

# Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name

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“To know God’s name is to know his purpose for all mankind from the beginning to the end.”<sup>1</sup>

“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14a, *The Message*).

## Introduction: The Importance of the Exodus

The story of the Exodus is the central salvation event in the Old Testament. The account of the liberation of a band of Hebrew slaves from horrific oppression in Egypt is the event that shaped virtually everything in the biblical imagination. One scholar remarks, “There are over 120 explicit Old Testament references to the Exodus in law, narrative, prophecy and psalm, and it is difficult to exaggerate its importance.”<sup>2</sup> Another writes, “This act of God, the leading of Israel out of Egypt—from Israel’s point of view, the march out of Egypt, the Exodus, is the determinative event in Israel’s history for all time to come.”<sup>3</sup> In many ways it provided the ground floor of that imagination for the majority of ancient Israelites, for thinking not only about faith but history, the future, nationhood, law, and ethics. It shaped the essential grammar that articulated Israel’s language of experience. “To go down” would often have negative connotations while “to go up” had positive associations. The first book of the Hebrew Bible presents the descent into Egypt (Gen 37-50).<sup>4</sup> The last word of

that Bible is the verb “to go up” (2 Chron 36:23).<sup>5</sup> A short Israelite creed could be reduced in essentials to the words: “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Exod 20:1). This language could even be used to interpret Abraham’s much earlier departure from Mesopotamia (Gen 15:6). Because Yahweh was the God of the Exodus, this meant that he must have been the God who brought up Abraham from Ur, and even returned Jacob from Haran.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Exodus language becomes the grammar used to express future salvation. Whether it is Hosea speaking of Israel going up from the land (Hos 1:11 [2:2 MT]), Isaiah of leading the people through the sea again (Isa 11:15), Micah of Yahweh leading an exodus of crippled and outcasts (Mic 4:6-7), Jeremiah of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31-34.), the Exodus language of salvation is the way Israel construed its understanding of the future. Moreover, the language of worship and praise begun on the other side of the Red Sea by Miriam and Moses lived on many generations later in Israel’s worship at the sanctuary. Israel was never to forget that it was a redeemed people, and that their God was the one who split the sea (Ps 66:6; 74:13-14; 77:16-20; 78:13, 53; 106:9-11, 22; 114:3, 5; 136:13-15).<sup>7</sup> This gave them hope in time of despair and praise in time of celebration.

Culturally, the Exodus changed how

Israel even thought about time. Its new year began on the note of a celebration of the divine presence (Exod 40:17) and Exodus liberation (Exod 12:6). From this temporal orientation, other major celebrations were marked, the Feast of Unleavened Bread following Passover (Exod 12:16-20); The Feast of Weeks coinciding with the giving of the Law at Sinai, fifty days after Passover (Exod 19:1; 23:16); and the Feast of Booths, remembering the time in the wilderness (Lev 23:40-43). Even the weekly orientation became based on Exodus salvation, its weekly relief from work becoming a way of institutionalizing the Exodus salvation for Israelites, foreign residents, animals, and even land (Deut 5:12-15). The Exodus became the first event that was used to date the construction of Israel's Solomonic temple; the first record of era dating begins with the Exodus (1 Kgs 6:1). Israel's legal traditions and institutions also have Exodus origins. The Exodus was viewed as the great indicative that provided the basis for the great imperative: "I am Yahweh your God who brought you up from Egypt, the house of bondage" (indicative). Therefore, "have no other gods before me" (imperative). Ethics and Law were rooted in salvation from oppression, which in turn was rooted in the character of God. The Exodus was nothing less than one of the events that shaped ancient Israel's worldview, and made it essentially a foreigner in the ancient world.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the great event marked the presence of God in a new way in the world. Astonishingly, the goal of the Exodus was that the great Creator and Redeemer of his people would come and live with them, as it were, "move permanently into their neighborhood,"<sup>9</sup> and bring a bit of heaven to earth.<sup>10</sup> The book of Exodus finishes with the powerful

image of the glory of God completely filling the tabernacle, the first down payment of a future glory-filled earth in which God would be all in all (Exod 40:34). But all of these events are a consequence of the great revelation of the divine name to Moses, a name that summarized in a word God's purpose for mankind from beginning to end.<sup>11</sup>

But it is not only Israelites and Jews whose worldview was shaped by the Exodus. Christians too inherited this new vision of the world. They had the same Bible as their Jewish counterparts. In the developing New Testament, Exodus language is pervasive. Herod's brutal murder of the infants in the district of Bethlehem echoes the slaughter of the Israelite newborns in Egypt (Matt 2:16-18). Jesus' descent into Egypt and exodus from it as a child mirrors early Israel's experience (Matt 2:13-15). His depiction as a new Moses giving his new commandments from the Mount is in both continuity and contrast with the old Moses at Sinai (Matthew 5-7).<sup>12</sup> His feeding of the crowds in the wilderness with bread shows that he is the ultimate manna come down from heaven (John 6:35). His last supper recalls the original Passover and his words of institution regarding the blood of the covenant deliberately recall Moses' words to the Israelites when sealing the Sinai covenant (Matt 26:28, cf. Exod 24:8). His entire life and ministry is viewed as the antitype of the tabernacle built at Sinai: The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood and we beheld his glory—not the old glory of the cloud filling the tent—but "the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NIV; cf. Exod 34:5). Those who dwell in the midst of this tabernacle, leave with a face set on fire by the divine

presence, just like Moses (2 Cor 3; cf. Exod 34:29-35). In the apocalyptic scenario with which the Bible closes, the judgment that falls upon the world is essentially a great amplification of the plagues that afflicted Egypt (Revelation 8-18; 15-18.). This end-time judgment is followed by the most dramatic depiction of salvation in the entire Bible that brings to a final culmination the covenantal words first enunciated in Exodus:

I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea. I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband. I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: *“Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God* (Rev 21:1-3; cf. Exod 6:7, *The Message*).

Again all of this comes as a consequence of the revelation of the divine name, which comprehended in its laconic form the saving purpose of God from beginning to end. Fittingly, it is this name in its Greek form that is given to Jesus after the salvation that he has accomplished. And the neighborhood of Jesus has become the entire universe (Phil 2:9-11).<sup>13</sup>

So an understanding of the Exodus is absolutely critical for an understanding of an ancient Israelite and Christian worldview and essential for understanding and probing the theology of the Bible as it unfolds historically. Without this Exodus grammar it becomes virtually impossible to understand the language of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> In order to understand this syntax more completely and become more fluent in the language of the Scripture, a closer look at this text is in order—a text in which the covenant name of God is first revealed.

## Exodus and Interpretive Impasses

There are three hermeneutical “dead-ends” that need to be avoided in dealing with these stories: (1) Often, Old Testament theologies and history books about ancient Israel begin with the Exodus as the first of God’s mighty acts with Israel and then proceed to rehearse the other mighty acts: wilderness provision, conquest, kingship, and liberation from exile.<sup>15</sup> In this view, it is as if Israel’s existence began in Egypt; and the Exodus was the pivotal event that not only created Israel but also wrenched it from its mythical past and started it on a historical trajectory.<sup>16</sup> But this overlooks the fact that the Exodus story is part of a larger biblical narrative—it does not begin the biblical narrative but is the continuation of a narrative that precedes it. In other words, the story of Israel is part of a world Story, with cosmic implications.<sup>17</sup> (2) The second impasse isolates the book from both its preceding and subsequent contexts, and thus it becomes a paradigm for how oppressed peoples can think about their plight and how to solve it,<sup>18</sup> or becomes a devotional aid that helps individuals trust in God when going through difficult times.<sup>19</sup> While there is much in this book that deals with oppression, to view the Exodus as simply a political manifesto or as a devotional guide is to ignore its larger context. That larger context shows that in many ways Israel needs far more than just a political and economic salvation or spiritual guidance. (3) A third error supposes that the book is nothing more than a fictitious statement of the past, that the events narrated in it are simply literary creations, or retrojections of later events in Israel’s life.<sup>20</sup> The claim that an ancient society whose entire worldview was shaped by such stories would intentionally have

fabricated them sounds very much like a retrojection of later western ideas into the biblical record. I cannot consider the evidence for such a position, but suffice it to say that theology and history do not have to be at odds with each other. The Exodus is theological historiography but this does not mean that it is not history. For an economic and political history of ancient Israel, the name of the Pharaoh of the Exodus would be important and the names of two Hebrew mid-wives would be unimportant, but for the biblical historian the reverse is the case.<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that one is historically true and the other is not; it just indicates a different perspective. From a theological point of view, everything looks different.

### **The First Paragraph—The Story of Exodus in the Context of the Story of Scripture**

Although the book of Exodus has its own literary integrity, it will not let the reader or hearer forget that it is part of an ongoing larger story. Its first paragraph begins with the conjunction “and,” which connects it with the previous book of Genesis.<sup>22</sup> The content of the first paragraph of Exodus (1:1-7) recalls leading themes and vocabulary of the larger biblical story. The mention of the seventy members of Jacob’s family in Egypt recalls their descent in the previous Joseph story (Gen 46:8ff) and the seventy nations of the world in the great table of nations of Genesis 10. The fact that Jacob’s children all came from his “thigh,” recalls the broken and blessed Jacob,<sup>23</sup> who was renamed Israel at Peniel, the one who fought God and lived to tell about it (Exod 1:5; Gen 32). He was crippled but blessed: out of that crippled thigh had come a large family. The conclusion of the paragraph in which the family has mul-

tiplied prolifically and filled the country of Egypt echoes a number of important texts in Genesis: (1) God’s charge to the human race in Genesis 1 to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:26-28). (2) God’s promise to Abram of a numerous progeny that would eventually bless the world, reversing the curse and restoring the world to its pristine glory (Gen 12:1-3; 13:15-16; 15:4-5). The first promise to Abram is strategically placed (Gen 12:1-3), beginning a new national history of Israel (Gen 12-50) after the primal universal history (Gen 1-11), which chronicles a world under curse and judgment because of human rebellion and autonomy. Thus, it is clear that somehow Abram and his seed carry in their genes the secret of universal blessing. The fate of the universe is wrapped up with the faith obedience of this budding octogenarian and his virtual septuagenarian wife, who leave Ur on the dusty Mesopotamian roads on a journey to only God knows where (Gen 12:4-5).

Thus, as Exodus opens, we are introduced to a story that is part of a larger story, which is indeed the story of the world. A family of seventy individuals that have gone down to Egypt and who have multiplied prolifically have a mission to the world. They are part of a new creation, a creation that is going to bring about universal blessing to a world in dire need. But there are two other texts in the larger story that are extremely important and provide needed background to the Exodus story. Immediately after the curse on the world is introduced in Genesis, a promise is made of a woman’s seed that will crush the head of the seed of the Serpent, and essentially restore humanity and the world to its lost glory (Gen 3:15). This text assumes a struggle to the death between two opposing forces. Thus,

it is no accident that there is a constant focus on descendants in the narrative of Genesis, with patriarchal wives having barren wombs. Miraculously these barren wombs get blessed, which indicates that God is at work in the patriarchal families, overcoming one “inconceivable” obstacle after another with his divine intent to bless the world. But it is implied that there will be many more obstacles to overcome. Imbedded in Abram’s blessing is the point that there will be those who will seek to destroy him and that some day his seed will possess the gates of his enemies (Gen 12:2; 22:17). Thus, as Exodus opens with a world of blessing for the Israelites, there are ominous clouds on the horizon.

The clouds become more ominous when another text in Genesis is considered. During a covenant making ceremony, God promises Abram the land of Canaan but the actual procurement of the land will be delayed 400 years (Gen 15:9-17). During that time his progeny will endure oppression in a foreign land for a long time, after which their oppressors would be judged and his family would return to the land of promise. The prediction is confirmed by a theophany of fire moving through a gauntlet of ritually slaughtered animals, the most powerful self-curse imaginable if the promise was broken. Thus, as one considers the opening paragraph of Exodus, one finds oneself in the literary calm before the storm.

### **Exodus—The Larger Structure: Deliverance, Covenant, Presence<sup>24</sup>**

The rest of the book of Exodus itself can be divided into three major sections. The first section presents the Egyptian storm breaking in all of its power upon the nascent nation of Israel. This is found in chapters 1:1-15:21. The storm breaks

by chapter 15 in which Israel has passed through the tempest and reached the other side in the sunlight of a new day—a day of *deliverance*. The narrative prose signals this climax by being transformed into poetry to celebrate the divine deliverance (15:1-18). The Song at the Sea is Israel’s new song of celebration and it is a salvation song concluding with the people dwelling with God on his holy mountain (15:17). The next division leads to this mountain of God, Sinai, where God makes a new *covenant* with the nation with universal implications (15:22-24:18). This covenant itself puts the very words of God in unmediated form at the very literary heart of the book of Exodus (20:1-17). These ten words thundering from Sinai precipitate a new storm in which Israel cannot endure the immediate presence of God. The thunder and lightning and earthquake evoked by the divine presence terrify the Israelites. The covenant resolves this difficulty with sacrifice and the appointment of Moses as a mediator of the divine word. After the covenant is ratified, this section concludes with representatives of the nation communing with God on his holy mountain, even experiencing a divine vision during a festal meal (24:9-10). The final division (25:1-40:38) establishes the theme of the divine *presence* taking up residence with the people as their king, as it details the instructions for building a tabernacle being given to Moses on the mountain (25-31) and their implementation by the people (35-40) followed by the descent of the divine presence from the mountain into the tent. But this long section is not without its own storm either (32-34). The covenant is barely ratified when it is broken by the people. The people may be out of Egypt but Egypt remains in their heart. When God threatens annihila-

tion, Moses intercedes successfully and the covenant is renewed. It is because of Mosaic mediation and divine mercy that Exodus can close on a note of the divine presence descending from the mountain and filling the tabernacle and dwelling with the people. Heaven has “touched down” on planet earth, the anticipation of a day when complete union will eventually occur.

It is during the three storms that some of the most profound theology found in the entire Bible occurs—the revelation and identity of the nature of God through his name. First there is the revelation of the divine name in which the name “Yahweh” is first revealed during the Egyptian storm, then during the storm at Sinai, the holiness of that name is discovered and its consequences (20:1-18) and finally during that third storm provoked by the sin of Israel, the meaning of that name is unpacked in unparalleled fashion in the Old Testament with profound implications for the history of Israel and the world (34:5-6). The significance of the revelation of the divine name for biblical theology cannot be exaggerated, for as Brevard Childs has remarked, “To know God’s name is to know his purpose for all mankind from the beginning to the end.”<sup>25</sup>

### ***(1) Deliverance (Exodus 1:1-15:21)***

The Egyptian storm begins after the book’s introduction (1:1-7) with the announcement that there is a new Egyptian dynasty that does not remember the blessing that the Israelites brought to Egypt (1:8). This new dynasty is afraid that the burgeoning Israelite population will become a political and military threat. In fact verse 9 is significant for being the first place in the Bible that Jacob’s family is regarded as a nation (a people), a trib-

ute to the divine blessing. But oppressive measures are taken to counteract this blessing and reduce the population by forcing them to build monumental construction projects for the regime. Those measures are counter-productive as the divine blessing only increases (1:12). The regime then resorts to clandestine genocide but when this policy fails because of civil disobedience on the part of Hebrew midwives, the sinister genocidal policy comes out in the open: every newborn Hebrew male is to be thrown into the Nile (1:22).

In this opening chapter the cosmic struggle between the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the woman becomes explicit. The Serpent wishes to destroy, oppress, enslave, and prevent divine blessing. This struggle remains hidden in the world’s story but occasionally comes to light during times of great crisis, such as when the murder of all but one of the Davidic king’s family by Jezebel’s daughter seems to jeopardize the Davidic covenant (2 Kgs 11:1), or when the Jews are threatened with extinction in the book of Esther, or when Herod’s forces try to murder the baby Jesus (Matt 2:16-18) or when a great dragon tries to kill the Messianic newborn of a woman, the woman herself, and the rest of her offspring (Revelation 12). It is clear that that the serpent receives a fatal blow from that Messianic son’s death and resurrection, but it does not experience its complete demise until believers put it under foot and the new heaven and new earth arrive, when death is abolished forever.

In the midst of the horrific genocide in Egypt, a child is born that is preserved from the holocaust. Moses is saved from the water and will eventually save his people from the water.<sup>26</sup> Again women

play a part in this cosmic struggle, giving birth to the boy (Jochebed), preserving the boy (Miriam), saving the boy (Egyptian princess), nursing the boy (Jochebed), and raising the boy in an Egyptian court (princess). Years later when the young prince tries to take things into his own hands by ending the oppression of a particular Hebrew slave through killing an Egyptian, he is forced to flee into the desert. There he “saves” some Midianite women from oppression (2:17). Here is the first reference to the theologically “loaded” verb “to save” being used in the Bible, a presage of Moses’ later role for Israel.

During Moses’ exile, the oppression of his people in Egypt continues and this leads to the first explicit note by the narrator that the time of deliverance is at hand. God has not forgotten his covenant of blessing with the patriarchs (and its universal implications): “The Israelites groaned as a result of their bondage and cried out. Their cry from their bondage ascended to *God*. *God* heard their groaning. *God* remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. *God* saw the children of Israel. *God* knew” (2:23b-25). By repeating the noun “God” as the main actor in this brief paragraph, the narrator indicates that the One who has been lurking in the background during the events of the opening chapters of Exodus is about to take center stage. The covenant has not been forgotten.

Thus chapter 3 begins with Moses shepherding a flock near the mountain of God and experiencing a theophany in the fiery bush, from which is issued a call to deliver God’s people from Egypt. When Moses pleads inability, God assures him of the divine presence: I am/will be with you (3:12; אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ). Moses then asks what he should say to the people.

He is told to tell them that the God of their fathers has sent for them. This is not enough for the reluctant emissary, so he asks for the divine name and is given it: “I am/will be who I am/will be” (3:14; אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה). Clearly this is a further amplification and intensification of the assurance of the divine presence that Moses has already received. The point is that God’s name means that he is the one who truly is there for his people, one who is committed to his covenant and his plan for the world. Just as he has promised to be with Moses to deliver, He will “move into their neighborhood” so to speak and deliver them! The rest of the chapter illustrates this. God is going to bring the people up from Egypt and settle them in a land of milk and honey (3:16-17).

Because the divine name is a verb conjugated in the first person, it is changed to the third person (Yahweh, “he is/will be”) when spoken by Israelites. In another text, God mentions the significance of this revelation in order to assure Moses, whose initial attempts to lead out of Egypt have met with failure. This new name means nothing less than a new chapter in the history of God’s relationship with his people.<sup>27</sup> The meaning of the name is unpacked further to assure Moses:

God spoke to Moses, “*I am Yahweh*. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by (the name) El-Shaddai. But (by the name) *Yahweh* I was not known unto them. I have both established my covenant with them to give to them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, and heard the groaning of the Israelites who have been oppressed by the Egyptians. I have remembered my covenant. Therefore tell the Israelites, *I am Yahweh*: I will bring you out from under the heavy burdens of the Egyptians. I will deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with outstretched arm and with

great acts of judgement. I will take you to me for a people. I will be to you for God. *You will know that I am Yahweh your God who delivers you from the burdens of Egypt.* I will bring you to a land which I promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it you as an inheritance. *I am Yahweh* (6:2-8, RSV).<sup>28</sup>

The presentation formula “I am Yahweh” begins and ends this pivotal speech.<sup>29</sup> To hear the name “Yahweh” means a new state of affairs for the Israelites (2-3). Yahweh is committed to the covenant. Then this means that Yahweh is going to act to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage with great power, and live with them in covenant relationship. Finally, this will result in the gift of the land as a fulfillment of the promise to the fathers. This passage further elucidates the earlier quote: “to know God’s name is to know his purpose for mankind from beginning to end.” Here it means clearly the salvation and flourishing of the people of God, who will live in harmony with their Creator and Savior.

Coinciding with a declaration of the identity of God to the Israelites is a declaration of the identity of Israel. They are Yahweh’s special people, to whom he is committed to help and save. But they can also be called Yahweh’s firstborn son (4:22). The idea of a firstborn son is a child who has a special relationship to the father, one who is in a privileged position of authority and intimacy (cf. Deut 21:15-17).

As the narrative develops, Moses confronts Pharaoh with the ultimatum to let Yahweh’s people go. Pharaoh retorts, “Who is Yahweh that I should listen to him to let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh and I certainly will not release Israel” (5:2).<sup>30</sup> The rest of the plague narratives are the answer to his question. Pharaoh,

Egypt, and the rest of the world receive an education in what Yahweh’s name means.<sup>31</sup> He will do anything, including taking Egypt apart piece by piece, to bring about the salvation of his people. He is moving into the Egyptian neighborhood, and it will never be the same!

- The Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring up the Israelites from their midst (7:5).
- By this you will know that I am Yahweh when I strike the waters of the Nile with the rod in my hand and they turn to blood! (7:17).
- So that you may know that there is no one like Yahweh our God, the frogs will depart from you and from your houses and from your servants and from your people (8:10-11 [MT 8:6-7]).
- I will distinguish in that day the land of Goshen (from the rest of Egypt) where my people live so that there will be no locusts there so that you may know that I am Yahweh in the midst of the land (8:22 [MT 8:18]).
- That you might know that there is no God like me in all the earth ... for I have appointed you [Pharaoh] to show you my power in order to declare my name in all the earth (9:14-16).
- When I spread out my hands to Yahweh, the thundering will cease that you might know that the earth belongs to Yahweh (9:29).
- In order that you will declare in the ears of your children and grandchildren how I treated the Egyptians and I placed my signs in their midst and you will know that I am Yahweh (10:2).
- In the middle of the night I will go out in the middle of Egypt and every first born will die ... so that you may know that Yahweh distinguishes between Egypt and Israel (11:4-7).

Clearly all these texts serve to clarify powerfully the meaning of Yahweh’s



name. He is the Creator God, the owner of all the earth, who is committed to his covenant with his distinctive people. The plagues and Pharaoh's intransigence become a means by which the entire world will learn about Yahweh's reputation and his commitment to his people.

The plagues culminate in the Passover event, which results in the death of the firstborn throughout Egypt. Israelites are spared this catastrophe when they smear the blood of a firstborn slaughtered goat or lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their dwellings. This is the second time in the larger storyline that a firstborn son is spared by the spilling of sacrificial blood (cf. Genesis 22). The narrative awaits a time when such a son will not be so fortunate, but whose spilled blood will save the world, not just a nation.

The importance of the Passover event in the text is emphasized. It forms the climax of the plagues. The previous nine catastrophes are divided into a trio of triads, each increasing in severity. But before the climactic Passover event occurs, the suspense is heightened by a protracted delay in which the longest chapter in Exodus presents the stipulations for the Passover (12:1-28). As Fox observes, "the narrator leaves the realm of storytelling and enters that of ritual."<sup>32</sup>

When the hammer blows of judgment finally fall on Egypt, Israel experiences liberation, but the euphoria of the liberation is short lived. The Egyptians change their minds about liberating their captives and pursue them in the desert. And it is at the Reed Sea that the Egyptian army finally comes to know Yahweh, as Pharaoh and his soldiers experience a watery grave, while Yahweh's firstborn son sings a salvation song on the other side of the shore (14:4, 14), having passed through on

dry ground. The salvation song celebrates Yahweh's power and his wondrous name. Ten times the name is used in this song, one of which is the first short form, "Yah," recorded in Scripture. It is clear why. Yahweh has no equal: He has cast horse and rider into the sea (15:1.4); he is a man of war (15:3); his right hand has shattered the enemy (15:6); the blast of his anger consumed them like chaff (15:7); the waters drew back from his breath and became like a wall (15:8); the depths congealed in the heart of the sea (15:8). Consequently, Yahweh is incomparable among the gods. And thus the first part of Exodus comes to an end. Yahweh has been true to his name. He has *delivered* his people and promises to bring them and plant them in the mountain of his inheritance, where he will live with them as their great king forever!

## **(2) Covenant (Exodus 15:22-24:18)**

The next few chapters begin on a negative note as Yahweh leads his people to the mountain of Sinai, where he first appeared to Moses. The desert journey to Mount Sinai is not marked by the euphoria of the Exodus but by grumbling and complaining because of lack of water (15:22-27; 17:1-7) and food (16). An ambush by Amalekite raiders does not help the languishing spirits (17:8-16), but Israel learns that God can provide in the desert journey just as he had provided at the Sea. Yahweh is his name. Just before the people's arrival at the mountain of fire, Moses is reunited with his family, thus recalling Moses' family situation before his call at the burning bush. The life of Moses is being reenacted on a larger scale.<sup>33</sup>

At Sinai, the burning bush at the foot of the mountain now becomes an entire mountain of smoke as God appears before

the people in a fiery storm, announcing to them that he has delivered them from Egypt and brought them to himself (19:1-4). Here in this statement is an anticipated goal of the covenant that God and his people would be together. For the first time in the biblical story, there is a nation encountering the Creator, who cares passionately for them. The little family of Abraham and Sarah through whom universal blessing was promised has now become a great nation whom God directly addresses. This encounter at Sinai will take up the rest of the book of Exodus, all of the book of Leviticus and a good portion of the book of Numbers. In order to see this in perspective, it should be noted that in the larger complex of the Torah which comprises the first five books of the Bible, there are sixty-eight chapters before Sinai (Genesis 1 – Exodus 18) and fifty-nine chapters after it (Numbers 11 – Deuteronomy 34), while the Sinai context accounts for fifty-eight chapters (Exodus 19 – Numbers 10)! Or to put it in chronological terms, the narrative before Sinai comprises thousands of years, the narrative after Sinai to the border of Canaan comprises forty years, while the Sinai material comprises approximately ten months!

While this encounter is absolutely central to the biblical story,<sup>34</sup> it is clearly a further development of the covenant with the patriarchs, who were elected not just so that they and their families would be blessed with a private relationship with God but that this blessing might flow through them to the whole world.<sup>35</sup>

At the beginning of Israel's history, then, is the fundamental fact that it has been made for the benefit of the world. Israel's calling is fundamentally missiological, its purpose for existence the restoration of the

world to its pre-Edenic state. Genesis 12:1-3 is thus "the aetiology of all Israelite aetiologies" showing that "the ultimate purpose of redemption which God will bring about in Israel is that of bridging the gulf between God and the entire human race."<sup>36</sup>

Now the story has moved to another level: the family has become a nation, delivered from incredible opposition and oppression, has had the Creator's heart disclosed to them in the gift of His name, and now stands before Him on Mount Sinai. Israel is presented with the covenant in the following words:

Now, if you truly obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will be to me a special treasure out of all the peoples of the earth, because all the earth belongs to me. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (19:5-6).

This text stresses that obedience to the covenant will lead to a unique relation to Yahweh and a unique relation to the rest of the nations. On the one hand Israel will become Yahweh's special treasure, having a special valued relationship to Yahweh out of all the peoples of the earth. This word "special treasure" means a personal article of movable property with an immense value. Thus, David donates a valuable personal treasure to the temple (1 Chron 29:3). Such a valuable treasure is virtually the prerogative of the wealthy—kings (Ecc. 2:8). Israel will become such a treasure to Yahweh—it will become his very own (cf. Ps 135:4).

If these verbal analogies may help one explain what this term means, a conceptual parallel in the general context is particularly useful. When the regulations for the high priest are made, who would represent the people of Israel, he is required to wear a breastplate upon

which are twelve gem stones signifying the twelve tribes. He had to wear these over his heart as a cherished possession when he came before God. In a very real sense these precious gems were his “special treasure.”

Thus, Israel will be Yahweh’s personal treasure taken out of all the peoples of the earth “because all the earth belongs to me.” This explanatory clause emphasizes this contrast between Israel and the nations and the right of Yahweh to make Israel his treasure since he is the owner of the whole world. But the text continues to explain what Yahweh is up to with his choice of Israel. Israel is to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. This concluding part makes clear Israel’s special relationship to the rest of the nations. As a priest represents the people before God and then represents God to the people, Israel is to do the same. Israel is called to be a community of priests whose congregation is nothing less than the globe. The end of the covenant is not Israel’s own salvation but the inclusion of the nations since “all the earth belongs to me.”<sup>37</sup> The expression “holy nation” underscores the twofold character of Israel: it is set apart to God, and it is visible as such to the rest of the world. This word becomes an important leitmotif of the Sinai covenant. But the point should not be lost. It is a holy life lived in community that will display God’s name to the world. Israel will essentially be a “shop window” of God to the world.<sup>38</sup> In fact if the name of Yahweh signifies

that the God of biblical revelation “is not like any other. And his strangeness is in this. He is with his people. He is for his people. His goodness is not in his great transcendental power nor in his majestic remoteness nor in his demanding tough-

ness but in his readiness to be with and for his people”<sup>39</sup>

then this means that Yahweh is also committed to the world, and Israel is his instrument to reach it!<sup>40</sup>

Israel quickly agrees to the covenant, once here and twice when it is ratified in chapter 24 (19:8; 24:3, 7). This paves the way for the announcement of the covenant obligations, the content of the promised obedience. When Israel is properly prepared, the divine voice speaks from Sinai directly in their hearing, again a unique occurrence in the larger story of the Bible.

This revelation emphasizes again the divine name. The divine voice begins on the note of the indicative and not the imperative, and it is an indicative of mercy: “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage” (20:1). As Rendtorff remarks, “Here God’s self presentation is expanded by a relative clause in which God’s fundamental saving act towards Israel in leading them out of Egypt is *effectively a further definition of the name.*”<sup>41</sup>

Yahweh is fundamentally the God who is Israel’s God, who responded to their cry and who delivered them from their dismal, desperate plight. It is interesting that this God who brought Israel out of Egypt is the subject of at least six verbs of action in the Exodus narrative, and these key active verbs have to do with strength exercised to rescue his people from forms of death.<sup>42</sup> Through the imperatives that follow, there is the concern that his people be committed to him with absolute single-hearted loyalty, since he is their God. There is the concern that they be committed to this truth and not live in a world of illusion and fantasy, nor to identify God with his creation but to honor above all his name—

his personal reputation. They are to model God in time by alternating activity and rest. Their weekly pattern relives God's primal pattern at the beginning of time, and thus, there is a concern for *imitatio Dei*. Moreover, their horizontal relationships among each other would be a further expression of this *imitatio Dei* and, thus, an expression of the divine name. Parents, who have mediated the Creator's gift of blessing in giving human life, should be treated with commensurate respect and reverence. Moreover, children, who have received that gift of life, should have that life protected. Those who co-create together should have their deep human bond guarded; respect for persons is to generate respect for their property and also their reputation. Finally, this community is to be a community that does not seek to covet, lust, and possess but, by implication, to give, respect, and love.

This may be regarded as Israel's national constitution—her Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or her Declaration of Dependence. When these commands are worked out in specific applications in an agrarian community, a fundamental insight into the divine is shown. In other words, although God has no image in heaven and on earth, he wishes to represent himself through the model of his people—they image him—this is how God is to be known through the world. The invisible God is to be made visible through the actions by a people that are “up close and personal” to him.

The impact of this revelation absolutely shocks Israel, as the people have been terrified since each “word” resounds with the force of a thunderclap. They cannot endure the storm created by the divine presence in their midst and ask for relief by having Moses relay the divine words

to them after this. Moses then receives an additional revelation oftentimes called the Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33), which is an expression of the way the previous “ten words” are to be worked out in practice in a particular historical community. If the ten words are the legal policy, the book is the procedure.<sup>43</sup> In the introduction to this book, there is focus on proper worship. Even the most precious metals, silver and gold, are banned from representing the divine presence, and the place where his name is to be invoked cannot be defiled by an instrument of violence (sword) or the possibility of sexual immodesty (nakedness) (20:24-26). The altar is to be made from rough, unhewn stones, and a ramp must be made instead of a stairway for the approach of the priest, lest he expose himself.

A complete analysis of the laws of the Book of the Covenant is impossible here but two points are worthy of note. It is not without significance that the first laws recorded in chapter 21 are intended to provide relief from slavery.<sup>44</sup> The law of manumission is important because the revelation of the divine name was intended to transform Israelite society. It had once been a band of slaves, but Yahweh had liberated them, and this liberation and redemption was to be institutionalized within their social structure. The importance of this freedom can be seen by the fact that a slave who refuses freedom is to have his ear branded. “The ear which heard at Sinai: ‘You are my servants’ (Lev. 25:42), but nevertheless preferred subjection to men rather than God deserves to be pierced.”<sup>45</sup>

But secondly the motivations added to many of the social laws reveal the values of their covenant Lord. They are to look after the stranger because they were

once strangers in Egypt and their God looked after them—in other words they are to “institutionalize the Exodus” and make the Exodus event a key part of their social welfare strategy.<sup>46</sup> Refugees must not be oppressed because the Israelites once had the same status in Egypt (23:9). Widows and orphans are similarly not to be oppressed because God will hear their crying out as he heard the crying out of his people under Egyptian oppression (22:20-23). A garment used as collateral for a loan must be returned to the debtor at night since, if it is not, he will cry unto God at night and God will hear his cry “for I am gracious” (20:25-26). Criminals must be punished and the innocent vindicated because this is what God does (23:7). Bribes must not be given since they pervert justice that is against the character of Yahweh (23:8); the sabbatical year will be kept in order that the poor might eat freely during this time, and the Sabbath must be observed for the relief of the hired hands and animals (23:11-12). These motivations clearly display the fundamental intent of these laws and their ideals. They might be summarized as based on the divine character: “I am gracious,” which is directly related to the name Yahweh, and by implication should result in a transformed society by his own treasured people.

Chapter 24 presents the ratification of the covenant in a unique rite. Moses delivers the stipulations of the Book of the Covenant to the people and calls them to obedience. Now having heard the content of their promise to obey and having Moses as a mediator, the people still wholeheartedly agree to obey the stipulations. Sacrifices are offered, and Moses takes half of the blood and spills it on the altar, which represents God. He

then takes the other half, which he has put in bowls, and reads again the stipulations to the people, who then affirm their obedience. At that point, Moses announces that the blood in the bowls is the blood of the covenant that Yahweh has made with the people, and then he sprinkles it over the people. The covenant is ratified and key representatives of Israel bring everything to a climax by ascending the mountain where they sit down and dine at a banquet hosted by Yahweh, without any fear. They are even granted a divine vision. As the blood of the Passover rite protected them from danger, the blood of the covenant rite gives them access to the divine presence without trepidation. The earlier fear has been replaced by ecstatic vision.

By this rite the entire nation enters into a covenant with Yahweh and is consecrated to priestly service. When a formal priesthood is later established in Israel, the members of the priesthood are consecrated to their office by the sacrifice of an animal and some of its blood is sprinkled on the altar and then on the priest’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe (29:14ff). This allows him to be prepared to serve a holy God and to mediate the divine presence to the community, without in any way being harmed. The blood on these body parts indicates a complete cleansing and removal of sin, which allows access to the divine presence.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, it would seem that this rite is a bond that unites Israel and God, as the blood is sprinkled on the altar and the people. They are now united in blood because of God’s election of them and their pledge of obedience. Israel is now consecrated to its role of priesthood for the nations. It has accepted its task, and now can experience full fellowship with God as indicated by the communal meal of the

elders with God. The pledge of obedience and the shedding of blood have made this possible.

The “blood of the covenant” is implied by the term “to cut a covenant,” which reflects the origins of a ritual. It probably means the resulting blood from “cutting” apart the bodies of sacrificial animals, which is then used to bind the two parties in a blood oath. In other words, this is a graphic symbol of self-curse in the event that the covenant is violated. The stipulations will be kept—or else!<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the second section of the book of Exodus comes to an end on another note of euphoria and elation. Israel has been delivered from oppression to be led to the mountain of God where they might live with him in harmony and shalom under his divine rule. But Israel has now been led to a mountain and has entered into a covenant, with a special role to the nations. The life of obedience to the divine rule will display the divine name to the nations and mediate the divine blessing. Unparalleled access to the divine presence is given as a sign of ultimate covenant blessing. Yahweh has been true to his name.

### **(3) Presence (Exodus 25:1-40:38)**

These chapters may seem tedious to read or hear, but they describe in detail one of the main goals of the covenant—the union of the covenant partners: “they will be my people, and I will be their God.” The nation as a whole is to experience union and not just its representatives on top of the mountain, and this will be their distinguishing mark among the nations of the world. There is going to be no more ascending and descending of the mountain to experience the divine presence, but God is going to take up residence with the

people down below permanently.<sup>49</sup> The means by which this will take place is now described: the building of a tabernacle. The purpose of this structure is impossible to miss. It occurs at the beginning of the description and near the end:

They will make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them (25:8).

For there I will meet with you to speak with you there. I will meet with you Israelites there and [the tabernacle] will be sanctified by my glory. I will sanctify the tent of meeting, the altar and Aaron and his sons for my priesthood. I will dwell in the midst of the Israelites and become their God. They will know that I am Yahweh their God who brought up from the land of Egypt to make my dwelling in their midst. I am Yahweh their God (29:42b-46).

As Rendtorff points out, “This is an astonishing statement. According to this it is practically the goal of Israel’s being led out of Egypt that God should dwell in the midst of them.”<sup>50</sup> The name Yahweh might be now glossed “Immanuel.”

The next six chapters meticulously describe how this will happen as Moses is given instructions for the building of the tabernacle. The author seems to linger lovingly over the description of the tabernacle apparatus, beginning with the symbols of the immediate presence of God first, the ark, and proceeding outwards to the outside of the tabernacle and then the installation of the priesthood, culminating with Sabbath legislation. This is done in seven discrete commands, which has not escaped the observation of some scholars. As the world was made in six days culminating with a seventh day of rest, thus the tabernacle is a mini-universe made with six commands and a seventh stressing the obligation of the Sabbath (Ex.

25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12).<sup>51</sup> Garden of Eden imagery is used to denote some of the paraphernalia of the tabernacle. Thus, what is at stake in Israel's tabernacle is a model of a new world with God at the center, living with his people.

When the instructions are completed,<sup>52</sup> Moses is handed the two tablets of stone representing the heart of the covenant, to bring to the Israelites and to begin the work of building the tabernacle and experiencing the divine presence. At this moment, on the verge of realizing the divine intention of the Exodus, Moses hears the unthinkable—the people have grown tired of waiting for him receiving the instructions on the mountain and have broken the first two commandments. It is as if the tablets have just been freshly chiseled with the obligations when they have been broken. Or to switch the metaphor, if Yahweh and Israel had been married at Sinai, Israel had committed adultery on the wedding night!<sup>53</sup> This is Israel's original sin, and it is, thus, a crisis of biblical proportions, almost reminiscent of the ancient flood story where God wiped out the population of the earth while saving Noah and his family.<sup>54</sup> Indeed it seems that God is willing to make of Moses a new Noah and to start all over with him. But Moses will have none of it. He intercedes for his people on the basis of the covenant and God's international reputation—his name. It is God's honor—his name—that is at stake among the nations with Israel's fate. Consequently, Moses intercedes successfully, and the people are spared. It is this concern for the name of Yahweh that will drive the narrative in the next two chapters.

When Moses descends the mountain, he is carrying the freshly cut tablets of stone. When he sees the idolatry, he shat-

ters them. This vividly depicts the nature of the crisis—the shattering of the stone into a myriad of fragments symbolizes the shattering of the covenant. Judgment and covenant renewal follow, but when Moses ascends the mountain again it is only a partial renewal. Moses has to intercede again when Yahweh withholds his presence from the people—the people can go into the land without God, who will send his angel with them. Moses pleads with God to change his mind, and the reason again has to do with the nations: Israel is not to be like the rest of the nations but its distinctive, its *raison d'être*, is the divine presence among the nations of the world. What good is a patient without a doctor, a spouse without a partner, a priest without God? This is its mark of distinction among the peoples of the world (33:16). And, as Christopher Wright observes, “*And only by Israel being distinct from the nations was there any purpose in being Israel at all or any hope for the nations themselves eventually.*”<sup>55</sup> Again this crisis is resolved, and Moses now “pushes his luck” as he wishes to have a glimpse of the divine glory—the essence of the divine character, the heart of the divine name.

By this time Moses is a lot bolder than when he first appeared at the burning bush. There he was afraid to look upon God. Since he has gotten to know something of the name of God, Yahweh (“I am who I am”), who liberated his people from Egypt, who made the covenant with them at Sinai, and with whom he has successfully interceded for his people, he wants to press on to see this God. But all he is able to get is a view of the “back” of God and not a full frontal view, since that would result in death. But this view that he receives is absolutely incredible and Yahweh's declaration to him with its

verbal repetition is intended as a further disclosure of the meaning of the divine name (I am/will be who I am/will be). Thus, Moses is told, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (33:19). While this certainly stresses the divine freedom, it is the notes of mercy and grace that are highlighted! These are the first two attributes that occur when the divine name Yahweh is further disclosed:<sup>56</sup>

Yahweh, Yahweh, *God of mercy and grace*, patient, full of covenant love and faithfulness, who keeps covenant love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, rebellion and sin, who will not acquit the guilty and who visits the sins of the fathers upon their children down to the third and fourth generation (34:5-6).

And if this is just the back of God—what must the front be like! That is a lingering question not completely answered in the text. But when Moses hears the revelation, he again pleads forgiveness,<sup>57</sup> and the commands are renewed signifying the complete renewal of the covenant. This time when Moses descends the mountain, his face is shining. He is the image of God, not the cheap idols that the Israelites made. And he becomes the means by which the people hear the word of God. The crisis is now resolved and the tabernacle can now be built (35-40). In a spirit of incredible change the people demonstrate their forgiveness, willingly supplying more than enough of the materials required to build the tabernacle (36:4). When the tent is finished, the New Year begins and the new relationship with Yahweh dwelling in the people's midst. Exactly one year before, Israel was in bondage in Egypt, and was liberated from that oppression two weeks later. And it was not long after that they were liberated from spiritual

oppression. Now they begin the New Year with the most important reality of all: the divine presence. The divine cloud and fire leave the top at Sinai and now descend, completely filling the new sanctuary, so much so that even the great Moses cannot enter. Now the relationship begins, grounded in covenant and divine condescension. The great question remains: how can this continue? The answer is to be found in the nature of covenant and in the incredible revelation of the divine name found in chapter 34:5-6. Israel is not only bound to this God but is to be a witness to the nations of this God. God has moved into their neighborhood, and it will never be the same.

### **The Ultimate Exodus**

The rest of the Old Testament confirms that truth. The definition of Yahweh's name is that finally God will have his way, despite human disobedience and intractability. And what is that way? When the tabernacle is destroyed because of Israelite sin, a temple is built (1 Sam 3-4; 1 Kgs 6). When the temple is destroyed, he decides to become "flesh and blood and move into the neighborhood" (John 1:14), and he builds a temple made of flesh and blood from every tribe and people, inhabited by the Divine Spirit, a temple which will someday comprise the entire earth (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21).<sup>58</sup> And if Moses saw the back of God on Sinai, he gets a full frontal view on another mountain with his prophetic accomplice, Elijah (Luke 9:28-36). There they see the face of Jesus shining in all of its glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And what is Jesus discussing with these prophets? His exodus (Luke 9:31)!<sup>59</sup> He goes down to "Egypt" and suffers oppression, completely submit-



ting to the penalty of sin and death and, thus, paving the way for the Exodus of all peoples into the glorious liberty of the children of God! This firstborn son's blood is not spared but becomes the blood of the covenant sprinkled on the nations not as self-curse, but as a balm of cleansing, renewal, and forgiveness, binding them to him forever. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and given him that name which is above every name (Phil 2:9-11)—that name which to know is to know God's purpose for the world from beginning to end!<sup>60</sup>

#### ENDNOTE)

<sup>1</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 119.

<sup>2</sup>R. Watts, "Exodus," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. D. Alexander and B. Rosner; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 478.

<sup>3</sup>Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. David E. Orton; Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2006), 47.

<sup>4</sup>Note the repeated use of the word "to go down" in these chapters: 37:25; 39:1 (2x); 42:2-3, 38; 43:4, 5, 7, 11.

<sup>5</sup>For the order and hermeneutical significance of the Hebrew order of the biblical books see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 15; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

<sup>6</sup>See D. Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).

<sup>7</sup>On these passages and others see Watts, "Exodus," 484.

<sup>8</sup>Sometimes this claim is made in absolute terms as if Israel had no point of contact with its cultural and religious environ-

ment. The old biblical theology movement may have erred in this direction but the point still remains valid. There are fundamental differences between Israel and the nations, which make Israel seem like an alien at times. See, e.g., Peter Gentry's article in this edition of *SBJT* in which he observes that the first four commandments are "absolutely unique" in the ancient world. For older classic biblical theology studies see, e.g., George Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament against Its Environment* (London: SCM, 1960). For a modern popularization see Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Anchor Books/Nan A Talese, 1999).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Lev 26:11: "I'll set up my residence in your neighborhood; I won't avoid or shun you; I'll stroll through your streets. I'll be your God; you'll be my people. I am God, your personal God who rescued you from Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians. I ripped off the harness of your slavery so that you can move about freely" (*The Message*).

<sup>10</sup>Ps 78:60: "the tent he established among humanity!" Note also: "[The tabernacle] constitutes a change in the way God is present among them—ongoing rather than occasional; close not distant; on the move, not fixed.... No longer are the people—or their mediator asked to come up to God; God 'comes down' to them. No more trips up the mountain for Moses! God begins a 'descent' that John 1:14 claims comes to a climax in the Incarnation" (Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction To The Old Testament* [2d ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005]), 133-35.

<sup>11</sup>Childs, *Exodus*, 119.

- <sup>12</sup>Note both the continuity and contrast in the expression, “You heard that it was said.... But I say unto you” (5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44).
- <sup>13</sup>Cf. Stephen G. Dempster, “LORD,” in *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (ed. Craig A. Evans; New York: Routledge, 2007), 375-80.
- <sup>14</sup>For further examples see conveniently Peter Enns, “Exodus/New Exodus,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 216-18.
- <sup>15</sup>See, e.g., Bernard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-hall, Inc., 1986). See also the sampling of Old Testament theologies in Elmer A. Martens, Ben C. Ollenburger, and Gerhard Hasel, eds., *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology: A Reader in Twentieth-Century Old Testament Theology, 1930-1990*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991).
- <sup>16</sup>James Barr, “The Meaning of Mythology in Relation to the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959): 1-10.
- <sup>17</sup>One author that repeatedly points out the importance of this truth is John Sailhamer. See, e.g., his work on the Pentateuch: John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Note also the powerful way this is presented in Christopher Wright’s superb new book. He describes the Bible as “the universal story that gives a place in the sun to all the little stories”: Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 47.
- <sup>18</sup>For further reading see Enrique Dussel, “Exodus as a Paradigm in Liberation Theology,” *Concilium* 189, no. 1 (1987): 83-92; Josiah Young, “Exodus as a Paradigm for Black Theology,” *Concilium* 189, no. 1 (1987): 93-99; Diane Bergant, “Exodus as a Paradigm in Feminist Theology,” *Concilium* 189, no. 1 (1987): 100-06.
- <sup>19</sup>On the problems with a simple devotional reading in general see N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God—Getting Beyond the Bible Wars* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 32-34.
- <sup>20</sup>Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written & Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
- <sup>21</sup>“What is remarkable is that the names of these lowly women are recorded whereas, by contrast, the all-powerful reigning monarch is consistently veiled in anonymity. In this way the biblical narrator expresses his scale of values. All the power of the mighty pharaoh, the outward magnificence of his realm, the dazzling splendor of his court, his colossal monuments—all are illusory, ephemeral, and in the ultimate reckoning, insignificant, and they must crumble into dust because they rest on foundations of empty moral content. Seven times in this brief episode the term ‘midwife’ is repeated, an index of the importance that Scripture places upon the actions of the women in their defiance of tyranny and their upholding of moral principles” (Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* [New York: Schocken, 1996], 25).
- <sup>22</sup>See the function of the Hebrew conjunction *waw*, particularly when it appears at the beginning of biblical books. Stephen G. Dempster, “Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985).
- <sup>23</sup>For a profound understanding of the Jacob story, as the record of someone who emerged “broken and blessed” in a struggle with God, which ended in “a magnificent defeat” see, Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1985), 10-18.
- <sup>24</sup>I owe this thematic structure to G. Michael Hagan, “Theology of Exodus,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. Walter Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 226-29. Hagan, however, divides the text differently.
- <sup>25</sup>Childs, *Exodus*, 119.
- <sup>26</sup>For the entire story see 2:1-10. For Moses’ experience being recapitulated in the experience of the people of Israel see Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (1st ed.; New York: Schocken, 2000), 253.
- <sup>27</sup>The vexed question of how this can be so, since the name Yahweh has been used frequently in Genesis, has driven scholars to various solutions. The most common one has been the so-called source theory of the Pentateuch in which Exod 6:3

represents the P narrative in which this is the first time the name is used. Thus, this is true for P but not for J (cf. Gen 4:26). However, most modern scholars strive for an integrated reading of the text and suggest that this is the first time the real meaning of the name has been disclosed to the Israelites. For an in depth treatment of the problem see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 5-78.

<sup>28</sup>For a profound theology of the Old Testament that expands on the themes found in 5:22-6:8, see Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (3d ed.; N. Richland Hills, TX: D. & F. Scott, 1997).

<sup>29</sup>For the classic study on this formula, see Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1982) 1-28.

<sup>30</sup>Translations are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>31</sup>On the phrase "the education of Pharaoh" and the following section I am greatly indebted to Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 93-94. Wright describes the following texts and others as "the curriculum of Pharaoh's education."

<sup>32</sup>Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 312. This would be like inserting Paul's instructions for the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17-34) into the Last Supper narrative in the Gospels.

<sup>33</sup>See n. 26 above.

<sup>34</sup>See in particular the insightful essay by Peter Gentry in this edition of *SBJT*.

<sup>35</sup>"The covenant at Sinai is a specific

covenant within the context of the Abrahamic covenant" (Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991], 209 [emphasis in original]).

<sup>36</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 73. The quotation within the quote is that of Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), 65. For a complete misunderstanding of election as "the ultimate anti-humanistic idea," see Jeremy Cott, "The Biblical Problem of Election," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984): 224. For a response to this view, which is virtually a concession, see John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 53-74.

<sup>37</sup>Blessing and salvation are not just primarily to Israel but through Israel (cf. Ps 67). This statement was inspired by N. T. Wright in a public lecture when he remarked, "Salvation is not to the church but through the church."

<sup>38</sup>"The whole history of Israel ... is intended to be the shop window for the knowledge of God in all the earth" (Wright, *The Mission of God*, 127).

<sup>39</sup>Brueggeman as cited in Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 110.

<sup>40</sup>Some scholars would construe the last part of Exod 19:5 with verse 6: "Because all the earth is mine, so you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This stresses Israel's universal mission even more. See Fretheim, *Exodus*,

212. Wright points out a chiasmic relationship in the structure with the focus on the nations at the center of the chiasm. See Wright, *The Mission of God*, 255. The text is probably more naturally understood as an explanatory clause attached to the end of verse 5. For a list of possible readings see the recent, superb study by John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Textual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 54-60. Davies himself does not believe that the mission to the nations is emphasized in the immediate context. Priesthood simply implies access to the divine presence, a fact that is confirmed in 24:9-11. While this is no doubt true, the larger narrative context, which implies a divine mission to the world for Israel (Gen 12:1-3) as well as the general understanding of priests as representatives, would seem to imply mission. As the priests within Israel represented Israel, so Israel as a collective priesthood represented the nations. As the priest would bless the people and place the divine name upon them, so Israel was to bless the nations and invest them with the divine name (Psalm 67).

<sup>41</sup>Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 596 (emphasis added).

<sup>42</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Theology Of The Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 173-76.

<sup>43</sup>George Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 2 (1954): 26-46.

<sup>44</sup>Mendenhall, "Biblical Law."

- <sup>45</sup>Tosephta, *Baba Kamma* VII, 5. Cited in Childs, *Exodus*, 469.
- <sup>46</sup>“[R]eference to the Exodus suggests that the theological intention of the Ten Commandments is to institutionalize the Exodus: to establish perspectives, procedures, policies and institutions that will generate Exodus-like social relationships... [These are] policies to create a society that practices Yahweh’s justice and not pharaoh’s injustice, and to establish neighborly well-being instead of coercion, fear and exploitation.” (Brueggemann, *Theology Of The Old Testament*, 184).
- <sup>47</sup>A similar rite occurs in the cleansing of a leper (Lev 14:14, 25). When a leper is deemed clean by the priest, the blood from a sacrifice is daubed on his ear, thumb, and toe, thus indicating complete cleansing from the impurity of the disease. The leper can now enter the community once again and be returned to the full privileges of a member of the community, including of course fellowship and worship.
- <sup>48</sup>E. Kutsch, “*krt* to cut off,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann; trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Hendrickson: Peabody, MA), 2:635-37.
- <sup>49</sup>Birch, *Theological Introduction*, 133-35.
- <sup>50</sup>Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 65.
- <sup>51</sup>For a complete development of these thoughts see the comprehensive work by G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).
- <sup>52</sup>The following description is based on Exodus 32-34.
- <sup>53</sup>R. W. L. Moberly, “Exodus, Book of,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 214.
- <sup>54</sup>R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 22; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1983).
- <sup>55</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 335 (emphasis in original).
- <sup>56</sup>And, thus, these first two qualities in Exod 34:5 are in chiasmic relationship with the two qualities mentioned in 33:19.
- <sup>57</sup>Thus showing that he does not take forgiveness for granted. The last part of the description of Yahweh’s attributes shows that this should never happen. Grace can never imply license! Grace is always costly. The revelation of the New Testament shows in fact how costly it can be.
- <sup>58</sup>See further Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 201-68.
- <sup>59</sup>Note that the Greek word used for departure is ἐξοδόν.
- <sup>60</sup>Childs, *Exodus*, 119. On the significance of the title LORD and its relation to the name Yahweh, see Dempster, “LORD,” 375-80.