YHWH your healer (15:25b-26).

In order to understand 15:25b-26 the clause *שם שם לו חק ומשפט ושם נסהו* requires examination, a phrase which Wellhausen argued “stands there quite isolated and without bearing on its context.”<sup>6</sup> First, the reference to *חק ומשפט*, “a statute and a judgment,” presents a difficulty, for it is unclear to what the phrase refers. Several approaches have been taken. Sarna, for instance, suggests that the verse refers to previously given laws now lost.<sup>7</sup> While admittedly a possibility, Sarna's suggestion is of limited help in understanding the final form of the text. Ruprecht argues that the clause refers to the Sabbath command, and was added later in order to make sense of the testing of 16:4, which Ruprecht argues already assumes the Sabbath command. The adverb *שם* in 15:25b refers not to the Marah, specific location of the restoration of the waters, but more generally to the wilderness area, where testing took place.<sup>8</sup> Others see the phrase connected with Massah and Meribah.<sup>9</sup> Rabbinic exegesis has suggested various laws as possibilities, such as honoring one's parents, or laws prohibiting incest.<sup>10</sup> Others simply

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<sup>6</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 343. The phrase, along with 15:26, is widely held to be Deuteronomic. Cf., e.g., Noth, *Exodus*, 127-29, William Johnstone, "From the Sea to the Mountain: Exodus 15:22--19:2: A Case Study in Editorial Techniques," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 250-51.

<sup>7</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> Eberhard Ruprecht, "Stellung und Bedeutung der Erzählung vom Mannawunder (Ex 16) im Aufbau der Priesterschrift," *ZAW* 86 (1974): 298-302.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 343. From a traditio-historical perspective, von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 15, finds it to be an aetiology of the name Massah. Cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 129.

<sup>10</sup> See Jacob, *Second Book*, 436-37.

take the phrase as a foreshadowing of Sinai. Houtman has offered a compelling suggestion that honors the canonical text, without speculating about editorial purposes or what may have been left out. For Houtman, חק ומשפט are not collectives, but should rather be understood as a hendiadys, “a binding statute.”<sup>11</sup> The function of the hendiadys, Houtman suggests, is to indicate from the beginning YHWH’s requirement of obedience as “the *charter, the constitution, for YHWH’s relationship with Israel.*”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Brueggemann captures well the implications, commenting that 15:25b-26

makes unmistakably clear that the liberation from Egypt does not lead to autonomy for Israel, but rather to an alternative sovereignty that imposes an alternative regimen on the liberated slaves. This single verse presents Yahweh as the God who commands, and it anticipates the larger tradition of command in the Sinai meeting to come.<sup>13</sup>

While the suggestions of Houtman and Brueggemann help make sense of the canonical text, it is not necessary to remove all ambiguity by asserting a precise referent of חק ומשפט in order to appreciate the connection in 15:25b-26 between obedience to YHWH and Israel’s welfare.

The connection between Israel’s obedience and her welfare leads to the second phrase in 15:25b that requires attention: וישם נסהו. The phrase is particularly important in that it addresses YHWH’s purpose for Israel at Marah. However, the precise meaning of נסהו in the present context is not entirely straightforward. Noth, for instance, finds the idea that YHWH tested Israel a “rather vague observation,” which was “attached only loosely to what goes before.”<sup>14</sup> How does נסהו fit the context?

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<sup>11</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:313.

<sup>12</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:313, italics original.

<sup>13</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 807-8.

<sup>14</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 129.

As Greenberg has argued with reference to 20:20,<sup>15</sup> the traditional translation “test” for נסה is, in itself, inadequate to the context of 15:25b. Though test may be difficult to improve upon as a translation, some qualification is necessary. While there may be an element of YHWH’s seeking to know Israel’s inclinations, particularly given the sense of נסה in 16:4, the emphasis in 15:25b-26 falls upon teaching or instruction. First, the crisis at Marah concludes with a word of instruction from YHWH to Israel, that in Israel’s obedience she would find her welfare. If YHWH were simply testing Israel to know whether or not she would obey, there would be no need for the subsequent exhortation concerning obedience. Secondly, the appearance of the acknowledgment formula in 15:26 suggests instruction, given that it has been used consistently throughout the Exodus narrative for instructional purposes.<sup>16</sup> Finally, a wordplay in 15:26 may suggest instruction. Often noticed, the phrase “and YHWH showed” (ויורהו יהוה) comes from the root ירה, which is rendered in the *hiphil* as “teach” or “instruct.”<sup>17</sup>

An interesting suggestion, appropriate to the present context, is Eissfeldt’s suggestion of “train.”<sup>18</sup> While Eissfeldt’s thesis that the verb is rooted in military terminology has been questioned, his translation fits the passage nicely in that YHWH’s goal at Marah is to fashion a people who will obey. The first way YHWH does this in 15:22-27 is through establishing trust. YHWH seeks to foster Israel’s trust in him through

<sup>15</sup> Moshe Greenberg, “נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany,” *JBL* 79 (1960).

<sup>16</sup> The language of revelation (primarily used to this point) and the language of instruction are similar. It could be just as easily said that 1:1—15:21 is primarily concerned with YHWH teaching Israel and the nations who he is.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 184.

<sup>18</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, “Zwei Verkannte Militär-Technische Termini im Alten Testament,” *VT* 5 (1955): 235-36. Eissfeldt renders the verb with “einüben.” Cf. Georg Beer, *Exodus*, HAT (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1939), 86, who suggests the sense “teach,” “instruct” (Germ. “belehren,” “unterweisen”). Norbert Lohfink, “I Am Yahweh, Your Physician (Exodus 15:26),” in *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 44, dismisses Eissfeldt’s suggestion, arguing that it is unsupported by the context, but fails to explain his contention.

reminding her of who he is, seen perhaps most obviously in the reappearance of the acknowledgement formula in 15:26. As we have seen above, the acknowledgment formula was meant to communicate YHWH's supremacy and, for Israel, his commitment to fulfilling his promises in delivering her from Egypt into the land. The restoration of the waters is another sign pointing to YHWH's willingness and ability to provide for Israel. Appended to the acknowledgment formula in 15:26 is "your healer." YHWH's help to Israel is not confined to deliverance from Egypt, but will include providing for her in the wilderness as well.<sup>19</sup> While the addendum to the acknowledgement formula is different in 6:7 and 15:26, the intended function is the same: to engender trust in Israel for YHWH by reassuring her that he is willing and able to fulfill his promises. The trust YHWH seeks to foster in Israel forms the foundation for YHWH's requirement of obedience in 15:26. The reference to Israel's stay at the springs of Elim is simply an affirmation to Israel of the way in which YHWH can provide, and ultimately a glimpse of the possibilities of the life a faithful and obedient Israel can expect in the promised land.<sup>20</sup>

The second way YHWH seeks to fashion an obedient people is through fear. YHWH's provision for Israel is not automatic, but rather contingent upon Israel's obedience, made explicit in the conditional statement of 15:26. If Israel will obey YHWH's law, YHWH will maintain Israel's welfare. However, 15:26 is also an implied threat. The corollary to the promise that YHWH will not put the disasters of Egypt upon Israel if she obeys is that he will bring disaster if she does not. In this way, the use of נסח

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<sup>19</sup> Normally translated as "heal," רפה here does not likely refer to the eradication of disease, given that the "healing" of 15:26 is the provision of drinkable water, and that the "diseases" inflicted on the Egyptians were not generally human sicknesses, but rather (super)natural disasters. In addition to healing disease, רפה can be used for such varied processes as repairing an altar or a pot (1 Kgs 18:30, Jer 19:11), restoring waters to their normal position (2 Kgs 2:22), or turning salt water into fresh water (Ezek 47:8-9). The sense here might be well understood "I am YHWH, who maintains your well-being."

<sup>20</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 324.

in 15:25b is similar to its use later in 20:20, where the purpose of the terrible theophany on the mountain is to instill fear: “Do not fear, because God has come to test you (נסות), in order that his fear may be before you, that you may not sin.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, instilling fear becomes the corollary to instilling trust, both serving the same end of leading Israel into a life of obedience.

Understanding נסה in terms of training and/or instruction is not meant to replace the idea of testing, but rather to suggest that the understanding of testing needs to be qualified. YHWH’s testing of Israel provides the opportunity for instruction. If Israel “passes” the test, then YHWH’s faithfulness in maintaining her well being, demonstrated in the exodus from Egypt, is further confirmed in the new setting of the wilderness. Israel can expect YHWH’s power and willingness, which delivered her from Egypt, to sustain her after she has left Egypt. If Israel “fails” the test, as in 15:22-27 (demonstrated by Israel’s murmuring), the failure provides the opportunity for explicit instruction concerning both YHWH’s expectations for Israel and the consequences Israel can expect for her compliance or lack thereof. In either case, the testing provides Israel the opportunity to know YHWH her God.

#### *Exodus 16:1-36*

Like the previous section at Marah, the theological rationale for the manna section is relatively straightforward, articulated explicitly in 16:4-5:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> With particular reference to Deut 4:10, 5:24ff. and Exod 19:9, Greenberg, “נסה,” 275-76, argues that נסות in 20:20 is best rendered “to give Israel a direct, palpable experience of God,” translating the phrase “God has come to give you the experience [of him].”

<sup>22</sup> Despite their importance in the theology of the text, modern critical scholars have generally considered 16:4-5 to be among the most problematic verses in Exodus 16, finding them an intrusion of J into the larger

And YHWH said to Moses, "Behold I will rain upon them bread from heaven, and the people will go out and gather a day's portion each day, in order that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day they will prepare what they bring in and it will be twice the amount which they gather day to day."<sup>23</sup>

From the beginning of the section, particularly in the purpose clause "that I may test them," it is apparent that YHWH responds to Israel's murmuring by seeking to teach or instruct. Again, as in the previous section, the sense of "test," understood as YHWH seeking information, is, by itself, inadequate to the context. Brueggemann's suggestion that "God resolves to 'test' Israel in order to determine whether Israel is prepared to receive bread and life under wholly new terms and completely changed conditions"<sup>24</sup> therefore only partially addresses what is at stake in YHWH's testing. If, as in the last section, teaching/training is part of what it means for YHWH to test Israel, the question then becomes, what does YHWH seek to impart to Israel through giving the manna daily, with a double portion given on the sixth day? Or, to connect it to our larger question, how does YHWH's giving of the manna help prepare Israel for the giving of the law?

The manna material prepares Israel for the giving of the law in, at least, two important ways.<sup>25</sup> First, as in the last section, the manna material is meant to foster trust in Israel. YHWH's giving of the manna is intended to remind Israel of who YHWH is through what he has done for her in the past. In 16:6-7, the effect of YHWH's provision is

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context of P. For a discussion of 16:4-5, and of the critical problems associated with Exod 16 as a whole, see e.g. Childs, *Exodus*, 271-92, and, recently, David Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School: A Retrieval of Ancient Sacerdotal Lore*, vol. 89, VTSup (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 63-117.

<sup>23</sup> There has been much discussion as to whether these verses are a command, an announcement of a miracle, or both. See W. A. M. Beuken, "Exodus 16.5, 23: A Rule Regarding the Keeping of the Sabbath?," *JSOT* 32 (1985): 3-14.

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 813.

<sup>25</sup> Although there are many theological implications of Exodus 16, we will maintain our focus on how the manna material prepares for the giving of the law. For suggestions concerning other theological implications of the manna material, see Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 117-19.

to remind Israel that YHWH brought her out of Egypt, and to show her the glory of YHWH.<sup>26</sup> This explicit remembering of YHWH's delivering Israel from Egypt will become crucial later in the giving of the law, as strikingly evident in the prologue to the Decalogue, "I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (20:2). In a statement roughly parallel to 16:6-7, 16:12 again employs the acknowledgment formula. As we have seen previously, the acknowledgment formula functioned to convey the ultimate supremacy of YHWH. This same YHWH, who in the exodus narrative demonstrated his superiority over all creation, is the one who provides for Israel in the wilderness. Such a reminder would have the effect of strengthening Israel's confidence in the power and willingness of YHWH to provide. Furthermore, the acknowledgment formula would have the effect of reminding Israel of YHWH's promise to escort her into the land. As we have seen previously, 6:6-8, a foundational passage in Israel's understanding of YHWH spoken to Israel in a time of distress, is bracketed by "I am YHWH" (6:6, 8), with the acknowledgment formula in the center (6:7), both structurally and theologically. Moses' reiteration of YHWH's words "I am YHWH your God," last spoken directly to Israel in 6:7, should remind Israel that YHWH's promise of 6:6-8 included both deliverance from Egypt and guidance and protection into the land. Knowledge that YHWH promised Israel possession of the land should serve to confirm to Israel that YHWH will provide for her in their journey to the land, thereby fostering Israel's trust in YHWH.

The manner in which YHWH provides for Israel further underlines YHWH's intention to foster trust in Israel. The issue in Exodus 16 is, of course, the lack of food.

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<sup>26</sup> Whether the glory of YHWH refers to the cloud in 16:10 (e.g., Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 594) or to YHWH's provision (e.g., Sarna, *Exodus*, 87), or both, has been debated.

YHWH addresses this lack by providing Israel with food for one day only, save the special circumstance of the Sabbath. The effect of this would be to re-present the very circumstance about which Israel was complaining, the lack of food, every evening as they went to sleep with nothing to eat for the next day. The lack of a sustainable food source would be a constant reminder that YHWH was Israel's provider. Israel's gathering of bread each day would serve as a daily practical reminder that "I am YHWH." While there is an element of truth in von Rad's comment concerning the manna that "daily sustenance by God demanded a surrender without security,"<sup>27</sup> it must be stressed that the experience with the manna was meant to teach Israel that security *could* be found, in YHWH, through obedience to his word.

To appreciate the connection between trust and obedience, a brief look ahead is warranted, for what is only hinted at in the wilderness material is brought out clearly in Israel's sin with the golden calf (32—34).<sup>28</sup> The issue that led to Israel's idolatry is precisely the fear that comes about through lack of trust. Anxious concerning Moses' extended absence, Israel charges Aaron "Get up, make for us gods who will go before us, because this Moses—the man who led us up from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him" (32:1). The charge to Aaron is driven by the people's anxiety about having no one to go before them, likely a reference to the upcoming journey into the land. In other words, Israel's idolatry is driven by fear concerning their welfare. Exodus 32:1 suggests that a stable trust in YHWH would have precluded Israel's disobedience concerning the calf. It is precisely this issue, trust that leads to obedience, that becomes the theological thrust of Exodus 16. Israel's obedience (or lack thereof) is

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<sup>27</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:282.

<sup>28</sup> A more extended treatment of 32—34 will be given in chapter 6.

shown to be dependent upon her trust in YHWH's promises of protection and provision. The provision of the manna as a *daily* provision is precisely meant to train, repeatedly instilling in Israel the kind of trust in YHWH that is so foundational in preparation for the giving of the law.

The second way YHWH uses the manna to teach/train Israel prior to giving the law is through the Sabbath command. With the Sabbath command, the emphasis falls not on provision, but on imitation. That provision is not the primary emphasis of the Sabbath command is apparent in the way the Sabbath command worked. Because the people were permitted to gather twice as much manna before the Sabbath, when the Sabbath came there was enough bread for the day. In that sense, the Sabbath is no different from any other day of the week in that the Israelites, even as they were resting, had only enough food for that particular day. Further, the impulse to gather on the Sabbath, should they feel the need to store up the manna for the following day, would be no different from gathering extra manna on any other day of the week. The primary significance of the Sabbath command must lie elsewhere.

If the Sabbath command is seen from the perspective of YHWH, however, another emphasis emerges. The absence of bread on the Sabbath indicates that YHWH is resting on the Sabbath. The observance of the Sabbath is not primarily that Israel ceases to gather, but that YHWH ceases to supply.<sup>29</sup> YHWH sets an example with his actions (or lack thereof) and expects Israel to do likewise. Thus, the Sabbath is not something that YHWH simply imposes on Israel as a weekly obedience, but rather YHWH commands the Sabbath in observance of something rooted in the life and practice of God himself. This practice of Sabbath rest is grounded, of course, in creation. Concerning the reference to

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<sup>29</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 385.

God's seventh day rest in Genesis 2:1-3, von Rad comments "[t]he Sabbath as a cultic institution is quite outside the purview. The text speaks, rather, of a rest that existed before man and still exists without man's perceiving it."<sup>30</sup> Or, in Buber's words concerning Exodus 16, "Sabbath does not exist exclusively in the world of human beings; it also functions outside their world."<sup>31</sup> The command to rest on the seventh day is therefore a command to conform to a pattern that transcends Israel, the pattern of YHWH himself. In resting on the seventh day, Israel's pattern of life conforms to YHWH's pattern. By observing the Sabbath, Israel imitates YHWH.

Again, another look ahead is warranted, this time to the formal institution of the Sabbath in 20:8-11, and its further explanation in 31:12-17. Prior to Exodus 20, there is no explicit indication that the Israelites knew the rationale behind the Sabbath command. They did know that YHWH commanded that they cease gathering on the seventh day, and that YHWH's provision of a double portion of manna on the sixth day enabled them to do so. Faithfully resting on the seventh day would not only train Israel by giving them a weekly rhythm of obedience, but would also prepare the people to understand the larger rationale for obedience to the law. Having already observed the Sabbath, and partaken in the rhythm of six days of work and a day of rest, Israel is given the rationale for the Sabbath later in the Decalogue: "Because in six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day. Therefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (20:11). The rhythm of Sabbath observance, according to the Decalogue in Exodus, is done in imitation of YHWH.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 60.

<sup>31</sup> Buber, *Moses*, 80.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Exod 22:27.

The significance of the Sabbath is further apparent in 31:12-17. Here YHWH singles out the Sabbath from all the commandments as a sign between himself and Israel, which is to be observed throughout the generations. Whatever other reasons there may be that the Sabbath specifically was chosen as a sign, it is interesting that, of all the commandments in the Decalogue, only the Sabbath is mentioned as something YHWH himself observed. In other words, the sign of the covenant between YHWH and Israel (31:16-17) is rooted not just in Israel's obedience to YHWH, but *in her imitation of* YHWH. The keeping of the Sabbath has a familiar purpose, "that you may know that I am YHWH, who makes you holy" (31:13). That the sign of the covenant was a command given in imitation of YHWH may well suggest that the whole law was to be in imitation of YHWH. Or, to say it another way, through her obedience to the law, Israel conforms to the character of YHWH.<sup>33</sup>

The above argument does not suggest that, in the wilderness, Israel was aware that in observing the Sabbath she imitated YHWH. Again, the text of Exodus 16, where the Sabbath is first mentioned, gives no hint that Israel knew anything of the origin of the Sabbath in the life and practice of God himself. However, Israel being ignorant of the origin of the Sabbath does not imply that training Israel in obedience to the Sabbath was not therefore training in imitation. Having observed the Sabbath prior to the formal institution of the Sabbath would serve to train Israel in conformity to YHWH, even before she understood what she was doing. When later informed of the rationale in Exodus 20, Israel would have understood something important, not only about the Sabbath, but about the law as a whole. In this way, the Sabbath command of Exodus 16 prepared Israel for the giving of the law.

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<sup>33</sup> The relationship between the law and imitation of YHWH will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 4.

There is one further theological implication of the Sabbath command that pertains to the whole of the law. Along with the command to cease gathering on the seventh day was the corresponding provision of extra manna on the sixth day. The extra portion given on the sixth day had the function of providing Israel with the ability to carry out the Sabbath command. In other words, Israel's obedience did not come at her expense. The fact that the Sabbath served as the continuous sign of the covenant would communicate something very important about the law as a whole: Israel would not have to suffer deprivation as she carried out YHWH's commands.<sup>34</sup> The weekly rhythm of the Sabbath would be a weekly reminder of the nature of the law, and YHWH's faithfulness to provide for Israel as she obeyed it.

*Exodus 17:1-7*

The discussion of the final murmuring section may be brief, for the section reiterates many of the same themes of the first two sections, particularly those of 15:22-26: the lack of water, the murmuring, the miraculous provision of water through Moses, the naming of the place.<sup>35</sup> As seen previously, YHWH seeks to foster trust in Israel by supplying her lack in a time of need. Noteworthy in light of the first two episodes is the absence of the acknowledgement formula as the goal of what YHWH seeks to teach Israel. However, present in this particular section is the staff of Moses, which may serve a similar function. The same staff which represented the power of YHWH in the plague accounts (4:17; 7:9-12, 17-20; 8:1[5], 12-13[16-17]; 9:23; 10:13; 14:16), represents that

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<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, the OT is replete with statements that indicate that Israel would be blessed in her obedience. Cf., e.g., Deut 28:1-14.

<sup>35</sup> The similarities between 15:22-27 and 17:1-7 have suggested to some (e.g. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 117) that they are duplicate accounts of the same event. Cf. Burden, *Kerygma*, 34-35.

same power as YHWH provides for Israel in the wilderness, this time as Moses strikes the rock with the staff, the sign which initiates YHWH's action on Israel's behalf.

One significant difference between 17:1-7 and the two prior episodes warrants mention. Whereas in 15:22-26 and 16:4 YHWH is the subject of *נס*, here Israel is the one to test YHWH. The sense of *נס* is different, however, since the idea of teaching/training would not apply to YHWH in the same way it does to Israel. Rather, Israel's testing has more to do with doubt concerning YHWH's willingness and/or ability to care for Israel.<sup>36</sup> The difference in the subject of *נס* in a passage that is otherwise so similar to 15:22-27 and 16:1-36 suggests mutual testing in all three narratives. The idea that Israel was trying the patience of YHWH is not explicit in 15:22-27, but is strongly suggested in YHWH's response to Israel regarding their disobedience over the manna: "how long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?" (16:28). That YHWH was training Israel in 17:1-7, while not explicitly stated, is nonetheless clear in the manner in which YHWH provides for Israel's need, in a manner almost identical to 15:22-27.

#### *Exodus 17:8-16*

The encounter with Amalek in 17:8-16 brings Israel to yet another trial. Although the form of the danger is different (being military, rather than hunger or thirst), the threat is ultimately the same: Israel's existence is threatened, and the patriarchal promises endangered.

The passage alternates between two scenes: Joshua and the Israelite army in battle with the Amalekites, and Moses with Aaron and Hur upon the mountain. The primary

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<sup>36</sup> F.J. Helfmeyer, "נס", *TDOT* 9: 443-55.

focus of the narrative, however, is not Israel's army, but Moses, which suggests that it is not military strength, but Moses' presence upon the mountain which is decisive in the battle. Of particular importance are Moses' hands, the position of which seems to determine the course of the battle.<sup>37</sup>

The exact function of Moses' hands is not explicit in the text. Several options have been proposed.<sup>38</sup> Some have argued, based upon the lack of mention of God in 17:8-13, that Moses' raised hands suggest a magical effect,<sup>39</sup> some have suggested Moses' raised hands indicate prayer,<sup>40</sup> while others have posited that he carried some kind of ensign that encouraged the Israelites in battle when they gazed upon it,<sup>41</sup> an interpretation encouraged by the reference to a banner (נִסִּי) in 17:15. The text certainly does not rule out any of the above options. However, the text makes a special point of indicating that Moses had the "rod of God" in his hand, suggesting that the rod is significant in interpreting Moses' actions. As mentioned above in reference to 17:1-7, the staff would serve to signify the power of YHWH. Prior to Moses' use of the rod on the mountain, the rod functioned in conjunction with YHWH's intervention on Israel's behalf, particularly involving a public demonstration of YHWH's power, whether over Pharaoh and his magicians, or the ability to bring water out of the rock. Here YHWH's power is again emphasized, this time signifying YHWH's ability to bring military victory,

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<sup>37</sup> Bernard H. Robinson, "Israel and Amalek: The Context of Exodus 17:8-16," *JSOT* 32 (1985): 15, suggests a chiasmic structure to 17:8-16 which finds the position of Moses' hands at the center of the narrative, and therefore theologically central.

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of the options, see Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:383-84. Enns, *Exodus*, 344-64, has a particularly lengthy and thoughtful reflection on 17:8-16.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Noth, *Exodus*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Cole, *Exodus*, 136-37. Buber, *Moses*, 90, suggests that the change from the singular "his hand" in 17:11 to the plural "hands of Moses" in 17:12 is an editorial change due to the supposition that Moses' action referred to prayer. Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:383, has suggested that Moses alternated hands when each grew too heavy, a suggestion that does not require the supposition of an editorial change. Cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 482, and Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 618.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Buber, *Moses*, 91, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 193, Clements, *Exodus*, 103-4.

in a manner similar to YHWH's victory over Egypt at the sea. As in Exodus 14, where Moses waves the staff over the waters (both to divide them and to bring them back together, 14:16, 21, 26-28) to bring military victory, so functions the rod in the battle against Amalek. The presence of the rod in Moses' hands, therefore, points to YHWH as the ultimate power behind Israel's victory over Amalek. In a manner reminiscent of the song of Exodus 15, the war is described in 17:16 as being between YHWH (not Israel) and Amalek, a further indication that Moses' hands indicate the power of YHWH.

The comparison between the victory over Egypt and the victory over Amalek suggests another way in which the wilderness section is preparing Israel for the law. Whereas in the destruction of the Egyptian army, Israel was entirely passive, Israel is required to fight against Amalek. This signals a change in Israel's role from being entirely passive to becoming more active. Israel's more active role, however, must be understood carefully, for Israel's role does not imply that YHWH is somehow insufficient to bring about victory for Israel, nor does it imply that Israel is sufficient in herself. Concerning the first, while Fretheim rightly calls attention to Israel's active role in the battle, to suggest as he does that God somehow *needs* Israel to fulfill her part goes beyond the sense of the text, which is focused upon Moses on the hill, and is inconsistent with what Exodus has communicated concerning the power of God.<sup>42</sup> Nor, concerning the second, does the smaller stature of the Amalekites compared to the Egyptians mean that the army is small enough for Israel herself to fight, as Propp implies.<sup>43</sup> Rather, Israel's activity simply means that YHWH's work is no longer done with Israel in a passive role. This shift in Israel's role is important in the manner in which YHWH works

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<sup>42</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 193-94. More likely is the suggestion of Robinson, "Israel and Amalek," 16-17, that the text portrays Moses as inadequate, and therefore in need of the assistance of Aaron and Hur.

<sup>43</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 617.

out his missionary purpose in Exodus. While a fuller discussion must await the ensuing treatment of 19—24, a simple observation may be made here. Whereas in 1:1—15:21, YHWH sought to reveal himself to the nations directly through signs and wonders, with Israel entirely passive, in 19—24 YHWH will seek to reveal himself through the active participation of Israel, who will then reveal YHWH to the nations through obedience to the law.

### *Exodus 18:1-27*

Chapter 18 differs from 15:22—17:16 in several respects. First, and most obviously, the section centers on the character of Jethro, who is absent in 15:22—17:16. Secondly, the two episodes of chapter 18 are not centered on immediate crises. While some have suggested that Moses' difficulty in applying the law in 18:13-27 is a crisis,<sup>44</sup> it is nonetheless of a different order from those of 15:22—17:16 in that Israel's existence is not threatened. Thirdly, unlike the previous material, 18:1-27 does not record any direct action of YHWH. Finally, unlike the other wilderness sections, chapter 18 has been generally viewed as a literary unity, in Durham's words "a literary and thematic unity virtually unparalleled in the narrative chapters of the Book of Exodus."<sup>45</sup>

While the literary unity of chapter 18 has been generally recognized, so has the apparently awkward position of chapter 18 before the Sinai material. Whereas 19:1-2 speaks of Israel entering Sinai, 18:5 tells of Jethro coming to Moses who is already

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<sup>44</sup> E.g. Charles D. Isbell, *The Function of Exodus Motifs in Biblical Narratives: Theological Didactic Drama* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 53-55.

<sup>45</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 241. Although see, e.g., Noth, *Exodus*, 146ff., who is not convinced of the literary unity of 18:1-12.

encamped there.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the burden of Moses being the sole authority in legal matters, the subject of 18:13-27, seems to assume that the law had already been given. The chronological difficulty has been approached in several ways. Durham has argued that the “nuclear theme” of Exodus 18 is the reunion of Abraham’s divided family, with Moses bringing together Aaron, who represents the Seth/Sarah/Isaac/Jacob line, and Jethro, who represents the Cain/Keturah/Ishmael/Esau line.<sup>47</sup> Given the fractured nature of Israel, politically and theologically, throughout their subsequent history, Durham argues that Exodus 18 is positioned where it is before Sinai in order to present Israel as one people before the momentous occasion of the giving of the law. Cassuto argues that Exodus 18 is situated in order to contrast the sympathy of the Kenites toward Israel with the hostility of the Amalekites.<sup>48</sup> Carpenter understands the position of chapter 18 to have a unifying function within Exodus, providing a transition between 1—17 and 19—40, an argument which will be considered in more detail below.<sup>49</sup>

The chapter divides naturally into two sections, the meeting between Moses and Jethro, and Jethro’s subsequent advice to Moses concerning the administration of justice in Israel (18:13-27). The theological climax of 18:1-12 comes in the confession of Jethro, who, after hearing of YHWH’s intervention on Israel’s behalf, declares “now I know that YHWH is greater than all gods (עתה ידעתי כי גדול יהוה מכל האלהים), because in this matter they dealt proudly over them” (18:11). Jethro’s confession has been interpreted in several ways. Childs notes that the confession could mean either that Jethro was converted to being a worshipper of YHWH (cf. 2 Kgs 5:15) or that he

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<sup>46</sup> For an attempt to resolve this according to the received text, see Calum M. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 244-45.

<sup>47</sup> For the particulars of Durham’s argument, see Durham, *Exodus*, 241-43.

<sup>48</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 211-12.

<sup>49</sup> Carpenter, “Exodus 18.”

experienced a deepening of an already present worship of YHWH (cf. 1 Kgs 17:24).<sup>50</sup> Childs favors the latter, arguing that Jethro is not presented as an outsider, but as a faithful witness to YHWH. Durham likewise opts for the latter, arguing that the phrase עתה ידעתי indicates that Moses' testimony confirms Jethro's already existing intuition,<sup>51</sup> while Cole argues that the simple meaning of Jethro's words suggests a conversion.<sup>52</sup> Houtman takes a different tack, denying that Jethro's confession indicates that he became a worshipper of YHWH, but that Jethro simply recognized YHWH's incomparability.<sup>53</sup> Common in the above interpretations is the recognition that Jethro acknowledged YHWH as supreme, although there seems little reason to deny, with Houtman, that Jethro worshipped, particularly given his participation in activities associated with worship, the sacrifices and the common meal shared with the elders of Israel (18:12).<sup>54</sup> As Carpenter notes, Jethro's confession provides the proper response to Pharaoh's question "who is YHWH" of 5:2. Unlike Pharaoh, Jethro's recognition of YHWH's incomparability leads appropriately to worship.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 329.

<sup>51</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 244, cf. H. H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua: Biblical Traditions in the Light of Archaeology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 150.

<sup>52</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, 139.

<sup>53</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:97.

<sup>54</sup> Jethro's participation in Israelite worship, which may suggest that Jethro was the initiator of the sacrifice (although see Aelred Cody, "Exodus 18,12: Jethro Accepts a Covenant with the Israelites," *Biblica* 49 (1968), who suggests that Jethro accepted the sacrifices as part of a covenant ceremony between himself and Israel), is one of the pillars of the Kenite hypothesis, a history of religions project which argues that Jethro brought to Israel the knowledge of YHWH who was already worshipped in Midian. The conflict between the Kenite hypothesis and the canonical text is a good example of how the methodologies and presuppositions of a history of religions approach and a canonical approach can conflict with one another and lead to widely divergent conclusions. In support of the Kenite hypothesis, see Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua*, 149-63, and, against the hypothesis, Buber, *Moses*, 94-100.

<sup>55</sup> Edward L. Greenstein, "Jethro's Wit: An Interpretation of Wordplay in Exodus 18," in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 155-71, argues that the wordplays in Exodus 18 suggest that Jethro is a particularly wise man, which adds weight to his confession of YHWH as God.

Jethro's confession, however, is much more important to the narrative than just the testimony of one individual, for it serves as a specific fulfillment of YHWH's primary goal in 1:1—15:21, that other nations would come to know YHWH's supremacy. The use of יָדַע in Jethro's confession not only brings to partial realization the purpose statement of 9:14-16, but also connects Jethro's confession to the acknowledgment formula so prominent to this point in the narrative. That Jethro is a non-Israelite is particularly important given the international scope of YHWH's commitment to be known, for Jethro's confession suggests that the intended goal of the plagues is being realized on an international scale, thereby fulfilling YHWH's goals in the exodus. As Carpenter expresses it, "the purpose of the deliverance of Yahweh finds expression in microcosm in Jethro."<sup>56</sup>

The second section, 18:13-27, takes a different trajectory. Jethro observes Moses' judging the people, sees a problem, and instructs Moses accordingly. The issue here is entirely practical—Moses, despite his ability to make known YHWH's statutes, is unable to manage the load that such a task requires. Jethro's solution, for Moses to share the burden with God-fearing men in positions of authority, allows the resolution of disputes and the teaching of YHWH's statutes to be carried out among the people. In other words, it is a practical measure which enables Israel to be governed under YHWH's law. As such, it anticipates the coming legal material of 19—24. In addition, Moses' language of 18:16 concerning "the statutes of God and his instructions" (חֻקֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֵת תּוֹרֹתָיו) looks back to language already encountered earlier in the wilderness section (חֻקֵי in 15:25, 26 and תּוֹרָה in 16:4). Again, as with the earlier wilderness material, 18:13-27 anticipates the giving of the law.

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<sup>56</sup> Carpenter, "Exodus 18," 98.

Concerning the relationship of 18:1-12 and 18:13-27, Carpenter has made a compelling argument that Exodus 18 serves the dual function of being an epilogue of Exodus 1—17 and a prologue to 19—40:

The chapter serves artistically as both an epilogue to the preceding materials of Exodus and as a prologue to the remaining sections of the book. Its positioning helps the reader grasp the overall content and meaning of the book. It helps to emphasize and make clear two ways of knowing Yahweh, that are, indeed, complementary: (1) the knowledge of Yahweh available in and through the event of the exodus itself and its recitation (18:7-8); and (2) the knowledge of Yahweh found in the way (דרך) of Yahweh—his Torah.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, for Carpenter, Exodus 18 serves as the theological center of the book of Exodus, which is concerned with the communication of the knowledge of YHWH. This is particularly important because, as mentioned earlier, the role of Israel changes significantly between 1—15 and 19—40 from being passive to active. Although he does not pursue the missionary trajectory of Exodus, Carpenter's observations demonstrate how the theme of knowing YHWH can remain central in Exodus while, at the same time, undergoing a significant change in the way that knowledge is communicated.

#### CONCLUSION: THE THEOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF THE WILDERNESS SECTION

As stated above, the function of the wilderness material cannot be appreciated fully outside the larger context of the giving of the law, beginning in chapter 19. In this way, Noth's comment that the wilderness is not an independent theme is surely correct. However, to argue, as Noth does, that the wilderness is therefore not that important suggests that, for Noth, the theme of the wilderness is fundamentally different from the themes of deliverance and the giving of the law.

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<sup>57</sup> Carpenter, "Exodus 18," 92.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it should be clear that the wilderness material shares the same theological concerns with the exodus material. The presence of the acknowledgment formula in the wilderness material suggests an extension of the purposes of 1:1—15:21, where the formula served as the goal of YHWH's activity. The formula functions in similar ways in both sections. In the exodus narrative, the formula functions as the goal of YHWH's activity as YHWH demonstrates his supremacy, both over nature (in the plagues) and over armies of the nations (Egypt). In the wilderness material, the formula likewise speaks to YHWH's supremacy over nature (the provision of food and water) and over the armies of the nations (Amalek). Such similarity in the goal of YHWH's activities suggests an extension of the same theological concerns in both sections. Furthermore, the confession of Jethro, the culmination of 18:1-12, stands as a microcosmic fulfillment of YHWH's purpose of 1:1—15:21, that YHWH be acknowledged throughout the nations. Clearly, the theological concerns of the exodus material are very much at stake in the wilderness material.

Regarding the theological relationship between the wilderness material and Sinai, we have argued that the wilderness serves as a preparation for the giving of the law at Sinai, both in terms of the relationship between YHWH and Israel, and in terms of the practical mechanism by which law could function in the land. Concerning the former, 15:22—17:16 tells of how YHWH sought to train Israel unto obedience by seeking to establish Israel's trust in him as her provider and protector. The training is not so much that Israel gets practice in obedience, but rather that she gets further instruction concerning the character of the one she is called to obey, thereby laying the necessary groundwork for obedience. Only as Israel trusts YHWH for her welfare will she be able

to obey him by following the law. Concerning the latter, Jethro's instruction to Moses in 18:13-27 gave the practical means by which Israel could function under the law—distributing the work of teaching the law and judging cases to God-fearing men. Without instituting others to share in the load of teaching and judging, it would have been practically impossible for Israel to function as a nation under law. If either the trust necessary for obedience to the law or the practical mechanism for teaching and applying the law are absent, YHWH's intention for Israel as a nation living under the law cannot be realized.

Arguing that the wilderness material prepares Israel for the law does not, however, suggest what the theological rationale for the law is. The preparatory function of the wilderness, however, suggests that the wilderness material shares the theological concerns of Sinai. While we have seen that the theological burden of the wilderness section shares the concern of 1:1—15:21 that YHWH be known amongst the nations, the theological burden of the wilderness section cannot be fully appreciated apart from a theological investigation of Sinai. It is therefore to Sinai that we now turn.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE LAW (EXODUS 19—24)

#### THE PROBLEM

In 1938, von Rad published “The Problem of the Hexateuch,”<sup>1</sup> an enormously influential essay which argued that the Sinai material and the Exodus material were originally independent traditions joined together at a later stage in the formation of the Pentateuch. In short, von Rad noted that Deuteronomy 26:5b-9, which he deemed a very ancient creed, briefly summarized Israel’s salvation history, with the remarkable omission of Israel’s experience at Sinai. Confirming von Rad’s hypothesis were Deuteronomy 6:20 ff. and Joshua 24:2b-13, both likewise summarizing salvation history with no mention of Sinai.<sup>2</sup> Combined with Wellhausen’s argument that the Sinai material was later inserted within the Kadesh narratives,<sup>3</sup> von Rad argued that the Sinai material and Exodus material were two independent traditions joined at a later stage.<sup>4</sup>

Von Rad’s historical hypothesis had important theological implications, particularly concerning the relationship between salvation and law. Particularly striking in this regard is the following passage:

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<sup>1</sup> von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 1-78.

<sup>2</sup> Von Rad also cites Exod 15; 1 Sam 12; Ps 78, 105, 135, and 136 as other examples of same literary type. The Sinai event is finally woven into salvation history tradition in Neh 9, a passage which von Rad argues was composed after the fixed form had broken down. See von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 8-13.

<sup>3</sup> von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 13-14. See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 343ff.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the debate surrounding the relationship between the Egyptian deliverance and Sinai, see Ernest W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1973).

Even though the interpenetration of one tradition by the other still fails to achieve complete harmony, the Settlement tradition is theologically enormously enriched by its absorption of the Sinai tradition. The former bears witness to Yahweh's generosity, but over against this, at the very heart of the Sinai tradition, is the demand of Yahweh's righteousness. Thus by its absorption of the Sinai tradition the simple soteriological conception of the Settlement tradition gained new support of a powerful and salutary kind. Everything which the Yahwist tells us, as he unfolds the plan of his tradition, is now coloured by the divine self-revelation of Mt. Sinai. This is above all true with regard to the underlying purpose of that tradition, which now becomes the record of the redemptive activity of One who lays upon man the obligation to obey his will, and calls man to account for his actions. The blending of the two traditions gives definition to the two fundamental propositions of the whole message of the Bible: Law and Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Notable in von Rad's theological assessment of the joining of the two traditions is the distinction between, in von Rad's words, law and gospel. Even though von Rad finds both the Settlement and Sinai traditions enriched in the relationship, they seem to stand in uneasy tension with one another, hence von Rad's words that YHWH's generosity (of the Settlement tradition) stands *over against* YHWH's demand for righteousness (of the Sinai tradition). Although he relates the two conceptions by noting that, for the Yahwist, the one who redeems is the one who insists on obedience to his will, the fundamental tension between the two conceptions still stands. For von Rad, this tension, apparent in the final text of the Hexateuch, runs throughout the Bible in the fundamental propositions of law and gospel.

Von Rad's analysis raises a fundamental question: what is the theological relationship between law and gospel in the Pentateuch? Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the Sinai and Settlement traditions were originally distinct, does the final form of the Pentateuch support such a *theological* contrast between two? Can law and gospel be meaningfully distinguished in the Pentateuch (or, as von Rad implies, the OT),

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<sup>5</sup> von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 54.

and, if so, what is the nature of that distinction? Are law and gospel ultimately helpful categories through which to understand the relationship between God's acts of deliverance and the giving of the law at Sinai?<sup>6</sup>

The proximity between the Egyptian deliverance and Sinai make the final form of Exodus a particularly fruitful place to explore this relationship. As Childs has commented, “[f]or the theologian the book of Exodus provides a classic model by which to understand the proper relation between ‘gospel and law.’”<sup>7</sup> The fact that the division of 1—18 and 19—40 is the most common division made by Exodus scholars may suggest that, at least in part, a theological judgment is being made concerning the nature of the two sections.<sup>8</sup> While the division in and of itself is not necessarily a problem, it can reinforce the idea that the deliverance from Egypt and the giving of the law are fundamentally different expressions of YHWH's relationship to Israel. The dichotomy between law and gospel suggested by von Rad provides a good test case for the present thesis, for any proposal for the theological unity of Exodus must be able to encompass seemingly divergent theological perspectives. Although, given the present concern for the canonical form of Exodus, the topic will be focused upon Exodus, the implications of the relationship are relevant for the broader issue of law and gospel in the Pentateuch and the Old Testament.

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<sup>6</sup> See also the comments of James Barr, "An Aspect of Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Man and His Salvation*, ed. Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 45-46: "though the Pentateuch contains a number of notable acts of deliverance, and though some of these in some later stages came to be regarded as prime examples of 'salvation', the inner structure of the Pentateuch is not particularly that of a religion of salvation; it can be read otherwise. In particular, it can be read as the document of a religion of law." While Barr does not argue that the Pentateuch is exclusively either, he nonetheless seems to view the two perspectives as distinct from one another.

<sup>7</sup> Childs, *Introduction*, 177. Cf. Ronald E. Clements, "Exodus, Book of," in *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 312.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, there are other reasons why one may divide Exodus between 1—18 and 19—40, such as the itinerary notice of 19:1-2, which marks the beginning of Israel's extended stay at Sinai, or the prominence of legal material in 19—40.

Having already explored the exodus material, the following chapter will focus on the purpose and content of the law given to Israel in 19—24, arguing that YHWH's missionary commitment to be known amongst the nations is the law's theological foundation. The following argument will be divided into two sections, focusing upon two questions. First, according to Exodus, what is the purpose of the law? Secondly, what does the structure and content of the law reveal about YHWH's driving commitments?

Here, as elsewhere, a certain selectivity is necessarily employed. More than in other chapters, however, the selectivity here is particularly apparent. In exploring the purpose of the law, we will give extended attention to 19:4-6 and 24:3-8. The reason for so doing lies in the canonical function of both. 19:4-6 introduces the law, and in effect gives Israel her mission statement. 24:3-8, the covenant sacrifice, concludes the giving of the law, and conforms closely to the purpose of 19:4-6. Taken together, the two passages serve as a theological *inclusio*, suggesting that the law given between the introduction of 19:4-6 and the covenant ceremony of 24:3-8 conforms to the purpose suggested by the two passages. In exploring the content of the laws in 19—24, we will give special attention to the Decalogue, both because Exodus itself suggests an elevated importance for the Decalogue, and because the Decalogue serves a interpretive function vis-à-vis the Book of the Covenant. We will end by making some brief, general observations concerning the content of the Book of the Covenant. In so doing, the chapter will argue that gospel and law (in this case, Exodus 1:1—15:21 and 19—24)<sup>9</sup> do not sit in such uneasy tension with one another, but are fundamentally expressions of the same commitment, that YHWH make himself known throughout the earth.

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<sup>9</sup> Chapters 25—40, also containing legal material, will be dealt with in chapter 5.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Before addressing Exodus 19:4-6, a comment concerning the broader literary context of Exodus 19 is warranted. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Exodus 19 in the book of Exodus. Exodus 19 has been the subject of much attention both due to its theological importance in introducing the Sinai material, and due to the literary difficulties it presents.<sup>10</sup> Expressing the sentiment of much OT scholarship, Brettler eloquently comments, “[o]ne thing is obvious about Exod 19: in its redacted form, it is a mess, telling a very confusing, ambiguous story.”<sup>11</sup> However, as literarily problematic as Exodus 19 is, it is difficult to doubt its theological importance. In fact, a few scholars have suggested that the literary difficulties are an indicator of its theological importance. For example, Schramm writes that the literary unevenness

is significant theologically because the material to which the reader is beckoned to return again and again is precisely that which introduces the core elements of Judaism: Mount Sinai, the coming of God and the inauguration of an exclusive relationship between God and the people Israel, Moses as the sole intermediary between God and Israel, and preparations for the giving of commandments expressive of the will of God for his people. *In terms of Old Testament theology, all of this suggests that the Sinai event is not just one link in the chain, equal in significance to all others; rather, it has a qualitatively different status.* The fact that just at this crucial point in the pentateuchal narrative, namely the arrival of

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<sup>10</sup> Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, vol. 21a, AnBib (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981), 244, sums up the issue well: “[if] we must recognize the fundamental importance of the Sinai texts, we must also admit the serious difficulty they pose. Nowhere does the Old Testament offer a more complex literary-critical problem. A century of research still has not produced a consensus on the discernment of the elements which make up our text nor in their assignment to the sources. How, then, can we hope to reach any conclusions from the account in Exodus which will not be hypothetical to a degree, no stronger than the more or less dubious literary analysis on which they are based? In the face of the question, an explicit discussion of methodology may be in order.” For a general survey of the literary difficulties and some modern attempts to address them, see Childs, *Exodus*, 344ff.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Many Faces of God in Exodus 19,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice O. Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, vol. 8, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 366. See the comments of Yitzhak Avishur, “The Narrative of the Revelation at Sinai (Ex 19-24),” in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography*, ed. Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 197: “[m]atters have reached such a pass that some scholars have despaired of finding any order at all in the composition of the tale as it stands.”

Israel at Sinai, things become so excruciatingly difficult literarily is a canonical signal that a datum of pressing theological significance is at hand.<sup>12</sup>

Schramm's observation is important for the present investigation, for it counters the tendency of some modern scholarship to see literary difficulties as a sign of theological incoherence. Of course, Schramm's thesis cannot be proven, but it nonetheless exposes this tendency as a presupposition. This is not to deny that there are literary difficulties in the section, nor is it to suggest that literary difficulties do not have theological implications. The following argument, however, proceeds on the assumption that literary difficulties need not necessarily render a passage theologically incoherent. Such an assumption is worth stating here, if for no other reason than to clear the way for the possibility of finding theological coherence in a text in which some have despaired of finding it.

*Exodus 19:4-6*

Our investigation of the purpose of the law for Israel in its canonical context begins with YHWH's initial words to Israel at Sinai:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you upon the wings of eagles and I brought you to myself. And now, if you listen attentively to my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession, distinct from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exod 19:4-6a).

The importance of these verses has been long recognized. Durham sees 19:4-6 as "a poetic summary of covenant theology,"<sup>13</sup> van Zyl has called 19:4-6 an intentional

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<sup>12</sup> Brooks Schramm, "Exodus 19 and Its Christian Appropriation," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice O. Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, vol. 8, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 332-33, italics original. Similarly, Moshe Greenberg, "Exodus, Book of," in *EncJud 6* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 1056, comments that "[t]he consequent looseness and obscurity of the story can hardly have escaped [the author's] notice, and may well have been intended as a literary reflex of the multivalence of the event."

summary of the entire Pentateuch,<sup>14</sup> Blum has cited the passage as “a paränetisch-programmatisch formulierter Text,”<sup>15</sup> and Steins has asserted that the text should be given higher authority due to its programmatic importance.<sup>16</sup> Fretheim has suggested that the entire book of Exodus may be fruitfully approached through these verses,<sup>17</sup> while Brueggemann has commented that “[t]his speech is likely the most programmatic for Israelite faith that we have in the entire tradition of Moses.”<sup>18</sup> Dumbrell has gone so far as to suggest that 19:4-6 is crucial to understanding the Old Testament as a whole:

[a] correct understanding of these verses which summon Israel, as a result of Sinai, to its vocation, is vital. The history of Israel from this point on is in reality merely a commentary upon the degree of fidelity with which Israel adhered to this Sinai-given vocation.<sup>19</sup>

The present argument likewise acknowledges the crucial importance of 19:4-6, particularly the way the passage, in its introductory function, lays out the purpose and underlying rationale for the law.<sup>20</sup> 19:4-6 introduces the law at Sinai by reminding Israel of YHWH’s gracious and mighty deliverance of Israel from Egypt, then telling Israel who she is to be by giving what may be understood as Israel’s “mission statement.” This section will carefully examine 19:4-6, first the introductory statement of 19:4, then the

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<sup>13</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 261.

<sup>14</sup> D. C. van Zyl, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Kerygmatic Perspective of the Pentateuch," *OTE* 5 (1950): 264-71.

<sup>15</sup> Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, vol. 189, BZAW (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1990), 193.

<sup>16</sup> Georg Steins, "Priesterherrschaft, Volk von Priestern oder was sonst? Zur Interpretation von Ex 19,6," *BZ* (2001): 31.

<sup>17</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "Because the Whole Earth Is Mine: Narrative and Theme in Exodus," *Int* 50 (1996): 231.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 834.

<sup>19</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1994), 80.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Shalom M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law*, VTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 30: “[19:3-6] clearly and unequivocally state the purpose of the forthcoming covenant.” The implication is that studies that seek to understand the underlying rationale of the law without reference to 19:4-6 (see, e.g., Jon D. Levenson, "The Theologies of Commandment in Biblical Israel," *HTR* 73 (1980), and B. D. Napier, "Community under Law: On Hebrew Law and Its Theological Presuppositions," *Int* 7 (1953)) run the risk of missing the central concern of the law, at least as suggested in its canonical presentation in Exodus.

mission statement of 19:5-6, giving particular attention to the terms “treasured possession,” “priestly kingdom,” and “holy nation.” In so doing, we will focus on two questions: what was Israel’s mission, and how is that mission related to the law?

### **Exodus 19:4**

YHWH’s words for Israel begin in 19:4, which recall YHWH’s great deliverance of Israel from Egypt. These words are foundational for understanding YHWH’s commission to Israel, if for no other reason than the presence of “and now” (ועתה) at the beginning of 19:5 indicates that 19:4 serves as the grounds for the purpose statement of 19:5-6. Here, at the beginning of YHWH’s introduction to the law, YHWH interprets the Exodus experience for Israel. First, the initial phrase “you have seen what I did to the Egyptians” recalls the plagues, and in so doing, recalls both YHWH’s mission and YHWH’s demands.<sup>21</sup> Regarding YHWH’s mission, recalling the plagues has the effect of recalling their purpose, that Egypt, Israel, and all the earth would know that “I am YHWH.” YHWH’s supremacy is thereby brought back into view, reminding Israel of the incomparable nature of her God. In this way, 19:4 reinforces the plagues’ missionary purpose. Regarding YHWH’s demands, the reminder of YHWH’s treatment of Egypt would have the effect of instilling appropriate fear into Israel. That YHWH uses fear to bring about obedience is not unknown to Exodus. As argued in the previous chapter, Israel had already received the implied threat of disaster for disobedience in 15:26. In addition, Moses later explains to Israel that the Decalogue was given through direct speech and accompanied by the terrible theophany that “[YHWH’s] fear may be before

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<sup>21</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 27, has observed the connection between 19:4 and 6:7 (“you shall know”).

you, that you may not sin (20:20).<sup>22</sup> 19:4 has a similar function: recalling the disasters that YHWH brought upon Egypt is intended, in part, to spur Israel to obedience.

Secondly, the phrase “and I bore you on eagles’ wings” portrays Israel’s role in the exodus from Egypt and the arrival at Sinai as entirely passive, as the metaphor suggests. YHWH’s statement effectively agrees with Israel’s own understanding, as we have seen articulated in Exodus 15, that YHWH was alone responsible for her deliverance.<sup>23</sup> That Israel could claim no credit for her deliverance again reinforces YHWH’s might in the exodus from Egypt, and Israel’s entire dependence upon YHWH for her deliverance. The effect of this reminder would seem, at least in part, to put Israel in YHWH’s debt.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, YHWH brought Israel to himself. While certainly it may refer to the mountain, thereby indicating the fulfillment of YHWH’s words to Moses in 3:12,<sup>25</sup> the statement “I brought you to myself” has a broader significance. YHWH did not deliver Israel for her own sake, henceforth to live independently, but rather for a *relationship*. Israel’s life free from bondage is to be lived in relation to YHWH. This relationship will require roles and definition, and will serve a particular purpose, which will be dealt with in 19:5-6. YHWH’s interpretation of the exodus in 19:4 is the ground of this relationship, and thus lays the foundation for the charge given to Israel in 19:5-6.

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<sup>22</sup> Ernest W. Nicholson, “The Decalogue as the Direct Address of God,” *VT* 27 (1977), Childs, *Exodus*, 371-73.

<sup>23</sup> In addition, the eagle metaphor may suggest YHWH’s care for Israel in the wilderness. This may be the point, in part, of Deut 32:9-11, which speaks of YHWH’s protection and care for Israel in the wilderness. See Enns, *Exodus*, 386-87.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Paul, *Studies*, 32. Cf. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 226-27, Noth, *Exodus*, 157.

## Exodus 19:5-6

Having interpreted the exodus for Israel in 19:4, 19:5-6 goes on to speak of the purpose for which the law is given. This purpose will be explored through three terms: סגלה (treasured possession), ממלכת כהנים (priestly kingdom), and גוי קדוש (holy nation).

*Treasured Possession* (סגלה). Although only appearing 8 times in the OT, סגלה has been the least difficult of the three terms to translate.<sup>26</sup> Twice referring to a king's personal treasure (Ecc 2:8, 1 Chr 29:3), the remainder refers to Israel as the people YHWH has distinguished from the nations (Exod 19:6; Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Ps 135:4; cf. Mal 3:17<sup>27</sup>). סגלה is well translated "treasured possession," and is most often used of Israel, who occupies a special position among all peoples. This special position is highlighted by the following assertion that all the earth belongs to YHWH, an assertion which in this context is concerned with all peoples.<sup>28</sup> Israel is not YHWH's only possession, but rather a special and treasured possession among all peoples which are his. Dumbrell has argued that the claim over all peoples renders "treasured possession" an election term, since it simultaneously sets Israel apart while identifying Israel with the rest of humanity: "[a]s an election term...the note of the specialization from within what is generally available or at the divine disposal, and thus for 'private' use, cannot be missed in the word."<sup>29</sup> The implication of this, for Dumbrell, is that Israel's status as a treasured possession is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end, an end that has in view all peoples of the earth.

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<sup>26</sup> See E. Lipinski, "סגלה" *TDOT* 10: 144-48.

<sup>27</sup> Mal 3:17 likewise draws a distinction, סגלה referring to "those who feared YHWH."

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Exod 9:29, where the phrase "all the earth is mine" is intended to establish a claim over not only the land, but over the nation of Egypt, thereby provide the grounds for YHWH's claim for Pharaoh's obedience.

<sup>29</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant*, 86.

*Priestly Kingdom* (ממלכת כהנים). Of the three terms under discussion, ממלכת כהנים, a *hapax legomenon*, has been the most difficult to interpret, and has generated a great deal of discussion.<sup>30</sup> The most obvious difficulty lies in the ambiguous grammatical structure of the phrase. Steins has argued that the grammar offers five possibilities: a kingdom under the authority of priests, a royal priesthood, a (divine) kingdom over a people of priests, a priestly kingdom, or a kingdom consisting of priests.<sup>31</sup>

Given the grammatical ambiguity, scholars have appealed to several contexts to adjudicate between the options. For instance, Moran sought to understand the phrase by seeking where the terms priest and king/kingdom occur in close proximity to one another, arguing for a royalty of priests.<sup>32</sup> Schenker investigated other places where the word ממלכת appears in a construct relationship, concluding that 19:6 refers to a kingdom governed by priests.<sup>33</sup> Given its singular occurrence in 19:6, the simplest and most straightforward solution is to interpret ממלכת כהנים in its immediate literary context, functioning in parallel with גוי קדוש. The vocabulary of the two constructions has strong associations. ממלכת and גוי are often used elsewhere synonymously,<sup>34</sup> and priest and holy

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g. Wells, *God's Holy People*, 50-52, Steins, "Priesterherrschaft," Adrian Schenker, "Drei Mosaiksteinchen: 'Königreich von Priestern', 'Und Ihre Kinder Gehen Weg', 'Wir Tun und Wir Hören' (Exodus 19,6; 21,22; 24,7)," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1996), 367-80, Rudolf Mosis, "Ex 19:5b, 6a: Syntaktischer Aufbau und Lexikalische Semantik," *BZ* (1978): 1-25. For a slightly older but comprehensive survey of approaches to the problem, see William J. Moran, "A Kingdom of Priests," in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. John J. McKenzie (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), 7-20.

<sup>31</sup> Steins, "Priesterherrschaft," 23-24.

<sup>32</sup> Moran, "Kingdom." Cf. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Schenker, "Drei Mosaiksteinchen," 370-72.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. 1 Ki. 18:10; 1 Ch. 16:20; 2 Ch. 20:6, 32:15; Ps. 46:7, 79:6, 105:13; Is. 13:4, 60:12; Jer. 1:10, 18:7; Ezek. 29:15, Nah. 3:5. According to Aelred Cody, "When Is the Chosen People Called a Goy?," *VT* 14 (1964): 3-4, "[גוי and ממלכה] belong together naturally as two complements constituting a unity which possesses a land and which, established on that land, enters as a sovereign nation into relations with the world at large."

have obvious parallels with one another.<sup>35</sup> One does not have to claim that the two constructions are strictly synonymous in order to assume that *גוי קדוש* is meant to shed light on *ממלכת כהנים*. If *גוי קדוש* should inform our interpretation of *ממלכת כהנים*, the most fitting translation would be “priestly kingdom,” understood as a kingdom with a priestly function.

The question then becomes, what does priestly kingdom say about Israel’s role among the nations? The sense of priestly kingdom is defined well by Noth: “Israel is to have the role of the priestly member in the number of earthly states. Israel is to have the special privilege of priests, to be allowed to ‘draw near’ God, and is to do ‘service’ for all the world.”<sup>36</sup> Put simply, what a priest was to be for Israel, Israel was to be for the nations. Similarly, Sarna writes, “[t]his concept of priesthood provides the model for Israel’s self-image and for her role among the nations of the world.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, what was this model and role to entail?

From a canonical perspective, the most natural way to discover what it meant for Israel to be a priestly kingdom is by exploring the analogy Exodus draws. By investigating what it meant to be a priest in Israel, we may draw some inferences as to what it meant for Israel to be a priestly kingdom among the nations. The task, however, is not easy. Long recognized is the fact that the OT nowhere gives a systematic account of either the development of the priesthood or of the role and function of priests.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The relationship between the terms priest and holy can be seen in the preponderance of both terms in the tabernacle material in Exodus, and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

<sup>36</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 157.

<sup>37</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 104. Cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 367.

<sup>38</sup> For the critical problems surrounding the priesthood in the OT, see Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 121-51. Theological surveys of the OT priesthood include Wells, *God's Holy People*, 98-129, and Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 145-54 (although Childs is principally concerned to respond to critical reconstructions of the priesthood, and only secondarily to offer theological overview). Peter J. Leithart, "Attendants of Yahweh's House: Priesthood in the Old Testament," *JSOT* 85 (1999): 3-24, has recently argued that the

Contributing to the problem is the manner in which the OT seems to assume a prior familiarity with the priesthood on the part of the reader. Non-Israelite priests are freely mentioned with no explanatory comment.<sup>39</sup> While the patriarchs engaged in practices associated with priests, they are never referred to as such, nor do they function in an organized and centralized manner as the priesthood established in Exodus 28—29 and Leviticus 8—9. And while there seems to have been some form of priesthood functioning by Sinai (Exod 19:20-24), Exodus gives no indication as to its role and function. In fact, Exodus 19:6 is the first reference to priests directly connected with Israel. Furthermore, when Exodus does later speak to the role and function of the priest in chapters 28—29 (cf. Lev 8—9), much of the material consists in descriptions of priestly attire or duties, with little interest in explanation or theological comment.

Our approach must therefore be modest. Given that our purpose is to establish that YHWH's intended function for Israel was to make himself known amongst the nations, a few basic observations may suffice. In seeking the nature of the priesthood as portrayed in the Exodus, we are not concerned with the historical development of the priesthood, but will rather make a few broad observations concerning priestly function in the canonical presentation of Exodus.<sup>40</sup>

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varied functions of the priests in both the tabernacle and among the people can be understood as various ways in which the priest serves as an attendant in YHWH's house. For an attempt to reconstruct the history of the Israelite priesthood, see Aelred Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, vol. 35, AnBib (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), and for its difficulties, R. K. Duke, "Priests, Priesthood," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 646-55.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Gen 14:18; 41:45; 47:22; Exod 2:16.

<sup>40</sup> In keeping with the present effort to stay within the boundaries of Exodus, we will glean our observations concerning the priesthood from Exodus, realizing that the discussion would be enriched by a broader exploration of the priesthood. For example, Leviticus (10:10-11) and Deuteronomy (31:9-13; 33:10, cf. Micah 3:11; 2 Chr 15:3) speak of the priest as teacher, a role relevant to the present discussion, particularly given that Israel's obedience to the law, the criteria of their priesthood, would serve to teach the nations of YHWH's wisdom (Deut 4:6). Exodus, however, does not explicitly speak of the priesthood in such terms.

First, the priest represented YHWH. Exodus illustrates this connection between the priest and YHWH through the garments of the priest. Aaron's garments were made of the same materials, woven in the same manner, as in the Holy of Holies, the specific place in the Tabernacle where YHWH dwelt (25:22; 26:34). The unmistakable association between Aaron's garments and the Holy of Holies suggests that Aaron, so dressed, symbolized YHWH's presence. The association between the priest and YHWH himself is supported by the statement that the garments for the priests were to be made "for glory and for beauty" (לְכָבוֹד וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת, 28:2, 40). With the exception of the verses under discussion, the word 'glory', כְּבוֹד, appears in Exodus exclusively in relation to YHWH (16:7, 10; 24:16ff.; 28:2, 40; 29:43; 33:18, 22; 40:34ff.).<sup>41</sup> In wearing the garments, the priests, particularly Aaron, effectively represented YHWH as they displayed his glory.

Secondly, the priest represented Israel. Both the garments and the function of Aaron testify to this association. The ephod, worn only by Aaron, contained two stones upon which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and was to be worn before YHWH "for remembrance" (28:12). Similarly, the breastpiece, again worn by Aaron, contained twelve stones, each engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel (28:15-30). The representative function of both these garments is further indicated by the manner in which Aaron is called "to bear" (נָשָׂא) the names of the tribes of Israel (28:12, 29).<sup>42</sup> As Brueggemann comments concerning the ephod, "[i]n its intention, the ephod serves to bring Israel, with all its generations gathered in a moment, into the holy

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<sup>41</sup> In Exodus, תִּפְאֶרֶת appears only in 28:2, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, 267-68.

presence of God.”<sup>43</sup> The function of the priests as bearing the sin of Israel (28:30) and the judgment of Israel (28:38) reinforces the role of the priest as a representative of Israel before YHWH.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the presence and service of the priest creates the possibility of a relationship between YHWH and Israel, whereby YHWH dwells in Israel’s midst:

This shall be a perpetual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting, before YHWH, where I will meet with you to speak to you. And I will meet there with the sons of Israel and it will be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tent of meeting and the altar and Aaron and his sons I will sanctify as priests belonging to me. And I will dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel and I will be their God. And they will know that I am YHWH their God who brought them from the land of Egypt so that I might dwell in their midst. I am YHWH their God (29:42-46).

An implication of the above verse is that without a functioning priesthood, YHWH could not dwell in Israel’s midst, for it is the mediating presence of the priests, who represent YHWH to Israel and Israel to YHWH, that allows YHWH to dwell among Israel. The priests were not set apart and given special access to YHWH for their own sake, but for the purpose of serving both YHWH and the people. Not only were the priests responsible for maintaining the tabernacle so that YHWH would dwell among the people, there are indicators that the priest secured YHWH’s favor toward the people. Having the role of

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<sup>43</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 906.

<sup>44</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 184, points out that the phrase נשא עון may mean either “to remove sin” or “to bear sin,” and therefore finds the phrase somewhat ambiguous. Without denying a certain ambiguity elsewhere in the OT, the immediate literary context of Exodus 28 suggests that the phrase is best understood as “to bear sin.” First, Aaron bears (נשא) the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment upon his heart in 28:29, which serves as the mechanism whereby Aaron bears (נשא) the judgment of the people of Israel in 28:30. The sentence makes best sense when נשא is consistently understood as “to bear.” In 28:43, the linen breeches are required “so that [the priests] will not bear guilt [ולא ישאו עון] and die.” To render נשא in either 28:29 or 28:43 as “remove” renders each sentence unintelligible. Thus, the overall use of נשא in Exodus 28 recommends the translation “to bear.” Cf. Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 8ff..

bearing the people's sin, Aaron is commanded to wear the turban plate in order that YHWH might favorably accept them (28:38).<sup>45</sup>

We are now in a position better to understand what it meant for Israel to serve as a priestly kingdom. First, as the priests represented YHWH to Israel, so Israel was to represent YHWH to the nations. As suggested by the priestly garments, Israel was to reflect the likeness of YHWH himself. Israel's presence was to be a reflection of YHWH's own presence. In representing YHWH to the nations, Israel makes YHWH known to the world. Secondly, as the priests represented Israel to YHWH, so was Israel to represent the nations before YHWH. While it is nowhere developed elsewhere in Exodus, the analogy suggests that Israel was meant to serve the role of bringing the nations before YHWH "for remembrance," and may further suggest that in some way Israel was to bear the sin of the nations (28:38). Finally, by representing YHWH to the nations and the nations to YHWH, Israel's presence creates the possibility of a relationship between YHWH and the nations.

*Holy Nation* (גוי קדוש). As with ממלכת כהנים, the term גוי קדוש is a *hapax legomenon*. The peculiarity of this term lies chiefly in the curious use of גוי for Israel, rather than the more common עם. In his study of עם and גוי, Speiser has argued that the former is generally a more personal term describing a group of people, whereas the latter refers to an established political entity.<sup>46</sup> Speiser's distinction is important in discerning YHWH's intentions for Israel expressed in the term גוי קדוש. The use of the word עם would only serve to reiterate what was already explicit in the use of "treasured possession" in 19:5, that Israel was YHWH's people. The function of גוי, however, explicitly relates Israel to the other nations of the earth by placing her in a similar

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<sup>45</sup> Further discussion of 29:42-46 appears in Chapter 5.

<sup>46</sup> E. A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' of Israel," *JBL* 79 (1960): 167-73. Cf. Cody, "Chosen People," and Wells, *God's Holy People*, 53.

category.<sup>47</sup> The use of גוי reminds Israel that, although set apart, she is still one among many.

Dumbrell offers another suggestion for the use of גוי.<sup>48</sup> Like Speiser, Dumbrell points out that עם functions as a kinship term, while גוי suggests a political entity. However, Dumbrell pushes further, suggesting that the use of גוי in 19:6 is an intentional allusion to Genesis 12:2, where גוי is used in YHWH's promise to Abram "I will make you a great nation." The effect of this connection is to draw 19:6 into the orbit of YHWH's missionary purpose from another angle. It is clear from Genesis 12:1-3 that the great nation YHWH promises to make through Abram is intended to point beyond itself, functioning as the means through which blessing will come to all the families of the earth. For Dumbrell, גוי applied to Israel in Gen 12:2 points to the purpose of YHWH to restore, through Abram, the divine purpose of "kingdom of God rule" in Genesis 1—2. Such a notion suggests a political reality, for which עם, as a more personal term, would have been insufficient. Dumbrell writes, "Israel as a nation, as a symbol of divine rule manifested within a political framework, was intended itself to be an image of the shape of *final* world government, a symbol pointing beyond itself to the reality yet to be."<sup>49</sup> In other words, Israel was to be a picture of YHWH's ultimate intention of governing the world. If Exodus 19:6 refers back to Genesis 12:2, as Dumbrell suggests, then the

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Cody, "Chosen People," 5: "while 'am throughout the Old Testament refers to a people or nation in its aspect of centripetal unity and cohesiveness, *gôy* is linked inseparably with territory and government and what we could today call foreign relations."

<sup>48</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant*, 86-87, cf. 64-68.

<sup>49</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant*, 67, italics original.

function of Israel as a גוי קדוש is simply an extension of YHWH's purposes for the families of the earth articulated to Abram.<sup>50</sup>

Although גוי highlights the similarity between Israel and the nations, Israel was to be different, a holy nation. In fact, the use of גוי draws out the force of קדוש, making distinction between Israel and the nations more vivid.<sup>51</sup> גוי demonstrates that the difference between Israel and the nations is not a political difference.<sup>52</sup> Israel is a nation amongst the other nations of the earth, just as the other nations of the earth are peoples (העמים) like Israel (19:5). Therefore, the difference between Israel and the nations must lie elsewhere. Wherein does this difference lie? First, קדוש confirms Israel's priestly function amongst the nations. While the root קדש is used frequently in Exodus, it is particularly concentrated in the tabernacle material, which deals in large part with the cultic service of the priests, and therefore the word קדש applied to Israel suggests a priestly function. Secondly, קדוש suggests that Israel herself reflected the character of YHWH. While not referring specifically to 19:6, von Rad's words concerning the meaning of holy are instructive here:

the concept of the holy cannot in any way be deduced from other human standards of value. It is not their elevation to the highest degree, nor is it associated with them by way of addition. The holy could much more aptly be designated the great stranger in the human world, that is, a datum of experience which can never really be co-ordinated into the world in which one is at home, and over against which he initially feels fear rather than trust—it is, in fact, the “wholly other.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Paul, *Studies*, 31, who similarly connects to 19:6 to Gen 12: “[f]or [Exod 19—24] is an integral part of the transformation of the divine promise to Abraham, ‘I will make of you a great nation’ (Gen. 12:2), into reality during the time of Moses.”

<sup>51</sup> Wells, *God's Holy People*, 54.

<sup>52</sup> This is not to suggest that there were no political ramifications to Israel's election, only that the force of גוי points to political similarity rather than difference.

<sup>53</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:205. Cf. the classic treatment of Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 25-30.

Von Rad's words help in understanding how Israel was to be distinct, for it suggests that Israel's distinctiveness was not simply being "better" than other nations, but categorically different. The difference lay not in Israel's nationhood, but in the fact that Israel was YHWH's, and she alone reflected the character of YHWH. That holiness refers to YHWH's character can be seen in the use of  $\text{שקד}$  throughout Exodus. As Wells notes, with few exceptions, the word  $\text{שקד}$  in Exodus is connected to the presence of God, with 78 of the 93 occurrences of the root  $\text{שקד}$  in Exodus being associated with YHWH's sanctuary.<sup>54</sup> The application of the word to Israel, then, suggests that Israel somehow reflects the presence of YHWH.<sup>55</sup> Summarizing the implications, Wells writes "[i]f the words here were not placed on the lips of YHWH himself, they might sound blasphemous. For this is a statement suggesting that people can, in some way, become like God."<sup>56</sup> Or, as expressed by Cole, "holiness is, in the deepest sense, a definition of God's nature as he expects to find it reflected in his children."<sup>57</sup> Because Israel was a nation, her holiness would be all the more apparent to other nations which were like her in other respects. What, then, did it mean that Israel was a holy nation? Simply put, Israel was set apart as a nation for the purpose of rendering priestly service in order to reflect the character of God to the nations.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Wells, *God's Holy People*, 29-31. Wells notes that 12:16; 13:2; 16:23; 20:8, 11; 31:14, 15; 35:2 concern Israel's religious institutions.

<sup>55</sup> The expectation that Israel is to reflect the character of YHWH, implicit in the use of  $\text{שקד}$  in Exodus, becomes explicit in Leviticus: "be holy, for I am holy" (והייתם קדשים כי קדש אני) (Lev. 11:44, 45; cf. 19:2, 20:26, 21:8). How Israel reflected the character of YHWH is discussed below.

<sup>56</sup> Wells, *God's Holy People*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Deut 4:5-8.

## Israel's Status and Vocation

How, then, are we to understand these terms and their relationship to one another? Clearly the three terms are related, with each shedding light on what it means for Israel to be the people of God, yet it appears that סגלה is used in a different manner than either ממלכת כהנים or גוי קדוש. Patrick's distinction is helpful: "treasured possession" speaks to Israel's *status*, while "priestly kingdom" and "holy nation" speaks to Israel's *vocation*.<sup>59</sup> The structure of 19:5-6 suggests this. Significantly given the concise, poetic language of these verses,<sup>60</sup> while all three terms are governed by the verb הִיָּה, "to be," סגלה is governed by one incidence, ממלכת כהנים and גוי קדוש by another. Rather than being a parenthetical disturbance, as Childs argues,<sup>61</sup> the presence of "for all the earth is mine" between the סגלה and the other two further suggests a separation. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the terms priest/holy and kingdom/nation have strong affinities with one another.

Patrick's distinction between status and vocation, however helpful, nonetheless must be held somewhat loosely and not strictly compartmentalized, for Israel's special status cannot ultimately be separated from her vocation. The phrase "all the earth is mine" is particularly important in this vein, because it has the dual effect of separating Israel from the rest of the earth, thus setting her apart, and also including her among all the earth which is his. Noting the difficulty many scholars have had with the phrase "for

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<sup>59</sup> Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 231.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion on the poetical nature of the passage, see Dale Patrick, "The Covenant Code Source," *VT* 27 (1977): 145-57, James Muilenburg, "The Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations," *VT* 9 (1959): 351-57, and Wells, *God's Holy People*, 39-45.

<sup>61</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 367. Cf. Muilenburg, "Form," 353.

all the earth is mine,” Wells offers the following suggestion regarding the structure of 19:5-6:<sup>62</sup>

- A You will become my own possession
- B among all peoples;
- B' Indeed, all the earth is mine
- A' But you, you shall become to me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

The effect of Wells’ structural suggestion is to highlight the relationship between “treasured possession” and “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation,” suggesting that the former is explained by the latter. In other words, the relationship between the terms provide further confirmation that Israel was called as YHWH’s own people for a particular purpose, a purpose that extended beyond herself. From her analysis, Wells draws the following implication:

Israel must relate to others. YHWH’s special relationship with Israel does not preclude his relating with other peoples. Similarly, it does not preclude Israel’s relations with other nations. Being ‘holy’ does not infer a separation in terms of isolation; rather it allows for a broadness and a generosity of outlook. Indeed, we may suggest it even *demand*s a relationship with others, for if Israel is invested with God’s presence, then it may represent it and mediate it to others.<sup>63</sup>

While she does not use the word, Wells sees Israel’s purpose as missionary in that Israel is to “represent [God’s presence] and mediate it to others.” In a similar vein, Fretheim writes that “as a kingdom of priests, they have the role of mediating [God’s] glory to the entire cosmos.”<sup>64</sup> Finally, Enns writes, “[a]s holy and priestly, Israel is the means by which God will, as his plan unfolds more and more, *bring the nations to have knowledge of him.*”<sup>65</sup> What, then, does it mean for Israel to be a treasured possession, priestly

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<sup>62</sup> Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 56-7, italics original.

<sup>64</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 272.

<sup>65</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 389, italics original.

kingdom and a holy nation? Put simply, Israel was set apart that YHWH might be known throughout the earth.

### **Israel's Purpose and the Law**

Having argued that YHWH's purpose for Israel was to make himself known to the nations, we now turn to the issue of how Israel was to fulfill that purpose. Here we come to the connection between Israel's purpose and the law: "if [אם] you will indeed obey My voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples...." Interestingly, other than the inferences drawn by the analogy of priesthood explored above, neither 19:4-6 nor the rest of Exodus gives an explicit picture of how Israel was to function as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.<sup>66</sup> There is no call to speak of the name of YHWH to the nations, or explicitly to serve the nations in any particular manner.<sup>67</sup> The only criteria which Israel must fulfill in order to discharge her vocation was obeying YHWH's laws and keeping his covenant.<sup>68</sup>

Understanding the relationship between the law and Israel's purpose hinges upon whether or not אם is meant to be conditional. Will Israel cease to be YHWH's treasured possession, priestly kingdom, and holy nation if she is disobedient? Muilenburg reads the passage this way, drawing parallels with conditional statements elsewhere in the Old Testament.<sup>69</sup> Patrick, however, disagrees, claiming that the sentence does not imply that Israel would cease to be YHWH's people. For Patrick, the protasis functions as a

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<sup>66</sup> This lack of explicit detail has led some (e.g. Yehezkiel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel*, vol. 4 (Dallas: Institute for Jewish Studies, 1977), 594-96) to see no mandate for mission to the nations in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>67</sup> Although the law assumes foreigners sojourning within Israel (e.g., Exod 22:21, Deut 29:11).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Deut 4:6-8.

<sup>69</sup> For instance, Gen 26:26-30; Exod 15:22-26; 23:22; Lev 26:2-45; Num 32:20-27; Deut 8:11-20, 11:13-15, 22-25, 26-28; 28:1-6, 15-19, 58-60, 30:15-20). Muilenburg's complete list can be found in Muilenburg, "Form," 355.

definition of what it means to be YHWH's treasured possession, creating an offer to Israel which it may accept or reject. Patrick offers this paraphrase: "[b]eing Yahweh's own possession, his holy nation and kingdom of priests, entails submitting to his will."<sup>70</sup> In a similar vein, Fretheim draws attention to YHWH's former promises to Israel,<sup>71</sup> observing that Israel was already God's people before Sinai, which makes it unlikely that Israel's status as YHWH's possession is contingent upon her obedience.<sup>72</sup> Fretheim sees obedience as the means by which Israel can become the people YHWH has called her to be.<sup>73</sup> That Israel's status as YHWH's own people is not ultimately contingent upon obedience is brought out in Exodus 32—34, where this very issue is at stake in YHWH's response to Israel's idolatry.<sup>74</sup>

For our purposes it is sufficient to recognize that Israel's purpose, or vocation, is bound to her obedience. Israel cannot fulfill her purpose without obedience. Thus, the purpose of the law in 19:4-6 becomes clear—it is the means by which Israel is set apart to serve YHWH as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.<sup>75</sup> Von Rad boldly connects Israel's election and law: "[n]ow there can be no doubt that it is the proclamation of the Decalogue over her which puts Israel's election into effect."<sup>76</sup> How, then, will Israel fulfill her purpose among the nations? Simply by obedience to YHWH's law. If Israel obeys YHWH's commands, she will fulfill her purpose as a priestly kingdom and a holy

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<sup>70</sup> Patrick, "Covenant Code," 149.

<sup>71</sup> Given to the patriarchs—Exod 2:24; 3:15-17; 6:4, 8. References to Israel as YHWH's people (עַמִּי) are abundant prior to 19:4-6. Cf. Exod 3:7, 10; 5:1; 7:4, 16, 26; 8:16-19; 9:1, 13; 10:3-4, 12:31, as well as references to YHWH as "God of the Hebrews," 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3.

<sup>72</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 208-9.

<sup>73</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 17.

<sup>74</sup> This interpretation of 32—34 will be taken up in Chapter 6.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. the connection between holiness and obedience in Leviticus: "Make yourselves holy and be holy, because I am YHWH your God. Keep my decrees and follow them: I am YHWH who makes you holy" (Lev 20:7-8).

<sup>76</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:192.

nation. If she disobeys, she will not. Obedience to the law is the necessary and sufficient means by which Israel is to fulfill the purposes to which YHWH called her. By her obedience Israel is to distinguish herself among the nations, thereby publicly displaying YHWH's character throughout the earth.<sup>77</sup>

#### EXODUS 24:3-8

The notion drawn from 19:6, that priestly kingdom and holy nation points to the priestly service of Israel on behalf of the nations, is confirmed in 24:3-8, a passage that many scholars find closely related to 19:3b-8.<sup>78</sup> Of particular interest for the present argument is the purpose of sprinkling of the blood upon the people in 24:8. Not surprisingly, given the lack of explicit comment in the text, several options have been suggested. Childs finds 24:3-8 to be a ceremony sealing the covenant between God and Israel, and suggests, based on parallels with Jeremiah 34:18 and Genesis 15, the further possibility that the rite functioned as a threat for disobedience.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Cassuto finds the sprinkling of blood upon both the altar and the people to be a sign of two parties joining in covenant.<sup>80</sup> Nicholson submits that the rite is primarily concerned with sanctification.<sup>81</sup> From a sociological perspective, Hendel argues that the rite functions as

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. e.g., Jer 4:1-2.

<sup>78</sup> E.g. Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 164-78, Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 28-30. Childs, *Exodus*, 502-3, comments that "ch. 24 brings to completion the sealing of the covenant which had been first announced in 19:3. The repetition of the people of the same response (19:8 and 24:3, 7) marks the beginning and end of one great covenant event."

<sup>79</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 505-6.

<sup>80</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 312. Cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 198. Walter Beyerlin, *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions*, trans. S. Rudman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 38, arguing from an historical connection with ancient Arab rites, similarly concludes that that 24:3-8 is a rite in which the two parties, YHWH and Israel, bind themselves together by partaking of blood sacrifice at the same time in equal amounts.

<sup>81</sup> Nicholson, *God and His People*, 164-78.

a sign of the bond between YHWH and Israel, similar to the rites of circumcision, sacred stones, or the Sabbath.<sup>82</sup>

While there may be several elements at work in 24:8, there are good grounds for finding the primary concern of the sprinkling to be sanctification.<sup>83</sup> First, the application of the blood to the people suggests sanctification. Blood applied to people is highly unusual in the OT. Aside from Exodus 24, the only place where blood is applied to a congregation, there are only two cases where blood is applied directly to a person. The first instance occurs in the priestly ordination of Aaron and his sons, where blood is directly applied to the tips of their ears, thumbs, and great toes, and sprinkled upon their persons and garments (Exod 29:20-21a; cf. Lev 8:23-24, 30a). Here the purpose of applying the blood is to sanctify the priests and their garments (29:21b; cf. Lev 8:30b).<sup>84</sup> The other place where blood is applied to a person occurs in Leviticus 14, which gives instruction concerning the cleansing of the leper. The ritual cleansing of the leper, after the leprous disease has been healed, requires two applications of blood: a sprinkling with blood on the first day when he initially approaches the priest (14:7a) and on the eighth day when blood is applied to his ear, thumb, and great toe (14:14). As a result, the leper is pronounced clean (14:7b, 9b, 20b). In both cases, the ordination of priests and the cleansing of the leper, the person to whom the blood is applied moves between realms of

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<sup>82</sup> Ronald S. Hendel, "Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24, 3-8," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 388.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Blum, *Studien*, 51, Steins, "Priesterherrschaft," 28-32, Ernest W. Nicholson, "The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3-8," *VT* 32 (1982): 80-83.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Eberhard Ruprecht, "Exodus 24:9-11 als Beispiel Lebendiger Erzähltradition aus der Zeit des Babylonischen Exils," in *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Claus Westermann zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. Rainer Albertz, et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 165.

sanctity. The priest moves from a common status to his holy status as a priest, while the leper moves from the realm of the unclean to the realm of the clean.<sup>85</sup>

Recognizing that the application of blood to people had the purpose of sanctification elsewhere, it is appropriate to suggest that the application of blood to the Israelites in Exodus 24 had a similar function of moving Israel between realms of sanctity. Understanding the rite as such does not necessarily rule out other suggestions, such as the solemnization of the covenant. But it does put forth sanctification as a primary purpose of the rite, in a way that is consistent with YHWH's words to Israel in 19:4-6. While all the earth is YHWH's, Israel is to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. Israel moves between realms of sanctity, moving from the common realm of all peoples who are YHWH's into the holy realm of those special to YHWH. Exodus 24 is Israel's consecration to her priestly calling.

Secondly, the application of the blood to the people *after* Israel's pledge of obedience supports the notion that the purpose of the blood rite is sanctification. As we have seen, the issue at stake in 19:5-6 is sanctification, Israel being set apart as a holy nation with a priestly calling. This holy calling, according to 19:5-6, is carried out through obedience. In other words, 19:5-6 suggests that Israel's holiness, or her sanctification, consists in her obedience. The issue of obedience is likewise central to the blood rite in Exodus 24. Not only does the blood rite follow Israel's pledge to obey YHWH in Exodus 24:3, 7, but Moses declares in the midst of the rite "behold, the blood of the covenant which YHWH has cut with you, according to all of these words" (על כל) (הדברים האלה, 24:8). Whether "according to all these words" refers to Moses' reading of

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<sup>85</sup> For a general discussion concerning movement between realms of sanctity, see Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 18-25.

the Book of the Covenant or to Israel's pledge of obedience (or both) is not clear. In either case, however, "all these words" implies the expectation of Israel's obedience. The fact that the blood of the covenant is cut "in accordance with all these words" shows that the blood rite cannot be properly understood outside the expectation of obedience. It is therefore inappropriate to suggest, as does Schenker,<sup>86</sup> that the foundation of the covenant differs between obedience in Exodus 19 and sacrifice in Exodus 24. If Israel's sanctification depends upon her obedience in Exodus 19:5-6, and if the ritual of Exodus 24:3-8 is likewise tied to obedience, then it is appropriate for Exodus 24:3-8 to be understood as a rite of sanctification. Nicholson's words concerning the relationship between 19:6 and 24:3-8 are worth quoting at length:

If Exodus 19:3b-8 as a whole is an anticipatory summary and interpretation of the nature and basis of the covenant, it may be suggested that the statement in 19:6a was intended by its author as an interpretation of Exodus 24:3-8; that is, the author of 19:3b-8 understood Israel's status among the nations in a similar way to that of the author of Isaiah 61:6 ('you shall be named priests of the Lord and ministers of our God') and saw Exodus 24:3-8 as a record of Israel's consecration and commissioning as such. Thus, what is set out in programmatic manner in Exodus 19:3b-8 is finally completed in 24:3-8 where Israel gives its pledge of obedience to the words of the covenant and is then, as the author of Exodus 19:3b-8 took it, constituted as Yahweh's 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. By such means Exodus 24:3-8 has been interpreted as the solemn commissioning of Israel as a holy nation, obedient to God's will and functioning among the nations in the manner that a priesthood functions in a society—a theologically striking understanding and extension of the ritual described in 24:3-8.<sup>87</sup>

Regardless of how one assesses the direction of influence between 19:3b-8 and 24:3-8, Nicholson's appreciation of the relationship between the two passages is important. In different ways, each addresses Israel's sanctification.

Thirdly, understanding Exodus 24:3-8 as a sanctification rite helps explain the connection between 24:3-8 and 24:9-11. Scholars have often encountered difficulty

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<sup>86</sup> Schenker, "Drei Mosaiksteinchen," 367.

<sup>87</sup> Nicholson, *God and His People*, 173.

between the two passages by seeing 24:3-8 and 24:9-11 as differing accounts of the same event: the former reporting the ratification of the covenant through sacrifice, the latter through a covenant meal.<sup>88</sup> However, if the emphasis of 24:3-8 is to sanctify Israel, then the relationship between 24:3-8 and 29:1-2, 9-11 can be more easily appreciated. Before partaking of a covenant meal, the people of Israel had to agree to the terms of the covenant, and be moved into the realm of sanctity required of the covenant, a covenant that set Israel apart as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. Such an elevation of sanctity would need to take place before a covenant meal could be shared in the presence of YHWH. That moving between realms of sanctity is at issue in 24:3-8 is further supported by the claim that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the elders saw God (24:10, 11), particularly when the peaceful scene in Exodus 24 is contrasted with the ominous scene at the mountain in Exodus 19. As will become more apparent in the tabernacle material, access to God was restricted to those priests who had been made ritually holy for the purpose of serving God in the tabernacle. While the observation does not clear up all the difficulties inherent in the notion that the leaders of Israel saw God,<sup>89</sup> it does suggest a plausible relationship between the two sections that allows the canonical form to be understood as it stands.

Fourthly, Israel's designation as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation calls for a rite of sanctification. If Israel's priestly vocation among the nations is to be understood after the analogy of the vocation of the priest to the people, then it is reasonable to

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<sup>88</sup> The notion of two covenant ceremonies explains, in part, the commonly accepted source divisions between 24:3-8 and 24:1-2, 9-11, a division which has, in turn, caused skepticism concerning whether or not 24:3-8 and 24:1-2, 9-11 can be meaningfully related (see, e.g., Nicholson, *God and His People*, 131). Suggesting a chiasmic structure in 24:1-11, John W. Hilber, "Theology of Worship in Exodus 24," *JETS* 39 (1996), has argued that the literary structure of the passage does not support the separation of the two sections.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of the difficulties, see Durham, *Exodus*, 344-45, and, for ancient solutions to the problem, Nicholson, *God and His People*, 127-30.

assume that there would be some type of ceremony to set Israel apart, as was the case with the priesthood within Israel. In other words, Exodus 24, the sanctification of the priestly kingdom, might well be understood as analogous to Exodus 29, the sanctification of the priests, which, as we have seen, likewise included the application of blood. As alluded to above, sanctification is required if one is to draw near to God. The priests, unlike the people, were allowed to draw near to God precisely because they were, ceremonially, sanctified to do so.

Finally, the rite of Exodus 24 serves as a sign of faithful obedience, essential to the sanctification of Israel as YHWH's people. While, as we have argued, there is little by way of theological explanation of the rite in the text, the (canonically) prior mention of burnt offerings and peace offerings in the Book of the Covenant provides an important clue to the significance of the sacrifice. After the giving of the Decalogue, YHWH tells Moses again to speak to Israel:

And YHWH said to Moses, thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven, "Do not make with me gods of silver, and gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for me and you shall sacrifice upon it your burnt offerings [עֹלֹתֶיךָ] and your peace offerings [שְׁלָמֶיךָ], your sheep and your cattle. In all the places where I will cause my name to be remembered, I will come to you and I will bless you (20:22-24).

The reference to YHWH speaking to Israel from heaven likely points back to the giving of the Decalogue.<sup>90</sup> If so, it is likely that the prohibition of idols functions here in a representative fashion, perhaps as a reiteration of its most important concern.<sup>91</sup> The interesting point here is the manner in which the prohibition of idols, or the expression of prohibited worship, is contrasted with the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings. The contrast suggests that the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings is a symbol

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<sup>90</sup> Nicholson, "Decalogue."

<sup>91</sup> This point is discussed further below.

of the faithful worship of YHWH alone. If this is the case, then the ritual of Exodus 24, which involves the offering of burnt offerings (עֹלֹת) and peace offerings (שְׁלָמִים) again emphasizes the obedience essential to Israel's consecration as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, for it moves the expression of faithful worship of YHWH alone, the commandment *par excellence*,<sup>92</sup> to the heart of the covenant sealing ceremony.<sup>93</sup> In this way, Exodus 24 serves as an expression of the pure, devoted worship of YHWH alone that is the basis of Israel's calling as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

Before concluding the discussion of Exodus 24, two further observations are warranted. First, 19:4-6 and 24:3-8, both centrally concerned with sanctification, frame the law given in Exodus 20—23, suggesting that the content of the law in this section is concerned with the same matter. Furthermore, the fact that Israel's consecration depended upon obedience suggests that 20—23 consists of the actual commands Israel was to obey in order to fulfill her priestly commission. That Israel's pledges of obedience (19:8; 24:3, 8) frame the commands of 20—23 confirms this. As YHWH's purpose for giving the law was Israel's sanctification, so the content of the law would in effect set Israel apart as that holy people. In other words, the purpose of the law suggests the purpose of the actual commandments, or the content of the law. In order to explore this point at greater depth, we turn to a consideration of the content of the law.

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<sup>92</sup> The term is from von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:210.

<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, the only other place in Exodus where sacrificing burnt offerings and peace offerings is mentioned is in connection with Israel's sin with the golden calf, the implications of which will be explored in chapter 6.

## THE CONTENT OF THE LAW

Having looked at the purpose of the law as reflected in 19:4-6 and 24:3-8, we now turn to the content of the law, asking the question, how does the content of the law given in 19—24 reflect YHWH's commitment to be known as God amongst the nations? Beforehand, however, it bears mention that, by its very nature, law functions to reveal the character of the lawgiver, since the content of a law code reflects the concerns of the one giving it.<sup>94</sup> Watts says it this way: “[s]peeches always indirectly characterize their speaker by providing readers the basis for inferring what kind of person talks this way. So the law codes voiced directly by God in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers provide a powerful impression of the divine character.”<sup>95</sup> The content of the law, therefore, would serve to make YHWH's character known to all who encountered it, whether Israel who heard it from Moses, or the nations who were to see it manifest in the life of Israel. In other words, whether concerning idolatry or the fair treatment of slave-girls, specific laws would make a public statement concerning YHWH's character. Cole's argument that the Decalogue, by revealing YHWH's moral nature, is “a theological explanation of the significance of the name of YHWH”<sup>96</sup> might well be applied to the entirety of the law, although the connections between the YHWH's character and its expression in the law in

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<sup>94</sup> Although referring to the “I am YHWH” formula in Leviticus, the words of Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 12, are relevant for the present discussion: “[t]his repetition [of the “I am YHWH” formula] pushes these legal statements into the most central position from which the Old Testament can make any statement. Each of these small groups of legal maxims thereby becomes a legal communication out of the heart of the Old Testament revelation of Yahweh. Each one of these small units offers in its own way a bit of explication of the central self-introduction of Yahweh, the God who summons his people—or better, recalling Leviticus 18 ff. (and Ezek. 20), the God who sanctifies his people.” John Sailhamer, “The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch,” *WTJ* 53 (1991): 246-47, goes so far as to argue that the laws of the Pentateuch were not primarily prescriptive, but were rather intended to portray God's divine wisdom and justice.

<sup>95</sup> James W. Watts, “The Legal Characterization of God in the Pentateuch,” *HUCA* 68 (1996): 1.

<sup>96</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, 22.

some instances (e.g., the prohibition of murder) may be more easily understood (at least by a modern mind) than in others (e.g., not boiling a kid in its mother's milk).<sup>97</sup> Even though the whole law communicated YHWH's character, we may still recognize that certain concerns seemed more important than others. In this vein, Levenson's point is important: "one commandment may be more important than another, but not more obligatory."<sup>98</sup> While a detailed examination of the content of the law is beyond the scope of our concerns, this section will seek to demonstrate, through several broad observations on the legal content and structure of 20—23, that the legal material directly concerning YHWH's name, though not more obligatory, is of paramount importance.

The inference of Watts and others that YHWH's commands reflect his character can be substantiated exegetically in several ways. First, the connection between law and YHWH's character can be seen by understanding Israel's priestly function. In our discussion of 19:6, we have seen how the priests represented God to Israel, and suggested that, in like manner, Israel was to represent God to the nations. Israel's priestly role among the nations, and hence her representation of God, was realized through obedience. Israel represented God by obeying his commands. In this way, the law, made manifest in Israel's obedience, reflected the character of YHWH.

Sarna finds exegetical warrant for the same idea in another manner. Sarna observes that the Decalogue was placed in the ark (25:16, 21; 40:20; cf. Deut 10:1-5; 1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chr 5:10), which was the only article of furniture in the Holy of Holies

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<sup>97</sup> Relevant to the approach of this paper, C.J. Labuschagne, "'You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk': A New Proposal for the Origin of the Prohibition," in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. Van der Woude*, ed. F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst, and C.J. Labuschagne, VTSup 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 6-17, has made the interesting suggestion that this elusive command has not been adequately understood because scholars have normally jumped to historical questions without exploring it in its literary context. Given that a mother's early milk is mixed with blood, Labuschagne argues that the prohibition is an extension of the command not to eat meat with the blood.

<sup>98</sup> Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 51.

(40:21). The presence of the law in the place where YHWH dwelt (25:8) intimately connects the presence of YHWH with the law. From the perspective of comparative religions, Sarna argues that, whereas in much ancient religion the holiest place was reserved for the image of the particular god, Israel the law in its holiest place, indicating that to know YHWH was to know his law.<sup>99</sup> However, the argument can be made from a canonical perspective in the simple recognition that the law was housed in the place most closely identified with YHWH himself. That the only explicit purpose given for YHWH's meeting with Moses in the Holy of Holies was communicating the law (25:22) confirms this connection. The idea that YHWH might be known through his law is further suggested by Moses' prayer later in Exodus 33:13: "show me your ways, that I may know you."<sup>100</sup>

Imitation is another means whereby the law is connected to YHWH's character.<sup>101</sup> The idea of law as imitation of God, suggested by man's being made as the image of God (Gen 1:26),<sup>102</sup> is brought out most explicitly in Leviticus 19:2: "be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy" (cf. 11:44-45).<sup>103</sup> In Exodus, the most obvious connection between

<sup>99</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 209. Sarna's observation will be discussed in more depth in chapter 5.

<sup>100</sup> God's ways and God's law are often closely connected. Cf., e.g., Josh 22:5; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 17:13; Ps 1:1-2; 119:29; Is 2:3; 42:24; Mic 4:2.

<sup>101</sup> The importance of imitation as a basis for OT ethics is becoming increasingly appreciated in OT studies. For a discussion of imitation of God in the OT, see Eryl W. Davies, "Walking in God's Ways: The Concept of 'Imitatio Dei' in the Old Testament," in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in the Old Testament in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, ed. Edward Ball, vol. 300, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). Cf. Edmund Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 173-77, and John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 50-54.

<sup>102</sup> Martin Buber, *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 71-77. Cf. Bruce C. Birch, "Moral Agency, Community, and the Character of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 66 (1995) and David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 51-103, who argues that man is a representative of God (see particularly 78-79 and 101).

<sup>103</sup> The Hebrew, קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני יהוה אלהיכם, literally reads "holy you shall be, for holy I am YHWH your God." The phrase thus translated is perhaps too awkward for acceptable English, but serves the purpose of highlighting the acknowledgment formula. As we argued in relation to Exod 20:2, the acknowledgment formula in the context of the law connects the law to the concerns of the formula in 1—18, further supporting the missionary thrust of the law.

law and imitation is the Sabbath command, where God's resting on the seventh day provides the rationale for Israel resting on the Sabbath (20:11). The idea, however, is present elsewhere in the book.<sup>104</sup> In Exodus, the command to redeem the firstborn cattle, donkeys, and sons is done in remembrance of YHWH's killing the firstborn of males and cattle in Egypt (13:1-2, 11-16). The prohibition of usury and the requirement to restore a garment taken in pledge from a poor neighbor is a call for compassion, rooted in the fact that YHWH is compassionate (22:25-27). The prohibition of the oppression of strangers (22:21; 23:9), rooted in Israel's own experiences as strangers in Egypt, suggests that the reason for the prohibition, at least in part, is that YHWH did not so treat Israel.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, the laws in Exodus are given as an expression of the worship of YHWH.

Consider the following words from Eichrodt:

“[t]he really remarkable feature of the Decalogue is rather *the definite connection of the moral precepts with the basic religious commands*. It is the expression of a conviction that moral action is inseparably bound up with the worship of God. This means, however, that the God whose help man craves regards obedience to the moral standards as equally important with the exclusive worship of himself; and consequently his whole will and purpose is directed to that which is morally good. The same state of affairs can be discerned in the Book of the Covenant also. Compared with the *mišpātīm*, the fundamental commands of the civil law, the cultic *d'ḅārīm* in chs. 22 and 23 occupy a relatively small space. This primer of the nations' law places the just fashioning of social life in the forefront throughout as the main content of the divine will.<sup>106</sup>

Eichrodt's assertion that moral obedience is equally important to exclusive worship does not quite capture the relationship of the two in Exodus. More accurately, moral obedience is an expression of exclusive worship. Furthermore, the OT itself does not divide the law into Eichrodt's categories of moral, civil, and cultic law. However,

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<sup>104</sup> See Davies, “Walking in God's Ways.”

<sup>105</sup> That this prohibition is rooted in the imitation of God is explicitly indicated in Deut 10:18-19: “[God] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and he loves the stranger, giving him bread and clothing. Therefore you shall love the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

<sup>106</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology*, 1:76-77.

Eichrodt is certainly correct in his basic assertion that laws that do not appear to be directly connected to worship are nevertheless inseparably bound worship. All of YHWH's commands are an expression of singular allegiance to and worship of YHWH. The following observations concerning the content and the structure of the law in Exodus 20—23 will seek to make that point.

### *The Decalogue*

From a canonical perspective, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Decalogue in the book of Exodus.<sup>107</sup> Cassuto, for instance, calls the Decalogue “the climax of the entire book, the central and most exalted theme, all that came before being, as it were, a preparation for it, and all that follows, a result of, and supplement to, it.”<sup>108</sup> Childs finds its importance in the manner in which serves to guide the interpretation of subsequent legal material.<sup>109</sup> Several items set the Decalogue apart. First, although modern scholarship has often placed it later chronologically, the Decalogue is the first law code to appear in the final form of the text. Second, the shift in the narrative to the reaction of the people after the Decalogue serves as a decisive narrative break between the giving of the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant. Third, the Decalogue is referred to in different language, literally as the ten words (דְּבָרִים—20:1; 34:28, cf. Deut 4:13; 10:4). Fourth, any reference to Moses as a mediator is absent in the giving of the Decalogue—it appears from the text that YHWH spoke directly to the people (20:1, 19, 21; cf. Deut 4:12-13; 5:22). Fifth, the Decalogue alone

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<sup>107</sup> From a critical perspective, the importance of the Decalogue is not obvious. See, e.g., von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:190.

<sup>108</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 205.

<sup>109</sup> Childs, *Introduction*, 174.

was contained on the tablets written by YHWH at Sinai (34:28; cf. Deut 4:13; 5:22), and, as we have seen, was specially designated to be placed in the ark (25:16, 21; 31:18).

While all the law was obligatory, Exodus suggests that the Decalogue had special significance.

The reason for demonstrating the uniqueness of the Decalogue becomes clear when looking at its content. If the Decalogue occupies a special place at the head of the law, and if it serves in some way as an interpretive guide to the rest of the law, then it follows that the concerns most central to the Decalogue should be recognized as particularly important.<sup>110</sup> Again we are brought to YHWH's concern to be known as God. This concern is immediately apparent in the prologue to the commandments: "I am YHWH, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exod 20:2).<sup>111</sup> The prologue functions in several ways. Most often noted among Biblical scholars is the manner in which the prologue serves to authorize YHWH's claim over Israel.<sup>112</sup> Houtman, for instance, is surely correct that the phrase is meant to instill in Israel thankfulness to YHWH for her freedom and remind her that she now serves YHWH.<sup>113</sup> However, if the acknowledgement formula is allowed to convey the depth it has acquired

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of the importance of the Decalogue in the OT, particularly how other sections of OT law expanded upon the basic commands of the Decalogue, see Patrick D. Miller, "The Place of the Decalogue in the Old Testament and Its Law," *Int* 43 (1989): 229-42.

<sup>111</sup> Two items warrant mention. First, instead of the usual אֲנִי יְהוָה is used in 20:2 and 20:5 (cf. 4:11). Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 140, n. 29, attributes the differences to sources, but does not find the differences theologically significant. Secondly, and more importantly, the phrase יהוה אלהים אֲנִי can be translated either "I, YHWH, am your God" (e.g., NAB, TNK) or "I am YHWH, your God" (e.g., NRSV, ESV, cf. LXX). To render the phrase "I, YHWH, am your God," while a smooth English translation, nonetheless obscures the acknowledgement formula apparent in the Hebrew text. See the discussion of Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 1-7, and Johann J. Stamm and Maurice E. Andrew, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research*, trans. M.E. Andrew, vol. 2, SBT (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1967), 76-78.

<sup>112</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 161-62. Although see Levenson, "Theologies of Commandment," who argues that an overemphasis on the prologue has led many to assume that Israel's *ethos* (norm) was always rooted in her *mythos* (narrative), a position which Levenson argues strips the law of any independent theological value.

<sup>113</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:16-17. Cf. Clements, *Exodus*, 123, Durham, *Exodus*, 76, 282-83, Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*, 116, Kürle, *Appeal*, 89.

up to this point in Exodus, several other emphases emerge. The reminder of YHWH's universal supremacy inherent in the acknowledgment formula establishes YHWH's authority over Israel from another direction, and can serve (as we have seen in 15:26 and argued concerning 19:4) as an implied threat for disobedience. Perhaps more importantly, the introduction in 20:2 serves as a reminder of YHWH's central concern in the exodus, that Israel, Egypt, and the earth would know "I am YHWH." The presence of "I am YHWH" in the prologue is a reminder of the missionary concern that the formula has carried to this point. This observation is particularly important, because it brings YHWH's missionary purpose to the head of the law,<sup>114</sup> which has implications for how the rest of the law is understood. As Childs writes, "[t]he prologue serves as a preface to the whole law and ... makes it absolutely clear that the commands which follow are integrally connected to God's act of self-revelation."<sup>115</sup> The position of the prologue indicates that the remainder of the law has a missionary function. This implication is further supported by the observation of Jacob, who connects 20:2 to 19:5, suggesting that "I am yours" is the complement to "you are mine."<sup>116</sup> If so, bringing 19:5 to the fore reinforces the missionary thrust of the prologue.

The first commandment, "you shall have no other gods besides me," is basic to the rest of the Decalogue: "it sets forth [for the remainder of the Decalogue] an expectation of absolute priority, a first and fundamental requirement of those who desire

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<sup>114</sup> 20:2 stands at the head of the law regardless of whether 20:2 is perceived to be the first word of the "ten words" (cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 544, George A.F. Knight, *Theology as Narration* (Edinburgh: Hansel Press, 1976), 136) or the prologue to the Decalogue (cf. Durham, *Exodus*, 284, J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 210, Childs, *Exodus*, 410, Noth, *Exodus*, 161-62).

<sup>115</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 401.

<sup>116</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 545.

to enter into the covenant relationship with Yahweh.”<sup>117</sup> The precise meaning of the command, however, has not been entirely clear. Particularly difficult in the interpretation of 20:3 is the phrase על פני. Several options have been put forward.<sup>118</sup> The phrase has been rendered in a spatial sense, such as “beside me,”<sup>119</sup> “in front of me,”<sup>120</sup> or, more broadly, “in my presence.”<sup>121</sup> This spatial sense has suggested to some that the command should be viewed primarily in a cultic setting, which would serve as a prohibition of syncretism in worship.<sup>122</sup> The phrase has also been rendered in what may be called a relational sense, such as “except me,” “in preference to me,”<sup>123</sup> “to my disadvantage,”<sup>124</sup> “in defiance of me,”<sup>125</sup> “over and against me,”<sup>126</sup> or “during the lifetime.”<sup>127</sup> Several of the options convey a sense of hostility, a sense consistent with the use of על פני elsewhere in the OT.<sup>128</sup>

The varied translations of 20:3 suggest that it cannot be properly interpreted based on linguistic criteria alone. If the first commandment is read in the wider canonical context of Exodus, then the options may be narrowed. What some scholars have called

<sup>117</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 284. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:210, went so far as to say that “the whole history of Israel’s cult is a struggle solely concerned with the validity of the first commandment.”

<sup>118</sup> See HALOT, 944, Rolf P. Knierim, “Das Erste Gebot,” *ZAW* 77 (1965), and, particularly, Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, trans. Aryeh Newman, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ahva Press, 1976), 315.

<sup>119</sup> J. Scharbert, *Exodus*, NEchtB (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 83. (Ger: *neben mir*)

<sup>120</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 241.

<sup>121</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 546, J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 5, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 125-26.

<sup>122</sup> E.g., Noth, *Exodus*, 162. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 126, illustrates the prohibition with 1 Sam 5:1-5, the toppling of Dagon in the presence of the ark.

<sup>123</sup> William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 297, n. 29. Albright translated 20:3 as “[t]hou shalt not prefer other gods to me.”

<sup>124</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:204, n. 31.

<sup>125</sup> Ludwig Köhler, “Der Decalog,” *ThR NF* 1 (1929): 174, from Stamm and Andrew, *Ten Commandments*, 179.

<sup>126</sup> Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of “Monotheism”*, vol. 1, FAT (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2003), 77.

<sup>127</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 546-47. Jacob’s rendering presupposes a marriage background: Israel was forbidden to have other gods as long as her husband, YHWH, lived.

<sup>128</sup> Stamm and Andrew, *Ten Commandments*, 79, MacDonald, *Deuteronomy*, 77.

alternate forms of the first commandment appear elsewhere in Exodus.<sup>129</sup> The exclusive nature of this commandment in Israel's cultic worship is clear in both 34:14 ("you shall worship no other god") and in 22:20[19] ("the one who sacrifices to a god, except YHWH alone, shall be destroyed"). If these verses are allowed to inform 20:3, then worshipping other gods, even if YHWH is still acknowledged as supreme, is categorically excluded. YHWH alone is to be worshipped. The commandment of 23:13, "you shall not remember other gods, nor shall they be heard upon your lips," likewise affirms a rigid exclusivity, but, significantly, demonstrates that this exclusivity is not limited to cultic worship, for the command is given directly after YHWH's words "take heed to all I have said to you."<sup>130</sup> Given the wide range of laws in the Book of the Covenant, the reference to "all I have said," rules out the possibility that only cultic concerns are in view. Again, if seen together, 23:13 suggests that the scope of 20:3 is broader than cultic worship. The position of 20:3 at the beginning of the Decalogue suggests the same thing, given that the Decalogue is concerned with far more than cultic law.

There may be no way to translate 20:3 adequately into English. The translation "besides me" speaks to YHWH's intolerance of any other gods, but misses the sense of hostility apparent in על פני. The suggestions that convey hostility, such as those offered by Knierim ("in defiance of me") or MacDonald ("over and against me") carry the sense of opposition, but are not as clear that all other gods are forbidden to Israel. The problem is that no English term is broad enough to incorporate simultaneously the range of meaning suggested by על פני. An exact, concise, rendering of על פני, however, may not be not necessary for the present purpose. Patrick's minimalist understanding of 20:3 is

<sup>129</sup> Knierim, "Das Erste Gebot," 23-24.

<sup>130</sup> Additionally, MacDonald, *Deuteronomy*, 75, observes that the usual rendering of "before me" is לפני, which makes a purely cultic sense less likely.

sufficient: “it is safe to say that the force of it is to exclude relations with any other deity.”<sup>131</sup> Strictly speaking, the first commandment addresses not the nature of God, but rather Israel’s relationship to him.<sup>132</sup> The primary quality of this relationship is exclusivity. Sarna notes that the verb *היה* is used for entering a marriage bond (Deut 24:2, 4; Judg 14:20; 2 Sam 20:10; Hos 3:3; Ruth 1:13), as well as for entering a covenant (Gen 17:7, Exod 19:4-5, Lev 11:45).<sup>133</sup> The exclusivity implied in the picture of marriage fits well the nature of the prohibition. Jacob likewise recognizes the image, and draws out the implication:

[a]t Sinai only God and Israel existed in the world. HE took Israel to His heart—you are mine and belong to no one else! This expression evokes the picture of *marriage*; the wife could belong to only one husband while every other man was an *ish a-her*. They continued to exist, but were not available to her.<sup>134</sup>

Brueggemann gives the positive implication of the commandment: “[t]he command requires Israel to mobilize all of its life, in every sphere, around one single loyalty.”<sup>135</sup>

The second commandment, 20:4-6, carries the concerns of 20:3 explicitly into the cultic sphere. Whether one sees 20:3 and 20:4-6 as distinct commandments which inform one another,<sup>136</sup> 20:4-6 as an elaboration of 20:3,<sup>137</sup> or the two passages functioning as one

<sup>131</sup> Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 42.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History*, trans. John Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 73.

<sup>133</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 251, n.15.

<sup>134</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 546, italics original. Based upon biblical and extra-biblical parallels, Seock-Tae Sohn, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People’: The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula,” in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 355-72, has argued that the covenant is based upon a marriage formula. Although Sohn’s case is centered primarily upon Exod 6:7, his work is pertinent for the present discussion.

<sup>135</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 841. Citing the broad range of possible translations of *על פני*, Kaiser, *Exodus*, 422, paraphrases 20:3 with Isaiah 42:8: “I will not give my glory to another.” While certainly insufficient as a translation, Kaiser’s rendering makes an interesting suggestion as to what is principally at stake in 20:3.

<sup>136</sup> Dale Patrick, “The First Commandment in the Structure of the Pentateuch,” *VT* 45 (1995): 116, Moberly, *Mountain*, 49, 116.

commandment,<sup>138</sup> scholars are generally agreed that the two commandments must be read in light of one another.<sup>139</sup> The issue most pertinent for the present purpose is the question, what exactly was Israel forbidden to worship, images or other gods? The difficulty lies in that the phrase “you shall not worship them and you shall not serve them” (לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם) suggests a plural referent, whereas the most immediate referent, “idol” (פֶּסֶל), is singular. Zimmerli has offered a simple linguistic solution which has gathered much support: the plural suffix in לָהֶם (20:5) cannot refer back to the singular פֶּסֶל (20:4), and therefore must reach back to the plural אֱלֹהִים in 20:3.<sup>140</sup> Zimmerli supports his contention by observing that the phrase “bow down and serve,” which he calls a fixed Deuteronomic phrase, is commonly used with other gods as the object, with only one instance (2 Kgs 21:21) where idols are the object.

If Zimmerli is correct that the prohibition against worship refers firstly to other gods, the worship of images is likewise implicitly forbidden by the simple fact 20:4 forbids the making of images.<sup>141</sup> In other words, the broad sense of 20:4-6 would include

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<sup>137</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:5.

<sup>138</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 546, Knight, *Theology*, 146.

<sup>139</sup> For a short summary of the problem concerning the relationship of 20:3 and 20:4-6 and different historical solutions, see Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:3-5.

<sup>140</sup> Walther Zimmerli, "Das Zweite Gebot," in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80 Geburtstag*, ed. Walter Baumgartner (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 552-54. Those who have followed Zimmerli include Childs, *Exodus*, 405, Stamm and Andrew, *Ten Commandments*, 83, Hyatt, *Exodus*, 211, Brichto, "Worship," 42-43. H. Th. Obbink, "Jahwebilder," *ZAW* 47 (1929): 264-74, has argued that 20:4 prohibits idols, but not images of YHWH. Obbink's proposal has not gathered substantial support (cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 406, Stamm and Andrew, *Ten Commandments*, 83-84).

<sup>141</sup> Although Exodus itself is silent on the matter, several reasons for the prohibition against all images have been suggested: YHWH cannot be contained in an image (e.g., Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*, 120-21, Hyatt, *Exodus*, 211), the presence of images would lead to the worship of images (e.g., Sarna, *Exodus*, 110, Durham, *Exodus*, 286), or the identification of images with YHWH would create the temptation to manipulate YHWH (e.g., Noth, *Exodus*, 162-63, Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 842). Schmidt, *Faith of the Old Testament*, 77, cf. 194-98 suggests that the most natural explanation is that images were forbidden because man was the image of God, but then rejects it on the critical grounds, arguing that the OT passages that speak of man being the image of God are late.

both other gods and images, which becomes apparent in Exodus 32.<sup>142</sup> As in the case of 20:3, the force of the prohibition, then, is an expression of YHWH's intolerance of any rival gods, with the corresponding demand for exclusive worship. The positive expression of the command is love expressed in obedience, implied in the reference to "those who love me and keep my commands" (20:6). Israel's commitment was to be to YHWH exclusively, expressed in loving obedience, and at the expense of all other idols or images.<sup>143</sup>

Concerning the third commandment, it is important to recall the importance of the name YHWH to this point in Exodus. As argued above, Exodus 1—18 has shown YHWH acting for the sake of his name. The driving motivation behind YHWH's actions in the exodus material and the wilderness material is his commitment to the universal acknowledgment that "I am YHWH." At stake here is not simply the label YHWH, but the content attached to that name. The series of plagues served not just to communicate a label to Egypt, but served to demonstrate to Egypt what kind of God YHWH is. As has been argued regarding 6:3, it was the meaning of the name, rather than the label, that was revealed as new to Israel. And, as will be argued below in chapter 6, Exodus 32 demonstrates YHWH's concern that the content of the name be preserved.

Recognizing the importance of the name in Exodus is crucial if the third commandment is to be understood from a canonical perspective. Whatever merit they may have from a historical critical perspective, suggestions such as that of Noth, that the

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<sup>142</sup> See chapter 6. Some, e.g., Albright, *Stone Age*, 265-66, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 218, have argued that the calf functioned not as a god, but as a pedestal for YHWH.

<sup>143</sup> Kürle, *Appeal*, 45, helpfully connects 20:6 to the rest of the law in Exodus: "[t]he effect [of 20:6] is that the reader perceives the entire legislation in Exodus 20—23 as an expression of a life which befits a God-lover."

commandment has to do with the manipulation of YHWH through magic,<sup>144</sup> does not well fit the canonical context of Exodus and its perspective on the divine name. Lehmann argues that the third commandment is an expression of an ancient oath formula, in which one bound himself to a covenant, calling down blessings if the oath was kept, and curses if the oath was broken. According to Lehmann, the third commandment is not a warning against unnecessary uses of the name, but rather a warning that YHWH will not release the covenant breaker from the curses which he has brought upon himself. While more satisfying than the suggestion of Noth, Lehmann's argument is only loosely connected to the canonical context in which YHWH has sought to make himself known as God.<sup>145</sup> More in line with the canonical context is the suggestion of Staples, who has proposed that the commandment is concerned with idolatry, and translates the phrase "[t]hou shalt not give the name of Yahweh (thy God) to an idol."<sup>146</sup> Staples supports his idea by suggesting that נָשָׂא can mean "to give" (cf. Is 5:26; Num 14:30; Gen 19:21), and that, in an effort to denigrate false gods, the OT frequently refers to idols by other names (e.g. "trouble," Hos 4:15; "terror," Jer 50:38; "worthlessness," Lev 19:4; "a lie," Amos 2:4).<sup>147</sup> Particularly important in Staples' case is Jeremiah 18:15, where שֵׁשׁוֹת refers to idols. With this connection in mind, Staples finds the third commandment taking up the concerns of the first two commandments in prohibiting syncretism in Israel's worship. In this way, Staples' argument is highly consistent with the immediate narrative context of the Decalogue. However, although his suggestion is consistent with the concerns of the Decalogue, given YHWH's commitment to be known and honored as God to this point in

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<sup>144</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 163.

<sup>145</sup> Manfred R. Lehmann, "Biblical Oaths," *ZAW* 69 (1969): 74-92.

<sup>146</sup> William E. Staples, "The Third Commandment," *JBL* 58 (1939): 329.

<sup>147</sup> Staples' complete list of parallels can be found in Staples, "Third Commandment," 328-29.

Exodus, the context of Exodus does not demand that the term שוּא be narrowed to idols as specifically as Staples suggests.

Childs and Wagner offer interpretations more consistent with the broader canonical context of the commandment. Childs takes as his starting point the traditional understanding that 20:7 deals with swearing falsely. In his survey of the third commandment, Child notes that, linguistically, the range of the command encompasses more than simply swearing falsely, but includes any “empty” use of YHWH’s name. Unlike many of its OT parallels, 20:7 has a general force which allows for many applications, which is consistent with the general nature of the Decalogue, the prohibitions of which are often given more specific application elsewhere. Understanding 20:7 as speaking of YHWH’s name in an “empty” manner is entirely consistent with YHWH’s concern to be acknowledged, and honored, as God: “[the] heart of the commandment lies in preventing the dishonouring of God.”<sup>148</sup> Wagner makes a suggestion even broader than that of Childs.<sup>149</sup> Making much of the usual translation of נָשָׂא as “to bear” or “to carry,” Wagner suggests that the verse is a prohibition of “bearing” YHWH’s name falsely, or, in other words, acting in a manner false to YHWH. Besides questioning the governing assumption that the command refers to speech (not required by the verb נָשָׂא), the merit in this suggestion is twofold. First, it honors the public connection that YHWH has established with Israel (the importance of which will be seen most clearly in Exodus 32). Secondly, it honors the sense of purpose for Israel as YHWH’s people given in 19:4-6, particularly Israel’s function as representing YHWH.

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<sup>148</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 68.

<sup>149</sup> A.J. Wagner, "An Interpretation of Exodus 20:7," *Int* 6 (1952): 228-29.

Wagner translates 20:7 as follows: “[t]hou shalt not carry with you the name of your God falsely, for God will hold him not guiltless that bears his name for nothing.”<sup>150</sup>

YHWH’s concern that his name be honored is found again in the fourth commandment. Keeping the Sabbath was a regular outward and communal expression of Israel’s obedience and submission to YHWH. The remainder of the commands become relevant more sporadically (e.g., one may not always have the occasion to steal or kill), but the Sabbath would be a constant weekly reminder that YHWH was Israel’s God and must be obeyed. Keeping the Sabbath would also serve as a communal observation. The other commandments have a more singular expression—the Sabbath commandment was to be obeyed every week, simultaneously, by the whole community. Furthermore, YHWH’s subsequent instructions concerning the Sabbath in 31:12-17 (cf. 35:2-3) are of great help in understanding the Sabbath’s purpose. The Sabbath commandment was given explicitly so that Israel might know that “I am YHWH,” again recalling the purpose of the spectacular manner in which YHWH delivered Israel from Egypt.<sup>151</sup> YHWH’s concern for his name explains why death is the penalty for those who violate the Sabbath (31:14-15; 35:2; cf. Num 15:32-36). If the purpose of the Sabbath was, at least in part, to communicate to Israel “I am YHWH,” then disobeying the commandment would be in effect a failure or refusal to acknowledge that “I am YHWH.”<sup>152</sup> Seen in this light, breaking the Sabbath could be seen as akin to idolatry (a refusal to acknowledge the

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<sup>150</sup> Wagner, "Interpretation," 229.

<sup>151</sup> This statement of the Sabbath’s purpose does not exclude other notions which the Sabbath was intended to communicate, such as remembering creation (20:11) or Israel’s slavery and deliverance (Deut 5:15).

<sup>152</sup> “I am YHWH, who makes you holy” [אני יהוה מקדשכם], may have also served as a reminder of the purpose to which YHWH set them apart, recalling the commissioning of 19:6. Thus, the Sabbath may have functioned in part as a continual reminder of the purposes for which YHWH called them. Cf. Ezek. 20:12, 20.

supremacy of YHWH by involvement with other gods), which accounts for the punishment of death in both instances.

It should be noted that, in one way or another, all of the first four commands are concerned with YHWH's honor, or his commitment to be known for who he is. That these four commands appear first in the Decalogue gives them a certain canonical importance, an importance supported by the fact that, as mentioned above, breaking any of the four warranted death. In addition, the Decalogue explicitly states consequences only in relation to the first three commandments (if 20:3 and 20:4-6 are read together). More importantly, there is a logical progression in the order and intention of the commandments. The first and the second commandments are given to ensure that Israel worships YHWH alone, with no exceptions. The God who delivered them from slavery is Israel's God, and her worship is for him alone. The third commandment is an injunction to represent YHWH faithfully, in a manner befitting the character of the God with whom Israel has been publicly identified. As Israel worships YHWH alone, she is called to faithfully represent the God she worships. The fourth commandment fills out the charge of the third commandment. The exhortation to keep the Sabbath, done in imitation of YHWH himself, indicates to Israel that her life is to be lived in imitation of God. In other words, Israel will represent YHWH ("bear" his name faithfully) as she lives in imitation of him. In this way, the first four commandments lay the groundwork for the commands that follow.

The remainder of the Decalogue concerns the relationships between Israelites, and does not have explicit reference to YHWH's name.<sup>153</sup> This, of course, does not mean that

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<sup>153</sup> The Decalogue has often been divided into two sections—the first four commands concerning Israel's relationship with YHWH, and the final six commands concerning Israel's relationship to others. Cf., e.g.,

commandments addressing Israel's common life are irrelevant to YHWH's honor, particularly if 20:2 functions to help interpret the Decalogue as a whole. Although we have drawn a distinction between laws that explicitly concern YHWH's honor and those that do not, it must be admitted that the distinction is somewhat artificial, and must not be pressed too far, as if one could keep the first four commandments while continuing to steal or covet. Obedience to the whole law was an expression of the exclusive worship YHWH demanded of Israel. Furthermore, as discussed above, Israel was to reflect YHWH's character as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, bearing his name faithfully as she imitated YHWH by observing the law. Therefore, the life and relationships within the covenant community had to reflect YHWH's character, which excluded dishonoring parents, murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and covetousness.<sup>154</sup> Breaking any of the commandments would undermine the purpose for which Israel was set apart, to be a priestly kingdom among the nations.

### *The Book of the Covenant*

The Book of the Covenant (ספר הברית, 24:7) consists of Exodus 20:22—23:33 and is a mixture of both casuistic and apodictic law that ranges over a broad spectrum of topics, including slavery, homicide, property regulations, worship violations, protection of the weak and the poor, regulations concerning festivals, and idolatry.<sup>155</sup> Many of these laws, which govern Israel's life together, do not explicitly refer to YHWH at all. The lack

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von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:191. While perhaps useful, it must be acknowledged that such a division is not apparent in the text, nor does the fact that the Decalogue was written on two tablets support this division.

<sup>154</sup> Cf., e.g., Hosea 4:1-2, where breaking the second section of the Decalogue is evidence of the lack of knowledge of God.

<sup>155</sup> From a higher critical perspective, see particularly "The Origins of Israelite Law" in Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 79-132.

of reference to YHWH in many of the laws does not pose a problem for the present argument if, as argued above, the presence of law serves to communicate the character of the lawgiver. In addition, the canonical shape of 19—24 suggests how the Book of the Covenant is to be read. The order of introduction to the law, the Decalogue, and the Book of the Covenant moves from the general to the specific. As Olson has argued, in its literary context the Book of the Covenant serves as an interpretation of the Decalogue with regard to the particulars of community life.<sup>156</sup> When considered in the context of the Decalogue and the introduction to the law in 19:4-6, it becomes clear that, canonically, the Book of the Covenant provides the practical contours of Israel's life as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.<sup>157</sup> Put more simply, “[a]ll covenant regulations rest on the principle I am holy, and ye must also be holy.”<sup>158</sup>

The Book of the Covenant expresses its concern for YHWH's honor in several ways. First, proper acknowledgement of YHWH frames the laws of the Book of the Covenant. As mentioned above, the opening words of the Book of the Covenant prohibited idolatry: “You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold” (20:22b-23). Similarly, the last words (23:23-33) give explicit instructions for Israel completely to destroy idol worship (and idol worshippers) in the land, in order to prevent Israel from serving foreign gods (23:24-25, 32-33). Both of these commands are practical expressions of the first two commands of the Decalogue,

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<sup>156</sup> Olson, "Jagged Cliffs," 252. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 45-50, has argued that the Book of the Covenant is not dependent exegetically upon the Decalogue, although he does find it theologically important that both are attributed to Moses, thereby giving both a divine authority. Cf. Childs, *Introduction*, 132-35.

<sup>157</sup> Paul, *Studies*, 36-42.

<sup>158</sup> Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 154. Similarly, in his work on the Book of the Covenant, Paul, *Studies*, 41, writes, “the prime purpose of biblical compilations [of law] is sanctification.”

which points to YHWH's insistence that he be honored and worshipped exclusively. The presence of the prohibition(s) at the beginning and end of the Book of the Covenant brackets the entire section with a thematic *inclusio*, which has the effect of communicating that relations within Israel's society are to be viewed in the context of a proper and exclusive relationship with YHWH.<sup>159</sup> In this way, YHWH's concern to be acknowledged as Israel's God casts its weight over the entire Book of the Covenant.

Secondly, YHWH's concern to be acknowledged as God can be seen in that offenses involving worship were considered capital crimes. Sorcery (22:17[18]) and sacrificing to another god (22:9[10]) warranted the death penalty.<sup>160</sup> 22:20[19] declares utter destruction for the one who sacrifices to another god. Blenkinsopp's observation that this command is the exact midpoint of the Book of the Covenant is interesting. Not only does it, as Blenkinsopp writes, "[proclaim] the sovereignty of YHWH in the legal community,"<sup>161</sup> but it also again emphasizes (structurally) YHWH's commitment to exclusive worship, and in the strongest possible terms. While laws concerning idolatry and proper worship were not the only laws that warranted the death penalty,<sup>162</sup> the fact that they were capital crimes would remind Israel that the worship of YHWH was a matter that had to be attended to with utmost care and reverence.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 197.

<sup>160</sup> Although the prohibition of blaspheming God (22:28) has no penalty attached, Lev 24:10-23 records that blasphemy was a capital offense.

<sup>161</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 199.

<sup>162</sup> Other capital crimes included various laws concerning homicide (21:12; 21:22-25; 21:28-29), striking or cursing a parent (21:15, 17), kidnapping (21:16), bestiality (22:18[19]). 22:20-23[21-24] declares that YHWH will kill the one who oppresses the widow or orphan. Outside the Book of the Covenant, it is instructive to note that the worship violations (eating leaven during the feast of unleavened bread, and mixing holy oil and incense for common use) warranted being cut off from the community (30:22-38), while profaning the Sabbath (31:14-15, 35:2) called for death.

<sup>163</sup> Erich Zenger, "Wie und Wozu Die Tora zum Sinai Kam: Literarische und Theologische Beobachtungen Zu Exodus 19-34," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1996), 278-80, sees the fiery theophany of Ex. 19:16-18,

Thirdly, the festivals called for in the Book of the Covenant ordered Israel's life around YHWH. As Israel prospered, she was to acknowledge YHWH with her increase. Offerings were to be brought from the increase of the Israelite, whether it be an offering of wine or grain, the redemption of the firstborn, the sacrifice of the firstborn of the cattle or the sheep (22:28-29[29-30], cf. 13:15; 34:19-20), or the firstfruits of the crops (23:19). Men were required to attend three annual festivals, the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Harvest, and Ingathering, and were not to come empty-handed (23:14-19). Again, attention to the requirements for offerings and festivals would have the effect of thrusting the worship of YHWH to a central place, and act as a regular reminder that the Israelite's life was to be an expression of service to YHWH.

Most of the actual laws of the Book of the Covenant do not have explicitly to do with worship. As importantly as the above, however, is how the Book of the Covenant provided practical instruction for how Israel was to live together as a community. A detailed discussion of the individual laws is not necessary here, but it should be noted that, with few exceptions (most of which have to do with worship, which we have addressed above), the laws of the Book of the Covenant are concerned with the welfare of fellow Israelites. This concern for the welfare of one another takes various forms. For instance, life is to be protected. Not only is murder forbidden (e.g., 21:12-14), but the Israelites are to ensure that they do that which is in their power to ensure that innocent life is protected (such as ensuring that a dangerous ox is contained, 21:28-32, or that anyone involved in kidnapping is executed, 21:16). Fellow Israelites are to deal honestly

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20:18 as the context in which to view 34:14, leading to the same implication that death was the consequence for the worship of strange gods (cf. Deut. 4:24). While the canonical form would not suggest Exod 19 as the context for 34:14, Zenger's suggestion could well apply to the laws concerning idolatry in the Book of the Covenant.

with one another (e.g., 22:1-4, 7-9; 23:1-2) and to personally absorb the consequences of negligent behavior (e.g., 21:33-34; 22:5-6, 12). The weak and the vulnerable are to be protected (e.g., 22:21-24; 23:3, 6-8, 9). Further than that, the people are commanded to positively seek the welfare of others (e.g., 23:4-5). YHWH's insistence on goodwill between members of the covenant community extends even to areas where it might seem within the rights of an Israelite to withhold it, such as voluntary kindness to one's enemies (23:5), or the injunction to lend without interest (22:25), and to return the garment taken in pledge (22:26). The laws of the Book of the Covenant are, in the main, a legislation of Israel's goodwill to one another, practical injunctions to the end that the Israelite "love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>164</sup> While not every law is concerned with neighbor relations, reading the Book of the Covenant in its entirety leaves the impression that it is important to YHWH that Israel life among one another be grounded in benevolence.<sup>165</sup>

How Israel's benevolence serves YHWH's international honor is apparent in the wider context of the purpose of the law. Again we return to 19:4-6, where YHWH gives the purpose of the law before giving any actual laws. According to Exodus, the cardinal purpose of the law is that Israel, as YHWH's treasured possession, would serve him as a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation." If, as we argued above, the law reflects the character of YHWH, and Israel in her obedience functions as YHWH's priestly representative among the nations, then Israel's observing the Book of the Covenant

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<sup>164</sup> Lev 19:18.

<sup>165</sup> See Kürle, *Appeal*, 92ff.

would represent to the nations that YHWH cares for his people. In short, the Book of the Covenant would communicate that YHWH is good.<sup>166</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: LAW AND GOSPEL IN EXODUS

We now return to the problem with which we began: the relationship between law and gospel in the Pentateuch. Is von Rad's dichotomy between law and gospel, drawn from his reading of Pentateuchal traditions, an accurate reading of Exodus?<sup>167</sup>

Approaching this issue requires us to gather what we have observed so far in Exodus 1—24. In chapter 2 we observed that the “gospel,” or YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, was motivated primarily by YHWH's desire to communicate to Israel, Egypt, and the world that “I am YHWH.” In other words, the chief impulse behind YHWH's actions 1:1—15:21 is that he be known amongst the nations. In chapters 19—24, YHWH's concern remains the same. As has been argued above, both the purpose of the law (particularly 19:4-6 and 24:3-8) and the structure and content of the law (20—23)

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<sup>166</sup> YHWH's concern to be recognized by the nations as good will become more explicit in the ensuing discussion of 32:12 in chapter 6.

<sup>167</sup> Because of their currency in OT scholarship, the terms *law* and *gospel* have been used in this discussion. However, certain problems with the terms should be noted. First, the terms law and gospel seem to suggest that they are mutually exclusive. The Biblical material, however, does not fall into such clean categories. To cite but one example, is YHWH's command that Israel “honor your father and your mother, in order that your days may be long in the land which YHWH your God is giving to you” (20:12) a statement of law or gospel? Clearly the statement includes an expression both of YHWH's righteousness, as evident in the command, and YHWH's generosity, as evident in the promise for long life in the land. Secondly, because law and gospel are so well established terms, there is a tendency for the terms to exercise a controlling influence on one's reading of the text. For instance, Childs, *Introduction*, 177, reads 19:4 as saying that Israel's election was due to the mercy and kindness of God. Strictly speaking, 19:4 does not speak of God's attributes, or even of the reasons behind Israel's deliverance, but simply that Israel's exodus was YHWH's doing. While it may be true that YHWH's mercy and kindness are at work in YHWH's deliverance of Israel, it bears mention that YHWH's compassion for Israel is implied as a motive relatively few times (2:23-25; 3:7-10, 16-17) compared to the numerous times YHWH's concern for international acknowledgment is given explicitly as a motive. To say that 19:4 speaks of the mercy and kindness of God as the reason for Israel's election, while neglecting to mention YHWH's international purposes, fails to recognize where the weight of the text lies. It would seem that Childs' interpretation of 19:4 comes in large part from the influence of the gospel/law paradigm, which, as we have seen, Childs has in mind as he approaches Exodus (see above, n. 7).

suggest that YHWH's commitment to be known among the nations is central to the giving of the law at Sinai. However, the manner in which YHWH seeks to bring this about shifts. In the exodus material, Israel was largely passive as YHWH manifested himself in the sight of the world directly through signs and wonders. In the Sinai material, Israel plays an active role as YHWH seeks to make himself known to the nations, Israel reflecting his character through obedience to his law. In this way, the Sinai material serves the missionary purposes of YHWH.

Understanding the missionary thrust of the law also shows how the wilderness material fits into this larger framework. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the wilderness material is a preparation for Sinai means that a full theological understanding of the wilderness material must await an examination of the Sinai material. While YHWH's missionary concerns are apparent to a certain extent by the appearance of the "I am YHWH" formula in the wilderness, the role that the wilderness material plays in YHWH's missionary purposes can now be more thoroughly appreciated. The central concern of the giving of the law was that Israel might, through her obedience, serve as witness to the character of YHWH among the nations. The wilderness material shows how YHWH prepared Israel for the giving of the law by training her unto obedience. If the central concern of the law was for YHWH to be known to the nations, then it can safely be said that Israel's preparation to that end shares the same theological concern.

This wider reading of Exodus, particularly the connection between the exodus material and the Sinai material, can be appreciated on a smaller level by again examining 19:4-6. YHWH's speech begins in 19:4 with a summary and interpretation of 1:1—15:21, with what might be called a statement of gospel: "you have seen what I did to the

Egyptians and how I carried you upon the wings of eagles and I brought you to myself.” What might be called a statement of law follows in 19:5-6: “and now, if you listen attentively to my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession, distinct from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” While it might (and perhaps should) be argued that the categories of law and gospel do justice to neither 19:4 nor 19:5-6, the juxtaposition of these two concepts in a statement so central to who Israel is shows that they are meant to be seen in relationship. In other words, on this smaller level, a canonical reading of Exodus 19:4-6 requires the interpreter to connect 1:1—15:21 and 19—24, or gospel and law.

It is precisely this relationship, however, that the categories of gospel and law tend to obscure. Von Rad’s statement that gospel and law are “the two fundamental propositions of the whole message of the Bible” illustrates the point. The term “fundamental” implies that something is largely independent and self-sufficient, a basic principle behind which one cannot go. That two concepts may be fundamental does not preclude any relationship or correspondence, but their fundamental nature limits the depth of that relationship. The practice of pairing cities may serve as a helpful analogy. Dundee may have a relationship with Alexandria, Virginia by virtue of being a sister city. The relationship between Dundee and Alexandria, however, will never be as deep as the relationship between Dundee and Edinburgh by virtue of the simple fact that there is a more fundamental reality at work between Dundee and Edinburgh: Scotland. This does not imply that Dundee and Edinburgh are the same, only that they share a unity that will never be true of Dundee and Alexandria. In other words, while one may try to speak of

Dundee and Alexandria together, fundamentally they are two separate entities. It is this type of independence that seems to be at work in the manner in which von Rad articulates the relationship between law and gospel in his essay. One can certainly speak about them alongside one another, but their independence precludes a relationship of any significant depth, which accounts for the comment that God's law stands "over against" his generosity.

What, then, is the relationship between law and gospel in Exodus? The recognition that the same missionary concern is the fundamental impulse for both law and gospel has the effect of significantly easing the tension between the two. If this basic missionary commitment is appreciated, no longer need YHWH's righteousness be understood in opposition to (or in significant tension with) his generosity. Rather than standing in conflict, the notions of gospel and law can be seen as two complementary ways that YHWH seeks to bring about his missionary commitment to be known as God amongst the nations. Or, to put it another way, both are means to the same end. YHWH's spectacular deliverance of Israel was the means to the end that the nations would acknowledge YHWH as God. Israel's obedience to the law serves the same goal. The question, ultimately, revolves around what one sees as the center of gravity in the book of Exodus. If one sees the central concern in Exodus as Israel, then the fact that YHWH deals with Israel in one way in 1:1—15:21, by deliverance, and in another way in 19—24, by placing Israel under law, presents a tension. One can handle the tension in the way von Rad does, speaking of "the redemptive activity of One who lays upon man the obligation to obey his will." However, although the two concepts are spoken of in the same sentence, it is apparent that the tension still stands, which again is why von Rad

speaks of YHWH's generosity as "over against" YHWH's righteousness. However, if the center of gravity in Exodus is YHWH, and particularly YHWH's missionary purposes in the world, the fact that YHWH handles Israel differently in different circumstances is not a problem. As suggested above, YHWH's delivering Israel from Egypt and his giving her the law can be seen as complementary ways of achieving the same objective. Reading Exodus this way has the effect of calling the categories of law and gospel into question.

Perhaps a more helpful way of speaking of the issues at stake is suggested by Seitz. Although made in a discussion of Genesis, Seitz' words concerning Israel and mission are apt here: "mission has to do with the simple existence of Israel and the charge that gives its existence sense and purpose, a charge entailing election and promise."<sup>168</sup> Seitz' comment suggests that Israel exists for a purpose, which in effect subordinates Israel to YHWH as the center of gravity. Because this is so, the term "charge" (with overtones of law) and the term "promise" (with overtones of gospel) can be spoken of with no sense of tension. The election of Israel, realized equally in the deliverance from Egypt and in the giving of the law, incorporates within it the sense of both gospel and law. And, as Seitz suggests, Israel's (missionary) charge requires both. Understood as such, gospel and law need not stand in opposition to one another, or even in tension, but are seen as complementary means to the same end.

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<sup>168</sup> Seitz, "Old Testament," 151.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE TABERNACLE INSTRUCTIONS (EXODUS 25—31)

#### PROBLEMS WITH TABERNACLE INTERPRETATION

Concerning the rationale for the genre of the Biblical commentary, Childs makes the following comment:

Because the Bible was traditionally understood as containing the very oracles of God, no word was regarded as superfluous. It was, therefore, thoroughly rational to argue that if Genesis needed only one chapter for the creation of the heavens and the earth but Exodus needed thirteen to describe the tabernacle, the Exodus chapters must contain multitudes of hidden mysteries calling for the most detailed commentary."<sup>1</sup>

What makes Childs' comment so interesting is that theological study of the tabernacle texts of Exodus has often gone in the opposite direction from detailed commentary. For instance, Fretheim gives 19 of 321 pages to the tabernacle material,<sup>2</sup> Enns gives 54 of 602,<sup>3</sup> Cole gives 29 of 239,<sup>4</sup> Davies 34 of 253,<sup>5</sup> and Hyatt 47 of 345.<sup>6</sup> Unable to find much theological fruit in the tabernacle, Gowan gives it only 4 pages in his 297 page

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<sup>1</sup> Brevard S. Childs, "The Genre of the Biblical Commentary as Problem and Challenge," in *Tehillah Le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. Mordechai Cogan, Barry L Eichler, and Jeffrey H Tigay (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 185-86.

<sup>2</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 263-78, 313-16. Similarly, Fretheim gives only one paragraph to the tabernacle in his 20 page overview of Exodus in *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 119-20.

<sup>3</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 506-61, 598-602.

<sup>4</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, 188—212, 233-39.

<sup>5</sup> Davies, *Exodus*, 198-229, 249-52.

<sup>6</sup> Hyatt, *Exodus*, 258-300, 328-33.

theological commentary.<sup>7</sup> Even Childs, despite the above comment, gives only 54 of his 659 pages to discuss the tabernacle material.<sup>8</sup> On a broader level, it is noteworthy that Gerstenberger's recent OT theology does not discuss the tabernacle, despite the fact that more is written on the tabernacle than any other object in the Pentateuch.<sup>9</sup> While admittedly these are a few of the more extreme examples, it is nonetheless common<sup>10</sup> in Exodus commentaries for the amount of space devoted to the tabernacle material to be proportionally less than the amount of space the tabernacle is given in Exodus itself.<sup>11</sup> Further, even where given proportional attention, the tabernacle sections are often unintegrated theologically in the rest of the book of Exodus,<sup>12</sup> either because the tabernacle material is not always dealt with from a theological perspective, or because (in the case of commentaries) the genre of the Biblical commentary does not necessarily lend itself to sustained theological integration, since one can comment upon multiple texts without relating them.

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<sup>7</sup> Gowan, *Theology*, 183-86.

<sup>8</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 512-52, 625-38.

<sup>9</sup> Gerstenberger, *Theologies*.

<sup>10</sup> This is generally true of Christian commentators, and more particularly of Protestant scholars. Jewish commentators, as a whole, are far more interested in the cultic sections of Exodus. Cf. Cassuto, *Exodus*, Jacob, *Second Book*, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (idem, *Exodus*), as well as the more exhaustive work by Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), and Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology*, vol. 14, University of California Publications near Eastern Studies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 62, speak of the tabernacle material as "the climax of the book [of Exodus], which is also perhaps the high point of the whole five books together."

<sup>11</sup> It must be acknowledged that one reason that tabernacle sections are often not given proportional space in commentaries compared to the actual text in Exodus is that the construction of the tabernacle in 35—40 largely repeats the instructions of 25—31. It is therefore natural that, in an effort to avoid tedium, some commentators would avoid repeating many of their observations.

<sup>12</sup> Notable examples of work that has explicitly understood the theology of the tabernacle in the wider context of Exodus include Davies, "Theology," and Angel Manuel Rodríguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," *AUSS* 24 (1986): 127-45. Despite his subtitle, Ralph W. Klein, "Back to the Future: The Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus," *Int* 50 (1996), focuses mainly on the connections between the tabernacle chapters and 32—34, but gives little attention to connections with the rest of Exodus.

Reasons for the general theological neglect of the tabernacle section are several. First, there is the issue of style. Compared with much of the narrative in the OT, the tabernacle sections can seem monotonous, which explains why some modern English translations relegate the tabernacle material to small print.<sup>13</sup> Not a few scholars have shared the assessment, not only of the tabernacle, but of the so-called priestly material in general.<sup>14</sup> Wellhausen, for example, made no effort to hide his distaste for the style of the priestly material, calling it “dead dogma of the past,” “dry history,” and “historical pedantry.”<sup>15</sup> Von Rad, despite his theological appreciation of the priestly literature, wrote “[t]he language is succinct and ponderous, pedantic and lacking artistry.”<sup>16</sup> Even Haran, whose enduring scholarly work has been in the area of the tabernacle, and who obviously has great respect for the priestly literature, described the tabernacle material as a “long-winded description.”<sup>17</sup> Referring not so much to style as to the existence of such a structure, Klein writes “[t]here is something off-putting about an ancient tent shrine, whose materials include such an enormous quantity of gold and silver, that forms the center of an elaborate, stylized, and hierarchical camp. The exclusivity of the Aaronic priesthood and the sharp hiatus between clergy and laity are also not in conformity with some current tastes.”<sup>18</sup> Rosenzweig raises the issue of how modern tastes can obscure the force of Hebrew style by way of an interesting example concerning a particular German

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. the RSV (The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> For a short survey of the largely negative attitudes toward the Priestly literature, see McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 1-8.

<sup>15</sup> Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 337-38.

<sup>16</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 26.

<sup>17</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 150. Jacob, *Second Book*, 760, argues in the other direction, contending that the tabernacle sections are actually remarkably free from details (e.g. the lack of any specificity regarding the tabernacle utensils, the thickness of the kipporet, or a description of any working procedures). These omissions have been one of the reasons many have denied the historical existence of the tabernacle in the Mosaic age. Cf. Driver, *Exodus*, 426ff., Hyatt, *Exodus*, 260.

<sup>18</sup> Klein, “Back to the Future,” 274.

translation of the tabernacle material. Since the following example is pertinent both here and later in this discussion, it is worth quoting at length:

The powerful divine speech of chapters 25 through 31, the word concerning the vision vouchsafed to Moses, explaining to what end, to what “service of labor” his people are to be led after their “service of bondage,” is in the translation under discussion transposed from its austere, concrete sublimity to a relentlessly chatty idiom that scribbles over all the original clarity of line. It is as if a sergeant attempted in his giving orders to “explicate” the classical commands of field duty ordinance. An evident example: these chapters are shot through with the word “made,” which is as it were the theme of this great fugue. The Kautzsch translation, no doubt to keep the reader from boredom, undertakes to render the word in charmingly diverse guises—sometimes as “erected,” sometimes as “produced,” sometimes as “put up,” sometimes as “worked.” It has not the least suspicion that what happens in consequence is the loss not “only” of the form but also of the entire meaning of the vision, which in fact looks toward the original model of the “Dwelling” created on Sinai in the six days of cloudy darkness ... as a human replica of the divine act of creation.”<sup>19</sup>

Further, there is in the text itself a noticeable lack of theological comment through most of the tabernacle section, which has influenced the kinds of questions scholars have asked. Questions concerning the tabernacle’s historical authenticity, its construction, and composition of the tabernacle texts have frequently occupied much attention, often at the expense of asking theological questions.<sup>20</sup> For instance, although he gives 61 of 283 pages to the tabernacle sections, Noth is mostly concerned with technical questions concerning the composition of the text, giving practically no theological attention to the section.<sup>21</sup> While there may be, in some cases, an appropriate exegetical reserve, not speculating where the text appears silent, the problem often seems to be an uncertainty as to the value of the details, which leads many to dismiss their importance. For instance,

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<sup>19</sup> Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:232-33, described it this way: “[t]he various pieces of cultic material are to a large extent presented with such bare objectivity, and so much without any addition which gives the theological significance, that the task of interpretation passes over unawares from the hands of the theologian to the Biblical archaeologist.”

<sup>21</sup> Particularly noteworthy is Noth’s failure to deal with 25:8 and 29:42b-46, arguably the two most important theological statements in the 25—31. Noth does not comment upon 25:8, and dismisses 29:42b-46 as “somewhat unskillfully composed of familiar expressions of P language” (Noth, *Exodus*, 233).

Klein, explicitly attempting to draw theological fruit from the tabernacle section within Exodus, writes “[i]t is not the details of the tabernacle account that make up its significance, but the underlying notion that God elects to be present with God’s people.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Balentine writes “[t]he focus of the texts themselves is not on cubits and figures, numbers and shapes, but rather on the indwelling presence of God that a sanctuary and its holy accoutrements enables a community to celebrate.”<sup>23</sup> While undoubtedly a major theme in these chapters, to focus primarily on God’s presence among his people raises the question: why the details?<sup>24</sup> The importance of YHWH’s dwelling among his people could have been conveyed without the painstaking detail of tabernacle furniture, specifics concerning types of fabric, or the specific garments woven for Aaron. The implication is that the details are of small, if any, theological importance.<sup>25</sup> Although not often said explicitly, the comparative silence of much modern theological scholarship on the tabernacle material suggests a general assent with Driver’s remark that the priestly writer “nowhere touches upon the deeper problems of theology.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Klein, "Back to the Future," 264.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 137. Balentine cites Ex. 25:8, 22; 29:45 in support of his statement.

<sup>24</sup> Blum, *Studien*, 302: “Gerade die intensität und Ausführlichkeit der Anweisungen gibt zugleich aber Fragen auf, steht sie doch in einem fast schon umgekehrt proportionalen Verhältnis zu deren »praktischer« Applikabilität für die Leser.”

<sup>25</sup> Church lectionaries likewise reflect this assessment. Of the 3 year lectionary cycles for public worship (Roman Catholic, Revised Common, and Episcopal), only the Episcopal lectionary includes any material (an optional reading) from the tabernacle sections (28:1-4, 9-10, 29-30 is an option for the seventh Sunday of Easter. Of the 37 different readings from Exodus in the Episcopal Daily Office, only 3 [25:1-22; 28:1-4, 30-38; 40:18-38] are from the tabernacle sections). The absence of any meaningful interaction with the tabernacle texts in church lectionaries again suggests a difficulty integrating the tabernacle sections with the rest of the Bible. Cf. the refreshing candor of Fretheim, *Pentateuch*, 108: “the purpose of the sheer volume of detail presented, much of which is repeated in chaps. 35-40 is not at all clear.” Despite both the above comment and the slight number of pages he gives to the tabernacle sections, Fretheim is one of the more theologically rich commentators on the tabernacle material in Exodus.

<sup>26</sup> S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913), 129.

Another reason for the comparative neglect of the tabernacle section, particularly in reference to the wider context of Exodus, has to do with Wellhausen's estimation of the tabernacle texts as a fictional retrojection into Israel's history.<sup>27</sup> Denying them any historical credibility, Wellhausen judged the tabernacle texts to be a priestly fiction, created for political ends. For Wellhausen, the prophets represented the real accomplishment of Israelite religion—the tabernacle material told more about self-serving motivation of the priests than Israel's history. Not surprisingly, Wellhausen naturally found little of theological worth in the tabernacle material. Although recent scholarship has modified Wellhausen's position at points, particularly due to archaeological discoveries, Wellhausen's influence has endured.<sup>28</sup> It is not surprising that a general neglect of the tabernacle material, particularly from a theological perspective, has persisted among many.

Another, and related, reason that the tabernacle chapters have been largely unintegrated into the wider theology of Exodus is the modern tendency to read the tabernacle chapters in the context of P, rather than in the context of Exodus. That P is generally considered to be the most easily discernible and definable Pentateuchal source

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<sup>27</sup> Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 38-51. Wellhausen's argument, based largely on an internal literary investigation of the OT, is broadly founded upon the premise that Israel lacked the skill and the materials to construct such a structure, and the scant references to the tabernacle and centralized worship in Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. Echoing, and elaborating upon, Wellhausen's argument are Driver, *Exodus*, 426-32, and Hyatt, *Exodus*, 258-64. In the last century Wellhausen's thesis has been challenged, particularly in light of archaeological discovery. Arguments for the general historicity of the tabernacle include Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 196-200, Frank Moore Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle in Light of Recent Research," in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times: Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem, 14-16 March 1977*, ed. Avraham Biran (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, 1981) and Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Desert Tabernacle: Pure Fiction or Plausible Account?," *BRev* 16 (2000): 14-21.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Klein, "Back to the Future," 264: "[n]o critical scholar accepts that the account in Exodus is a literal account of the desert shrine."

further encourages a search for the theology of P.<sup>29</sup> While there is much to be said for such an approach, given that the cultic material in Exodus—Numbers provides a rich context to study the tabernacle and its worship, it nonetheless has the effect of divorcing cultic concerns in Exodus from the rest of the narrative. Further, the fact that P is generally considered to be post-exilic has caused many to view the tabernacle chapters from that vantage point. The historical distance suggested by such a late dating has, for some, removed it from the wider context of Exodus and placed it in the context of exilic and post-exilic concerns.

Of course, not all interpreters have agreed with the largely negative assessment of the theology of the tabernacle material. Durham argues that “[the tabernacle] chapters are theological in their origin, theological in their statement, and theological even in their arrangement.”<sup>30</sup> Gorman suggests that ritual was, for the priests, the primary means for theological reflection.<sup>31</sup> Implicitly responding to Wellhausen’s negative view of the priestly material in relationship to the prophets, Jacob wrote “[t]he so-called Priestly Code, with its sanctuary, represented the crown and noblest expression of prophecy, just as Moses was the greatest of the prophets.”<sup>32</sup> And Longacre writes “although the surface texture is that of a set of rather detailed and involved instructions, the purpose of the construction, the institution of the regular worship of Yahweh at a central sanctuary—albeit a tent—is presented as something glorious and fraught with deep religious

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<sup>29</sup> For an argument for P as a complete and separate narrative, in light of more recent trends in Pentateuchal criticism, see Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Priestly Account of the Theophany and Lawgiving at Sinai,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox, et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 353.

<sup>31</sup> Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*, vol. 91, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 60. Cf. the evaluation of Eichrodt, *Theology*, 1:98-102, that the cult was an integral aspect of spiritual communion with God in the OT.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 759, italics original.

meaning.”<sup>33</sup> Recognizing the theological importance of the tabernacle material does not, of course, indicate that the theological meaning of the details is readily apparent, or even discernible in all cases. But it does mean that it is appropriate to approach the tabernacle material with the expectation of discovering theological significance.<sup>34</sup> In seeking to draw out the theological significance of the tabernacle (the main problem this chapter seeks to address), we will draw theological conclusions along the way as we address different aspects of the tabernacle. In other words, we will address the problem in the course of the chapter, and will therefore not end with a formal conclusion.

One comment is relevant before proceeding. Perhaps more than the other sections of Exodus, it is with particular respect to the tabernacle section that the limitations of restricting the inquiry to a particular book become evident. Because similar concerns in Leviticus and Numbers serve to fill out and expand the cultic material introduced in Exodus, the effort to limit our observations to Exodus means that at times the theological yield concerning the cult in Exodus is less than it might be in the context of a wider investigation.<sup>35</sup> However, as we will find, there is still a great deal of theological fruit to be found in the tabernacle material in Exodus alone, which in the course of a larger investigation (of the cult, the Pentateuch, or the OT) can (and should) be expanded upon. Further, limiting the enquiry to Exodus alone will suggest theological themes that might

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<sup>33</sup> Robert E. Longacre, "Building for the Worship of God," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter Bodine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 24. Although concerning Leviticus, given the exhaustive work he has done in the area of Israel's cult, Milgrom's words are relevant: "[t]heology is what Leviticus is all about. It pervades every chapter and almost every verse. It is not expressed in pronouncements but embedded in rituals." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, vol. 3, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Although generally avoided by modern interpreters, traditionally symbolic interpretation was an important means of seeking the theological significance of the tabernacle details. For a discussion of symbolic interpretation of the tabernacle, and its difficulties, see Childs, *Exodus*, 537-39. Childs cites K. C. W. Bähr, *Symbolik des Mosaischen Cultus I-II*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1874), as the most significant modern defender of symbolic interpretation.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Wenham, *Leviticus*, 18, finds it theologically inappropriate to allow canonical boundaries to isolate sections of cultic law.

be missed if the cultic material in Leviticus and Numbers were included. The fact that Exodus 40:34-38 seems to suggest closure of many themes in Exodus warrants this treatment, even if it does not exclude wider investigations.

## THE THEOLOGY OF THE TABERNACLE

What is the tabernacle material of Exodus meant to communicate? Or, since our primary concern is theological, the question may be asked, what is the tabernacle material meant to convey concerning the nature and character of God? This chapter will explore, theologically, the often neglected details of the tabernacle, asking what the tabernacle details communicate about YHWH. We will focus on three particular aspects of YHWH's nature: YHWH as holy, YHWH as Israel's king, and YHWH as cosmic king. The chapter will conclude by examining two direct theological statements which do appear in the tabernacle material.

### *YHWH as Holy: The Materials and Space of the Tabernacle*

As mentioned above, the modest amount of theological work done on the tabernacle is in some respects understandable given that the tabernacle material gives little in the way of theological comment. In other words, some of the lack of detailed theological work on the tabernacle may be the result of exegetical reserve on the part of many interpreters. However, if the sheer abundance of technical detail has any significance, it warrants careful investigation. Indeed it has been argued that the

technicalities and repetitions in the tabernacle sections are due to the heightened significance of the tabernacle within Exodus.<sup>36</sup>

The most significant modern work concerning the details of the tabernacle has been done by Menahem Haran. Taking the details concerning the tabernacle construction and the regulations associated with tabernacle worship, Haran has drawn together some important observations concerning the nature of the tabernacle. While not always explicit in drawing out the theology of the tabernacle from his work, it is a short step from many of Haran's observations to their theological implications. The following discussion concerning the details of the tabernacle is largely gleaned from Haran's work.<sup>37</sup>

Many of Haran's observations concerning the materials and workmanship used in the construction of the tabernacle, as well as the rules concerning access to different areas of the tabernacle, revolve around a dual system: the eastern axis and concentric circles.<sup>38</sup> According to the system of eastern axis, as one proceeds from the outside to the inner parts of the tabernacle (all through entrances facing east), the types of fabrics and metals grow more precious. For instance, the outer tent curtains are less magnificent in fabric and workmanship than the outer veil of the tabernacle, which is less magnificent than the inner curtains and, then, the *paroket* veil. The principle at work in the system of concentric circles is that the closer one moves to the Holy of Holies (containing the ark and the *kiporet*), the more elaborate and magnificent the materials and workmanship

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<sup>36</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> See particularly Haran, *Temples*, 149-224. Studies relying largely upon Haran's work include Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, and Gorman, *Ideology*. Although Haran does not interact with his work, mention should be made here of the work of Benno Jacob (*Second Book*), who likewise gives the tabernacle details careful treatment.

<sup>38</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 164-65.

involved. Underlying both these observations is the premise that the more precious the materials and more intricate the workmanship involved, the more important the object, and therefore the greater level of sanctity assigned to it.<sup>39</sup>

Two factors go into assessing the relative sanctity of fabrics associated with the tabernacle: types of thread and types of workmanship. The types of thread used in the fabrics of the tabernacle (in order of relative value) are blue, purple, and scarlet-dyed wool, goats' hair, and linen. The text also mentions three different types of workmanship (or embroidery): *חשב*, *רקם*, and *ארג* workmanship. *חשב* workmanship is the most intricate, involves a mixture of threads, and includes working with figures, particularly cherubim (26:1, 31; 28:6, 8, 15, 27; 29:5; 31:4; 35:32, 35; 36:8, 35; 38:23; 39:3, 5, 8, 20). *רקם* workmanship is likewise intricate, involving a mixture of threads, but does not work with figures (26:36; 27:16; 28:39; 35:35; 36:37; 38:18, 23; 39:29). *ארג* workmanship involves only one kind of thread, and does not involve figures (28:32; 35:35; 39:22, 27).

The preciousness of the fabrics corresponds to the relative sanctity of particular zones in the tabernacle. The *paroket* veil, separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies, is made of the three dyed wools and linen, with *חשב* workmanship. Next are the tabernacle curtains, made from the same materials, also of *חשב* workmanship, although the proportion of expensive wools is less for the tabernacle curtains than in the *paroket* veil, thereby suggesting a descending level of sanctity.<sup>40</sup> The outer veil of the tabernacle is another step down in sanctity, for although it is made of the same materials in the same

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<sup>39</sup> In the words of Jacob, *Second Book*, 760, “[n]obility and distinction were expressed through the value and purity of the material; everything else was subordinate. Mass and proportions, form of thought, execution, purpose, and reason all were matched.”

<sup>40</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 162, argues that the difference in proportion is suggested in the respective order of materials mentioned. The finely twisted linen appears first in 26:1 (36:35) concerning the tabernacle curtains, and last in 26:31(36:8) concerning the *paroket* veil.

order as the *paroket* veil, the weave is of רקם workmanship, and therefore does not include cherubim (26:36; 27:16; 36:37; 38:18). Finally, the tent curtains are of (undyed) goats' hair (26:7; 36:14), and the court hangings are made solely of linen (27:9; 38:9).

The same principle of relative sanctity can be seen in the selection of metals used in particular sections of the tabernacle.<sup>41</sup> The pillars of the *paroket* veil are overlaid with gold, with golden hooks and silver bases. Further out, the pillars of the outer veil are similar with their gold overlay and golden hooks, but have bronze, not silver, bases. Only the inner furniture of the tabernacle and its vessels are specifically to be made of, or overlaid with, “pure gold” (זהב טהור, 25:11, 17, 24, 29, 31, 36, 38; 30:3; 37:2, 6, 11, 16, 22, 26). Gold is not found in the court, while bronze, the least precious of the metals mentioned in Exodus, cannot be found in the Holy of Holies.<sup>42</sup> Again, the preciousness of the materials corresponds to the proximity to the Holy of Holies.

Conforming to the gradations noted above, the priestly vestments exhibit the same pattern of relative sanctity. The garments worn exclusively by Aaron are of a superior quality both in materials and workmanship. The ephod (28:6-12; 39:2-7) and the breastpiece (28:15-20; 39:8-21) are both constructed of the same materials as the *paroket* veil, with the same השב workmanship, with the breastpiece being attached to the ephod with rings of gold.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the gold woven into Aaron's garments is likewise “pure gold,” as well as the chains joining the breastpiece to the ephod (28:14, 22; 39:15), the bells (39:25), and the diadem (28:36; 39:30). On the other hand, the garments worn by the rest of the priests (which Aaron also wore) are of inferior quality, both in materials

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<sup>41</sup> For a helpful table illustrating which metals are used in which zones, see Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 102.

<sup>42</sup> Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 167, notes two differences in that the ephod did not have cherubim worked into it, and that gold was the primary ingredient in the ephod.

and in workmanship. The regular priestly garments are made of linen, rather than dyed wool. The tunic is made of ארג workmanship (Aaron's is distinct in that it only is chequered). Aaron's girdle is of רקם workmanship, consisting of linen and dyed wools,<sup>44</sup> whereas the priests' girdles are given no such specific comment (28:39-40; 39:29).

The same principles that apply to the tabernacle materials and workmanship and the priestly vestments likewise apply to the zones of the tabernacle. As alluded to above, the different zones in the tabernacle are associated with differing levels of sanctity. The holy place, the inner furniture, and the altar of burnt offering are anointed with the holy anointing oil and are therefore intrinsically holy, thereby communicating holiness to anything that comes into contact with them (the altar, 29:37, the tabernacle, its furniture, and its articles, 30:22-29; 40:9-11; cf. Ezek 44:19). Unlike defilement, this principle of "contagious holiness" cannot be reversed, which puts those (except priests) who come in contact with the holy things at the risk of death.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, a non-priest may not eat of the ram of ordination (29:33), or make any compound of the holy oil (30:32) or holy incense (30:37). In the last two cases, the penalty for transgression of the holy by the common Israelite is being cut off from the people. Even the priests, protected by virtue of being anointed with the holy oil and thereby being lifted into the same realm of sanctity,<sup>46</sup> are in danger of death under certain circumstances (28:42-43). It is therefore imperative that no one but the priests, who have themselves been elevated to a like sanctity by being anointed with the holy oil, come into contact with the holy place or the

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<sup>44</sup> The composition and workmanship of Aaron's girdle is similar to that of the tabernacle curtains and the outer veil. Haran, *Temples*, 170.

<sup>45</sup> In explaining the irreversibility of communicated holiness, Haran, *Temples*, 176, uses the example of the censers of Korah and his people, which, having come into contact with the altar (Num 17:5 [16:40]) and become holy (17:3[16:38]), had therefore to remain in the holy sphere by being hammered out as plating for the altar by the priests. This also explains the responsibility of the priests to cover the inner furniture before the Kohathites may transport it (Num 4:5-15).

<sup>46</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 177.

holy furniture. This explains the death penalty for anyone who mixes oil like the holy oil or who applies it to a stranger (30:33).<sup>47</sup> However, because the priests have been anointed with the oil, and therefore elevated to the appropriate level of sanctity, they are in no danger when they come into contact with the holy furniture or serve in the holy place.

The effect of this careful attention to the details of different fabrics, metals, workmanship, space, and ministration is to communicate the holiness of God.<sup>48</sup> The place where YHWH appeared in the tabernacle (25:22; 30:6, 36), above the *kiporet* in the Holy of Holies, contained the most elaborate materials and workmanship precisely because such was appropriate to the importance of the space. The fact that no other zone in the tabernacle and surrounding area received commensurate materials and workmanship would have the effect of communicating that there is none like YHWH. The danger associated with the tabernacle, particularly the holy anointing oil would likewise convey that YHWH is holy. Sarna says it well:

God's holiness is the very essence of His being, and is intrinsic to Himself. The graduated sequences described above effectuate the gradual distancing from that ultimate Source of absolute holiness. Precisely because the tabernacle was constructed in the first place to give concrete, visual symbolization to the conception of God's indwelling in the community of Israel, that is, to communicate the idea of God's immanence, it was vitally important that His total independence of all materiality, His transcendence, not be compromised. The gradations of holiness are one way of articulating this, of giving voice to God's unapproachable holiness, and of emphasizing His ineffable majesty and the inscrutable mystery that He is.<sup>49</sup>

Although in Exodus the term  $\text{שָׁרֵת}$  is used predominantly in the tabernacle sections, the concept of holiness is not limited to the cult. The burden of Exodus 1—

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<sup>47</sup> Haran, *Temples*, 183, argues that, for P,  $\text{רִי}$  is simply a non-priest.

<sup>48</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 541.

<sup>49</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 205-6.

15:21 likewise has to do with YHWH's holiness. As we have seen, the manner in which YHWH handled the conflict with Pharaoh was intended to make a public distinction between YHWH and all else, "that you may know that there is none like YHWH our God" (8:6; cf. 9:14). The acknowledgment formula, "that you may know that I am YHWH" carried the implication YHWH was supreme over (and therefore distinct from) all else. In other words, holiness is at stake at 1:1—15:21, a point made explicit in Israel's song in 15:11: "Who is like you among the gods, O YHWH? Who is like you, majestic in holiness [שׁוֹרֵר], fearful in praise, doing wonders?" Consistent with what YHWH intended to communicate in the Egyptian deliverance, one of the unmistakable implications of the tabernacle details—from the magnificence of the materials most closely associated with YHWH, to the increasing restrictions of access, to the danger associated with improperly approaching YHWH—is that YHWH is distinct from all else.

### *YHWH as Israel's King: the Tabernacle and Sinai*

In addition to communicating YHWH's intrinsic holiness to Israel, the tabernacle communicated the nature of the relationship between YHWH and Israel, that YHWH ruled over Israel as her divine king. YHWH's rule over Israel is expressed primarily in terms of an association between the tabernacle and Sinai, a connection which suggests that the tabernacle continues the function of Sinai in Israel's life.

The association between the tabernacle and Sinai can be seen on several levels. First, as many have noted, there are important structural parallels between Sinai and the tabernacle.<sup>50</sup> Mt. Sinai appears to be divided into three zones, each with a particular level

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<sup>50</sup> E.g., Rodríguez, "Sanctuary Theology," 131-37, Sarna, *Exodus*, 105.

of sanctity. The first zone is the top of the mountain, where only Moses is permitted to ascend (19:20). The second zone extends upwards from the border of the mountain, but does not include the top of the mountain. Here the select group of Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders are permitted, and only after the covenant sacrifice (19:22). The third zone is the foot of the mountain, which contained an altar for burnt offerings (24:4-5) and was guarded by a border to prevent the common Israelite from ascending the mountain (19:12-13, 21-24). The tabernacle exhibits a similar tripartite structure. The Holy of Holies corresponds to the first zone in that only Moses<sup>51</sup> was permitted within its boundaries. The holy place was off limits to all but a select few, the priests, and thereby corresponds to the second zone. Finally, the outer court (27:9-19), likewise with an altar for burnt offering, is accessible to the common Israelite, and thus corresponds to the third zone of Mt. Sinai.

The fact that transgressing the boundary at the foot of the mountain and transgressing the boundaries of the tabernacle both warranted death further strengthens the parallel between the tabernacle and Sinai. As we have seen, one of the striking features of tabernacle worship is the strict separation between the holy and the common, a separation which, if not honored, puts the common Israelite in danger of death. The boundaries of Mt. Sinai have a similar cultic dimension. Cole argues that the death penalty at Sinai is essentially cultic in nature—since the mountain was holy, anything that touches the mountain must become holy.<sup>52</sup> The nature of contagious holiness, transmitted regardless of the intention, explains why both man *and* beast (which has no

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<sup>51</sup> Exodus does not explicitly envision Aaron entering the Holy of Holies, unless *שִׁמְעוֹן* in 28:29, 35, refers to the Holy of Holies, as argued by Jacob Milgrom, "The Compass of Biblical Sancta," *JQR* 65 (1975): 205-16.

<sup>52</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, 147.

intention) are subject to death upon contact with the mountain, and also accounts for YHWH's additional warning that the people not transgress the boundary at the foot of the mountain (19:21-24). As Childs explains "[t]he issue at stake is not whether God is a stuffy monarch, who does not think enough honor has been shown him.... Rather the warning is given for the sake of the people, who have no experience as yet of the dimensions of divine holiness, and lest warned will destroy themselves."<sup>53</sup>

Finally, the language associated with YHWH's descent upon Mt. Sinai has strong echoes in the tabernacle chapters. YHWH descended upon Mt. Sinai in a cloud (19:9, 16; 24:15, 16, 18), just as a cloud covered the tabernacle when the glory of YHWH filled it (40:34ff). Further, according to 24:16 the glory of YHWH dwelt, or tabernacled (וַיִּשְׁכֶּן), upon the mountain as it was covered by the cloud, making the obvious connections with the dwelling of YHWH in the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן).<sup>54</sup>

The structural and lexical similarities between Sinai and the tabernacle have led many scholars to see the tabernacle as an extension of Sinai,<sup>55</sup> an association with important theological implications. Sinai is where YHWH gave Israel his law and where Israel pledged to obey (19:8; 24:3, 7). The connection between Sinai and the tabernacle suggests that, despite the lack of direct kingship language in the tabernacle section, the tabernacle is the place where YHWH continued to exercise his reign over Israel.<sup>56</sup> That the tabernacle is associated with YHWH's ruling over Israel is further supported by two

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<sup>53</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 370.

<sup>54</sup><sup>54</sup> Ronald E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 22, finds Sinai "a literary account of a theophany of Yahweh which continued to be repeated in Israel's cultic life." Cf. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, 247.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 759, Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, 273, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 274, R. E. Averbeck, "Tabernacle," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 824, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 203, Childs, *Exodus*, 540, Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 392.

<sup>56</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 540-41.

considerations. First, 25:22 explicitly states that the meetings between Moses and YHWH in the Holy of Holies were for the purpose of YHWH commanding Israel, thereby exercising his authority over the nation.<sup>57</sup> Secondly, and more implicitly, the fact that the tablets of testimony were the only objects in the ark (25:21) suggests again a close connection between the Holy of Holies and YHWH's commanding Israel.<sup>58</sup> Noting that the image of the deity was located in the innermost shrine of temples in other Ancient Near Eastern religions, Sarna writes

[i]n Israel, with its uncompromising aniconic, imageless religion, in place of the representation of the deity came the tangible symbol of His Word—the stone tablets of the Covenant. The Ark and its contents became the focus of the collective consciousness of the community. It remained the symbol of the eternal covenant between God and the people, the record of His inescapable demands upon the individual and society in every sphere of life. It was this, not an image, that occupied the center of attention and that was at the core of the religion. This written reminder of God's revealed word constituted the sign of His presence and His indwelling in the midst of Israel. The "Ark of the Covenant," therefore, embodied one of the fundamental ideas of the religion: that it is only through His Word that true knowledge of God, the understanding of His essential nature, can be apprehended or at least pursued.<sup>59</sup>

The implication of Sarna's comment is that knowledge of YHWH could not be separated from obeying his law. As Mt. Sinai was the place where YHWH established his authority over Israel as her God, so the tabernacle was the place where YHWH practically extended and perpetuated his authority over Israel.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. 34:34, which recounts the practice of Moses returning from YHWH's presence to speak what he was commanded. The phrase "and when Moses went in... until he came out," using the verbs בא and יצא, suggests that the reference is to the Tent of Meeting, rather than Mt. Sinai, where we would expect to find the verbs עלה and ירד, which are normally used for Moses' meetings with YHWH on Mt. Sinai (19:3, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25; 24:9, 12, 13, 15, 18; 32:1, 7, 15). If 34:34 is meant to be projected forward to speak of Moses' ongoing meetings with YHWH, as Childs, *Exodus*, 534, suggests, it likely refers to the tabernacle. If not, it may refer to the Tent of Meeting in 33:7-11. This is, of course, an observation made on the canonical text. For a discussion of the critical problems associated with the 33:7-11 over and against the tabernacle, see Childs, *Exodus*, 589-93.

<sup>58</sup> The notion that the throne of YHWH was located between the cherubim and that the ark was YHWH's footstool, suggested elsewhere in the OT (Ps 99:5; 132:7; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 28:2), likewise supports the notion that the ark was associated with the rule of YHWH as king. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 209-11.

<sup>59</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 209.

Sarna's comment has important implications concerning the nature of Israel's mission. The tabernacle was the means through which YHWH dwelt among his people (25:8), most particularly in the Holy of Holies (25:22; 30:6, 36), the only place in the tabernacle where YHWH would meet with Moses. The fact that the Holy of Holies, the locus of God's presence, was associated with the law suggests that YHWH's presence was inextricably connected with the law. In her obedience to the law, Israel would encounter the presence of YHWH. To put it another way, seeking YHWH's presence meant living in obedience to his commands.<sup>60</sup> If YHWH was sought through obedience to his commands, and obedience to his commands was the means by which Israel fulfilled her intended missionary function among the nations (19:5-6), then Israel's seeking YHWH cannot be separated from her missionary function.<sup>61</sup> As Israel sought YHWH, she fulfilled her missionary function. In other words, fulfilling YHWH's purpose among the nations was not something that Israel had to do, as if it were a separate and additional task beyond seeking to live faithfully. Rather, fulfilling her missionary calling was the inevitable consequence of Israel's seeking YHWH. To seek YHWH was, necessarily, to participate in her missionary calling.

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<sup>60</sup> The connection between seeking YHWH and keeping the law is indicated perhaps most strongly in Psalm 119, where seeking YHWH and obedience to the law are often blurred together: "with my whole heart I seek you, do not let me stray from your commandments" (119:10). Cf. Psalm 1:2, Psalm 19. For essentially the same point made from the other direction, see, e.g., Jer 7:1-7.

<sup>61</sup> This is particularly important when the question of the "method" of mission in the OT is discussed. E.g., G. Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 19, comments that "[a]s to the mission of Israel in the world, the Old Testament, of course, gives no united voice, except on the fact of the mission and on the necessity of becoming and remaining a loyal 'people of God.'" This, however, is precisely the point. The method, if it can be so called, consists in faithfulness. Whatever other manifestations of Israel's missionary calling may be present in the OT, they stem from faithfulness to the law.

## *YHWH as Cosmic King: The Tabernacle as Microcosm*

Thus far we have seen how the tabernacle is the means by which YHWH rules over Israel as her divine king, serving YHWH's missionary purpose of 19:4-6 as the place where YHWH continues to give His law (25:22). The tabernacle symbolism presses further, however, suggesting a more cosmic scope to YHWH's reign than that suggested by the parallels between the tabernacle and Sinai. Here we turn to an important parallel between the tabernacle and creation, a parallel which suggests that the tabernacle represented a microcosm of the universe.

### **The Tabernacle and Creation**

Significant observations concerning the relationship between creation in Gen 1:1-2:3 and the construction of the tabernacle have been made by many.<sup>62</sup> Often cited are the following linguistic similarities:<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Studies exploring the relationship between Gen 1:1—2:3 and the tabernacle include Blum, *Studien*, 306-11, Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 18-19, Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 78-99, Gorman, *Ideology*, 39-60, Benjamin D. Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 42-44, and, focusing on cultic material more generally, Edwin Firmage, "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda," *JSOT* 82 (1999): 97-114.

<sup>63</sup> The following table, taken from Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 280, has been often replicated. Cf. Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 139, J.G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 14, Levenson, *Creation*, 85-86, Blum, *Studien*, 306-7, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 213-14, William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 41, Leder, "Reading Exodus," 18-19, and the slightly modified version in Peter Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung: Komposition und Theologie der Priesterschriftlichen Sinaigeschichte," *RB* 95 (1988): 365. Levenson, *Creation*, 86, adds Ex. 40:9-11 as another noteworthy parallel to Gen 2:3.

Creation of the world

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen 1:31).

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished (Gen 2:1).

On the seventh day God finished this work which he had done (Gen 2:2).

So God blessed the seventh day (Gen 2:3).

Construction of the Sanctuary

And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it (Exod 39:43).

Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished (Exod 39:32).

So Moses finished the work (Exod 40:33).

And Moses blessed them (Exod 39:43).

In addition to the similarities noted above, Blenkinsopp adds two further observations. First, the injunction to observe the Sabbath as a sign of both the covenant and creation concludes the section of tabernacle instructions. Secondly, the phrase *רוח אלהים*, given to Bezalel for the skilled work involved in constructing the tabernacle (Exod 31:3; 35:31, cf. 28:3) echoes the language of Genesis 1:2 prior to creation.<sup>64</sup>

The number seven likewise forges links between the tabernacle account and creation. Kearney observes that the divine instructions in Exodus 25—31 fall into seven speeches, set apart by the words “YHWH said to Moses” or (in two cases) slight variations thereof.<sup>65</sup> Kearney argues that these instructions, which end with the injunction to observe the Sabbath, correspond to the seven days of creation. Concerning the actual erection of the tabernacle, Kearney further observes seven instances of the phrase “as YHWH commanded Moses” (40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32), arguing that the phrase is an

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<sup>64</sup> The only other occurrence of *רוח אלהים* between Gen 1:2 and Exod 31:3 is in Gen 41:28, the rarity of the term suggesting an association between the two occurrences (those who take P to be their controlling context note that there is no occurrence of *רוח אלהים* between Gen 1:2 and Ex. 31:3). Cf. Levenson, *Creation*, 84, Eric E. Elnes, "Creation and Tabernacle: The Priestly Writer's 'Environmentalism'," *HBT* 16 (1994): 149.

<sup>65</sup> Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy."

intentional allusion back to the seven speeches.<sup>66</sup> While Kearney's attempt to draw exact correspondences between individual days in creation and in the construction of the tabernacle seems farfetched in places,<sup>67</sup> he appears to be on solid ground in recognizing a structural similarity between Gen 1:1—2:3 and Exod 25—31.<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Gorman notes that the number seven is important for the performance of rituals, such as the ordination of the priesthood (Exod 29:35; cf. Lev 8:33-35) and the consecration of the altar (Exod 29:37) both of which take seven days to perform.<sup>69</sup> Building upon Rosenzweig's observation concerning its importance in the tabernacle material quoted above,<sup>70</sup> it is noteworthy that the seemingly monotonous repetition of the verb עשה in the tabernacle material corresponds to its sevenfold occurrence in Genesis 1.<sup>71</sup>

The correspondences between creation and the construction of the tabernacle point to the intimate association between creation and cult, which warrants a closer look at Genesis 1.<sup>72</sup> In Genesis 1, creation consists primarily of bringing order from chaos,<sup>73</sup>

<sup>66</sup> P.J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex. 25-40," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 381.

<sup>67</sup> Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy," 376-77. E.g., in the second speech, Kearney compares "separation" of the Israelites into two categories based on age (for tax purposes) to the separation of the waters on the second day of creation. Kearney's use of Psalm 89:21 to connect the holy anointing oil to the creation of the sun and the moon seems equally questionable. Cf. Levenson's more extended critique in *Creation*, 83.

<sup>68</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 770, draws the parallel between creation and the construction of the tabernacle in a different manner, suggesting that, in 24:16, Moses was shown the תבנית of the tabernacle during the six days the cloud covered the mountain, followed by a special seventh.

<sup>69</sup> Gorman, *Ideology*, 58. Gorman notes the importance of seven days in other priestly rituals: the restoration a leper (Lev. 14:8-9), the cleansing from a discharge (Lev. 15:13, 19, 24, 28), the purification from the contamination of a corpse (Num. 6:9-10; 19:11, 12, 14, 16; 31:19), and the cleansing after the birth of a boy (Lev. 12:2).

<sup>70</sup> Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 62.

<sup>71</sup> For a more rigorous demonstration of the importance and pervasiveness of the number seven in Genesis 1:1—2:3, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 12-15.

<sup>72</sup> Although the treatment here will be limited to Genesis 1, the correspondences between the tabernacle material and creation extend further into Genesis. For connections between the tabernacle and Genesis 2, see Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *"I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood,"* ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399-404, and, for connections to the flood narrative, Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung," 352-54.

<sup>73</sup> The basic argument of Levenson's *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* is that bringing order out of chaos is the sum of creation, and that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew

moving from the chaos of Gen 1:2 (תהו ובהו) to the satisfied rest of the completed creation. Throughout Genesis 1 this order is achieved through setting boundaries and making distinctions. On days one through four, God separates: light is separated from darkness (1:3), the lower waters are separated from the upper waters (1:7), the waters are separated from the land (1:9), and the days are separated from the night (1:14, 18). On the fifth and sixth days, the birds and the water creatures, followed by the beasts, are created “according to their kinds,” an expression which implies separation and categorization. The pinnacle of creation, mankind, shows a separation of both nature and function: created as God’s image (nature), mankind is charged with naming and exercising authority over the beasts (function).

The connection between speaking and making, or creating, calls forth the recognition of YHWH’s power. YHWH commands, and his commands are obeyed,<sup>74</sup> conveyed powerfully in the simple expression ויהי כן (Gen. 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30; cf. 1:3). However, the power at work in Genesis 1 is not simply the imposition of the will of the strong upon the weak, who nonetheless had the ability to obey. For instance, a father who might command his adolescent son to stand would give no such command to his infant son, for the former is able to obey while the latter is not. YHWH’s command in creation does not come to that which is able to obey, but to that which is not. As Goldingay has observed, there is no implication that light has the ability to generate itself, that water has the inherent ability to gather itself together, or that the earth has the

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conception of creation. For a similar argument in the broader context of the Ancient Near Eastern religion, see Douglas A Knight, "Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition," in *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics*, ed. Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), particularly 138-40.

<sup>74</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 30, finds “command and execution” the central pattern of Genesis 1:1—2:4, leading to his conclusion that “[c]reation is in principle obedient to the intent of God.”

intrinsic capacity to generate plant life.<sup>75</sup> It is YHWH's command that gives the light, the water, and the earth the ability to do the thing required. In other words, YHWH's command in creation speaks to his power in a deeper way than simply imposing one's will upon already able subjects. YHWH's ability to bring about his will in the cosmos is due to power inherent in YHWH himself, rather than in the materials with which he works. The nuance is important in that it speaks to the extent of YHWH's power over the cosmos. If YHWH's rule of the cosmos is constrained by the ability of the materials to obey, his power is limited. Genesis 1, on the other hand, gives no indication of limitations upon God's power. While not said directly in Genesis 1, the creation account leaves the inference that there are no impediments to God's rule over the cosmos.<sup>76</sup>

The connection between creating and separating points to another important inference—that establishing boundaries is as important as God's speaking in bringing forth creation. As we have seen, in each day the act of creation involves separation. In fact, it might even be said that establishing boundaries is the same as bringing forth creation.<sup>77</sup> Or, to apply it to God's ruling over creation, his command and his establishing order are both essential in understanding what it means for God to rule. Just as God rules through giving commands, *God rules through establishing order.*<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Levenson, *Creation*, 3: [w]e can capture the essence of the idea of creation in the Hebrew Bible with the word "mastery." The creation narratives, whatever their length, form, or context, are best seen as dramatic visualizations of the uncompromised mastery of YHWH, God of Israel, over all else."

<sup>77</sup> Levenson, *Creation*, 122, speaks of "the process of setting up boundaries and making separations that we have come to call creation." Arvid S. Kapelrud, "Die Theologie der Schöpfung im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 164, writes (concerning P), "Schöpfung war Ordnung und Trennung." Similarly, in an obvious allusion to Genesis 1:1, Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 90 writes, "in the beginning, God ordered the heavens and the earth." Sæbø, "God's Name," 160, refers to creation theology as a theology of order.

<sup>78</sup> The importance of order in creation and in cult prompts Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 215-19, to argue for the concept of order as a possible center of OT Theology.

Levenson finds Gen 1:1—2:3 essentially cultic in nature,<sup>79</sup> arguing that through YHWH's activity of separating and ordering, he constrains and thereby controls evil. The chaos does not disappear, YHWH transforms it. The darkness is not removed, but is given precise boundaries, so that the darkness of night alternates with the light of day. As Levenson writes, in creation "God functions like an Israelite priest, making distinctions, assigning things to their proper category and assessing their fitness, and hallowing the Sabbath."<sup>80</sup> Levenson, however, presses further, suggesting that it is through the cult that YHWH continues to control evil. In a statement that one would expect to refer to explicitly cultic material (e.g. Exodus—Numbers), Levenson comments:

Among the many messages of Genesis 1:1—2:3 is this: it is through the cult that we are enabled to cope with evil, for it is the cult that builds and maintains order, transforms chaos into creation, ennobles humanity, and realizes the kingship of the God who has ordained the cult and commanded that it be guarded and practiced.<sup>81</sup>

Not only is creation dependent upon the establishment of order, order is essential in maintaining the cosmos, for without order, creation collapses back into chaos. Gorman has gone so far as to argue that the maintenance of cultic order serves the maintenance of cosmic order, for it is through the cult that sin and defilement, which Gorman argues are the two biggest threats to order in priestly thought, are dealt with and the created order restored.<sup>82</sup> The important point for the present purpose is the recognition that bringing about order through making distinctions is an essential aspect of what it means for YHWH to rule over the cosmos.

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<sup>79</sup> Levenson, *Creation*, 121-27. Cf. Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 82-95.

<sup>80</sup> Levenson, *Creation*, 127. Cf. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> Levenson, *Creation*, 127.

<sup>82</sup> Gorman, *Ideology*, 42.

Particularly with Levenson's comments in mind, we now turn to the construction of the tabernacle. In a manner much like the creation of the cosmos, the construction of the tabernacle both brings out the dual significance of speech (God's commands) and order. As noted above, the tabernacle was constructed according to the command of YHWH, a point which the narrative takes great pains to convey. Not only are the tabernacle instructions given with very specific detail,<sup>83</sup> but the narrative records that they were carried out precisely, "just as YHWH had commanded Moses" (38:22; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 42; 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). Just as the elements obeyed precisely in Genesis 1, so do the Israelites in the construction of the tabernacle. Further, as in YHWH's creation of the cosmos, Exodus implies that the tabernacle was ultimately YHWH's work. In an allusion to Genesis 1:2, the giving of the spirit of God (רוח אלהים)<sup>84</sup> to Bezalel (Exod 31:1-11; 35:31-35) suggests that the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings was something that required ability given by YHWH in order for the command to be carried out. In other words, Israel was no more able to construct the tabernacle according to YHWH's command than the תהו ובהו (waste and void) was able to form itself into an ordered creation. As in Genesis 1, YHWH's command carried with it the power for obedience.

Not just obedience, but order is apparent as well. The effect of Israel's obedience in building the tabernacle was the establishment of an orderly cultic life. As we have seen above, one of the great characteristics of the tabernacle was the manner in which it

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<sup>83</sup> Despite the detailed description of some aspects of the tabernacle's construction, there are also many essential details left out: "[w]e are faced with a unique combination of long-winded description on the one hand and total omission of various particulars on the other" (Haran, *Temples*, 150). The omission of important aspects of the construction is another reason that the tabernacle's historical credibility has been questioned (e.g., Driver, *Exodus*, 426).

<sup>84</sup> Concerning the issues involved in the translation of רוח אלהים, see William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1-2:3*, vol. 132, SBLDS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 75-77.

expressed order, separating the holy from the common (or the holier), distinguishing between Aaron, the priests, and the people, and distinguishing between kinds of incense and oils, fabrics, and spaces. On the most basic level, the tabernacle had the effect of separating YHWH from the people, even as he dwelt in their midst. Just as YHWH rules through establishing order and making distinctions in Genesis 1, so he rules through establishing order and making distinctions in the tabernacle.

The connections between creation and the tabernacle suggest that they are to be understood in light of one another. For instance, von Rad finds it impossible to understand the tabernacle if divorced from the background of creation:

The fact that this history of cultic institutions begins with the creation of the world shows the tremendous theological claim made by P. Obviously then the only appropriate way of treating the worship of Israel is to take it in the light of this background—only then is everything set in due proportion. P is utterly serious in wanting to show that the cult which entered history in the people of Israel is the goal of the origin and evolution of the world. Creation itself was designed to lead to this Israel.<sup>85</sup>

Von Rad's quotation raises the important issue of exactly what the connection between creation and the tabernacle is meant to convey. While surely correct that the tabernacle is incomprehensible apart from the background of creation, to suggest that the goal of creation was Israel and its cultic life runs the risk of seeing creation in a manner too Israel-specific than is warranted. While von Rad finds the rationale for creation in Israel,<sup>86</sup> it can also be argued that Israel finds its rationale in creation. Knierim's question is pertinent here: "whether the purpose of the creation of the world is the history

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<sup>85</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:233-34. Similarly, Blenkinsopp, "Structure of P," 279.

<sup>86</sup> As mentioned in chapter 4, von Rad found the historical core of the Pentateuch in the *credo* of Deut 26:5b-9, in close relationship with Deut 4:20-24 and Josh 24:2b-13. Working from the standpoint that these passages encapsulate the core of the Hexateuch, von Rad argues for salvation and election as the central doctrines of Israel's faith, with creation following as a later development, and serving the ancillary function of undergirding those central doctrines. See von Rad's discussions in *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 3-8, *Genesis*, 43-44, and *Old Testament Theology*, 136-53.

and existence of Israel, or whether the purpose of Israel's history and existence is to point to and actualize the meaning of creation."<sup>87</sup> If the latter, the connection between creation and the tabernacle implies that Israel's worship life serves God's original purposes in creation. Seen in such a manner, the universal quality of God's purposes comes to the fore. As Köhler has written, the question "[f]rom where does the history of God's people derive its meaning?" is answered by "God has given the history of His people its meaning thorough creation."<sup>88</sup> Raised again are the issues of particularity and universality, and the manner in which they relate to one another. Ultimately, it is probably unwise to press the distinction so far as to choose between the two. The relationship is likely dialectical.<sup>89</sup> However, returning to von Rad's connection between cult and creation, at the very least it must be recognized that failing to see Israel's existence serving God's purposes in creation run the risk of distorting the meaning of Israel's cultic life, and thus the theological significance of the tabernacle.

While the term "king" or "rule" is never used in the tabernacle section, the above parallels between the tabernacle and suggest that the tabernacle expressed YHWH's rule over the universe. Just as the cosmos conformed to YHWH's exact specifications ("obeyed") in being brought into order in Genesis 1, so the tabernacle was erected and ordered according to YHWH's precise specifications in Exod 35—40. As the above quotations of Levenson and von Rad suggest, the tabernacle serves both as a reenactment of creation as well as an extension of YHWH's purposes in creation. This recognition has

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<sup>87</sup> Knierim, *Task*, 181. Cf. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 100-1.

<sup>88</sup> Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 87. Cf. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 100-1.

<sup>89</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 101, captures well the importance of this dialectic: "[t]he people of God is always open to overestimating its own significance, and also to underestimating it. When it flourished, it can forget that its *raison d'être* relates to YHWH's purpose for the world and can begin to think it is important in its own right. When it crashes, too, it can forget its place in YHWH's purpose for the world, and infer from its assumed insignificance that YHWH could let it go out of existence."

led many scholars to see the tabernacle as a microcosm of the universe, a miniature world over which YHWH rules as he does over the cosmos.<sup>90</sup> Again, concerning the correspondences between the tabernacle and creation, Levenson writes:

Collectively, the function of these correspondences is to underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, Goldingay comments:

While the whole world (heaven and earth) is God's home, the sanctuary represents God's home in microcosm.... God will dwell in this microcosm of what the cosmos was designed to be and what it therefore is in its essential nature, a place where everything has its place and is in order, in keeping with God's intention for the whole cosmos. Here there is one world, with everyone and everything in their place.<sup>92</sup>

The tabernacle, then, represents all that the cosmos was created to be: YHWH ruling over the universe as king, with all creation in appropriate obedience.

### **The Tabernacle as Model of the Heavenly Dwelling**

Related to the notion that the tabernacle was a microcosm of the universe is the notion that the tabernacle was constructed according to the תבנית of the heavenly sanctuary. According to Ex. 25:9, 40 Moses was commanded to build the tabernacle and its furnishings according to the תבנית shown him on the mountain:

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<sup>90</sup> E.g. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 268-71, Leder, "Reading Exodus," Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 395-96, Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1980), 35-42, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 213-15, and particularly Levenson, *Creation*, 78-99. The notion of the tabernacle as a microcosm of the universe goes back at least as far as Philo (*Life of Moses* 2, 88, 101-5, 126) and Josephus (Ant. 3.122-24, 179-87), although each relied more heavily on allegory than does Levenson, whose argument is based more on comparisons of biblical texts. For a thorough argument concerning the tabernacle as microcosm, from a Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern perspective see Levenson, *Creation*, 78-99.

<sup>91</sup> Levenson, *Creation*, 86. See also Fretheim, *Exodus*, 271: "The tabernacle is the world order as God intended writ small in Israel." For a more general discussion concerning Biblical law as the expression of the laws of nature established in creation, see Levenson, "Theologies of Commandment," 28-32.

<sup>92</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 396.

According to all that I show you concerning the תבנית of the tabernacle and the תבנית of all its vessels, thus you shall make it...and you shall see and you shall make it בתבניתם which is being shown to you on the mountain.

The exact nature of תבנית in these verses, however, is not immediately clear. Taken alongside 26:30<sup>93</sup> and 27:8 (cf. Num. 8:4) which likewise refer to what Moses was shown on the mountain (albeit without the word תבנית),<sup>94</sup> interpreters have arrived at different understandings of תבנית.

In an extended excursus on Ex. 25:40, Davidson finds that attempts to discern the meaning of תבנית fall into six categories:<sup>95</sup>

1. a model of the earthly sanctuary,
2. a blueprint of the earthly sanctuary,
3. a copy of the heavenly sanctuary which serves as a model,
4. a blueprint of the heavenly sanctuary which serves as a model,
5. the heavenly sanctuary itself which serves as a model,
6. subjective inspiration which serves as the model.

While acknowledging that none of the above suggestions can claim certainty, he argues on the basis of lexical and larger contextual observations that תבנית refers to a heavenly sanctuary. Noting that 11<sup>96</sup> of the 20 uses of תבנית (leaving 25:9, 40 aside) refer unambiguously to a solid structure (copies of an original), and that Köhler and Baumgartner categorize the remaining occurrences of תבנית under the heading “model,” Davidson rules out blueprint or subjective inspiration (2, 4, 6).<sup>97</sup> Whether תבנית refers to

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<sup>93</sup> Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung," 353-54, sees great theological significance in the vocabulary of 26:30, arguing that the unusual use of the verb קום (rather than עשה) suggests important parallels to YHWH's promises both to Noah (Gen 6:18, 9:9-11) and to Abraham (Gen 17:7). These parallels lead Weimar to infer that the tabernacle symbolizes that the people of Israel as a whole stand protected from complete destruction. While it may be questioned whether Weimar places too much weight upon the relatively common verb קום, his suggestion nonetheless becomes extremely interesting when viewed in the light of Israel's experience with the golden calf (discussed below in chapter 6).

<sup>94</sup> 26:30 uses the word שפתח to denote plan. 27:8 does not use a proper noun to describe what Moses saw.

<sup>95</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical [Typos] Structures*, vol. 2, AUSS (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981), 367-88.

<sup>96</sup> Davidson, *Typology*, 371, 76, mistakenly counts 12.

<sup>97</sup> Davidson, *Typology*, 375-76. Cf. HALOT, 1686-87. Köhler and Baumgartner do not categorize the occurrence in 2 Kgs 16:10.

a model of the earthly sanctuary, a model of the heavenly sanctuary, or the heavenly sanctuary itself (1, 3, 5) depends upon whether the passage suggests a vertical earthly/heavenly correspondence. Davidson argues for a heavenly sanctuary over an earthly sanctuary based on the following considerations. First, as mentioned above, the preponderance of occurrences of תבנית suggests an already existing original. Secondly, a vision of a heavenly sanctuary is consistent with the immediate literary context of the vision of God beheld by Moses, the priests, and the elders in Exodus 24. Thirdly, he cites the common notion in the Ancient Near East that an earthly temple replicated an original heavenly temple.<sup>98</sup> Fourthly, he argues that an earthly/heavenly correspondence is common elsewhere throughout the OT.<sup>99</sup> Finally, he sees heavenly/earthly correspondence in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal literature, Rabbinical literature, the LXX use of τύπος and παραδείγμα, and in Philo.<sup>100</sup> Thus, Davidson rules out תבנית as a model of the earthly sanctuary (1), leaving him with either a model of the heavenly sanctuary, or the heavenly sanctuary itself (3, 5). Although Davidson does not find the evidence explicit enough to decide between the final two options, he does argue that תבנית must involve a heavenly/earthly correspondence between an original heavenly sanctuary and an earthly replica.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> See bibliography in Davidson, *Typology*, 381, n.1.

<sup>99</sup> Davidson, *Typology*, 382. Davidson cites Gen. 1:27; 28:10-22; Ps. 11:4; 18:6(7); 60:6(8); 63:2(3); 68:35(36); 96:6; 102:19(20); 150:1; Is. 6:1ff; Jon. 2:7(8); Mic. 1:2; Hab 2:20.

<sup>100</sup> Davidson, *Typology*, 383-84.

<sup>101</sup> Others who argue for a heavenly original behind an earthly copy include R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "The Temple and the Origins of Jewish Apocalyptic," *VT* 20 (1970): 5-6, Jacob, *Second Book*, 770, Cassuto, *Exodus*, 322, McNeile, *Exodus*, 158, Eichrodt, *Theology*, 1:423, Davies, *Exodus*, 201, Weimar "Sinai und Schöpfung," 350, 385. For the same argument from a wider Biblical perspective, and particularly concerning the Temple, see Clements, *God and Temple*, 63-78. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, 247, sees the significance of the "model" not in Moses seeing a heavenly original, but in the manner in which the "model" alerts the reader to Moses' indispensable function as the one through whom YHWH communicates to Israel. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:345-46, is unconvinced that the tabernacle replicates a heavenly original.

For the present purpose, it is of little importance whether or not תבנית in 25:9, 40 is the original heavenly sanctuary, or a model of the heavenly original. In either case, תבנית implies that there is a heavenly sanctuary in which YHWH resides which serves as the structure or pattern for the earthly tabernacle. This correspondence reinforces the notion that the tabernacle functions as a microcosm of the universe. As Rodríguez notes, a structural correspondence between the heavenly and earthly tabernacles suggests a functional correspondence as well.<sup>102</sup> As demonstrated above, it was from the tabernacle, the “wandering Sinai,” that YHWH ruled over Israel (25:22). The heavenly/earthly correspondence suggests that, as YHWH rules over Israel from the earthly tabernacle, YHWH rules over the cosmos from the heavenly tabernacle. In this way, the idea of תבנית complements the parallels between the tabernacle and creation, likewise suggesting for the tabernacle a more cosmic scope.<sup>103</sup>

*Direct Theological Statements: Exodus 25:8 and 29:45-46*

Finally, although theological statements in the tabernacle section are rare, it is obviously important to consider those that are available in seeking to understand the tabernacle’s theological function. While not the only theological statements in the tabernacle material,<sup>104</sup> 25:8 and 29:42b-46 are arguably the most explicit, and are widely recognized as particularly important. In fact, it can be argued 25:8-9 and 29:42b-46 are

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<sup>102</sup> Rodríguez, “Sanctuary Theology,” 143.

<sup>103</sup> For a broader discussion of the spatial relationship between heaven and earth in the OT, and some of its theological implications, see Knierim, *Task*, 186-91.

<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., Buber’s interesting discussion of the breastpiece of judgment in 28:13-30, which he argues contains “[t]he whole sacral anthropology of the Bible” (Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 36-37). The import of 31:12-17, another theologically rich passage, has been discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

all the more crucial precisely due to the paucity of direct theological comment in the tabernacle material.

### **Exodus 25:8**

The first of these theological statements is 25:8: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” The purpose statement is straightforward enough, so much so that it is not given much attention in the commentaries. The aspect that receives the most attention is YHWH’s intention to dwell among Israel as the purpose for the tabernacle. Given less attention is the *necessity* of the tabernacle so that YHWH might dwell in her midst.<sup>105</sup> As has been discussed above, YHWH’s holiness was a cause of potential danger for Israel (cf. 33:5). The restricted access to the Holy of Holies, and the severe penalties for transgressing the boundaries of the tabernacle (or mountain) all testify to the danger of YHWH’s holiness: “for no man shall see my face and live” (33:20).<sup>106</sup> Therefore, if YHWH were to dwell in the midst of his people, there must be a mechanism whereby he could simultaneously be present and yet protect the people from his holiness. The tabernacle, with its carefully guarded boundaries, provided a place where YHWH could dwell in Israel’s midst, and yet still remain distinct.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, 274.

<sup>106</sup> Although cf. 24:11 and 33:11, which stand in tension with 33:20. For a discussion of the delicate and mysterious matter of seeing YHWH in Exodus, see Moberly, *Mountain*, 79-83.

<sup>107</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 158, is careful to point out that the language of 25:8 does not indicate that YHWH dwelt in the tabernacle, but rather that he dwelt in the midst of Israel. Thus, the tabernacle should not be understood as God’s dwelling place, but rather as that which allows God to dwell in Israel’s midst and makes his immanence perceptible to Israel. Cf. Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 888. David Frankel, “Two Priestly Conceptions of Guidance in the Wilderness,” *JSOT* 81 (1998): 31-37, takes the observation a step further, arguing that 25:8 (and 29:45b-46) is a later addition with the polemical purpose of demonstrating that YHWH is not simply present to Moses, but to all Israel.

## Exodus 29:45-46

The statement of 25:8 begs a further question. For what purpose does YHWH desire to dwell among Israel? The answer to that question is made clearer in the second of the theological statements, 29:45-46:<sup>108</sup>

And I will dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel and I will be their God. And they will know that I am YHWH their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt, that I might dwell in their midst. I am YHWH their God.

According to these verses, that YHWH might dwell in Israel's midst was the reason for the deliverance from Egypt. However, the appearance of the acknowledgment formula, particularly given that the context of the Egyptian deliverance is reintroduced, points back to purposes of 1—15, and functions to connect the purpose of the tabernacle with the purpose of the exodus. Recognizing this, Brueggemann comments (concerning 29:46) that

[t]he final statement of the chapter is especially remarkable. It not only refers to the exodus, but also reasserts the formula of acknowledgment. Remarkably, the old liberation formulas are joined to an affirmation concerning the abiding, dwelling presence of God. By bringing together “brought out (יָצָא *yāsā*)” and “know” (יָדָע *yāda*) with “dwell” (*šākan*), this verse joins together liberation with presence and historical event with ritual stability...and in a canonical mode joins chaps. 1—15 and 25—31.<sup>109</sup>

While the acknowledgment formula is tied more to YHWH's concern to be known than simply to liberation (as argued in chapter 2), Brueggemann is surely right to see the formula connecting the tabernacle with the exodus.

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<sup>108</sup> It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these verses. For Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung," 346, they are the "Höhepunkt der ganzen Jahwerede," Elnes, "Creation and Tabernacle," 152, finds them "the heart of P's tabernacle theology" (152). Clements, *God and Temple*, 115, argues that 25:8-9 and 29:45-46 are "the motive clauses for the entire cult and worship of Israel." Klein, "Back to the Future," 271, goes so far as to call the acknowledgment formula of 29:46 the theological summary of the entire book of Exodus, Cole, *Exodus*, 205, calls 29:46 "the sum and crown of all that has gone before," and Leder, "Reading Exodus," calls 29:43-46 the "thematic statement" of Exodus.

<sup>109</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 914.

Brueggemann's observation has important implications for the interpretation of 29:45-46. Perhaps due to the repetition of YHWH's dwelling among Israel (cf. 25:8), many commentators find the end goal of the tabernacle as YHWH's fellowship with Israel.<sup>110</sup> If the tabernacle sections are treated in isolation from the context of Exodus as a whole, such a deduction might be warranted. However, to conclude that YHWH's ultimate goal in the tabernacle was fellowship with Israel can obscure the fact that Israel was called for a specific purpose.<sup>111</sup> Houtman's comment on 29:46 provides a good example:

Not the settlement in Canaan (3:8, 17; 6:8), but YHWH's residence in the midst of Israel is here mentioned as the goal of the exodus out of Egypt. When YHWH dwells in the midst of Israel (29:45) and takes up contact with the Israelites (29:42b, 43a), then they will understand that the purpose of the exodus was YHWH's fellowship with Israel (cf. 19:5 and see Lev. 26:11, 12).<sup>112</sup>

Surely Houtman is correct to note that 29:46 states that YHWH's residence among Israel was the immediate goal of the exodus, and also pointed to a further purpose. This further purpose, for Houtman, is "YHWH's fellowship with Israel." While not denying its importance, to suggest that YHWH's fellowship with Israel is *the* purpose of the exodus misses the thrust of the acknowledgment formula which appears in the 29:46. The issue here is somewhat delicate, and has to do with assessing the canonical weight of the text.<sup>113</sup> While the nations are not explicitly mentioned in the tabernacle material, the

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Hyatt, *Exodus*, 264, Blum, *Studien*, 297, Driver, *Introduction*, 129, and particularly Klein, "Back to the Future," 271, and Longacre, "Building," 25, who both explicitly refer to YHWH's dwelling among Israel as the "ultimate purpose" of the tabernacle.

<sup>111</sup> Suggesting that YHWH's dwelling among Israel was not the *ultimate* goal of the exodus need not deny the explicit statement of 25:8 that the purpose of the exodus was YHWH's dwelling among Israel. Rather it simply acknowledges that the goal of YHWH's dwelling amongst Israel was not an end in and of itself, but an end which reached toward a further, ultimate goal. What is at stake when speaking of ultimate goals will be further explored in the conclusion, chapter 8.

<sup>112</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:553.

<sup>113</sup> It might be objected that the above suggestion reads too much into the phrase "I am YHWH," treating the phrase as a lexical unit that carries independent meaning. Such an objection has been voiced emphatically

reappearance of “I am YHWH”, which has had international implications to this point in Exodus, again brings YHWH’s purposes for the nations into view. It is interesting that Houtman supports his comment by citing 19:5, concerning Israel’s status as a treasured possession among all peoples of the earth, but does not cite 19:6, which concerns Israel’s function as a priestly kingdom and holy nation.<sup>114</sup> The splitting of 19:5 from 19:6, which Houtman neglects to defend, is dubious, for it subtly misrepresents the nature of the covenant, implying that Israel was a treasured people without regard to her specific calling. However, it is precisely this split that appears, at least implicitly, in many theological treatments of the purpose of the tabernacle.<sup>115</sup> From a canonical perspective, better is the handling of Jacob, who, commenting on the conceptual setting from which to understand the tabernacle, writes

Israel, which had stood at the mountain of revelation before its heavenly king, would not remain at Sinai; therefore God wished to move with His people. In order that they constitute a priestly kingdom, they shall prepare a place appropriate to His being, so that HE could dwell in their midst as their king and they could constitute a priestly kingdom.<sup>116</sup>

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by James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 274, particularly as a common methodological flaw of much Biblical Theology: “[i]t seems to me clear that the insistence on a synthetic approach, on ‘seeing the Bible as a unity’, on overcoming the divisions which literary criticism and religious history caused to appear throughout the Bible, has been much to blame for the exaggerations and misuse of the interpretation of words.” Such a comment points out what is undoubtedly a danger, particularly for the present work. Barr’s contention that the sentence, not the word, is the “linguistic bearer of the usual theological statement” (*Semantics*, 263) is sound, and calls into question any exegesis that relies too heavily on “general” meanings of words outside of the contexts of sentences. It is, of course, a corresponding (and somewhat circular) truth that sentences are made up of words, which carry independent meaning (or range of meaning) that must be appreciated in order for a sentence to be intelligible. Furthermore, Barr’s argument concerning words can be extended to point out that sentences are themselves best understood in the literary contexts in which they appear. Discerning appropriate literary boundaries, is, of course, essential in careful interpretation. The present point suggests that “I am YHWH” is best understood in the wider context of Exodus where the formula has to this point been so important. That the acknowledgment formula has to this point been intended precisely for communication to Israel makes it unlikely that its presence in 29:45-46 should be understood in a significantly different manner from its prior canonical context in Exodus.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Driver, *Exodus*, 362, who makes the same move.

<sup>115</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 536, Hyatt, *Exodus*, 291, 294, Cassuto, *Exodus*, 388-89, Blum, *Studien*, 297.

<sup>116</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 863.

Understanding the tabernacle in the context of Israel's calling as a priestly kingdom brings Israel's broader purposes in view, a perspective hinted at by the reappearance of the acknowledgment formula in 26:45-46.

This is not to say that 29:45-46 indicates that the tabernacle was to communicate directly to the nations that "I am YHWH." Nor is it to suggest that YHWH's fellowship with Israel was not ultimately important to YHWH. The verses are clear that it is Israel who is to know "I am YHWH" due to YHWH's dwelling in her midst, and nowhere do they suggest that the tabernacle, per se, was to communicate anything to the nations. The purpose of the foregoing discussion is only to point out that "I am YHWH" was not knowledge that was to be privileged to Israel alone, but was also intended for the surrounding nations, just as Israel's covenant was not for her sake alone, but also had the nations in view. In fact, it is precisely in Israel's acknowledgment that "I am YHWH," and the obedience implied in that acknowledgment, that causes the covenant with Israel to serve its international purpose given in 19:4-6. Therefore, to suggest that YHWH's fellowship with Israel was the ultimate goal of the tabernacle, without acknowledging the wider purpose of the Sinaitic covenant as articulated in Exodus, runs the risk of limiting the theology of the tabernacle too narrowly. As Fretheim remarks concerning the tabernacle, "this microcosm of creation is the beginning of a macrocosmic effort on God's part."<sup>117</sup> The presence of the acknowledgment formula in 29:45-46, the theological highpoint of the 25—31, points to this larger concern.

Further supporting the implication that the tabernacle's function ultimately extended beyond Israel is the close similarity between what both the acknowledgment formula and the tabernacle communicate. As argued in chapter 2, "I am YHWH"

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<sup>117</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 271.

conveyed, among other things, that YHWH alone was the creator and supreme ruler of the universe. The tabernacle, as we have seen, communicated the same thing in the parallels between the tabernacle and Sinai and the tabernacle and creation.

While we have explored much of the theology of the tabernacle, it must be remembered at this point that the theology of the tabernacle cannot be understood in its fullness apart from the golden calf narrative and apart from the account of the tabernacle construction in 35—40. It is to the narrative of the golden calf that we now turn.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE GOLDEN CALF (EXODUS 32— 34)

As a way of approaching the golden calf narrative in Exodus 32—34, the following discussion will focus on the character formula of Exodus 34:6-7:

And YHWH passed by before his face and he proclaimed, “YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and great in love and faithfulness, keeping love to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, but will surely not clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and the son’s sons to the third and the fourth generation.

There are several reasons for concentrating on 34:6-7. First, 34:6-7 provides a profound theological reflection on YHWH’s response to Israel following the golden calf. As Goldingay comments, “Exodus 34:6-7 constitutes a retrospective systematic theological reflection on the narrative beginning in Exodus 32.”<sup>1</sup> If this is the case, then 34:6-7 provides a good lens through which to view the golden calf chapters theologically. Secondly, the importance of the canonical context is particularly apparent in the interpretation of 34:6-7. One of the important issues in 34:6-7 is the apparent tension between mercy and judgment. As we shall see, the ability to wrestle meaningfully with this and other theological issues raised in the formula is closely related to the context in which it is interpreted. This is particularly important for the present thesis, for any unified reading of Exodus must wrestle with the theological tensions in the book. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 37. See also Moberly, *Mountain*, 130, who argues that, along with 33:19, 34:6-7 constitutes “the highpoint upon which the surrounding narrative is dependent and up to which it leads.”

34:6-7 provides a good test case for the hermeneutical concerns we have raised to this point. Thirdly, 34:6-7 has tremendous theological importance regarding the character of YHWH, an issue that has been at stake throughout the book of Exodus.<sup>2</sup> As we have argued to this point, Exodus has been concerned with the revelation of the name of YHWH among the nations. This concern has not been simply with the name YHWH, understood narrowly as what YHWH wishes to be called, but with the character of YHWH. In other words, a major concern throughout the narrative has been to demonstrate what kind of God YHWH is. Exodus 34:6-7 is particularly relevant for the present enquiry because it addresses a concern that has been at issue throughout the Exodus narrative, but not dealt with explicitly: the relationship between YHWH's character and his missionary commitment to be known amongst the nations. The golden calf narrative brings this relationship into clearer focus.

The chapter will proceed as follows. First, we will take a brief look at how others have dealt with the theological tensions of 34:6-7, taking particular note of how methodology and chosen context affects each interpreter's ability to wrestle with the theological difficulties of the character formula. Secondly, because of its importance in understanding what is at stake in Israel's idolatry, we will take another look at 20:4-6. Thirdly, we will closely examine Moses' intercession in 32—34 with the following question in mind: why was Moses' intercession effective in moving YHWH from his stated intention of destroying Israel to restoring the covenant? Finally, we will suggest how the wider canonical context helps in the interpretation of 34:6-7, with particular

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<sup>2</sup> The importance of the character description is also reflected in its presence elsewhere in the OT (e.g. Num 14:18; Psalms 86:15; 103:8, 145:8; Neh 9:17; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:17; Nah 1:3). See J. Scharbert, "Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex. 34. 6f und Seiner Parallelen," *Biblica* 38 (1957): 133.

reference to the theological tension between mercy and judgment.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the chapter will argue that the tensions in the character formula make greater sense when understood in light of the theological burden of Exodus, YHWH's missionary commitment to be known amongst the nations.

#### THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF EXODUS 34:6-7

Perhaps the most important reason for the difficulty in interpreting 34:6-7 is the tendency to take 34:6-7 out of its narrative context and locate it instead in other contexts.<sup>4</sup> Interpretation, Biblical or otherwise, is in large part a matter of deciding upon context. The following interpreters will be grouped into two broad categories: those who interpret 34:6-7 outside the canonical context of Exodus, and those who interpret the character formula within that context.

#### *Exodus 34:6-7 in Other Contexts*

Those who interpret the formula apart from its canonical context in Exodus include Dentan, Wright, Andersen, Raitt, and Laney. Dentan, in an effort to better

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<sup>3</sup> Another significant tension suggested by 34:6-7 is the relationship between individual and corporate retribution. This tension, however, is not as acute within the book of Exodus as it is in conjunction with passages such as Deut 24:16, Jer 31:19-20, and Ezek 18, and therefore will not be dealt with here. See Scharbert, "Formgeschichte," Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 335-50, and, for a wider theological overview, Joel S. Kaminsky, "The Sins of the Fathers: A Theological Investigation of the Biblical Tension between Corporate and Individualized Retribution," *Judaism* 46 (1997): 319-33, and Jože Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views*, vol. 78, VTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 110-59.

<sup>4</sup> One reason for the tendency to lift the formula out of its narrative context may be the general assessment that 32—34 has a particularly complicated and fragmented compositional history, causing skepticism concerning the usefulness of 32—34 as a context. For a counter argument that 32—34 is a structural unity, see Davis, "Rebellion, Presence, Covenant."

understand its theology, is primarily concerned with the origin of Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>5</sup> Lacking confidence in the literary integrity of chapters 32—34, Dentan examines the formula apart from its canonical context in Exodus, instead working within an alternative context of recognized bodies of Hebrew literature (Deuteronomic, Wisdom, Priestly, and Prophetic). Dentan's treatment is essentially an effort to locate the words and phrases of 34:6-7 within a distinct body of literature. For instance, Dentan finds חַנּוּן uncharacteristic of Deuteronomic language, but common in Wisdom literature. As he moves through each lexical unit, Dentan finds strong affinities with Wisdom literature in almost every case, while finding no affinities with other Biblical corpora. Dentan therefore suggests that 34:6-7 has its origin in Wisdom literature. He further supports his claim by drawing attention to thematic similarities between 34:6-7 and wisdom literature, such as a concern for moral behavior and a more universal (rather than Israel-specific) character. Dentan concludes that 34:6-7 was a later addition by the Wisdom writers, a "calm, rational, and generous spirit" added to balance the "fanatical intensity" of much of the OT literature.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Dentan considers the formula to be concerned only with individuals, not with nations or other social groups.

Dentan's work provides a particularly interesting example of how the decision to lift the formula from its canonical context in Exodus affects interpretation. First, his comment that the formula was added later to soften an otherwise harsh conception of God shows that he actually sees the formula working *against* the canonical context in which it is set. Secondly, even though Exodus 32—34 is concerned primarily with the fate of Israel as a *nation*, Dentan finds the formula only to concern individual people. While it

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<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," *VT* 13 (1963): 34-51.

<sup>6</sup> Dentan, "Literary Affinities," 51.

may have implications concerning individuals, any sense that the formula concerns Israel as a nation is lost.

Wright shares Dentan's skepticism concerning the literary integrity of 32—34, which undermines his confidence the formula should be evaluated in that context.<sup>7</sup> With the exception of his comment that 34:6-7 is given in response to Moses' request of 33:18, Wright gives little discussion to the wider narrative context of 32—34. Rather, Wright sets his discussion of the formula in the context of sources, specifically other revelations of YHWH's name in Exodus, where he argues that J (34:6-7) is more concerned about making a theological statement concerning God's character than either E (3:13-15) or P (6:2-9), who are more concerned with what YHWH is called. After making several source-critical observations, Wright focuses upon brief lexical studies of *חסד* and *נשא* in an effort to draw out the theology of the passage. Wright's discussion is largely a theological reflection on the formula as it stands by itself. Although he speaks of both the mercy and judgment aspects of the formula, he does not discuss their relationship.

Andersen's primary concern is that exegesis is compromised when interpreters rely on lexicons at the expense of interpreting words in their immediate literary contexts.<sup>8</sup> Andersen addresses the issue through a study of *חסד*, which he claims has often been misinterpreted, therefore leading the exegesis of *חסד* texts in the wrong direction. Andersen's effort to define *חסד* leads him to an extended discussion of 34:6-7. Rather than the immediate literary context, Andersen employs similar statements concerning God's character in the Pentateuch as his controlling context in his treatment of 34:6-7. In

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<sup>7</sup> G. Ernest Wright, "The Divine Name and the Divine Nature," *Perspective* 12 (1971): 177-85.

<sup>8</sup> Francis I. Andersen, "Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God," in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. Peter T. O'Brien and David G. Petersen (Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), 41-88.

his “synoptic study” Andersen interprets the formula primarily in relation to Exodus 20:5-6, Numbers 14:18-19, and Deuteronomy 7:9-10. Aside from the comment that YHWH was justified in his anger toward Israel after the calf, the context of Exodus (as well as Deuteronomy and Numbers) is absent from his discussion. Andersen’s approach is to study the following six elements in relation to the passages cited above: the name of YHWH, attributes of God as hostile, his treatment of enemies, attributes of God as friendly, his treatment of his friends, and the emphatic statement that he will never declare the guilty innocent.<sup>9</sup>

Andersen is aware of the difficulties, stating at the outset that 34:6-7 contains “paradoxes, contradictions, mysteries.”<sup>10</sup> His exegesis of the passage, while helpful in illuminating the relationship between the texts with which he works, nonetheless does not wrestle with the difficulties he poses. Ultimately Andersen concludes “there is no justification for his compassion and kindness, and his *hesed* is completely incomprehensible.”<sup>11</sup> Given his emphasis on firmly locating individual words within their immediate narrative contexts, it is curious that Andersen ignores the narrative context of 34:6-7.

Finding 34:6-7 to be the most important OT text bearing upon the issue of forgiveness, Raitt examines the formula in an effort to answer the question posed in his title: “Why Does God Forgive?”<sup>12</sup> Raitt is also aware of the difficulties: “Exod 34:6-7 is a hard saying. Both ancient and modern interpreters of it back away from taking the

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<sup>9</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh,” 47.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh,” 45.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh,” 51.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas M. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?” *HBT* 13 (1991): 38-58.

whole thing, in all its stresses, seriously.”<sup>13</sup> Largely ignoring the wider literary context, Raitt instead focuses his discussion upon the passage itself, particularly the apparent poles of mercy and judgment, while broadening his discussion to include other OT passages that address the topic of forgiveness.

While Raitt’s discussion contains helpful insights, his conclusions concerning 34:6-7 seem to leave his initial question unanswered:

Why, in Exod 34:6-7 does God forgive? Because it is not true to God to see him only as a punishing God. Because the Sinai Covenant carries the dialectic of forgiveness and punishment alternatives. Because the forgiveness and punishment alternative are always held in tension. Within the mystery of God’s holiness forgiveness and punishment are not mutually contradictory.<sup>14</sup>

He goes on to make four further observations:

Looked at as a whole, Exod 34:6-7 makes these four affirmations: 1) Sin is taken completely seriously, 2) God is just, 3) God has such depth and richness of love that he can overcome sin with forgiveness, and 4) God also will punish sin wherever and whenever it occurs.<sup>15</sup>

While each of these statements may be true, none of Raitt’s reasons or affirmations actually answers the question he asks of the text. Further, the tensions raised by Raitt’s own observations (such as the relationship between 3 and 4 above) are left unaddressed.

The concern Laney brings to the text in his treatment of 34:6-7 is simply a desire to know more clearly the nature of God as revealed in the formula, and does not raise any of the text’s difficulties.<sup>16</sup> To include Laney alongside other interpreters who have interpreted the formula out of its canonical context may seem strange considering that Laney’s article begins with a two page treatment of 32—33. While he gives more than passing comments, however, it is unclear how this treatment informs his exegesis of

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<sup>13</sup> Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" 47.

<sup>14</sup> Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" 46.

<sup>15</sup> Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" 55.

<sup>16</sup> J. Carl Laney, "God's Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8," *BSac* 158 (2001): 36-51.

34:6-7, which consists primarily of general lexical studies seemingly unrelated to his discussion of 32—33. In effect, Laney likewise lifts the formula out of its canonical context. Laney's conclusion is simply an observation of Moses' response of worship, and does not draw any conclusions concerning some of the difficulties inherent in the passage.

One curious similarity shared by the above interpreters is a difficulty in grappling with the formula's tensions at any depth. Neither Dentan nor Wright makes any attempt to wrestle with the tensions within the formula. Raitt leaves unanswered the great question he poses in his title. Andersen accepts the tension as mystery, with the affirmation that ultimately the reasons for God's  $\text{קטן}$  are unknowable. Laney leaves the theological tensions unaddressed. Taking the findings (or lack thereof) of these interpreters together, one gets the impression that the problem is methodological. Whatever fruit may be gleaned from lexical studies and comparative analysis with other OT texts, interpreting 34:6-7 outside its narrative context leaves important difficulties unanswered.

#### *Exodus 34:6-7 in its Canonical Context*

Those that interpret the formula within the narrative context of 32—34 include Freedman, Moberly, Gowan, and Brueggemann. Freedman is concerned with the theological issues raised by the formula: the problem of divine immanence and transcendence, the problem of election, and the problem of divine justice and mercy. While Freedman gives much broad theological reflection on the formula, often ranging beyond the immediate context, it is clear that he roots his discussion in the context of

32—34. For Freedman, the formula is given by God “in order to clarify and explain his role in the tragic incident of the golden calf.”<sup>17</sup>

Freedman’s conclusions, which he gives throughout his essay, demonstrate that he wrestles with the deep theological issues raised in the formula. For instance, concerning the difficulty of mercy/judgment, Freedman writes:

At first sight, this may seem a strange contradiction. But the Israelite did not regard it as a paradox at all.... The establishment of the moral order of the universe, and the principle of justice in human affairs, were acts of grace. They exemplified the compassion and loyalty of God. At the same time, forgiveness was itself part of the process of justice. In the Bible, justice is not conceived as a rigid system of retribution for wrong-doing, but a flexible process by which good is promoted and evil restrained. On the other hand, mercy and forgiveness do not proceed from indifference to questions of right and wrong, but are invariably conditioned by moral considerations.<sup>18</sup>

Freedman goes on to explain the relationship between forgiveness and judgment in the following manner: “Forgiveness does not contradict judgment; it is based upon it. Only when the issue of right and wrong has been settled, and the verdict rendered, does mercy have its role.”<sup>19</sup>

While Moberly clearly roots his discussion of 34:6-7 firmly in the context of 32—34, his most valuable theological reflections on the formula may occur with reference to 20:5-6. Commenting that critical scholarship has generally viewed 20:5 as dependent upon 34:6-7, Moberly draws out several theological observations which arise if 34:6-7 is read in light of 20:5, according to the narrative order in Exodus. From this perspective, Moberly observes that the sequence of judgment and mercy is reversed from 20:5 to 34:6-7, and that the statement of mercy in 20:6 is greatly expanded in 34:6-7. Most

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<sup>17</sup> David Noel Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," *Western Watch* 6 (1955): 7.

<sup>18</sup> Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," 14.

<sup>19</sup> Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," 15.

helpful is his observation that, in 34:6-7,  $\text{דָּבָר}$  being shown to those keeping the commandments is absent, an observation from which Moberly infers that YHWH's  $\text{דָּבָר}$  is shown to Israel *independently* of her obedience. The theological fruit of Moberly's exegesis is found not only in the words of the formula itself, but in its relationship to the movement from 20:5-6 to 34:6-7. In this way, Moberly's approach is different from Andersen's. While Andersen also treats 20:5-6 in his discussion of similar passages, he examines the two passages largely independently. Moberly, on the other hand, roots his discussion firmly in the canonical context of Exodus, seeing how 20:5-6 and 34:6-7 function together in the canonical movement of Exodus.<sup>20</sup>

Like Moberly, Gowan discusses 34:6-7 in both its immediate and its wider literary context. Most helpful is his discussion of the Decalogue in relationship to Israel's sin with the golden calf, which "provides the essential context for the dialogue between Moses and God."<sup>21</sup> Regarding theological reflection on the character formula, Gowan is chiefly concerned with the mystery of how God can both be just and forgive sin. He does not seek to resolve any of the tensions in the formula, but is rather content to speak of the mystery of undeserved forgiveness. He does mention that God forgives because of an "unwavering intention to save,"<sup>22</sup> although how he reconciles this "unwavering intention" with the part of the formula that speaks of judgment is unclear. He goes on to speak of how later Biblical writers used the allusion in such a manner that gave Israel confidence that YHWH would persist with them, despite their sinfulness.

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting, however, that Moberly does not give much attention to the apparent mercy/judgment paradox of 34:6-7. This may be due to Moberly's understanding of paradoxical language as a means of communicating mystery: "such is the inherently mysterious nature of God and his ways with men that it is often difficult to make a statement in a theologically reflective way without wishing to qualify it, sometimes by the assertion of an apparently opposite truth." Moberly, *Mountain*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Gowan, *Theology*, 221.

<sup>22</sup> Gowan, *Theology*, 226.

Of the interpreters cited above, Brueggemann may be the most aware of the theological difficulties 34:6-7 poses.<sup>23</sup> Among the difficulties he cites are the tension (in Brueggemann's words, contradiction)<sup>24</sup> between mercy and judgment, and, more fundamentally, the tension between God's inclination to be for Israel and to be for himself. As Brueggemann writes concerning the latter,

The tension or contradiction is that Yahweh is for Israel (or more generally "for us," *pro nobis*) in fidelity, and at the same time Yahweh is intensely and fiercely *for Yahweh's own self*. These two inclinations of Yahweh are not fully harmonized here, and perhaps never are anywhere in the Old Testament. This reading of the statement entails the conclusion that there is a profound, unresolved ambiguity in Yahweh's life. As a consequence, in any moment of Yahweh's life with Israel, Yahweh has available more than one alternative response to Israel, and Israel is never fully, finally certain of Yahweh's inclination toward it.<sup>25</sup>

That Brueggemann sees such tensions suggests that his thought is firmly rooted in the canonical context of Exodus. While the tension between mercy and judgment is apparent when 34:6-7 is read in isolation, the seemingly paradoxical tension between YHWH's concern for Israel and his concern for himself is not obvious in 34:6-7, and can only be made in the broader context of Exodus. Despite his observations, however, Brueggemann does not adequately wrestle with the formula's tensions. Distancing himself from any attempt to harmonize or otherwise relate the tensions in the formula, Brueggemann opts instead to move the ambiguities and contradictions he finds into the character of YHWH himself, suggesting an instability in YHWH's character that ultimately left Israel unsure of who YHWH was and what she could expect from him.

Can any conclusions be drawn from the manner in which these interpreters handle the difficulties raised in the formula? While they offer different theological reflections,

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<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 943-49. See also idem, *Theology*, 213-28.

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 227.

<sup>25</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 227.

their general confidence in the immediate literary context allows them to press more deeply into the mysteries and difficulties inherent in the description of YHWH's character than those who do not. Freedman directly addresses the relationship between justice and mercy, and offers some helpful insights. While not directly addressing some of the tensions in the formula, Moberly's insistence on interpreting the formula in its canonical context, both in terms of 32—34 and 20:5-6, has nonetheless allowed him to offer some very suggestive theological reflections. While Brueggemann does not adequately wrestle with the tensions in the formula, he nonetheless has identified important issues at stake in 34:6-7 as a result of attending to the larger canonical context of Exodus. It would seem that, in the survey of interpreters cited above, that those who have sought to understand 34:6-7 in the context of Exodus (at least 32—34), show greater ability to wrestle with the theological issues the formula raises.

The point of the above survey is to suggest that interpreting Exodus 34:6-7 in its canonical context has proven to be more fruitful theologically than interpreting it outside that context. The following treatment of 34:6-7 will follow the second group in seeking to understand the formula in its wider canonical context, first in 32—34, then in Exodus as a whole. Again, one of the implications of the following argument is that interpreting the formula in the wider context of Exodus illuminates the formula in ways that seeing it isolated, or even limited to the context of 32—34, does not. As Moberly has written,

[i]n the exegesis of Ex. 32-34 it is proposed that frequently sense may best be made on the assumption of a knowledge of the preceding narrative in Ex. 19-24; (25-31); and more generally Ex. 1-18. The point is a corollary of the importance of context for exegesis. The more a writer assumes that the context makes his meaning clear, the less he need specify individual points. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the less the context is taken into account, the wider the range of interpretations of any given unit that becomes available.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 32.

The following argument will therefore explore 34:6-7 in both its immediate literary context, and in the wider context of Exodus, ultimately arguing that the theological burden of both 34:6-7 and 32—34 is, as has been argued in the previous sections, YHWH's missionary commitment to be known and honored as God amongst the nations.

#### FROM (NEAR) RUIN TO RESTORATION: THE THEOLOGY OF EXODUS 32—34

The following will seek to account for the movement between YHWH's declaration to destroy Israel in 32:10 to his restoration of the covenant in 34:10. After another brief look at 20:4-6, we will focus on the role of Moses' intercession, Moses' character, and Israel's repentance in Israel's restoration.

#### *Exodus 20:4-6*

Investigating the character formula of 34:6-7 warrants another look at Exodus 20:4-6. The reasons are twofold. First, according to the canonical order of the texts, Israel's sin in Exodus 32 is a direct repudiation of YHWH's command of 20:4-6.<sup>27</sup> Commanded not to make (לא תעשה) or worship (לא תשתחוה) any image, Israel made and worshipped a golden calf (סרו מהר מהדרך אשר צויתם עשו להם עגל מסכה וישתחוו לו). Therefore a close look at the prohibition is important in considering YHWH's response to Israel's sin. Secondly, 20:5 is echoed in 34:6-7, which makes 20:4-6 particularly important in the

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<sup>27</sup> This, of course, assumes a canonically ordered reading. Some critical scholars (e.g. Calum M. Carmichael, *The Spirit of Biblical Law* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 86-92) argue that the Decalogue in its final form is a response to the golden calf incident.

proper interpretation of 34:6-7.<sup>28</sup> For both reasons, the second commandment provides an important context from which to understand the character formula of 34:6-7. Rather than repeating the earlier discussion of chapter 4, the following will focus on the rationale behind the prohibition: “because I am YHWH your God, a jealous God” (כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך (אל קנא).<sup>29</sup>

### **I am YHWH**

Particularly important in interpreting 20:4-6 is the reappearance of the acknowledgment formula. Due to the attention already given the acknowledgement formula, the following comments may be brief. The fact that the formula occurs both in 20:5 and 20:2 suggests that the verses should be read in light of one another.<sup>30</sup> As suggested earlier in reference to 20:2, the presence of the acknowledgment formula in 20:5 has the effect of calling forth the use of the formula earlier in Exodus, where it expresses both YHWH’s supremacy and his commitment to be acknowledged as God by both Israel and Egypt. This is particularly important given the function of 20:2 in bringing YHWH’s commitment to be honored as God to the head of the law. 20:5 corresponds to this commitment in a negative fashion by forbidding the worship of anything else but YHWH. Only YHWH is to be acknowledged by Israel as God. The

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<sup>28</sup> Concerning the critical priority of 34:6-7 over 20:5, see e.g., Moberly, *Mountain*, 128-31, Beyerlin, *Origins*, 137-38, Hyatt, *Exodus*, 323.

<sup>29</sup> In addition to virtually all English Bibles, many scholars have chosen to translate the phrase as “I, YHWH your God, am a jealous God” (e.g. Childs, *Exodus*, 386; Durham, *Exodus*, 276, Cassuto, *Exodus*, 242). The translation suggested above, however, is equally faithful to the Hebrew wording, and preserves the integrity of the acknowledgment formula, which is apparent in Hebrew but obscured in English if translated as “I, YHWH your God, am a jealous God.” Further, as discussed in chapter 4, Zimmerli has argued persuasively that the “I am YHWH” formula should be preserved in 20:2, over and against the translation “I, YHWH, am your God.” Given the proximity of 20:2 to 20:5 (and given the function of 20:2 in interpreting 20:5), it makes good sense to translate the identical Hebrew renderings (אנכי יהוה אלהיך) consistently. See chapter 4, n. 111.

<sup>30</sup> The unusual use of אנכי, rather than אני, may further suggest a relationship (cf. Exod 4:11).

prominence of the acknowledgment formula suggests that knowing YHWH stands as the foundation of the law. To deny YHWH through false worship, then, undermines that foundation.

### YHWH's Jealousy

YHWH's commitment to be known as God is further strengthened by the apposite, a jealous God. The reason for the prohibition of idolatry is expressed in the phrase "because I am YHWH your God, a jealous God," and applies to both other gods and images.<sup>31</sup> Concerning the word "jealous,"  $\text{אֵנָף}$ , two particular items warrant mention. First, YHWH's jealousy is personal. Von Rad is surely right in seeing YHWH's jealousy as "an emotion springing from the very depths of personality,"<sup>32</sup> so much so that YHWH defines his name as jealous in 34:14. Secondly, YHWH's jealousy is intolerant of rivals. Always appearing in the context of false worship when speaking of God,<sup>33</sup>  $\text{אֵנָף}$  suggests that YHWH will not share his claim to exclusive love and worship with anyone or anything else.<sup>34</sup> As Clements writes concerning YHWH's jealousy, "the title [*a jealous God*] does not imply unworthy feelings of envy or suspicion in God but his determination to uphold his honour in the face of evil and falsehood, and his refusal to allow himself to be displaced by any rival."<sup>35</sup> Kaiser's comment concerning 20:5 is worth repeating:

[t]he term "jealous" or "zealous" God must not be understood in such popular misconceptions as God is naturally suspicious, distrustful, or wrongly envious of

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<sup>31</sup> Stamm and Andrew, *Ten Commandments*, 80, find YHWH's jealousy as the connecting link between 20:3, which speaks of other gods, and 20:4, which speaks of images. See discussion of 20:5 in chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:207.

<sup>33</sup> Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15. In each of these instances, God's jealousy is the grounds ( $\text{כִּי}$ ) for the prohibition of idolatry. See E. Reuter, " $\text{אֵנָף}$ " *TDOT* 13: 47-58.

<sup>34</sup> Noting that the primitive meaning of  $\text{אֵנָף}$  is "to become intensely red," Sarna, *Exodus*, 110, argues that  $\text{אֵנָף}$  lends itself to the implied metaphor of marriage being the nature of the covenant. For a sustained argument in this direction, see Sohn, "I Will Be Your God."

<sup>35</sup> Clements, *Exodus*, 124.

the success of others. When used of God it denotes (1) that attribute that demands exclusive devotion (Exod 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:51), (2) that attitude of anger directed against all who oppose him (Num 35:11; Deut 29:20; Ps 79:5; Ezek 5:13; 16:38, 42; 25:11; Zeph 1:18), and (3) that energy he expended on vindicating his people (2 Kings 19:31; Isa 9:7; 37:32; Joel 2:18; Zech 1:14; 8:2). Thus all idolatry, which Scripture labels elsewhere as spiritual adultery, that raises up competitors or brooks any kind of rivalry to the honor, glory and esteem due to the Lord will excite his jealousy for the consistency of his own character and being. Every form of substitution, neglect, or contempt, both public and private, for the worship of God is rejected in this commandment.<sup>36</sup>

Or, in Houtman's succinct definition, YHWH's jealousy means that "he claims all honour for himself."<sup>37</sup>

Although YHWH's jealousy is often conceived more in terms of judgment due to false worship,<sup>38</sup> it is equally important to note that YHWH's jealousy is also expressed in showing  $\text{קנא}$  to those who love him. Helpful in this vein is Goitein's definition of  $\text{קנא}$  as

the strength of an emotion and the exclusiveness of its direction. It denotes complete devotion either to one's own aims or to another person. Therefore, the word can stand parallel either to Love, as in the Song of Songs viii 6, or to Hatred and Anger, as in Deuteronomy xxxix 19.<sup>39</sup>

Both aspects of jealousy articulated by Goitein, the devotion to one's aims and devotion to another person, are apparent in 20:5-6. Not only does YHWH's jealousy in 20:5-6 point to YHWH's commitment to his honor (his aim), but it also dictates his response to his people, either in love or judgment. The manner in which 20:5-6 is phrased has the effect of dividing the people into two categories, those who love YHWH and those who hate him. Those who love YHWH are treated with  $\text{קנא}$ , while those who hate him are punished. Important to observe is that both YHWH's responses of love and judgment are

<sup>36</sup> Kaiser, *Exodus*, 423.

<sup>37</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:31.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Freedman, "Name," 155-56, connects the jealousy of God only with judgment, but not to mercy.

<sup>39</sup> S. D. Goitein, "YHWH the Passionate: The Monotheistic Meaning and Origin of the Name YHWH," *VT* 6 (1956): 2. Curiously, Goitein does not connect his observation to Exod 20:5-6, the place in the OT where his point is most evident.

rooted in his jealousy. The implication is that *all of YHWH's dealings with Israel, whether in love or judgment, are rooted in his commitment to being acknowledged as God*, an implication which will become particularly important later in our discussion of 34:6-7.

Understanding that love and judgment are both rooted in YHWH's jealousy helps explain what may appear to be a tension or contradiction within the Decalogue itself. For instance, Zimmerli writes

The theological background of the Decalogue in its present form, including the interpretive expansions of the brief commandments, can be seen in the remarkable tension between Yahweh's two descriptions of himself that frame the first two commandments. In the preamble (Exod. 20:2/Deut. 5:6), Yahweh introduces himself as the God of Israel, who, in an act of mercy, led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. This stands in contrast to a second self characterization in Exodus 20:5b-6/Deuteronomy 5:9b-10 in which Yahweh says "I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God. I punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. But I keep faith with thousands among those who love me and keep my commandments."<sup>40</sup>

If the function of "I am YHWH" in 20:2 is simply to remind Israel of YHWH's mercy, extended toward them in delivering them from Egypt, then the threat of punishment in 20:5-6, which refers to the same acknowledgment formula, might seem in tension. However, if "I am YHWH" in 20:2 is a reminder of the wider missionary purpose of YHWH amongst the nations, as argued above in chapter 4, then the apparent tension diminishes, for both appearances of the acknowledgment formula serve the same end. In 20:2, YHWH reminds Israel of his purpose to be honored as God by Israel and the nations as a result of the Egyptian deliverance, and in 20:5 YHWH warns Israel against dishonoring him by serving other gods. Thus, Zimmerli's observation concerning mercy and punishment need not be seen as a contrast, or even a tension, but rather as the natural

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<sup>40</sup> Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*, 111.

outworking of YHWH's jealousy to be honored as God. While the expression of YHWH's jealousy is different in each case, YHWH's jealousy stands as the underlying motive for both.

Before proceeding to the account of the golden calf, two comments concerning how 20:5-6 sets the theological background of Israel's sin are warranted. First, 20:5-6 explains the gravity of the sin by demonstrating that idolatry undermined YHWH's purposes both in delivering Israel from Egypt and in giving her the law. In other words, the entire foundation of YHWH's relationship with Israel is compromised by the calf, which explains YHWH's severe reaction to Israel's sin. Secondly, the recognition that YHWH's jealousy is the grounds upon which YHWH deals with Israel, both in judgment and in love, serves to alert the reader concerning the manner in which YHWH will ultimately deal with Israel in 32—34.

#### *Moses' Intercession for YHWH*

Exodus 32 begins by describing Israel's sin concerning the golden calf, which serves as the context of the ensuing narrative. Uncertain of what has become of Moses due to his extended absence on the mountain, the people gather against Aaron and demand that he make for them gods who will go before them. Taking the golden earrings of the Israelites, Aaron fashions a molten calf, whereupon Israel proclaims "these are your gods, Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt" (32:4b). Seeing the

people's response, Aaron builds an altar and calls for a feast to YHWH the ensuing day, a celebration, with burnt offerings and peace offerings, food, drink, and merriment.<sup>41</sup>

With regard to the seriousness of the sin, two comments are particularly pertinent. First, in words that echo 20:2, which explicitly credits YHWH with the exodus from Egypt, Israel's acclamation of 32:4b credits the calf with the Egyptian deliverance. As argued above, the position of 20:2 at the head of the law suggests that Israel's acknowledgment of YHWH as their deliverer is foundational for the ensuing law. Israel's words, then, in effect deny that the Egyptian deliverance was YHWH's doing, thereby undermining that foundation. Secondly, the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings serves as an ironic comment on Israel's sin. As mentioned in chapter 4 concerning 20:22-24, sacrificing burnt offerings and peace offerings was an expression of the pure worship of YHWH, understood over and against the worship of idols. Further, the only place in Exodus where burnt offerings and peace offerings are offered is the covenant ratification ceremony of Exodus 24, where Israel (after her pledge of obedience) is consecrated as a people holy to YHWH and set apart for his purposes. By offering burnt offerings and peace offerings in the context of idolatry, Israel has in effect perverted the pure worship of YHWH, and thereby repudiated her holy calling. In other words, Israel's actions have reverted her from the holy to the common. Yet, as we have seen in the tabernacle material immediately preceding, while the common can be moved

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<sup>41</sup> The nature of the sin has been variously interpreted. Childs, *Exodus*, 564, for instance, finds Israel's action indefensible: "[t]he abusive reference to Moses with flippant unconcern sets the tone for the coming activity, and reflects the absolute disapproval of the author." On the other hand, Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 217, finds Israel's action with the golden calf "perfectly natural and understandable," arguing that, in demanding a "god," Israel "intended nothing more than an appropriate object emblematic of the Divine Presence," and that no rejection of YHWH is implied. It is difficult, however, to reconcile this interpretation with YHWH's intense anger, YHWH's own interpretation of Israel's sin in 32:7-10, or the difficulty with which the covenant is restored. From a canonical perspective, these same reasons render unlikely the similar argument of Albright, *Stone Age*, 202-3, that the calf was not a rival god, but a pedestal for YHWH himself.

into the realm of the holy, there is no mechanism whereby the holy can be moved back into the realm of the common. The implication involved is that anything withdrawn from the holy must be destroyed, an implication entirely consistent with YHWH's response, a declared intent to destroy Israel.

### **First Petition (Exodus 32:11-13)**

YHWH's responds to Israel's sin with hot anger. Having ordered Moses to descend the mountain, YHWH speaks to the gravity of Israel's sin in two ways. First, he describes Israel's sin in terms of the second commandment. Not only does YHWH say that Israel "has quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them," he uses the language of the second commandment: they have made for themselves (עשו להם) and worshipped (וישתחו) a molten calf. Secondly, he relates to Moses that Israel has credited the molten calf with delivering them from Egypt. YHWH's repetition of Israel's words confirms the inference offered above that Israel's declaration (and ensuing idolatry) undermines the entire law, an inference confirmed in 32:19 when Moses shatters the stone tablets containing the Decalogue. Calling them a stiff necked people, YHWH commands Moses "let me alone, that my anger may burn hot against them and that I may consume them. But I will make you into a great nation" (32:10).

Moses immediately makes intercession as follows:

Why, O YHWH, must your anger burn hot against your people who you brought from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say "with evil intent he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to annihilate them from the face of the ground?" Turn from your hot anger and repent from this evil against your people. Remember for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, your servants to whom you swore by yourself, saying to them "I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and all this

land which I promised I will give to your seed and they will inherit it forever” (32:11-13).

Moses opens his intercession with a reminder of who Israel is in relationship to YHWH. The question *why* is rhetorical. Moses is not asking the reasons for YHWH’s anger (he has already been told), nor is he simply reminding YHWH of what YHWH has done on behalf of Israel, as if to suggest that YHWH would not want to destroy his work with Israel having brought them thus far.<sup>42</sup> Rather, Moses’ description of Israel in 32:11 as the people YHWH brought out with great power (בכח גדול) and a mighty hand serve to remind YHWH of his purposes in the plagues, “to show [Pharaoh] my power (כחי), that my name may be declared throughout the earth” (9:16).<sup>43</sup> This connection back to 9:16 also helps explain Moses reference to “your people.” Unwilling for YHWH to forsake Israel, as YHWH implied by referring to “your [Moses’] people” (32:7) and “this people” (32:9), Moses reminds YHWH that they are YHWH’s people. While some have taken “your people” to refer to YHWH’s love for Israel,<sup>44</sup> the fact that Moses describes “your people” as those who YHWH delivered in such a spectacular and public manner implies that the connection between YHWH and Israel is chiefly based upon the public association between YHWH and Israel forged in the plagues. In other words, the connection with Israel wrought in the plagues has made Israel YHWH’s concern. Buber’s paraphrase captures the sense well: “[y]ou cannot assign this people to me, nor seek to replace it by

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<sup>42</sup> Several have suggested that Moses appeals to the great trouble YHWH has undergone on behalf of Israel (and the wasted energy which would result from Israel’s destruction) serves a reason for YHWH to relent (cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3: 612, 649-50, Durham, *Exodus*, 429). While of course possible, such an argument does not seem consistent in other places in the OT where YHWH apparently had no difficulty undoing something he has already done (e.g., the flood) and is foreign to the main concerns of Exodus. Understanding 32:11 as the grounds for 32:12 not only makes better sense of what is at stake in Exodus 32, but also strengthens Moses’ argument of 32:12.

<sup>43</sup> That the word כח only appears one other time in Exodus, again in connection with the display of YHWH’s power in the plagues (15:6), suggests that 32:11 may refer back to 9:16.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 416.

me; this concerns not me but you, this is *your* people, you are the one who brought it here!”<sup>45</sup> The effect of Moses’ reference to Israel as YHWH’s people is meant to suggest that YHWH’s has publicly bound himself to Israel.

Having established the connection between YHWH and Israel, Moses follows with two direct appeals. First, he invokes YHWH’s reputation, suggesting that the destruction of Israel will disparage YHWH’s character in the eyes of the Egyptians. At stake here is exactly what YHWH wants to communicate concerning himself to Egypt. The implication of Moses’ comment is that Egypt will continue to recognize YHWH as powerful, but also as evil.<sup>46</sup> In other words, YHWH is not only concerned to display his power, but is also concerned to communicate *what kind of God he is*. Moses’ appeal is based upon the premise that YHWH wants to be known as a particular kind of God, a God who is good (as suggested by YHWH’s desire not to be known as evil [רע]). Because YHWH is concerned to be known as a particular type of God, Margaliot does not go too far when he suggests that nothing less than YHWH’s recognition as God amongst the nations is at stake. Imagining the following words from Moses to YHWH, Margaliot writes: “your very divinity, your recognition as a God by other nations and Israel is here most seriously endangered.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 144.

<sup>46</sup> Because the potential insult is to YHWH’s character, not his power, Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:649, is correct that YHWH’s reputation would be ruined by being considered an “evil genius,” as opposed to the notion of Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 932, that Egypt would simply view the exodus as a “bad scheme.” George W. Coats, “The Kings Loyal Opposition: Obedience and Authority in Exodus 32-34,” in *Canon and Authority*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 97-8, argues that the evil refers not to YHWH’s reputation, but rather to the breaking of the covenant. Even if one appeals to Num 14:3-9 as a parallel, as Coats does, it is difficult to reconcile Coats’ interpretation with explicit reference with the reaction of the Egyptians.

<sup>47</sup> Meshullam Margaliot, “The Theology of Exodus 32-34,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), 44.

Secondly, Moses invokes YHWH's promises to the patriarchs. The ground of this second appeal has been debated. A common Jewish reading suggests that Moses appeals to the merit of the patriarchs.<sup>48</sup> While Moses does describe the patriarchs as "your faithful servants," he goes on to describe them as those to whom YHWH swore by himself (נשבעת להם בך) thereby laying the emphasis on the *promises* given to the patriarchs. By emphasizing YHWH's promises, Moses brings YHWH's integrity to the fore. Again, the issue is bound to YHWH's honor, this time as one who keeps his word.

The appeal to the patriarchal promises may also have a wider scope. First, as Jacob points out, the reference to Abraham, Isaac, and *Israel* (rather than Jacob), suggests the bond between YHWH and the people in a way that would not be so apparent if YHWH had mentioned Jacob.<sup>49</sup> By speaking of Israel, Moses reminds YHWH that he has bound himself to this people. Secondly, the reference to the patriarchal promises calls to mind Genesis 12:1-3, the place where those promises were first articulated.<sup>50</sup> While Genesis 12:1-3 does not explicitly speak of YHWH's honor, it clearly has the nations in view, that all the families of the earth would find blessing through Abraham. So, while appealing to YHWH's integrity, it is quite possible that Moses in 32:13 also appeals to YHWH's purposes in calling the patriarchs. If this is the case, the reasons of integrity and worldwide purposes in 32:13 should not be separated too sharply, particularly given that they both deal with YHWH's honor. The reason that Moses' appeal in 32:13 is so

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<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Cassuto, *Exodus*, 416, and Brichto, "Worship," 9. Jacob, *Second Book*, 946, places the emphasis on the promises to the patriarchs.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 946. Jacob points out further that the only other time "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" is mentioned is 1 Kings 18:36, a similar circumstance where Israel's future is in jeopardy.

<sup>50</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 567, argues that YHWH himself suggests the link to Genesis 12:1-3 by using the term לגי גדול in 32:10.

compelling, then, is not only that a broken word dishonors God, but that failure to follow through upon his promises brings his plan for worldwide acknowledgment into jeopardy.

That Moses' concerns were important to YHWH is suggested in YHWH's response: "and YHWH repented from the evil which he had spoken of doing to his people" (32:14). At this point, it is important to be clear about the reasons for YHWH's repentance. Albeit in slightly different ways, both of Moses' appeals are grounded in YHWH's foundational commitment to be known as God amongst the nations. In 32:12, Moses appeals to YHWH's international reputation (specifically Egypt). In 32:13, Moses appeals both to YHWH's integrity and to his purposes for blessing the nations inaugurated in Genesis 12. It is noteworthy that in neither case does Moses ground his appeal in Israel. He does not make light of her sin, nor does he appeal to any special love YHWH may have for her. The reminder that Israel is "thy people" (32:11) is the most Moses will say of Israel, a statement which says as much about YHWH as it does about Israel.<sup>51</sup> Durham's statements that "Moses' whole concern is with the people" and that YHWH repented because he was "moved with pity for Israel under such a threat as he had made" therefore miss the primary issue at stake.<sup>52</sup> The grounds of Moses' appeal are concerned solely with YHWH's honor, as one who has a reputation to uphold, one who has made promises he has sworn to keep, and as one who has embarked upon a plan to secure for himself the acknowledgment of the nations. In other words, Moses grounds his plea for Israel *in the interests of YHWH himself*. This must not be missed, for it is crucial for

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<sup>51</sup> Some, e.g. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 416, find the phrase "your people" in 32:11 to appeal to YHWH's special love for Israel. While such an interpretation is possible, it lacks strong textual support in Exodus. The "your people" can just as easily be a reference, not to the love of YHWH for Israel, but to the connection already established between YHWH and Israel, which has created a situation whereby YHWH's reputation is bound up with Israel's welfare.

<sup>52</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 429.

understanding what is at stake in YHWH's response to Israel. Rather than defending the people before YHWH,<sup>53</sup> Moses defends *YHWH* before YHWH. On these grounds, YHWH reverses his decision to exterminate Israel.

### **Second Petition (Exodus 32:31b-32).**

After the first intercession, Moses descends from the mountain and sees Israel's idolatry for himself. After, in hot anger, smashing the tablets, destroying the calf and forcing Israel to drink its dust, confronting Aaron, and ordering the slaughter of 3000 Israelites, Moses returns to YHWH with the following request:

Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive the sin—but if not, blot me, I pray, out of your book which you have written (32:31b-32).

Here Moses presses further than in 32:11-13. Rather than simply asking that YHWH not exterminate Israel (which has been granted), Moses asks for YHWH to forgive Israel,<sup>54</sup> offering to assume Israel's fate should YHWH refuse to grant forgiveness.<sup>55</sup> In so doing, Moses unequivocally asserts his solidarity with Israel.

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<sup>53</sup> As argued by Krašovec, *Reward*, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Contra Childs, *Exodus*, 558, 571, at this point in the narrative YHWH has not granted forgiveness to Israel. YHWH's threat in 32:10 was to destroy Israel, and is therefore the content of his repentance in 32:14. In addition, nowhere in 32:11-13 does Moses ask for forgiveness, as he does in 32:32 and 34:9. To suggest that 32:14 grants forgiveness removes the rationale for Moses' petition in 32:30-34. Interpreting 32:14 as YHWH's granting forgiveness causes Childs problems in understanding much of the following chapter: "the forgiveness for which Moses interceded in vv. 11ff. and which he received in v. 14 does not tally well with the punishment in vv. 25ff., nor the refusal of forgiveness in vv. 33ff." Childs cites this as an inconsistency, and uses it as a grounds for arguing that 32:7-14 is a Deuteronomic addition. If, however, it is recognized that forgiveness is not at issue in 32:7-14, the apparent inconsistency fades and the need to invoke different sources to explain an apparent theological tension diminishes.

<sup>55</sup> It is unclear from the grammar whether or not Moses is suggesting he take Israel's place in punishment (Childs, *Exodus*, 571), or that he simply share Israel's punishment (Cassuto, *Exodus*, 423, cf. Moberly, *Mountain*, 199, n. 57, Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, vol. 81, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1995), 205, n. 55). However, Moses' concerns in 32—34 suggest the former, given that Moses' sharing Israel's punishment would not solve the problem of YHWH's honor with which Moses is so concerned, whereas

Moses' request is denied. YHWH will not allow Moses to assume Israel's punishment, and pledges to punish the guilty (32:33-34). The question arises: why did YHWH deny Moses' request here after granting his request earlier in 32:14? The text is not explicit. However, it is worth noting that, unlike 32:11-13 where Moses' offers a carefully reasoned request grounded in YHWH's commitment to be honored amongst the nations, here Moses provides no reasons for YHWH to forgive Israel, a point to which we will return later. Moses simply makes the request, and is apparently denied.<sup>56</sup>

### **Third Petition (Exodus 33:12-18)**

Moses' third intercession of 33:12-18 comes as a response to a further problem: although YHWH has agreed not to destroy Israel, he refuses to accompany Israel into Canaan. This sets up the central issue of chapter 33, the problem of YHWH's presence with Israel. This third intercession is both complicated and extremely important.<sup>57</sup> As Brueggemann has written, "[t]here can be little doubt that Exodus 33 is the most

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Moses taking Israel's punishment upon himself (and thereby sparing Israel) would. It is interesting to note that the above cited interpreters who reject the notion of Moses offering himself as a substitute for the people do not argue for the point, but simply assert it.

<sup>56</sup> Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 205, suggests that Moses appeals to the existence of a "faithful remnant," embodied in himself, as the basis for YHWH's mercy. This seems unlikely for at least two reasons. First, Hafemann's argument that only the most guilty were slaughtered (cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 956, Brichto, "Worship," 16-17), while certainly plausible, is not explicit in the text, and difficult to reconcile with the ensuing plague. Secondly, if Moses were petitioning on behalf of a faithful remnant, it is unclear why he would have felt the need to ask for forgiveness, given that forgiveness need only be granted to the unfaithful (cf. 32:33, and also Gen 18:22-33 where Abraham petitions for justice for the sake of the righteous of Sodom, rather than for forgiveness for the wicked). A more straightforward reading suggests that YHWH denies Moses' request to take, or to share in, Israel's punishment.

<sup>57</sup> Aside from the commentaries, extended discussions of the issues at stake in Exod 33:12-23 include Walter Brueggemann, "The Crisis and Promise of Presence in Israel," *HBT* 1 (1979): 47-86, James Muilenburg, "Intercession of the Covenant Mediator," in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Wynton Thomas*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), John Piper, "Prolegomena to Understanding Romans 9:14-15: An Interpretation of Exodus 33:19," *JETS* 22 (1979): 203-16, and W.H. Irwin, "The Course of the Dialogue between Moses and Yhwh in Exodus 33:12-17," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 629-36.

sustained and delicate attempt to deal with the problem of Yahweh's presence/absence in Israel."<sup>58</sup>

In investigating Moses' intercession, it is important to be clear about the nature of the problem. While YHWH has declared he will withhold his presence, he nonetheless promises Israel safe passage to the land (33:2) and an abundant land ("flowing with milk and honey," 33:3). Furthermore, YHWH's withholding his presence is an act of mercy, since his going with Israel would mean their destruction (33:3b). Yet, despite the promise of safe passage and abundant land, the news is received as an "evil word" (הדבר הרע הזה, 33:4). Why the word is thus received by the people is never explicitly given. However, the recognition that life would be good in the land despite YHWH's absence is important, for it suggests that, both for Moses and for Israel, something deeper is at stake than Israel's welfare, a point to which we will return below.

After a recounting of Israel's reaction to YHWH's word, Moses offers a third petition, given in two parts. The first is as follows:

And Moses said to YHWH, "See, you have said to me, go up with this people—but you have not made known to me who you will send with me. But you have said 'I know you by name, and also you have found favor in my eyes.' And now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me know your ways, that I may know you, in order that I may find favor in your eyes. And see that this nation is your people" (33:12-14).

Although indirectly, Moses expresses his dissatisfaction with YHWH's declared absence with Israel, particularly given the special favor Moses has found in YHWH's sight.<sup>59</sup> This statement of YHWH's favor is particularly important, for Moses uses it as leverage for his ensuing intercession, in effect arguing that, because he enjoys special favor in YHWH's

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<sup>58</sup> Brueggemann, "Crisis," 48.

<sup>59</sup> As has been often observed, Moses' charge that YHWH has not revealed who would accompany Israel is curious in light of 33:2, and is often interpreted as suggesting his dissatisfaction with YHWH's declaration.

sight, YHWH should grant his petition.<sup>60</sup> Based on this special favor, Moses makes two further petitions: that he would know YHWH's ways,<sup>61</sup> and that YHWH would reinstate Israel as his people.<sup>62</sup>

Moses' request that YHWH acknowledge Israel as his people is particularly significant. First, Moses reaffirms his solidarity with Israel. If YHWH wants to show favor to Moses, who already has found favor in YHWH's sight, then YHWH must show favor to Israel as well. Knowing that he cannot appeal to anything in Israel, for she has "sinned a great sin" (32:30, 31), Moses uses *his own* favor with YHWH as leverage in order to restore Israel to a position of similar favor in YHWH's sight. Secondly, the reference to Israel as a גוי in 33:13 is likely another reference to 19:6. As discussed in chapter 4, the term גוי is most often used for non-Israelite nations, and rarely for Israel herself. In Exodus, applied to Israel, גוי occurs only here and in 19:6. This suggests the possibility that in speaking of Israel as a גוי, Moses is reminding YHWH of Israel's purpose given in 19:4-6.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Brueggemann, "Crisis," 50, 75 n. 15, argues that the phrase "to find favour in one's sight" occurs in situations whereby the subordinate petitions the powerful superior, often the king who has the power of life and death over the subordinate. While Brueggemann is surely right in citing the dynamic of subordinate/superior, he does not exploit the manner in which YHWH's favour already granted Moses gives Moses leverage in his intercession, which explains in part why Brueggemann sees YHWH offering Moses nothing in response to his petition of Exod 33. For a range of possible meanings of the phrase, see Moberly, *Mountain*, 70.

<sup>61</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 73, comments that, in a possible double meaning, "your ways" may refer both to YHWH's character and to the route to the promised land.

<sup>62</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 594, does not see this final phrase as a petition, but rather the grounds for Moses' plea, arguing that Moses appeals to the covenant which he regards as still operative despite Israel's sin. This seems unlikely for two reasons. First, the symbolic import of Moses' shattering the tablets suggests that he understood the covenant to be broken (a point Childs himself makes on p. 569). Secondly, all that YHWH has granted Israel to this point has been continued existence. At this point in the intercession the relationship between Israel and YHWH is still severely impaired. Forgiveness has not been granted, nor has YHWH's presence. Hence it is more likely that the phrase is a petition for the restoration of the covenant.

<sup>63</sup> See also Gen 12:2, where גוי is used of Israel, in a context again concerned with Israel's international purpose. While not drawing any explicit connections to 19:6, Durham, *Exodus*, 447, sees עמך הגוי הזה as a term of intimacy, translating the phrase as "your very own people."

YHWH's response in 33:14 is somewhat enigmatic, in a manner often obscured by English translations. YHWH's response, literally, reads "My face will go, and I will give you rest" (פני ילכו והנחתי לך). Suggestions as to the meaning of YHWH's response have varied. Some have argued that YHWH granted Moses' request in full.<sup>64</sup> Others have suggested that YHWH offers only a partial concession to Moses,<sup>65</sup> while some argue that YHWH offers Moses nothing at all.<sup>66</sup> Given Moses' continued intercession, both in 33:15-16 and 34:9, it is unlikely that Moses is completely satisfied.<sup>67</sup> Particularly significant is that YHWH's promise of rest is singular, directed to Moses alone.<sup>68</sup> Despite Moses' efforts to get YHWH to include Israel in the favor he has toward Moses, Israel has not been fully restored. YHWH's response drives Moses to intercede again.

Moses' second intercession pushes further than the first. Whereas in 33:13 Moses requests a reinstatement of Israel as YHWH's people, only tentatively approaching the subject of YHWH's presence, this time Moses boldly seeks for YHWH to reverse his intention of 33:5, 7 not to accompany Israel into the land:

If your presence will not go, do not cause us to go up from here. For how will it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from all the people upon the face of the earth?

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<sup>64</sup> E.g., McNeile, *Exodus*, 214: "[i]t is a complete and final response, exhibiting full forgiveness and reconciliation." Cf. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 434, Durham, *Exodus*, 447.

<sup>65</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 594-95, S. L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 142.

<sup>66</sup> Brueggemann, "Crisis," 50, Gowan, *Theology*, 231. Brichto, "Worship," 25-27, translates 33:14 as a question, suggesting that YHWH's response is playful: "Suppose I go Myself in the lead—will I satisfy you?" Given the gravity of the situation to this point, such a suggestion is unlikely.

<sup>67</sup> Although Durham, *Exodus*, 447, interprets Moses' intercession as a "relief-laden reply."

<sup>68</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 74. Although cf. Van Seters, *Life of Moses*, 334-35, who argues the promise is not directed solely to Moses. The suggestion of Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 141, that 33:14b means "I will cause thee to be transformed from a fretful to a secure person" seems overly influenced by modern psychology, and does not fit the context of Moses' intercession, which to this point has been entirely based upon YHWH's reputation and Israel's welfare, without concern for himself.

Moses appeals to YHWH in two ways. First, he again reminds YHWH of the favor YHWH has granted him. Then Moses asks “how will it be known?” a question that suggests YHWH’s favor toward Moses is something that should be, to a certain extent, public knowledge. Likely in response to YHWH’s singular promise to Moses in 33:14, Moses goes on to include Israel in that favor, again carrying the unmistakable implication that he stands in solidarity with Israel.<sup>69</sup> Moses then presses further to answer the question he has posed concerning how he and Israel will be recognized as distinct: their distinctiveness will be known by YHWH’s presence with them.<sup>70</sup>

This final argument proves the clinching argument, for in 33:17 YHWH responds unambiguously “this word you have spoken I will do.” The reason for the argument’s effectiveness again lies in its appeal to YHWH’s purposes with Israel.<sup>71</sup> As in 33:13, there is a subtle allusion to 19:6.<sup>72</sup> While the word “holy” (שָׁדָק) is not used, as in 19:6, the idea is clearly the same—Israel is intended to be a people distinct from all others. In Janzen’s words, “Moses implicitly appeals to God’s original intent that this people should be a

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<sup>69</sup> Contra Fretheim, *Exodus*, 297, it is not that Moses is trying to change YHWH’s thinking concerning Israel, but rather he is asserting that he will not be separated from them.

<sup>70</sup> According to Muilenburg, “Intercession,” 180, 33:16 implies that Israel is the object of knowing, that only through YHWH going with Israel will *Israel* know she is distinct. There are, however, several reasons for understanding 33:16 to refer to non-Israelite nations. First, non-Israelite nations recognizing Israel’s distinctiveness is consistent with Moses’ appeal to YHWH’s reputation among the nations in 32:12. Secondly, as suggested above, the word יָדָע in 33:13 may point back to 19:6, which clearly has the nations in view. Finally, the same root, נָפַל, is used three other times in Exodus (8:18; 9:4; 11:7), each time to show *Egypt* that Israel is distinct. See Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 146.

<sup>71</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 72, finds Moses’ favour in God’s sight as the grounds for Moses’ successful intercession. While certainly Moses’ position of favour is vital to his intercession, the *content* of his intercession obviously plays an important role. The development of Moses’ prayer in 33:12-16 demonstrates the importance of the content. Moses in 33:12-13 had already grounded his appeal in YHWH’s favour toward him, yet had not received the answer he sought. The reference to YHWH’s plan for Israel in 33:16 is the new element in Moses continued intercession in 33:15-16, suggesting that this is the argument that clinches the response Moses seeks. Thus, both Moses’ favour in YHWH’s sight *and* the content of his intercession are of vital importance in the success of his intercession.

<sup>72</sup> Robert A. Hammer, “New Covenant of Moses,” *Judaism* 27 (1978): 347, has likewise observed that Moses’ petitions of 33:13 and 33:16 seek to restore the Sinaitic covenant of 19:5-6.

‘distinct’ people, ‘a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ (19:3-6).”<sup>73</sup> Moses thereby brings YHWH’s worldwide purpose for Israel back into view. In other words, Moses’ successful appeal in 33:15-16 is based upon the same foundation as his successful appeal 32:11-13: YHWH’s honor among the nations.<sup>74</sup>

This understanding helps explain Moses’ dissatisfaction with YHWH’s absence, despite the promise of protection and abundance. That Moses is not interested in enjoying a good life with Israel if it does not include YHWH’s presence indicates a desire to know YHWH. This desire is likely behind Moses’ following request “show me your glory” (33:18).<sup>75</sup> Less often recognized, however, is the fact that Moses is not content to live well in the land if it will not further the missionary purposes of Israel as given in 19:4-6. While Moses’ desire to know YHWH is clear in this intercession, it is interesting to note that that the only specific reason that Moses insists upon YHWH’s presence among Israel concerns his purposes vis-à-vis the nations. In other words, while the intercession certainly concerns Israel’s fate, Moses again focuses the issue on YHWH’s commitment to be known and honored as God.

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<sup>73</sup> J. G. Janzen, *Exodus*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 246, cf. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 214. Likewise, Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 144, writes that the prayer of 33:16 is based on Moses’ desire for “the assurance of God’s presence for the sake of Israel’s distinctiveness in fulfilling her historical destiny.” Blum, *Studien*, 63, sees 33:16 referring to 19:5, but not to 19:6: “Inhaltlich entspricht letzteres dem bedingten Zuspruch von Ex 19,5 am Beginn der Sinaiperikope (והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים) – freilich der veränderten Situation entsprechend ohne die hehren Aussagen von 19,6.” While it may be granted that Moses has 19:5 in mind, there is no reason to assume that, in the canonical presentation, Moses would have understood 19:5 apart from 19:6, a point made previously in the discussion of 29:46. Indeed, it is the appeal to the purposes of 19:5-6 that gives 33:16 its force.

<sup>74</sup> Connecting 32:12 and 33:16, Moberly, *Mountain*, 56, writes “Moses appeals to Yahweh’s glory as bound up with the fate of the people.”

<sup>75</sup> Exactly what Moses is asking for has generated much discussion, and will be addressed below.

#### Fourth Petition (Exodus 34:9)

In response to Moses' final petition to "show me your glory," YHWH reveals his character in Exodus 34:6-7,<sup>76</sup> which serves, finally, as the declaration of forgiveness for which Moses petitioned in 32:31b-32. Here is the theological climax of the section, and the ultimate fulfillment of all that Moses has sought for YHWH and Israel. Now the covenant can be restored. While technically the covenant is not reinstated in 34:6-7, Moses can now appeal to YHWH's revealed character and once more petition for Israel's forgiveness. Whereas in 32:32 he did not offer any grounds for his appeal, in 34:9 Moses offers a fourth and final petition: "if I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in our midst, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for your inheritance." Again appealing for Israel's forgiveness, Moses now grounds his appeal both to the favor he enjoys with YHWH, and to the revelation of YHWH's character he has just been given.<sup>77</sup> YHWH's response of 34:10 follows naturally: "behold, I cut a covenant."<sup>78</sup>

The reinstatement of the covenant in 34:10 effectively ends Moses' intercession. Moses has been successful in moving YHWH from his stated intention to destroy Israel in 32:10 to forgiving Israel and reinstating the covenant in 34:10. In short, Moses' success

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<sup>76</sup> The Hebrew wording of 34:5 allows for either Moses or YHWH as the speaker. Based on the manner in which Moses appeals to 34:6 in his intercession of 34:9, and supported by Num 14:17-18, the following argument takes YHWH as the speaker. For possible renderings of 34:6, see Scharbert, "Formgeschichte," 131.

<sup>77</sup> Piper, "Prolegomena," 208-9, makes the interesting suggestion that Moses also appeals to Israel's stiff-necked nature. Rather than as a concessive, Piper interprets ׀ in 34:9 as the grounds of Moses' appeal, Moses being confident of forgiveness for Israel based upon the YHWH's merciful nature just revealed in 34:6-7. If this is the case, the petition of Moses is all the more bold, in that Israel's stiff-necked nature was previously the grounds behind YHWH's stated intention both to destroy Israel (32:9) and to withhold his presence (33:3, 5).

<sup>78</sup> It could be argued that the ensuing commands of Exodus 34 are a further expression of mercy, since the commands largely concern idolatry, the precise point of Israel's unfaithfulness. In speaking of the post-calf commands of Ex 34, Zenger, "Wie und Wozu," 279-80, speaks of "Fremdgötterverbot als Hauptgebot ... und sakralrechtlichen Einzelgeboten." The singularity of focus may be regarded as YHWH's merciful attempt to secure Israel's faithfulness.

was due to the manner in which he grounded his petitions in YHWH's own purpose to be known as God amongst the nations. Each time Moses appealed to YHWH's honor in some manner, the request was granted. The only time Moses did not appeal to YHWH's honor, the request was apparently denied (32:32). In fact, Moses did not even appeal to YHWH's grace until 34:9 when YHWH had already indicated that he would fully forgive Israel.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the content of Moses' appeals, grounded in YHWH's concern for his honor, was effective in his intercessions with YHWH.<sup>80</sup> Thus, while perhaps legitimate to see Moses defending Israel in 32—34, it is closer to the text to see that, in his concern for YHWH's reputation and purposes, Moses is defending YHWH.

### *Moses' Character*

A further matter concerning Moses' successful intercession remains to be addressed. As important as the content of Moses' intercession is in YHWH's decision to reinstate the covenant with Israel, 33:17 suggests an additional reason for YHWH's change of heart: Moses' favor in YHWH's sight. This raises the following question: what about Moses caused him to find favor in YHWH's sight to the point where he exerts such influence over YHWH's dealings with Israel? Although the answer, it must be acknowledged, is nowhere explicitly given in Exodus, inferences based upon Moses' prayers and actions may indicate that, at least in part, Moses found favor with YHWH due to Moses' own concern for YHWH's honor.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Contra Clements, *Exodus*, 208.

<sup>80</sup> For an excellent argument along similar lines, see Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 189-231.

<sup>81</sup> Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 212, argues that "[i]t is not Moses' merit or character that should motivate YHWH to act in the future, but the evidence of God's own bestowal of his

The first indication that Moses is primarily concerned with YHWH's honor is Moses' rejection of personal privilege at the expense of YHWH's reputation. It is quite possible that YHWH's stated intention to destroy Israel and make a great nation of Moses (32:10) carries a subtle appeal to Moses' self interest. In effect, by calling Moses to stand aside as Israel is destroyed, YHWH offers Moses the opportunity to assume a place akin to Abraham as the patriarch of a new people. Despite what appeal this might have had, Moses rejects the proposal outright. As discussed above, YHWH's honor is at stake, and Moses' reaction to YHWH's stated intention shows that he is more concerned with YHWH's reputation among the Egyptians than he is about personally assuming a more exalted position. Indeed, the phrase *ויהל משה את פני יהוה* may suggest that, far from being attractive to Moses, the proposition made him ill.<sup>82</sup> If 32:10 in any way served to appeal to Moses' self interest, his ensuing intercession in 32:11-13 makes it clear that YHWH's honor is more important to Moses than personal ambition.

The second episode that sheds light on Moses' character is his reaction to Israel's idolatry. Commentators have often argued that Moses' hearing of Israel's idolatry on the mountain is inconsistent with his fierce reaction in seeing it himself, leading some scholars to suggest a source critical problem.<sup>83</sup> It is not obvious, however, that such a solution is necessary. It is common to human experience that hearing about something and seeing it with one's own eyes can often be far different experiences, for it is often in

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'favor/grace' on Moses in the past." While he does not explain his assertion, it seems that the issue turns on whether or not *חן* signifies a favour that is always undeserved. While certainly YHWH's grace to Israel in 32—34 is undeserved, other places in the OT suggest that *חן* may be given in response to obedience or humility (e.g., Ps 84:11[12]; Prov 3:4, 34. See H.-J. Fabry, "חנן" *TDOT* 5:30-33). Such a sense may well be at work in YHWH's favor toward Moses.

<sup>82</sup> Although see Klaus Seybold, "חלה," *TDOT* 4: 399-409, for the semantic range of *חלה* and the difficulties in precisely identifying the root.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Coats, "Loyal Opposition," 98, who shares the common view that the account assumes Moses had no prior knowledge of Israel's sin.

the direct encounter that the weight of a particular circumstance is felt. Along these lines, Driver suggests that seeing the spectacle of Israel's idolatry caused Moses to realize the gravity of the offense in a way he had not before, thereby triggering the fierce reaction and destruction of the tablets.<sup>84</sup> If Driver is right, moving too quickly to a source critical solution to Moses' reaction misses the human element, and in effect obscures the rather important implication that not only is Israel's idolatry an offense to YHWH, but it is an offence to Moses. Further, it is noteworthy in this light that the same language of burning anger is used to describe Moses' reaction in 32:19 (וַיִּחַר אָרַף) and YHWH's reaction previously in 32:10 (וַיִּחַר אַפֵּי בְהֵם). The similarity between YHWH's and Moses' reactions suggests that Moses shares the zeal that YHWH has for his honor and reputation.

The slaughter of the 3000 at the hands of the Levites is a third episode which shows Moses' zeal for YHWH's reputation. The slaughter by the Levites is typically taken to be the punishment for the sin of the calf. To be sure, the action has a strong element of punishment in it, but the immediate reason for the slaughter may lie elsewhere. A hint as to the reason is found in 32:25-6:

And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (פָּרַע)—for Aaron had let them break loose (פָּרַעָה), to their shame (לִשְׁמֹצָה) among their enemies—then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Who is on YHWH's side? Come to me."

Interpretation of the above passage has proven difficult, particularly given the uncertainty of the words פָּרַע and שְׁמֹצָה. Better attested, פָּרַע has been rendered to let free, to leave unattended, or to run wild,<sup>85</sup> but can also be understood in the more profound sense of

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<sup>84</sup> Driver, *Exodus*, 350, cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:614. Also fitting naturally within the narrative is the interpretation of Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 216, who takes the view that Moses' shattering the tablets was intended to be symbolic of the breaking of the covenant.

<sup>85</sup> HALOT, 970.

departing from that which is true and right.<sup>86</sup> A *hapax legomenon*, שמצה has understandably been more difficult to interpret, as can be seen in the divergence of suggestions. Modern English bibles have translated the phrase as “derision” (*ESV, NASB, NRSV*), “shame” (*KJV, RSV*), “laughingstock” (*NIV*), and “menace” (*NJPS*). Sarna follows the *NJPS* and translates לשמצה as “so that they were a menace,” suggesting that their activities were designed to generate fear amongst their enemies.<sup>87</sup> Houtman takes the opposite view, translating לשמצה as “so that they were not concerned,” suggesting that Israel’s worship left them defenseless against their enemies.<sup>88</sup> Recognizing that the exact meaning is elusive, Childs translates לשמצה as “to the delight.”<sup>89</sup>

The interpretation of the passage can, therefore, take several directions.<sup>90</sup> A common interpretation has found 32:25 to refer to Israel breaking loose in a kind of sexual revelry, perhaps involved with a fertility festival. In Cassuto’s understated terms, “they were completely given over to their desire.”<sup>91</sup> Knight suggests Israel engaged in ecstatic behavior.<sup>92</sup> Janzen, countering the view that fertility in 32:25 has to do with sex and fertility, argues that the bull was a military symbol, and that Israel’s breaking loose (particularly from the commandment against images) was a repudiation of YHWH’s rule

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<sup>86</sup> J. G. Janzen, “The Character of the Calf and Its Cult in Exodus 32,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 603-5, has argued this point in depth, writing that the “consistent connotation [of פרע] is of the relaxing and disregard for, or flouting of and rebellion against, structures and constraints considered (rightly or wrongly) to be foundational to true and life-giving order” (p. 604). See also his earlier article, “The Root *pr*’ in Judges V 2 and Deuteronomy XXXII 42,” *VT* 39 (1989): 393-406.

<sup>87</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 208.

<sup>88</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:663-64. Cf. Brichto, “Worship,” 15: “to the point of helplessness.”

<sup>89</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 570.

<sup>90</sup> It is perhaps due to the difficulties involved that several commentators (e.g. Noth, Childs, Durham) make no attempt to interpret what exactly is referred to in 32:25.

<sup>91</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 420.

<sup>92</sup> Knight, *Theology*, 189.

over Israel (and of YHWH as her military strength). In this case, Israel intended the bull to serve as a war-emblem to frighten Israel's enemies.<sup>93</sup>

While Janzen's view seems more consistent with the literary context of Exodus, exactly what Israel was engaged in is perhaps not too consequential for the present purpose. Significantly, the different interpretations share the recognition that Israel's behavior had public ramifications in the eyes of her enemies. In the first case, Israel's enemies view Israel as an object of mockery. In the second case, Israel's enemies are given the message that the bull, not YHWH, is responsible for their military might. As suggested by YHWH's angry response to Israel's crediting the calf with exodus (32:8), a public demonstration denying YHWH as Israel's deliverer would have been a grave offense. In either case, given the public connection YHWH has established with Israel, YHWH's reputation among the nations is at stake. This raises the possibility that, rather than punishment, the immediate issue for Moses is the shame that Israel is bringing upon YHWH in the sight of her enemies. In fact, the presence of the passive participle פָּרַע allows for the possibility that Israel was acting *at that time* in a manner that would publicly dishonor YHWH in the sight of the nations. If so, the urgency and the immediacy of the slaughter would be better viewed not primarily a vehicle for retribution, but rather an extreme measure to stop the public disgrace Israel was bringing upon YHWH.<sup>94</sup> As

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<sup>93</sup> See his larger argument in Janzen, "Character," 607.

<sup>94</sup> This interpretation also offers possible solutions to two other problems connected with the slaughter. First, it may explain why there are apparently two accounts of YHWH punishing Israel, the slaughter of the 3,000 and the plague of 32:35 (some include Israel's drinking the water as a third). The seeming presence of two accounts has led some scholars to suggest that the two punishment accounts come from different sources (cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 245, who judges 32:25-29 an addition concerned with why the Levites were entrusted with the priestly office). Rather than attributing each to different sources, the above interpretation suggests that the reasons for the two disasters were different. The plague was YHWH's punishment, while the slaughter was an immediate measure to preserve YHWH's reputation. The notion that the slaughter of the 3,000 was not primarily a vehicle of punishment is further supported by Moses' words to Israel following the slaughter: "you have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to YHWH; perhaps I can make

Durham writes, 32:25-29 serves simply “as the report of how the out-of-control Israelites were brought under control again.”<sup>95</sup>

This interpretation sheds important light on Moses’ character, particularly when compared to his reaction to YHWH’s declared intention to destroy Israel in 32:10. Unlike his response to 32:10, there is no record in 32:25-26 of Moses interceding on Israel’s behalf. On the contrary, Moses does not seem to flinch in obeying YHWH’s call to order such a brutal command. The explanation plausibly lies in the fact that, in contrast to YHWH’s proposed wholesale destruction of Israel in 32:10, YHWH’s promises to the patriarchs and his international reputation (the grounds of 32:11-13) would not be compromised by the partial destruction of the unfaithful (those not on YHWH’s side) in this instance. Because YHWH’s integrity and reputation are not compromised in killing the unfaithful Israelites, and because the people are engaged publicly in shameful activities, Moses can act in a swift and decisive manner. Moses’ actions in calling for the slaughter of the 3,000 and his steadfast intercession that YHWH not completely destroy Israel in 32:11-13 are therefore consistent. If the above interpretation is valid, then it

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atonement for your sin” (32:30). The mention of atonement for Israel and Moses’ subsequent petition to YHWH indicate that Moses himself did not think the slaughter adequately served the purpose of punishing Israel for her sin. Secondly, the above interpretation offers a possibility concerning the identity of the 3,000 killed. Often it is assumed that those who were killed were the ringleaders of the rebellion (e.g., Brichto, “Worship,” 15). While certainly plausible, it is nowhere suggested in the text. Another interpretation suggests that the drinking of the dust of the tablets functioned to distinguish the guilty from the innocent, in a manner comparable to the water of bitterness in Numbers 5 (cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 249-50). Again, while possible, nowhere does Exodus suggest the water functioned as such. An alternative possibility is that the 3,000 were those publicly engaging in shameful behaviour. Besides being an inference more directly connected to the text, such behaviour would be publicly and immediately recognizable, thereby distinguishing those actively participating from those not in the midst of the people. Hence the need to move further beyond the text and surmise some kind of special discernment on the part of the Levites or any special properties of the water diminish. The observation of Michael Walzer, “Exodus 32 and the Theory of Holy War: The History of a Citation,” *HTR* 61 (1968): 2-3, that the slaughter is the only instance in the wilderness where YHWH does not directly punish the Israelites himself may also suggest that something else than punishment is at work here.

<sup>95</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 431.

suggests that Moses dealt with Israel in the matter of the 3,000 in an effort to preserve YHWH's honor, again revealing a zeal for YHWH's honor that drives his actions.<sup>96</sup>

Moses' offer of himself in place of the Israelites in 32:32 is a fourth instance where his zeal for YHWH's honor is apparent. One thing clear about Moses in 32:32 is that Israel's restoration is more important to Moses than his own life. Exactly why Moses offered himself in place of Israel is less certain. Was it Moses' love for Israel? Or was it Moses' love for YHWH? While it must be acknowledged that the text is not explicit, given that nowhere in Exodus 32 does the text comment on Moses' love for Israel, the evidence in Exodus suggests that Moses' offer is based primarily upon his zeal for YHWH, even if Moses did have a corresponding zeal for Israel.<sup>97</sup> Buber captures it well: "to be sure, [Moses] is not concerned with the soul of man, he is concerned with Israel; but he is concerned with Israel for the sake of YHWH."<sup>98</sup> If this is correct, 32:32 provides strong support for the notion that Moses' favor in YHWH's eyes has to do with YHWH's favor in Moses' eyes. This suggests that, in offering himself, Moses is not only asserting his solidarity with Israel, as argued above, but is more fundamentally asserting his solidarity with YHWH himself.

Finally, Moses' favor in YHWH's eyes has a strong connection with his desire to know God, a desire most clearly manifest in his request for YHWH to "show me your

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<sup>96</sup> R.N. Whybray, "The Immorality of God: Reflections on Some Passages in Genesis, Job, Exodus and Numbers," *JSOT* 72 (1996): 119, sees Moses in two distinct roles in Exod 32: the bold and merciful intercessor who bravely stands against YHWH's on behalf of the people and the wrathful Moses who slaughters the 3,000 as "the ruthless opponent of the people." In the end he finds the two pictures theologically incongruous, and attributes them to different traditions both of which a final redactor deemed to be so important that he held them together despite the different pictures they give of Moses. In addition to being ultimately unhelpful theologically, in that it dismisses a significant tension by making it a compositional problem, such a move is unnecessary since Moses' actions in both instances are consistent with the motivation driving each.

<sup>97</sup> Thus, the comment of Krašovec, *Reward*, 91, that "Moses reacts so forcefully because his love for his people is so extreme," needs to be qualified.

<sup>98</sup> Buber, *Moses*, 135-36.

glory” (33:18). The exact nature of the request has been debated. Terrien, for instance, finds Moses’ request egocentric and arrogant, driven by “the lure of infinity” and “the lust for absolute knowledge.”<sup>99</sup> It is difficult, however, to reconcile egotism with Moses’ declaration that he would die in place of Israel (32:32) and his refusal to take Abraham’s place at the head of a new people (32:10 ff.). It is also difficult to reconcile egotism with the YHWH’s positive response, who gives Moses, at least in part, what he asks for. Piper, Moberly, and others suggest that Moses’ request is for assurance regarding YHWH’s promise of his presence with Israel given in 33:17. Piper argues that Moses’ request is driven by the staggering nature of his larger petition, that YHWH take an idolatrous and rebellious people, whose stiff necked nature cannot abide YHWH’s presence (33:5), and grant them his special favor as his own people. As Piper writes,

the magnitude of his request drives Moses to probe into the very heart of God, as it were, to assure himself that God is in his deepest nature the kind of God who could ‘pardon our iniquity and take us for [his] inheritance’.... The request to see God’s glory should be understood in this context as a desire to have God confirm his astonishing willingness to show his favor to a stiffnecked, idolatrous people.<sup>100</sup>

Moberly concurs, arguing that Moses presses further into YHWH’s character because the fundamental issue of Israel’s sinfulness remains unresolved. If YHWH were to come into the midst of the people, it would again mean judgment. Therefore, Moses needs assurance that forgiveness is grounded in the character of God himself.<sup>101</sup>

A further possibility is that the request comes from Moses’ desire to know God, particularly triggered by the staggering nature of the mercy that YHWH had just granted

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<sup>99</sup> Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 144.

<sup>100</sup> Piper, “Prolegomena,” 207-8. Noticing that glory refers to the manifestation of God’s presence (Exod 24:16-17, 29:43), Park, *From Mount Sinai*, 283-4, connects the request with the Tabernacle by arguing that Moses’ request is meant to ensure the recovery of YHWH’s presence with Israel.

<sup>101</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 68. Cf. Durham, *Exodus*, 452.

in 33:17. Curiously, this aspect of Moses' intercession has received little attention in the commentaries.<sup>102</sup> Margaliot, noting the audacity of this request, states that seeing YHWH's face "is to be equated with an intimate knowledge of his personality, the way a person looks at the face of his fellow-man, enabling him to know to a large extent his thoughts and intentions."<sup>103</sup> While there are likely other factors at work in Moses' request, such as those suggested above by Piper and Moberly, there is no reason to rule out the straightforward and simple suggestion that Moses' request reveals a desire to know YHWH. Supporting this notion is Moses' request in 33:13: "show me your ways, that I may know you." Given that the central concern of the book of Exodus is YHWH's desire to be known, it is entirely possible that Moses' request is, at least in part, based on a desire to know YHWH as YHWH desires to be known. Piper sees this, commenting that "what was clearly at the heart of Moses' request was a longing to know the glory of God's character from which flowed the mercy that he had just been promised."<sup>104</sup> If so, there is a personal element at work in Moses' request, but of a nature different than the egotistical sense Terrien posits. Such a desire on Moses' part would also explain his concern for YHWH's glory demonstrated throughout his intercessions.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Although see Brichto, "Worship," 28, who translates 33:18 as "Show Yourself to me, now!" and Cassuto, *Exodus*, 435, who renders 33:18 as "grant me, pray, the privilege of Thy manifesting Thyself to me."

<sup>103</sup> Margaliot, "Theology," 46.

<sup>104</sup> Piper, "Prolegomena," 214. Although, curiously, he writes elsewhere that "it is impossible to construe Moses' request in 33:18 as an expression of a desire mystically to enjoy God's essence." (John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 60.) There does not seem to be a reason to choose between the two.

<sup>105</sup> If the above interpretation is correct, it calls into question the comment of Van Seters, *Life of Moses*, 323, that 33:18-23 is "so entirely out of character with [33:12-17] and with what follows in 34:1-10 that it must be judged as an addition." Cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 257.

## *Israel's Repentance*

One more consideration is relevant in seeking why YHWH reinstates the covenant with Israel: Israel's repentance. To this point we have looked upon Moses' intercessions, particularly in the manner in which Moses appealed to YHWH's honor and worldwide purposes. Never does Moses appeal to anything in Israel, except in calling her YHWH's people, which, as mentioned above, says as much about YHWH as it does about Israel. Several interpreters, however, have suggested that Israel's repentance may be the reason for YHWH's reinstating the covenant. For instance, Milgrom finds Israel's stripping off her ornaments in 33:4 to be a demonstration of Israel's contrition, and on that basis infers that this may be the reason that God renews the covenant in 34:10.<sup>106</sup> While it goes too far to say, as does Jacob, that "[t]hrough this act [of humbly putting off their garments] they designated themselves as the true *b'nei yis-ra-el* and "saved" themselves,"<sup>107</sup> it would nevertheless be wrong to rule out Israel's repentance as having significant relevance. Therefore a brief investigation of Israel's repentance and its role in her restoration is warranted.

To understand the nature of Israel's repentance, we must begin with YHWH's declaration of his absence that triggers Israel's response.

And YHWH said to Moses, "Go, go up from here, you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land which I swore to Abraham, to

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<sup>106</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 395. Cf. Noth, *Exodus*, 254, Krašovec, 96-97, and Kaiser, *Exodus*, 482. On the other hand, Moberly, *Mountain*, 60-61, noting that the same verb is used in Num 14:39 where Israel continues in disobedience, argues that the text indicates remorse on Israel's part, not repentance. Gowan, *Theology*, 229, suggests that the text does not give enough information to make a judgment.

<sup>107</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 960. Not only does the text not support this directly, but we have seen that Israel's "salvation" (or, to this point, non-destruction) has been effected by Moses' intercession, which has not appealed to Israel, but to YHWH himself.

Isaac, and to Jacob, saying ‘to your offspring I will give it’ (for I will send before you an angel, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizites, and the Hivites and the Jebusites), to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go up in your midst, because you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way” (33:1-3).

It is particularly important to note what is granted and what is withheld. In emphasizing the threatened withdrawal of YHWH’s presence, many commentators have failed to note what YHWH grants Israel. For instance, Durham calls the declaration of YHWH’s absence “a punishment worse than death,” which “negates every announcement, every expectation, every instruction except those now being given.”<sup>108</sup> However, there is much in this passage which YHWH grants Israel. YHWH promises Israel safe passage into the land. Not only will the angel guide Israel, but he will also drive out the inhabitants. In addition, the land is described as “flowing with milk and honey,” indicating that a life of abundance and prosperity lies before Israel. Further, they will travel without the danger of utter destruction, which may come upon them if YHWH were to go with them. The language “lest I consume you on the way” suggests that YHWH’s absence, rather than being a curse, is actually a blessing for Israel,<sup>109</sup> given their stiff-necked nature.<sup>110</sup>

Recognizing what YHWH grants Israel focuses the issue of Israel’s repentance. Despite all that is granted, Israel takes the declaration of YHWH’s absence as “this evil word” (הדבר הרע הזה) and mourns. The implication is that Israel is not primarily interested in YHWH’s gifts, but rather in YHWH himself. Israel is not content to enjoy an

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<sup>108</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 437. Cf. Enns, *Exodus*, 578, who calls YHWH’s declaration “the end of the road.”

<sup>109</sup> Krašovec, *Reward*, 95, finds YHWH’s refusal to go with them an expression of both judgment and mercy.

<sup>110</sup> It should be noted here that we need to look no further than Moses’ petition of 32:13 to explain YHWH’s concessions to Israel. As has been argued above, YHWH relented, in part, based upon his concern to be faithful to his prior promises to the patriarchs (reiterated to Israel in 6:8). Faithfulness to those promises required that they should actually enter the land and that that land should be of the (abundant) kind promised. YHWH’s sending the angel (to guide and protect) and his refusal to go himself ensures the former, while the reiteration of the phrase “a land flowing with milk and honey” insures the latter.

abundant life in the land if it involves separation from YHWH. The contrast with 32:1 could not be stronger. In 32:1, Israel charges Aaron to “make us gods who will go before us.” The text records no lamenting or mourning for absence of Moses, but rather an aggressive attempt to secure someone to accompany the people into the land. It is not important to Israel who that someone is, as long as they are escorted safely into the land. Israel’s response of mourning in 33:4, however, demonstrates a thorough change of heart. No longer is Israel content to be accompanied to the land by just anyone. The people have been granted an angel to take them in safely and are unsatisfied. It must be YHWH. The promise of safety and abundance does not appeal to Israel outside the presence of YHWH in her midst.

This narrative hints further that this change of heart is accompanied by a willingness to obey. Many scholars have pointed to an awkwardness, or, for some, a contradiction,<sup>111</sup> in the relationship between 33:4, where Israel put off their ornaments, and 33:5, where the text records that YHWH told Israel to put off her ornaments. The common critical solution, taken by Childs and others, is to attribute the two verses to different traditions.<sup>112</sup> It is not at all obvious, however, that such a move is required. It is, of course, well within the possible range of Hebrew grammar for the *waw* at the beginning of 33:5 to introduce an explanation. The text in 33:4 does not demand that Israel’s putting off her ornaments be a spontaneous response, it only records that Israel mourned and put off her ornaments. The explanation follows immediately in 33:5—

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<sup>111</sup> Jacob, *Second Book*, 959.

<sup>112</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 589. Childs cites several other reasons for assuming different traditions: the appearance of Horeb, rather than Sinai, in 33:6, the plural address of 33:5 (compared to the singular of 33:4), and the form of address of 33:5, which Childs finds common to P. Jacob, *Second Book*, 959, cites the Jewish interpretation that the people would have resumed wearing the ornaments had YHWH been pleased with their renunciation.

YHWH commanded Israel to remove her ornaments. The translation adopted by many English Bibles reflects this sense of explanation: “for the LORD had said to Moses...”<sup>113</sup> Israel putting off her ornaments in response to YHWH’s command need not suggest that her mourning was not genuine, nor her repentance artificial. In fact, it may do the opposite. The sin of making and worshipping the golden calf was one of disobedience. 33:4-5 is an instance of Israel’s *obedience*. At this point, the text may well be hinting that Israel is now willing to obey YHWH. As we have seen, Israel’s obedience is essential to her position as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. Israel’s existence as YHWH’s people is unintelligible outside her obedience. Therefore, if Israel’s repentance is to mean anything to YHWH, it must involve obedience. It would not be unusual, or far-fetched, to see in Israel’s putting off her ornaments an example, not only of mourning, but of a repentant heart willing to obey.<sup>114</sup>

That Israel genuinely repented of her sin is further indicated in her response to YHWH’s presence in 33:7-11. The Decalogue, as we have seen, explicitly called for Israel to worship no god but YHWH. As we have seen, the sin of the golden calf was an explicit repudiation of YHWH’s command: commanded not to worship any graven image (20:5, *לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְהֵם*), Israel worshipped the golden calf (32:8, *וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ*). In 33:7-11, however, Israel worships appropriately. Responding to the presence of YHWH, visible in the pillar of cloud, Israel’s worships (*וַהֲשִׁיחֻהוּ*, 33:10). Furthermore, the text takes pains to qualify the extent of this repentance: when all the people (*כָּל הָעָם*) saw the pillar of

<sup>113</sup> E.g., ESV, RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB.

<sup>114</sup> Several interpreters (e.g., Krašovec, *Reward*, 95, Cassuto, *Exodus*, 427) have suggested that Israel’s stripping herself of her ornaments is not only a gesture of remorse, but also a repudiation of the very objects which they used to create the calf, a gesture of devotion to YHWH which further supports the notion of Israel’s repentance. That Israel’s repentance involves practical obedience is confirmed in the tabernacle section following, to be discussed in chapter 7.

cloud...all the people (כל העם) would rise up and worship (33:10). Israel's repentance includes not only some, but all.

Does suggesting that Israel's repentance plays a part in YHWH's restoration of Israel somehow provide an exception to the trajectory we have seen thus far in Exodus, that YHWH acts as he does for the sake of his name? There are two reasons why YHWH's responding to Israel's repentance is entirely consistent with, and even grounded by, the commitment to his worldwide honor. First, as indicated above, Israel's repentance is necessary for her to be reinstated as YHWH's treasured possession, and to function as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, for her calling is dependent upon her obedience. In other words, Israel's repentance is required if she is to function according to her missionary purpose. Secondly, Israel's repentance indicates a *desire* for YHWH that she did not have previously. Again, 32:1 indicated that Israel was primarily interested in the gifts or benefits that YHWH had offered: safe passage to the land, and presumably the abundant life associated with it. On the other hand, 33:4-11 indicates that Israel is not content with safe passage or the promise of an abundant life in the land. She is not primarily concerned with YHWH's gifts, or even his threats. She will be content with nothing but YHWH himself. This is a very deep expression of honor, to esteem the presence of a person more than the gifts that person affords. And such an expression of honor by the people that YHWH has called to be his treasured possession among the nations is entirely consistent with YHWH's commitment to his honor on a worldwide scale.

## CONCLUSION: A PROPOSAL FOR EXODUS 34:6-7

The foregoing discussion has suggested that the success of Moses' intercession is grounded in his appeal to YHWH's commitment to be known amongst the nations. Both times that Moses appealed to YHWH's commitment to his honor among the nations in 32:11-13 and in 33:12-17 (particularly 33:16), his prayer was granted. The one time that Moses did not (32:34), his request was apparently denied. This leads to the conclusion that YHWH restored Israel due to his commitment to his honor. On a broader level, this suggests that, in Piper's words concerning God's righteousness in the OT, "the most fundamental characteristic of God's righteousness is his allegiance to his own name, that is, to his honor and glory."<sup>115</sup> In other words, YHWH's allegiance to himself, here expressed in his purpose to be honored as God amongst the nations, is the standard by which he makes decisions.

We are now in a position to look at Exodus 34:6-7 and explore some of the theological tensions inherent in the formula. As indicated above, the tension between judgment and mercy has perplexed interpreters. Yet, having seen how YHWH's commitment to his glory motivates his dealings with Israel in Exodus 32—34, the relationship between mercy and judgment becomes more apparent. As clear from 20:4-6, YHWH must punish idolatry. Failure to do so would not only go against his word of 20:5, but would also implicitly suggest that idolatry was not overly serious. Such a suggestion would, of course, dishonor YHWH himself. Therefore, YHWH must punish Israel, lest his glory be diminished and his purposes undermined. On the other hand, YHWH must

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<sup>115</sup> Piper, *Justification of God*, 90.

extend mercy in order to uphold his honor,<sup>116</sup> for failure to do so would compromise both his reputation in the eyes of the surrounding nations and his mission to those nations through Israel.<sup>117</sup> In other words, the reason that YHWH must punish Israel and the reason that YHWH must extend mercy toward her are the same: to uphold his honor and maintain his purpose to be known. To do one and not the other would be to compromise that honor, and thereby undermine that purpose. YHWH must do both. This is exactly what we find in 34:6-7, a statement concerning YHWH's character that explicitly states that YHWH is merciful, forgiving sin, yet will also punish sin. This characterization is entirely consistent with YHWH's dealings with Israel in 32—34, both forgiving Israel and renewing the covenant, and punishing her for her idolatry. In both forgiving and punishing Israel, YHWH maintains his honor and preserves his missionary purpose amongst the nations.

Rather than seeing the co-existence of mercy and judgment as a manifestation of the conflicted inner nature of God, as Brueggemann suggests, the above interpretation suggests the opposite: both judgment and mercy flow from YHWH's settled commitment to be honored as God amongst the nations. This understanding does not, of course, solve all the mysteries in the formula. For instance, although there may be hints in Israel's repentance, Exodus is nowhere explicit concerning who will be punished and who will be shown mercy. In fact, YHWH's words of 33:19, "I extend grace to whom I will extend

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<sup>116</sup> That YHWH's mercy is grounded in his concern for his honor is abundant in the OT. Cf., e.g., Deut 32:26-27; Ezek 20:8b-9; cf. Josh 7:8-9; 1 Sam 12:22; Ps 25:11; Is 43:25, 48:9-11; Dan 9:18-19.

<sup>117</sup> Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Gen 18:22-33) is instructive here, for Abraham's petition for YHWH to act justly toward Sodom was based upon the righteousness of the people. YHWH's right to slay the wicked is never questioned. Although he significantly reduced the number of righteous needed to save the city (and the text may imply that YHWH might have made further concessions), Abraham's petition did not save Sodom. On the contrary, Moses appealed to YHWH in an entirely different manner, grounding his requests not in the righteousness of the people, but in the interests of YHWH himself. That YHWH had already forged a public connection with Israel, and not with Sodom, may explain the difference in YHWH's response in each case.

grace, and I show mercy to whom I will show mercy,” explicitly hides those decisions within the counsel of YHWH alone.<sup>118</sup> However, it does allow the reader to understand that mercy and judgment are not at odds with one another, but are both the logical outworking of YHWH’s commitment to be honored as God. It is not, then, any “unwavering commitment to save” that leads YHWH to be merciful to Israel, as Gowan suggests,<sup>119</sup> but rather YHWH’s unwavering commitment to be known for who he is. Thus, in answer to Raitt’s question concerning why God forgives according to 34:6-7, YHWH forgives for the sake of his honor among the nations. The above argument would suggest that Andersen overstates his case when he asserts that “there is no justification for his compassion and kindness, and his *hesed* is completely incomprehensible.”<sup>120</sup> Even though mystery concerning YHWH’s *hesed* remains (33:19), the incident with the golden calf suggests that YHWH’s *hesed* is not completely incomprehensible, but can, at some level, be understood. That mercy is undeserved and given freely does not mean that YHWH has no discernible reasons for extending it. Likewise, Dentan’s suggestion that 34:6-7 was added to balance out an otherwise unattractive picture of YHWH becomes unnecessary, for YHWH’s exercise of judgment and his extension of mercy flow from the same settled commitment. It is the same YHWH who does both. Exodus 34:6-7 simply reflects the manner in which YHWH has acted all along.

Finally, we return to the fundamental tension (“contradiction”) that Brueggemann sees between YHWH’s commitment to Israel and his commitment to himself. According to Brueggemann, these two commitments “are not fully harmonized here, and perhaps

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<sup>118</sup> Piper, “Prolegomena,” 210, cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 596.

<sup>119</sup> Gowan, *Theology*, 221.

<sup>120</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh,” 51.

never are anywhere in the Old Testament.”<sup>121</sup> The emphasis on YHWH’s concern to be honored as God amongst the nations could leave the impression that YHWH is self serving, with no genuine concern for Israel or the nations. Such a reading would, of course, be false to Exodus. YHWH does exhibit genuine concern for the people. Remembering the covenant, which as we have argued is bound up with his missionary concern to bless the nations in Genesis 12, is triggered by the cries of his oppressed people (2:23-25; 3:7-8; 6:5), and the land promised to Israel is an abundant land (3:8; 33:3). The plain sense of 34:6 speaks of YHWH’s grace, mercy, and willingness to forgive. The above reading of 32—34 suggests that these commitments are not at odds with one another, but in fact fit naturally together: *YHWH is for Israel precisely because he is for himself*. Or, to say it differently, YHWH’s commitment to Israel flows from his commitment to himself.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the most striking thing to be learned from Moses’ intercession is that YHWH moves in mercy toward Israel on the grounds of YHWH’s commitment to himself. And yet the mercy extended to Israel is real mercy—Israel is not destroyed, but is in fact finally fully reinstated into her covenant relationship with YHWH (34:10). The relationship between YHWH’s mercy and his concern for himself expressed in Exodus is similarly expressed by Ezekiel, later reflecting upon YHWH’s response to Israel in the wilderness:

But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, 16 because they rejected my rules

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<sup>121</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 227.

<sup>122</sup> This will be further addressed in the conclusion.

and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness (Ezek 20:13-17, ESV).

One of the central messages of Exodus 32—34 is that, if YHWH is not for himself, there is no reason to expect that he is for Israel.



## CHAPTER 7

### THE TABERNACLE CONSTRUCTION (EXODUS 35—40)

As previously observed, treatments of the tabernacle material in Exodus tend to address the two sections together. Enns, for instance, discusses the two sections jointly, giving a separate treatment of 40:34-38 at the end.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Childs focuses his discussion on 25—31, and gives less than 5 pages of commentary to 35—40.<sup>2</sup> The reason for such is understandable, given that 35—40 is often a verbatim repetition of 25—31.<sup>3</sup> And, to a certain extent, we have followed that practice, particularly in our observations concerning the tabernacle and creation in chapter 5, where we have included 35—40 in our discussion.<sup>4</sup> However, the practice of treating the tabernacle sections together also stems from the impulse, discussed in chapter 5, of reading the tabernacle

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<sup>1</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 598-602.

<sup>2</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 633-38.

<sup>3</sup> There are differences between the 25—31 and 35—40 as well, both in the details and in the order of construction. See Childs, *Exodus*, 633-34. The differences are more acute in the LXX, prompting some to suggest that 25—31 and 35—40 were translated by different hands. See Martha L. Wade, *Consistency of Translation Techniques in the Tabernacle Accounts of Exodus in the Old Greek* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Many of the theological insights concerning the tabernacle discussed in reference to 25—31 are equally appropriate here. For example, as discussed in chapter 5, the tabernacle functioned as a microcosm of the universe, with YHWH ruling and all creation in compliance. One of the ways in which this microcosm is apparent in Exodus is the connection between the creation account in Genesis 1 and the completion of the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 39—40. Because of the creation themes apparent in 25—31, and because of the close relationship between 25—31 and 35—40, we have already discussed this connection between the tabernacle and creation, and will therefore not revisit the discussion here. It bears mention here, however, since the connection between Genesis 1 and the tabernacle material is not brought out fully until 35—40. As in the case with many treatments of the tabernacle, approaching the tabernacle material as such accounts for the brevity of this chapter vis-à-vis chapter 5.

material in the context of P, whether in an effort to discern the “theology of P,” or to seek to understand Israel’s cultic worship. The tendency to read the tabernacle primarily in the context of P has led to the practice of treating the tabernacle material without reference to 32—34, undoubtedly due in part to the common assessment that, whatever the composition history of 32—34, it is not the work of P.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of 32—34 in the midst of the tabernacle material, however, is actually of great significance in understanding important theological aspects of the tabernacle.<sup>6</sup> Relevant here is the simple principle, articulated by Rosenzweig and others, that “it is impossible to transmit the content without at the same time transmitting the form. How something is said is not peripheral to what is said.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, commenting on the first tabernacle section, Knierim writes

[t]his structure [of 25:1—30:10] demands much more than our usual recognition of the redactional or compositional technique of the writers. It especially prevents us from quickly setting aside the ‘redactional framework’ as a mere shell for the important essence of the text, as if we possessed any essence without this framework!<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Van Seters, *Life of Moses*, 291.

<sup>6</sup> The burden of the dissertation of Park, *From Mount Sinai*, is to demonstrate that how the golden calf material and the tabernacle are meant to be read together.

<sup>7</sup> Buber and Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> Knierim, “Conceptual Aspects in Exodus 25:1-9,” 115. Park, *From Mount Sinai*, 146ff., argues that the structure of the passage calls for the sections to be read together, finding the following chiasmic structure:

- A. 24:12-18 Introduction
  - B. 25:1—31:18 The Tabernacle
    - C. 31:12-17 Sabbatical Law
      - D. 31:18 Overlap
        - E. 32:1—33:6 The golden calf
          - F. 33:7-11 The tent of meeting
            - E’. 33:12—34:35 The golden calf
              - D’. 34:[28]29-35 Overlap
                - C’. 35:1-3 Sabbatical Law
                  - B’. 35—40 The Tabernacle
                    - A’. 40:43-38 Conclusion

To the extent that Rosenzweig or Knierim's comments are true, to discuss the tabernacle theologically while neglecting 32—34 necessarily diminishes its theological impact. As we shall see, dealing with the tabernacle without reference to 32—34 runs the risk of missing important theological implications.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will seek to demonstrate how the position of the golden calf narrative in the midst of the tabernacle material is crucial in understanding the theological importance of both sections. Therefore, the scope will be brief, resulting in a shorter treatment of 35—40 than of 25—31. The reason for the brevity lies not in the relative importance of the two sections, but is rather an effort to avoid unnecessary repetition. Rather than revisiting many of the theological discussions of chapter 5 concerning the details and function of the tabernacle, this section will focus on two important ways that the theology of the tabernacle is impacted by 32—34.

#### THE PRIORITY OF PRESENCE IN YHWH'S MISSION

As observed by many, YHWH's presence is crucial throughout the book of Exodus.<sup>10</sup> The Egyptian deliverance was accomplished because YHWH fulfilled his promise to Moses that "I am with you" (3:12). The training in the wilderness was done to the end that Israel would trust YHWH's presence with her, as her protector and provider. And, as we saw in chapter 5, two of the most important theological statements in the tabernacle material have to do with YHWH's presence:

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<sup>9</sup> For a sustained, narrative critical look at the unity of 24:12—40:38, see Park, *From Mount Sinai*, who argues that the golden calf narrative and the Tabernacle material are separate plots that have been intentionally combined as an integrated double plot, which creates a theological effect greater than either plot could convey by itself.

<sup>10</sup> See particularly Durham, *Exodus*.

“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (25:8).

“And I will dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel and I will be their God. And they will know that I am YHWH their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt, that I might dwell in their midst. I am YHWH their God” (29:45-46).

As suggested by the above verses, the tabernacle material of 25—31 indicates both the desire of YHWH to dwell among Israel, and means by which he might do so.

The golden calf section brings the issue of presence into particularly sharp focus.<sup>11</sup> First, the issue of YHWH’s presence spurs Israel’s disobedience to YHWH’s command of 20:5. Chapter 32 begins with the people’s charge to Aaron: “get up, make for us gods who will go before us, because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (32:1).<sup>12</sup> Both the imperative and the grounds for the imperative are straightforward. In response to Moses’ extended absence, the people charge Aaron to make gods “who will go before us,” which indicates that the people’s driving concern in approaching Aaron is the absence of a leader who will accompany them to the land. It is not dissatisfaction with YHWH or with Moses that leads Israel to approach Aaron, but rather the people’s need for a discernible presence among them, who would lead them into the land. The people are not faulted for their anxiety over Moses’ absence, nor for their desire for a discernible presence, but rather for seeking that presence outside the boundaries that YHWH had established (cf. particularly 20:3-6). In fact, their desire for a discernible presence seems appropriate, as suggested by the fact that YHWH was instituting the tabernacle precisely so that he could

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<sup>11</sup> Ralph E. Hendrix, "A Literary Structural Overview of Exod 25-40," *AUSS* 30 (1992): 128, is correct in his assertion that, rather than being an interruption, the presence of 32—34 in the midst of the tabernacle material serves “to focus the reader’s attention on YHWH’s uninterrupted desire to dwell among the people.”

<sup>12</sup> Greenberg, "Exodus," 1061, suggests that the charge is driven by the people’s fear that Moses had died, leaving Israel without a leader.

dwell in Israel's midst.<sup>13</sup> One of the ironies of the Exodus narrative is that, at the very time that YHWH is instructing Moses concerning the practical means by which YHWH would be present to Israel, Israel was seeking the presence of other gods. In so doing, Israel rejects YHWH. As Childs notes, in demanding a calf, "the people demand a substitute for Yahweh himself."<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, as we have seen, without his presence among Israel, YHWH's plans for Israel are brought to an end. This is evident from two perspectives. From Israel's perspective, the people have been consciously dependent on YHWH from the beginning. In fact, it was precisely the promise of YHWH's presence that encouraged Israel to leave Egypt in the first place. YHWH's response to Moses' misgivings concerning his own abilities is answered by YHWH's promise "I am with you" (3:12). As argued in chapter 2, Moses envisions Israel having similar misgivings, which prompts YHWH to reveal his name in such a way that Israel knows that YHWH is present with them (3:14-15). Furthermore, in a time of distress YHWH sought to instill confidence in Israel precisely by promising his presence with Israel (in bringing her into the land, 6:6-8). Israel's confidence, and therefore her ability to carry out YHWH's will, comes from an acknowledgement of YHWH's presence in her midst. From YHWH's perspective, the mission that YHWH intends for Israel likewise comes to an end without YHWH's presence with Israel. As we have seen above, YHWH finally and completely restores the covenant in response to Moses' argument that YHWH's intended mission to the nations will come

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<sup>13</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 218-19, argues that the golden calf functioned in the same way as the cherubim in the tabernacle, a pedestal for YHWH's presence. The differences between the golden calf and the tabernacle are twofold: YHWH's presence in the tabernacle was hidden from view, as opposed to publicly displayed, and YHWH's presence dwelt upon that which was not associated with any kind of living thing, as opposed to the calf which was clearly the graven image of a living entity. Thus two responses to YHWH, one legitimate and one illegitimate, are played off against one another, which for Sarna explains the intersection of the tabernacle and the golden calf material.

<sup>14</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 564. See chapter 6, n. 41.

to naught if YHWH is not present with Israel (33:16). The need for YHWH's presence among Israel for the sake of his purposes amongst the nations is not obvious until the incident with the calf. From both directions, YHWH's and Israel's, the issues raised in 32—34 make it abundantly clear that YHWH's presence with Israel is foundational for Israel's relationship to YHWH as his people and the purpose to which he called her.

In this light, the importance of the tabernacle in Israel's life as YHWH's people becomes clearer. The tabernacle is not simply the context within which Israel's cultic life might be carried out. Rather, the tabernacle, as the means by which YHWH is present with Israel, is essential for both Israel's welfare and for YHWH's mission through Israel to the world. Without the golden calf material, the issue of YHWH's presence would not be so apparent. In light of the golden calf, the issue of presence is shown to be crucial.

#### THE REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL

A second way that 32—34 and the tabernacle material inform one another concerns Israel's repentance. As we have seen in 19—24, and most particularly in 19:4-6, the fulfillment of Israel's vocation as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation depends upon her obedience. While 32—34 indicates that YHWH will not utterly forsake Israel for disobedience, the necessity of obedience has not changed if Israel is to know YHWH's presence and fulfill her calling. If Israel is to know YHWH and to fulfill her purpose, she must repent.

As argued in chapter 6, Exodus 33:4-11 indicates that Israel repented of her sin with the calf. Two observations in the latter tabernacle material confirm the contention

that Israel repented. First, Israel brings voluntary freewill offerings for the construction of the tabernacle:

And each man whose heart was lifted and each whose spirit was willing came, and they brought the freewill offering of YHWH for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. And the men went to the women, all of willing heart, and they brought rings and earrings and signet rings and a golden ornament, and all vessels of gold, and every man waved an offering of gold to YHWH. And each man who had found with him violet and purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen and goat's skins and tanned ram's skins and the leather skins brought them. All who could raise a contribution of silver or bronze brought the contribution of YHWH. And each who possessed (which was found with him) acacia wood and all for the works of service brought it. And each skillful woman spun with her hands and they brought that which is spun, violet and purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. And each woman who had skill spun the goats hair. And the leaders brought gemstones and stones for setting for the ephod and the breastpiece and the spices and oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. Each man and woman who were willing in their hearts to bring with them for all the work which YHWH commanded to be done by the hand of Moses, the sons of Israel brought it as a freewill offering to YHWH (35:21-29).

The text belabors the point, carefully noting both the attitude and the scope of the people.

The attitude of the people is emphasized in the repeated comment that only the willing came to give. In other words, the gifts were not brought out of compulsion, but were given gladly. Additionally, the text seems to indicate that all the people were willing, as suggested by the comment that all who were able gave to the construction.<sup>15</sup> This practice continues, according to the text, until the people are actually commanded to stop giving when what they brought became sufficient for the task (36:3-7). The implication is that Israel, as a whole, participated willingly in the construction of the tabernacle. As has been often noted, where the people once gave their gold for the calf, now they freely give it to YHWH. The contrast between Israel's giving to the calf and giving to the tabernacle suggests a wholehearted repentance.

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<sup>15</sup> See Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy," 381-82.

That Israel repented for her sin with the calf is suggested in another manner. Among the most notable characteristics of the tabernacle material, as alluded to above, is the almost verbatim repetition in many places between the tabernacle instructions and the tabernacle construction. Several reasons for this have been suggested. For instance, Goldingay suggests that the repetition suggests YHWH's generosity, that YHWH's intention to dwell among Israel had not been withdrawn due to the golden calf incident.<sup>16</sup> However, 35—40 concerns primarily not YHWH's instructions (given in 25—31) but rather Israel's following those instructions. In other words, rather than YHWH, Israel is the primary focus of 35—40. Blenkinsopp argues that "[t]he detailed account of the implementation of the visionary instructions (chs. 35—40) was probably the work of a clerical editor anxious to make the point that the instructions retained their validity in spite of the fact that Aaron had compromised himself in the Golden Calf incident."<sup>17</sup> While Blenkinsopp's suggestion may be true, more seems to be intended.

The simplest reason, again noted by many interpreters, is that the repetition emphasizes Israel's careful obedience. According to Levine, "[t]he ancient Israelites demonstrated their obedience to God by carrying out his commands with precision and dispatch."<sup>18</sup> This obedience is stressed, according to Levine, not only by the general repetition throughout the latter tabernacle section, but also through two other literary devices: the repetition of the prescriptive introduction in 35:4-19 and the presence of what he calls the compliance formula ("as/which YHWH commanded Moses" and

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<sup>16</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 415-16.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Structure and Meaning in the Sinai-Horeb Narrative (Exodus 19-34)," in *A Biblical Itinerary: Essays in Honor of George W. Coats*, vol. 240, *JSOTSup* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 113.

<sup>18</sup> Baruch A. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 310.

variants).<sup>19</sup> Again, the contrast with the calf incident is striking. Where there has been flagrant disobedience, now there is careful compliance.

The consequences of this repentance are made plain: “and the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle” (40:34). The ending of Exodus records YHWH’s continual presence among Israel, signified in the return of the cloud which, throughout Exodus, has been the manifestation of YHWH’s presence (13:21-22; 14:19, 24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15-16, 18; 33:9; 34:5). In so doing, the final evidence of Israel’s complete restoration is given. While YHWH had promised that the covenant would be restored (34:10), the dwelling of YHWH in the tabernacle becomes the practical realization of that promise. Thus, Noth’s comment that the appearance of the cloud “gave the sign of legitimacy and approval to the newly-built sanctuary,”<sup>20</sup> while true, does not go far enough. Further, the practical effect of YHWH’s presence, as we are reminded in 33:16, makes Israel distinct, and therefore in a position to fulfill the commission given her to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (19:4-6). Here Exodus ends, with YHWH dwelling among an obedient Israel, poised to carry out YHWH’s missionary purpose to reveal to the nations, through Israel, that “I am YHWH.”

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<sup>19</sup> Exod 35:4, 29; 36:1; 38:22; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 43; 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Noth, *Exodus*, 283. Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 266, recognizes the presence of the cloud as a sign of divine mercy.



## CONCLUSION

The above argument has sought to address two issues. First, we have argued that YHWH's missionary commitment to be known as God amongst the nations accounts for YHWH's actions throughout Exodus, and thus unites the various materials in the book by demonstrating that they share a common theological trajectory. Our investigation of 1:1—15:21 suggested that the manner of the exodus from Egypt was not primarily to liberate Israel, but rather to reveal YHWH on an international scale. We argued that 19—24 demonstrated that both the purpose and the content of the law pointed to that same commitment to be honored as God. The purpose of the law, according to the canonical presentation of Exodus, was that Israel would serve as a priestly kingdom, by her obedience representing YHWH to the nations. The content (and structure) of the law, both in the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant, suggested that exclusive allegiance to YHWH was of paramount importance to Israel as she sought to fulfill her calling. Joining 1:1—15:21 and 19—24, and preparing for the giving of the law at Sinai, we argued that the wilderness material of 15:22—18:27 served the dual purpose of reminding Israel that “I am YHWH,” the lesson of the exodus, and preparing Israel to receive the law, which would be the means by which Israel would fulfill the mission assigned her. We then argued that the tabernacle material demonstrates this missionary commitment in several

ways. First, the details of the tabernacle communicate the holiness (uniqueness) of YHWH, which was the primary burden of 1:1—15:21. Secondly, the presence of the law in the Holy of Holies suggests that YHWH's presence was inextricably bound with obedience to the law, and therefore Israel's seeking YHWH's presence and her fulfilling her missionary calling are one. Thirdly, the parallels between creation and the tabernacle construction suggest that the tabernacle was meant to represent, in microcosm, YHWH's rule over the universe. From there, we examined 32—34, and sought to demonstrate, primarily through Moses' intercessions, that the movement from YHWH's spoken intention to destroy Israel after her idolatry to his restoring the covenant was based, again, upon YHWH's missionary concern to be known amongst the nations. Finally, we returned to the tabernacle material to demonstrate the necessity of YHWH's presence in the mission he had given to Israel, an insight that became more apparent after the intervening golden calf material. In each of these sections, the principle motive driving YHWH's actions vis-à-vis Israel and the nations stem from his commitment to be internationally known as God. We are, therefore, in broad agreement with Durham's statement that Exodus is a "one-track book," and "theologically single-minded."<sup>1</sup>

The second, hermeneutical, issue that this thesis has sought to address is how appreciating this missionary trajectory actually helps in the interpretation of some of the smaller parts of the book. Not only has each chapter sought to shed light upon a recognizable problem in the interpretation of Exodus (such as the interpretation of 6:3 or the relationship between judgment and mercy in 34:6-7), but we have sought to address smaller issues along the way (such as the function of the slaughter of the 3,000 at the hand of the Levites). In either case, the argument above has suggested that an

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<sup>1</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xxiii.

appreciation of this overarching missionary trajectory in Exodus helps in understanding some of its smaller sections. Whereas we have sought to examine the parts (the major sections of Exodus) to understand the whole, we have also sought to demonstrate, by way of specific examples, that an appreciation of the whole illuminates the parts.

The study of Exodus is not, of course, an end to itself. While there may be merits in studying Exodus according to its canonical boundaries, Exodus is ultimately meant to be read in the wider context of the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and the Bible. How this may be done is, in the main, beyond the scope of this study. However, suggestions have been made. Scholars such as Hasel, Rendtorff, and House have suggested that a potentially fruitful approach to Biblical Theology is to study individual books in their canonical shape as a first step, then see how the results of such work fit into a larger whole.<sup>2</sup> Should this be undertaken, it is hoped that this thesis may be of some help in that wider endeavor.

In closing, I want to refer to the work of 18<sup>th</sup> century pastor/theologian Jonathan Edwards, *A Dissertation concerning the End for which God Created the World*.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, and despite sometimes difficult argumentation, Edwards' *Dissertation* is an attempt to answer one simple question: why did God create the world? Summarizing Edwards' argument is, of course, beyond the scope of this discussion. However, I want to point out three aspects of Edwards' argument that are relevant for the present work.

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<sup>2</sup> Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 202ff., Rolf Rendtorff, "Approaches to Old Testament Theology," in *Problems in Biblical Theology*, ed. Henry T. C. Sun, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 24-25. For a practical example of this kind of approach, see House, *Old Testament Theology*.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Made the World," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974). See also Piper's reprint and helpful commentary on Edwards' *Dissertation* in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998).

The first point concerns assessing purpose statements. In order to lay the groundwork for his argument, Edwards begins by carefully delineating the differences between ultimate ends (or goals) and subordinate ends. An ultimate end, according to Edwards, is an end which is sought after for its own sake, and not as a means to a further end. A subordinate end is that which is sought for the sake of something else, either another subordinate end or an ultimate end.<sup>4</sup> While Edwards realizes that a person may have more than one ultimate end (i.e., he may seek more than one thing which is desirable in itself), he is clear that a subordinate end is never valued above the ultimate end to which it is subordinate. In other words, the end is always more valued than the means to that particular end.

Edwards' discussion is relevant in that the issue of subordinate and ultimate ends is very much at stake in Biblical scholarship. For instance, concerning the Egyptian deliverance, Pleins writes, "[t]o truly realize the exodus trajectory, the text points toward the ultimate purpose of such a freeing: the community must find a way to structure itself ritually and legally so that an enduring community might function in the wilderness and beyond."<sup>5</sup> Park comments that "God's ultimate purpose of the liberation of the Israelites is to bring them to the land."<sup>6</sup> Klein cites Exodus 29:46 to argue that "the ultimate purpose of this exodus is that Yahweh might dwell among his people." Longacre finds God's dwelling among his people as the "ultimate purpose" of the tabernacle.<sup>7</sup> More broadly, as we have suggested above, one of the difficulties of the exegesis of some

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., one may seek the (subordinate) end of getting a job so that he might pursue the (subordinate) end of making money so that he might realize the (ultimate) end of putting food on his table, thus satisfying his appetite. The satisfaction of his appetite is that which is desirable for its own sake; the others are simply means to that end.

<sup>5</sup> J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 162.

<sup>6</sup> Park, *From Mount Sinai*, 168.

<sup>7</sup> Longacre, "Building," 25.

liberation theologians is the supposition that Israel's political liberation was the ultimate goal of the exodus.<sup>8</sup>

A particularly interesting example can be found in the work of Otto Kaiser who, in making the case for the law as the theological center of the OT, writes the following:

Confronted by their own human, religious, and ethical failing, they could wait for the Lord's salvation as prophesied in Jer 31:31-34: the Lord himself shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah and implant obedience to his תורה in the heart of his people (cf. Ezek 11:14-21, 36:26-27). Thus what all the preaching of the prophets could not attain, the Lord himself would realize, for his election of his people is valid forever. If one should further ask why the Lord should do this in spite of the people's disobedience, the Book of Ezekiel provides the answer: that by this the Gentiles shall know that he is the Lord, whose name is holy and who sanctifies his name, collecting his dispersed people and leading them back to the land given to their fathers (Ezek 36:22-25). Then the covenantal promise shall become reality; then Israel shall really be his people and the Lord their God (Ezek 36:28).<sup>9</sup>

Particularly pertinent are Kaiser's words "if one should further ask why the Lord should do this," for here he speaks of goals. Kaiser's words suggest that the law serves a greater purpose than itself. As Kaiser acknowledges, the law (and, as he says, Israel's election) serves as a means to a greater end, that the nations (Gentiles) shall know that YHWH is the Lord, and that Israel should be his people. This does not in anyway nullify Israel's election; rather, it makes sense of it. Such a concession is particularly interesting in the context of an argument for the law as the center of the OT. While Kaiser does not use the explicit language of means and ends, the issue is nonetheless implicit in his writing. The statement above suggests that a greater awareness of the issues that Edwards raises concerning subordinate and ultimate ends might have led Kaiser to suggest a different center of the OT, or at least to modify or nuance his understanding of that center.

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<sup>8</sup> Likewise using the language of ultimacy, Fretheim, "Ecological Signs," 392, challenges this view, arguing that "[t]he deliverance of Israel is ultimately for the sake of the entire creation."

<sup>9</sup> Kaiser, "The Law as Center," 95-96.

The exegetical importance of Edwards' observations lies in the implication that purpose statements need not always refer to ultimate goals. The discussion above concerning Exodus 25:8, a clear and straightforward statement of purpose, serves as an example. YHWH's words "let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst," while clearly referring to a goal, need not imply that YHWH's dwelling among Israel is the ultimate end of the tabernacle, a position that, as we have seen, has been taken by several interpreters. Furthermore, the fact that a particular purpose statement need not necessarily refer to an ultimate goal opens the possibility that two different purpose statements may serve the same ultimate goal. As we have seen, Exodus is fraught with purpose statements concerning the reasons for particular plagues, laws, trials, rituals, etc. The abundance of purpose statements need not logically imply that they are at odds with one another, or even that the differing statements ultimately serve different ends. Realizing that purpose statements need not refer to ultimate ends, but may perhaps refer to subordinate ends, alerts us to the possibility that several different purpose statements may serve the same ultimate goal. Of course, different purpose statements may in fact suggest different ultimate purposes. However, not recognizing the distinction between subordinate and ultimate ends can have the effect of causing the exegete to *assume* a contradiction when two statements of purpose do not appear to coincide. Given the number of purpose statements in the OT, it is important for those who engage in OT Theology to seek to discern if, and how, purpose statements may work together.

The second way in which Edwards' work is helpful in the present discussion concerns the character of YHWH. As discussed in chapter 6, the issue of YHWH's character in Exodus is perhaps best raised by Brueggemann, who finds a profound and

irreconcilable internal contradiction between YHWH's regard for Israel and YHWH's regard for himself. While Brueggemann's observation is rooted in the golden calf material, the tension runs throughout Exodus. Concerning 1:1—15:21, Eslinger argues that YHWH's actions in the exodus are rooted in himself, with little or no appreciable concern for Israel.<sup>10</sup> While Eslinger's argument concerning YHWH's commitment to himself is compelling, does his argument necessarily mean that YHWH is therefore unconcerned with Israel? As Dozeman has written, "[d]ivine power presents a problem of character."<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the primary burden of Edwards' *Dissertation* is to seek to understand the purpose statements in the Bible that suggest that YHWH does what he does for his own sake (e.g., Is 48:9-10; Ezek 36:21-23) and those which suggest that YHWH does what he does for the sake of his people (e.g., Deut 8:7-8). In a nutshell, Edwards argues that these two purposes are not at odds, but rather are complementary and inseparable. While there is not space to recount his argument, Edwards concludes that "God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is the happiness in union with himself."<sup>12</sup>

In Exodus, more is said explicitly of YHWH's purposes concerning himself than is said of his commitment to Israel's welfare. To be sure, statements concerning Israel's welfare are not absent (e.g., 2:23-25; 3:7-10; 6:6-8; 34:6-7), but do seem to be subordinate to his concern to be honored as God amongst the nations. The importance of Edwards' argument is that it suggests that YHWH's commitment to himself is not necessarily at odds with, or at the expense of, the welfare of Israel. Thus, on a broader

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<sup>10</sup> Eslinger, "Freedom."

<sup>11</sup> Dozeman, *God at War*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, "Dissertation," 120.

level Edwards' argument addresses Brueggemann's assertion that YHWH's concern for himself and his concern for Israel are, in the end, a contradiction. Going precisely in the opposite direction, Edwards argues that both are concerns are ultimately one, and that if YHWH has no regard for himself, then there is no hope for the welfare of his people, which is essentially the argument made above concerning 32—34. For OT Theology, the larger question is how such an understanding of the relationship between YHWH's regard for Israel and his regard for himself functions in other parts of the Old Testament.

Finally, a look at Edwards' work suggests how such a study may be fruitfully extended. As mentioned in the introduction, there is little consensus as to how to approach the discipline of Biblical Theology, suggesting to some an opportunity to explore various approaches. One approach has been mentioned above, to study individual books and then seek to discern how they function together as a whole. This argument has sought to establish that YHWH's missionary concern to be known amongst the nations is the ground of all his actions, and thus the unifying trajectory of the book of Exodus. If that is the case, then it is reasonable to explore if and how this trajectory is presented elsewhere in the OT. Of course, recognizing such a trajectory in Exodus does not mean that it must be present elsewhere. The exegete must take caution to avoid the temptation to read his sense of a particular book back into other places in the OT. Yet possible dangers do not excuse one from the pursuit of possibilities. In fact, understanding potential dangers can (and ought to) have the effect of causing the exegete to pursue a line more carefully.

Edwards' *Dissertation* essentially argues that YHWH created the world for his own sake. Or, in modern theological language, Edwards has argued that YHWH's

concern to be honored amongst the nations is the theological center of the Bible. While many biblical scholars might find Edwards' approach to the Bible to be an inadequate way to approach Biblical Theology, his suggestion nonetheless merits further exploration.

How to pursue that line of thought is of course another matter, but the canonical presentation of the OT may in fact point in that direction. It has been argued that God's charge in creation for mankind to multiply and exercise dominion is in effect a missionary charge, for as God's image spread throughout the earth, governing the earth as befitting his representatives, God would be glorified.<sup>13</sup> Genesis 3, which speaks (in Seitz' words) of what has gone awry, suggests that the nature of sin is precisely the failure (or refusal) to acknowledge YHWH as God. The movement from Genesis 12, where YHWH calls Abram for the sake of blessing all peoples, to the prophecies of Isaiah that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of YHWH, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; cf., e.g., 2:1-4; 25; 65:17-25) suggest YHWH's missionary commitment to be acknowledged as God throughout the earth as a potentially fruitful line of inquiry into the theology of the OT. Such a line has been suggested. As mentioned in the preface, Seitz suggests that "[mission] could be said to be *the* theme of the Old Testament as such."<sup>14</sup>

Or, in a comment that comes very close to the argument of Edwards, Childs writes

[i]f one asks what was God's purpose, that is, his motivation in revealing himself, the Old Testament is silent. However, if one asks what was God's purpose, that is, his goal toward which his self-disclosure pointed, then the Old Testament is eloquent in its response. God revealed himself that all may see and know who God is:

I am Yahweh, and there is no other;  
besides me there is no God;

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 99-114. Or, as eloquently written in a personal letter, "God created us to bring him glory by ruling over his good creation with generosity, courage, and royal joy" (personal correspondence, Matthew Canlis, April 27, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Seitz, "Old Testament," 147.

I gird you, though you do not know me,  
that men may know, from the rising of the sun  
and from the west, that there is none besides me;  
I am Yahweh, and there is no other...  
I am Yahweh, who do all these things (Isa. 45. 5-7).

Or, again, the prophet Ezekiel never wearies of grounding God's purpose with the formula: 'that you may know Yahweh'— and thus have life.<sup>15</sup>

Childs' comment is certainly consistent with what we have argued for in Exodus.

Whether or not it can be supported throughout the Old Testament awaits a detailed and sustained exegetical argument.

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<sup>15</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 45.

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