# **Exodus**

## Introduction

Exodus tells the story of Israel’s beginnings as a nation. It commences with the time when Israel’s flourishing in Egypt leads to its being treated tyrannically, and covers Israel’s escape from Egypt, its meeting with God at Mount Sinai, its receiving his instructions for its worship and its ordinary life, and its building of a moveable sanctuary there.

The book gives little indication of the date of these events, though its reference to the Israelites being involved in the construction of the cities of Pithom and Ra‘amses likely suggest the thirteenth century BC, the era of the great Pharaoh Ra‘amses II. Yet that makes it the more striking that Exodus never names the Pharaoh of the day, which puts him in his place but also evades giving readers a hint of the date, through naming him.

Exodus also gives no concrete indications of its origin as a book. Its jerkiness and repetitions suggest (but do not require) that it came into being by a process of compilation from already-existing versions of the story and the instructions. The usual scholarly view is that this process took place over a number of centuries, possibly beginning in the pre-monarchic period and continuing into the Second Temple period (see Longacre). There are consensus views about the date of some of the materials, but not about others, and in any case consensus views change and cannot be assumed to be correct on the basis of their representing a consensus. Fortunately our not knowing when the book came into existence does not too much affect the possibility of understanding it as part in the way “God spoke to our ancestors” (Heb 1:1)—our adoptive ancestors, for most readers.

When other books have language and themes in common with Exodus, that uncertainty about the book’s origin means it is commonly hazardous to assume a view on whether the other book is following Exodus or Exodus is following the other book. Fortunately, this uncertainty, too, need not compromise the possibility of gaining insight from comparing and contrasting the two works. Thus, when this study speaks in terms of works that are “earlier” or “later” than Exodus, this will commonly be referring only to an earlier or later position within the order in which the books come in the Scriptures, not to chronological priority.

Outlining the story of Israel’s beginnings as it appears in Exodus suggests its chief textual affinities, and points to its approaches to interpretation.

It tells of how Israel began as a nation in Egypt: Genesis to Kings thus relates to Exodus by seeing earlier and subsequent events as background to or outworkings of or analogous to or more glorious than events in Exodus. It tells of how Israel experienced oppression but Yahweh enabled Israel to escape from Egypt: Psalms that reflect the experience of oppression and deliverance relate to Exodus by making it the subject of subsequent recollection, protest, and praise. It tells of how Yahweh met with Israel at Sinai: Leviticus relates to Exodus by continuing its story and finding the rationale for its actions there. It tells of how Yahweh issued Israel instructions concerning its future life: Leviticus and Deuteronomy relate to Exodus by issuing new versions of its directives. It tells of how Yahweh issued instructions for the construction of a sanctuary with its priesthood: Leviticus relates to Exodus by expanding on the implementing of these, and Ezekiel does so by providing an alternative vision. It tells of how Israel was unfaithful and Yahweh took action against the people: Kings, Jeremiah, and Psalms relate to Exodus by relating subsequent events in light of these early events. It tells of how Yahweh reaffirmed his covenant commitment to Israel: Psalms and Prophets confirm and rework his reaffirmation. And it tells of how Israel did construct and consecrate the moveable sanctuary: Leviticus relates to Exodus by recounting how Israel completed this project through the anointing of its priesthood.

Exodus may provide an analogy for the later task of interpretation. It may provide raw material for interpretation that goes beyond the earlier one (e.g., picturing an event as a new exodus more splendid than the first exodus). This use in a later text can be termed typological interpretation. It may relate something that a later text sees as implying an obligation. It may relate the promise whose fulfillment a later text reports. It may relate the bidding whose fulfillment or flouting a later text reports. It may relate an event that a later text celebrates. It may use words that a later text uses in a different connection or turns upside-down. It may be set in the context of a later historical or social context (for instance, the building of the temple) in a way that issues in creative new interpretation. It may be set in the context of another text (for instance, the creation story) in a way that issues in creative new interpretation. It may be set in the context of a need that arises in another context (for instance, the protection of servants) in a way that issues in creative new interpretation.

The theological implications of the relationship between Exodus and other works within the OT are especially twofold. Its links with the Psalms suggest that Yahweh’s deliverance of his people from servitude is an ongoing basis for praise and thanksgiving but also an ongoing basis for protest and prayer when Yahweh’s action in the present does not match his action back then. And its links with Leviticus and Deuteronomy suggest the way in which Yahweh’s changing expectations of his people reflect a dialogue between the social and historical contexts in which they live and Yahweh’s own standards expressed in creation and in his act of deliverance.

## Exodus 1:1–7: Fruitfulness

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The opening of Exodus refers back to the preceding story of Jacob’s family moving to Egypt (Gen 46–50), but comes to a climax with a declaration that has close verbal links with earlier passages in Genesis.

The Israelites, they were fruitful, they teemed, they became many, and they became very, very strong. The land became full of them. (Exod 1:7)

The opening story in Exodus relates a development that fits into the way the Torah’s story as a whole goes beyond anything that corresponds to regular life and experience, relating dazzling transformations and other amazing phenomena, wild hyperbole, and astounding coincidences (Feldt). The following verses relate that the Pharaoh does not know Joseph, or perhaps did not “acknowledge” Joseph (often the implication of the verb *yada‘*). Growing population can always be a problem (Houtman), and the Pharaoh is concerned about the Israelites becoming so many and strong, and needs to do something about it. It thus transpires that Exod 1:1–7 is a prelude to tragedy (Andiñach). It implies “a dark view of history” (Dozeman). Ironically, the growth of this people, which is now the major reason for their misery, cannot be stemmed (Durham).

On the usual scholarly theory, all the passages on the theme of fruitfulness belong to the “Priestly” strand of the Torah, which is interwoven with earlier and perhaps later material in the Torah as we have it.

### B. Context of Related Passages

To the background of Exod 1:1–7 is God’s blessing the first human beings and other creatures in Gen 1:22, 28, bidding them to become many and fill the land and the sea, and bidding humanity to subject the land and the creatures (Bills). Then, in the background after the deluge is God bidding Noah and his sons to take the creatures out of the ark“so that they teem in the land and become fruitful and become many in the land,” and God’s renewed blessing, with a commission to Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and become many and fill the land … teem in the land, and become many in it” (Gen 9:1, 7). Subsequently “God appeared to Jacob … and blessed him … and God said to him, ‘I am El Shadday. Be fruitful and become many’” (Gen 35:9, 11). Here in Exod 1:1–7, “very quickly the narrator moves the story away from Genesis into a new world, from twelve sons to seventy persons to a full land” (Fretheim, *Exodus*)*.*

The OT’s recurrent summaries of its story commonly begin with the exodus, or with Yahweh’s promises to Israel’s ancestors. This encourages the view that the first versions of a narrative account of the OT story would have begun there, the creation story being added later as a prequel. Yet verbal links between Genesis and Exodus bind the story of creation and the story of Israel's deliverance. A further note recurring through Gen 1 is the way God looked at elements in the creation and “saw that [it was] good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and now Moses’s mother looks at her baby and “saw him that he [was] good” (Exod 2:2; Heesing). Moses’s birth is “the dawn of a new creative era” (Sarna). Moses is then saved through being in a chest (Exod 2:3), like Noah (Gen 6–9) (Becking/Dijkstra). The word for chest (*tebah*) occurs only in these two passages and further binds the stories of creation and of Israel’s deliverance. This aspect of the Moses story also illumines its intertextual relationship with the story of Sargon’s birth and of Atrahasis (Propp). Whereas the Sargon story relates how a foundling becomes king, the Moses story begins an account of how someone of known and worthy background is imperiled, then preserved, and exalted, and in due course humbled but thereby prepared for his vocation (Childs). Yet beyond comments about Moses’s mother and about the Pharaoh and the midwives, the text includes no interpretation of human motivations or of the right and wrongs in the Moses story, unlike Philo in his *Life of Moses*,Stephen in Acts 7, and Heb 11 (Childs). Moses’s actions in Exod 2:11–22 are simply the necessary background to events in Exod 3–4.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Reading Exodus in light of Genesis suggests that the Israelites’ fruitfulness in Egypt matches the fruitfulness to which God commissioned humanity at creation and after the deluge, and the fruitfulness to which God commissioned Jacob. It is a fulfillment of God’s creation purpose, and of God’s reaffirmed purpose, after regretting creating the world and bringing calamity on it. When humanity then went wrong again after the deluge, God spoke more of blessing and fruitfulness to Abraham and Isaac, though not in the same precise words, which recur only in connection with Jacob (who gets mentioned twice in 1:1–7). The Israelites’ flourishing is a fulfillment of Jacob’s blessing and of God’s bidding to him to be fruitful, even after he imperiled his commission and God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and after their various failures. None of this made God abandon his intention for humanity to be fruitful and fill the earth.

This last English phrase draws attention to a comparison and contrast between Exodus and Gen 1–9. Reference to *ha’aret*s recurs, but translations naturally render that word “the earth” in Genesis but “the land” (that is, the land of Egypt) in Exodus. This aspect of the link between Exodus and Genesis underscores the implication that the Israelites’ fruitfulness in Egypt is an aspect of the fulfillment of God’s creation commission.

The verb “teem” (*sharats*) in Exod 1:7 further underscores the point. In Gen 8:17 and 9:7, this relatively rare verb functions as a vivid alternative to “fill” (*mala’*) in 1:22, 28; 9:1. The Exodus passage has both verbs and thus has four verbs where the Genesis chapters have three, and also has the Israelites becoming “very, very strong” (*‘atsam*;cf. Exod 1:20)—another relatively rare verb that functions as a vivid alternative to “become many.” On the other hand, Gen 1:28 includes a commission to “subject” the land (*kabash*), yet another relatively rare verb that otherwise does not occur in Genesis or Exodus. It is used in connection with the land of Canaan being subjected (Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1; 1 Chr 22:18), but Exodus does not speak of the Israelites subjecting the land (of Egypt), though ironically the Egyptian king is indeed worried about them having become too “many and strong” (1:9).

### D. Theological Use

Comparison with the Genesis passages highlights the extraordinary nature of the Exodus description of the Israelites flourishing, though there is also a contrast between the two. When Genesis speaks of becoming fruitful, becoming many, teeming, and filling, all but one of the passages speaks of it as an outworking of God’s blessing. It is an aspect of the importance of the idea of blessing in Genesis. The same applies to Ps 105:24, which rejoices that “he made his people very fruitful, and made them stronger than their foes.”

The motif does not recur in Exodus in this way, and in 1:7 Exodus does not say “but God blessed the Israelites, and they were fruitful.” As well as having the Egyptian king echo the narrative’s words about their becoming numerous and strong (1:9–10), the narrator restates them in describing how the more the Egyptians afflicted Israel, the more Israel “would become many and be fruitful and spread” (1:12). Again Exodus makes no reference to God bringing this about. Its report of how God deals well with the midwives and establishes households for them is the only point at which 1:1–2:22 reports him acting. Exodus simply says “became many and they became strong” (1:20–21).

Whereas Genesis, then, consistently notes God’s involvement in bringing about flourishing, Exodus consistently notes the human side. Flourishing does not come about without God’s blessing. But it also involves the Israelites expending their life force or energy or hopefulness that they can have a future, when they are merely an extended family of seventy people (1:5) and when they are troubled by oppressive masters. This combining of an emphasis on God’s activity and on Israel’s activity matches an assumption running through the OT, which does not seek to explain how the two interrelate. It just knows they do.

A related implication of Exod 1 is that the sovereignty that God exercises in the world is mostly a permissive sovereignty. Exodus does not portray God as inspiring the Egyptians to oppress the Israelites. They decide for themselves, and God lets them do it. But occasionally God intervenes in the world, and an example will shortly follow. Perhaps his intervention happens because circumstances change (the Pharaoh dies) and because the Israelites cry out, and it would not have happened had both these events not come together.

## Exodus 2:23–24; 6:3–5: Mindful of the Pledge

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

So the Israelites flourish and seem a threat. The Egyptians’ consequent oppressive and then brutal treatment leads to the Israelites groaning under their servitude and crying out. Exod 2:23 does not say that they cried out to God, but their plea for help reached God anyway (Kass). He listened to their wail. Exodus uses four words to describe it, which might be translated groan, cry out, plea for help, and howl. “Israel groaned in all sorts of ways” (Houtman). The language points up and underlines their desperation and the pressure it puts on God. Its effectiveness is first suggested by describing this wail as “going up” to God (it did not just evaporate into the ether), then by affirming that God “listened to it” (*shama‘*). One might translate “heard.” But the narrator implies something more, when going on to say that God “saw,” or rather “looked at” the Israelites, and that he “acknowledged” them (that verb *yada‘*, noted in the comment on 1:1–7). In between going up/listening and seeing/acknowledging is the key statement that “God was mindful of his pledge with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (2:24). The intense, concentrated focus on the appeal to God and then on the divine response is all the more arresting against the background of the previous paucity of reference to God. And perhaps we should honor the terseness of the chapter’s final observation, which simply declares, “God knew” (Alexander).

The dynamics of 2:23–25 recur later in 6:3–5 in the Priestly narrative’s version: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob … and not only did I establish my pledge with them to give them the country of Canaan … but also I myself have listened to the Israelites’ howl … and I have been mindful of my pledge” (6:3, 5). “Pledge” translates the word *berit*, traditionally translated “covenant.” Sometimes this translation gives the right impression, but “covenant” is inclined to suggest a mutual commitment, whereas *berit* can also denote a one-sided commitment, something closer to a promise, and this meaning is implied when it is the subject of mindfulness. Again, “was mindful” translates the verb *zakar*, traditionally translated “remember.” Remembering is the opposite of “forgetting,” and the Israelites might well have been tempted to think that God had forgotten them and forgotten his pledge. But remembering suggests action as well as thought (it parallels *yada‘* meaning “acknowledge” as well as “know”). So does forgetting (as is implied when Psalms such as 44:24 [ 25] speak of Yahweh forgetting—that is, doing nothing about). And both remembering and forgetting suggest something one does deliberately—they suggest being mindful and putting out of mind. Action as well as thought is what Israel needs and what Yahweh implies when he speaks of mindfulness, as his subsequent words in 6:6 make explicit.

### B. Context of Related Passages

God made his first “pledge” in connection with the deluge (Gen 6:18; 9:9–11), and it is a pledge not to repeat the deluge that is the first subject of his commitment to be mindful (9:15–16). It hints that pledges and mindfulness link with blessing and fruitfulness. The authors and readers of Genesis may presuppose that God has been mindful of that first pledge and that they can continue to live their lives on the assumption that he will continue to be so.

God then made a pledge to Abraham to make him spectacularly fruitful, a pledge for all time that will mean he will be God for Abraham and his descendants and they will be a people for him (17:1–7). The expression *berit le‘olam* ,“a pledge for all time,” is traditionally translated “an everlasting covenant,” but “everlasting” may also be misleading. Literally, it is “a pledge of age,” a pledge that will last until the end of the age. It is this pledge of which God was mindful in Exod 2:24 and 6:5. Indeed, he “has been mindful of his pledge” (Ps 105:8–10, as it looks towards celebrating the exodus). Some EVV translate “he *is* mindful” of this pledge, but the verb is *qatal*, so its explicit point is more likely that he has been mindful on an ongoing basis in Israel’s experience of this pledge for all time to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Other passages that speak of Yahweh being mindful of his pledge indicate that this mindfulness does not imply his people’s immunity to his disciplinary chastisement. Ps 106:45 affirms that mindfulness, but the affirmation follows up reference to a faithlessness on Israel’s part that led to his surrendering Israel to their adversaries; but then he was mindful of his pledge and relented. Jer 14:21 imagines Judahites pleading with Yahweh to be mindful of his pledge despite their waywardness, and not to annul it (*parar*). Perhaps they would assume that he can hardly annul his pledge because he had made it a pledge that would stand for all time. But Jeremiah knows that whatever the truth in that assumption, a plea that he should relent can be fruitless, and there follows a formidable expression of his willingness to act on his anger, when he lets Jerusalem fall in 587.

Yet Yahweh knows that they are right that he cannot finally annul his pledge or give up his mindfulness. Before he lets Jerusalem fall, as Leviticus and Ezekiel present matters, he acknowledges it. “I will be mindful of my Jacob pledge and also of my Isaac pledge and also of my Abraham pledge I will be mindful.… I will be mindful for them of the pledge to the first people, whom I got out from the country of Egypt” (Lev 26:42, 45). “You have despised an oath in violating a pledge, but I for my part will be mindful of my pledge with you in your young days and I will establish it for you as a pledge for all time” (Ezek 16:59-60). Yes, “he will be mindful for all time of his pledge” (Ps 111:5).

Pss 105 and 106, with their reference to mindfulness and the pledge, are among a number of Psalms that are open to “intertextual analysis” in light of their reference to Exodus or at least to the exodus (Emanuel, sorry, stet Bards see also, e.g., Estes; Fuad; Gillingham; Human; Niccacci). Ps 105 turns the entire story in Genesis to Joshua into a vehicle of confessional praise. Perhaps one should see the narrative itself as an implicit act of praise. Anyway, the psalm makes the praise explicit, with an initial hint that it will be turning the action that inspires praise into action that inspires prayer, and with a closing hint about turning it into action that inspires submission (vv. 4, 45). In this connection, the psalm calls for mindfulness of Yahweh’s acts on Israel’s part (v. 5), before testifying to Yahweh’s own mindfulness to which Israel’s mindfulness responds. Yahweh has indeed been mindful for all time of his pledge (vv. 8–10). All the way to Canaan “he was mindful of his pledge with Abraham” (v. 42).

Ps 106 then walks through the story from Genesis to Kings and turns it into another kind of confession, in which Israel acknowledges its waywardness. One might again see the narrative itself as an implicit act of such acknowledgment, what von Rad called a *Gerichtsdoxologie*, an act of praise at the justice of the judgment of God. The psalm expresses a confidence that the waywardness it acknowledges, the exodus generation’s failure to be mindful (v. 7) and its inclination rather to put Yahweh out of mind, to forget him (*shakah*,v. 21), does not make it impossible to praise and pray, if one has now turned away from such waywardness. Even in the context of that waywardness, Yahweh has been mindful of his pledge (v. 45). One can thus still urge him to be mindful (v. 4).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The references to mindfulness and pledge assume the principle of promise and fulfillment. Exod 3 and 6 presuppose this relationship with Gen 17:1–7. Ps 105:8 makes the same assumption in connection with the people’s life in Genesis and in Egypt and on the way to Canaan. Ps 111:5 affirms that it will apply there for all time. Ps 106:45 applies this assumption to Yahweh’s mercy towards Israel in the course of the faithlessness of their life in Canaan. The people who pray in Jer 14:21 assume that it applies in this context. Lev 26:42 and 45 pick up the assumption in Exod 3 and 6 on the basis of the hypothesis that eventually that faithlessness will indeed issue in terrible redress, but declare that this will not be the end of Israel’s story. In Ezek 16:59-60 Yahweh makes the point more explicit in speaking both of the way Israel has violated a pledge but also of the way he himself will not.

### D. Theological Use

The references to mindfulness and pledge bring out the irresolvable tension between divine commitment, divine expectations, human obligation, and human failure. The background to the commitment in Genesis is the burgeoning of human faithlessness and violence that issues in the decision to bring the deluge, yet also issues in a commitment not to act in that way again. Alongside God’s determination to fulfill his purpose in creating the world, an aspect of the paradoxical basis of God’s pledge to Noah and then to Abraham is the inevitability of human faithlessness. God’s pledge cannot be a pledge that is conditional. God is faithful to his pledge notwithstanding Israel’s faithlessness. Yet he can hardly simply ignore that faithfulness forever. Like parents in relation to a child, eventually he has to declare, “That’s it.” However, even then he cannot give up being mindful of his pledge, and his chastisement cannot be the end of the story, as is the case with parents in relation to their children. Hence the undertakings in Leviticus and Ezekiel. In Gen 9:15–16 the pledge is “for all time.” So it is again in Ezek 16:59–60.

The references to mindfulness and to a pledge have further implications. Yahweh has bound himself not to give up his commitment to Israel, which excludes the idea of giving up on the people of Israel and letting the people that acknowledges Jesus take their place. It excludes supersessionism. A converse is that one cannot infer from Exodus that God is always committed to being on the side of peoples who are oppressed by other more powerful peoples. Exodus is about his pledge to Israel. Any argument that he always takes the side of the oppressed or the powerless would have to be based somewhere else.

## Exodus 3:1–16: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob: I Will Be With You

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Following on Yahweh’s exercise of mindfulness in response to the Israelites’ cry, his aide appears to Moses, and he himself summons him and declares, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.… I have definitely seen the affliction of my people, in Egypt … and I have come down to rescue it from Egypt’s hand..… Go, I will send you to Pharaoh. Get my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.… I will be with you” (3:6–12).

In Genesis, God was the God of Abraham, then the God of Abraham and Isaac, then the God of Jacob. And to Isaac and Jacob he had said in tricky situations, “I will be with you” (Gen 26:3; 31:3). In Exod 3:6 for the first time, God describes himself as the God all three ancestors, and also the God of Moses’s father. Nothing in Exodus so far has indicated that Moses already knew who God was, and the prospect of the Israelites asking about God’s name (3:13) suggests the assumption that neither would they know who God was. In response to Yahweh’s commission, Moses says, “Who am I” to undertake this task? To which Yahweh’s response is, “The question is not who *you* are but who *I* am, and I will be with you” (Propp,). “It’s not yours but mine” (Rashi).

Actually, the God in whose name Moses will speak to the Israelites is not a new God but one who has long been involved with the community, yet they do not know that. He is the God who made promises to Abraham and renewed them to Isaac and Jacob, though he does not make that point explicit here. In 3:14–15 he does make a several-fold self-revelation. He will be what he will be, or he will be who he will be, or he is who he is (3:14a). His enigmatic self-designation suggests that he is not going to reveal much that is very specific, but the breadth of who he is implies that Moses and his people can take the risk of being his people. To put it another way and more succinctly, though not more specifically, he is “I will be” or “I am” (3:14b). Further, he is Yahweh (3:15). This is a new name that he gives Moses and the people. Genesis has referred to him by this name, thus making the point that the God who appears here had long been involved with Israel’s ancestors. But the actual name “Yahweh” is a new revelation. The name would look as if it might be related in some way to the verb meaning “to be” (*hayah*), which he used when he said “I will be” or “I am.”. The name could thus also function as shorthand for the nature of God as described in 3:14. And as Yahweh, he is indeed the God of the Israelites’ ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and thus not a new God. Genesis’s use of that name was therefore appropriate, if formally anachronistic. Yahweh is now his name for all time, to go with his pledge for all time (3:15b).

While 3:1–15 is the story of Moses’s commission, “the point of focus is the identity of Yahweh” (Dozeman). Perhaps there is no commission without theophany but also no theophany without commission (Durham, though he notes that actually in 6:2–13 there is only mention of a commission).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The OT subsequently takes the name Yahweh for granted and does not allude again to the more enigmatic self-designations that Yahweh uses with Moses. “Yahweh” is simply a name, with reference, but not with a meaning independent of that reference. It is the fact that Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that spells out its significance (G. I. Davies,). Perhaps the complexity and jerkiness of 3:13–15 are a sign of a process of reflection and rethinking about the name, but there is little indication of such reflection and rethinking elsewhere in the OT. Something similar is true about “El Shadday” (6:2), which is also simply a name. The OT sometimes works with the possible resonances of this name, as suggesting fruitfulness (*shad* means breast; Gen 49:25) or destroyer (*shadad* means to destroy; Isa 13:6). But in itself Shadday is simply a name, like Yahweh, the first being distinctively the name by which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God, the second the name by which Israelites knew the same God. El Shadday is God’s name in the era of promise; Yahweh is God’s name as the era of fulfillment dawns (Childs). Moses could not perform signs by the name of Shadday, only by the name of Yahweh (Ibn Ezra).

An anticipation of Yahweh’s self-revelation to Moses features in a revelation to Jacob: “I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac: The country that you are lying on, I will give to you and to your offspring.… There, I am with you” (Gen 28:13, 15; see also 26:3, 24; 31:3). Moses later reminds the Israelites that God is taking them into Canaan “in order to fulfill the word that Yahweh promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Deut 9:5). And subsequently he urges: “Choose life” and live in commitment to him, “because that is your life and your length of days to live on the land that Yahweh promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them” (Deut 30:19–20). When the people have brought their gifts for the building of the temple, David urges: “Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep this for all time as the inclination of the thoughts in your people’s mind” (1 Chr 29:18). Elijah, at his confrontation with the Baal prophets, urges: “Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today it should be acknowledged that you are God in Israel and I am your servant” (1 Kgs 18:36). He implies something similar to the concern David expresses: the people need the God of their ancestors to be active not only in fulfilling his promise to give them the country, but in himself safeguarding their faithfulness. Hezekiah urges the Ephraimites: “Turn back to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will turn back to the survivors who are left of you” (2 Chr 30:6).

In addition, God says “I will be with you” or “I have been with you” to Joshua, Gideon, David, and Solomon (Deut 31:23; Josh 1:5; 3:7; Judg 6:16: 2 Sam 7:9; 1 Kgs 11:38; 2 Chr 17:8). And he says “I [am] with you” to Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, also 1:19; 15:20), as he did to Jacob: there is no verb in this second expression, though the broad parameters of Yahweh’s words to Jeremiah at his commission compare with those to Moses. It is the promise to which Haggai appeals (Hagg 2:4–5).

In Exod 3, Israel is Yahweh’s people and Egypt is its oppressor. In Isa 19:19–25, Egypt becomes “my people,” and in its country there will be an altar and a column for Yahweh (cf. Exod 24:4) which “will be a sign and a witness” there. The former oppressors “will cry out to Yahweh because of their oppressors” and Yahweh will send them “a deliverer, and he will defend and rescue them.” They will acknowledge Yahweh and serve Yahweh there with sacrifices (cf. Exod 3:18) (Beaulieu). In multiform ways the message pictures a relationship between Yahweh and Egypt that is analogous to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel in Exod 3 and later chapters.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

A number of passages thus affirm the ongoing significance of Yahweh’s having made promises to the ancestors, and also assume that Yahweh’s self-identification as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could be of ongoing significance. These references occur in works from the late First Temple period and the Second Temple period. Meanwhile, Deuteronomy confirms that Yahweh will see that the Israelites occupy Canaan, because he must fulfill his promise to the ancestors, but also because of the faithlessness of the country’s present occupants. It adds something that logically follows but was not explicit in Exod 3. As the Canaanites are about to discover, possessing the country depends on commitment to faithfulness, and although it is the promise that will give Israel the country, their faithlessness will mean they forfeit it. While their faithfulness was not and is not a sufficient basis for coming to possess the land, it is a necessary basis for holding onto it.

For the most part, then, these various passages simply assume that the affirmations in Exod 3:1–16 still apply. Isa 19:19–25 works in a different way. It presupposes a prophetic awareness about Yahweh’s intentions regarding Egypt that issues in the prophet’s turning inside out the promises in Exod 3:1–16 in a way that has no basis in the text itself. Its hermeneutic is the one Paul will imply in Rom 9:25–26, where Paul takes up a promise about Ephraim’s restoration within Israel and turns it into a promise about Gentiles having access to membership of Israel. Isa 19 does the same.

### D. Theological Use

As the God of Israel’s ancestors, Yahweh can be active both in giving the country to Israel (and taking it back) and in pushing Israel to be faithful to him. Israel’s possession of the country depends on the God of the ancestors and on Israel’s faithfulness. The allusions complicate rather than simplify the significance of Yahweh’s being the ancestors’ God.

For the position of the Jewish people, and that of the church as sharing in God’s promise to Abraham, God’s promise to Israel’s ancestors continues to be theologically significant. The survival of the Jewish people for more than two millennia beyond the last of those references to God’s promise to the ancestors, often against the odds, constitutes a fulfillment of that promise. The Jewish people can still not take that promise for granted, and it needs God to be involved in maintaining the inclination of the thinking of its mind. And the church has often related to the Jewish people as the Egyptians did. Further, in the twenty-first century in much of the world, the church needs the God of Israel’s ancestors to turn back to its survivors.

## Exodus 3:17: A Country Flowing with Milk and Molasses

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Yahweh continues his revelation to Moses: “AndI hereby say, I will get you up from the affliction of Egypt to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a country flowing with milk and molasses” (Exod 3:17; cf. already v. 8). It is not a logical list, as if these were *the* six peoples in Canaan. The list functions to make the bare term “Canaanites” more concrete, and to spell out Yahweh’s pledge to Abraham which he is now intending to fulfill. The entire statement is a hyperbole (Houtman). The land will flow with milk because it has abundant pasturage for sheep, and with molasses because it has abundant fruit trees (the word *debash* includes bee honey, but it covers sources of sweetness more generally). “Milk flows from the goats, honey flows from the dates and the figs” (Rashi, on 13:5). Like the list of peoples, the specification of milk and molasses is illustrative, in this case illustrative of the land’s good gifts (Houtman). For practical purposes, it is more important that the country has vines and olives, and land where grain will grow (cf. Deut 6:11; 8:8). Like the list, this specification appeals to the imagination.

A similar list of peoples with the description of the country as flowing with milk and molasses will recur in Exod 13:5; 33:1–3, and the list on its own in 23:23. In 3:8 the reason Yahweh gives for taking the Israelites into this good land that belongs to other peoples is his compassion for the Israelites’ affliction. In 23:23 he gives no reason. In Exod 13:5 and 33:1–3 he adds that he is fulfilling his promise to their ancestors.

### B. Context of Related Passages

The same or a similar list of peoples features in a number of passages. In Gen 15:18–21, the list spells out to Abraham the implications of God’s promise of the country of Canaan. In Deut 7:1, it relates to Yahweh’s choice of Israel, and their obligation to “devote” them and not intermarry with them (see the comment on 23:23–33). In Deut 20:17, Moses gives no reason for the list; cf. Josh 3:10; 12:8; 24:11. In Judg 3:5, the list denotes peoples among whom the Israelites lived. In 1 Kgs 9:20; 2 Chr 8:7, they are a conscript labor force. In Ezra 9:1–2, they are people among whom the Israelites are intermarrying. In Neh 9:8, they are people in regard to whom Yahweh had fulfilled his promise.

 “Flowing with milk and molasses” also features frequently. In Lev 20:24, it relates to Yahweh’s promise to Israel, but it carries an obligation. In Num 13:27, the reconnoiter party acknowledge that this is the country’s nature, but note that its occupants are strong. In Num 14:8, Joshua and Caleb confirm that this is the country’s nature, but remind the people of Yahweh’s promise. In Num 16:13–14, Dathan and Abiram accuse Moses of having brought the people out of a country flowing with milk and molasses and not brought them into another one. In Deut 6:1–3, Moses urges the people to comply with Yahweh’s biddings so that they may enjoy the land flowing with milk and molasses. In Deut 11:8–12, Moses repeats this bidding with a claim that actually the country is better than the one from which they have come. In Deut 26:9, Moses pictures them acknowledging that Yahweh has brought them into this country. In Deut 26:15, Moses pictures them praying for Yahweh’s blessing on this land that he will have given them in fulfillment of his promise. In Deut 27:3, Moses pictures them setting up rocks inscribed with Yahweh’s commands on their arrival in this country. In Deut 31:20, Moses imagines them turning their backs on Yahweh when they have enjoyed the provision in this country. In Josh 5:6, Yahweh recalls that he did not fulfill his promise regarding this country for the exodus generation, who did not comply with his commands; cf. Ezek 20:15–16. In Jer 11:5, Yahweh affirms that the promise about enjoying the fruit of this country still requires that compliance. In Jer 32:22–23, Jeremiah notes that Yahweh did fulfill his promise to give them this country, but that they did not show that compliance.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Commonly (e.g., Deut 20:17; 26:9), the list of peoples and the description of the country simply adds specificity and thus adds to the effectiveness of communication. The description may relate a promise that Yahweh has fulfilled (e.g., Neh 9:8). In Ezra 9:1–2, the list makes a link between the peoples among whom the community now lives and the expectations of the Torah (Clines). The description may relate a promise that still implies an obligation for a later text (e.g., Jer 11:5). It may relate to an obligation that a later text notes has not been fulfilled (e.g., Jer 32:22 – 23). In Num 16:13–14 it takes up words from the earlier text and turns them upside-down, rather like the prophetic word in Isa 19:19–25 noted in the discussion of Exod 3:1–16.

### D. Theological Use

The list and the descriptive phrase imply two theological points. The list suggests the concreteness of Yahweh’s involvement in disposing of the current occupants of Canaan. And the picture of a country flowing with milk and molasses suggests the delightful nature of Yahweh’s material provision for his people. Canaan will be a place of material enjoyment. Both phrases suggest the power and generosity of Yahweh’s commitment and also imply the obligation of a responsive commitment.

## Exodus 3–4: Moses the Prophet

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The account of Yahweh’s commissioning in which Moses receives these revelations and promises incorporates motifs that parallel some OT accounts of a prophet’s commissioning. Moses is engaged in his everyday work, and Yahweh summons him by name (Exod 3:1-5). He covers his face, and Yahweh announces his intentions (3:6-10). Moses asks how he can go to the Pharaoh, and Yahweh says, “I will be with you” (3:11-12). Moses asks what he is to say about who Yahweh is, and Yahweh tells him (3:13-22). Moses says that people will not believe him, and Yahweh gives him signs to perform (4:1-9). Moses points out that he is no speaker, and Yahweh deals with that objection (4:10-12). Moses asks Yahweh to send someone else, and Yahweh gives him Aaron as assistant (4:13-17. Moses begins to act, and Yahweh tries to kill him, but his wife rescues him (4:18-26).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The account of Yahweh commissioning Jeremiah suggests most specific analogies with Moses’s story. Yahweh’s declaring that he had set Jeremiah apart long ago compares with his addressing Moses by name (Exod 3:4; Jer 1:5). Like Moses, Jeremiah resists Yahweh’s commission and says he is no speaker (Exod 4:10–12; Jer 1:6). However, whereas it seems that Moses “passes the bounds of legitimate humility” (Greenberg) and gets into trouble for it, Jeremiah does not. Yahweh says he will be with him and touches his mouth (Jer 1:8–9). Yahweh gives Jeremiah visual signs of his intentions as he does Moses, and Jeremiah does as he is bidden, as does Moses (Exod 4:1–9; Jer 1:11–18). Yahweh’s words to Jeremiah refer to a charge with regard to nations and kingdoms to pull down and build, which compares with his charge to Moses as regards the Egyptians and the peoples of Canaan (Jer 1:10). A major distinctiveness in Yahweh’s charge to Jeremiah is that it relates to putting his people down, not delivering them (Jer 1:10).

Joshua’s meeting with Yahweh’s army commander (Josh 5:13–15) also has analogies with Yahweh’s commissioning of Moses. Both involve a strange sight and some ambiguity about the relationship between the figure who appears and the person of Yahweh, and both end with the same bidding to remove footwear (Lepesqueux). Yahweh’s commission of Gideon (Judg 6), too, has analogies with his commission of Moses (Enns): its background is the Israelites being under pressure, their crying out to Yahweh, another appearance by a divine aide, Yahweh’s promising to deliver the people, Gideon’s resistance to Yahweh’s summons because he is not up to it, Yahweh’s promise to be with him, and Yahweh’s giving him a sign—though Moses doesn’t ask for one (Greenberg). All this might suggest that Gideon is a new Moses (Wong).

Isa 6:8 illustrates how the correct response to Yahweh’s commission is “Here am I” (Propp;cf. Gen 22:1; 1 Sam 3:4), which was Moses’s response to Yahweh’s original call to him, but not to the commission that followed.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The Jeremiah account, and to a lesser extent the Joshua and Gideon accounts, imply an analogy between the commission and role of Moses and that of the later figures. But the OT does not include any further substantial narratives comparable to Exod 3–4 as a whole. Nor does it picture Moses or Jeremiah as an embodiment of the true Israelite or an example to be followed. Their significance lies in their uniqueness as voices for Israel to follow.

### D. Theological Use

The narratives draw attention to God’s sovereignty. If God decides to use someone, they may be unlikely to be able to escape. Yahweh is not known for his flexibility in this connection. His commission does not relate to the fulfillment of a vocation for someone but to the fulfillment of Yahweh’s purpose. “Neither previous faith nor any other personal endowment had the slightest part to play in preparing a man who was called to stand before Yahweh for his vocation” (von Rad; cf. Childs).

The continuing story portrays Moses and Jeremiah as people of unsurpassed fluency and articulacy in the OT, and the Gideon story portrays him as someone of unsurpassed bravery and military achievement. This might imply that their objections indicate that they did not understand themselves, or that Yahweh changed them in spectacular ways. But in the context of the Scriptures, with regard to Moses and Jeremiah the likely implication is that Yahweh really did provide the words for them. The point about this motif is to provide the audience with reason to take seriously what they do and say.

Both Moses and Joshua narratives refer to the location of the event as a sacred place. This introduces in the OT the notion of sacred space, which is currently of considerable interest in OT study, though these events do not establish the locations as permanently sacred places (Meyers). They rather suggest that there is something sacred about a place where God or his aide appears.

## Exodus 4–15: Firmness

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

A key theme in the exodus story is the firmness or hardness or solidness of the Pharaoh’s mind. The three verbs signifying be firm, be hard, or be solid (*hazaq*, *qashah*, *kabed*) have(space needed here) approximately the same meaning, and English translations traditionally take all three as meaning “be hard.”Like the three English words, none of the Hebrew words has essentially negative implications. Being solid or hard or firm of mind is not inherently wrong; everything depends on the connection in which someone manifests the firmness. It is through this context in Exodus that they gain negative connotations. English translations speak of the “heart” as the organ affected by the firmness, but the Hebrew word (*leb*) more often refers to thinking and forming attitudes, whereas “heart” suggests feelings.

Although the three verbs have similar meanings, they can be used in different ways, in the italics needed qal, to mean “be hard” or “become hard,” or in the *piel* or *hiphil* to mean “harden.” The hardness can thus be a simple fact, or a process, or something that subjects bring on themselves, or something Yahweh brings about. Thus different texts have: I will make Pharaoh’s mind firm (4:21; 14:4); I myself will harden Pharaoh’s mind (7:3); Pharaoh’s mind became firm (7:13, 22; 8:19 [15]; 9:35); Pharaoh’s mind became solid (9:7); he made his mind solid (8:15, 32 [11, 28]; 9:34; Yahweh made Pharaoh’s mind firm (9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8); I have made his mind solid (10:1); I am making the Egyptians’ mind firm (14:17); Pharaoh’s mind was solid (7:14: this is actually the adjective *kabed*); Pharaoh was hard (13:15). Exodus will later also refer to necks being hard, or stiff as translations put it (32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9).

Delete space

### B. Context of Related Passages

At a number of different points, the OT story takes up various elements from the description of firmness in Exodus, and it also appears in a passage from a psalm, from Proverbs, and from a prophet. “Yahweh our God hardened his spirit and strengthened his mind” (the verb *’amats*;Deut 2:30); “You are not to strengthen your mind” (*’amats*; Deut 15:7); “It was from Yahweh to make their minds firm” (Josh 11:20); “Why would you make your mind solid?” (1 Sam 6:6); “he strengthened his mind so as not to turn to Yahweh” (2 Chr 36:13); “don’t harden your mind” (Ps 95:8); “the person who hardens his mind falls into trouble” (Prov 28:14); “the entire household of Israel are firm of forehead and hard of mind” (Ezek 3:7).

Yahweh uses overlapping expressions in connection with wanting his people to see but not acknowledge or know or understand, in his commission of Isaiah to “fatten this people’s mind, make its ears solid, and smear over its eyes” (Isa 6:10). Yahweh is commissioning Isaiah to act in a way that will have the same effect on Judah as his and Moses’s action had on the Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for parallel reasons that have been expounded through Isa 1–5 (Eck).

The OT thus uses the same expressions as Exodus with their overlapping or complementary significance as Exodus, adds one or two, and adds “spirit” as one of the objects of the verbs.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Whereas Exodus interweaves these expressions and opens up the possibility of reflection on their interrelationship, other passages choose one way of speaking that suits their purpose, to provide an interpretation for an event or situation (Deut 2:30; Josh 11:20; 2 Chr 36:13; Ezek 3:7), or to urge responsibility (Deut 15:7; 1 Sam 6:6; Ps 95:8; Prov 28:14).

### D. Theological Use

The key theological significance of these expressions is their capacity to express the complex interweaving of divine intention (I will make Pharaoh’s mind firm), human responsibility (Pharaoh made his mind firm), and empirical fact with no comment on causality or responsibility (Pharaoh’s mind was firm). What we actually see is firmness, expressed in events. But Yahweh’s purpose is the framework within which the events happen; Yahweh encourages people to be firm. Yet they are not subject to manipulation; they make their own decisions about their firmness.

## Exodus 6:1-6: A Strong Hand and an Extended Arm

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Within the account of Pharaoh’s firming up, MT has a section break between 6:1 and 6:2, and modern source analysis sees 6:1 as the end of a section in the older version of the Exodus story and sees 6:2 as the beginning of a new section from the Priestly version. Yet insights emerge from working with the medieval chapter division which appears in English Bibles. The Israelites have reached “rock bottom,” but this is the situation in which Yahweh chooses to speak (Houtman). “By a strong hand” Pharaoh will send the Israelites off “and by a strong hand he will expel them from his country.… I will get you out from under the Egyptians’ burdens and rescue you from their serfdom. I will restore you with an extended arm and with great acts of authority” (Exod 6:1-6). Of course, whereas he says that now he is going to act, for the moment he simply carries on talking (Houtman).

The close of the passage introduces the verb “restore” (*ga’al)*, traditionally “redeem,” which came once previously in the OT (Gen 48:16); see the comment on 21:1–11. Likewise, the term “acts of authority” (*shephatim*)almost introduces to Exodus the family of words related to the verb “act with authority” (*shaphat*), including the common noun for action with authority, concretely a “ruling” (*mishpat*). These terms are traditionally translated with words such as justice and judgment, but they are intrinsically words that suggest having the authority to make decisions that people have to accept. Ideally, these will be decisions and rulings that are expressions of justice, though there can be such a thing as unjust acts of authority. Here they refer to Yahweh acting in power in relation to the Egyptian authorities.

### B. Context of Related Passages

The restated account of Yahweh’s revelation, following on 3:1–16, corresponds to the account of his appearing in Gen 17:1–2 (Hood; cf. 28:3; 35:11). Whereas this chapter then refers to *Pharaoh’s* strong hand and *Yahweh’s* extended arm, Deut 3:24 speaks of *Yahweh’s* strong hand (cf. Deut 6:21; 9:26; 34:12; Josh 4:23–24; also Neh 1:10; Dan 9:15; see Seely). Greatness and awesomeness are Yahweh’s attributes, not Pharaoh’s (Deut 3:24; 9:26; 11:2; 26:8; Jer 32:21). More pointedly, and effectively, Deut 6:21 attributes the Israelites’ escape from Egypt to *Yahweh’s* strong hand and extended arm (cf. Deut 7:18–19; 11:2; 26:8; also 1 Kgs 8:41–43; 2 Chr 6:32–33; Ps 136:12). This exercise of strong hand and extended arm was an act of mercy, love, and faithfulness (Deut 5:15; 7:8). Moses can therefore plead, “Do not annihilate your people … whom you ransomed by your greatness, whom you got out from Egypt with a strong hand” (9:26). But in Jer 21:5, Yahweh tells the Judahites, “I myself will fight with you with extended hand”—he means “fight against you.” That chapter turns the exodus against the Israelites (Rom-Shiloni). Likewise in Ezek 20:33 Yahweh declares that he will “rule over you with a strong hand and with an extended arm and with outpoured fury” (Ezek 20:33). Israel becomes Egypt (DeLapp).

Yet the other side of his acting in that way, Isa 40:10 affirms that he is coming back to Jerusalem with his strength and with his arm ruling for him in a more positive way. In Ezek 20:37 he adds, “and I will bring you into the discipline of the covenant.” He is not finished with Israel, but he also indicates that this will be no cheap covenant restoration. Yahweh’s having made the heavens and the earth with his great power and extended arm (Jer 27:5; 32:17) is not necessarily good news.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Exod 6:1–6 speaks of Pharaoh’s strong hand and Yahweh’s extended arm, with the two phrases coming in separate blocks of material. Deuteronomy and many later works combine the two expressions in connection with Yahweh’s action. They half-turn upside-down the expression in Exod 6 and make for a powerful synecdoche to bring home the reality of God’s strength in action.

Deut 7:8 reports Yahweh’s strong hand acting in fulfilment of remove underline something that was a matter of promise in Exodus. Deut 7:18–19 makes something that was a matter of promise that has now been fulfilled into a promise for the further future, and urges mindfulness in light of the fulfillment. The Pharaoh’s being unnamed in Exodus is useful (Hendel; Sun): it encourages the assumption that the strong hand and extended arm can act again. In comparison and contrast, Exod 6:6 and a subsequent text such as Deut 3:24 combine a concrete expression with a more abstract one: “an extended arm and great acts of authority” or “your greatness, your strong hand” (cf. Deut 11:2, 7).

Deut 7:8 makes explicit that Yahweh’s powerful acts are acts of love and are a fulfillment of his promise. It thus goes behind the factual statement. Deut 9:26 turns the action “by a strong arm” into a basis for prayer. Deut 26:7–10 turns it into an answer to prayer (as it is elsewhere in Exodus) and a basis for worship (cf. Ps 136). 1 Kgs 8 makes it a basis for prayer by foreigners.

Jer 27:5; 32:17 extends the activity of Yahweh’s power and arm back to creation. Deut 34:10, 12 turns Yahweh’s strong hand and awesome greatness into Moses’s, in a different turning upside-down from Deuteronomy’s usual one. Dan 9:15 grants the scandal in the fact that Israel offended and rebelled in relation to the Yahweh who had acted on its behalf with his strong hand (cf. Jer 32:21–23). Jer 21:5 turns Exodus and Deuteronomy upside-down in yet another way, as Yahweh threatens to use the extended arm and strong hand *against* his people. Isa 40:10, following the fulfillment of that threat, makes the past act the model for picturing a coming new act. Ezek 20:33, 37 also makes the past act the model for a coming new act, in a way that involves a particularly complex turning upside-down.

### D. Theological Use

Yahweh is not only realistic about the Pharaoh’s having a strong hand. He is intent on driving the Pharaoh into using that strong hand in a way that benefits Israel, not that merely afflicts them. But he also affirms that he himself possesses a strong hand and is prepared to extend his arm to protect and rescue his people.

## Exodus 6:7a: My People, Your God

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Following up his declaration about his extended arm and great acts of authority (6:1-6), Yahweh declares, “I will take you as a people for me and I will be God for you” (Exod 6:7).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The promise “I will be God for you, and you will be a people for me” recurs a number of times in the OT. Yahweh promises: “If by my laws you walk and my commands you keep, and you act on them…, I will put my dwelling in your midst, and my spirit will not loathe you. I will walk about among you, I will be God for you, and you will be a people for me. I am Yahweh your God, who got you out from the country of Egypt, from being servants to them” (Lev 26:3, 11–13). Jeremiah makes the same promise in the context of urging the Judahites in the decades before 587 to walk in Yahweh’s way: “Listen to my voice, and I will be God for you, and you—you will be a people for me. Walk by every word that I command you, in order that things may go well for you” (Jer 7:23; cf. 11:4). After they have taken no notice and have paid the price; Ezekiel promises: “I will give you a fresh mind and I will put a fresh spirit among you … and I will make it that by my laws you walk and my commands you keep, and act on them. And you will live in the country that I gave your ancestors, and you will be a people for me and I, I will be God for you” (Ezek 36:26–28; cf. Jer 30:22; 31:33). The opening chapter of Hosea makes the threat that read “the relationship” will indeed not work out, but also declares that this does not mean the relationship is finished: “You—not my people and I, I will not be God for you,” but subsequently, “Instead of it being said to them, ‘You—not my people,’ it will be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’” (Hos 1:9–10 [2:1]).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Lev 26, Jer 7, and Jer 11 add to the promise expressed in Exod 6 the requirement that the people live in obedience to Yahweh if the promises are to come true. Lev 26 also combines the phraseology of Exod 6 with the image of Yahweh’s dwelling, his *mishkan*. That word, traditionally translated “tabernacle,” is the regular expression for Yahweh’s portable wilderness dwelling. Lev 26 illumines the my-people/your-God relationship by turning this dwelling into a metaphor for the reality of Yahweh’s presence, whether or not it is embodied in a material structure. In addition, Lev 26 adds another concrete image, that of Yahweh walking among the people. Jer 7 and 11 also add the awareness that the people have failed to deliver this required obedience. This is the presupposition in Hosea, who thus declares that the promise is terminated, yet also says that this is not the end of the story. Ezek 36 does the same, picking up the language of Lev 26, his favorite chapter in the Torah, and promising that Yahweh will bring about a transformation in the people that results in their fulfilling his expectations. They will thus be a people for him as he is God for them. Jer 30:22 and 31:33 simply reassert the promise in Exod 6 in promising a new covenant that will be like and unlike the covenant in Moses’s time (cf. van der Wal). Thus the Torah and the Prophets set the promise in the context of expectations on Yahweh's part that appear elsewhere and in the context of assumptions about commitments that are required by the relationship, without which there is no relationship.

### D. Theological Use

The expression “You will be a people for me and I will be God for you” (with variations) has been described as the “covenant formula” (e.g., Smend; Baltzer; Rendtorff). The expression does not occur often in association with the word *berit*, the word commonly translated “covenant,” but this puts us on the track of some insights. The English word “covenant” has different resonances in American English and British English, and in both cultures has different resonances from the German word *Bund*, and in all three from *berit*,which causes misunderstanding (Barr Thus the comment on 2:24; 6:5 has noted that “pledge” is sometimes a nearer equivalent to *berit* than “covenant”. And there is a difference between the pledge on God’s part that exists and of which God is mindful, in 6:5, and the mutual relationship that is a subject of promise here in 6:7. There is no contradiction between the two, but they make different statements.

God’s pledge to Noah or Abraham is a commitment made by a more powerful party to a less powerful party and made simply on the basis of God’s initiative. God will be looking for a response to his pledge, but the pledge-giving is one-sided. The reciprocal relationship of “You will be a people for me and I will be God for you” complements that imagery with the mutuality of a relationship that is more like that of two people who say, “My lover is mine and I am his.… I am my lover’s and my lover is mine,” or more literalistically, “My lover for me and I for him.… I for my lover and my lover for me” (Song 2:16; 6:3).

## Exodus 6:7b: Acknowledge that I Am Yahweh

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Yahweh adds to his promises in Exod 6:2–7a: “And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh your God who got you out from under the Egyptians’ burdens” (6:7b). While Pharaoh’s not knowing Joseph may imply not acknowledging him, Israel’s knowing Yahweh certainly implies acknowledging him. It will be a fruit of his making fools of the Egyptians (10:1–2) and of his coming to live among them when he has delivered them (29:46). It will be expressed in their observance of the Sabbath whereby they “acknowledge that I am Yahweh who made you sacred” (31:13). “You will eat meat … you will be full of bread, and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh your God” (16:12). This acknowledgment is a recurrent motif in Exodus, not only on the part of the Israelites. “The Egyptians will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when I extend my hand against Egypt and get the Israelites out from them” (7:5; cf. 7:17; 14:4, 18). “I am Yahweh” is a statement of identity that also backs up promises and threats, commands, and declarations of intent (Propp).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The OT commonly sees Yahweh’s action as aimed to bring about acknowledgment of him. To that end, logically, the actions would be astonishing ones: withholding regular food from the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness (Deut 29:5, 6 [4, 5]), giving them extraordinary military victories (1 Kgs 20:13; cf. 20:28), restoring them after the fall of Jerusalem (Isa 49:23), making Cyrus his agent in this connection (Isa 45:3). “Then you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh; those who wait for me do not experience shame” (Isa 49:23).

It is especially Ezekiel who speaks of this aim. It applies to acts whereby Yahweh brings death among the people (Ezek 6:7; cf. 6:13, 14; 7:4, 27; 11:10, 12; and others) or to a people such as the Moabites (25:11; and others). It also applies to his making a renewed covenant (16:62), renewing the gift of the land (20:42), and making his name sacred after it has been profaned (36:23). “You will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when I act with you for my name’s sake, not according to your dire ways” (Ezek 20:44).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

In Exod 6:7, Yahweh states a general truth, “You will acknowledge that I am Yahweh your God,” and then gives specificity to the general truth or gives a basis for accepting it, “who got you out from under the Egyptians’ burdens.” The related texts start from the same general truth and provide more specificity or more bases that take various forms, many of them paradoxical.

It is Yahweh who does the speaking in this way. One could conjecture that the declarations issue from human reflection on earlier texts by prophets such as Ezekiel, but the texts themselves invite their recipients to take them as divine revelation. One might infer that earlier texts become the vehicles of divine revelation as prophets reflect on them in new contexts. Prophets look at a situation in which they and their people are living and look at the Scriptural text, and their reflection and the insights that come from Yahweh enable them to put the two together.

### D. Theological Use

English translations commonly have the expression “You will know that I am the LORD.” And the verb *yada‘* does mean “know,” so that the expression in 6:7 can denote a theological awareness. But the verb commonly denotes a knowing by the whole person, involving attitude and action. And while the Scriptures sometimes use the generic term “the Lord” to refer to God, more regularly they use the name, Yahweh, but translations substitute “the LORD.” Here, the name draws attention to the specificity of Israel’s recognition. Further, “acknowledging Yahweh” has different implications from “acknowledging that there is one God.” The important truth is not merely that there is one God, but that Yahweh is the one God.

## Exodus 6:14–25: Israel’s Ancestral Households

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Exod 6 goes on to incorporate a list of the heads of the Israelite ancestral households, the extended families—or rather, it gives the impression that it is about to incorporate such as list, though in the end it does not do so. It begins with Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, but then stops—or rather, diverts into providing a detailed listing of the early generations of Levi, which include not only Aaron and Moses but also Nadab and Abihu, and Eleazar and Itamar, and other names that will be significant as Exodus (and Leviticus and Numbers) goes on to note Levi’s future role. So the Exodus listing is unexpected, though understandable. It relates to its context, in that the context is concerned especially with Aaron and his family, who are to be the priests.

### B. Context of Related Passages

In the background of the partial list of the households is a list of the names of the family who came to Egypt (Gen 46:8), which covers all twelve sons. In the foreground of the list, in Num 1, is a list of the sons of those sons and their descendants, omitting Levi (which has become the priestly clan) but treating Ephraim and Manasseh as separate clans and thus keeping the number of the clans as twelve. In Num 26, at the other end of Numbers and of Israel’s forty years in the wilderness, is another list of the clans by their kin groups and another list of the totals for each clan. Then in 1 Chr 2–9 there is a comprehensive list of the sons of Israel.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The Genesis list affirms that the ancestors of all twelve clans had taken part in the saga of how Jacob and his family found themselves in Egypt, even though the family was destined in due course to live as titleholders and not merely guest workers in Canaan. It brings the Genesis story and the Exod 6 listing together. The Genesis listing compares with the listing in Exod 6 but it relates to all twelve clans by also building on Gen 29–30 with its information on the origin of the clan heads.

The Numbers lists also relate the households list to Israel’s story, but to the story that leads on from the exodus rather than up to it. If the family were seventy on their way to Egypt and a teeming horde in Egypt (Exod 1:1-7), then now they are 600,000. Numbers makes clear the assumption that all twelve clans did take part in the exodus. There is thus some irony about the scholarly suggestion that actually only a few of the clans took part (e.g., classically, Rowley; more recently Dever). The semi-repetition of the lists in Numbers confirms that the exodus generation’s dying off did not compromise the nation’s flourishing. The Numbers listings move in the opposite direction from the Genesis listing in having Ephraim and Manasseh replace Levi. In another sense, Numbers compares with Exodus in this connection, as Exod 6 focuses on Levi, and Numbers 1:48–54 goes on to note the distinctive importance of Levi.

First Chronicles 2–9 comprises extensive lists overlapping with Exodus and Numbers. In the context of the Second Temple period, when “Israel” is effectively little Judah surrounded by peoples who might or not have a right to view themselves as part of Israel or as the real Israel, Chronicles affirms the history and place of the twelve clans.

### D. Theological Use

God created humanity to work by procreation, and works out his purpose for the people of the world by means of a family. He chose the family for no retrospective reason that he reveals, but for a prospective reason; he intends to work through it. This people’s set of family links is then integral to its position as Yahweh’s people. In Hebrew, the book of Exodus is called “Names” (cf. Exod 1:1), and names and generations are significant throughout the story of God’s people (cf. Kass). Its clans are the basis for its life—different clans receive and farm different parts of Canaan, Judah will be the leadership clan, Levi the sanctuary clan. When clans fail morally or religiously, or disappear, Chronicles assumes that they have no more disappeared forever than that the people as a whole could do so.

## Exodus 7–11: Signs and Spectacles

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Yahweh intends for Pharaoh to be “put under pressure” (Houtman). “I myself will harden his mind, and make my signs and my spectacles many in the country of Egypt” (7:2–3). The sequence of chapters itemizes the sequence of meetings and confrontations and epidemics in which “Pharaoh and Yhwh face off” (Houtman). It reads like a drama, whose regular reenacting in worship then “serves to establish these events as paradigmatic for the faith and imagination of Israel” (Brueggemann building on Pedersen). Put another way, “Exodus 4–14 unfolds as a kind of political cartoon” (Myers).

### B. Context of Related Passages

Retrospectively, Deut 26:6–8 summarizes this story in Exodus with its “signs and spectacles.” Deut 4:34 asks rhetorically, “Has a god ventured to come and get himself a nation from within another nation, by ventures—by signs, by spectacles, by war, by a strong hand, by an extended arm, and by great acts of terror—according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt?” (Deut 4:34; cf. 6:22; 26:8; 34:11). Deut 7:19 therefore encourages Israel to trust that “The great ventures that your eyes saw, the signs, the spectacles, the strong hand, and the extended arm, with which Yahweh your God got you out—so will Yahweh your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.” Ps 105:27–45 notes how “Moses [and] Aaron … set among them his sign acts and his spectacles in the country of Ham … to the end that they might keep his laws and observe his instructions.”

Actually, Jeremiah comments, “You got your people Israel out of the country of Egypt with signs and with spectacles.… But they did not listen to your voice and they did not walk by your instructions” (Jer 32:20–23). Even on the way to Canaan, the Israelites “were not mindful of his hand … when he set his signs in Egypt, his spectacles in the open country of Zoan, and turned their rivers to blood…, would send off among them a swarm and it devoured them” (Ps 78:42–53). Indeed, Ezekiel traces this dynamic back into the time when Yahweh was engaged in his confrontation with Pharaoh: even then they were disinclined to faithfulness (Ezek 20:5–9). Therefore, when the community in Ezra and Nehemiah’s day urges Yahweh to consider the contrast between the way he “performed signs and spectacles against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his country” and the way “today we are serfs,” they have to acknowledge that it is “because of our offenses” (Neh 9:10, 36, 37).

Ironically, in 2 Chr 35:20–22 Josiah behaves to the Pharaoh the way the Pharaoh had behaved to Moses (2 Chr 35:20–22; Jarrard). But in a more pleasing contrast, Nebuchadnezzar (of all people!) testifies to “the signs and the spectacles that the High God has done for me!” (Dan 4:2–3 [3:32–33]; cf. 6:27 [28]; for “spectacle,” Daniel has the Aramaic word *temah*, the equivalent of Hebrew *mopet*).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Whereas Exodus is promising signs and spectacles, Deuteronomy is looking back to them; the promise has been fulfilled. Deuteronomy then takes the fulfilled promises as grounds for hope. The events model possible future expectations. And in Daniel, imperial kings see events they have experienced as further embodiments of the signs and spectacles related in Exodus. Ps 105 sets the signs and wonders in the context of Yahweh’s involvement with Israel’s ancestors and then of Yahweh’s involvement with the Israelites on the journey through the wilderness and their entering into possession of the promised land—in other words, it presupposes a link between the Exodus story and the Genesis story on one hand, and Numbers and Joshua on the other. It sees them also as a reason for submitting to Yahweh’s instructions and a reason for worship. In Neh 9 the signs and spectacles make for a contrast between past event and present reality, though the people’s offenses mean they can hardly complain. Jer 32 and Ps 78 spell out that logic. In the radical retelling of the story in Ezek 20, the first exodus becomes a failure from the beginning (Barriocanal)sorry, stet. So Yahweh will need to act again with strong hand and extended arm so that people acknowledge, “I am Yahweh” (Ezek 20:33–34, 42–44).

### D. Theological Use

The modern concept of miracle as something going against natural law overlaps with the notion of signs and spectacles, though it is not identical with it. The Exodus signs and spectacles include events that look as if they go against natural law, though perhaps they could be explained within that framework if we had the information needed. But their point is that they are spectacles, extraordinary events happening in fulfillment of declarations of intent by Yahweh, so that they are capable of being signs of his sovereignty and his involvement in events.

## Exodus 11–13: Firstborn

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Near the beginning of the exodus story, before the signs and spectacles drama begins, Yahweh lays down a principle that Moses is to announce to Pharaoh: “Israel is my firstborn son. I hereby say to you, ‘Let my son go so that he may serve me. Were you to refuse to let him go, there, I am going to slay your son, your firstborn’” (Exod 4:22–23; some EVV have “I said” and “you refused,” but Yahweh has not yet issued a command that Pharaoh has refused, so I take the first *wayyiqtol* verb as a performative and the second as an irreal condition).

Pharaoh consistently refuses. Yahweh then declares the death sentence on “every firstborn in the country of Egypt,” from Pharaoh to servant girl, and on firstborn cattle (11:5). He will pass through Egypt and strike down every such firstborn, “and against all the gods of Egypt I will perform acts of authority” (12:12). And he did (12:29). He then bids the Israelites, “Make sacred to me every firstborn—the opening of every womb among the Israelites, among human beings and among cattle is mine” (13:2). The Israelites are to “set them apart” as Yahweh’s. As part of this making sacred, “the firstborn of a donkey they are to ransom with a sheep, or if you do not ransom it, break its neck. Every human firstborn among your sons you are to ransom” (13:12–13; cf. 22:29–30 [28–29]; 34:19–20). A donkey cannot be offered in sacrifice, but it is vitally important, not least to carry the silver and gold the Israelites have acquired (Rashi). “Ransom” is the verb *padah*, which is commonly translated “redeem,” like *ga’al*. The verbs have overlapping meanings, but also distinctive connotations (see the comment on 21:1–11), and the translation “ransom” reflects the fact that payment is more integral to *padah* (cf. Alexander).

There is a connection between Yahweh’s requirement of Pharaoh, Pharaoh’s refusal, Yahweh’s action, and Yahweh’s requirement of the Israelites. “Yahweh slew every firstborn in the country of Egypt…. That is why I am sacrificing for Yahweh every opening of a womb, but ransoming every firstborn of my sons” (13:15).

### B. Context of Related Passages

Almost at the beginning of humanity’s story, Abel “brought from the firstborn of his flock” as an offering to Yahweh (Gen 4:4). Jacob sees his firstborn as “a symbol of his father’s strength” (49:3; Sunon Exod 11:1–10). In Exodus, it is not explicit that Israelite firstborn might have any role when they are set apart for Yahweh. Num 3 will clarify the point (M. A. Sweeney): “I hereby take the Levites from among the Israelites instead of every firstborn opening of a womb,” and they become the people with ministerial responsibility among the Israelites (Num 3:12; cf. 3:40–51; 8:13–19; 18:15–18; Lev 27:26). And “to the place that Yahweh chooses… you are to bring… the firstborn of your cattle and your flock and eat them there before Yahweh your God, and rejoice” (Deut 12:5–7; cf. 12:17; 14:23; 15:19–20; Neh 10:35–36). This gathering would surely include a rejoicing at how “Yahweh struck down every firstborn in Egypt” (Ps 78:51; cf. 105.36; 135:8; 136:10).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Exodus simply presupposes that firstborn belong to God. The psalms do not pick up the assumption that Israel as a people is like Yahweh’s firstborn and that this is part of the logic that issued in Yahweh’s action against Egypt, though they do assume that this action is a basis for praise. Nor does the Torah take further the assumption that Israel is Yahweh’s firstborn, and relate it to Israel’s ongoing life. Deuteronomy does take up the principle that God claims the firstborn of human beings and animals, and spells out its implications in light of two principles of its own, that offerings are to be made in the place Yahweh chooses, and that making such offerings is an occasion of joy, which compares and contrasts with the psalms’ appeal to the firstborn event that was involved in the exodus. Deuteronomy thus works by looking at the text in light of other principles that it knows are important. Numbers does something parallel, taking up the principle that firstborn are owed to Yahweh and associating it with the principle that he has taken the clan of Levi to be given over to his service in the sanctuary. They become the firstborn clan within the firstborn people.

### D. Theological Use

The birth of the first offspring means that the family, the society, and the animal world will have a future, so that for family, society, and the animal world their death signifies a death knell (Meyers). The recurrence through cultures of the idea that firstborn belong to God suggests that it is either an aspect of God’s natural revelation, of natural theology, or it is a human instinct like having kings or building a temple that God affirms. The idea that Israel’s obligation to serve Yahweh relates to its being Yahweh’s firstborn could then have provided the OT with a piece of theo-logic to which it might appeal, yet it does not. Nor does Exodus refer to the idea that the exodus is an act of liberation that gives Israel its freedom (Kass). The idea and the ruling about the firstborn links with the exodus being rather a removing of Israel from serving Pharaoh to serving Yahweh. The question Exodus presupposes is, whom will Israel serve? (Fretheim).sorry, stet Exodus It is Pharaoh who “stands in opposition to Yhwh” (Scarlata). The Israelites are claimed from Pharaoh’s service, and from the service of other such deities. The striking down of the firstborn is the only point at which the exodus story refers to the Egyptian gods (12:12; the Red Sea song does refer to them in 15:11, as does Jethro in 18:11). “Not only does *Y-H-V-H* have no peers among the gods that other people worship, but he also cannot even be counted in the same category: *Y-H-V-H* is altogether beyond ‘god-ness’, beyond what the rest of the world understands as a ‘god’” (Kass). He is the only being who deserves the title “God” with upper-case G in English, though the OT recognizes that there are many lesser supernatural beings, many “gods.” At 15:11, Ibn Ezra calls them “holy aides on high.”

## Exodus 12–13: *Pesah* and Flatbread

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Interwoven with the announcement concerning the one-time death of the firstborn and the ongoing dedication of firstborn are instructions concerning the Israelites’ action as the slaughter happens, and concerning the ongoing celebration of Yahweh’s excluding the Israelites from the slaughter. The instructions for ongoing celebration precede actual mention of “Passover” (12:11), which pointedly indicates that “they are not simply a narrative of the past but a pattern for the present and the future” (G. I. Davies).

Each extended family will slaughter a lamb, daub its blood on its doorposts and lintel, roast the lamb, and eat it, in a state that indicates readiness to leave Egypt. The blood will be a sign that this is an Israelite house, and Yahweh will pass it by and exclude it from the slaughter of the firstborn. The Destroyer will not go their way. The celebration of this event in spring each year will make its month the beginning of the year. Families will reenact the event. Foreigners may not take part, but outsiders who have been circumcised and thus count as part of the family may take part. In addition, for a week the Israelites are then not to eat sourdough bread but only flatbread.

The traditional translation of *pesah* is “Passover,” which makes sense in association with the verb *pasah* in Exod 12, but in Isa 31:5 EVV plausibly take this verb to mean “protect” (in the other three passages where *pasah* occurs, it is a homonym meaning “limp”). “Protect” would make sense in Exod 12 and “Protection” would be a plausible name for the festival. But *Pesah* may simply be the festival’s name and it may not exactly have a meaning (like the English word Easter). Whereas the related traditional English title for the observance that follows is “Unleavened Bread,” the Hebrew word *matsah* is not one denoting the absence of something (namely leaven). This word’s root, too, is unknown. But “flat bread” conveys the meaning: it is bread somewhat like pita or naan bread (Sun) that is flat because it is made just from flour and water without a raising agent. Sourdough bread or bread made with yeast was allowed on other occasions; confining oneself to flatbread is simply one aspect of commemorating the exodus.

### B. Context of Related Passages

Developing the brief summary in Exod 23:14–17, Lev 23 gives an account of the festivals Israel celebrates each year, with Pesah and Flat Bread first. Num 28–29 does the same with more detail, and Deut 16 gives yet another summary. Meanwhile, Num 9 records the first celebration of Pesah, with an extra late celebration for people who miss the first for some good reason. Josh 5 then relates the first Pesah and Flat Bread celebration in Canaan. Second Kings 23, 2 Chr 30, and 2 Chr 35 describe celebrations by Hezekiah and Josiah, and Ezra 6 a celebration in the restored temple.

In Exod 12:23 Yahweh apparently works via a Destroyer rather than undertaking the destruction himself, and other passages also distance Yahweh from destructive action in this way (e.g., 2 Sam 24:16; 2 Kgs 19:35; Ezek 9), though they can also distance him from more positive action (e.g. Gen 16:7; 48:16; Exod 23:20). “The Egyptians were dire to us and to our ancestors,” Moses tells the Edomites, “but we cried out to Yahweh and he listened to our voice and sent an aide and got us out of Egypt” (Num 20:15–16).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The distinctive feature of the main treatment of Pesah and Flat Bread in Exod 12–13 is its focus on the exodus event which the festivals commemorate. Conversely, the extensive treatments of the festivals in Lev 23 and Num 28–29 ignore that connection in a concern with the celebrations’ setting in the annual calendar. These two festival calendars focus on celebrations at the major shrine, whereas Pesah is more a home event. In effect they thus form a cross between Exod 12–13 (with the detail about the celebration) and 23:14–17 (which sets Flat Bread in the context of the calendar).

The calendar in Deut 16 gives more space to Pesah, because it makes a link between Pesah and the sanctuary (Gertz), while also emphasizing the connection between Pesah and the exodus itself (Berner). The accounts of the celebrations by Hezekiah and Josiah link more closely with the instructions in Deuteronomy than with Exodus. As happens with the treatments of the Firstborn, the process of interpretation thus involves setting the text in the context of other insights and thereby generating something new. Another expression of this process is the incorporation in Num 9 of some adaptation of the Pesah rules to cover the circumstances of people who were affected by a taboo or have been out of town, so that they can take part in a celebration a month later. The Exodus regulations suggest the same process: the rules about whether and on what basis non-Israelites may share in Pesah will have arisen in response to the question arising in Canaan.

The emphasis in Exodus is on liberation, ritual, and pedagogy (L. M. Nascimento), in Numbers on temporality and purity, in Joshua on the possession of the land. In a sense, Josh 5 and Ezra 6 thus belong together: both record the celebration in connection with Yahweh’s fulfilling his promises—in the people’s original arrival in Canaan, and in the return of people from exile and the restoring of the temple. In between these two, Isa 52:11–12 promises in the manner of typology that the new exodus will not involve hurrying, as the original exodus did.

### D. Theological Use

If Pesah and Flat Bread have backgrounds respectively in a shepherding festival and a harvest festival (Bokser), this highlights the contrast in the significance of these festivals in the OT, which emphasizes their connection with Israel’s story, with the departure from Egypt and the arrival in Canaan. Signs and spectacles become memorials. They bring home the fact that God did not make his covenant with our ancestors (alone) but with us who are alive this day (Deut 5:3) (Johnstone). And in this way they shape people’s lives (Bosman).sorry, stet Further, their being combined in Exodus marks Israel as a society that is not based on shepherding or farming, but combines the two. Their adaptation in Deut 16, as observed in Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra, in turn marks Israel as not simply a dispersed society but a society with a center.

## Exodus 12–13: The Exodus

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The unsurprising result of the slaughter of the firstborn is that Pharaoh urges the Israelites to get out of his country: “Go, serve Yahweh in accordance with your word.… Go, and bless me as well.” In this plea, “the role reversal of Israel and Egypt is complete”: Pharaoh recognizes that the strong have become weak, the powerless powerful (Brueggemann).It is the bidding’s urgency that causes the Israelites to leave carrying their dough before it has risen. In addition, they take with them objects of silver and gold and clothing given them by the Egyptians as a result of Yahweh giving them grace in the Egyptians’ eyes, a “gift of credibility” that might reflect the esteem Moses has come to have in the Egyptians’ eyes (11:3; cf. Durham). The narrative’s grammar supports the idea that they had asked for these things sometime before (the verbs’ subjects precede the verbs, the opposite of the regular Hebrew order, which encourages the idea that the clauses are not part of the main body of the report). But it would add to the drama to imagine the Israelites telling the Egyptians that they will go only if the Egyptians make it worth their while. One way or another, “they stripped the Egyptians” (12:36).

“They traveled from Ra‘meses to Sukkot, some 600,000 men on foot, beside children. A large mixed group also, it went up with them, and flock and cattle, very extensive livestock.” Yahweh then led them by an inland route, not by the obvious way along the Mediterranean coast, through what the readers would know as Philistine country, where the prospect of battle might scare them. “They travelled from Sukkot and camped at Etam on the edge of the wilderness, with Yahweh going in front of them during the day in a cloud column to lead them on the way, and during the night in a fire column to give them light, for going during the day and during the night” (12:33–51; 13:17–22).

### B. Context of Related Passages

Gen 15:13 envisaged 400 years of oppression in a foreign land, and Exod 12:40 says the Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years, so it would be 470 years by the time they got to Canaan. First Kgs 6:1 notes that it was 480 years from the Exodus to the temple building, while Ezek 4:5–6 implies the passage of 430 years from the temple building (?) to its destruction. And Dan 9:24 has 490 years as the time determined to pass from Jeremiah and the period of the destruction to the temple’s reconsecration after the deliverance from Antiochus Epiphanes.

The columns of cloud and fire play a significant role in accounts of the Israelites’ journey to Canaan. In bidding Yahweh not to give up on the people, Moses reminds him: “You, Yahweh, are among this people… and in the cloud column you go in front of them during the day and in the fire column during the night” (Num 14:14). Neh 9:12 affirms that indeed “in a cloud column you led them during the day and in a fire column during the night to lighten the way for them that they would go on.” And for the journey from Babylon back to Jerusalem, for which they will not have to rush this time, Yahweh will go ahead and be their rearguard (Isa 52:12). Here, too, the prophet hints that the journey back will be an improvement on the original journey: not a column of cloud or fire, but Yahweh himself. “Going up” from Babylon as they once “went up” from Egypt (Ezra 1:3–5; 2:1) also hints at a new exodus (e.g., Thambyrajah), though there is little further indication that their journey is portrayed in these terms (Becking). Hos 2:14–19 [16–21] is more explicit.

As well as being a means of guidance for the journey, the cloud column features on other occasions as a symbol of Yahweh’s presence. “Moses and Aaron … and Samuel … were people calling to Yahweh, and he himself would answer them; in a cloud column he would speak to them” (Ps 99:6–7). When Miriam and Moses spoke against Moses, “Yahweh came down in a cloud column, stood at the tent entrance, and summoned Aaron and Miriam” (Num 12:1, 5). When Moses was about to die, ”Yahweh appeared at the tent in a cloud column” to give Joshua his orders as Moses’s successor (Deut 31:14–15).

In a distinctive image, Ps 80:8 has Yahweh bringing a vine out of Egypt to set in Canaan (cf. Exod 15:17; G. I. Davies). They resemble a people “planted” there (Hieke). But the psalm with this creative picture exists to protest that Yahweh’s more recent treatment of Israel does not match his action in bringing them out of Egypt. In Exodus the recording of the huge number of people involved in the exodus vividly conveys the stupendous nature of what Yahweh did for his people.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The round figure of 600,000 people in Exodus emphasizes what a great event the exodus was, what a great thing Yahweh had done. There follow detailed figures in 38:24 and in Num 1 that also have that function, while the figure in Num 26 from the end of the people’s time in the wilderness likewise indicates what Yahweh had done in keeping the people going through the forty years when he was chastising them. As well as illustrating Yahweh’s thus holding together toughness and mercy, Num 26 details the breakdown of figures between the twelve clans, so that they also fulfill another function. And in Num 1, the 603,550 are fighters, one reason why the head count covers only the men. This picks up the comment that the Israelites leaving Egypt are “Yahweh’s armies” (12:41) who are “equipped” (*hamushim*, 13:18): the word is a puzzle, but in some way it refers to being ready for battle. While Yahweh is hesitant to risk them needing to fight the Philistines, Exodus will soon have them fighting the Amaleqites (cf. Rashi). The figure of 601,730 in Num 26 covering the twelve clans to receive land allocations in Canaan may be another reason why the numbers cover only the men, who will be the heads of the households that receive the allocations.

The cloud and fire column(s) function in a variety of ways beyond Exodus. In Neh 9 they have a place in the recounting of Yahweh’s acts in an act of praise, acknowledgment of waywardness, pleading, and commitment, which effectively summarizes the entire story from Genesis to Kings (Williams). The testimony to the Egyptians and Canaanites provided by this miraculous provision will be compromised, even simply overthrown, if Yahweh disinherits Israel because of its unfaith (Num 14). They provide a distinctive way of conceptualizing Yahweh’s appearing on concrete occasions, to Aaron, Miriam, and Moses, and to Moses and Joshua, and to Moses and Aaron and Samuel (if Ps 99:6–7 intends him to be included in its “them”).

The “mixed group” (*‘ereb*) accompanying the Israelites out of Egypt otherwise appears described thus only in Neh 13:3, though equivalent multi-ethnic groups are mentioned elsewhere in connection with other nations (e.g., Jer 25:20, 24). The term is not inherently a pejorative one, except through any people’s inclination to look down on foreigners. But it is presumably the same group that appears more pejoratively as a “collection” (*’asaphsuph*) inNum 11:4, and simply as “the alien(s)” (*ger*) in Deut 29:11 [10] and Josh 8:35. In Exodus, one might make a link with the rules about the terms on which foreigners (including the *ger*) can participate in Pesah (12:48–49). In Neh 13:1–3 the community takes a tougher line than Exodus on the basis of what Deut 23:3–4 [4–5] says about Ammonites and Moabites—so that whereas the Torah makes toughness to some peoples an exception, here the community turns it into a generalization. As elsewhere, contextual considerations affect the process of interpretation. Whereas in Exodus the 600,000 might not need to worry about being religiously overwhelmed by a multi-ethnic minority, the little fifth-century Judaic community was aware of being under pressure from other communities around, which could encourage the instinct to raise the drawbridges. So reading Exod 12 in light of Neh 13 would make Exod 12:38 pejorative (Lee).

While the periods of years noted in Exodus, Kings, Ezekiel, and Daniel are enigmatic, they look like hints of the OT seeing centuries fitting into a pattern that reflects God’s sovereignty overall.

### D. Theological Use

Exodus highlights further the extraordinary nature of the exodus when it relates how Pharaoh pleads with the Israelites to bless him. They should pray for him (cf. 8:12; 10:17). It likely suggests something beyond this, that they have the power to convey blessing to him (as Balaam will to them) to replace the curse that in effect has come upon him.

Amazingly, the Egyptians pay the Israelites to leave. The Israelite company is miraculous in number. A big multi-ethnic group chooses to go with them, and they have a huge number of sheep and cattle. The timing somehow reflects Yahweh’s sovereignty over the entire story of Israel in the OT. The cloud column and fire column provide supernatural guidance. The rest of the Scriptures give little indication that Israel had any later experience of such extraordinary events. The Israelites could infer that the story is pervaded by a symbolism without any basis in facts on the ground: there was no literal farewelling, prayer, generosity, 600,000, multi-ethnic group, cloud column, or fire column, only a symbolic story making affirmations about the empire and about Israel and its long-term destiny. Yet the story running through the OT does provide periodic small-scale fulfillments of this symbolism, of which the new exodus from Babylon is an example. Perhaps a similar understanding of the original exodus is appropriate. Israel did not create out of nothing, and then live by, the story about a Yahweh who had been involved with them in this way. More likely Yahweh had been so involved, even if the story then portrays things larger than life.

## Exodus 14: The Parting of the Sea

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

“The exodus” comprises two events, the action Yahweh takes against Pharaoh within Egypt, facilitating the Israelites’ escape from there, and the action he takes against Pharaoh at the Red Sea (or Reed Sea: it’s not certain which is the right translation). “The splitting of the sea takes the exodus story to a new level,” to a whole other kind of sign and spectacle, one that “takes us into the realm of cosmic battle” (Meyers). That event finally demonstrates that Yahweh reigns.

When it happens, the Israelites are already out of Egypt and on their way to Canaan, and one might have expected Pharaoh to breathe a sigh of relief and focus on the need for Egypt to recover from its trauma. But Yahweh is not finished, and he announces the intention to inspire Pharaoh to give chase to the Israelites. “I will show my splendor through Pharaoh and through all his force, and the Egyptians will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.” The Israelites were fearful, “they cried out to Yahweh, and said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness?’” Moses responds “like a kind pastor” (G. I Davies): “Don’t be fearful, take your stand and see Yahweh’s deliverance, which he will effect for you today, because the Egyptians you have seen today you will not see again ever. Yahweh will fight for you. You yourselves are to shut up” (14:10–14).

Following Yahweh’s bidding, “Moses extended his hand over the sea, and Yahweh caused the sea to go, by means of a powerful east wind all night, and made the sea into dry ground. The water divided and the Israelites came through the middle of the sea on the dry ground, with the water a wall for them on their right and on their left.” The Egyptians tried to flee, but Yahweh then got Moses to cause the sea to come back. Thus “Yahweh scattered the Egyptians into the middle of the sea.… Israel saw the strong hand with which Yahweh acted against the Egyptians, and they were in awe of Yahweh. They had faith in Yahweh and in Moses his servant” (14:16–31). Thus was achieved “the true goal of the contest at the Sea of Reeds,” or at least one true goal, “the ‘conversion’ of the Israelites” (Kass). They had moved from fear of the Egyptians to fear of Yahweh, though it did not stay that way (Yang).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The OT records many occasions when Israel cried out as it does in Exod 14:10. Ps 106:7 calls it rebelling. And sometimes Yahweh may say “No!” (Num 12:14). But on many occasions he says “Yes!” (Judg 4:3; 10:12; 2 Chr 13:14; Neh 9:27; Ps 107:6, 28). And often he says, “Don’t be afraid.” This has been described as the most frequent negative command in the OT. It goes back to Gen 15:1, where it might denote being afraid of God or being afraid of human or other worldly threats. In a story such as that of Abraham’s offering of Isaac, the verb “to fear” (*yare’*) denotes a proper awed submission to God (Gen 22:12). Maybe Moses’s own original reaction to God’s appearing (Exod 3:6) was more like awe (Kass), though it looks rather like fear, yet perhaps it was a proper fear in light of what Exod 24 will have to say about seeing God. In Exod 14 both the negative bidding and the use of the verb in a good sense feature (vv. 10, 13, 31).

The bidding recurs on the lips of a leader or prophet such as Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, or Zechariah (e.g., Deut 1:21, 29; Josh 10:25; Isa 10:24; Hagg 2:5; Zech 8:13), though it can also be Yahweh’s bidding to an individual such as Moses, Joshua, Ahaz, or Jeremiah (e.g., Deut 3:2; Josh 8:1; Isa 7:4; Jer 1:8). Addressed to a king such as Ahaz, or to Israel as if it were an individual (Isa 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; 51:7; 54:4), it compares with a bidding of the goddess Ishtar of Arbela to the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon: “Don’t be afraid,” to which she adds the promises that she will see that his enemies flee, that she will protect him, that she has not abandoned him, and that she loves him (Pfeiffer), and the similar bidding of Ba‘lshamayn (Ba‘al Shamayim) to Zakkur, king of Hamath (Millard).

The promise that Yahweh will fight for Israel (*laham* *niphal*; Exod 14:14), and the recognition that he is doing so (14:25), recur as the people reach Kadesh-barnea (Deut 1:29–30), as they are close to entering Canaan under Joshua (3:21–22), in the prospect of other battles they may be involved in (20:1–4), and as a report of specific battles with the occupants of Canaan (Josh 10:14, 42) and of the completion of the victory over these peoples (23:3, 10) (Braulik). “All these kings and their countries Joshua captured in one stroke, because Yahweh the God of Israel was fighting for Israel” (10:42). “I got your ancestors out of Egypt, and they came to the sea,” Yahweh reminds the gathering at Shechem in Josh 24:6–7, “and they cried out to Yahweh. He put darkness between them and the Egyptians, and the sea came on them and covered them. Your eyes saw what I did against the Egyptians.”

Yahweh fighting for Israel is not just a reality associated with the exodus and the taking of Canaan. When we need it, “our God will fight for us” (Neh 4:20 [14]). The account of Yahweh’s bringing disaster on the Assyrian army in 2 Kgs 18–19 manifests parallels with Exod 14. Speaking of the exodus and its aftermath as deliverance from people with a strange language (Ps 114:1) suggests that deliverance from subsequent foreign invaders and overlords such as Assyria and Babylon, and later Persia, is being portrayed in light of those events at the beginning (cf. Deut 28:49; Isa 28:11; Jer 5:15) (Bosman).sorry, stet Ezekiel promises action against the powers of his day that matches his action in Moses’s day, and one could say that throughout Ezek 29–32 Yahweh is threatening once more to show his splendor through Pharaoh. Specifically, “Here am I, against you, and I shall show my splendor among you,” Yahweh also says to Sidon. “And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when I act against it with acts of authority” (Ezek 28:22). Such a day “will be for them renown, a day when I show my splendor” (Ezek 39:13). More positively:

But now Yahweh has said this,

your creator, Jacob, your former, Israel:

“Don’t be afraid, because I am restoring you;

I summon you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through water I will be with you,

and through rivers they will not overwhelm you.…

Yahweh has said this,

the one who made a way in the sea,

a path in powerful waters,

Who brought out chariot and horse,

army and powerful one, altogether—

They lie down, they don’t get up;

they were extinguished, they went out like a wick:

“Don’t be mindful of the earlier events,

don’t think about previous events.

Here am I, doing something new;

now it is to grow–do you not acknowledge it?” (Isa 43:1–2, 16–19; cf. 50:2)

With delightful apparent illogic, Yahweh simultaneously tells Israel to remember the Red Sea (so that they can believe he will act in the same way again) and not to remember the Red Sea (because Yahweh is going to do something new). Isa 51:9–11 even more concretely recalls the Red Sea event as it calls on Yahweh. The bidding includes a reference to the demonic sea monster, Rahab (not the Rahab in Joshua, whose name is spelled differently):

Wake up, wake up, put on strength,

Yahweh’s arm.

Wake up as in days of old,

generations long ago.

Are you not the one who split Rahab,

pierced the dragon?

Are you not the one who dried up the sea,

the water of the great deep,

Who made the depths of the sea

a way for the restored people to pass?

The people ransomed by Yahweh will return,

they will come to Zion with chanting,

with eternal gladness on their head.

 Joy and gladness will overtake them;

sorrow and sighing will flee.

Ps 74:12–14 appeals in a similar way:

God, my king of old,

the one who effects acts of deliverance in the midst of the earth:

You are the one who parted the sea by your might,

you smashed the heads of the dragons on the waters.

You are the one who crushed the heads of Leviathan

so that you could make it food for a company of wildcats.

Other passages in Isaiah make Yahweh’s past action a model for his bringing his work of crushing to a future consummation.

Yahweh will devote

the tongue of the Egyptian sea.

He will raise his hand over the River

with the scorching of his wind.

He will strike it down into seven wadis

 anenable people to make their way on foot. (11:15)

On that day, Yahweh will visit

with his hard, great, and strong sword

Leviathan the fleeing serpent,

 Leviathan the twisting serpent,

and slay the dragon, in the sea (27:1)

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The passages from Isa 51 and Ps 74 speak in terms paralleled in Exod 15, interpreting the parting of the sea in ways that recall the Babylonian creation story *When on High* (*Enuma Elish*; e.g., Speiser; Foster;; Hays; Lambert). In *When on High,* the name of the equivalent sea monster to Rahab or Leviathan is Tiamat; elsewhere a name equivalent to Leviathan does occur, but not the name Rahab (see *Spronk*)not italics. The significance of OT references to the parting of the sea emerges partly from a comparison with the Babylonian story. The OT, too, speaks in terms of a God who embodies all power defeating other supernatural beings, though it does not suggest the degree of conflict that *When on High* pictures. Nor does it link Yahweh’s victory to the establishment of his people’s capital city, though Exod 15:17 does relate it to his sanctuary. Isa 51 and Ps 74, and Exod 15, all suggest a connection between a victory won at creation such as *When on High* describes and the victory at the Red Sea. The Red Sea event is a kind of creation event (Propp; cf. Bills). And the victory is one Yahweh will win again in restoring Israel (cf. Fretheim, “Suffering God”; also Fretheim, “Reclamation,” Harner).

The Red Sea story relating a once-for-all demonstration of power and act of deliverance is also one capable of being repeated in ways that are parallel or might be even more spectacular—in other words, the two events can be related typologically (so Schreiner on 2 Kgs 18–19). Thus people may relate to the story by urging Yahweh to act in the same way again, and prophets may promise that he will do so, even if the portrayal of the parting of the sea is larger than life, and so is the event that recapitulates and exceeds it (see the comment on Exod 12–13).

But Israel is always in danger of having the theo-logic of Exodus turned against it. “I will show my splendor through Pharaoh,” Yahweh said (Exod 14:4). Then, after the Nadab and Abihu catastrophe, he declares: “In someone near me I will show myself holy, and with all the people I will show my splendor” (Lev 10:3). And as Yahweh said he would "pass through" the country of Egypt in a way that would bring terrible suffering (Exod 12:12), so he threatens to "pass through" the midst of Ephraim in a way that would bring wailing and lament (Amos 5:17).

### D. Theological Use

The parallels between the once-for-all act at the Red Sea, Yahweh’s assertion of his power in creation, and his assertion of power in subsequent events indicate that there is a consistency about his involvement in the world. The assertion of power at creation and at the Red Sea are indeed once-for-all, one-time acts, yet subsequent acts are outworkings of those events at the beginning of the world or the beginning of God’s involvement with Israel. Further, God’s involvement in the world is linear, and so are the history of the world and the history of Israel. Yet the capacity for events to be repeated means that God’s involvement in the world is also cyclic, and so are the world’s history and Israel’s history. Further, again, declarations that coming events will not only repeat but eclipse events such as the exodus and the parting of the Red Sea suggest that there is another sense in which the world’s history and Israel’s history are not only the outworkings of events that took place in the past. They are also anticipations of events that will happen in the future that will take both the world and Israel to their goal. In this sense one might call them eschatological.

## Exodus 15:1–21: The Song at the Sea

### *A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities*

The story of the parting of the sea leads into an act of praise, with Moses and the Israelites singing this song for Yahweh:

I will sing for Yahweh, because he has indeed triumphed,

hurling horse and its rider into the sea.

Yah is my might and music,

and has become my deliverance.

This is my God and I will enshrine him,

my father’s God and I will lift him up.

Yahweh is a man of battle,

Yahweh is his name.…

As the deeps would cover them,

they went down into the depths like a rock.

Your right hand, Yahweh, glorious in power,

your right hand, Yahweh, shattered the adversary.…

At the blast of your nostrils, water piled up—

floods stood up like a dam.…

Who is like you among the gods, Yahweh,

who is like you, glorious in holiness?…

In your commitment you are leading the people whom you restored,

by your might you are guiding them to your holy abode.…

You will bring them and plant them on the mountain that is your endowment,

the place that you have made as your dwelling, Yahweh,

the sanctuary, Lord, that your hands have established.

Yahweh will reign for all time, forever. (15:1–18)

“The song looks like a hymn and thanksgiving song” (Houtman). It is indeed both. Like any thanksgiving song, it confesses the wonder of what Yahweh has done, and also goes on to confess the implications in terms of who Yahweh is. Its closing line is of key significance: Yahweh's action at the Red Sea demonstrates that he can act like a powerful king in Israel's life. “In the drama of the poem, the world is made utterly safe for the adherents of Yahweh. Slavery is banished, and chaos is eliminated” (Brueggemann).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The sequence of story and song recurs in Judg 4–5 (Sarna). Miriam is a key song-maker here, and Deborah a key song-maker in Judges.

To begin at the end: “Yahweh will reign for all time,” Ps 146:10 affirms, in the same words as Exod 15:18, though its different word order makes more explicit that “Yahweh, he will reign for all time.” And while Exod 15:18 adds another term for “forever,” the psalm at greater length adds, “your God, Zion, for generation after generation.” So “who is the king in splendor? Yahweh mighty and forceful, Yahweh forceful in battle” (Ps 24:8). Other psalms celebrate Yahweh’s parting of the sea in terms broadly similar to Exod 15 (e.g., Ps 66:6), as does the Levites’ proclamation in Neh 9:9-11. According to Ps 106:9 Yahweh “rebuked” the sea or sent it packing (the verb *ga‘ar*). In Ps 89:10–11 [10–12] there is some subtlety in the references to Yahweh’s triumph over the sea and the sea monster:

You would rule over the triumph of the sea,

 when its waves rise, you would still them

You yourself crushed Rahab [so that it was ] like a corpse,

with your strong arm you scattered your foes.…

You have an arm with might,

your hand is powerful, your right hand lifts high.

Like Exod 15, the psalm combines *qatal* verbs that refer to the past (crushed, scattered) and *yiqtol* verbs (would rule, would still) that may refer to the past in a vivid way or may refer to the present and affirm that Yahweh’s power holds now and not just back then. They thus speak to readers (Talstra). The reference to victory over the sea monster again recalls ancient Near Eastern ways of referring to creation (see the comment on Exod 14). Ps 33:6–7 makes the same link (Botha and Potgieter) and takes up the language and imagery of Exod 15:

At Yahweh’s word heavens were made,

 at the blast of his mouth all their army,

Heaping up the sea’s water like a dam,

putting their deeps into vaults.

The word “dam” (*ned*) in Exod 15:8 otherwise occurs only here, in a recollection of the sea crossing in Ps 78:13, perhaps in Isa 17:11, and also in Josh 3:13, 16 as an aspect of another parallel that makes bookends out of the exodus/Red Sea event and the Israelite arrival in Canaan, when the Israelites again cross over “on dry land” (Exod 14:16, 22, 29; Josh 4:22) (Dallaire/Morris; Lunn; Wagenaar). “The crossing of the Jordan” is “a *reenactment* of the Red Sea crossing” (Enns). There is a typological relationship between the two events (Fishbane).

The word for “depths” (*metsolah*)in Exod 15:5 likewise recurs only in Neh 9:11, and in Ps 88:6 [7]:

You have put me in the deepest pit,

 in dark places, in the depths.

The psalm speaks of Yahweh as God of deliverance, cries out in the night, speaks of being full of dire experiences and being afflicted by Yahweh’s breakers, wonders whether Yahweh’s commitment holds, and almost closes with a protest at being surrounded by Yahweh’s terrors like water. In comparison and contrast, Jonah 2 looks back in thanksgiving on a rescue from the sea, the “depths,” a similar noun (*metsulah*) that is almost as rare. Jonah had been overwhelmed by Yahweh’s waves, but Yahweh had listened to his prayer (Vermeylen). Perhaps Jonah speaks as a prophet, but perhaps as an ordinary individual who might have the same experience. “Jonah’s psalm of thanksgiving… could just as well have been sung by the Israelites after the sea crossing” (Morales).

The possibility of Jonah’s experience being repeated for an ordinary individual is implied when his word for “depths" recurs in Ps 69:1, 2, 15 [2, 3, 16]).

Deliver me, God,

 because water has come up to my neck.

I have sunk into turbid depths

 and here is no foothold.…

The stream of water must not sweep me away,

 the depths must not swallow me.

There seems to have been a “change in the right hand of the One on High” (Ps 77:10 [11]). Translations of that line vary, but in some way the psalm is working with the difference between how God is letting things be in the present and how he acted at the Red Sea, of which the psalmists remind themselves and remind God (Gaiser).

Waters saw you, God;

when waters saw you, they would convulse.…

The earth trembled and shook,

your way being in the sea.

Your paths were in mighty waters,

though your steps were not known.

You led your people like a flock

by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Ps 77:16–20 [17–21]

remove indentYahweh walked through the sea all right, even if he couldn’t be seen.

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“Like the days of your getting out from the country of Egypt, I will show it wonders,” Yahweh says in Mic 7:15, and 7:18–20 goes on also to use the slightly less rare word *metsulah* (in the plural) picturing Yahweh throwing an enemy into the depths. Ironically, Ps 68:22 [23] adds, don't think you can take refuge in the depths, because Yahweh's power over them also means he can reach you there. “Who is like you?” Exod 15:11 asks; so does Mic 7:18. “Horse and its rider he hurled into the sea,” say Exod 15:1. In Micah 7:19 the enemy cast into the depths becomes “all our offenses” (DiFransico).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

There are several levels to the song in Exod 15 as there are to the story in Exod 14. The story relates an event that one can imagine in a this-worldly fashion. Given a modern way of thinking, readers may be inclined to demythologize it and see a this-worldly battle between Israelites and Egyptians. But even with a literal understanding of the story, the song gives a different account from the story. It introduces a different level of conflict between Yahweh and other forces, which are now supernatural, but do not possess his level of power. One or other of the two levels is more prominent in different OT allusions to the event (Miller). Both story and song relate a once-for-all act of deliverance of Israel with a this-worldly level and an other-worldly level. One way of engaging with it is simply by an act of praise for the past act. Another is to reflect on its being not only a once-for-all act but a testimony concerning ongoing truth about Yahweh and the gods. Another is to protest that the way Yahweh is acting or not acting now does not match the way he was acting then, and to suggest that surely Yahweh should think about this. One might then appeal for a repetition of the act. And an individual might do so. The act of deliverance has implications both for the people and for the individual.

### D. Theological Use

Yahweh acts in historical contexts and takes on political powers, but in doing so continues to be the God he was in creating the world. Exod 15 and some psalms that speak the same way may imply that creation was a more complicated process than one might think from Gen 1–2, involving forces that God had to defeat and did defeat. He thus made the world secure and made his victory at the Red Sea not very surprising. But alternatively, Exod 15 and the psalms may turn the victory that Mesopotamian stories link with creation into a victory that Yahweh won at the Red Sea. Either way, it is a victory he wins again each time he delivers the community or individual Israelites from the depths that overwhelm them. He won it with potential finality in Jesus’s cross and resurrection, and he will win it with true finality on the ultimate Day of the Lord.

## Exodus 15:22–17:7: Reproaches and Cries

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The Red Sea deliverance leads more or less directly into life in an “in-between space” (Sun on 15:22–18:27), a situation where the Israelites can find no drinkable water (15:22–27). It is thus a crisis that “concerns the fundamental human need for survival, namely water” (Meyers, *Exodus*, 129). “The stark realities of the wilderness silence the celebrations at the Sea of Reeds” (Scarlata, *Abiding*, 122). The people reproach Moses, Moses cries out to Yahweh, he shows Moses some wood, Moses throws it into the water, and the water becomes drinkable. The dynamics of this event recur in connection with food (16:1–36) and with water again (Exod 17:1–7). “God’s leading does not always move directly toward oases” (Fretheim, *Exodus*). Yet perhaps, when people now ask, “Is Yahweh among us, or not?” (17: 7), “the only unbelievable aspect of the narrative is that the Israelites could possibly ask such a question” (Durham). Perhaps it is no coincidence that the first story about water ends up as a story about Torah (Dozeman).

### B. Context of Related Passages

After a celebration of Yahweh’s power and faithfulness over some thirty-seven verses that rejoices in the Red Sea event, Ps 89:38 [39] turns into a protest: “but you, you have spurned, rejected, become enraged with your anointed one.” It speaks as Israel speaks in the stories that follow Exod 14:1–15:21, for which Moses and Yahweh rebuke Israel. A similar occasion of letdown beyond Exodus comes in a chapter where their crying out is juxtaposed with regretting leaving Egypt: “And they said, one to his brother, ‘We will make someone head, and go back to Egypt.’… The people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why did you get us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?’” (Num 11:1–2, 4–5; 14:2–4; 21:5). Perhaps crying out is one thing, but muttering in one’s tent is another: “You muttered in your tents and said, ‘Because Yahweh repudiated us, he got us out of the country of Egypt to give us into the hand of the Amorites to annihilate us.’ I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, do not be afraid of them. Yahweh your God, the one going in front of you, he will fight for you, in accordance with all that he did with you in Egypt before your eyes.… But with this thing, you do not have faith in Yahweh your God” (Deut 1:26–32).

The dynamics of those stories recur in the Israelites’ journey to Canaan (e.g., Num 14:2–3, 27–29), with further subsequent talk of reproach (16:11, 41 [17:6]; 17:5, 10 [20, 25]), and an apparent replay of what happened at the place that came to be called Contention (Exod 17:1–7). The replay has solemn implications for Moses and Aaron (Num 20; see D. Nascimento). On the other hand, in Ps 81:4–7 [5–8] Yahweh speaks less disparagingly in recollecting the place called Contention and Test (Emanuel, “Voice”), and speaks not of them testing him there (Exod 17:2) but of him testing them (Exod 16:4; Childs). That might imply both bringing out into the open (for him and for them) how they will react, and leading them on in their understanding and commitment (Bills). Later, the whole community reproach their leaders during the aftermath of their letting themselves be fooled by the Gibeonites (Josh 9:18). The motif of reproach (*lun*) is otherwise virtually confined to Exod 15–17 and Num 14–17 (EVV translate “complain,” “murmur,” “grumble”). Yet Exodus does speak of real problems such as lack of water and food, and the Israelites’ complaint seems not so unreasonable, Numbers speaks of complaints that lie more in the Israelites’ imagination. Deut 8:3 offers a further telling observation about the significance of manna (Childs; see further Fishbane). Having to rely on Yahweh for provision of food could teach Israel that “it is not on bread alone that humanity will live. Rather, on anything going out from Yahweh’s mouth humanity will live.” They had no food. God says, “Eat this.” They survive.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Later stories assume that the Red Sea story provides a pattern for the way God may relate to Israel (for instance in taking Israel into hazardous experiences) and Israel may relate to God (for instance, in prayers of reproach). Does the name Marah (Exod 15:22–27) reflect the waters’ bitterness (the root *marar*)or the Israelites’ rebelliousness (the root *marah*)? These alternative possibilities match the OT’s different depictions of the wilderness time as a period of joy, a honeymoon period, or a period of rebellion. These possibilities suggest possible further intertextual links: “Anyone thirsty, go to the water” (Isa 55:1); wisdom is “a tree of life to people who grasp it” (Prov 3:18) (Boyarin).

### D. Theological Use

The Exodus passages and ones that follow imply that crying out (*tse‘aqah*) is one thing, but reproaching is another. And when the people reproach Moses and Aaron, Yahweh assumes that they are really reproaching him; sometimes Moses makes this point with his “What are we” or “What is he, Aaron?” The significance of this motif in Exodus raises the question whether reproach is a feature of the exodus and wilderness period but a fault that did not characterize Israel later. Or must one view much of the subsequent protesting in the Psalms (or, e.g., Isa 40 or 49 or 54) as reproach?

Further, the motif of crying out to God in this way is an aspect of delivering Israel from Egypt, and it raises a question that applies to this entire story, the question of whether all migrants may cry out to God and look for a response in the way that the Israelite migrants did on the way to their new country (Acha).

## Exodus 16:23-30: Sabbath

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

In Exod 16, in the aftermath of the reproaching about having nothing to eat, Yahweh provides the Israelites with a mysterious flaky food, and the story has a spin-off in the OT’s first mention of the Sabbath. People are to gather the food every day, but to collect a double supply on Friday because there will be none on Saturday. “‘Tomorrow will be a sacred absolute Sabbath [a sabbathness of sabbath of sacredness] for Yahweh. What you would bake, bake, and what you would boil, boil, and all that is left, set down for keeping until morning’.… On the seventh day, some of the people went out to gather, but did not find anything. Yahweh said,… ‘Yahweh having given you the Sabbath, he himself is therefore giving you food for two days on the sixth day.… No one is to go out from his place on the seventh day.’ So the people stopped on the seventh day” (16:23–30).

Thus “the Sabbath was revealed to Israel through the manner in which the manna appeared in the desert, and not through direct divine pronouncement to the people at Mt. Sinai, within the framework of the Decalogue” (Frankel). But that divine pronouncement follows. “Be mindful of the Sabbath day to make it sacred. Six days you will serve and do all your work. The seventh day being a Sabbath for Yahweh your God, you will not do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your servant or your maid, your cattle, or your resident, in your compound. Because in six days Yahweh made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them, and rested on the seventh day. That is why Yahweh blessed the seventh day and made it sacred” (20:8–11). “For six days you will do your works and on the seventh day you will stop, in order that your ox and your donkey may rest and your maid’s son and the resident may draw breath” (23:12)

Yahweh repeats this instruction after giving Moses specifications for building the wilderness dwelling: “My Sabbaths you are to keep, because it is a sign between me and you through your generations of your acknowledging that I am Yahweh who makes you sacred. You will keep the Sabbath, because it is something sacred for you—one who treats it as ordinary, he will definitely die.… The Israelites will keep the Sabbath, putting the Sabbath into effect through their generations, a covenant for all time.… Because in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day stopped and drew breath” (31:13–17). A reaffirmation follows in the preliminaries to the making of the dwelling: “You are not to light a fire in any of your settlements on the Sabbath day” (35:3).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The background to the Sabbath requirement thus lies in the creation story: “On the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done. He stopped on the seventh day from all his work that he had done, and blessed the seventh day and made it sacred, because on it he stopped from all his work” (Gen 2:2–3). The alternative version of the Decalogue reads: “Keep the Sabbath day to make it sacred, as Yahweh your God has commanded you. Six days you will serve and do all your work. The seventh day being a Sabbath for Yahweh your God, you will not do any work, you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maid, your ox, your donkey, any of your cattle, or your resident, in your compound, in order that your servant and your maid may rest like you. Remember that you were a servant in the country of Egypt, and Yahweh your God got you out from there with a strong hand and with a stretched out arm—that is why Yahweh your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:12–15). Forbidden therefore on the Sabbath is collecting wood (for a cooking fire?) (Num 15:32–35), carrying loads (Jer 17:21–27), buying grain or other goods (Neh 10:31 [32]), or treading winepresses and associated other trading (Neh 13:15–22). Nehemiah commissions the Levites to keep an eye on this as part of their involvement in safeguarding the Sabbath’s sacredness.

Keeping Sabbath is a sign of the covenant and of the people’s sacredness (Ezek 20:12–24; cf. 22:8; 23:38), a sign of the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel. People who keep the Sabbath will find that blessings follow (Isa 56:2). They will ride on the country’s heights (58:13–14). Eunuchs will gain a monument and a name, and foreigners will have access to Yahweh’s sacred mountain (56:4–7). There are extra offerings and obligations associated with the Sabbath (Lev 24:5–8; Num 28:3, 7, 9–10) (cf. 2 Kgs 4:23; 1 Chr 9:32; 2 Chr 2:4 [3]; 31:3; Neh 10:33 [34]), and one particular psalm (Ps 92).

Thus it would be terrible if Yahweh were to “make all its rejoicing stop, its festival, its new month, its Sabbath, and its every appointed occasion” (Hos 2:11 [13]). Yet some people ask “when will the new month pass so that we can sell grain, and the Sabbath so that we can offer grain, reducing the *ephah* measure and increasing the *sheqel* weight?” (Amos 8:5). That last cynical question links with Yahweh’s declaration that “new month and sabbath, summoning a congregation: I cannot bear disorder and assembly” (Isa 1:13)—that is, keeping Sabbath counts for nothing if it is combined with living a life characterized by moral disorder. And it is terrible that the fall of Jerusalem means Yahweh has caused appointed occasion and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion (Lam 2:6). But in Ezekiel’s visionary temple there are special arrangements for the Sabbath, with special opening and special offerings (Ezek 46:1–4). And in the new heavens and new earth, “from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will go out to bow down before me” (Isa 66:23).

Sabbath is a weekly observance, but its significance gets stretched so that the day of self-affliction at the season of the Day of Atonement will be “an absolute Sabbath” (Lev 16:31; 23:32). An “absolute Sabbath” [a “sabbath of sabbath-ness”] suggests a sabbath when even acts such as making your bed or sweeping the floor are forbidden. And Lev 25 introduces the idea of a Sabbath year for the land, with no sowing and no pruning. The dreadful consequences of failure to keep this Sabbath regulation will include expelling people from the land, to give it opportunity for make up for the missing Sabbaths (Lev 26:14, 33–35, 43; 2 Chr 36:21)

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Etymologically, the Sabbath is simply the day when people stop (*shabat*). Different passages spell out the implications of that in varying ways, provide varying rationales for it, and assert varying sanctions for ignoring it. These arise from varying contexts.

An ultimate rationale is the picture of God stopping work when he had completed the work of creation (Gen 2:1–4). While Genesis does not make this a basis for Sabbath observance, Exodus makes the connection. One might infer that within the Decalogue God gives a revelation about the Sabbath in light of which the author of Genesis composed the creation story. While Genesis refers to God “stopping,” Exodus refers to God “resting” (*nuah*),which is not so different, as it denotes settling back or settling down or reclining (it’s what the ark does on Mount Ararat and what Israel will do in Canaan). It suggests the household being quiet after a hectic week’s work. Perhaps it’s like a return to Eden and a promise of Eden (Haynes/Krüger). And perhaps Yahweh contrasted with the Egyptian gods, who were keen on working and on people working (von Mengden/da Silva). Subsequently Moses refers to the most minor members of the household (ox, donkey, maid’s son, resident alien) “drawing breath” (*naphash niphal*; Exod 23:12) on the Sabbath, as Yahweh did (31:17); the only other occurrence of this verb refers to David when he is on the run (2 Sam 16:14).

The crass anthropomorphism binds the deity and the tired, exhausted slave, and with words arousing the soul calls the attention of the free man’s indolent heart to the slave.… Everyone that belongs to the essence of Israel—and the servants, the sojourners included, belong to it—shall be able to imitate Yhvh without hindrance. (Buber, *Prophetic Faith*,54; cf. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 281)

Exodus thus implies a link that the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue makes explicit, in terms of a complementary rationale for the Sabbath. It is a day for the heads of households to ensure that everyone in the household, and specifically servants, have a rest day. The basis of its exegesis is the juxtaposition of the Sabbath command and the fact of Yahweh’s freeing the Israelites from servitude in Egypt, when they had little chance to sit down and draw breath.

Alongside this rationale is the declaration in both versions of the Decalogue that the Sabbath is “for Yahweh” or “Yahweh’s,” as a firstborn animal or human being is “for Yahweh” or “Yahweh’s” (Exod 13:12–15). Yahweh claims this day. The comparison suggests the assumption that Yahweh could claim every day as he could claim every offspring, but he actually makes his claim only on one day and one offspring. On those, he does insist. So people must keep off the Sabbath in recognition of his claim. In this sense they must “keep” it (*shamar*), guard it. In Gen 2:1–3, the equivalent way of making this point is to say that God made the Sabbath sacred, as he makes the firstborn sacred (Exod 13:15; Num 3:13). People must not treat it as ordinary (*hillel piel*)—the traditional translation is “profane.” The verb denotes the kind of profanity that treats something that belongs to God as if it was something everyday. The other facet of the rationale in Gen 2:1–3 and Exod 20 is that God blessed the Sabbath, which suggests he greeted it and praised it. Declaring that the Sabbath is an aspect of the covenant would be a way that priests and prophets might seek to get people to take the Sabbath with absolute seriousness. To work on the Sabbath is a contravention of the covenant, and risks the kind of sanctions that attach to contravening the covenant, which can mean death itself.

Leviticus and Numbers presuppose questions about the Sabbath in light of a concern about worship. While the Sabbath is not essentially a worship day, it is in a special sense “for Yahweh,” so it makes sense for it to involve special offerings (see Num 28) and for it to be the day when the priests set fresh “Presence Bread” before Yahweh. Leviticus is likewise spelling out the Sabbath’s implications by extending it to apply to another special day, the day of self-affliction associated with the Day of Atonement, and also letting the weekly Sabbath provide a model for that observance, and taking the Sabbath as a model or rationale for a rule that one stops sowing and pruning one year in seven (Lev 25). That year is also “a Sabbath for Yahweh.” This would be a challenging and anxiety-making requirement, and the weekly Sabbath could be the same. If the barley is ready to harvest and there might be a devastating storm tomorrow.…

The Israelites are to keep the Sabbath in all their settlements (Exod 35:3). No work is to be done in their compounds—literally within their gates (20:10). What about their towns when they become more of an urban culture? What about life in Jerusalem, when Israel has a capital? What about the situation when it becomes a more commercial culture? One can imagine someone arguing that the Torah forbade pruning on the Sabbath but said nothing about treading and transporting and selling produce. In this connection, too, prophets, priests, and leaders such as Nehemiah rethink texts in light of the context and declare that trading and shopping count as contraventions of the Sabbath. They have to work out what in a different context from the one in Exodus counts as treating the Sabbath as ordinary.

They would also have to set the Sabbath text alongside other texts. Keeping the Sabbath and keeping one’s hand from doing anything dire have to go alongside each other. They are both aspects of keeping covenant. It would be useless to keep Sabbath but engage in unfaithful lives on other days of the week.

### D. Theological Use

The Sabbath is a fundamental requirement of Israel’s life with God that can be related to understanding creation, the deliverance from Egypt, worship, covenant, the requirement of self-affliction, trust in Yahweh, and the ethics of the concern for ordinary people that is expected of people with authority in family and community.

## Exodus 17: Amaleq

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

A series of stories that follow the account of Israel’s leaving Egypt and Yahweh’s defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea relate a series of surprising events. One would have thought that Yahweh’s transferring Israel from vulnerability and bondage to a life of security and blessing had been achieved. But it has not been. And now it transpires Pharaoh has not really disappeared: “the threat he stood for persists” (Houtman). The Amaleqites come and fight with Israel, but the Israelites under Joshua defeat them. Then Yahweh says to Moses: “Write this as a commemoration on a document, and declaim it in Joshua’s ears: ‘I will definitely eliminate the memory of Amaleq from under the heavens.’” To which Moses adds, “Yahweh will have war against Amaleq through the generations” (Exod 17:8–16). The events point realistically to the way Israel’s life is going to be over the centuries, and also to the way he will continue to provide for his people and support them.

### B. Context of Related Passages

The OT traces Amaleq’s descent back to Esau (Gen 36). It was a tribe living south or southeast of Israel, and featuring in a number of references to conflicts from Genesis onwards. Amaleq itself features again in Deut 25:17–19, which fills out what happened between Amaleq and Israel. Its critique is that Amaleq attacked Israel “at the rear, all the people who were shattered behind you, with you yourself faint and weary. He had no awe for God.” Moses also affirms that it is Israel’s own task to “eliminate Amaleq’s remembrance from under the heavens.” It would be tempting not to do so—who wants to eliminate a people? But, says Moses, “you will not forget.” Moses also makes clear that this is not because the Amaleqites are Israel’s enemies but because of the inhumanity and godlessness of what they did. The context of Deuteronomy could thus also imply principles that the Israelites need to live by: if they behave like the Amaleqites, they may find themselves sharing Amaleq’s fate.

Yahweh subsequently gives Saul a commission. He is to do as Moses said, making no exceptions. The Qenites apparently lived in the same area as the Amaleqites, and without being told (but apparently without being faulted for it) Saul bids the Qenites get out of the area, because they had acted with commitment (*hesed*) towards the Israelites when they left Egypt. Saul’s point thus complements Moses’s point in Deuteronomy: the Amaleqites should be struck down for their viciousness, but the Qenites should be protected for their faithfulness. “So Saul struck down Amaleq”; except that he spared Agag, the Amaleqite king, and the best of the flock, the cattle, and the fatlings. Which (among other things) led Yahweh to regret making Saul king (1 Sam 15:2–11).

Much later, “Haman ben Hammedata the Agagite, foe of all the Judahites, he made a plan against the Judahites to destroy them.” But the efforts of Esther led to his and his sons’ execution (Esther 9:24–25). Literally or metaphorically, Haman is an Amaleqite and a descendant of the king whom Saul kept alive, and a man who behaves with the viciousness of his forebears, and Esther acts more thoroughly than Saul in doing as Moses and Yahweh say.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

If Yahweh wants to eliminate remembrance of Amaleq, why is he perpetuating it by making this intent the subject of the first writing of a document in the Scriptures? Paradoxically, “to remember not to remember is the point of this writing” (Sun). But further, if he is eliminating the memory of Amaleq, why will he need to be at war with Amaleq through the generations? Is the intention to eliminate the memory a long term project? That would fit with the passages from Deuteronomy, Samuel, and Esther.

Deuteronomy has some other vivid imaginative details to complement the vivid, more allusive specifics of the Exodus story. It also adds two key pieces of interpretation. One is the typical Deuteronomic insight that the Amaleqites’ action showed they had no awe for Yahweh (Gerbrandt). The other is perhaps also a typical Deuteronomic inference, that an intention on Yahweh’s part (“I will eliminate”) becomes an intention for Israel (“you are to eliminate”).

First Samuel 15 presupposes the latter point. Yahweh declares that he will take action, then makes clear that he will do so by issuing a commission to Saul. This chapter’s own first distinctive piece of interpretation is to understand “elimination” by means of Deuteronomy’s notion of “devotion” (see the comment on 23:23–33). Its vivid additional feature is the reference to the Qenites, whose positive relationship with Israel might be inferred from various OT references to them from Genesis onwards. Its most striking distinctive interpretive note concerns Saul. “Devotion” can imply various levels of rigor, and here Yahweh implies a strict version in keeping with Exod 17 and Deut 25, whereas Saul has assumed a less strict one.

Agag gets further mention in Esther, so the memory of Amaleq abides. The Esther story implicitly turns Amaleq into a symbol of anti-Judahite/anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic attitudes and actions. It does contribute to the memory of Amaleq being only a negative memory. It leaves ambiguous how far the elimination of that memory is God’s business or Israel’s. God does not feature in Esther. Esther speaks only of Israel taking action (see Scheinerman, Thambyrajah). Mordecai and Esther see to the Judahites’ survival when Amaleq again attacks, though God is surely at work behind the scenes. The Persian king does Saul’s job in executing Haman, but it is the Judahites who strike down Haman’s ten sons and thousands of others who attack them. They thus act in keeping with Yahweh’s instructions in Exodus, in Deuteronomy, and in 1 Samuel, and without touching the plunder.

### D. Theological Use

Yahweh intends that a nation acting with aggression against the people of God gets its comeuppance and is never remembered, though that intention is not one whose implementing he ensures quickly. The people of God should therefore not fret too much at his delay. His intention will be fulfilled. It is likely that he intends his people to be his agents in fulfilling his intention, and one could thus call the Israelites’ action against Amaleq “Israel’s prototypical ‘Holy War’” (Propp)—though the OT does not use that expression. If it is to be a holy war, the OT hints that his people should wait until a word from Yahweh or a set of circumstances points in the direction of their action. They then have to be wary of falling short of his commission, or of making it the means of procuring their own advance.

## Exodus 19 and 24:1–8: Covenant and Sacredness

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Two months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive at Sinai, Yahweh summons Moses, and gives him a message to pass on to the Israelites. He is to get them to think about the fact that Yahweh has taken action against the Egyptians and brought them to himself. They are now to listen to him with a view to keeping his covenant, and they will then be his own possession among all peoples. They agree to accept this commitment. Yahweh goes on to bid Moses get the people to prepare for his coming to speak to him by making them sacred, washing their clothes. And they are to keep away from the mountain, where Yahweh will appear (19:1-12).

After the revelation of the terms of the covenant, Moses sets up an altar with twelve columns for the twelve clans, and has some young men offer sacrifices. He reads the terms of the covenant to the Israelites, and they accept them. He dashes blood from the sacrifices on the altar and on the people, and declares it to be the blood of the covenant that Yahweh now makes with them, in connection with all the words they have accepted (24:1–8).

### B. Context of Related Passages

Yahweh’s deliverance of the Israelites issued from his pledge (*berit*)to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2:24), which was associated with no specific requirements on Israel’s ancestors beyond the circumcision of their males (Gen 17). Yahweh is now reworking the terms of the covenant pledge he made to Abraham. In effect, it becomes a new covenant. He has been carrying the Israelites “as a person carries his son” and will continue to do so until they get to the edge of the promised land (Deut 1:31). There he will remind them that they are a people sacred to Yahweh their God: “You, Yahweh your God chose to be his, as a people who were his own possession, from all the peoples that are on the face of the ground” (7:6). They have said that Yahweh will be God for them, and that they will walk in his roads, live by his rulings, and listen to his voice. And Yahweh has said that as a people who will be his own possession, he will put them on high over all the nations that he has made, for praise and for a name and for grandeur, and they will be a sacred people for him (26:17–19). “Like an eagle that stirs its nest, hovering over its young, he would spread his wings, get them, carry them on his pinions” (32:11).

When this people came out of Egypt, then, “Judah became his sacred thing, Israel became the realm he ruled” (Ps 114:2). It is reason for praise: “Sound out Yah, sound out Yahweh’s name, sound out, servants of Yahweh … because Yah chose Jacob for himself, Israel as his own” (Ps 135:1, 4). “You, you will be called ‘priests of Yahweh’” and “‘ministers of our God,’ it will be said of you. The resources of nations you will eat, and on their splendor you will thrive” (Isa 61:6). To Zion “the former rule will come, the kingship of Lady Jerusalem” (Mic 4:8). “They will be mine, Yahweh Armies said, on the day when I am acting, my own possession” (Mal 3:17).

In this connection, the account of the Jordan crossing again portrays it as corresponding to the Red Sea crossing, and also to the meeting with Yahweh at Sinai. Yahweh requires Joshua to “be very strong and firm in being careful to act on the entire instruction that Moses my servant commanded you” (Josh 1:7). When the people follow the covenant chest across the Jordan, there is to be a distance of a thousand yards between it and them—“Do not go near it” (3:4). They are to make themselves sacred (3:5; cf. Exod 19:10).

Whereas at Sinai the covenant with Abraham in effect becomes a new covenant, the Israelites violated (*parar*) this covenant. It didn’t work. Yahweh will therefore need to rework it again, to get his teaching inside them, inscribed onto their minds. Then he actually will be their God and they will be his people (Jer 31:31–34).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Yahweh’s words in Exod 19 mark Sinai as confirming the promise in Gen 17 and 35. Abraham’s descendants have become very fruitful, and arguably have already become nations with kings (Gen 25:23; 36:31). They have kept the covenant by having their males circumcised (admittedly Moses had needed some prompting in this connection). Exod 19 now presupposes that Yahweh is changing the terms of the covenant in light of getting the Israelites out of Egypt. The new version of the covenant has a background in ancient Near Eastern politics as well as in Genesis. It has parallels with some agreements imposed by imperial powers on lesser peoples (“suzerainty treaties”; Meyers). The earlier part of such an agreement notes ways the senior party has benefited the junior party so that it owes allegiance and other commitments. In this new version of the covenant with its similarity to the political version, Yahweh takes the place of the king. This links with the Decalogue’s distinctive combining of requirements of a relationship with Yahweh and requirements concerning relationships within the community (Sarna), an aspect of the “unexpected and stunning” nature of the Decalogue (Kass). In the Decalogue, there are no threats of consequences that will follow rebellion, though elsewhere the Decalogue’s requirements all have sanctions attached to them (Sun).

Yahweh has a distinctive metaphor for his getting the people from Egypt to Sinai, a metaphor that partially recurs as a simile in a different connection in Deut 1:31. It fully recurs in a more developed form in 32:11; a metaphor looks more at home in that poetic context than in this prosaic one (one would infer that Exod 19 likely builds on Deut 32 rather than vice versa). In its context at the end of the journey to the edge of the promised land, Deut 1 and 32 apply the metaphor in different ways to Yahweh’s support of the people through the wilderness. In the poetic context, Moses might get away with the metaphor more easily than Yahweh would in Exod 19, where the Israelites might be inclined to protest that they were not carried; they walked. However, in Exod 19 the image of the eagle (or vulture) may suggest “majestic, devastating power” (Brueggemann), while the context of Deut 32:11 suggests that Yahweh’s emphasis may be more on ensuring that they got there safely (Ibn Ezra). In Deut 1 the simile aspect to Moses’s words (“as a person carries his son”) also suggests the father-son imagery of Exod 4:22–23.

Exod 19 uses the adjective “sacred” (*qadosh*) for the first time in the OT, andDeut 7; 14; and 26 take up its identification of Israel as a “sacred” people, spelling out its significance in general terms as setting Israel over against all other peoples. Concretely, this sacred distinctiveness will express itself in not following the customs that the nations follow in connection with mourning (14:1–2). The passages correspond with Exod 19 in terming the people’s sacredness as involving their being “his own possession,” his *segullah* (traditionally, his “special possession”). Ps 135:4 and Mal 3:17 are the only other texts that use the word in this connection. Deut 7 and 14 associate the language of sacredness and being Yahweh’s own possession with the idea of Yahweh “choosing” Israel. Following up 4:34, these are the first OT references to Yahweh choosing the people. Ps 135:4 also associates the image of Yahweh’s own possession and the notion of Yahweh choosing Israel, and make the combined reality a reason for enthusiastic praise.

Exod 19 further spells out Israel’s significance in terms of being a kingship or kingdom of priests as well as a sacred nation. It will be a kingdom with a body of priests, which it did not have before; Israelite priests appear for the first time later in this chapter. The expression might also suggest that Israel is “a royal body of priests” (see J. A. Davies), and other passages that speak in overlapping ways may support such an understanding of this unique expression. Most explicitly, “you will be called ‘priests of Yahweh’” (Isa 61:6) suggests they will *be* priests as opposed to *having* priests. It also explicates the relationship between Israel and the nations, which compares with the relationship of Levi and the other clans. Further, “Judah became his sacred thing, Israel became the realm he ruled” (Ps 114:2): not a nation that reigns but a nation that knows Yahweh reigning in its midst. Similarly, the return of “the kingship of Lady Jerusalem” (Mic 4:8) might imply that Yahweh’s reign will return to Zion, or it might imply that Zion’s own reign will return. Perhaps they are to be a body of priests that rule the world on God’s behalf (cf. Gen 1:26–28; Alexander) or a body of priests to rule in the world in a way that reflects God’s way of ruling (Enns).

### D. Theological Use

From Sinai, Israel looks back and forward. It looks back to Yahweh’ s pledge to Abraham, which gave a formal structure to the simple promise that Yahweh would make Abraham a people with a land of its own, and added the expectation that Abraham’s people for their part keep this pledge. This specifically means the practice of circumcision but also means walking his way, being people of integrity. They have done that, more or less, and Yahweh for his part has taken the action that was needed as preliminary to giving them their own land. Now there is need of a new commitment to a reworked pledge or covenant. They now are something like a nation, not a mere family. They are thus Yahweh’s special possession among the nations. They have to behave in the distinctive fashion that will mark them out.

Witnessing God appearing and acting involves a commitment to acting in accordance with Yahweh’s revelation to Moses and a recognition of the importance of an awed reverence about meeting with Yahweh. This requires the people to be sacred in the sense of separated from ordinary everyday things, and such separation requires time—the motif of three days recurs in Exodus and in Joshua. The Sinai event and the Jordan event involve the entire people, yet the awesomeness of the events requires some keeping of distance by the people. Yet as well as both also involving the priests having a special role, they further involve a role for some laypeople who represent the clans (Exod 24; Josh 4).

## Exodus 20:1–17 [1–14][[1]](#footnote-1) and 34:10–28: The Decalogue and Dodecalogue (?)

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

In Exod 20, Yahweh lays down requirements related to his having got the Israelites out of servitude in Egypt: have no gods but him, make no images, do not bow down to them or serve them, do not associate Yahweh’s name with something empty, be mindful of the Sabbath, honor parents, do not murder, commit adultery, steal, give false testimony, or covet a neighbor’s possessions.

In 34:10–28, Yahweh seals another covenant related to his intention to drive out Canaan’s current inhabitants. Its terms are that the people seal no covenant with the country’s current inhabitants, demolish their altars, columns and asherahs, make no cast gods, keep a flat bread festival, acknowledge that firstborn livestock are Yahweh’s but ransom firstborn donkeys and firstborn human babies, avoid appearing before Yahweh empty-handed, stop work on the seventh day, observe the festivals of weeks, first produce of the wheat harvest, and ingathering, use no leaven in slaughtering a sacrifice, do not let the Pesah sacrifice stay until morning, bring the best of the first produce of the ground to Yahweh’s house, and do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk.

Exod 34:28 records that Moses wrote down “the ten words” (the OT does not describe them as the ten commandments). It is not straightforward to get ten commands out of Exod 20, but it is harder to get ten words out of Exod 34 (and almost as hard to get twelve out of it to make a dodecalogue). So the “ten words” are likely the ones in Exod 20, as Deut 4:13; 10:4 refer to the version in Deut 5. While some of the commands in Exod 34 recur in the Decalogue, all recur elsewhere in the Torah. Exod 20 is mostly succinct and tight, and focuses on fundamental obligations to Yahweh and fundamental obligations in human relationships that make a difference to the family and the community. Exod 34 focuses more exclusively on relationships with Yahweh, and it is more concrete in the obligations it lays down.

### B. Context of Related Passages

Deut 5 has a version of the Decalogue that is broadly similar to the one in Exod 20. The most extensive difference relates to the Sabbath (see the comment on Exod 16), but also significant is the difference in the tenth item, beginning “You will not desire your neighbor’s wife and you will not want your neighbor’s household.”

Lev 19 has a set of expectations starting from the requirement that the Israelites be sacred, and spelling this out as involving revering parents, keeping Yahweh’s Sabbaths, not turning to godlets (*’elilim* as opposed to God, *’elohim*)or making cast gods, eating shared offerings on the day they are made, leaving the edge of the harvest field uncollected, not stealing, deceiving, being false, taking false oaths, defrauding, or robbing, not holding onto a worker’s wage, not vilifying someone deaf or putting an obstacle in front of someone blind, and revering Yahweh (19:2–14; see further vv. 15–37).

Deut 7:1–5 has a set of requirements focusing on devoting the current inhabitants of Canaan, demolishing the Canaanites’ worship structures, and not having any relationships with Canaanites, because this will surely lead to serving their gods. Deut 27 then has a set of threats to anyone who makes an image, dishonors a parent, moves a neighbor’s boundary marker, misleads someone blind, treats alien, orphan or widow unjustly, has sex with his step-mother, with an animal, with his sister, or with his mother-in-law, strikes down a neighbor, or takes a bribe.

Jer 7:9 and Hos 4:2 both critique Israel for three of the practices forbidden in the Decalogue: theft, murder, and adultery in Jeremiah; murder, theft, , and adultery in Hosea. Thus in each case the three offenses come together as they do in the Decalogue, but in a different order. This difference compares with differences elsewhere, in the Septuagint the order is adultery, theft, murder. In Luke 18:20 and Rom 13:9 it is adultery, murder, theft. Further, the three prohibitions are set in broader contexts. Jeremiah sets them in the context of a broader confrontation of Israel on the basis of principles from Deuteronomy. Hosea presents them as expressions of a failure of truthfulness (*’emet*), commitment (*hesed*), and acknowledgment of God (*da‘at ’elohim*). Ps 50 also comes close to a direct comparison with the Decalogue as it critiques people who identify with thieves or adulterers, or engage in deceit or slander.

Ps 15 is broader in its list of offences that disqualify one from worship, including slander, abuse, failure to implement action against wrongdoing, and lending on interest. More briefly, Ps 24 disqualifies people with stained hands and impure minds who have lifted up their spirits to something false or sworn deceitfully. And at length Ezek 18 declares that a person will live who has not served other gods, not engaged in sexual impropriety, not exploited anyone, been generous to the needy, nor lent on interest, and Ezek 22 has a comparable list of wrongs (plus profaning the Sabbath) for which it condemns people.

Job says there is no way he could have looked at a girl, walked in falsehood, been enticed by a woman, refused a judgment for his servant or maid, withheld something that poor people desired, raised his hand against an orphan, put his trust in gold, been glad at the ruin of people who hated him, or caused his land to cry out against him (Job 31).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Exod 20 and 34 complement each other, and their introductions hint at the respective significances of the two sets of commands. Exod 20 starts from Yahweh’s having got the Israelites out of Egypt, and its requirements are foundational to the nation’s life. Exod 34 starts from Yahweh’s intention to take the people to Canaan, and its requirements focus on how Israel will need to stay distinctive there. It shows links with Deuteronomy and the prophets (Kemp; and see more generally Weinfeld).

Lev 19 revisits the Decalogue (Marx). It broadly follows the order of Exod 20 but follows Exod 34 in being more concrete, and it is more wide-ranging and detailed than either. It combines many concerns of both the Exodus sets of commands as well as developing its own concerns, with the result that it is longer than the two Exodus sets combined. As they put theirs in the context of the exodus and of life in Canaan, Leviticus puts its set in the context of its characteristic framework, a concern with the sacredness of the people and its commitment to the fact that “I am Yahweh”—so do what I say in light of the priorities I have. Whereas Exod 20, being quite general in its expectations, does not suggest a particular context as the background of its reflection, Lev 19 compares more with Exod 34 in overtly suggesting issues that would be raised by life in Canaan. Its combination of broad order with randomness makes it look like a chapter that grew over time as it worked out the implications of principles such as are summarized in the Decalogue, in light of questions arising in different contexts. It combines groups of biddings concerning relationships with God and concerning relationships in the community, and it combines two types of bidding—moral exhortations, and directives that are more like ordinances. Its discursive sections might have been added to a collection of biddings that were originally more uniformly succinct, with some of its more discursive biddings comparing with the kind that appear subsequently in Exod 21–23. In turn, that feature draws attention to the Decalogue’s combining (run on)

* the succinct and reasonably self-explanatory and uncontroversial (murder, adultery, theft, perjury), (run on)
* the succinct but a little enigmatic (e.g., other gods “beside me,” “upon my face”; *‘al-panay*), and (run on)
* the more discursive, surprising, and distinctively Israelite (the directives concerning images, Sabbath, and coveting), which might reflect contextual needs and mark the ways in which the Decalogue differs from expectations that any national code might contain. Some rules in Deuteronomy may seek to take further the explication of the coveting command (Rofé).

Ezek 18 includes three slightly different versions of a set of sixteen succinct and concrete descriptions of the lifestyle of someone who has lived properly in relationships with God and with other people, in terms more redolent of Lev 19 and Exod 34 than of Exod 20. Ps 15 has another such more general description in eleven terms outlining the lifestyle in relation to other people that is required of someone wishing to be in relationship with God. It thus compares with the second part of the Decalogue. And Job 31 makes a comparable claim regarding nine areas of lifestyle in relation to other people, spelled out in detailed, concrete terms.

Whereas the Decalogue may be thought of as timeless, ironically the history of its interpretation has been manifestly influenced by the cultural context of its interpretation (Childs). With further irony, that matches the influence of cultural contexts on the origin of the Decalogue and the related expositions of Yahweh’s expectations.

### D. Theological Use

Being Israel involves living by a set of principles for relationships with Yahweh and relationships in the community, on the basis of what Yahweh has done for Israel, what he is going to do, and who he is. It involves having a sense of how those principles must work out in practical ways. The concrete practice without the principles will not do; the principles without the concrete embodiment will not do. The principles are more or less timeless, though the more timeless they are, the more they may presuppose a level of abstraction that makes them not very useful. They thus need to be worked out in light of the contexts in which life has to be lived, so that the outworking is timely. And they need both to confront the community, as Exodus and Leviticus do, and to confront the individual, as Ezek 18, Ps 15, and Job 31 do, in distinctive ways.

## Exodus 20:24–26 [21–23]:[[2]](#footnote-2) Altars

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Please move this paragraph to the end of section A.

Within Exodus, the first set of instructions thus regarding the altar gain two kinds of links with what comes later. Yahweh’s further instructions in 27:1–8, which Moses implements, change the details in the first (the altar will be made of wood not earth or stone) but also give greater specificity, and further instructions regarding its equipment. This relates especially to the altar envisaged for the wilderness dwelling rather than “in every place where I have my name commemorated” (20:24 [21]). The account of Aaron’s actual altar-making then relates how it goes directly against Yahweh’s instructions. More happily, Exodus almost closes with Moses setting up the altars as prescribed, in Exod 37–38 and 40.

A block of detailed instructions follows the Decalogue. Exod 21:1 has the introduction to the main body of rulings, which mostly concern community life. This prequel thus puts God first in the detailing of covenant life. It begins with a renewed prohibition on making gods, then lays down specifications for an altar on which to make offerings. It is to be made of earth, or if made of rocks, “you will not build it of hewn rock, because wielding your sword on it you will make it ordinary.” And “you will not go up by steps onto my altar, in that your nakedness is not to be visible on it” (Exod 20:24–26).

For the wilderness dwelling, Exod 27:1 later speaks of an altar made of shittim wood, overlaid with bronze; the wooden frame would be filled with soil (cf. Rashi, on 20:21). It will be five cubits square and three cubits high (a cubit is half a yard). Integral to it will be horns on its corners. Exod 30 prescribes a further altar for burning incense, also made of shittim wood, but overlaid with gold.

Exod 32:3–5 relates how the people took off their gold rings and brought them to Aaron, who made them into a cast bullock, built an altar in front of it, and proclaimed, “A festival for Yahweh tomorrow!” That is, put that opening paragraph here.

### B. Context of Related Passages

Deut 27:5–8 prescribes the building of a similar altar of untrimmed rock at Mount Ebal: “And you will write on the rocks all the words of this instruction,” sufficiently plain to read easily. Joshua duly built such an altar (Josh 8:30–31). After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, Ezekiel receives detailed instructions for an altar in his vision of a new temple (Ezek 43:13–21). Fifty years later, “Joshua ben Jozadaq and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel and his brothers, got going and built the altar of the God of Israel for offering burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the instruction of Moses the man of God” (Ezra 3:2).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Whereas Exod 20 may envisage altars in a number of sanctuaries in the land, Deut 12 may envisage the altar in the one sanctuary that Yahweh chooses, though it is hard to be sure of the implications of the passages (Kilchör). When Moses prescribes further altar-making in Deut 27, he first affirms key elements from Exod 20, but adds the inscribing on the altar of the words of his instruction (his *torah*), which thus reworks the prescription in Exod 27 in light of a key theme in Deuteronomy. And Joshua implements the instructions in Exod 27 as elaborated in Deut 27. Ezra 3 likewise relates the implementing of Moses’s instructions, without being specific about which version. Meanwhile (chronologically) Yahweh has revealed to Ezekiel a new and more specific set of specifications for the altar in his visionary temple. This altar will have the steps that Exod 20 excluded, it being more a platform than the table-like altar that a priest stands in front of. The concern Exod 20 expressed about priestly exposure is covered by the assumption that a priest wears shorts in climbing onto it (28:42–43).

### D. Theological Use

There are matters about which Yahweh is prepared to be flexible, and matters about which he is not. The sort of God he is, one who speaks from the heavens (20:22 [19]), means that he will never countenance people thinking they can make an image of him. But he can countenance and commission a variety of possibilities regarding what an altar might be like, and thus how worship might work.

## Exodus 21:1-11: Servants

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The introduction, “These are the rulings that you are to set in front of them,” marks this as the beginning of the main body of the “covenant document” (24:7). The passage goes on to prescribe constraints on the arrangements when someone becomes a servant to another person, a “manservant” or “maidservant” (Propp). “Fundamental to the understanding and application of this passage is the distinction between chattel- and debt-slavery” (Johnstone; see further Chirichigno). The use of the word “slave” for *‘ebed* in modern translations is generally misleading (Meyers). Among the many references to slaves or servants in the OT, there is no indication that the owner of chattel-slaves had absolute rights over them that entitled him to treat them as he wished or (for instance) to assume sexual rights in relation to a woman slave/servant. The story of an individual such as Abraham’s servant in Gen 24 suggests a different kind of relationship—as does the standard use of servanthood to speak of the relationship between people and God (and cf. Ps 123:2).

The ruling concerning servants is concerned especially to safeguard a servant’s rights. A servant is to serve for only six years, then go free. Servants would typically be youngsters, and a master might give a male servant a daughter of his as a wife, and by the end of the six years, she might have children. The servant is then not entitled to take them with him; he would have to choose between going out alone or staying as a permanent servant (of which the OT mentions many). The rules for a female servant take another compromise form: either the master lets her be ransomed by her family, or he marries her to his son and treats her as a daughter, or he marries her himself and treats her as a wife—and if he fails in that respect, she simply goes free.

### B. Context of Related Passages

Like a number of other passages in Exod 21–23, this ruling compares with passages from other Middle Eastern legal documents, in particular Hammurabi’s Legal Treatise from the eighteenth century BC. Translations here are taken from Wright (cf. Meek; Roth, “Hammurabi;” Roth, *Law Collections*; Hays). Translations of Hammurabi also use the word slave, though they also refer to servitude. An *awilum* is a landowner.

If an obligation has come due for a man, and he sells his wife, son, or daughter, or he gives any (of them) (alternatively: he surrenders himself) for dependent debt servitude, they shall work in the house of their buyer or creditor for three years. In the fourth year their freedom shall be effected. (Hammurabi #117)

If an obligation has seized a man and he sells his slave-woman who has borne him children, the owner of the slave-woman shall weigh out the silver that the merchant weighed out and effect the release of his slave-woman. (Hammurabi #119)

If a palace-slave or a slave of a commoner marries a woman of the *awı̄lum* class and she bears (him) children, the owner of the slave has no claim of slavery on the children of the woman of the *awı̄lum*-class. (Hammurabi #175)

If a slave should to his master say, “You are not my master,” he shall prove that he is his slave and his owner shall cut off his ear. (Hammurabi #282)

If a man takes (i.e., marries) a woman and *laʼbum*-disease then seizes her, and he decides to take a second (woman), he may marry (her), but he may not divorce (lit.: forsake) his wife whom *laʼbum* disease seized. She shall stay in a dwelling that he builds and he shall support her as long as she lives. (Hammurabi #148; *la’bum* disease may be something like the scourge in Lev 13)

If that woman does not consent to dwell in her husbandʼs house, he shall replace the dowry that she brought from her fatherʼs house, and she may leave. (Hammurabi #149)

Both the Hammurabi rulings and, within the OT, the ruling about servants in Lev 25:35–55 clarifies the background. Someone from your kin group or clan in reduced circumstances cannot support himself or his family, so he surrenders his independence (literally, his hand) to you and becomes your servant. You must not then treat him as if he actually were a servant—that is, someone you own of whom you can make unlimited demands (the word “slave” would then be more appropriate, though it would not imply that you have absolute rights over him). You must treat him as you treat an employee or a guest worker (a foreigner working for you, who can walk out when he wishes). He will serve you only “until the Ram’s Horn year,” the year marked by the blowing of a ram’s horn, a *yobel*—hence the English word Jubilee. “Then he will go free from being with you, he and his children with him,” and go back to his extended family and its land. “Because they are my servants whom I got out from the country of Egypt—they will not sell themselves in the manner of a servant,” a servant you bought, probably a foreigner. “You will not rule over him in a tough way,” making whatever demands you like of him. “You will revere your God.” And if he manages to acquire assets that enable him to make a payment that would cover his obligations up to the Ram’s Horn year, then he has the right to do so, on the basis of some calculation of what will be fair in terms of paying off the debt in light of the time to elapse until the Ram’s Horn year. Alternatively, someone in his extended family might pay off the debt and thus “restore” him (*ga’al*). “Restorer” (*go’el*), the term traditionally translated “redeemer” to describe a family member who acts in that way, comes to be an image for Yahweh as restorer of Israel as his family.

Like Exod 21:2–11, Deut 15:12–18 speaks of a six-year servitude, but varies from it in significant ways. It makes explicit that the ruling applies to a man or a woman; sometimes the covenant document makes that point about a ruling, but Deuteronomy does so more often. And after the six years “you will not send him off empty-handed. You will definitely provide for him from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your wine press, giving to him what Yahweh your God has blessed you with. You will remember that you were a servant in the country of Egypt but Yahweh your God ransomed you” (Deuteronomy here uses the verb *padah* rather than *ga’al*). Deuteronomy reminds the master that he has done well out of having this servant in his household. And it promises Yahweh’s further blessing.

The OT tells no stories about the implementing of any of the rulings about servants. Jer 34 relates one about non-implementation. During the siege of Jerusalem, “King Zedekiah sealed a pledge with the entire people, in Jerusalem, to proclaim a release to them, a person to send off his Hebrew servant and his Hebrew maid, free, so that they should not make servants of them.… They listened and sent them off, but after this they went back and made the servants and the maids go back.… Therefore, Jeremiah says, “Yahweh has said this. You yourselves did not listen to me by proclaiming a release.… Here am I proclaiming a release to you (Yahweh’s affirmation)—to sword, to epidemic, and to famine.”

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Hammurabi’s rulings and the Torah’s rulings are traditionally described as law codes, but the current scholarly view is that neither was a basis on which legal decisions were made. They were more like concrete embodiments of principles, something like treatises in other cultures. In the OT, the covenant document might thus function in a way analogous to the common role of the Scriptures within Christian thinking. It gives illustrations of what is involved in living in covenant and invites the audience to extend what it says into other areas of life (Fretheim, *Exodus*), and to rethink its rulings in other contexts as Leviticus and Deuteronomy do.

The practice of bond-service could in theory provide a way of enabling people to work their way out of debt. It would be a safety net for people in economic trouble. But Jer 34 illustrates how it would require some compromise between the economic interests of a creditor and the needs of a debtor, as is reflected in the Hammurabi and Exodus formulations. It thus requires some regulation both for the benefit of creditors (who might need some incentive to work with the practice) and for the benefit of debtors (who could be in danger of abuse by their creditors). The second-person singular formulation in Exod 21:2 drives the point home to a creditor (Lo).

Exod 21:2–11 is broadly similar to the Hammurabi rulings, but it speaks in terms of six years of servitude (which might be more or less generous to debtors) and suggests no difference between classes. And Hammurabi’s treatise makes justice the responsibility of the king. He sees himself as put in his position by the gods to this end, though he does not say that the treatise’s rulings came from them (Bills). Exodus sets its ruling in the context of the covenant document (24:7), and thus of the relationship between God and people. Exod 21:2–11 is more like a regulation and Lev 25:35–55 and Deut 15:12–18 are more like theological and ethical treatises, though the location of Exod 21:2–11 at the head of the covenant document marks it as already relating to the exodus and thus to ethics and religion (Arneth), a further distinctiveness over against Hammurabi (Lo considers more systematically the way in which the Exodus ruling works in a more liberative fashion).

Leviticus begins its version of the regulation by noting that the person who might be indebted to you is “your relative” (your *’ah*—the word for a “brother”). So if he cannot maintain his independence and you have to take him (and his family) into your family, you mustn’t treat him as a long-term bondservant. Leviticus adds another consideration backing up this requirement. Both debtor and creditor are Yahweh’s servants. Debtors therefore cannot sell themselves, creditors cannot buy them, and creditors cannot treat servants in a tough way.

Whereas the Exodus regulation presupposes an individual bondservant, it implies that this might be a teenage boy or girl (hence someone single). The presupposition might be that their father puts them into servitude while he works to try to get the family back on its feet. But “the primary problem” for the covenant document “was the issue of the creditor’s likely sexual exploitation of a debtor’s daughter given to pay off a debt” (Wright). Leviticus presupposes that the creditor takes on the entire family and makes explicit that the family will go back to their own land. Given that the Ram’s Horn year comes only every fifty years, a servitude might last a lifetime, so it might be a descendant rather than the original debtor who eventually goes back, but either way, the creditor cannot add their land to his own.

Perhaps something in the context pushes Deuteronomy in the direction of more often making explicit that rulings apply to women as well as men. Perhaps it was a prophet such as Huldah, who certainly told the men what to do in response to the discovery of a scroll that seems to have been a version of Deuteronomy (2 Kgs 22:14–20).

### D. Theological Use

Yahweh’s rulings are realistic as well as visionary. They embody “resistance and compliance” (Lo). Their realistic aspect assumes that Yahweh allows for the need to start where people are with their needs and priorities. Their visionary aspect urges them to take other principles into account: debtors and creditors are members of one family. They are both servants of God. Women and men are both members of the human family. Every family has a right to own the land on which it lives. Rulings can appeal to a human instinct for generosity.

## Exodus 21:12–32: Injury and Death

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Exodus goes on to lay down rules for handling situations where someone “strikes down” another person. The verb *nakah hiphil* in Exod 21:12 covers both serious injury and death. The ruling distinguishes between causing someone’s death on purpose, and by accident—"God made [it] happen” (the rare verb *’anah* *piel*), it was “an act of God” (Exod 21:13). The family or community is responsible for the execution of a murderer, but there is to be a place where someone can take refuge from the executioners if they kill someone by accident, though if they acted intentionally, they can be taken from there. Special versions of the different rules apply to injuring a servant, which require the act to be taken seriously but allow for the sense in which the person who does the harm is causing self-injury. And special rules apply when an ox kills a person. To strike down a parent even if it does not result in death, or to put them down (perhaps falsely accusing or disowning them), or to kidnap someone so as to sell them into slavery, counts as an act as serious as killing them. A person who injures someone in a fight or causes a man’s wife to miscarry has to make compensation. In this context Exodus lays down the “life for a life, eye for an eye” rule. The rule might limit redress, but it might also mandate it: “there will be no ‘communal wholeness’” (no *shalom*)“until reparations are made” (*shalam* piel, the verb that occurs thirteen times in 21:34–22:14 [13]) (Brueggemann).

Propp surveys theories on the significance of the “eye for an eye” principle. There are no examples of its implementation in the OT except perhaps Judg 1:6–7 (Johnstone).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The “life for a life” ruling outlaws the action assumed by Lamech in Gen 4:23–24 and provides an example of rulings that prohibit people from imitating actions undertaken by Israel’s ancestors that are described in Genesis (see Carmichael).

Most of the Exodus rulings compare with rulings in Hammurabi and thus combine a context in Genesis and a context in Middle Eastern society. In Exodus, they are set in the context of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel, and are again part of the covenant document. Yet there is some comparison and contrast between Exod 21–23 and Prophets over whether Yahweh is part of the argument: see Isa 10:1–2; Amos 2:6–8; 5:10–13 (Jiang). In Amos, the exodus tradition is utilized as a motivation for the prophecies of doom directed to Israel, and turned against Israel, and radically relativized as an event not unique to Israel (Snyman).

Examples of rulings in Hammurabi, as translated by Wright:

If an *awı̄lum* blinds the eye of a member of the *awı̄lum* class, they shall blind his eye. If he breaks the bone of an *awı̄lum*, they shall break his bone. If he blinds the eye of a commoner or breaks the bone of a commoner, he shall weigh out one mina (sixty shekels) of silver. If he blinds the eye of an *awı̄lum*ʼs slave or breaks the bone of an *awı̄lum*ʼs slave, he shall weigh out half of his value. If an *awı̄lum* knocks out the tooth of an *awı̄lum* of the same rank, they shall knock out his tooth. If he knocks out the tooth of a commoner, he shall weigh out one third mina (twenty shekels) of silver. (#196–201)

If an *awı̄lum* [a landowner] strikes another *awı̄lum* in a fight and injures him, that *awı̄lum* shall swear (saying), “I did not strike him with intent,” and he shall pay the physician. If he dies from his being struck, he shall also swear (as in previous paragraph). If (the victim) is an *awı̄lum*, he shall weigh out one-half mina (= thirty shekels) of silver. If (the victim who dies when struck) is a commoner, he (the assailant *awı̄lum*) shall weigh out one-third mina (= twenty shekels) of silver. If an *awı̄lum* strikes an *awı̄lum*-woman (literally: daughter of an *awı̄lum*) and he causes her to miscarry her fetus, he shall weight out ten shekels of silver for her fetus. If that woman dies, they shall kill his daughter. (#206-10)

If an ox gores a man while passing through the street and kills (him), that case has no claim. If a manʼs ox is a habitual gorer, and his district has informed him that it is a habitual gorer, but he did not file its horns and did not control his ox, and that ox gores a man and kills (him), he shall pay one-half mina of silver [= 30 shekels] and his district has informed him according to whatever is laid upon him. If it is the slave of a free person he shall pay one-third mina of silver to his (the slaveʼs) master and the ox shall be stoned. [= 20 shekels]. (#250–52)

Further: if a son disowns or abandons his adoptive parents, his tongue is to be cut out or his eye plucked out. If he strikes his father, his hand is to be cut off (#192–93, 195). “If a man steals the young child of a man, he shall be put to death” (#14). If someone strikes a pregnant woman and she miscarries and dies, his daughter is to be put to death (#210). Among ways that Exodus contrasts with Hammurabi is in not allowing for such vicarious punishment. It is also more explicit about compensation to victims and restoration to health for them. And it requires that someone who injures his servant has to let him go free (Lo).

While some of the Exodus rulings are clear, some raise questions that the Torah goes on to clarify. Lev 24:10–23 begins with a vivid brief account of two people getting into a fight. The word (*natsah niphal*) is unusual, but it is the verb in Exod 21:22, and it will recur in an overlapping connection in Deut 25:11. One of the fighters is a man of mixed Israelite and Egyptian ethnicity and presumably one of the mixed ethnicity group who left Egypt with the Israelites. He goes on to “vilify” Yahweh’s name (*qalal* *hiphil*), the verb in Exod 21:17 (and Lev 19:14; 20:9). The community consults Yahweh regarding what is to be done, Yahweh says the vilifier must be executed. This leads into a restatement of an “eye for an eye, a life for a life,” which with regard to vilifying Yahweh does mandate literal application of the ruling as opposed to limiting the redress. It also clarifies that “there is one ruling” for non-Israelite and Israelite, and clarifies the process whereby the ruling is implemented: the entire community is involved in stoning the offender.

Num 35 vastly clarifies questions that could be raised by the brief Exodus ruling concerning a place where someone may “flee” if they “strike down” and actually kill someone unintentionally (the verbs *nus* and *nakah* *hiphil*, and the infinitive from *mut* followed by the *hophal*, recur). There will be six asylum towns for someone to flee to. They will also be towns where Levites live, which implies that they have sanctuaries and thus altars, of which the person who killed someone by accident may take hold. They will be safe there from “the blood restorer” who is responsible on behalf of the family and community to see to the execution of a murderer and thus restore order in the situation where the victim’s blood is crying out from the ground (Gen 4:10) and the ground needs to be cleansed. The person can take refuge there while there is some enquiry into whether the killing really was accidental. Num 35 goes on to illustrate circumstances that would suggest deliberate or accidental killing, lays down the principle that execution requires the testimony of more than one alleged witness, and makes explicit that a murderer cannot pay a fine instead of being executed.

Deut 19 has a shorter version of the ruling in Num 35. Scholarly views differ over which is older and thus over the direction of possible dependence. It gives an example of what would count as accidental killing and what would not, and notes the need to avoid adding to the blood staining the land by executing an innocent man. After a note about not stealing a strip of another family’s land, it adds another formulation of the ruling about more than one witness of an offense. This leads into another formulation of “an eye for an eye” that implies another rationale for it: someone who makes a false accusation should suffer the penalty that applied to the false accusation.

Josh 20 also summarizes the ruling in Num 35, clarifying further the process whereby the community adjudicates the case. And 1 Kgs 1–2 narrates occasions when someone claimed the ruling, though not in connection with homicide (see Burnside). Adonijah took hold of the altar horns after his attempt to become king in place of Solomon, and Solomon had him taken down but not executed. He looked as if he was trying again after David’s death, and Solomon had him killed, and banished the priest Abiathar, one of Adonijah’s two key supporters. General Joab, arguably a more dangerous figure, also went and grasped the altar horns, but Solomon had him killed there on the basis of blood he had shed.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Neither Exod 21 nor Hammurabi offers theological or ethical rationale for its judgments. Both may be concerned to safeguard order in the society and limit conflict, in light of theological and ethical assumptions that are taken for granted. Thus one aim is that redress for wrongdoing should work within parameters set by the community, rather than leaving any family or individual to act as they see fit. Among the possible specific concerns are then that redress for wrongdoing should not go beyond something equivalent to the wrong in question (the punishment should fit the crime). But “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” might be a metaphorical way of making this point more broadly. Exodus does compare with Hammurabi in making a distinction between victims of homicide who are servants as opposed to free citizens, a distinction comparable to the one in Hammurabi between an *awilum* and a commoner. But another possible concern is that the same requirements of redress or restitution should apply to everyone; the well-to-do should not be able to evade redress. Redress is physical; monetary payment cannot replace it. Exodus has no provision for monetary compensation in connection with accidental homicide except when someone’s ox attacks a person and the owner was negligent. Within the OT, there is some concern that Israelites should not follow the wayward example of some characters whose story the OT tells. And it is possible to base moral arguments on God's involvement as Israel's master and Israel's covenant obligation to him, or to base the arguments on what is obviously right or wrong without making reference to God (on what might in a Western context be called natural theology or natural ethics).

### D. Theological Use

The various sets of rulings seek to safeguard different principles. One implicit principle is the need for order in the community. The system of justice should see to the execution of proper redress but protect people who should not be treated as murderers when they are not. Redress applies not only to human beings but also to animals. Someone who causes loss to a person should provide compensation to them. People should be treated in the same way whether or not they are full members of Israel. The entire community is involved in the process of redress. The principle of an eye for an eye both mandates redress and sets limits to it. The same standards and sanctions should apply to the well-to-do and the less well-to-do. Rulings that relate to the kind of issue covered in this passage are not laid down once for all; they require rethinking and elaboration in different contexts.

## Exodus 22:21–24 [20–23]: Sojourner, Widow, Orphan

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Within the covenant document, these rulings cover action by people who have a secure place in the community towards people who do not have one, because they have no land—they never had it, or they have lost it through the death of the head of the household. “Membership in a household ordinarily was necessary for survival,” and these rulings protect people who do not belong to a household (Meyers). They are the people without power (Ibn Ezra). People in a strong position in the community are not to afflict a resident alien, because they once were one. They are not to afflict widow or orphan, because Yahweh will hear their cry, be angry with them, put them to death, and thus turn their own wives into widows and their children into orphans. “Any widow or orphan you are not to afflict.… If one does cry out to me, I will definitely listen to their cry, my anger will flare, and I will slaughter you.”

### B. Context of Related Passages

The OT speaks of resident alien, widow, and orphan in a series of contexts and connections. People are not to oppress them if they want Yahweh to live among them and to preserve the city (Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5). They can be the victims of scams or violence (Ps 94:6), and you are not to be unjust or tough with them (Deut 24:17; 27:19). They are to share in the celebration of the Pentecost and Sukkot festivals (Deut 16:11, 14). They partake of the triennial tithe, so that God may bless you (Deut 14:28–29; 26:12–13). They are to share in the harvest of fields and trees (Deut 24:19–21). Yahweh looks after resident alien, widow and orphan (Ps 146:9), sees that justice is done to widow and orphan, and provides for resident alien (Deut 10:18).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Once again the rulings compare with ones in Hammurabi and elsewhere, but they add arguments based on who Yahweh is (one who listens to the cry of people who are abused and is willing to take redress) and on their own human experience and hopes (they know what it's like to be abused, and they would like to see Yahweh's blessing). and on Yahweh’s relationship with the community.

### D. Theological Use

The nature of Yahweh points to policies of care and generosity to resident alien, widow, and orphan that as far as possible enables them to enjoy the same benefits of being members of the community as people who belong to a household and thus have land.

## Exodus 22:25–27 [24–26]: Lending to the Lowly

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The covenant document goes on to the lowly (*‘ani*), who often appear in the company of resident alien, widow, and orphan. It is a more general term for people who have no status or security. The traditional translation is “poor,” and the covenant document’s point about them here is that they may need to borrow money or resources such as grain. They might be people who do have land but whose harvest has failed, or the problem might be taxation. Either way, they need to borrow in order to feed their family and to sow for next year. The covenant document’s point then is that other members of the community (whose harvest has been good and are in a position to make the loan that the lowly person needs) are not to treat lending as a way of making a profit. They are not to be the kind of creditor who charges interest on the loan. They are entitled to take collateral but if the collateral is the debtor’s coat, they must return it before sundown because it is also the debtor’s blanket. This will be a concrete way of Exodus making the point, not the only way a creditor might behave like a creditor. They need to remember that Yahweh listens to the cry of the lowly because he is gracious—which is what the creditor is thus supposed to be. The lowly are “my people” (Ibn Ezra).

### B. Context of Related Passages

Lev 25:35–38 takes up the ban on lending on the basis of paying interest: “When your brother is reduced, and his hand falls with you, and you hold him as a resident or guest worker, and he lives with you, do not get interest or profit from him, but revere your God. The life of your brother being with you, you will not give him your silver on the basis of interest, nor on the basis of profit will you give him his food. I am Yahweh your God who got you out of the country of Egypt to give you the country of Canaan, to be your God” (cf. Deut 23:19–20). Not lending money at interest is one of the qualifications for living on Yahweh’s sacred hill (Ps 15:5) and one of the characteristics of a faithful person (Ezek 18:8, 13, 17), and in the end, lending on interest will not pay (Prov 28:8). Ezek 22:12 critiques the well-to-do for ignoring this principle, and Neh 5 describes a situation in Jerusalem where people had been ignoring it.

The covenant document’s ruling about loans is related to its opening ruling about servanthood, in that debt would commonly be the cause of a person becoming someone else’s servant. In this connection, Deut 15:1–11 has a more substantial ruling about remission of debts.

At the end of seven years you will practice remission.… Of a foreigner you may exact, but what is yours with your relative, your hand will remit. Only, there will not be a needy person among you, because Yahweh will so bless you in the country that Yahweh your God is giving you as a heritage, to possess it, if you do just listen to the voice of Yahweh your God in taking care to act on this entire command that I am giving you today.… When there is a needy person among you from one of your relatives in one of your compounds,… do not make your mind firm. Do not close your hand against your needy relative. Rather, do open your hand to him and do lend him enough for his need that he has. Watch yourself so that there is not the worthless saying in your mind, “The seventh year is near,” the remission year, and your eye is dire against your needy relative, and you do not give him, and he calls against you to Yahweh.… Because needy people will not cease from within the country.

Like Exodus, Deuteronomy works with a seven-year schedule, yet more like Leviticus and unlike Exodus, it assumes that the calendar itself works by seven year periods. Thus someone entering servitude midway through a six-year period has part of his debt remitted when year seven arrives, but Deuteronomy forbids Israelites from taking this into account in connection with lending, and declining to make a loan of grain or other produce that will never be paid back. Like Leviticus, Deuteronomy notes the presupposition that the problem of debt is a family issue, in a broad sense—your debtor is a relative of yours.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Possibly Leviticus’s fifty-year schedule was a more realistic one that takes into account resistance to the seven-year schedule, illustrated by Jer 34. Or perhaps it relates to more serious indebtedness. Once again Lev 25 develops the ruling in Exodus by referring to the needy person being your relative, to your generosity being an expression of your awe for God, and to Yahweh’s having got you out of Egypt. Deut 15 constitutes a profoundly complex reconsideration of the theoretical problem of debt that works with the fact that it should never happen, but it does.

### D. Theological Use

The OT is not here concerned with people getting into debt because of their folly—perhaps their ignoring the tenth commandment. It is talking about economic problems that come to people when they have done nothing to deserve it, and it exposes the paradox involved in the reality of debt. The OT is full of promises that Israel will enjoy a life of plenty in the land that flows with milk and molasses, but many people don’t. Deuteronomy is particularly aware of Yahweh’s promises that his people would do well economically. It is thus odd to think of someone’s farm failing to produce enough food, with the result that he has to borrow from another family. But it happens. It will be tempting to assume that the person whose farm fails is either lazy or stupid, and he may be. Deuteronomy implicitly forbids the hard-working, skilled, and successful farmer from making that possibility an excuse for taking a tough line with another family. One has to be trusting of Yahweh’s promises, realistic about realities, and then practical about coping with the consequences.

## Exodus 23:1–8: Being Community

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

A sequence of separate sayings aims to safeguard a series of significant community issues. Yahweh requires that people’s testimony not be empty (*shaw’*) or facilitating violence (23:1). They must not let bias enter into the deciding of disputes (23:2–3). They must not disregard an enemy’s oxen and donkeys (23:4–5). They must not pervert the judgment due to the needy (23:6). They must not make charges based on falsehood (*sheqer)* (23:7a). They must not let the innocent be slain (23:7b). They must not take bribes (23:8). While Exod 23:1–8 is part of the covenant document, these verses themselves do not make any connection with the covenant, with Yahweh, or with the exodus, as the verses on either side do: you will be sacred to me (22:31 [30]); you will sympathize with the resident alien because you were one in Egypt (23:9). There is no logic about the list: they are just an important collection of principles that have in common the temptation to act in a way that ignores the fact that the people belong to a community.

### B. Context of Related Passages

Proverbs and Deuteronomy are the works with most parallels to these concerns. Proverbs warns against false testimony (e.g., 6:19; 12:17; 14:5), emptiness (*shaw’*) (30:8), violence covering the mouth (10:6, 11; cf. 13:2; 16:29; 26:6), disputes (3:30; 17:14; 25:8; 26:17, 21), perversion of judgment (17:23; 18:5), falsehood (*sheqer*) (12:17, 19, 22), shedding innocent blood (6:17), and bribery (17:8, 23). Deuteronomy warns against malicious testimony (19:16–17), falsehood (*sheqer*) (19:18), disputes (17:8; 21:5; 25:1), perversion of judgment (16:19; 24:17; 27:19), ignoring the ox and donkey that strays (22:1–4), shedding innocent blood (19:10, 13; 21:8, 9), and bribery (16:19; 27:25). There is thus substantial identity between Yahweh’s practical expectations in the different social contexts presupposed by Exodus and Deuteronomy. There is also substantial identity between the expectations of the Torah and the expectations of a didactic work like Proverbs. And there is thus substantial identity between what Yahweh expects of people on the basis of his revelation in the Torah and on the basis of the teaching in Proverbs based on human experience. But the verses in Deuteronomy equivalent to the ones in Exodus are more inclined to bring Yahweh in than Exodus does (e.g., 16:18–20; 17:8; 19:10, 17; 21:5, 8–9; 24:17–18). While the verses in Proverbs are mostly one-line aphorisms, they are set in the context of affirmations about Yahweh that make their theo-logic similar to that of Exodus and Deuteronomy. But Proverbs is distinctive for making no reference to exodus or covenant, so that its affirmations stand on their own authority, like the Exodus ones. In different ways, Deuteronomy and Proverbs put flesh on Exodus.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

 Typically, Deuteronomy works by providing more basis than Exodus does in who Yahweh is. It makes links with what is right in terms of faithfulness to other people within the community (*tsedeq*). It makes links with the long life Yahweh will enable people to live in the land. It sets decision-making in the context of the sanctuary and the work of priests. It sets requirements in the context of the obligations that neighbours have to one another. It takes into account the importance of the land not being stained by innocent blood. And typically, Proverbs works by taking for granted the teaching about integrity and waywardness that has always been part of the community’s worldview and the learning of the family.

### D. Theological Use

The discussion of 21:1–11, 12–32, and 22:21–24 [20–23] has indicated how Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Proverbs parallel ancient Middle Eastern texts in their principles of behavior (e.g., insistence on truthful testimony), affirming principles widely accepted in human communities and needed to make the community work. Theologically one can see this as reflecting aspects of God’s creating humanity with a built-in awareness of right and wrong. In different ways Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Proverbs then set the insights of natural theology or natural ethics into the context of Yahweh’s involvement with Israel.

## Exodus 23:23–33: Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, Jebusites Again

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

Yahweh affirms that his aide (*mal’ak*, traditionally “angel”) will go in front of the Israelites and bring them to these six nations, whom Yahweh will “efface”: this uncommon and equivocal verb (*kahad*) can mean hide, ruin, destroy, or disown. The Israelites are not to bow down to their gods, but rather demolish them. Yahweh will send off terror of him in front of the Israelites, throw (*hamam*) the people they come to into confusion (move (hamam) to here), and cause them to retreat. He will send a “scourge” in front of them that will “drive them out” (*garash*). The noun for “scourge” (*tsir‘ah*) is a rare variant on the word in Lev 13 for a deformity that attacks people (cf. the comment on 21:1–11). Yahweh will drive these nations out gradually, not all at once, but he will give them into the Israelites’ hand, and they will drive them out.

“The theology of holy war” is developed in 23:20–33 (Dozeman; see the comment on Exod 17).

### B. Context of Related Passages

As the Israelites arrive on the edge of the promised land, the Canaanites in Arad, in the Negeb, attack them and take some captive (Num 21:1–3). The Israelites then promise to “devote” their towns if Yahweh gives them into the Israelites’ power. The verb for “devote” (*haram* *hiphil*)is traditionally translated “annihilate,” and it does often imply putting people to death, but its distinctive connotation lies in denoting an irrevocable giving over to God, which sometimes does not imply killing. Yahweh agrees, and gives Arad over to the Israelites, and they devote them and their towns. In Deut 7:2, Yahweh speaks of “removing” or “clearing out” the peoples in Canaan (*nashal*, another rare verb), and in Deuteronomy he repeatedly speaks of himself and of the Israelites “dispossessing” the Canaanites, and thus of the Israelites coming to “possess” the country themselves (*yarash* *qal* and *hiphil*). In Deut 7:1 Yahweh also commissions the Israelites to “devote” them (see further Fishbane). In Joshua this becomes a default way to describe the Israelites’ action. Yet Joshua also notes that the Israelites did not actually “dispossess” the peoples in the country. Sometimes they simply *did* not dispossess them, sometimes they *could* not (Josh 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12, 13). The “scourge” reappears in Deut 7:20 and Josh 24:12. The list of nations reappears in Ezra 9:1-2 in connection with Israelites compromising their commitment to Yahweh through marrying people from the later equivalents of these nations (see the comments on 3:17), though there is no talk in this later context of "devoting" them, only of staying properly separate.

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Exodus and the succeeding books speak in a fashion that is simultaneously confusing and illuminating about the Israelites and the Canaanites. All agree that it was Yahweh’s intent that the Israelites should become the occupants of the country in place of its previous inhabitants. Exodus implies that Yahweh will make them disappear, driving them out in a way that makes it possible for the Israelites to drive them out. It thus speaks in terms of ethnic cleansing, though not of slaughter. Deuteronomy and Joshua do speak in terms of slaughter, but think of this slaughter as something like a sacrifice. This way of thinking begins as the Israelites’ idea, not Yahweh’s. They suggest following a practice and conceptualization known elsewhere. It is illustrated in a Moabite king’s description of one of his victories, the Mesha Stele (Albright; Smelik). Yahweh adopts Israel’s proposal with gusto, though Joshua indicates that devoting did not happen. The OT shows that the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, with the results of which Exodus warns.

### D. Theological Use

The texts point to the interaction between what Yahweh seeks and what Israel does, through which he works. Exodus does not say that the Canaanites deserved to be expelled from their land or killed, any more than did (for instance) Native Americans who were displaced by Europeans, or the people who had earlier been displaced by the Native Americans, or the Celts in England who were displaced by the Anglo-Saxons. In this way Exodus differs from Gen 15:16 and Lev 18:24-28. It is just the way history works, which Yahweh works with.

## Exodus 24:9–18; 33:7–11, 20–22; 34:29–35: Seeing God’s Face

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The Israelite leaders and elders “saw the God of Israel.… They beheld God.… The appearance of Yahweh’s splendor [was] like consuming fire on the top of the mountain before the Israelites’ eyes” (24:9–11, 17). And subsequently, following Yahweh’s issuing a set of instructions for the construction of a sanctuary with a meeting tent and the people’s getting Aaron to make gods for them, Moses approached or entreated or placated the face of Yahweh his God (*halah* piel) (32:11). Then before the implementing of the instructions in Exod 25–31, Moses erected a small-scale meeting tent where Yahweh would speak with him “face-to-face” (33:7–11). Moses or anyone else could consult Yahweh there, and Yahweh would respond to Moses’s questions. This tent is something like one Israel would actually have had through the wilderness and would have taken into Canaan, and a later version was incorporated in the temple.

For the future, Yahweh promised, “My face, it will go, and I will bring about settling for you,” and Moses replied, “If your face is not going, don’t make us go up from here” (33:14–15). Moses went on to ask Yahweh to let him see his splendor, if he is to take the people up to Canaan. Yahweh says Moses can see his goodness, as the one who will be gracious and compassionate to whomever he wishes, but not his splendor. He can see his back, “the traces of His presence, the afterglow of His supernatural effulgence” (Sarna). But his face “will not let itself be seen” (33:20–22).

When Moses subsequently went up and then came down the mountain (34:29–35), his face “horned” (*qaran*; a horn is a *qeren*) or “shafted” or “beamed” (Kass). The verb suggests something that looked like horns, shining rays. Moses manifested an “awe-inspiring radiance,” in an “afterglow of the refulgent splendor of the Divine Presence” (Sarna).

### B. Context of Related Passages

The first person who saw God may have been Hagar (Gen 16:13), though her words are appropriately enigmatic in speaking of her experience. She calls Yahweh “God of my seeing,” which might denote her seeing God or God seeing her. After his enigmatic experience, Jacob says, “I have seen God face to face, and my life has escaped” (*natsal* niphal; Gen 32:30 [31]): or does he mean he saw a god, a supernatural being? Micaiah says that he saw Yahweh on his throne and overheard him speak (1 Kgs 22:19), as does Amos (Amos 9:1), and Isaiah (Isa 6:1). But this prophetic seeing in a vision seems a different kind of seeing. Ezekiel sees God in a vision, too, though he is more restrained in speaking of what he saw (Ezek 1:26–28), and Exodus and Ezekiel both add “something like” (Brueggemann). Ezekiel is more expansive in speaking of Yahweh’s visionary temple (Ezek 40–48). This might make one understand him as a new Moses (McKeating; Idestrom), though he does not here speak of seeing God. “Beheld” (*hazah*) suggests a more prophetic form of perception (Childs; cf. Ibn Ezra), perhaps a mystical seeing (Scarlata)

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Exod 24 is unique for its boldness in speaking of seeing God. As Genesis maintains some ambiguity about what Hagar and Jacob saw (an aide? a person? a supernatural being? or God himself?), so the Exodus passages leave some ambiguity about the sense in which Moses did see God. LXX neatly removes the idea of seeing God from Exod 24 (Festa) and has the Israelites seeing the place where Yahweh stood, a formulation that parallels Ezek 1.

### D. Theological Use

“The dialogue between Moses and God in Exodus 33 is one of the most mysterious and complex in the Hebrew Bible and raises acutely issues of metaphoricity, corporeality, and ineffability in relation to God” (Landy ). Exodus and other passages acknowledge that the idea of seeing God is perplexing, perhaps unfathomable and inexplicable. By nature Yahweh is not bodily or visible, as human beings are, and therefore by definition he cannot be seen. Yet the Scriptures also indicate that he can decide to take human form. If he does, it might be inevitable that his human form would be so dazzling as to consume anyone who looked at him. In other contexts, he appears shrouded in a cloud that both reveals and conceals him. And the texts that speak of individuals seeing him can also imply that he shields his splendor even while revealing it. His explanation to Moses in Exod 33:20–22 is particularly thought-provoking. In response to Moses’s request to see his splendor, he seems to give a qualified “Yes”: Moses can see his goodness (that is, his grace and compassion). By implication, that *is* his splendor. Yet there is another aspect to this splendor that would be too dangerous to behold. So Moses can see his back as he leaves, but not his face as he comes.

## Exodus 25–31; 35-40: Sanctuary, Chest, Table, Lampstand, Dwelling, Altar

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The wide-ranging instructions in Exod 20–23 issued from Moses’s going up the mountain to meet with God. In Exod 25–30 God gives Moses another set of instructions concerning building Yahweh a sanctuary (*miqdash*; 25:8), a dwelling (*mishkan*; 25:9; the traditional translation is “tabernacle”). It will be made possible by the people’s gifts (25:1–9). It will have a chest (*’aron*,traditionally “ark”) to contain stones inscribed with the terms of the covenant, a gold cover for the chest, two gold griffins (the *cherubim*) to stand above it, a table for presence bread, a lampstand (a *menorah*), and an altar for burning incense. (The English word cherubim is simply a transliteration of a Hebrew word—they were apparently like griffins, entities that combine features of an animals and a bird.) Above, there will be curtaining over a wooden frame, so that it is also possible to call the structure a tent (*’ohel*, also traditionally translated “tabernacle”), specifically a meeting tent (*’ohel mo‘ed*). Within the tent will be further curtaining, dividing it into two rooms. Outside the tent will be a courtyard, a plaza surrounded by further curtaining, and in the plaza an altar for sacrifices and a basin for priests to cleanse their hands and feet. The chapters also contain specifications for robes that the priests will wear, and for the priests’ ordination.

After the story of rebellion in Exod 32, it is perhaps surprising as well as encouraging to read of the implementing of the instructions for the sanctuary (Exod 35–40). The priests’ ordination will come in Lev 8–9.

### B. Context of Related Passages

Genesis often refers to altars and sacrifices, though not to sanctuaries. Israel’s ancestors were of no fixed abode, and their God was of no earthly abode at all.

Like the treatise in Exod 21–23, the prescription for a sanctuary bears comparison with Mesopotamian equivalents. *When on High* (*Enuma Elish*; e.g., Speiser; Foster; Hays; Lambert) holds together creation, the sovereignty of a supreme deity, the building of a capital city, and the building of a temple. Exodus makes no link between sanctuary and king or city, and its sanctuary is capable of being on the move, not something built of solid materials and fixed in its location (Dozeman).

While the OT often refers to sanctuary, altar, and covenant chest, two contexts manifest particular overlap with Exod 25–31 and 35–40, the account of Solomon’s temple building in Jerusalem (especially the version in 2 Chr 3–4) and Ezekiel’s vision of a new sanctuary (Ezek 40–47). David had set up in Jerusalem the current version of Moses’s dwelling (see the comment on 33:7–11), of which Solomon’s temple is then a replacement or continuation. It can be described anachronistically as a tent, though more realistically David said he wanted to build Yahweh a house, which is what Yahweh is unenthusiastic about (2 Sam 7). There is continuity and discontinuity between the Exodus tent and the Chronicles house.

Whereas in Samuel-Kings, David and Solomon work out for themselves how to build a temple, in Chronicles David gives Solomon a plan (*tabnit* ) to implement, which he had received from Yahweh (1 Chr 28:11–19), as Yahweh gave Moses a plan (Exod 25:9) (Albertz), and Solomon has a 'master-builder' equivalent to Bezalel (Exod 31) (Boda). Chronicles thus underlines how Solomon's temple (and by implication the temple in Chronicles' day) stood in continuity with the Exodus sanctuary. While the Chronicles account of the temple mostly corresponds to the Kings account, one difference is that 2 Chr 3:14 describes the curtain that separated off the especially sacred, inner room within the sanctuary, which 1 Kings does not refer to, but Exod 26:31-35 describes. Samuel-Kings does not refer to the temple as the sanctuary, the term Exodus uses once, Leviticus and Ezekiel frequently, and Chronicles occasionally (e.g., 1 Chr 22:19). Ezekiel once uses the word 'tent' in connection with the visionary temple (41:1)--an odd usage in the context, which makes the link with Exodus more striking. The dimensions of the visionary temple with their use of hundred-cubit measures (e.g., 40:27) sometimes correspond in distinctive ways with those of the wilderness dwelling: e.g., Exod 27:9-13. The process for the dedication of the altar and the talk of "filling the priests' hands" (an expression for ordination) in 43:18-27 compares with that in Exod 29:35-37.

As the cloud indicating yet concealing Yahweh’s presence came down on the wilderness dwelling on its completion, and Yahweh’s splendor filled the dwelling (Exod 40:34–35), so the cloud and Yahweh’s splendor filled Yahweh’s house on its completion (1 Kgs 8:10–11; 2 Chr 5:13–14; 7:1–3). Yahweh’s splendor that left the temple in 587 filled it again in Ezekiel’s visions (Ezek 10:18; 44:4).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

Chronicles’ use of expressions from Exodus confirms the unity between wilderness dwelling and Solomonic temple. Josephus (e.g., Jewish War V.5.4) refers to the temple veil as a feature of the Second Temple, so the Chronicles reference would signify for people in Second Temple times that the temple that it knew corresponded at this point to the wilderness dwelling described in Exodus. Ezekiel’s use of expressions from Exodus confirms Yahweh’s promise that the wilderness dwelling is still a reality in Yahweh’s vision.

### D. Theological Use

Between them, these passages suggest a wide-ranging understanding of the place where Yahweh is present with his people. It can be a moveable tent dwelling, which matches Yahweh’s being a God who likes to be on the move with his people. It is a house, where he really does live. It is a sanctuary, a place set apart that needs to be treated as sacred and not allowed to become an ordinary place and lose its specialness. While “temple” becomes a metaphor for Jesus and for the church in the NT, Jesus’s followers still took part in the worship of the literal temple, and in due course they were building places of worship that they could call a sanctuary or house of God—or a church, oddly, because a church is a body of people, so that instead of the building becoming a body, the body of people becomes a building. In his grace God matches his relationship to his people with their nature and life. They are on the move, so he meets with them in a dwelling they can take along with them. They live in houses, so he is willing even if not enthusiastic about living in a house. The house gets devastated but he is willing for his people to rebuild it. Yet his visionary sanctuary reminds them not to let their vision be too small.

## Exodus 32:1–33:6: Covenant Breaking and Redress

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

After chapters 25–31, Exod 32 is shocking, “almost numbing” (Enns). In light of Moses’s apparent disappearance on the mountain, the people urge Aaron to make gods to lead them. Aaron collects their jewelry, melts it down, and makes it into a gold bullock. They exclaim, “These are your gods, Israel, that got you up from the country of Egypt.” Perhaps they mean “these are your God” or they don’t mean it too literally and the bullock is a pedestal on which they could think of the invisible God enthroned, like the griffins (*cherubim*) that have been prescribed for the sanctuary (Sarna).Aaron then builds an altar and the people offer sacrifices and shared offerings, eat and drink and dance. Yahweh is aware of all this and tells Moses to go down the mountain, but also declares the intention to annihilate them and start again with Moses. “Moses does not flinch” (Johnstone) but urges Yahweh not to do so, and Yahweh relents.

Moses goes down, smashes the stones inscribed with the covenant testimony, burns and grinds up the bullock, and makes the Israelites drink it. He also challenges whoever identifies with Yahweh to join him. The men of the Levi clan do, and they slaughter 3,000 people in the camp.

Moses urges Yahweh to carry their offence, or otherwise erase Moses’s name from his book. Yahweh refuses to do that and commissions Moses to lead the people on to Canaan, with his aide going ahead. He also causes an epidemic among them. They take off their ornaments.

### B. Context of Related Passages

The OT has two overt parallel accounts of the events in Exod 32 and several more covert allusions. Moses’s recollection in Deut 9:8–29 is much shorter than the Exodus account, more concerned in its context with a bigger picture (Johnstone). It adds Moses’s forty days’ prostration and intercession before Yahweh, and thus emphasizes Moses’s mediation (Dozeman).

Ps 106:19–23 tells the story against the bigger picture of Exodus and OT faith:

They exchanged their splendor

 for the pattern of a bull eating grass.

They forgot God, one delivering them,

 doing great things in Egypt,

Marvels in Ham’s country,

 wonders at the Red Sea.

He said he would destroy them

had not Moses his chosen

Stood in the breach in front of his face

to turn back his wrath from destroying.

Ps 90 begins “A prayer of Moses,” but the Targum’s introduction reads, “A prayer of Moses the prophet, when the people of Israel sinned in the wilderness,” and the psalm prays in words paralleling Exod 32. Moses urges and pleads, “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He got them out… to consume them….’ Turn from the blazing of your anger and be merciful regarding the calamity for your people” (Exod 32:12). The psalm urges and pleads, “We are consumed by your anger.… Turn, Yahweh,… and be merciful regarding your servants” (Ps 90:7, 12) (Fishbane).

The covert parallel narrative comes in 1 Kgs 12–13. After the northern clans make Jeroboam ben Nebat their king, he makes two gold bullocks, declaring, “There, your gods, Israel, that got you up from the country of Egypt” (1 Kgs 12:28). He sets them up in Bethel and Dan, establishes other aspects of a worship and festival system that would be equivalent to Judah’s, and himself presides at a festival at Bethel. A divine man then comes and declares judgment on the Bethel altar and on Jeroboam. Given the parallels, Exod 32 has been seen as an allegory of the Jeroboam story (Oblath). The exodus story has also been seen as formulated as a critique of Solomon (Särkiö). The specific links include references to conscript labor (*mas*), building storage towns, experiencing hard servitude, and bearing burdens (*sabbal, sebel*, *sebalah* ; Exod 1:11, 14; 2:11; 5:4–5; 6:6–9; 1 Kgs 5:13, 15 [27, 29]; 9:19; 11:28; 12:4) (e.g., G. I. Davies; Johnstone; S. K. Sweeney). Even if *’elohim* in Exod 32:4 actually refers to God, as Neh 9:18 assumes with its singular verb (Fishbane),the plural *’elohim* with its plural verb would encourage people to make a link with 1 Kgs 12, and they might have a background there (Scarlata; cf. Dozeman). The Exodus story might then be a parody of the Jeroboam story (Propp).

“What gives the story such a cutting edge is its penetrating insight that religion itself can be the means to disobedience” (Childs). In 2 Kings the further element in that cutting edge is the subordination of religion to politics.

Whereas they made a king, it was not through me;

 whereas they made officials, I had not acknowledged them.

Of their silver and their gold

 they made themselves idols.

In order that it may be cut down,

he has rebuffed your bullock, Samaria.

My anger has blazed up against them—

 how long will they be incapable of being free of guilt?

6Because it was from Israel

 and it—a craftsman made it.

So it’s not a god;

 because broken bits is what it will become, Samaria’s bullock. (Hos 8:4–6)

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

The stories work by implicitly portraying the two events or sets of events alongside each other, so as to suggest that the Israelites’ action at Sinai is as despicable as that of the Ephraimites and perhaps that of Solomon, and that the Ephraimites’ action after their split from Jerusalem is as despicable as that of the Israelites in Exodus.

### D. Theological Use

The parallels between the stories in Exodus and 2 Kings suggests a series of points. Worship arrangements have to be as mandated by Yahweh, and as mandated by Yahweh they exclude the making of images. They cannot have as key function the encouraging the people of God when they feel insecure or abandoned. The leadership of the people of God have to be wary of falling into the same practices as the nations that oppress the people of God. Ignoring such principles endangers the leadership of the people of God and endangers the ongoing relationship of the people of God with God.

Exodus and Deuteronomy share a portrayal of Yahweh as holding together a series of stances in relation to the waywardness of the people of God. One might put them as a series of questions.

Read

Is Yahweh to ignore their perversity? Is he to cast them off as his people and start again? Is he bound by his promises to them? Is he to treat their action as imperiling his covenant with them? Is he to discipline them in some severe fashion? Is he to yield to his servant’s intercession for them? Is he to modify the nature of his relationship with them? Can he incline to one action and then relent of it?

The Exodus narrative makes clear that these questions stand in tension with each other, but that none can be dismissed. They are all proper questions that the audience of Exodus and Deuteronomy need to think about.

Neither the story nor the page from Moses’s memoir in Deuteronomy speaks only of Yahweh’s action. They also note Moses’s role as mediator and intercessor. As Yahweh determines how to work with the contrary demands expressed in those questions, he does so in dialogue with Moses and using Moses as his agent. Moses’s role as mediator and intercessor in Exodus and Deuteronomy features in a telling image in Ps 106: Moses stands in the breach in front of Yahweh. The image implies that there is a gap in the city’s defenses through which the attacker may find his way into the city, but a brave warrior stands in the gap. Yahweh in his wrath is the attacker and Moses stands up to him (cf. Ezek 22:30). Amos and Jeremiah compare with Moses as intercessor, and their vocation, too, is to seek to persuade Yahweh to relent (*naham* niphal). Sometimes they are successful, sometimes not, because they, too, are dealing with the reality of the pressures on Yahweh implied by the list of questions above. Different ones get priority at different times.

## Exodus 34: Covenant Renewal and Systematic Theology

### A. Context of Passage Containing Textual Affinities

The Decalogue lays out the fundamental terms of the covenant, so Moses’s shattering the stones inscribed with the Decalogue implies that the covenant is not merely broken but annulled. Yet the subsequent exchanges between Yahweh and Moses have implied that Yahweh is not finished with Israel. In the context of covenant, punishment can be positive chastisement (Granados). Yahweh now intends to reinscribe the Decalogue. In doing so, he proclaims a “new revelation of the name Yahweh” that is “filled with pathos” (Dozeman):

Yahweh, God (*’el*) compassionate and gracious, long-tempered and big in commitment and truthfulness, keeping commitment to thousands, carrying waywardness, rebellion, and offence, but he certainly does not acquit, visiting parents’ waywardness on children and on grandchildren, as far as fourths [in generations]. (Exod 34:6–7)

There follows a sealing of the covenant, and the laying down of a further set of expectations, in 34:10–28 (see the comment on 20:1–17).

### B. Context of Related Passages

Variants on the words in 34:6–7 recur through the OT (Barker; Barriocanal, “Tensión”; Fishbane). I guess you will want to remove the bullet points from what follows but it would require more revision to turn them into prose. Maybe they can stay as they are without the bullet points. If not, ask me to rework the paragraph

* Yahweh, long-tempered and big in commitment, carrying waywardness and rebellion but he certainly does not acquit, visiting parents waywardness on children, on thirds and on fourths. (Num 14:18)
* God [*’eloah*] of great pardon, gracious and compassionate, long-tempered and big in commitment, and he did not abandon them. (Neh 9:17)
* Has his commitment ceased for all time?… Has God (*’el*) forgotten [how] to be gracious or stifled his compassion in anger? (Ps 77:8–9 [9–10])
* God [*’el*] compassionate and gracious, long-tempered and big in commitment and truthfulness, turn your face to me and be gracious to me. (Ps 86:15–16)
* Yahweh is compassionate and gracious, long-tempered and big in commitment—he does not contend forever. (Ps 103:8–9)
* Yahweh is gracious and compassionate, long-tempered and large in commitment. (Ps 145:8)
* He is compassionate and gracious, long-tempered and big in commitment, and he relents of dire action. (Joel 2:13)
* You are a God [*’el*] gracious and compassionate, long-tempered and big in commitment, and you relent of dire action. (Jonah 4:2)
* Who is a God (*’el*) like you, carrying waywardness, passing over rebellion for what remains of his heritage—he has not made his anger strong for all time, because he delights in commitment. (Micah 7:18)
* Yahweh is a God of great passion and takes redress—Yahweh takes redress and is master of wrath. Yahweh takes redress on his adversaries and rages against his foes. Yahweh is long-tempered and large in might but he certainly does not acquit. (Nahum 1:2–3)

Other passages refer to elements within this self-description such as “gracious and compassionate,” and may be allusions to it (e.g., 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:31; Pss 111:4; 116:5).

### C. Exegetical Techniques/Hermeneutics Employed

In Num 14:18, Moses makes Yahweh’s self-description a basis for petitioning Yahweh to behave towards the Israelites as he did in Exod 32, not long previously. The Levites in Neh 9:17–18 recall how at that moment Yahweh did behave in accordance with the self-description. Ps 86:15–16 provides a petitioner with these same words to pray in a situation of need. In Joel 2:13 the prophet invites the community to hear Yahweh speaking of himself in these terms and to turn to him, in a context when they are afflicted by an epidemic or an invasion pictured in terms of an epidemic. Ps 103:8–9 and 145:8 make these words a basis for praise (Coniglio). And Micah 7:18–20 makes them a basis for confidence for the future in a context where Israel has experienced Yahweh “visiting” it (cf. Bullock). But it can seem that he has given up on the characteristics in the self-description (Ps 77; Harman).

Other appeals to this description of Yahweh are more subtle or confrontational. Jon 4:2 takes it up with irony. Yahweh has relented of the intention to take action against Israel’s imperial oppressor, and Jonah is displeased because he wanted to see the oppressor put down. The trouble is, Yahweh is gracious and compassionate, long-tempered and big in commitment, and relents of dire action. It has been nice for Jonah himself that Yahweh is that way (Jonah does not note or notice), but Jonah does not wish it to extend to an imperial oppressor (see Hallstrom; Giménez-Rico). Jonah is not merely being exclusivist over against anyone outside Israel. The point is that this is Assyria. And his objection to Exod 34:6–7 links with Nahum’s taking up these words but reworking them in an adventurous way to which some ambiguity attaches. Nahum pronounces the judgment on Assyria that Jonah was sent to declare, and hearing him do so would be an encouragement to Judah. Yet Nahum hardly names Assyria or Nineveh (after 1:1, only in 2:8; 3:7 and 18), so Judah will have to be careful of assuming that his words don’t apply to it (Cook).

### D. Theological Use

The covenant of grace had ensured the continued existence of Israel, but the mutual covenant had almost led to its destruction. Based on the new articulation of Yahweh’s character in Exod 34:6–7, Moses makes another new covenant (34:10; Hammer). There are two sides to Yahweh’s self-description. He is gracious and faithful, but he does not just ignore waywardness. Yet in his self-definition, graciousness and faithfulness come first and occupy more space than commitment to taking action against waywardness. Thus Exodus’s “presence-absence-presence” narrative (Durham) closes with presence.

Exod 34:6–7 sums up the OT’s systematic theology. It is the guarantee of Israel’s future, but it warns Israel against walking into chastisement.

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1. In some printed Hebrew Bibles, the commands concerning slaughter, adultery, stealing, and testimony are one verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the footnote to the heading to the comment on 20:1–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)