The Justice of Exodus

by

Nathan Bills

Date: April 19, 2018

Approved:

Stephen B. Chapman, Supervisor

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Laura S. Lieber

Tremper Longman III

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the theme of justice through the whole narrative of Exodus. Its aim is to explicate how YHWH's reclamation of Israel for service-worship as narrated in Exodus reveals a distinct theological ethic of justice that is grounded in YHWH's character and Israel's calling within YHWH's creational agenda. It adopts a synchronic, text immanent interpretative strategy which takes specific note of canonical and inner-biblical connections. This exposition gives particular attention to two other overlapping motifs in Exodus that help illuminate the theme of justice. First, it considers throughout the importance of Israel's creation traditions for grounding Exodus's theology of justice. It shows that the ethical disposition of justice imprinted upon Israel in the events of Exodus is built upon and is an application of YHWH's creational agenda of justice. This becomes evident when Exodus is understood against the backdrop of creation theology and as a continuation of the plot of Genesis, a reading that Exodus itself invites. Second, because the book of Exodus functions as a pedagogical narrative—i.e., a persuasive story that is meant to form readers in normative, paradigmatic ways, this work highlights how an educational agenda is woven throughout the text. The narrative gives heightened attention to the way YHWH catechizes Israel in what it means to be the particular beneficiary and creational emissary of YHWH's justice. The interpretative lenses of creation theology and pedagogy furthermore help in explaining why Israel's salvation and shaping, in turn, embodies a programmatic applicability of YHWH's justice for the wider world.

DEDICATION

For Jenni my love and partner in the gospel.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT IV

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS VI

1. JUSTICE AND EXODUS 8

1.1 Introduction 8

1.2 Centrality of the Exodus 12

1.3 Purpose of this Study 20

1.4 Recent Discussion on the Justice of Exodus 21

1.4.1 Universal or Particular Justice in Exodus 22

1.4.2 Exodus, Creation Theology, and Hegemony 24

1.4.3 Exodus, Deliverance, and Election 27

1.4.4 The Justice of Exodus for the Church 32

1.5 A Reading Strategy for Exodus 34

1.5.1 A "Text Immanent" Approach 36

1.5.2 A Cultural Memory Approach 42

1.6 Overview of this Study 60

2. DEFINING JUSTICE: JUSTICE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND ISRAEL 64

2.1 Introduction 64

2.2 A Sketch of the Ideological Background of Justice in the Ancient Near East 65

2.3 Old Testament Language for Justice: *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* 76

2.4 Doing "Justice And Righteousness": What Does It Entail? 84

2.5 Excursus: Identifying the Poor 88

2.6 The Creational Imprint of YHWH's Justice 96

2.6.1 YHWH's Justice and Psalms 97

2.6.2 YHWH's Justice and Proverbs 101
2.6.3 YHWH's Justice and the Prophets 106
2.6.4 YHWH's Justice and the Law 112
2.6.5 Summary 114
2.7 Human Responsibility for Justice in Israel 114
2.7.1 Justice and the Human King 115
2.7.2 Justice and the Individual 120
2.8 Justice in Genesis as a Prelude to Exodus 122
2.9 Conclusion 135
3. JUSTICE UNDER THREAT: EXODUS 1-4 137
3.1 Introduction 137
3.2 Exodus 1 140
3.2.1 Exodus 1:1-7 140
3.2.2 Exodus 1:8-14 144
3.2.3 Exodus 1:15-21 153
3.3 Exodus 2 158
3.3.1 Exodus 1:22-2:10 161
3.3.2 Exodus 2:11-22 167
3.3.3 Exodus 2:23-25 178
3.4 Exodus 3-4 187
3.4.1 YHWH, Moses, and Identity 188
3.4.2 A Second Attempt on Moses's Life 194
3.5 Conclusion 198
4. JUSTICE CHAMPIONED: EXODUS 5-15 201
4.1 Introduction 201

4.2 Exodus 5-6 203
4.2.1 “Send out my people so that they may serve me.” 203
4.2.2 “Who is YHWH that I should heed his voice . . . ? I know not YHWH.” 212
4.3 Exodus 7-13 217
4.3.1 The Plagues 218
4.3.2 Summary 230
4.3.3 Pharaoh’s Hard Heart 233
4.3.4 Summary 249
4.3.5 The Final Plague on the Firstborn 253
4.3.6 The Despoliation of Egypt 261
4.4 Exodus 14-15 266
4.5 Conclusion 276
5. SUMMONED TO JUSTICE: EXODUS 15-24 279
5.1 Introduction 279
5.2 Exodus 15:22-18:27 281
5.2.1 Wilderness “Testing” as Pedagogy 282
5.2.2 Learning YHWH’s Creational Justice in the Wilderness 288
5.2.3 Summary 300
5.3 Exodus 19-24 301
5.3.1 Exodus 19:4-6: A Priestly Royalty and Holy Nation 304
5.3.2 The Law Collection 321
5.3.3 Summary 333
5.4 Conclusion 334
6. BUILDING FOR JUSTICE: EXODUS 25-40 337
6.1 Introduction 337

6.2 Excursus: Identifying the Tabernacle 340
6.3 The Tabernacle: Exodus 25-31, 35-40 343
6.3.1 Learning to Serve-Worship YHWH by Building Justly 348
6.3.2 The Creational Anatomy of the Tabernacle Account 356
6.3.3 Summary 366
6.4 The Golden Calf Debacle: Exodus 32-34 367
6.4.1 Exodus 32: Creational Chaos, Egyptian Disorder 370
6.4.2 Exodus 32-33: Mediation of the Justice Crisis 379
6.4.3 Exodus 34: The Justice of Restoration 391
6.4.4 Summary 402
6.5 Return to the Tabernacle 403
6.6 Conclusion 407
7. CONCLUSION 409
7.1 Introduction 409
7.2 Universal and Particular Justice in Exodus 410
7.3 Exodus, Creation Theology, and Transformation of Oppressive Hegemony 413
7.4 Exodus, Deliverance, and Election 416
7.5 The Justice of Exodus for the Church 418
7.5.1 The Justice of Exodus and the Church's Justice 418
7.5.2 Justice and Pedagogy 423
7.7 Conclusion 427
BIBLIOGRAPHY 429
BIOGRAPHY 487

1. JUSTICE AND EXODUS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, church interest and participation in "justice" activities appear to have intensified among many branches of North American Christianity. A spate of recent books and conferences attests to the heightened popularity of the intersection of church and justice, particularly in relationship to issues of poverty.[1] For Catholic Americans the coronation of Pope Francis has signaled a renewed commitment to social justice, a concern that a 2012 poll found a majority of American Catholics favor.[2] A 2013 survey conducted by Lifeway Research reports that "there is a growing awareness of and

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[1] A sampling of books from across the spectrum: Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, eds., *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Peter Greer and Phil Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World Out of Poverty* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Mae Elise Cannon, *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . And Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009); Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009); Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us? The Answer That Changed My Life and Might Just Change the World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009); Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011); Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2017). One can now acquire a justice-themed Bible, e.g., *The Poverty and Justice Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 2009); *God's Justice: The Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). Christian conferences addressing the issues of justice and poverty abound, but see especially the annual meetings hosted by the Christian Community Development Association, the "Justice Conference" (initiated in 2011), and the "Love Does" conference (initiated 2012).

[2] Tom Roberts, "Study: Majority of Catholics say church should emphasize social justice, the poor," http://ncronline.org/news/politics/study-majority-catholics-say-church-should-emphasize-social-justice-poor (October 22, 2012).

involvement in social justice ministries among Protestant churches in the United States, aimed at caring for the forgotten, disenfranchised, and oppressed." Pastors in this survey identified poverty as the most important matter facing the nation.[3] This trend emphasizing the Christian task of working toward justice, with specific emphasis on the poor, though by no means a new phenomenon in American Christianity,[4] is particularly pronounced among many evangelical churches not typically known for social justice activity.[5] One could speculate about the many causes behind this religio-cultural shift—e.g., globalization, urbanization, increasing technological connectivity of the world—but the upshot is that it is tougher for many American church-goers, whose scriptures proclaim a God who "secures the claim of the oppressed and justice of the needy" (Ps 140:12), to remain impervious to the specter of injustice and poverty.[6]

Nonetheless, the belief in the biblical call for justice for the poor does not mean concerned North American Christian communities are of one mind on what exactly counts as "doing justice." Interestingly, the question about the meaning of the term "social justice" grabbed national headlines in 2010 when Fox News pundit Glenn Beck pleaded for Christians to flee churches that pursue "social justice." According to Beck,

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[3] Ed Stetzer, "The World as God Intends," *Sojourners*, September-October 2013, http://sojo.net/magazine/2013/09/world-god-intends.

[4] For a readable account of this history, see Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995); ibid., *The New Abolition: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[5] At least over the course of the last century; see Philip Goff and Brian Steensland, eds., *The New Evangelical Social Engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[6] Here and throughout all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

"social justice" is coded language for socialistic politics.[7] The public reaction was swift. A host of Christian respondents across the spectrum of progressive and conservative circles sought to correct (and a few defend) Beck's salvo. At the very least, Beck's pontification and the variety of reactions to it illustrate that church participation in justice activity is a contested notion which suffers from ambiguity in the national public conversation.[8] The plasticity of the moral language of "justice" underlies theologian Stanley Hauerwas's (in)famous provocation that "justice is a bad idea for Christians."[9] The abstract, modern notion of "justice," Hauerwas charges, is too determined by Enlightenment political theory of the nation-state, which is inimical to Christian thinking. Both Beck and Hauerwas, though as politically different as night and day, testify that recent enthusiasm in Christian circles toward talk of justice trades on a fuzzy, disputed, even suspect concept.[10]

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[7] On his television program, Beck held up a swastika and a hammer and sickle when explaining the outcomes of "social justice." See David Sessions, "Glenn Beck Urges Listeners to Leave Churches That Preach Social Justice," *Politics Daily*, March 8, 2010, http://www.politicsdaily.com/2010/03/08/glenn-beck-urges-listeners-to-leave-churches-that-preach-social/.

[8] My claim is illustrated by reading through the diverging responses of Christian leaders conveniently gathered together at the web forum "On Faith" located at http://newsweek.washington post.com/onfaith/2010/04/beck_vs_wallis_social_justice/ all.html.

[9] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 45-68; ibid., *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 215-41; ibid., *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 99-116. The confusion over "social justice" is reflected in the recent title and argument of Michael Novak and Paul Adams, with Elizabeth Shaw, *Social Justice Isn't What You Think It Is* (New York: Encounter, 2015).

[10] For a reader-friendly survey of different philosophical theories of justice, see Karen Lebacqz, *Six Theories of Justice: Perspectives from Philosophical and Theological Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986); Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009); and Vic McCracken, ed., *Christian Faith and Social*

Recent passion and/or confusion among Christians toward justice or "social justice" suggests there is room (and good reason) for reflection on a theology of justice in Scripture. The search to understand the meaning of justice for the poor and how it concords with the church's mission has fueled much of my faith journey. I was raised in a conservative Christian tradition that, for various reasons, has been suspicious of Christian engagement with the kinds of activities historically associated with "justice ministry." Justice and poverty were not prominent topics of conversation in my congregation in my youth. Nonetheless, my spiritual pilgrimage involved an awakening to Scripture's ubiquitous attentiveness to matters of justice for the poor. A pivotal moment came when I discovered during my college years the deep reservoir of YHWH's special concern for the marginalized in the Old Testament.[11] I ascertained then, as I still believe now, that a neglect of issues of justice in my ecclesial tradition is, at least in part, a consequence of a shallow reading, ignorance, and/or neglect of the Old Testament. And as a result, my academic pursuits have gravitated toward exploring YHWH's justice as revealed in Israel's Scriptures. I learned early on that central to any investigation into Israel's ethic is the exodus experience. This dissertation is something of a culmination of my (academic) journey to this point. It represents my attempt to parse what Israel's exodus experience, as remembered in the book of Exodus, contributes to a theology of justice, especially for the poor.

Justice: Five Views (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). On the suspect provenance of the term "social justice" in Christian tradition, see Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 99-123.

[11] Throughout my work I use "YHWH" even in quotations of others who spell out the Name with vowels.

1.2 CENTRALITY OF THE EXODUS[12]

The exodus is arguably the foundational event in the Hebrew Bible for Israel.[13] As a book, Exodus narrates YHWH's "definitive deliverance" and seminal revelation to Israel.[14] So important are the exodus traditions that they crop up no less than 120 times elsewhere in the canon in a variety of genres.[15] Overt references to the story appear in legal literature, song, historical narration, poetry, prayer, and prophecy.[16] No less

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[12] Throughout I attempt to refer to the event of Israel's redemption from Egypt with the lowercase "exodus." When I make reference to the canonical book by the same name, I use capitalized "Exodus." Nonetheless, the distinction is not in every case clear cut.

[13] I say "arguably" because some might object that creation is more fundamental. My dissertation will attempt to illustrate that the book of Exodus reflects and carries forward themes in Genesis's creation narrative.

[14] Northrop Frye, "Exodus—the definitive deliverance," in *Exodus,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 75. Frye goes on to state that because the exodus is "the definitive deliverance and the type of all the rest, we may say that mythically the Exodus is the only thing that really happens in the Old Testament" (75).

[15] Nahum Sarna, "Exodus, Book of," *ABD* 2:698, who gets the number from Yair Hoffmann, *The Doctrine of the Exodus in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: TAU School of Jewish Studies and University Publishing Projects, 1983), 11 (Hebrew).

[16] Because this ground has been extensively plowed in the following treatments, I will not detail biblical references here. Some of the more important and/or comprehensive works are as follows: David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963); Siegfried Herrmann, "Exodusmotiv: I. Altes Testament," *TRE* 10 (1982): 732-37; Yair Zakovitch, *"'And You Shall Tell Your Sons…': The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible*" (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991); Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition,* trans. Baruch J. Schwartz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992); Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001); Richard J. Clifford, "The Exodus in the Christian Bible: The Case for 'Figural' Reading," *TS* 63 (2002): 345-61; Frank Sabine, *Das Exodusmotiv des Alten Testaments: Religionsgeschichtliche, exegetische sowie systematisch-theologische Grundlagen und fachdidaktische Entfaltungen* (Münster: LIT, 2004); George Edayadiyil, *Israel in the Light of the Exodus Event: An Analysis of the Impact of the Exodus Event in the Life of Old Testament People* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Company, 2009); R. Michael Fox, ed., *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014); Pamela Barmash, "Out of the Mists of History: The Exaltation of Exodus in the Bible," in *Exodus in the Jewish Experience: Echoes and Reverberations*, ed. David Nelson and Pamela Barmash (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 1-22; Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018); and Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL:

impressive are the numerous places where scholars contend the exodus memory palpitates covertly but formatively under the surface of the text.[17] Based on the sheer frequency of its 'encore' appearances, the memory of the exodus exercises an inescapable dominance in Israel's Scriptures.[18] Moreover, New Testament scholarship continues to demonstrate the pivotal influence the narrative plays in much of New Testament literature.[19] The watershed exodus experience bequeaths a significant "grammar of faith"

Crossway, 2018). For more extensive bibliography, see Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus,* trans. Johan Rebel and Sierd Woudstra, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 1:190-212. The significant exception is the Wisdom literature, but see Peter Enns, *Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15-21 and 19:1-9*, HSM 57 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

[17] I borrow the language of "covert' from Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son,"* see especially 46-98; cf., e.g., Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 121-40; Erich Zenger, "The God of Exodus in the Message of the Prophets as Seen in Isaiah," in *Exodus — A Lasting Paradigm,* ed. Bas Van Iersel et al., Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 22-33; Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Stories," *JBL* 117 (1998): 23-43; Amos Frisch, "The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1-14," *JSOT* 25 (2000): 3-21; Ninow, *Indicators of Typology*; Rebecca G. S. Idestrom, "Echoes of the Book of Exodus in Ezekiel," *JSOT* 33 (2009): 489-510; Lee Roy Martin, "'Where are all his wonders?' The Exodus Motif in the Book of Judges," *JBPR* 2 (2010): 87-109; Fox, *Reverberations of the Exodus*, 18-93.

[18] On historical grounds, Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy,* trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 40-94, has cogently argued that the exodus experience was the historical starting point for Israelite religion (cf. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 351). Against those who would pursue a later origination of an exodus-type memory, Albertz contends the "whole series of special features which YHWH religion displays can be explained only from the extraordinary social conditions in which it came into being" (44); cf. "[E]ssential elements of emergent YHWH religion seem to be described here with fundamental accuracy" (55). Moreover, Albertz claims that the fundamental structure of Israel's religion, *in nuce* in the exodus, functions as the generative pump of Israel's historical opposition to social structures of domination (66). For more on this, see the exchange between Karel van der Toorn, "The Exodus as Charter Myth," Albertz, "Exodus: Liberation History Against Charter Myth," and John J. Collins, "The Development of the Exodus Tradition," in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition: Papers Read at a NOSTER Conference in Soesterberg, January 4-6, 1999,* ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Anton Houtepen, STAR 3 (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2001), 114-55.

[19] E.g., Otto A. Piper, "Unchanging Promises: Exodus in the New Testament," *Int* 11 (1957): 3-22; Robin E. Nixon, *The Exodus in the New Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963);

to Israel by which Israel's leaders, prophets, and tradents perpetually re-imagined the people's relationship to YHWH.[20] In short, Israel's life with YHWH pulsates to the rhythm of the exodus.

The generative pervasiveness of the exodus story has led biblical scholars to characterize the book of Exodus as Israel's "paradigmatic" narrative.[21] YHWH's dealings

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Fred L. Fisher, "The New and Greater Exodus: The Exodus Pattern in the New Testament," *SWJT* 20 (1977): 69-79; Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, "Exodusmotiv III: Neues Testament," *TRE* 10 (1982): 741-45; Jay Casey, "The Exodus Theme in the Book of Revelation Against the Background of the New Testament," in *Exodus — A Lasting Paradigm,* ed. Bas Van Iersel et al., Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 34-43; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), esp. 268-71; Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition,* JSNTSS 181 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, WUNT 88 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); William N. Wilder, *Echoes of the Exodus Narrative in the Context and Background of Galatians 5:18* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Clifford, "The Exodus in the Christian Bible," 354-61; Richard D. Patterson and Michael Travers, "Contours of the Exodus Motif in Jesus' Earthly Ministry," *WTJ* 66 (2004): 25-47; John York, "The New Testament Breathes the Exodus," in *Reclaiming the Imagination: The Exodus as Paradigmatic Narrative for Preaching*, eds. David Fleer and Dave Bland (St. Louis: Chalice, 2009), 85-97; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), *passim*, but see especially comments on 2:1069, 1105; Fox, *Reverberations of the Exodus*, 94-186; Craig A. Evans, "Exodus in the New Testament: Patterns of Revelation and Redemption," in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr, VTSup 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 440-64; Estelle, *Echoes of the Exodus*, 208-313; cf. the criticism of Daniel L. Smith, "The Uses of 'New Exodus' in New Testament Scholarship: Preparing a Way through the Wilderness," *CBR* 14 (2016): 207-43.

[20] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 178, speaks about "the Exodus grammar of YHWH." For a list of recurring phrases associated with the Exodus that appear throughout the canon, see Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 29-30; cf. Edayadiyil, *Israel in Light of the Exodus Event*, 46-47, n. 82.

[21] I am unsure of the provenance of describing the Exodus as "paradigmatic," but it seems to have been popularized by Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis, 1988), 90; see also, e.g., Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 121; the collection of essays in Van Iersel et al., *Exodus*; Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 7; Bruce Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 129-33; Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 177-81; David Fleer and David Bland, eds. *Reclaiming the Imagination: The Exodus as Paradigmatic Narrative for Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2009); George Edayadiyil, *Beyond Exodus: The*

with Israel recorded in Exodus epitomize the "structuring principle" by which Israel interpreted the bulk of historical experience and Scripture.[22] This story "stands out in imposing its presuppositions and categories on all others."[23] Michael Fishbane has creatively dubbed it the "archetypal armature" of Israel's historical renewal.[24] To switch metaphors, in the story of Exodus are found all the ingredients that are basic to YHWH's recipe for Israel's salvation—broadly categorized in the formative sequence of distress, redemption and formation.[25] Though there is fluidity in the way the story is remembered in different traditions (it is a layered, complex memory), this first, kerygmatic recipe, narrated in the book of Exodus, is Israel's guide for understanding how YHWH "cooks up" salvation in the future. Matthew Boulton describes it finely:

> [F]or ancient Israel, this is how deliverance happens. It happens typologically, because God is a typological poet. Indeed, if a new or anticipated deliverance

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Exodus as a Paradigm for Interpretation of the Bible and History (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2011).

[22] Rubem Alves, "El pueblo de Dio y la liberación del hombre," *Fichas de ISAL* 3 (1970): 9, as cited in Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression,* trans. James C. Dekker (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 6.

[23] David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern*, 11. He relates "[a]t one time I planned to write on Patterns of Deliverance in the Bible, believing that there must be several of about equal eminence. I soon discovered that there was none remotely comparable to the exodus."

[24] Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 125.

[25] Cf. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 131; Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), ch. 4, "The Exodus as Paradigm of Salvation," helpfully expands the list to nine "ingredients": (1) Impediment to flourishing and well-being; (2) Cry of help from those in need; (3) YHWH comes from his heavenly throne into the concrete, historical situation of need; (4) The divine king fights for those in need, removing the impediment to flourishing; (5) God often uses creaturely agents to assist in bringing salvation; (6) God restores the needy to a good land, with breathing room to live; (7) A life of obedience to YHWH is necessary to complete salvation; (8) God comes to dwell with the redeemed in a concrete, historical context; (9) Salvation is grounded in God's prior relationship with those in need. Cf. Pinchas Lapide, "Exodus in the Jewish Tradition," in *Exodus—A Lasting Paradigm*, eds. Bas Van Iersel et al., Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 47-55.

> were described in terms entirely disconnected from what Fishbane calls 'the paradigm of historical renewal' outlined in Israel's exodus from Egypt, such novelty would appear suspect and unpersuasive. The divine signature of authenticity, we might say, is correspondence with the exodus motif.[26]

Hence, Israel would heartily agree with an aphorism attributed to Mark Twain: "history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme." Not only is the exodus the rhythm of Israel's life, but it is also its rhyme.

The paradigmatic power of the Exodus account, though, is by no means limited to Scripture.[27] Michael Goldberg describes Exodus as the Jewish "master story"—the key narrative that has given the Jewish people their basic orientation to the world.[28] Christians as well live in the shadow of the exodus. For, as David Tracy claims, "Christianity is most itself when it is an Exodus religion" because the exodus is the "proper context" for capturing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.[29] Aside from the unsurprising influence Exodus exerts on Jewish and Christian communities, there is

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[26] Michael Myer Boulton, "Supercession or Subsession? Exodus Typology, the Christian Eucharist and the Jewish Passover Meal," *SJT* 66 (2013): 25.

[27] It would be hard to find a stronger statement than Jan Assmann, "Exodus and Memory," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Levy, et al (New York: Springer, 2015), 3: "The Biblical story of the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt is THE story, the story of stories, arguably the greatest, in any even the most consequential story . . . It is a story that in its endless tellings and retellings, variations, and transformations changed and formed the human world in which we are living."

[28] Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight. The Exodus and the Passion Resurrection,* 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991). To support his historical claim, Goldberg cites (20, n. 4) Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and History: Historical Events and Religious Change," in *Perspectives in Jewish Learning*, vol. 1, eds. Stanley Kazan and Nathaniel Stampfer (Chicago: Spertus College Press, 1977); and Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970). Most recently, see W. David Nelson and Pamela Barmash, ed., *Exodus in the Jewish Experience: Echoes and Reverberations* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), who contend the Exodus "has functioned as the primary hermeneutical model from which Jews have created theological meaning and historical self-understanding" (vii).

arguably no other story that has left a deeper imprint on Western civilization as a whole. Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, writes that the "book of Exodus is the West's meta-narrative of hope."[30] He draws on the programmatic use of the exodus in the history of the Puritan revolution, the founding of America, and the era of Civil Rights to support his momentous claim. In a similar vein, John Coffey impressively documents the persistent adoption of the rhetoric of the exodus in English-speaking political culture.[31] After a survey of Protestant history from the Reformation to modern day America, Coffey concludes "readers did not merely cite the Exodus; they inhabited it . . . The sheer range of [Exodus's] use testifies to [its] imaginative force."[32] These studies focus on the Anglo world, but Exodus has likewise proved the quintessential reference point in the twentieth century flowering of liberation politics and theology in Latin America.[33] The reception history of the story in

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[29] David Tracy, "Exodus: Theological Reflection," in *Exodus—A Lasting Paradigm*, eds. Bas Van Iersel et al., Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 118-24. Cf. n. 19 above.

[30] Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible. Exodus: The Book of Redemption* (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2010), 1.

[31] John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). He argues historians have consistently underplayed the influence of the exodus story—and the Hebrew Scriptures in general—for comprehending the history of Western political civilization. In this regard, see also Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*; Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Gary S. Selby, *Martin Luther King and the Rhetoric of Freedom: The Exodus Narrative in America's Struggle for Civil Rights* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008); Bruce Feiler, *America's Prophet: Moses and the American Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). For a broader survey of the reception history of Exodus, see Scott Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

[32] Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 217.

[33] Ibid., 15-17; see Alfredo Fierro, "Exodus Event and Interpretation in Political Theologies," *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman K. Gottwald (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 473-81; Enrique Dussel, "Exodus as a Paradigm in

Jewish, Christian, and Western civilization illustrates that "the protean exodus symbol refuses to be 'laid to rest.'"[34]

But why does this narrative reverberate with such weighty influence? One answer, probably the preeminent reason, lies in what Exodus says about justice, especially justice for the disenfranchised.[35] Readers of all sorts, searching for inspiration, have returned repeatedly to Exodus's politically potent portrayal of the clash of God against oppressive forces. The plot's pointed critique of imperial villainy has functioned throughout history as a "typological map to reconnoiter the moral terrain,"[36] typically redrawing the boundaries for the marginalized in more just, pleasant places. According to Sacks, "no story has been more influential in shaping the inner landscape of liberty, teaching successive generations that oppression is not inevitable, that it is not written into the fabric of history."[37] But if the story has been deployed in the struggle against perceived injustice, then it is, unfortunately, no less the case that Exodus has been wielded by oppressors to maintain tyrannical power arrangements. The discrepant use of the book is vividly illustrated in the ironic, contradictory appeal to the story by enslaved African

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Liberation Theology," in *Exodus — A Lasting Paradigm*, eds. Bas Van Iersel et al., Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 83-92; Peter Hebblethwaite, "Let My People Go: The Exodus and Liberation Theology," *Religion, State and Society* 21 (1993): 105-114.

[34] Norman Gottwald, "The Exodus and Event and Process: A Test Case in the Biblical Grounding of Liberation Theology," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1989), 258.

[35] I would relate the "preferential option for the poor," so important in liberation theology, to this same theme.

[36] Albert Raboteau, "African Americans, Exodus and the American Israel," in *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, ed. David Hackett (New York: Routledge, 1995), 81, cited by Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 217.

[37] Sacks, *Exodus*, 2. "The exodus represents the first international intervention in the name of human rights" (7). Cf. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 3-17.

Americans, abolitionists, *and slaveholders* in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.[38] As John Coffey observes, "The story was contested so fiercely because readers needed it on their side."[39] The history of the book's interpretation demonstrates that understanding its vision of justice for the vulnerable is no innocuous endeavor—Exodus is not an innocent, or unambiguous, text.[40] "The thin line between good and evil becomes evident in the use of Exodus, and the power of its ideas makes it a potentially dangerous book. It can bring about great good, but it can also create great evil."[41]

In sum, then, my investigation assumes, in the good company of those just surveyed, that Exodus is a paradigmatic text, one ultimately with universal significance. The reception history of Exodus, both within the Bible and through the centuries, confirms the promise of exploring the book's theology of justice even as it warns of the risk of the enterprise. And though we cannot deny that Exodus has "worked" in struggles for justice, nonetheless, this is not a sufficient justification for carelessly understanding, much less adopting, its claims about justice.[42] For, as John Coffey cautions, the history of

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[38] See the dialogue between John Coffey and Mark Noll, "*Exodus and Liberation*: An Exchange," *Holiness* 2 (2016): 211-24; Also, Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Langston, *Exodus*, 163-67.

[39] Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 218; cf. the exchange between Karel van der Toorn, Rainer Albertz, and John Collins in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition* for a parallel illustration of this point within the biblical tradition.

[40] Tracy, "Exodus: Theological Reflection," 119. This is true for the use of the exodus motif even within the canon of Scripture, as argued by Barmash, "Out of the Mists," 1-22.

[41] Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries*, 6-7.

[42] Cf. Walter Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor," *CBQ 57* (1995): 27: "Perhaps the most convincing warrant for such usage is the undeniable fact that it is so used, that its adherents find it to 'work.'"

exegesis of Exodus reveals an eisegetical "nose of wax in the hands of interpreters."[43] To avoid a facile grasp of its theology we must take seriously, then, that this is Israel's story—a doggedly particular narrative—which demands a close reading in order to hear Israel's distinct rendering of the justice of Exodus.

1.3 Purpose of this Study

In this work I trace the theme of justice through the whole narrative of Exodus. The book of Exodus tells how YHWH brings the people out of Egyptian bondage and comes to tabernacle among them at Sinai. Near the beginning of the story, Pharaoh forces Israel, YHWH's firstborn (4:22), into Egyptian servitude. The chaos of Egypt threatens to undo Israel's promised role as descendants of Abraham set forth by YHWH in the story of Genesis. In order to re-initiate YHWH's creational agenda begun in Genesis, YHWH rescues Israel from Egypt. At the outset of this spectacular transition, YHWH makes clear the divine intent is to reclaim Israel's service out from under Pharaoh's oppressive slavery (e.g., 3:12, 4:23). But YHWH's salvation of Israel extends beyond the exodus from Egypt. YHWH's reclamation project, from the beginning to the end of Exodus, works to reorder Israel's identity and vocation so that Israel can carry forward YHWH's just agenda in the world. Exodus is as much about Israel's entrance into the way of YHWH as it is Israel's exit from Egypt.

My goal is to explicate how YHWH's reclamation of Israel for service-worship as narrated in Exodus reveals a distinct theological ethic of justice that is grounded in

[43] Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 215.

YHWH's character and Israel's calling within YHWH's creational agenda. In my exposition I pay particular attention to two other overlapping motifs in Exodus that help illuminate the theme of justice. First, I consider throughout the importance of Israel's creation traditions for grounding Exodus's theology of justice. I show that the ethical disposition of justice imprinted upon Israel in the events of Exodus is built upon and is an application of YHWH's creational agenda of justice. This becomes evident when Exodus is understood against the backdrop of creation theology and as a continuation of the plot of Genesis, a reading that Exodus itself invites. Second, because the book of Exodus functions as a pedagogical narrative—i.e., a persuasive story that is meant to form readers in normative, paradigmatic ways (more on this below)—I highlight how an educational agenda is woven throughout the text. I argue that the narrative gives heightened attention to the way YHWH catechizes Israel in what it means to be the particular beneficiary and creational emissary of YHWH's justice. The interpretative lenses of creation theology and pedagogy furthermore help in explaining why Israel's salvation and shaping, in turn, embodies a programmatic applicability of YHWH's desires for the wider world. It is prudent at this point to turn to what others have said in recent discussion about the motif of justice in Exodus.

1.4 Recent Discussion on the Justice of Exodus

Just as in more popular discourse, the theme of justice, particularly as it relates to poverty, has generated a recent surge of scholarly attention in biblical studies. Creation

theology, though perhaps not as conspicuous to those outside the academic discipline, has also witnessed an unprecedented degree of interest in the past few decades.[44] My work is situated in the overlap of these categories in the book of Exodus, a fertile junction that I contend has a good deal more yet to yield.[45] However, biblical scholarship coalescing around these themes reveals several areas of interrelated tension if not outright disagreement. In the following I describe three interrelated areas where tension is felt most acutely in order to set the stage for my own discussion.

1.4.1 Universal or Particular Justice in Exodus

The first significant tension unfolds in two recent publications on justice in the Bible by Walter Houston.[46] Building on the work of Rolf Knierim, Houston contends that the theology of justice emerging out of Exodus conflicts with the theology of justice rooted in Israel's creation traditions. Texts in the latter category of creation traditions speak of justice based on a cosmic order ruled by YHWH. Multiple psalms bring out this

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[44] A good starting point is Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *ThTo* 53 (1997): 177-90. More than anyone else, Terence Fretheim has fueled the ongoing interest in creation traditions. It will become clear throughout this study that I am particularly indebted to his path-blazing work to show the importance of the categories of creation for interpreting the book of Exodus. Fretheim's writings have ranged over the biblical canon, but his *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) offers a sort of compendium of his work on creation theology. For a bibliography, see Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn, eds. *What Kind of God? Collected Essays of Terence Fretheim*, Siphrut 14 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 392-99.

[45] I largely save discussion on the category of pedagogy for the section below on cultural memory.

[46] Walter Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*, Paperback ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 204-19; idem, *Justice: The Biblical Challenge,* BCCW (London: Equinox, 2010), 36-61. Houston works with the

dimension of God's right ordering of the world, as do various passages in the wisdom literature and Prophets.[47] In contrast, Houston argues Exodus, though including aspects that cohere with a cosmic justice theology, presents a view of justice not principally derived from YHWH's role as creator and world ruler. The governing theology of the justice of Exodus, instead, originates out of God's patronage of Israel. God's motivation is not primarily presented in terms of redressing universal injustice but is rooted rather in being faithful to the ancestral promises (e.g., Exod 3:6). According to Houston, the overarching concept of justice enacted in Exodus is unapologetically partial and non-universal, and results in the unjust, "collateral" damage of other, innocent parties, e.g., the first-born of the maid at the mill (Exod 11:5).[48] Thus, the partisan conception of justice (understood as fairness) offered in the Exodus narrative clashes with God's role as impartial judge of all creation.[49]

My reading will show that the theology of justice emerging in Exodus coheres with creation in a more harmonious relationship than Houston's (and Kneirim's) schema

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conclusions of Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 89-121.

[47] E.g., Pss 65; 72; 89; 93-99; Prov 14:31; 17:5; 21:13; Job 20; Amos 9:7; Isa 1-5; 11:1-9.

[48] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 208: "Are we to suppose that the slave who grinds corn is implicated in the oppression of Israel rather than being herself a victim of oppression?"

[49] Houston, *Contending*, 219: "An absolute polarization of universal and particular justice is unnecessary. Nevertheless . . . concepts of divine justice associated both with patronage and with kingship are entertained in the Old Testament and combined, *but not without significant tension*, to form the picture of YHWH's justice" (italics mine). Though he does not speak specifically in terms of justice, David J. Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 170-75, parallels Houston and Knierim's concerns. Houston does express disagreement with Knierim at a key point (*Contending for Justice*, 210), viz., whereas Knierim downgrades Israel's partisan justice in favor of universal justice (*The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 131-37), Houston upholds each as equally valid.

permits.[50] The friction that Houston and Knierim discern in Exodus between justice as cosmic order and justice as faithfulness substantially dissipates when God's actions are viewed through a creational (and by extension, pedagogical) lens. Without a diligent accounting of the creational underpinnings of Exodus, Israel's story remains open to the charge that it amounts only to a particularistic narrative which serves a narrow-minded, jingoistic platform.[51] By couching Israel's origins in creational categories and reading these categories as an outworking of the Genesis narrative, however, the narrator intimates that YHWH's election and salvation of Israel strategically serve the larger telos— YHWH's wider salvific agenda for creation. Therefore, YHWH's faithfulness to the children of Israel memorialized in Exodus is in service to, not opposed to, YHWH's universal order of justice and righteousness.

1.4.2 Exodus, Creation Theology, and Hegemony

Second, Walter Brueggemann perceives a tension from another, though related, angle. Few scholars have written more eloquently, voluminously, and influentially on the

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[50] Houston, *Justice*, 60, admits the narrative muddles these two opposing conceptions: "The difficulty in the story of the exodus as it is told . . . arises from a confusion of YHWH's two roles as world ruler and protector of Israel." So, though the two are distinct, their confluence in Exodus understandably leads to confusion. Nevertheless, Houston thinks that the way these two models become entangled in the Exodus narrative reflects a confusion is ethically insightful. For more on this, see his "The Character of YHWH and the Ethics of the Old Testament: Is *Imitatio Dei* Appropriate?" *JTS* 58 (April 2007): 25.

[51] I readily concede that one can read the Exodus account through foci other than creation theology and avoid the charge of jingoism. One recent example is representative: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks eloquently presents Exodus's justice talk through the filter of covenant in his Exodus commentary. I contend that an appreciation of creation theology not only debunks the charge of jingoism directly but contributes to a much richer theology (and under-appreciated aspect) of Israel's understanding of justice.

theme of justice in Scripture than Brueggemann. His work in this regard, however, harbors a suspicion of Israel's creation theology. He charges that Israel's creation traditions too easily and too often function to legitimate systems of conservative, and habitually unjust, royal power.[52] Israel's creation traditions, he believes, are largely distinct from and averse to the Mosaic-prophetic traditions that characteristically emphasize justice for the marginalized. Though he has conceded that some of his earlier reservations with creation theology were overdrawn, he admits an ongoing worry that the recent revival of interest in creation theology cannot adequately generate or support revolutionary social praxis—the kind on display preeminently in the story of Exodus.[53] In other words, creation theology, because of its propensity to prop up an elitist status quo, does not contain the requisite capacity to stimulate social transformation. According to Brueggemann, such capacity is at the heart of the biblical witness in the exodus, which is

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[52] See J. Richard Middleton, "Is Creation Theology Inherently Conservative? A Dialogue with Walter Brueggemann," *HTR* 87 (1994): 257-77, and Brueggemann's reply, "Response to J. Richard Middleton," *HTR* 87 (1994): 279-89. It is true, as Middleton notes (263), that ancient Near Eastern cultures legitimated their social and political orders with creation theology, and that creation theology so used could and often did functioned in oppressive ways. On this point, see Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible,* CBQMS 26 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994); William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1-34; J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 147-84; Scott B. Noegel, "Dismemberment, Creation, and Ritual: Images of Divine Violence in the Ancient Near East," in *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition*, ed. James Wellman (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 13-27; Kevin Mellish, "Creation as Social and Political Order in Ancient Thought and the Hebrew Bible," *WeslTJ* 44 (2009): 157-79; Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18-49.

[53] Brueggemann, "Response," 283.

the heart of the Mosaic-prophetic tradition. Too heavy an emphasis on creation theology—especially as the horizon of biblical faith—dulls this subversive edge.[54]

In response to this legitimate worry,[55] I think Brueggemann's concern not to obscure the liberationist potential of Exodus, far from being threatened by creation theology, actually requires the creational and pedagogical categories that underlie the Exodus narrative. Brueggemann (inadvertently?[56]) continues an older trend in scholarship that emphasizes the distinction between creation and redemption traditions rather than exploring their thick interrelationship in Israel's memory of historical salvation.[57] My work investigates this interrelationship, particularly as it pertains to the issue of justice. Exodus tells of the beginnings of the Israelite nation, but the story is deliberately composed in such a way as to show Israel's "definitive deliverance" actualizes YHWH's

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[54] Hans Heinrich Schmid has been especially influential in making the case that creation is a horizon of biblical theology. See *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968); idem., "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: 'Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, IRT 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 102-117. Also, Hermann Spieckermann, "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil Als Horizont Alttestamentlicher Theologie." *Zeitschrift Für Theologie und Kirche* 100 (2003): 399–419.

[55] A legitimacy borne out by the historic interpretation of Exodus itself. See above and Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries*, 6-9.

[56] I say "inadvertently" because Brueggemann's article "The Loss and Recovery of Creation" traces the historical fall and rise of this doctrine in Old Testament scholarship. He diagnoses the problems with the bifurcation (and privileging) of redemption from creation in the 20th century. In an admirable example of scholarly humility, he confesses his struggle to integrate the paradigm of creation in his own theological reflections (186-87, n. 37).

[57] A trend I suspect also lurks in Houston and Knierim. Cf. George M. Landes, "Creation and Liberation," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, IRT 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 135-51.

creational justice agenda. Furthermore, when read as a continuation of Genesis's creation trajectory, the story of Exodus takes on cosmic, pedagogical import.[58] In direct contrast to Brueggemann's caution, I argue that the worldwide (liberating) implications of Israel's story come most fully and potently through the way in which Exodus narrates Israel's redemption and reorientation within the horizon of creation traditions.

1.4.3 Exodus, Deliverance, and Election

A third area of interrelated tension arises from the universal implications of YHWH's deliverance of Israel in Exodus. Especially in the last half of the twentieth century, liberation scholars have brought heightened awareness to this theme by enlisting the Exodus story in support of social revolutions.[59] Liberation theologians emphasize that the heart of the narrative is the political emancipation of the victimized poor who then work to establish more just social arrangements. Exodus, consequently, reveals YHWH's liberative desires for all oppressed humanity. Liberationists herald the text's overarching

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[58] I owe something of the stimulus of my argument to the insights of Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 30-73. McConville discerns a political theology in Genesis-Kings. He argues that Genesis presents justice-righteousness as a guiding concept YHWH stamps on creation. In YHWH's creational strategy of redemption, YHWH elects the line of Abraham to demonstrate justice-righteousness before the nations. The exodus furthers this creational intent by judging Pharaoh's (sub)version of justice-righteousness and establishing Israel's vocation originating in Abraham. In my concentration on Exodus, I will fill out and deepen his perceptive analysis.

[59] For an introduction, see Jorge Pixley, "Liberation Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, MBI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131-62; Paulo Nogueira, "Exodus in Latin America," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 447– 59. Several examples of how Exodus is used in liberation theology are found in Bastiaan Van Iersel, Anton Weiler, and Marcus Lefebure, eds., *Exodus — A Lasting Paradigm*, Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987).

purpose as the revolutionary establishment of "social justice" in human society in whatever age.

This view has received significant push back by some in the biblical guild. Jewish scholar Jon Levenson, foremost among others, has aptly criticized liberationists' interpretations of the Exodus for the way many characteristically ignore the unmistakable role of Israel's special election in the narrative. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Levenson avers, must be appreciated within the context of the chosenness of Israel. Moreover, the redemption of Israel out of Egypt should not be read apart from the people's entrance into covenant at Sinai. Levenson charges that the predilection toward the universal application of the exodus threatens to swallow up the particularism of Israel's redemption and consequent formation at Sinai.[60] As a result, the biblical doctrine of election percolating throughout the narrative does not fit easily into a socio-political account of Exodus.

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[60] See the exchange in Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, eds., *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, SBL SymS 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2000): Jon D. Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 215-30; Jorge V. Pixley, "History and Particularity in Reading the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Jon D. Levenson," 231-38; Levenson, "The Perils of Engaged Scholarship: A Rejoinder to Jorge Pixley," 239-46; John J. Collins, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology," 247-62; Levenson, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology: A Rejoinder to John J. Collins," 263-75. Levenson's first article in the volume is an abbreviation of his essay "Exodus and Liberation" in his book *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 12-59. Collins follows up the discussion in "Exodus and Liberation in Postcolonial Perspective," in *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Also noteworthy are the contributions of John Howard Yoder, "Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation," *Cross Currents* 23 (1973): 297-309; Gottwald, "The Exodus as Event and Process," 250-59; Norbert Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible*, ed. Duane Christensen, trans. Linda M. Maloney, 2nd ed. (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1995), 23-43; De Schrijver, "The Exodus Motif in the Theologies of Liberation," 169-90; Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 204-31.

Levenson's appraisal discloses perturbing questions about the relationship between election and universalism—and Israel's salvation and vocation—that have persistently haunted biblical scholarship.[61] Conversation along these lines makes it evident, if discomfiting, that these issues matter for any textually faithful proposal which wishes to re-appropriate Exodus for what it says about justice. How, then, can Exodus be applied universally while satisfactorily taking into account the particularity of the story? Is it even possible? Or, to state it differently, in what way is the Exodus narrative paradigmatic for a theological ethic of justice? Answering this question has proven controversial. For example, liberation scholar Jorge Pixley suggests Exodus contains two, interwoven perspectives: liberation and immigration. He contends liberationists emphasize the former and Jewish interpreters underscore the latter, each according to their respective social contexts. Both are present and equally valid: one's social location is the trump card for deciding which interpretation rules the day.[62] Brueggemann gives a different accounting. He believes the narrative is awash in profound tension between a revolutionary discourse (chs. 1-15) and constitutive, monopolizing discourse (chs. 25-40).[63] He suggests that the final form of the text intentionally juxtaposes the two, but he hints that the narrative itself wishes to show the triumph of the former over the latter.

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[61] See, e.g., the review of scholarship in the first half of Joel N. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, Siphrut 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

[62] Pixley, "Liberation Criticism," 147-48. In the end, I do not see how Pixley's response answers Levenson's trenchant critique, which, among other points, reckons that Pixley's historical reconstruction underplays the chosenness of Israel *as a kin-group* in the text (Levenson, "The Perils of Engaged Scholarship," 242-43).

[63] Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," in *NIB* 1, ed. Katherine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 682-84.

Some recent interpreters even dispute the ethical potential of the "revolutionary discourse" of Exodus.[64] David Pleins is representative of this more suspicious view of the justice of Exodus: "the exodus story . . . [is] liberating to the extent that one finds elite-based nationalist movements liberating."[65] For Pleins the Exodus narrative is anything but emancipating for the poor. In its canonical form, it is thoroughly tainted by ancient Israel's imperialist agenda.[66] Levenson is not as pessimistic as either Brueggemann or

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[64] This counter-reading of Exodus is shared by many from a variety of hermeneutical perspectives. For a sampling, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* 3rd ed., rev. and exp. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 205-78; Pleins, *Social Visions,* 156-78; Laurel A. Dykstra, *Set Them Free: The Other Side of Exodus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002); Demetrius K. Williams, "The Bible and Models of Liberation in the African American Experience," in *Yet With A Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation*, SBLSS 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 33-60; Brian R. McCarthy, "The Characterization of YHWH, the God of Israel, in Exodus 1-15," *God's World for Our World: Volume 1: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., JSOTSup 388 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 6-20; Anna Kasafi Perkins, "Resisting Definitive Interpretation: See the Story of the Exodus Through Caribbean(ite) Eyes," *Caribbean Quarterly* 51 (2005): 53-66; Gale A. Yee, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193-234; Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "How Liberating Is the Exodus and for Whom? Deconstructing Exodus Motifs in Scripture, Literature, and Life," in *Exodus and Deuteronomy*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee, Texts@Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 3-28.

[65] Pleins, *Social Justice*, 173. He states "the text of Exodus offers a nationalistic, monarchic, hierarchal agenda" (172). His concerns parallel Brueggemann's worry about the potential of creational categories to serve imperialistic ends. Pleins understands the resemblance of Exodus to ancient Near Eastern cosmic battle myths as exposing the nationalistic nature of the book of Exodus. Brueggemann does not take this route, but Levenson, "Response to Collins," 270, charges that Brueggemann falls prey to the same critique he levels against the liberationist's reading, i.e, glossing over the promise to the patriarchs as a reason for YHWH's deliverance.

[66] McCarthy, "The Characterization of YHWH," 18-20, is most stark in his judgment: "The conclusion seems unavoidable that, despite its appearance of being an ethical tale promoting ethical values, this way of evaluating it needs to be abandoned. It should be seen instead as having a certain integrity as a tale of power and towering willfulness . . . This god would not qualify as the 'Judge of all the world' of Gen 18:25, who must act justly and make distinction between the righteous and the wicked. This god only cares to make a 'tribal' distinction between one people and another. This god cannot be the prototypical liberator, the hope of all oppressed peoples everywhere. He is not intolerant of oppression, but liberates one people by oppressing another."

Pleins: Exodus can justify a more universal justice agenda, but only secondarily.[67] He believes there will be inevitable tension between (what he comes to call) the "social-ethical" and "familial-national" dimensions of the Exodus. These must be read together, not played off each other.

One implication of my argument brings out how an interpretation of Exodus attuned to creational and pedagogical themes eases (though does not completely resolve) the tension identified by Levenson's two poles. I intimate how, from an exploration of the theme of justice in YHWH's redemption of Israel in Exodus, a creational-pedagogical perspective provides a frame large enough to hold together election and universalism.[68] To put the matter from a different angle, the friction that some commentators discern in Exodus on the subject of justice substantially dissipates

when one situates the concerns of Exodus creationally and canonically, viz, as a continuation of YHWH's creational project initiated in Genesis. The upshot of my study is that YHWH's pedagogical goals for Israel throughout Exodus—which are a reflex of Israel's chosenness—extend beyond Israel.[69] YHWH's educative desires related in the book of Exodus dignify Israel as the divinely authorized exegete of justice before and for the nations.

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[67] And even in this he thinks other texts may be more appropriate. See Levenson, "Response to Collins," 269. To be clear, Levenson affirms the need for both.

[68] If I am successful, a by-product of my discussion would be that the conversation around election could perhaps benefit from more rigorous interaction with creation theology.

[69] Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World*, trans. Seán Charles Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 50-61, esp. 58-61, sketches an alternative to liberation theologians' use of the Exodus that I have found stimulating for my argument.

1.4.4 The Justice of Exodus for the Church

Finally, and on a more personal and pastoral note, in this work I hope to contribute to a theological reading of Exodus that exhibits its riches to the North American church with which I am most familiar. I was raised in the Stone-Campbell Restoration tradition in the South (churches of Christ). Though my church tradition—to which I remain committed—has cherished a high regard for Scripture, my experience in our churches has shown me that the Old Testament, for the most part, is quite often relegated to shallow history-like summaries or pilfered for vacation Bible school stories. I believe an anemic theological ethic of justice for the poor is but one profound consequence of this neglect. Thus, by demonstrating how a robust theology of justice can emerge from a reading of the book of Exodus, I wish to contribute to the church's reclamation of YHWH's passion for a holistic, creation-wide salvation that is especially concerned with the marginalized. Toward this end my study further plows the ground for an understanding of how the ministry of Jesus and his church is an outgrowth of Israel's theological vision fired in the iron furnace of Egypt (Deut 4:20; 1 Kgs 8:51; Jer 11:4). Of course, my vantage point is influenced by my identity as a Christian, white, privileged, American, heterosexual man. I wish to encourage the faithful and responsible Christian work of justice, but I recognize and lament that I cannot help but be a participant in the institutional machinery which still grinds many down. Inasmuch as people who have my similar background have been the cause of much injustice in this world, I hope my work

can help as a conduit for reading the text in liberating ways and inspiring people like me (and not like me) to work toward the kingdom of justice and righteousness.[70]

To summarize, my project enters into contested waters over the interpretation of justice in Exodus. The disagreements swirl around whether Exodus presents a theology of justice that is larger than Israel itself, and if so, how. I think a more rigorous appreciation of Exodus's use of creational and pedagogical categories and its canonical placement as a sequel to Genesis can contribute some calm to these seas of dispute, though by no measure do I believe this work can resolve all of the issues I noted above. Now I offer a bit more discussion about my methodological approach for navigating these waters.

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[70] Additionally, I suggest my work impinges on the recent interest in the missional interpretation of Scripture. In the last decade, a growing cottage industry of publications from scholars across the disciplines has emerged on the topic of "missional hermeneutics." Though there is no consensus yet on what a missional hermeneutic is, many build on Christopher Wright's seminal *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). See also George Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping a Conversation," *Miss* 39 (2011): 309-21, who traces the history of the conversation and outlines four somewhat distinct definitions of a "missional hermeneutic" currently at play in the discussion. The centerpiece of Wright's proposal is that Scripture has a missional basis, so that the *missio Dei* is the hermeneutical key for biblical interpretation. The story of God's salvific mission in the world provides the frame of reference for and gives coherence to the individual writings within the canonical whole. Though Wright's work is the most comprehensive to date, many others have taken up the challenge of developing how the theme of mission impacts biblical interpretation. More recently, W. Ross Blackburn's published dissertation, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, NSBT 28 (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), contends that mission is the "governing theme" of Exodus. Both authors advocate that God's actions in Exodus are guided by and point to a larger, missional goal. My own reading of Scripture is sympathetic to their convictions concerning a strong missional thread throughout the canon and in Exodus. In this dissertation I intend to hone this insight by highlighting how the category of creation in Exodus helps deepen an understanding of YHWH's "missional" predilection for justice and care of the poor.

1.5 A READING STRATEGY FOR EXODUS

For most of the last two centuries, the historical critical method dominated Exodus scholarship.[71] The bulk of academic research proceeded against the backdrop of Pentateuchal criticism and pivoted around issues concerned with the reconstruction of the sources, authors, and events originating in the pre-history of the text.[72] Brevard Childs's 1974 commentary on Exodus marked a turning point in studies on the book.[73] While by no means jettisoning previous investigations on the prehistory of the text, Childs concentrated his commentary on the theological interpretation of the canonical form of Exodus as Christian Scripture. His effort signaled a larger shift taking place in biblical interpretation away from source, form, and redaction critical approaches toward more synchronic, "text immanent" methodologies.[74] Since the appearance of Childs's commentary, literary, canonical, and theological studies on Exodus have flourished.

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[71] On the following paragraph and for a survey of Exodus scholarship up to the end of the last century, see Helmut Utzschneider, "Überlegungen zu Hermeneutik und Geschichte der Forschung" *ZAW* 106 (1994): 197-223; Marc Vervenne, "Current Tendencies and Developments in the Study of the Book of Exodus" in *Studies in the Book of Exodus. Redaction-Reception-Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne, BETL 126 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 21-55; Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOTSup 239 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 144-79. Also, Thomas Dozeman, ed., *Methods for Exodus*, MBI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), contains articles on various interpretative approaches on the book of Exodus. Each chapter presents a different methodology and provides a brief history of interpretation relevant to the methodology presented.

[72] For a rigorous analysis, see E. W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[73] Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary,* OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

[74] I borrow the term "text immanent" from John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, rev. and exp. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 2. He defines "text immanent exegesis" as a development in the last thirty years of biblical interpretation that "looks for the meaning of biblical texts as we now meet them in our Bibles instead of trying to get behind the finished form of the text to earlier stages."

These focus more on the world presented "in" the text rather than "behind" the text, though more traditional historical critical analyses have by no means abated.[75]

I locate my hermeneutical approach within the more recent stream of "text immanent" methodologies. My methodology will be principally literary, concentrating on a "constructive," close reading of the text in order to develop a theological interpretation of the text. Yet, I will also draw occasionally on more historically oriented observations to the extent that these shed light on the text for my theological purposes. I also find in the category of "cultural memory"—a voguish concept gaining traction in Old Testament scholarship—a helpful way to think about the relationship between the oft-opposed poles of synchronic and diachronic approaches to the text. Of course, my investigation gravitates heavily toward the synchronic end, and my argument is not especially date-sensitive. Nonetheless, I offer below some thoughts on how "cultural memory" helps reframe the thorny, historical issues behind the book of Exodus. I will argue, moreover, that the upshot of cultural memory for my project is the way in which it helps gain purchase on the pedagogical function of Exodus as Scripture.

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[75] See, e.g., Christoph Berner, *Die Exoduserzählung: Das literarische Werden einer Ursprungslegende Israels*, FAT 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). On the broader historical analysis of the Pentateuch, see most recently Thomas Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, eds., *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research,* FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). More ideologically attuned studies focusing on the world "in front of the text" have also proliferated. For an exposition of the hermeneutical metaphors of "behind," "in," and "in front of" the world of the text, see W. Randolf Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach,* 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008).

1.5.1 A "Text Immanent" Approach

I will approach the book of Exodus as an internally unified, theologically oriented, literary composition. My exegesis assumes the received form as represented by the Masoretic Text (MT).[76] I also assume Exodus offers a cohesive narrative unity. Such an approach does not rule out the presence of sources or editorial activity.[77] Yet, the impulse of methodologies that search for the fractures in the text can tend to shortchange the holistic interpretation of the received text.[78] My interpretative stance lies with those who presuppose a basic, coherent structure and meaning of the received form of the text, whatever its process of accretion. The text as it presently exists is worthy of attention in its own right.[79] While appreciative of genuine tensions (and ambiguities) in the text, the burden for a literary-theological interpretation of Scripture remains to show how perceived rifts in the text might illuminate the final, unified shape of the narrative.[80]

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[76] More specifically, I follow the MT tradition as set out in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. On the text of Exodus see John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), xxvi-xxix; William H. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 41-47.

[77] This commitment is not meant to deny the value of methodologies that explore the historical contexts or layers ostensibly present behind the text. Nonetheless, given the great divergence (some would say collapse) of current Pentateuchal source and redactional criticism—and a wider suspicion of classic historical-critical assumptions—interpretations that rely heavily upon theories of the text's origins and divisions are provisional at best and at worst in danger of missing what Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 131-54, usefully calls the narrative's "composite artistry."

[78] Or, at the least, merely noticing the fractures leaves unaddressed the literary merit of the tensions or "jarring juxtapositions" in the final text. See further Adriane Leveen, "Reading the Seams," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 259-87; Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 111-16.

[79] Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), 5.

[80] Childs, *Book of Exodus*, xv; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament,* trans. David E. Orton (The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005), 1-2. The quest to explain the presence of these tensions (in a highly edited text) should beware of the naive presumption that the various tradents were unconscious of the same issues.

Concomitant with the desire to read the book as a well-integrated whole is the commitment to interpret Exodus as a literary work.[81] Literary criticism encompasses a broad spectrum of hermeneutical approaches. I invoke the rubric to emphasize a constructive, synchronic approach that gives close attention to literary conventions (such as repetition, themes, point of view, plot, characterization, gaps, irony, allusion, genre, pattern, polysemy) and literary contexts.[82] The book of Exodus, regardless of sources or redactions, has been artfully fashioned into a narrative whole wherein internal literary aesthetics—or the poetics—of the text are vehicles for the theological message. Thus, we want not only to observe the poetics of the text, but also to inquire about their overriding communicative function as a part of the text. Additionally, in the past few decades critical scholars have fruitfully engaged the compositional contours of Exodus in the context of the Pentateuch, i.e., as the second of a five-part book.[83] I also will take seriously the

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[81] For a recent, lucid defense of Exodus as a unified, literary work from the vantage point of rhetorical-critical analysis, see Stefan Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters God, Moses and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus* (PBM; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013). For a review of theories on the organization and structure of Exodus, along with a cogent case for the literary coherence of the book as unified whole, see Arie C. Leder, "An Iconography of Order: Kingship in Exodus. A Study of the Structure of Exodus" (ThD diss., University of Toronto, 1992). Also see Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, 180-263; Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Literary Unity of the Exodus Narrative," in *"Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?" Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg, BBRSup 13 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 113-32.

[82] This task concentrates on the dynamic narrative qualities of the text, summarized by Dennis Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, MII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13-54, esp. 16-19. Olson compares *constructive* approaches with *deconstructive* (owing to reader-centered approaches) and *dialogical/rhetorical* (building on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and James Muilenburg, respectively). According to Olson, *constructive* biblical literary criticism characterizes the works of scholars such as Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, and Terence Fretheim.

[83] For a summary and relevant bibliography, see V. J. Steiner, "Literary Structure of the Pentateuch," *DOTPentateuch* 544-56.

canonical dimension of Exodus as part of a larger literary whole of the Pentateuch--a dimension that invites a reading across biblical books.[84] My constructive literary hermeneutic, then, not only highlights the literary artfulness and persuasiveness within the book itself, but also leverages the pertinent links between Genesis and Exodus (and also to a lesser extent connections between Exodus and the wider canon) for interpretation. One prominent literary convention, "inner-biblical exegesis," that I employ to exploit these theological linkages needs some further explanation.

"Intertextuality" has garnered considerable attention in the rise of literary methodologies. Intertextuality has become a catchall term to describe a range of relationships that can be discerned between texts. Unfortunately, no consensus definition for the concept exists, and that ambiguity is borne out by scholars who apply the term to disparate, even conflicting, approaches to the text. In a helpful survey of intertextuality in Old Testament scholarship, Geoffrey Miller delineates two major streams of intertextual approaches in scholarship.[85] The first approach places the emphasis on the reader's role in creating the interaction, links, and subsequent meaning of juxtaposed texts.[86] The

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[84] My approach will illustrate that the concern of justice is better understood in Exodus when read as a literary outworking of Genesis. The importance of the canonical sequence is emphasized well by, among others, Terence Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus," *Int* 45 (1991): 354-65. This avenue of interpretation is distinct from some recent interpreters who have stressed the independent and competing traditions of Israel's origins in Genesis and Exodus. For an entrée into this debate, see the discussion between Joel Baden, "The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus," and Konrad Schmid, "Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel," *Bib* 93 (2012): 161-208.

[85] Geoffrey Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," *CBR* 9 (2010): 283-309. The two approaches are less sealed categories as poles of a spectrum.

[86] The reader-oriented approach is indebted to post-structuralist thought. It is particularly associated with the work of Julia Kristeva, *Σημειωτικη [Séméiôtiké]: recherches pour une*

second, more traditional approach, and the one I will draw upon, does not discount the role of the reader but gives comparatively greater emphasis to the world within the text as a delimiting factor in the determination of intertextual relationships.[87] For the sake of this present discussion, I use the name "inner-biblical exegesis" to designate this second approach.[88] Inner-biblical exegesis describes a phenomenon frequent in Scripture in

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*sémanalyse (*Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969); *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique: L'avant-Garde À La Fin Du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont Et Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), who coined the term "intertextuality." She develops the notion that any text emerges in relationship to a network of other texts, regardless of cultural milieu, from which it derives meaning. The act of reading, not any kind of diachronic criteria, establishes the relationships between texts. Thus, meaning is always dependent on the nexus of texts determined by the reader and thereby is potentially endless. For more background of intertextuality in the Kristevian sense in biblical studies, see David I. Yoon, "The Ideological Inception of Intertextuality and Its Dissonance in Current Biblical Studies," *CBR* 12 (2013): 58-76.

[87] This is in contrast to the first approach which ascribes intertextual connections principally to the reader's horizon. The second approach is exemplified by scholars such as Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), and Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); also see Richard Hays, "'Who Has Believed Our Message?' Paul's Reading of Isaiah," in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 34-45. Advances in the field of linguistics have appropriately problematized authorial intentionality as *the* determining category for textual meaning, which is frequent among biblical exegetes. See Helmut Utzschneider, "Text-Reader-Author: Towards a Theory of Exegesis; Some European Viewpoints," *JHebS* 1 (1996): 1-22; Christo Van der Merwe, "Biblical Exegesis, Cognitive Linguistics, and Hypertext," in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004*, ed. Andre Lemaire (Boston: Brill, 2004), 255-80. Yet, these advances have by no means wholly displaced referential accounts of textual interpretation. For a defense of the reality of authorial intention in constructing textual meaning, see Anthony Thisleton, "'Behind' and 'In Front of' the Text: Language, Reference and Indeterminacy," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., SH 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 97-120; Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998). By my use of the "author," "editor," "redactor," "tradent," etc., I do not mean to deny the long, complex process of tradition which resulted in the present form of Exodus. The only access one has to the "author" of any text is the text itself—there is no "de-textualized" author. Yet, authors/editors are historical persons in historical contexts, so that any text immanent approach is not complete without at least posing the question of the historicity behind the text. More on this below.

[88] Throughout my study, however, I alternate between the terms "intertextual" and "inner-biblical" when describing the phenomenon. I will also use the terms "allusion,"

which one biblical text alludes to, comments upon, and/or reuses other biblical texts. One text elicits another text in order to signal some correspondence between the two. Inner-biblical exegesis hinges on some level of connection conditioned by the text itself and recognized by the reader. The reader's role is irreducible to the production of meaning in inner-biblical exegesis, but "in a way which does not bypass the text, but rather completes it."[89]

What textual criteria, then, help to identify inner-biblical connections between texts? Miller's survey demonstrates that, on the whole, scholars adopting an inner-biblical model discern linkages based largely on the presence of shared lexical features.[90] Criteria of lexical similarities serve as the primary evidence, such as (in order of significance): (1) the presence of corresponding language, e.g., similar vocabulary and/or phraseology, explicit citation, and allusion; (2) content, e.g., thematic connections, plot, characterization; and (3) form or structural function. These elements invite the reading of

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"resonance," and "echo" as synonyms to refer to the same phenomena, though I realize other scholars assign different meanings to each of these terms. For example, Stead, *Intertextuality of Zechariah*, 21-22, lists the following terms on a spectrum on the basis of their degree of identification between texts, from greater to lesser: citation, quotation, allusion, echo, trace. See also Michael H. Floyd, "Deutero-Zechariah and Types of Intertextuality" in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-14*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, JSOTSup 370 (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 238; Estelle, *Echoes*, 30-39.

[89] Mark R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1-8*, LHBOTS 506 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 28. Thus, much recent biblical interpretation is shifting from decoding meaning in the text to the process of meaning making that happens in the event of interpretation. For a succinct overview of the contribution of semiotics to interpretation, see Jonathan Huddleston, *Eschatology in Genesis*, FAT 2, 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 5-21.

[90] Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," 294-98. The degree of specificity between inter-texts exists on a spectrum (see Stead, *Intertextuality of Zechariah*, 21-2). For example, a citation establishes a "louder" connection than, say, an allusion. Nonetheless, other contextual factors contribute to determination of an inner-biblical relationship such that the various categories established by scholars can begin to coalesce.

texts together. Naturally, the cumulative convergence of several criteria increases the "persuasiveness" of an inner-biblical connection. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in the book of Exodus, the dramatic literary placement and density of inner-biblical phenomena—in our case, links particularly with Genesis and/or echoes of creation traditions—at pivotal points within the story encourage the reader to look for more subtle echoes peppered throughout. Nonetheless, these criteria are not beyond dispute in any one text, and they are weighed differently among scholars. In the end, as Benjamin Sommer befittingly suggests, the process of determining inner-biblical relationships is more art than science.[91]

So too, the purport of inner-biblical exegesis relies to a significant extent upon the interpreter's overarching educated and artistic judgment. On the one hand, some commentators use an inner-biblical approach to discern diachronic relationships between texts. They then explain the meaning of the texts based largely on these historical judgments. In this way inner-biblical allusions act as evidence for source critical and redactional verdicts.[92] My aim is not to probe the question of compositional history (e.g., the diachronic direction of influence), though I do not mean to reject the conversation by

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[91] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 35; also Hays, "Who Has Believed Our Message?" 30.

[92] E.g., Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments*, WMANT 81 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999); ET = *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. James Nogalski, Siphrut 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

definition.[93] Rather, I attend to Exodus's inner-biblical phenomena as an avenue into the literary and theological significance of the narrative. My exegesis will focus upon discerning the "cross referencing" of texts and how this hermeneutical maneuver modifies the theological interpretation of Exodus by putting it into explicit conversation with other texts. Most especially, I will examine the inner-biblical juxtaposition of creation traditions within the text of Exodus. To this end, I take seriously the canon as a crucial theological category for interpretation. Such a commitment means, first, that I will give due regard to the theological-canonical flow of Genesis to Exodus. I consider the presence of inner-biblical exegesis in Exodus, in other words, as a means by which the book of Exodus theologically interprets and/or expands "earlier" texts and themes encountered in Genesis.[94] Second, but to a lesser extent, I intend to reflect on how Exodus (re)casts other creational texts and categories from outside the Pentateuch for its theological ends.

1.5.2 A Cultural Memory Approach

Though my focus falls squarely on the theological world within the text, interpretation cannot ultimately avoid wrestling with the question of the particular historical setting(s) of the text, i.e., the world behind the text.[95] It is no surprise given the

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[93] Hence, my language throughout of an Exodus text "echoing," "recalling," "recasting," etc. is not an argument for a diachronic direction of influence but rather a way to reference the canonical sequence.

[94] Again, by "earlier" I am not referring to the historical dating of the texts. Within the narrative of the Pentateuch, texts in Genesis appear "earlier" canonically than ones in Exodus.

[95] For a window into the current debate, see Craig C. Bartholomew et al., eds., *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, SH 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

ubiquity and centrality of the exodus tradition in Scripture that Western scholarship in the past two centuries has expended enormous energy in attempts to answer historical questions raised by the book of Exodus. Both knowledge of the events that gave rise to the story and an awareness of the production, recension, and reception of the book of Exodus would ostensibly contribute to a more robust interpretation. On both fronts there has been no shortage of proposals and dispute.[96] Suffice it to say, there is little consensus on the antiquity of the exodus tradition, the degree of historicity behind the text of Exodus, and the social situation(s) which gave rise to its literary production, (continual) usage, or textual stabilization.

One avenue that holds promise for charting a way through (or perhaps better stated, around) the current historiographical disarray involves the study of the Hebrew Bible as "cultural memory."[97] In the last two decades, several Old Testament interpreters have employed memory, rather than history, as a category with which to understand the character of the biblical texts.[98] Though study of cultural memory encompasses a wide

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[96] The best and most recent example is Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H. C. Propp, eds., *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience* (New York: Springer, 2015). The various articles display the remarkable degree of divergence of opinion concerning the historicity of the events behind the book of Exodus.

[97] The descriptor terms "cultural," "collective," and "social" are often used interchangeably in the literature, as I will do here. Note the hesitation for complete confluence among terms in Dietrich Harth, "The Invention of Cultural Memory," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 87.

[98] I list here a selection from a burgeoning field: Marc Brettler, "Memory in Ancient Israel," in *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Michael A. Signer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 1-17; Ronald Hendel, "The Exodus in Biblical Memory," *JBL* 120 (2001): 601-22; Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Memory, Tradition, and the Construction of the Past in Ancient Israel," in *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

range of disciplines, in the following I note a few of its most salient features as it pertains to its application in biblical scholarship.

Cultural memory is largely traced to the pioneering work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the early twentieth century.[99] Halbwachs's generative insight was the

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2004), 1-17; Ronald Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Stephen C. Barton, and Benjamin G. Wold, eds., *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity*, WUNT 212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Philip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, eds., *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond*, BMW 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2009); Nadav Na'aman, "The Exodus Story: Between Historical Memory and Historiographical Composition," *JANER* 11 (2011): 39-69; Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, eds., *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah*, FAT 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Pernille Carstens, Trine Bjønung Hasselbalch, and Niels Peter Lemche, eds., *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis*, PHSC 17 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2012); Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi, eds., *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); various articles in Levy et al., eds. *Israel's Exodus*.

The study of collective memory, though widely diffused among various disciplines (Jeffrey K. Olick et al., "Introduction," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3, refers to the "memory boom" in the late 20th century), is a relative newcomer to biblical scholarship. Though "memory" was a theme explored by Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1962) and Willy Schottroff, *Gedenken im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel zakar im semitischen Sprachkreis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967) more than half a century ago, the developments of memory in wider disciplines proceeded largely unnoticed until the work of Jan Assmann (see below). This absence of memory studies in biblical scholarship until the last two decades is due in part to the strong influence of a form-critical understanding of tradition, a heavy emphasis on historiography, the lack of an agreed upon methodology, and the persistence of understanding memory as an individual phenomenon (see Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition as Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, SBL SemeiaSt 52 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005), 25-41; Linda M. Stargel, "Social Memory and the Exodus Tradition" (Th.M. thesis, Duke Divinity School, 2007), 42-47. For a succinct overview of collective memory within biblical scholarship, see Ritva Williams, "Social Memory," *BTB* 41 (2011): 189-200.

[99] Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Librarie Félix Alcan, 1925); *La topographie légendaire des Evangiles en Terre Sainte: Etude de memoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1941); *The Collective Memory*, ed. Mary Douglas, trans. Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophon, 1980); a distillation of the former two works is *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). On the development of collective memory and its broad acceptance among

necessary social conditioning of memory.[100] He maintained that individual memory, contrary to popular perception, is not possible outside of an existing social framework of interpretation. He contended the social framework of memory means that memory is not merely a storehouse of artifacts about the past but is the mechanism which distills the past in conversation with and in service to present concerns. Memory, as human's basic relationship to the past, entails a recall of a past that is active, i.e., memory mediates the past for the present. Hence, Halbwachs argued that memory works as the connective glue for a social group. Groups rely on memory to establish a shared identity among individuals through a common template of self-understanding.[101] He believed this was characteristically the case for religious groups, whose emphasis on tradition perpetuated collective memory generationally.[102]

Although the theory of cultural memory has percolated for some time and has found general acceptance (with debate and development) across the humanities and social-sciences, it has only recently entered into the grammar of Old Testament

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social-scientific disciplines, see Olick et al., "Introduction," 3-62; Harth, "The Invention of Cultural Memory," 85-96. On Halbwachs and Old Testament scholarship in particular, see Hans M. Barstad, "Maurice Halbwachs, Memory, and the Hebrew Bible," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. David Clines and Ellen van Wolde, HBM 38 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 45-58.

[100] Not only is memory socially conditioned, but Olick et al., "Introduction," 20, contends subsequent work on collective memory "has demonstrated that there are long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them."

[101] Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: McGraw-Hill International, 2003), 51, notes Halbwach's "assertion that every group develops a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity is still the starting point for all research in the field."

[102] See "Religious Collective Memory," 84-119, in *On Collective Memory.*

scholarship principally through the writings of Egyptologist Jan Assmann.[103] Using Halbwachs's work as a starting point, Assmann contends memory of the past works as a "cultural creation" that is socially constructed, organized, and negotiated to address the present and future.[104] He distinguishes two modes of collective memory—communicative memory and cultural memory.[105] On the one hand, communicative memory describes "biographical" memories which individuals informally share with contemporaries. They consist of personal memories of the recent, lived past. Communicative memory survives at most 80-100 years. Eventually, it gives way to cultural memory with the effect that a collective memory is transmitted generationally.

Cultural memory, on the other hand, distills and extends memory. It unites, condenses, and brings coherence to what may have originated as a potpourri of disjointed memories.[106] Of course, not everything is remembered, but what is remembered (and

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[103] Assmann's most influential work in biblical scholarship is *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 1-54; see also "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-33; *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Culture Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); his watershed work, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992) is available in English as *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[104] *Cultural Memory*, 28. "Anyone who during today fixes his eyes on tomorrow must preserve yesterday from oblivion by grasping it through memory. This is how the past is reconstructed, and this is the sense in which we say that the past comes into being when we refer to it" (17).

[105] On the following paragraphs see "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 126-33; *Cultural Memory*, 36-41.

[106] Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 130-32, characterizes cultural memory by the following six, overlapping variables which tie together memory, culture, and group identity: (1) Concretion of Identity: preservation of the distinguishing marks of a group's self-understanding; (2) Capacity to Reconstruct: meaningful organization of a group's

what is also forgotten) serves to perpetuate social identity in both its unity and particularity.[107] Assmann argues that cultural memory is largely preserved by "institutionalized mnemotechnics," viz., semiotic systems such as dress, language, myths, rituals, calendric phenomena, and sacred texts—organized and often ceremonially practiced patterns of culture making. Cultural memory is comprised of "that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."[108] Through such means individual identities are connected and calibrated to the group's collective identity. The group's social identity and its continuity with its past endures by the reflexive re-appropriation of its memory in light of evolving, present needs.[109] According to Assmann, then, cultural memory names the "cultural sphere that combines tradition, awareness of history, myth in action, and self-definition, and that—a crucial point—is subject to the vast range of historically conditioned changes."[110]

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accumulated past memories within a contemporary frame of reference; (3) Formation: stabilization of collectively shared knowledge as a prerequisite to cultural institutionalization; (4) Organization: formalization and distribution of memory through durable vehicles or agents of transmission; (5) Obligation: cultivation of the system of values inherited in memory among group members, in both its normative and educative role; (6) Reflexivity: interpretation of common practice through dialectical reference to community's collective memory.

[107] Diana Edelman, "Introduction," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xx-xxi, argues that it is social memory's functional characteristic—i.e., to reinforce group identity through a shared past—which distinguish it from the broader notion of "tradition."

[108] Assmann, "Collective Memory," 132.

[109] On the similarities and differences between the understanding of the process of actualization, "*Vergegenwärtigung*," as developed in biblical scholarship, see A. J. Culp, "The Memoir of Moses: Deuteronomy and the Shaping of Israel's Memory" (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 2012), 6-9, 84-87, 224.

[110] Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 10.

What can be gained by seeing the book of Exodus within the category of collective, or cultural, memory? The continual appearance of the Exodus tradition throughout Scripture illustrates its overwhelming potency as the central collective memory in Israel's theological imagination.[111] Of course, the fact that the narrative was written down itself reveals a will to remember.[112] But even more, Exodus is explicitly a story about remembering. Assmann states:

> Egypt must be remembered in order to know what lies in the past, and what must not be allowed to come back. The theme of remembering is therefore central to the Exodus myth and to the constellation of Egypt and Israel. This is not only a myth to be remembered but a myth about remembering, a myth about past and future. It remembers the past in order to win the future.[113]

Accordingly, in more than one place in the Exodus narrative itself, the author of Exodus appeals to Israel's task of remembering the events:

> And for this reason you will recount in the ears of your son and your grandson how I made a mockery of Egypt and about my signs which I displayed there so that they will know that I am YHWH. (10:2)
>
> When your son asks you in the future, "What is this about?" you tell him, "With a strong hand YHWH brought us out from Egypt, from the house of slavery. (13:14; cf. 12:26; 13:18).

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[111] See above section "The Centrality of Exodus." Cf. Assmann, "Exodus and Memory," 3-15. Stargel, "Social Memory and the Exodus," 50-76, looks at the following texts and themes in order to demonstrate how the exodus tradition fits well Assmann's six characteristics of cultural memory: (1) Concretion of Identity: Exod 19:4; Lev 25:55; Deut 6:20-25; Josh 24:5-7 (2) Capacity to Reconstruct: Exod 15:1-18; 114; Isa 43:16-19; 51:10-11 (3) Formation: song: Exod 15:1-21; ritual: Exod 12:14-20; 24-27; 13:3-10; 23:14-15; Deut 16:1-8; Lev 23:42-43; familiar language and imagery (see her list on 60-61); (4) Organization: Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:30; Deut 16:1-8; 2 Chr 30; Num 9:6-14); (5) Obligation: Exod 12:14; 13:5-10; Deut 6:20-22; Ps 78:11-14; (6) Reflexivity: basis of telling time (Exod 16:1; 19:1; Num 1:1); interpretation of contemporary events (Deut 7:18; Judg 6:13; Isa 10:24; Hos 2:15; Zech 10:9-11).

[112] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 102.

[113] Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8.

> YHWH said to Moses, "Write this commemorative text in the book and put it in the ears of Joshua, namely, that I will wipe out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. (17:14)

And, obviously, the prescription of the annual ritual of the Passover (Exod 12) assures bodily, mnemonic practice of the story perennially in Israelite homes.[114] The perpetuation of the Exodus memory is made explicit in the narrative, not least because, as Laura Feldt argues,

> [T]he Israelites are presented as forgetful and in constant need of new fantastic events, ever more miracles. No matter how often they are presented with miracles, wonders, violent killings, and other extreme events . . . they do not have lasting effect, because the Israelites forget them almost immediately and doubt the supernatural agent that performed them.[115]

The perpetuation of the Exodus memory, through recital and ritual, becomes the *sine qua non* of Israel's cultural identity and survival.[116]

For the most part, biblical scholars who have drawn on cultural memory study have done so in order to elucidate the world behind the text. The focus has rested on what Assmann calls "mnemohistory," that is, uncovering the historical process of the

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[114] See Diana Edelman, "Exodus and Peasch-Massot as Evolving Social Memory," in *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah*, eds. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, FAT 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 161-93. Assmann, "Exodus and Memory," 9-14, insightfully reflects on memory and Passover. He contends the "mnemotechnique" of the Passover celebration to remind the people of their covenant and story, though it has analogies among Israel's contemporaries, "surpasses by far anything comparable in the ancient world" (10).

[115] Laura Feldt, "Fantastic Re-Collection: Cultural vs. Autobiographical Memory in the Exodus Narrative," in *Religious Narrative, Cognition, and Culture: Image and Word in the Mind of Narrative*, ed. Armin W. Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (Sheffield: Equinox, 2010), 203. She notes further, "The oscillation between belief and doubt present in the text is absolutely necessary, for without it the problem of the text would not be clearly stated: how do we secure belief and orientation of the collective self? The text implies that this can be achieved by means of a memorial narrative." She goes on to outline no less than nine mnemonic practices woven into the narrative as strategies to transmit the Exodus memory through the generations (203-204).

[116] This truth becomes even more acute in Deuteronomy's emphasis on remembering. See Culp, "Memoirs of Moses."

production of memory—or, how the perception about the past developed historically.[117] For example, in applications of cultural memory specific to Exodus, Ronald Hendel, Nadav Na'aman, and Andrew Mayes independently attempt to uncover the particular, historical context(s) in which the tradition of the exodus emerged as the master narrative.[118] All three take for granted the exodus tradition as the fundamental story for Israel's Scriptures (though each has a different opinion about the historicity behind the exodus event). Yet, their goal is to establish historical circumstances in Israel's history that explain how the exodus memory came to exercise its prominence in Israel's scriptural imagination. In other words, "for the Exodus story to take root in early Israel it was necessary for it to pertain to the remembered past of settlers who did not immigrate from Egypt."[119] Each proposes a plausible set of historical factors that they suggest

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[117] Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8-9: "Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertexuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past. Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but rather is one of its branches or subdisciplines . . . Mnemohistory is reception theory applied to history." We might add, whereas the recent appreciation of the reception history of the Hebrew Bible overlaps with cultural memory, the latter focuses more on how the texts functioned to reinforce group identity.

[118] Hendel, "Exodus in Biblical Memory;" ibid., "The Exodus as Cultural Memory: Egyptian Bondage and the Song of the Sea," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. T. E. Levy et al. (New York: Springer, 2015), 65-77; Nadav Na'aman, "The Exodus Story;" ibid., "Out of Egypt or Out of Canaan? The Exodus Story Between Memory and Historical Reality," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. T. E. Levy et al. (New York: Springer, 2015), 527-33; Mayes, "Pharaoh's Shishak's Invasion of Palestine." Cf. H. Zlotnick-Sivan, "Moses the Persian? Exodus 2, the "Other" and Biblical "Mnemohistory," *ZAW* 116 (2004): 189-205, who looks at only Exodus 2. Also cf. Kåre Berge, "The Anti-Hero as Figure of Memory and Didacticism in Exodus: The Case of Pharaoh and Moses," 145-60, and Edelman, "Exodus and Peasch-Massot," 161-93, both in *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah*, eds. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, FAT 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

[119] Hendel, "Exodus in Biblical Memory," 604; cf. Na'aman, "Exodus Story," 60-63.

explains the relevance and endurance of the exodus memory throughout Israelite history.[120]

These kinds of investigations demonstrate feasible reasons why the exodus tradition continued to have a transformational influence in Israel. Furthermore, they supply historical evidence that can be used to elucidate the presence of various components and layers within the book of Exodus. And yet, the category of cultural memory cautions against locating the historical silver bullet that conclusively explains the story as we now have it. A singular context cannot sufficiently accommodate the rich, textured complexity of Exodus. Aren Maeir diagnoses the problem with a creative assortment of analogies:

> This tradition, or matrix of cultural memories, was woven together and altered over a long period (perhaps, periodically unwoven as well—*Penelope's shroud* perhaps serving as an analogy), containing "snippets of yarns of memory" from many sources. This explains why this "amazing technicolor dreamcoat" does not dovetail with any specific, limited set of events; in fact, by definition it cannot fit into a restricted historical horizon! We are not looking for the "tree" that will provide the "ultimate" definition of the "forest"—but rather we must realize that this "forest" comprises many trees—each reflecting another "snippet" of collective memory.[121]

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[120] Although they do not specifically use the category of cultural memory, others have attempted to locate the emergence of the exodus tradition within a specific, historical period of ancient Israel, e.g., Donald Redford, "Some Observations on the Traditions Surrounding 'Israel in Egypt,'" in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, ed. Oded Lipschits et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 279-338; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 65-71.

[121] Aren M. Maeir, "Exodus as a *Mnemo-Narrative*: An Archaeological Perspective," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Levy et al. (New York: Springer, 2015), 414. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 132, uses textile imagery to describe Torah's redactional pattern. Cf. the question of Zlotnick-Sivan, "Moses the Persian?" 189: "how is it possible to inscribe into a "mnemohistory" which is nevertheless carefully constructed around chronological sequence the work of authors and redactors who have noxiously resisted identification, let alone a date?" This comment in spite of the fact that he goes on to propose a redactional history (of sorts) in his article, albeit unconvincingly. Abraham

The Exodus narrative as collective memory was somewhat fluid—a bricolaged "chain of memories"—negotiating numerous periods and events.[122] To be sure, the presence and apparent weight attached to the exodus tradition in early biblical consciousness suggests the antiquity of a historical nucleus, notwithstanding recent efforts to depict the story as a late fiction.[123] Yet, contemporary source, tradition, and redaction criticism analyses demonstrate that the text was remembered and re-membered over shifting historical

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Malamat, "The Exodus: Egyptian Analogies," in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 16, shows that an exodus of Canaanite slaves from Egypt was a "durative" event happening over a long period of time in the waning years of Egyptian hegemony over Canaan (19th-20th dynasties).

[122] See the discussion and notes above on the Exodus as paradigmatic. "Chain of memory" I borrow from Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000). The variety among presentations of the Exodus tradition throughout different genres in the canon demonstrates the elasticity of the tradition. See Stargel, "Social Memory and the Exodus," 65, who applies the categories of "stable" and "unstable" elements to two renditions of the Exodus memory (Exod 13:17-14:31 and Exod 15:1-21) in order to explore the reasons behind its variations. Moreover, Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 39-40, maintains memory often acts as an adhesive, transforming an assemblage of disconnected points in time into "seemingly unbroken historical continua."

[123] The rise of critical historiography and advances in archaeology have substantially withered positivistic confidence in the historicity of the Exodus narrative. Nonetheless, there is biblical evidence that makes better sense with a historic exodus-like event taking place on Egyptian soil than without. For a sensible sifting of the evidence, see Graham Davies, "Was There An Exodus?" in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 23-40; cf. Ernest S. Frerichs, Leonard H. Lesko, and William G. Dever, eds., *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); and various articles in Levy et al. *Israel in Transdisciplinary Perspective*. For a thorough defense of the *plausibility* of the historicity of the exodus, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); idem, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Na'aman, "Out of Egypt or Out of Canaan?" 527, describes the situation aptly: "Scholars dispute the historicity of the Exodus narrative. The range of opinions stretches from those who suggest the nucleus of the story is basically authentic and the episode reflects an important event in the early history of Israel to those who entirely dismiss the historicity of the story, emphasizing that it was written at a later time and suggesting that it mainly reflects the time of its composition . . . Between the two extremes lie scholars who accept the historicity of a few details in the story and

horizons. We could debate to what degree this or that element, layer, or tradition stems from this or that historical setting. The category of cultural memory, however, curbs the tendency to argue for the primacy of one historical period, and moreover, moderates the impulse to explain the text in light of a strict chronology of historical developments.[124] Such attempts might use the category of cultural memory as a tool for modern historiography (such attempts are valuable).[125] To my mind, though, the more persuasive contribution cultural memory makes to historiographical questions lies in its emphasis not on the historical but the *social* dimension of the memory, namely, why this particular narrative embedded itself within the collective consciousness of ancient Israel through the centuries. So, for example, I find reasonable Hendel's suggestion that the memory of a pervasive and oppressive presence of Egypt in the land of Canaan just before and

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posit that the story includes a small nucleus of historical events that took place on Egyptian soil and on the way from Egypt to Canaan."

[124] Cf. Edelman's comments, "Introduction," xix: "The point of applying memory studies to reading the texts of the Hebrew Bible is not to discern how accurately or inaccurately events have been portrayed, interpreted, or remembered. Rather it is to explore how the books contributed to the shaping of the social memory of those of Judean descent or affiliation who self-identified as members of the religious community of Israel who were able to read them." Also, note well her judgments on the incompatibility of source and redaction criticism with a social memory perspective (xxii-xxiii).

[125] Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 99-108, offers a succinct sketch of the contested relationship between history and memory in scholarship. Though all agree these two are distinct, scholars dispute the exact boundaries between them. Cf. Olick et al., "Introduction," 43-45. Also note the cogent criticisms of using cultural memory as an approach to serve historical reconstruction by Jens Bruun Kofoed, "The Old Testament as Cultural Memory," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, eds. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 303-23.

during the early Iron Age naturally "greased the wheels," so to speak, for a widespread embrace of the exodus story by an indigenous population in Canaan.[126]

Nevertheless, cultural memory is a different mode of inquiry into the past than modern historiography. Yael Zerubavel describes a distinguishing quality of the former: "the power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance."[127] Collective memory becomes a meaningful category not based primarily on the past reality of the events but rather based on the memory's significance for collective identity. A group recognizes the memory as definitive for perpetuating identity—regardless to what extent various group members (or their ancestors) were involved in the actual historical experience.[128] Thus, cultural memory

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[126] Hendel, "The Exodus as Cultural Memory;" Na'aman, "Out of Egypt or Out of Canaan?" Cf. Barmash, "Out of the Mists," 4-6; Maeir, "Exodus as a *Mnemo-Narrative*," 413-15. This of course presumes in accordance with most recent scholarship that the majority who came to identify themselves as Israel emerged from within the land. See the survey of scholarship on the issue in Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 77-143; William G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 119-258. Interestingly, Manfred Bietak, "On the Historicity of the Exodus: What Egyptology Today Can Contribute to Assessing the Biblical Account of the Sojourn in Egypt," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Levy et al. (New York: Springer, 2015), 17-37, reviews evidence that the collective memory of suffering by Canaanites in Canaan on account of Egypt could have reasonably merged with memories of Canaanites suffering in Egypt.

[127] Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8.

[128] Edelman, "Introduction," xix. R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 93, expresses it well: "Whatever the origins of the narrative, as the narrative is handed on and retold, it acquires ever greater coloring from the contexts of its retelling. This is because the narrative is seen to be a suitable vehicle for the expression of certain recurrent existential issues and questions of identity that are important to the people who cherish the narrative. Because of such a history of prior use, the narrative in its received form may relate somewhat loosely to its received literary

navigates a way through the historiographical quandaries of Exodus by, on the one hand, pointing to the larger social and political rhythms as a backdrop to this epic story and, on the other hand, bringing into focus the story's socio-ethical qualities as *educative* memory.[129] To say it again, if on the one hand collective memory brings new awareness to how the broader patterns of Israelite history shaped (and was shaped by) the memories of the Exodus tradition, then it also (and more significantly for this study) recognizes that the text is a long-term, negotiated stabilization of these accumulating "rememberings" which function as Israel's formative and normative narrative.[130] The category of cultural memory, thus, pushes us to examine this bricolage of memories as a storied constellation of abiding truth which oriented and continues to orient theological imagination. Cultural memory facilitates the shift of emphasis from the modern historiographical "where" and "what" of the narrative to the metahistorical "why." It is "the actuality rather than factuality of the past" which is at issue.[131]

Here again, Assmann's work helpfully describes the purposes cultural memory can serve in perpetuating the "actuality" of the narrative. He contends cultural memory

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contextualization. One consequence is that it is usually more or less impossible to separate out, or reconstruct, the different elements that have come to constitute the narrative, though sometimes anachronisms can give some clues."

[129] Brettler, "Memory in Ancient Israel," 2-3, 9, notes that the rabbinic view of the past was fundamentally didactic, not historical.

[130] Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 38, distinguishes between normative and formative in the following way: "Normative texts . . . answer the question "What shall we do?" They help us to make judgments, arrive at legal findings, and make decisions. They transmit practical knowledge and point the way to right action. . . Formative texts . . . answer the question "Who are we?" They help to define ourselves and establish our identity. They transmit identity-confirming knowledge by narrating stories that are shared."

[131] Carol Meyers, *Exodus,* NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

mediates and condenses the past by transforming it into foundational memory, or "myth." Foundational myths articulate salient moments that have shaped an identity of a group. In so doing, they embody fundamental group values which supply the frame(s) of reference to propel the group for action in the present.[132] Assmann designates this aspect a "mythomotoric" function of foundational memory.[133] He makes clear his choice of the term "myth" is not aimed at stripping memory's content of its truth value or necessarily

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[132] Assmann insists that the relationship between the past and the present is not unidirectional but a dialectical one. Memory shapes the present, but the present also shapes memory of the past (see especially "Guilt and Remembrance: On the Theologization of History in the Ancient Near East," *Memory and History* 2 (1990): 5-33; and examples in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006). The "presentist" nature of collective memory is somewhat disputed; namely, to what degree do present concerns impose themselves on the construction of memory. Indeed, some collective memory theorists (and not a few biblical scholars) have gone so far as to say that the present, hegemonic forces dictate the construction of the past, such that cultural memory is a veiled manipulation or even fabrication of the past for solely ideological ends. The term "invention of tradition" can tend to be used in this direction (e.g., van der Toorn, "The Exodus as Charter Myth," 13-27), although it need not be understood in such a radical constructivist way (see Paul Post, "The Creation of Tradition: Rereading and Reading beyond Hobsbawm," in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition: Papers Read at a NOSTER Conference in Soesterberg, January 4-6, 1999,* ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Anton Houtepen, STAR 3 (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2001), 41-59). Without denying ideological interests are at work in the formation of memory, several scholars have shown that this *Tendenz* is an extreme to be resisted (see e.g., Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386-1403; Mitsztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 56-73; Alan Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," and Barry Schwartz, "Christian Origins: Historical Truth and Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, SBL SemeiaSt 52 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005), 10-17, and 43-56, respectively; Frank H. Polak, "Afterword: Perspectives in Retrospect," in *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, Bible in the Modern World 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2009), 296-99; Culp, "Memoir of Moses," 76-78. Memory is an elastic framework that mediates and makes the past relevant to present concerns, but it is more accurate to cast memory as a negotiation between past and present, rather than a reflex of present power holders. "It is true that present identity is the perspective from which individuals—and groups—view and shape the past. But present identity configurations are always emerging from the variegated experiences of ever-deepening pasts" (Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," 15).

[133] Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 63.

denying the historical reality of the events. Rather, foundational memory as "myth" points to the remembered history's formative and normative significance for a community's identity.[134] Cultural memory lays the emphasis on the myth's "future 'binding' qualities as something that must not under any circumstances be forgotten."[135] Foundational memory, then, offers a hermeneutic for ethical activity in the future—it articulates an abiding, symbolic world laden with constitutive values that legitimizes and mobilizes certain patterns of social behavior. The past, as a didactic, orienting, and mobilizing memory, is woven into the present for the sake of the future.[136] In a word, the memory inscribed in the narrative is pedagogical.

In addition to its foundational function, Assmann highlights another mythomotoric function of cultural memory: contra-present.[137] If foundational memory conjures up the past in order to make the present into something meaningful, then

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[134] Ibid., 38. Cf. ibid., *Moses the Egyptian*, 8.

[135] Ibid., *Cultural Memory*, 61.

[136] Does qualifying the Exodus tradition in this way make it historically untrue? I do not want to remain apathetic to the historical background of the story. Indeed, I will draw on the ancient Near Eastern backdrop and Israelite history in my exegesis of the text. But, I do remain agnostic toward nailing down precise historical details concerning the originating events or the literary compilation of the narrative. I have here defended my approach to the text as cultural memory as a warrant for my agnosticism toward modern historiographical questions. Apart from this, I take the current widespread divergence on historical questions as another indication for a healthy skepticism toward any particular reconstruction (despite scholars who employ cultural memory for this very activity). I wish to lay emphasis on the orienting function of the book of Exodus as highlighted by Assmann's description of cultural memory: "What counts for cultural memory is not factual but remembered history. One might even say that cultural memory transforms factual into remembered history. Myth is foundational history that is narrated in order to illuminate the present from the standpoint of its origins…Through memory, history becomes myth. This does not make it unreal—on the contrary, this is what makes it real, in the sense that it becomes a lasting, normative, and formative power" (*Cultural Memory*, 37-8).

[137] Ibid., 62-69.

memory can also serve to critique the present experience as inconsistent with a community's identity as rooted in memory. It furnishes the measuring stick of what is wrong with the present in light of the past. The act of remembering, in the context of incongruity, then becomes a contra-present act of resistance. Foundational memory functions in contra-present ways in contexts in which the present experience might lack sufficient, daily reminders that confirm the reality of the memory.[138] Especially in situations of oppression, Assmann notes, foundational memories become contra-present memories that form frames of reference for empowering cultural change, even revolution.

What we have in the book of Exodus is the evolved and elevated foundational memory that has endured in contra-present ways.[139] So what does all of this have to do with my project? The focus of this dissertation is not on Exodus's mnemohistorical character—the memory's historical development.[140] Rather, I focus on the literary emplotment of the memory, specifically as it relates to the theme of justice. The overall presentation of this theme in the story, as foundational memory, transcends any single time period. The category of cultural memory underlines the foundational, even

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[138] Ibid., *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 16-17.

[139] Ibid., *Cultural Memory*, 67: "Generally, it appears that religion tends to go together with the foundational function. In relation to Judaism, it appears that the link with . . . contrapresent memory is much more striking than elsewhere."

[140] We could explore this direction as a way to explain the book's presentation of the motif of justice. I think, though, this is a speculative enterprise which ultimately runs against the grain of the book's own sense of its theological and metahistorical character. It is, of course, legitimate to focus on the "mnemonic effects" of the Exodus memory—that is, how the narrative of the Exodus was interpreted and enacted—in any number of historical periods. So, for instance, *Remembering Biblical Figures*, concentrates on how biblical characters reinforced group identity in the late Persian and Hellenistic Period; also see Barmash, "Out of the Mist," 7-15.

"decontextualized,"[141] quality of the narrative, and highlights its pedagogical role for generations to come.[142] In other words, didacticism is part of the fabric and function of the narrative.[143] What is more, we will see that the story itself gives sustained attention to the importance of pedagogy *in and for justice* in particular. My reading demonstrates that Exodus means not just to depict the contours of YHWH's justice but also to underline the importance of learning and growing into YHWH's justice. That is, the nature of the text is pedagogical (per cultural memory); and tutelage in justice is a specific focus of its pedagogical impetus. Hence, my exploration of the theme of justice in Exodus shows the significance of formation and maturation with regard to justice.

On a final note, I think the well-attested creational imagery pushes in a complementary, pedagogical direction. It was generally the case that cosmogonic myths in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt functioned in foundational ways.[144] These myths related stories of origin which served as archetypes to legitimate the ethics of human society. Exodus fulfilled these same roles for Israel with an important distinction: it located the myth in human history.[145] Yet, as I argue the book of Exodus is in explicit

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[141] James Fentriss and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*, New Perspectives on the Past (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 71-74, provide insight on the ways epic narratives are unmoored from specific external historical contexts. The memory subsequently survives and is reinforced through a concretization of the internal context—i.e., the world within the text—which do not depend heavily on external contexts.

[142] See the similar line of argument by Barmash, "Out of the Mists of History," 5-7.

[143] Cf. Kåre Berge, "Didacticism in Exodus? Elements of Didactic Genre in Exodus 1-15," *SJOT* 22 (2008): 3-28.

[144] Clifford, *Creation Accounts*; John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 19-44. See the next chapter.

[145] Since Bertil Albrektson's monograph *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup,

conversation with the cosmogonic narrative at the beginning of Israel's canon, Gen 1-11, and other creational themes. Exodus weaves its historical narrative with creational ("mythic") categories. This is not to be understood as a disruption, deposition, or demotion of Genesis's creation narrative, but rather its ethical demonstration in the memory of the chosen people of God. Hence, the canonical book of Exodus is not a foundational story in disharmony with the beginnings of the world. If the Exodus is paradigmatic for Israel's understanding of justice, then Genesis's creation account is the "pre-emptive" meta-narrative for understanding Exodus.[146] To say it differently, creation provides the perduring anchor that secures Exodus as programmatic.

1.6 Overview of this Study

This dissertation investigates the paradigmatic, moral vision of justice presented in the book of Exodus. I adopt a synchronic, text immanent interpretative strategy which takes specific note of canonical and inner-biblical connections, especially as they

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1967), it is understood that the gods of ancient Near Eastern religion also were involved in historical affairs. Yet, their involvement in history does not come close to matching Israel's conception of the divine action in history. See Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1:56; ibid., "Exodus: Liberation History Against Charter Myth," 133-37. For more on the interfusing of myth and history in Israel and among its contemporaries, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[146] In one sense, Exodus is the cultural memory that makes "available the moral and symbolic resources for making sense of the present through 'keying' present experiences and predicaments to archetypal images and narrative representations of the commemorated past" (Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," 16). But, in another sense, Exodus as a whole is "keyed" to creation. I borrow the language of "pre-emptive" from Kirk's discussion of Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*. Schudson discusses the traumatic past as a "pre-emptive metaphor" for understanding the present (167).

point toward creational categories in the narrative. My foregoing discussion of cultural memory gives good reason also to attend to the pedagogical nature of the text. The complementary lenses of creation and pedagogy, thus, work in tandem to sharpen my close, constructive reading of the justice of Exodus. The following briefly outlines the content of each chapter. At the end of each chapter, I summarize at greater length my exegetical conclusions.

Chapter Two: Defining Justice (Justice in the Ancient Near East and Israel). The ancients understood "justice and righteousness" as principles ingrained in creation and at work in every sphere of society. Justice in this frame of reference names an ethical norm and goal, rooted in a divinely mandated social order, that embodies relational harmony and restorative compassion toward the vulnerable.[147] Israel's Scriptures testify to YHWH's imprint of justice on and within creation. Humans and especially the king were meant to act justly, which was behavior conformed to YHWH's creational order. Genesis provides an essential prelude to investigating the theme of YHWH's justice in Exodus.

Chapter Three: Justice under Threat (Exodus 1-4). The beginning of Exodus casts Israel's situation in terms of a breakdown of YHWH's creational trajectory of justice-righteousness launched in Genesis. Pharaoh's oppression stymies YHWH's creational goals for Israel on behalf of the wider world. Within this creational framework, Israel's experience in Egypt is marked by "poverty" (i.e., vulnerability and oppression).

[147] As such, it is a concept not adequately captured by modern notions of "retribution," "fairness," or "equity."

The episodes of Moses's early life pivot around the issue of justice, and YHWH's call and commission of Moses bespeak YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant and attentiveness to the cry of injustice. Exodus 1-4 sets the stage for YHWH's deliverance by which YHWH will educate Israel (and Egypt) on the divine creational agenda that showcases a key concern for justice.

Chapter Four: Justice Championed (Exodus 5-15). With signs and wonders YHWH unmasks Pharaoh's order as an anti-creational affront to true justice. YHWH wants Pharaoh to concede to sending the people out to serve YHWH. YHWH preserves Pharaoh's ability to do so by "hardening" his heart. Yet, Pharaoh will not yield, ultimately driving Egypt to bear the brunt of his injustice against the elect. The plagues, the exodus of a "mixed multitude," and the dramatic sea crossing all serve YHWH's reclamation of creational intentions for Israel and, by extension, for the world. YHWH 's extrication of Israel from Egypt educates all involved in YHWH's way of justice.

Chapter Five: Summoned to Justice (Exodus 15-24). The deliverance from Egypt is by no means all that Exodus offers on the theme of justice. In the exit from Egypt Israel transitions from service under Pharaoh to service under its new king YHWH. This transition necessarily expands the theology of the justice of Exodus. In the trek through the wilderness, YHWH aims to heal Israel of the "diseases of Egypt" by training the people in a different regimen of justice. At the mountain the implications of YHWH 's kingship continue to unfold. Israel is summoned into covenant with YHWH, who positions Israel as the divinely appointed exegete of YHWH 's justice. Through following the law, Israel is to emerge from Sinai as a re-ordered community that embodies and mediates God's creational justice for all the earth.

Chapter Six: Building for Justice (Exodus 25-40). The tabernacle is the meeting point between heaven and earth, symbolically reflecting in its structure YHWH's creational order. It is to be for Israel the orienting center for the practice of YHWH's justice. However, the people's building of the golden calf places everything in jeopardy. The great sin becomes the occasion to learn of the relationship between mercy and judgment as constitutive of YHWH's justice. The book ends with the construction of the tabernacle, which itself models the way to build for justice.

I close with a short chapter that summarizes my conclusions. One last note: throughout my exegetical treatment I address ethically troublesome passages on justice (e.g., Pharaoh's hard heart, the "plundering" of the Egyptians, the death of the firstborn, Amalek, Levitical slaughter) as they appear in the sequence of the narrative. These passages surely deserve more thorough attention than I provide here; but I aim to show (at the least) how the larger narrative helps one probe these (alleged) morally problematic passages on the text's own terms. Now I begin my investigation into the justice of Exodus.

2. DEFINING JUSTICE: JUSTICE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND ISRAEL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this work I build the case that the narrative of Exodus is the exemplary exposition of YHWH's creational concern for justice, particularly as exercised toward the poor. In order to recognize the cadence of justice in Exodus, we must familiarize ourselves generally with the background of justice-talk in Israel and among its contemporaries. Because a host of book-length studies, specialized monographs, and articles already exist on the concept of justice in the Old Testament, it is hardly possible or particularly prudent to attempt a comprehensive summary of the discussion in a single chapter.[1] Instead, I offer a selective survey of the wider background out of which Israel's view of justice, and especially justice toward the poor, should be understood.

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[1] I list here only a few monographs to which the reader can refer for further study and bibliographic information. More popular treatments of the topic include Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What is New and What is Old* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Walter J. Houston, *Justice—The Biblical Challenge*; H. G. M. Williamson, *He Has Shown You What Is Good: Old Testament Justice Then and Now* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2012); Jeremiah Unterman, *Justice For All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics*, JPS Essential Judaism Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2017).

For more in-depth works, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995); Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World*, trans. Seán Charles Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); Houston, *Contending for Justice*. For a recent collection of specialized articles on justice, see Reinhard Achenbach and Martin Arneth, eds. *"Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben" (Gen 18,19): Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie: Festschrift für Eckart Ott*, BZABR 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009).

I begin with a sketch of the ancient Near Eastern ideological background of justice. This will lead to a discussion of the language and content of justice and righteousness in Israel's writings. I then present a brief excursus on the identification of the "poor" in the Hebrew Bible. Next, I address how various parts of the Hebrew canon bear witness to the creational foundation of YHWH's justice, followed by a section that comments upon the responsibility for justice both by Israel's kingship and individual community members. I follow these sections with a short exploration of justice in a key text in Genesis as a precursor to the theme in Exodus. My modest aim in this chapter is to relay some of the more pertinent details about justice, specifically justice for the poor, in the ancient Near East and Israel. This sketch will prepare us to examine how justice concerns are manifest in the book of Exodus.

2.2 A SKETCH OF THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF JUSTICE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Ancient Near Eastern societies shared a robust sense of justice, especially as it related to the plight of the poor.[2] The call to practice justice toward the poor was not

[2] In this chapter I am concerned with role of justice in the theology and ideology of the ancient Near East and Israel, not its historical actualization (on the latter see Dominique Charpin, "Le 'bon pasteur': idéologie et pratique de la justice royale à l'époque paléo-babylonienne," in *Les moyens d'expression du pouvoir dans les sociétés anciennes*, ed. ARGO, Lettres Orientales 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 101-14; Bernard S. Jackson, "Justice and Righteousness in the Bible: Rule of Law or Royal Paternalism?" *ZABR* 4 (1998): 218-62). For surveys on the common view of social justice in the ancient Near East, see Harriet K. Havice, "The Concern for the Widow and Fatherless in the Ancient Near East: A Case Study in Old Testament Ethics" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1978); Leon Epzstein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*, trans. Jon Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1986), 3-44; K. D. Irani and Morris Silver, eds., *Social Justice in the Ancient World*, Contributions in Political Science 354 (Westport, CT:

peculiarly Israelite, but rather a humane concern Israel had in common with contemporary nations. Norbert Lohfink states rather baldly that "[m]any biblical statements, motifs, and formulations [consisting of special regard for the poor] are simply participation in the thought and feeling of the whole environment in which the Bible arose."[3] More broadly, the concept of doing justice was much deeper than the adjudication of legal affairs or retributive judgment. The conviction and activity of doing justice and its correlative term, righteousness, formed a basic, constitutive principle—a sort of ethical cornerstone—of ancient Near Eastern moral tradition, ideology, and society.[4]

Justice and righteousness were believed to inhere in the constitution of the cosmos itself. These ethical standards were ideals of the gods that were supposed to filter down to the human sphere, and they were especially associated with royal ideology. As P. J. Nel observes about Mesopotamian cosmology,

> The world was perceived as being encompassed by a set order. The intrinsic structure of this order was "righteousness" (*mīšarum*), which implied that this divine order was uncritically realized as normative for all categories of being—without exception. The traverse of the sun god and the moon god became, in terms of the underlying metaphorical thought-structure, the embodiment of the constant and continuous activity of the gods to guarantee and to establish *mīšarum*-order for the entire world . . . The gods provided and kept the righteous order intact.[5]

Greenwood Press, 1995), 3-8, 75-90, 101-114, 149-178; Weinfeld, *Social Justice*; Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 1-41.

[3] Lohfink, *Option for the Poor*, 13.

[4] Herbert Niehr, "The Constitutive Principles for Establishing Justice and Order in Northwest Semitic Societies with Special Reference to Ancient Israel and Judah," *ZABR* 3 (1997): 112.

[5] Nel, "Conception of Righteousness," *JSem* 6 (1994): 6. H. H. Schmid advances a similar idea that "righteousness" characterized a comprehensive cosmic order which formed the

A regularly associated part of this belief was to understand the originating act of creation as a kind of liberation. The initial creation brought an ordered world out from the primordial chaos, often by violent means.[6] The social, political, and natural stability established at creation had to be continually maintained. Malevolent forces had to be suppressed repeatedly. Creation was perceived as an "ongoing process of establishing order, mainly in opposition to chaos."[7] The behavior that upheld this set order, or was involved in the reestablishment of the divine order when it went awry, was characterized in Mesopotamia by *kittum* and *mīšarum*—"righteousness and justice"—both attributes of the gods.[8] Human behavior in the sociopolitical spheres could foster the harmonious order built into the creation by acting in tune with this moral, creational infrastructure. The gods established and protected the righteous order, but as we will see in more detail below, the facilitation of the order was a particular obligation of the human king. The

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backdrop uniting the ethical, political, and social orders. His comparative analysis focuses most heavily on the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* (more below). See his *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 13-77, 166-86; ibid., "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil," 1-19. Cf. Henning Graf Reventlow, "Righteousness as Order of the World: Some Remarks Towards a Programme," in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, eds. H. G. Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, JSOTSup 137 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 163-72.

[6] Various cosmologies existed in the ancient world. For the most part, these ancient cosmologies were interested in describing the cosmos not primarily in terms of origins but in terms of the emergence and organization of society and the kind of behavior humans had to engage in to live optimally in the world. Richard J. Clifford, "Justice in the Bible," in *Jesuit Education 21: Conference Proceedings on the Future of Jesuit Higher Education, 25-29 June 1999*, ed. Martin R. Tripole (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2000), 113, puts the matter succinctly: "Origins were important in the ancient Near East and in the Bible, for it was then that the imprint and purpose of the Creator was freshest and most visible." For a survey of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, see Clifford, *Creation Accounts*.

[7] Nel, "Conception of Righteousness," 7.

[8] These principles could also be personified and even hypostatized; see Niehr, "Constitutive Principles," 113-118; B. F. Batto, "Zedeq," *DDD* 1750-58.

violation of the order resulted in severe consequences for the king, people, and the land. In short, creation was imbued with an ethos, the transgression of which permitted chaos to reemerge in the social, political, and environmental spheres.

This comprehensive, creational order had something of an analogue in the Egyptian conception of *ma'at*. *Ma'at* was the ethical concept of truth, universal order, and cosmic balance—an interrelated order of justice. *Ma'at* included the divine ordinances deriving from the foundation of the world, by which the cosmos was set into motion and its harmony appropriately maintained. *Ma'at* set the just limits of the proper exercise of authority and power. It also entailed specific ethical requirements toward the less fortunate as well as obligations toward the state. To live according to *ma'at* was to live in harmony with the moral order. To transgress *ma'at* was to introduce chaos into the human domain.[9]

In Egypt the monarch's role as the earthly representative of the gods was to uphold the order, i.e. *ma'at*, derivative of the divine sphere.[10] The king's task paralleled

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[9] For an introduction to *ma'at* and relevant bibliography, see Emily Teeter, "Maat," *OEAE* 2:319-21; Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Maat," *DOTWPW* 447-51. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 46-60, is especially responsible for advancing the parallels between *ma'at* and Israel's understanding of righteousness (see below). For recent (re)assessments of the relationship of *ma'at* to Israelite thought, see Klaus Koch, "Sädäq and Ma'at: Konnektive Gerechtigkeit in Israel and Ägypten?" in *Gerechtigkeit. Richten and Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, ed. Jan Assmann (Munich: Fink, 1998), 37-64, and Michael V. Fox, "World Order and Ma'at: A Crooked Parallel," *JANES* 23 (1995): 37-48. Also note the appraisal of H. H. Schmid's conception of "Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung" by Jan Assmann, *Ma'at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (München: Beck, 1990), 34; see also ch. 6.

[10] Emily Teeter, *The Presentation of Maat: Ritual and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, SAOC 57 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997), details the ritual of the king's presentation of an image of *ma'at* to the gods. This ritual "commemorates the willingness of the king to uphold the fundamental principles of world order [*ma'at*] that were established at the beginning of time . . . [symbolizing] pharaoh's superior and sole ability to discern the true functions and value of

and enacted the god's establishment of cosmic justice in the human sphere. A 15th century B.C.E. Egyptian tractate describes the kingship: "Re [the creator god] has established the king on the earth . . . to dispense justice to the people and to satisfy the gods, to realize *ma'at* and annihilate chaos."[11] *Ma'at* was considered the foundation of Pharaoh's throne, and in turn, the Pharaoh was to maintain principles inherent in *ma'at*. The Egyptian Pharaoh's responsibility was to promote the divine intentions by enacting *ma'at* through (1) the upkeep of the temples; (2) the proper exercise of the judicial powers through decrees, reforms, and the appointment of competent judicial officials; and (3) the protection of the land. All of these actions were to promulgate *ma'at* in keeping with the just order bequeathed to Egypt at the creation of the world.[12] Failure meant the introduction of chaos, which threatened the well-being of the land.[13] More

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Maat. He alone, as the divinely supported ruler, knows the values by which Egypt should be guided" (1). On the following, also see Ronald J. Leprohon, "Royal Ideology and State Administration in Pharaonic Egypt," *CANE* 1:273-75.

[11] See Assmann, *Ma'at*, 205-52, for interpretation; cf. the text from the accession of Merneptah: "Be joyful the entire land! Good times have come. The lord (l.p.h. = life, prosperity, and health) has ascended in all lands, and orderliness (mty) has gone down to its throne. The king of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of millions of years, great in kingship just like Horus, Ba-en-Re Mery-Amun (l.p.h.), who overwhelms Egypt with festivals, the Son of Re who is more excellent than any king, Merneptah hetep-hir-maat (l.p.h.). Every truthful one (m3't) come and see. Truth (m3't) has subdued falsehood. Evil ones have been thrown [on] their faces. All the greedy are ignored. The flood arises and does not subside, the inundation (h'py) crests. The days are extended, the nights have hours, and the moon comes precisely (i.e., at the right time). The gods are satisfied and content." Translation provided by Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 153.

[12] See the informative summary article of Scott Morschauser, "The Ideological Basis for Social Justice/Responsibility in Ancient Egypt," in *Social Justice in the Ancient World*, Contributions in Political Science 354 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 101-110; cf. John Baines, "Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 41–46.

[13] See the litany of texts in Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 151-53. He concludes "Irregularities in nature abound when cosmic order is gone awry . . . The legitimate king who

important for our discussion here, it is clear from Egyptian texts, tomb inscriptions, and wisdom literature that at the heart of the ethical demands of *ma'at* was justice specifically defined by responsibility and mercy toward the disadvantaged, the widow, the orphan, and the poor. The king as well as the general Egyptian citizenry was obliged to engage in these patterns of behavior, understood as inherent in the practice of justice.[14]

In relatively the same manner in Mesopotamia, it was ultimately the task of the king to make sure the mechanisms of justice functioned according to the divine prerogatives.[15] The king was a mediator between the gods and humankind, a link between the divine and earthly spheres. Thus, he was charged by the gods with executing the

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rules by [*ma'at*] can expect the Nile to flood properly and bring fertility to the land, and additionally the sun and moon operate according to the created order."

[14] For example, Morschauser, "Ideological Basis," 106, cites the following as a typical example of a tomb inscription that describes the moral rectitude of the deceased: "I have carried out justice for my lord; I have satisfied him with what he loves. I spoke truly; I did what was right; I spoke fairly, and reported accurately. I held onto what was opportune, so as to stand well with people. I adjudicated between the two, so as to content them both. I rescued the weak from one stronger than he, as much as was in my power. I gave bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, water to the thirsty. I brought the deceased who could not afford the transportation to the cemetery; I buried him who had no son. I furnished transportation for him who lacked it. I respected my father, and pleased my mother, rearing up their children" (K. Sethe, *Urkunden des Alter Reiches* (Urk. 1 Leipzig: n.p.), 198-200). Morschauser comments, "[i]nasmuch as such statements appear consistently in tomb inscriptions and funerary stela over millenia and are also alluded to in legal stipulations, judicial documents, and wisdom-texts, one may refer to these tenets of *ma'at* as being in a real sense 'canonical'—precepts to which all segments of ancient Egyptian society were expected to adhere." See also the survey of Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 21-41. For a wider treatment of justice in ancient Egypt, see Joyce Tyldesley, *Judgment of the Pharaoh: Crime and Punishment in Ancient Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000).

[15] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 24-46; Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel*, 45-56; Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2d ed., SBLWAW (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 4-5. Also helpful is Niehr, "Constitutive Principles;" and Henri Cazelles, "De l'ideologie royale," *JANES* 5 (1973): 59-73.

divine order of *kittum* and *mīšarum*. The king's dominion was based on the execution of these principles; his "royal duty par excellence was to realize justice" in the land.[16] Because the activity of justice incorporated many different spheres—political, administrative, legislative, religious, environmental—the vocation of the king meant heeding the justice imbued by the gods so as to maintain (or restore) a just, harmonious society reflective of the cosmic order. The king was held responsible to eliminate evil and intervene on behalf of the weak. His activity in this regard created the right and just conditions for humans to progress in their god-ordained social position. Furthermore, the king's responsibility for order ensured the perpetuation of the fertility and prosperity of the land. Thus, when the monarch did not maintain cosmic order, the effects were understood to manifest themselves in a decline of the land's fecundity.[17] The king was the link between divine order, societal justice, and agricultural fertility.[18]

Moshe Weinfeld has contributed detailed comparative work on the themes of justice and righteousness in the social-political realm across ancient Near Eastern cultures. He gives attention to the Mesopotamian idiom *kittum u mīšarum* (sometimes translated "truth and equity"), which he argues cogently is semantically parallel to the Hebrew expression "*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*," conventionally translated "justice and

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[16] Niehr, "Constitutive Principles," 115.

[17] Jan Dietrich, "Psalm 72 in Its Ancient Syrian Context," *Mediating Between Heaven and Earth: Communication with the Divine in the Ancient Near East*, eds. C. L. Crouch, Jonathan Stökl, and Anna Elise Zernecke, LHBOTS 566 (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 144-60.

[18] This was especially true in Egypt. See Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 46-60; see also Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 285-86.

righteousness."[19] Weinfeld documents that across Mesopotamia, and especially tied to royal ideology, the motif of *kittum u mīšarum* is bound up with the performance of social acts on behalf of the poor.[20] He marshals evidence that demonstrates *kittum u mīšarum* was (1) understood as a disposition of justice granted to the king by the gods, (2) considered a social ideal closely associated with mercy and kindness, and (3) characterized a particular way of community conduct best corresponding to the phrase "social justice."[21]

The Code of Hammurabi offers a typical example of what Weinfeld illustrates is a pervasive conviction in hymns, law collections, and various inscriptions and documents throughout the ancient Near East. Hammurabi's prologue sets the framework for the larger collection of laws. In the prologue Hammurabi declares himself elected and endowed by the gods,

> to make justice (*mīšarum*) prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak . . . When the god Marduk commanded me to provide just ways for the people of the land (in order to attain) appropriate behavior, I established truth and justice (*kittum u mīšarum*) as the declaration of the land, I enhanced the well-being of the people.[22]

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[19] The binomial *kittum u mīšarum* is found as *ṣdq-mšr/yšr* in Northwest Semitic languages but *mšr/yšr* was replaced by *mšpṭ* in most occurrences in Hebrew; see Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 25-27; Niehr, "Constitutive Principles," 120.

[20] Weinfeld, *Social Justice,* passim; note also 25, n. 7, for Weinfeld's explanation of why the Akkadian *mīšarum* is semantically equivalent to *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*; cf. Niehr, "Constitutive Principles." His discussion also includes Egyptian evidence that supports his interpretation of a broader ethic of justice on behalf of the poor in the ancient Near East. Cf. Nardoni's admirable catalogue of Mesopotamian and Egyptian examples of social justice measures (*Rise Up, O Judge*, 1-41). For more discussion of the Hebrew expression "justice and righteousness," see below.

[21] Weinfeld, *Social Justice,* passim, but esp. 27-33.

[22] "The Laws of Hammurabi," trans. Martha Roth (*COS* 2:131:336-37). Note that Hammurabi does not claim in the prologue or epilogue that the gods revealed the law to him.

Hammurabi's declaration reveals that the execution of *kittum u mīšarum* is central to royal ideology. Kings in the ancient Near East conventionally described themselves as committed "to justice in the land at the behest of the gods." Ancient Near Eastern kings' lengthy formulaic titles hardly ever lacked mention of the king's duty to intervene on behalf of the socially disadvantaged, especially the widow and orphan.[23] Weinfeld offers this summary of the wider phenomenon: "Walking the path of *kittum u mīšarum* means . . . the establishment of social equity, i.e., improving the status of the poor and the weak in society through a series of regulations which prevent oppression."[24]

To execute *kittum u mīšarum* included the proper administration of the law in the courts by the king or judges, but it was by no means limited to the juridical sphere for application.[25] At times the pursuit of justice meant that powers opposed to justice had to be forcefully suppressed, or in the words of Hammurabi's prologue, "to abolish the wicked and the evil." A hymn of Ishme-Dagan, a king in the Babylonian city of Isin in the 19th B.C.E., celebrates the sun-god's bestowal of justice on the king in order that the king "treat people equitably . . . preserve the just and eliminate the wicked so that the weak might not be handed over to the strong . . . so that evil and injustice might be

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[23] Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Donald G. Schley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 66.

[24] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 33. We should add that by "social equity" Weinfeld does not mean a leveling of the social hierarchy, but the enhancement or restoration of the rights appropriate to the social level.

[25] On this point, Jackson, "Justice and Righteousness," 220-24, points out that Weinfeld unhelpfully equivocates between the social-administrative and legal-adjudicative tasks of the king. Nonetheless, the king's role in legal administration was of utmost importance. Roth, *Law Collections*, 5, offers this overview: "Whether or not the king was always himself an active participant in the administration of the legal system, he was always its guardian, for the application of justice was the highest trust given by the gods to a legitimate king."

eliminated and justice flourish."[26] In royal ideology a commitment to justice sometimes involved purging the oppressor.[27] Of course, the king was beholden to the god's sovereign guardianship of the order. If the king himself violated the order by becoming the instigator of injustice, then the gods were responsible for punishing or deposing the unjust king.[28]

In addition, *kittum u mīšarum*, as Weinfeld illustrates, also was performed in royal proclamations of debt release, liberation of slaves, and restoration of prisoners and exiles. These emancipatory proclamations (known specifically as *andurārum* in Mesopotamia) manumitted people to their original station and returned property to its original (ancestral) owner.[29] Moreover, whole cities and their inhabitants could benefit from royal

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[26] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 51-52.

[27] Ibid., 48-52. Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace, and Empire; Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, DM 98 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992), 38, summarizes the Assyrian perspective: "[A]s 'king of kings' and 'king of the universe,' the logical conclusion is that it is lawful and obligatory for the Assyrian monarch not only to judge and punish the subjects and officials of his kingdom but also the offenders wherever and whenever necessary. Through the agency of war he sets right the injustice committed by the transgressors . . . the wars of the king of Assyria are part of his never ending struggle against evil at any time and in any place, with the ultimate objective of redressing injustice over the entire world." One can easily see how such a view problematically legitimated any military aggression. War in general in the ancient Near East was cast in terms of "setting right all wrongs" in order to accommodate itself to the traditions of cosmic "justice and righteousness." On the conflation of divine and human kingship in a cosmological nexus, see especially C. L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, BZAW 407 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

[28] Nel, "Conception of Righteousness," 9-10, cites the first ten lines from the *Babylonian Admonition* as a typical case of this belief: "If a king does not heed justice, his people will be thrown into chaos, and his land will be devastated. If he does not heed the justice of his land, Ea, king of destinies, will alter his destiny and will not cease from pursuing him with hostility… (BWL: 112-3)"; cf. Roth, *Law Collections*, 5; Hans-Peter Schaudig, "Erklärungsmuster von Katastrophen im Alten Orient," in *Disaster and Relief Management: Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung*, ed. Angelika Berlejung, FAT 81 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2012), 425–43.

[29] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 9-15, 75-151.

decrees of liberation. Kings freed cities from taxes and military service, which Weinfeld contends was understood to restore the residents of a city back to service to their respective gods. He asserts such an act of liberation in effect transferred the people's yoke of service from the king to the god/s.[30] The king's declarations of liberty were defined as "the establishment of justice and righteousness in the land."[31] These acts of social administration did not aim to eradicate poverty but rather more generally to protect the weak against the strong. This served the larger goal of the king's responsibility to maintain the ideological balance of the status quo.[32] The motivation for all such actions, Bernard Jackson adds, was cosmological:

> In liberating his subjects from various kinds of oppression, the king was restoring an original divinely-mandated social order, one whose legitimacy derived not from some conception of inherent human rights, but from the fact that it had been divinely mandated.[33]

In Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, the king's administration and adjudication of justice was a divinely-granted vocation beholden to the divinely-formed infrastructure of the created world. The execution of justice and righteousness developed, thus, a strong restorative dimension that sought to reestablish society for service to the gods and, in turn, their

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[30] Ibid., 17, 75-132, 231-43. He intriguingly suggests that this phenomenon forms the pattern on which the Israelite exodus is best understood.

[31] Ibid., 76.

[32] Thus, the conception of "social justice" was much different than how the term is typically understood in a modern context. It concerned a restoration of persons to their predetermined societal position and not the democratization of social equity. See Havice, "Concern for the Widow and Fatherless," 275-76; Raymond Westbrook, "Social Justice in the Ancient Near East," in *Social Justice in the Ancient World*, Contributions in Political Science 354 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 149-50, and Charpin, "Le 'bon pasteur'," 113.

[33] Jackson, "'Law' and "Justice' in the Bible," 223. He credits J. J. Finkelstein, "The Ox that Gored," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 71 (1981): 3-89. He further

earthly representative, the king. This took place through judicial practices, military coercion, and a host of social reforms in order to perpetuate the cosmic harmony of the created order.

2.3 OLD TESTAMENT LANGUAGE FOR JUSTICE: *MIŠPĀṬ* AND *ṢƏDĀQÂ/ṢEDEQ*

The issue of justice is present everywhere and in all genres of Israel's literature.[34] "The evidence shows that the concern for justice was one, if not the central, factor by which ancient Israel's multifaceted social life was united throughout its historical changes . . . No sphere of Israel's life was exempt from the concern for justice, and YHWH was known to be at work in all its spheres."[35] In the Hebrew Bible, there are two words that are most commonly used when dealing with the concept of justice: *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*. Individually, these words have wide semantic ranges that make them

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asserts the issue was not a matter of the king's subjects enjoying "individual rights" as much as a social order wherein everybody enjoyed an accepted "individual place" (223).

[34] The following list of references to justice is indicative and not exhaustive: Torah: Gen 18:19; Exod 12:12; 23:6; Deut 16:18; 25:1; Lev 19:15; 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9; Prophets: Isa 9:6; Jer 22:3; Ezek 18:5; Hos 2:19 [21]; Amos 5:7; Mic 6:8; Writings: Pss 33:5; 97:2; 119:121; Prov 1:3; 2:9; 31:9; Job 8:3; 35:2; Eccl 3:17.

[35] Knierim, *Task of Old Testament Theology*, 88. Yet, as Knierim observes, the Hebrew Bible is not monolithic in its claims for God's justice (see 86-114). Justice has many aspects within the Old Testament. Knierim lists sixteen different facets, and he believes some of these are "contending theologies of justice." Knierim's shrewd observations should make us circumspect about comprehensive claims that can tend to homogenize the various aspects of justice in the Bible. Nonetheless, after reviewing the wider semantic field for justice in the Bible, Knierim himself recognizes "there is an interdependence of specific aspects expressed in the texts and a conceptual preunderstanding of justice underneath their surface, a preunderstanding without which the texts and what they say would have no coherence. The fact that a preunderstanding is not abstractly defined does not mean that it does not exist and is not operative in the texts" (87). Furthermore, this dissertation contests Knierim's belief that a "national covenant justice"(121) experienced by Israel is perforce incompatible with YHWH's universal justice.

intrinsically difficult to capture with a single English gloss or idea. Even so, I will attempt to describe concisely some of the layers of meaning in these words in order to be able to concentrate on how their use, especially their frequent combination, and other concepts/words regularly associated with them open up the contours of meaning into Israel's conception of justice, expressly on behalf of the poor.[36]

Mišpāṭ occurs over 420 times and is rendered in English translation variously by the terms justice, judgment, a legal decision, a legal claim, a regulation, a measure, or a customary way of doing something. It comes from the root *špṭ*, whose verbal form means "to judge." It is judgment in the fuller sense of restoration of wrong—"to put things to right." Such judgment aims to intervene between parties in order to bring resolution to some problem. *Špṭ*-action is routinely performed in a legal context, but "judging" can also take place in other arenas. For example, it can be associated with saving deliverance in an armed conflict or more generally applied to the task of a king exercising his governing rule.[37]

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[36] I will not try here to reproduce a discussion of these words that one can locate in any one of the standard lexicons, many of which I consulted for what follows. On מִשְׁפָּט; *mišpāṭ*, see *BDB* 1048-49; *HALOT* 2:651-52; *NIDOTTE* 2:1135-37; *TLOT* 3:1392-1399; *TWOT* 2443; *TDOT* 9:86-98; on צֶדֶק/צְדָקָה; *ṣedeq/ṣədāqâ*, see *BDB* 84-43; *HALOT* 3:1003-07; *NIDOTTE* 3:744-66; *TLOT* 2:1046-62; *TWOT* 1879; *TDOT* 12:239-64.

[37] G. Liedke, "שפט," *TLOT* 3:1394: "The restoration of community order should be understood not only as a one-time act but also as a continuous activity, as a constant preservation of the *šālôm*; thus the meaning 'to govern, rule' results . . . The oft-mentioned formula "to judge Israel" (Judg 3:10; 4:4; 10:2f.; 12:7-9, 11, 13f.; 15:20; 16:31; 1 Sam 4:18; 7:6, 15-17; 8:2; 2 Kgs 23:22) also has overtones of governing over Israel." See the subjects of the verb *špṭ* as the king (1 Sam 8:5-6, 20; 1 Kgs 3:9, 28, 2 Kgs 15:5; Dan 9:12), YHWH (Ps 67:5; 82:8; 96:13 = 1 Chr 16:33; Ps 98:9; Job 21:22), and the *śārîm* (Hos 13:10).

Mišpāṭ is the nominal form of *špṭ* and indicates from its use as a cognate accusative of *špṭ* that it is the act of doing *špṭ*.[38] It has strong judicial connotations, in that it is most frequently used in contexts to refer to various parts of or the whole process associated with the passing of authoritative judgment, i.e., the case, the law, the place of judgment, the litigation, the settling of a dispute, the verdict, or judgment's execution. It is also a term that can emphasize the decisive authority exercised in judgment.[39] *Mišpāṭ* can also describe not just the act of judging but a claim to a right that intrinsically belongs to someone, especially one vulnerable to exploitation.[40] Yet, it cannot be restricted to the legal sphere alone; but, just as the verbal form *špṭ*, it can apply to actions performed to deliver the vulnerable or more generally to make right some wrong. In other words, juridical categories alone do not sufficiently account for the exercise of judgment or justice in biblical texts.[41] Nonetheless, and despite its semantic range, it seems unlikely to find a more suitable translation other than "justice" that covers the central ideas of

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[38] Deut 16:18; 1 Kgs 3:28; Jer 5:28; Ezek 16:38; 23:45; Zech 7:9; 8:16; Lam 3:59. The parallel phrase *ʿśh* ("doing") *mišpāṭ* is used synonymously with *špṭ mišpāṭ* (cf. 1 Kgs 3:28): Gen 18:25; Deut 10:18; 1 Kgs 8:45, 49, 59; Jer 5:1; 7:5; Ezek 18:8; 39:21; Mic 6:8; 7:9; Pss 9:5, 17; 119:84; 140:13; 146:7; 149:9; Prov 21:7.

[39] John Goldingay, "Justice and Salvation for Israel and Canaan," in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium: Form, Concept, and Theological Perspective*, eds. Wonil Kim et al., vol. 1: Theological and Hermeneutical Studies, SAC (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 176-77, rightly points out that *mišpāṭ* stresses the exercise of power in authority in comparison to *ṣədāqâ* more than with the particular moral way that power is exercised. Yet, he goes too far in dismissing moral criteria behind YHWH's exercise of *mišpāṭ* against the Egyptians (Exod 6:6; 7:4; 12:12).

[40] E.g., Exod 23:6; Deut 10:18; 24:27; Isa 10:2. See Liedke, *TLOT* 3:1395.

[41] Ellen F. Davis, "Biblical Perspectives on Divine Justice and Political Authority," in *Justice and Rights: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Michael Ipgrave (Washington D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 16, suggests the awkward bivalent translation justice/judgment to emphasize the relationship between the two ideas denoted by *mišpāṭ*. "Both

mišpāṭ (though we intend to explore below the substance of justice in the text, especially when considered alongside *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*).[42]

Ṣədāqâ and *ṣedeq* are formed from the common root *ṣdq*, and they conventionally appear in English translation in the nominal form as "righteousness."[43] *Ṣdq* denotes a "particular quality of some act, the way it fits into a worldview or set of relationships that possess, among other things, some moral or social order."[44] Definitions of *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* typically fall into two camps.[45] One stresses that righteousness is centrally about conformity to the demands in a relationship; the other emphasizes righteousness as conformity to an objective (external) norm of what is right. Both ideas are necessary to convey a full sense of the idea. First, *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* is a relational category. Righteousness denotes the quality of an act, one that characteristically fulfills the obligations upon parties involved in a relationship. In this relational sense, righteousness is socially appropriate behavior, not an impersonal, rule-based measure of conduct. Thus, "communal loyalty" or "faithfulness" comes closer to the meaning of righteousness. Second, *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* indicates right behavior conformed to a norm—that which is

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are correct, and the problem is that, in English, we must choose between them, thereby missing the essential relationship between the two."

[42] Robert Culver, "מִשְׁפָּט," *TWOT* 1879.

[43] Some scholars have noted a slight difference between these two noun words. *Ṣedeq* is a more abstract ideal, while *ṣədāqâ* is more concrete and specific. See Ahuva Ho, *Ṣedeq and Ṣedaqah in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 143; Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 34.

[44] Goldingay, "Justice and Salvation," 175.

[45] See the recent review of scholarship on "righteousness" by Sun Myung Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs*, FAT 2.55 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 11-32.

expected, right, or proper.[46] These norms can be a function of the relationship itself, but they are not wholly reducible to the relationship. Righteous behavior is doing right by people with whom one is in relationship, but that social context is itself beholden to some external norms which define the "rightness" of the relationship (and consequently the conduct within the relationship).[47] External norms—moral standards—exist that can qualify whether obligations within a relationship are right or wrong. Hence, both faithfulness to relationship and obligation to broader norms are necessary components of the root meaning of *ṣdq*.

Ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq forms a basis for objective, moral standards, understood in the context of relationship, to which humans can be held accountable.[48] H. H. Schmid in particular has pointed to *ṣdq* as a key concept in the Old Testament and ancient Near East behind which lays an understanding of a synthetic, comprehensive world order.[49] Among

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[46] It is used literally for standards of measurements, i.e., "a measure of *ṣedeq*" (e.g., Deut 25:15; Ezek 45:10).

[47] Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs*, 20, issues this caveat: "To be sure, the act of fulfilling obligations, regardless of what we call it, means different things for different relationships. It is also a truism to say that fulfilling one's obligations is a right thing to do, and one must consistently do so to qualify as a righteous person. One must note, however, that the above statements are true *if and only if those obligations are of the right kind.* This caveat is critically important, because some relationships are irrefutably wrong."(emphasis in the original). Moreover, as David J. Reimer, "צדק," *NIDOTTE* 3:749, observes, the standard of behavior is more often than not assumed or implied. "The picture is rather one akin to natural law, where tacit assumptions about behavior are held in common, but nonetheless real for that." One could say they were understood to inhere in creation. See further below.

[48] Ho, *Ṣedeq and Ṣedaqah,* 145, concludes: "At the basis of all the literature *ṣedeq* and *ṣədāqâ* are the ultimate code, the divine criterion of what is right." Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs*, 22, helpfully observes: "God may be transcendent in ontological terms, but God does not transcend his own norms. That God abides by certain moral norms is the basis of his credibility as the righteous judge and guardian of justice."

[49] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 46-66, argues *ma'at* and the Sumerian *me* are analogues for *ṣdq* as world order. He distinguishes between *ṣedeq* as the cosmic order manifest in

these cultures *ṣdq* describes the order of created reality established at creation that was intended to direct human affairs rightly. The creational order of righteousness encompasses law, nature, politics, and cult, for which the human king especially was responsible for guaranteeing.[50] To do *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*, according to Schmid, is to live in conformity with the created order. Thus, for Israel, if *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* is a signature criterion of the created order that derives from YHWH's will and work, then YHWH and YHWH's creation form the ultimate horizon for the basis of righteousness as obligation to norms within relationship. To say it another way, creation forms the widest and most fundamental context for comprehending righteousness.[51] Yet, righteousness is not an impersonal (non-relational) measure of conduct in creation, but flows out of the character of the Creator.[52] Within the horizon of creation, *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* (and *mišpāṭ*) are principles that orient creaturely behavior toward the good which inheres in creation by virtue of its

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wisdom and law and *ṣədāqâ* as the term to describe behavior in line with the beneficent order (67, 178-80). Schmid thinks (pre-exilic) Israel modified this view of righteousness by combining it with a dynamic, historical consciousness (169-72).

[50] Ibid., 14-46. Hence, Schmid concludes that creation provides the comprehensive framework into which were integrated the order of the state and society. There was an order to the created reality established at creation that carried normative force and was meant to direct human affairs rightly (166-73). "In this view, history is understood as the implementation of creation and the actualization of the order of creation" ("Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation," 108).

[51] Also see Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 183, 198-204. This is not to deny that *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* are used more narrowly to denote commitment between God and a human party (see the discussion in Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 211-214). However, to pit this meaning of *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* over against the sense of order (as Houston does) is to miss Schmid's point that creation forms the widest backdrop for the *ṣdq* root. Because Houston reads a notion of impartiality into the wider just world order concept of righteousness, he finds tension between the narrower denotation loyalty between parties and creational justice. Rather than pit one against the other, I suggest following Schmid that creation is the wider horizon in which to make sense of YHWH's righteousness exercised toward Israel.

[52] Ho, *Ṣedeq and Ṣedaqah*, 145, characterizes *ṣdq* as the "way of the divine sphere."

Creator.

"Justice" and "righteousness" are the most common English translations of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*, though the previous thumbnail review reveals that these renderings are at best approximations of the richness of these individual words. Both describe two attributes essential to harmonious relationships. Christopher Wright offers a helpful, succinct summary of the two:

> In the broadest terms (and recognizing that there is a great deal of overlap and interchangeability between the words) *mišpāṭ* is what needs to be done in a given situation if people and circumstances are to be restored to conformity with *ṣedeq*/*ṣĕdāqāh*. *Mišpāṭ* is a qualitative set of actions—something you do … *Ṣedeq/ṣĕdāqāh* is a qualitative set of affairs—something you aim to achieve.[53]

What is equally if not more significant for our study is that *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* are often used together as a coordinated word-pair. The common combination, "justice and righteousness"[54] (or their close association in parallel lines of poetry) forms a unified concept throughout the Old Testament that most scholars agree is indicative of the idea of "social justice." The two words appear as a word-pair in thirty-one passages and twenty-one times in synonymous poetic parallelism.[55] In some passages only one term of the

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[53] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 257. Justice (*mišpāṭ*) can be perverted; hence, righteousness is a measure for the proper practice of justice (Deut 16:20).

[54] The combination also occurs in the reverse, "righteousness and justice," with no apparent difference in meaning.

[55] As the word pair "*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ*": Gen 18:19; 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9; Isa 9.6; 33:5; Jer 4:2; 9:24 [23]; 22:3, 15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Pss 33:5; 99:4; Prov 1:38; 2:9; 21:3; Eccl 5:8 [7]; 1 Chr 18:14; 2 Chr 9:8. In parallelism: Isa 1:27; 5:7, 16; 28:17; 32:16; 56:1; 59:9, 14; Amos 5:7, 24; 6:12; Mic 7:9; Pss 36:6 [7]; 37:6; 72:1; 103:6; 106:3; Job 35:2; 37:23; Prov 8:20; 16:8. As *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*: Deut 16:18; Isa 1:21; 16:5; 26:9; 32:1; Jer 22:13; Hos 2:19 [21]; Zeph 2:3; Pss 9:4 [5]; 72:2; 89:14 [15]; 94:15 [14]; 97:2; 119:121, 160; Prov 1:3; 2:9; Job 8:3; 29:14. This list was adapted from José Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974), 107, nn. 35-

word-pair occurs, but the context suggests the same concerns of the passages where they both occur.[56] Alternatively, in other passages one or both of the word-pair appears connected with a related term of similar significance, viz., lovingkindness (*ḥesed*),[57] equity (*mêšārîm/mîšôr*),[58] faithfulness (*'ĕmûnâ*),[59] or truth (*'ĕmet*).[60] Such correlations offer further evidence that *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* portray a notion that is wider than juridical justice and is bound up with kindness and mercy (*raḥămîm*).[61] It will be constructive at this point to look at a few passages where this phrase appears in order to notice how the immediate surrounding context furnishes content to the terms *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*.

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37. He also notes that the roots *špṭ* and *ṣdq* appear paired in thirty-two other contexts: Lev 19:15; Deut 1:16; 16:18; 25:1; 1 Sam 12:7; 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Kgs 8:32; Isa 1:26; 11:4; 16:5; 43:26; 51:5; 59:4; Jer 11:20; Ezek 23:45; Pss 7:8 [9], 11 [12]; 9:4 [5], 8 [9]; 35:24; 50:6; 51:6; 58:1 [2], 11 [12]; 82:3; 96:13; 98:9; Job 9:15; Prov 8:16; 31:9; Eccl 3:17; 2 Chr 6:23.

[56] Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 94: "Either one of these terms might, in any given instance, fulfill the same function as the entire hendiadys"; similarly, Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 181-2.

[57] E.g., Isa 16:5; Jer 9:24 [23]; Mic 6:8; Hos 2:19 [21]; 10:12; 12:6 [7]; Zech 7:9; Pss 25:9-10; 33:5; 89:14 [15]; 101:1.

[58] E.g., Isa 11:4; 33:15; 45:19; Pss 9:8 [9]; 58:2; 98:9.

[59] E.g., Deut 32:4; Isa 11:5; 59:4; Jer 5:1.

[60] E.g., 1 Kgs 3:6; Pss 33:4-5; 89: 14 [15]; Isa 16:5; Jer 4:2; 9:23; Zech 8:8.

[61] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 35-36; Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 102; Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 47-53. Such an understanding of biblical justice is also supported by the way the meaning of these terms developed in Second Temple Judaism. It appears that instead of the word pair "righteousness and justice," the word pair "righteousness and lovingkindness" comes to take its place (Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 19). As Williamson, *He Has Shown You*, 17-18, observes: "[t]his shows that the later usage is really just an abbreviation of a longer form of [righteousness and justice], so that the addition of the word '(loving)kindness' is only a clarification of the meaning of the term, not a change in its meaning." On the phrase in Second Temple Judaism, see Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

2.4 Doing "Justice And Righteousness": What Does It Entail?[62]

In many passages the expression "justice and righteousness" appears to function as a kind of abridgment for an association of behaviors that the audience would readily infer (e.g., Gen 18:19; 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9). It is the prophets, above all, whose trenchant messages provide explicit texture to the meaning of the phrase. The prophets regularly inveigh against the people of Israel, and especially the leaders, for their unjust behavior. Their indictments raise the demand for *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*, and from their expectations one can develop a fuller picture of the kind of behavior that accords and does not accord with the demand. It is particularly the prophets, Walter Houston asserts, who teach "social relationships as governed by morality [just] as interpersonal relationships are—that social relationships are moral relationships, and hence that we can speak of social justice."[63] So, for example, Jeremiah addresses the king and his court about the ethical expectations in such social relationships:

> Thus says YHWH, 'Do justice and righteousness (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ*): rescue the one robbed from the grip of the oppressor; do not exploit or do violence to the stranger, orphan, or widow; do not shed innocent blood in this place. (22:3)

In the same passage Jeremiah bemoans the king's government, a rule quite literally built upon unrighteousness and injustice (22:13). The king's concern with royal opulence has

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[62] The verses I sample in this section have the advantage of illustrating the content of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* with minimal context. In many texts listed in n. 55, a reading of a larger context than I can provide here delivers similar conclusions. Consider Miranda's unequivocal statement: "The nonspecialized reader has only to read [the scriptural texts listed in n. 55] to establish that indeed "justice and right" or "right and justice" means justice for the poor and needy" (*Marx and the Bible*, 93).

[63] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 97.

outstripped his desire to give wages to his countrymen who worked for him. This causes Jeremiah to draw a comparison with the king's father, his predecessor:

> "Do you reign because you compete in cedar? Your father—he ate and drank and did justice and righteousness (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ*)—did it not all go well with him? He upheld the cause of the oppressed and poor, then it went well. Is this not what it means to know me?" declares YHWH. (22:15-16)[64]

The prophet Amos movingly exhorts his audience to allow "justice to gush forth like water, and righteousness like a never-failing stream," but not before he acerbically castigates the people for perverting justice. His detail of their social relationships shows that they are contaminated by activities which negate justice:

> Those who turn justice (*mišpāṭ*) into bitterness,
> And throw righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*) to the ground (5:7)
>
> They hate the arbitrator at the gate;
> They abhor the one who speaks completely.
> Therefore, because you exact a tax on the poor,
> And you take a tribute of grain from them.
> Houses of chiseled stone you have built—
> You will not live in them;
> Lush vineyards you have planted—
> You will not drink their wine.
>
> For I know the multitude of your crimes,
> And the mass of your sins.
> There are those who harm the innocent,
> Those who take bribes,
> And they suppress the poor in the gate. (5:11-12)

[64] See also Jer 7:5-6, where only *mišpāṭ* is used: "Instead, if you truly do good in your ways and your deeds—if by really doing justice (*mišpāṭ*) between neighbors, if you do not oppress the stranger, orphan, and widow, if you do not shed innocent blood in this place, if you do not follow after other gods to your own detriment, then I will let you go live in this place."

Other prophets make similar statements. Note as well that the prophets frequently identify the same demographic of people who suffer the absence of justice and righteousness (i.e., the stranger, orphan, widow, and poor).[65]

> Alas! She has become a whore—the city of faithfulness!
> Filled with justice (*mišpāṭ*), righteousness (*ṣedeq*) lodged in her,
> But now murdering.
> Your silver has turned to dross,
> Your wine is diluted with water.
> Your officials are rebels, thick with thieves,
> All of them loving bribes and pursuing payoffs.
> They do not defend the cause (root is *špṭ*) of the orphan;
> The case of the widow never reaches them. (Isa 1:21-23)[66]

> Suppose a man is righteous and he does justice and righteousness (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ*) . . . He does not oppress another, he returns the debtor's pledge, he does not commit robbery, he gives his bread to the hungry and he covers the naked, does not lend with interest or take profit, his hand abstains from iniquity and he does true justice between people. (Ezek 18:5, 7-8)[67]

> Thus says Lord YHWH, Enough from you, princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression and do justice and righteousness ((*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ*). Cease your evictions of my people, declares the Lord YHWH. Let there be among you just (*ṣedeq*) balances, a just (*ṣedeq*) ephah, a just (*ṣedeq*) liquid measure. (Ezek 45:9-10)

And two verses where justice or righteousness occurs alone but the context suggests similar lines of thought:

> The one who walks in righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*) and speaks with equity (*mêšārîm*),
> Who rejects gain from oppression and waves off with his hand the acceptance of bribes,
> Who shuts his ears against listening to murdering and shuts his eyes against seeing wickedness. (Isa 33:15)

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[65] See the following excursus, "Identifying the Poor."

[66] Again, Isa 1:17 only uses *mišpāṭ*, but certainly has the same kind of conduct in mind: "Learn to do the good, pursue justice (*mišpāṭ*), aid the oppressed, uphold the cause of the orphan, defend the cause of the widow."

[67] Ezekiel 18 sets out a list of behaviors that describe just and unjust practice. I have left out v. 7 because it fits the priestly focus of Ezekiel's concern.

> Thus says YHWH of Hosts, "Execute true justice (*mišpāṭ*),
> And practice lovingkindness (*ḥesed*) and mercy (*raḥămîm*) with one another.
> Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger, or the poor,
> Nor should a person devise disaster in his heart for his brother.
> (Zech 7:9-10)

Outside of the prophets, Job 29 in particular gives a clear list of what are recognized as actions of justice and righteousness. Job poetically imagines the character of his relationships with marginal members of his society as his garments:

> For I saved the poor who cried out, and the orphan who had no helper.
> The blessing of the lost came upon me. I brought celebration to the heart of the widow.
> I put on righteousness (*ṣedeq*) and it clothed me. Like a robe and turban was my justice (*mišpāṭ*).
> I was eyes for the blind; I was feet for the lame.
> I was a father to the needy, and the dispute of the one I did not know I examined.
> I broke the fangs of the unjust, and I caused him to drop his prey from his teeth.
> (29:12-17; cf. 31:16-22)

And finally, a line from Proverbs 31:9 instructing the king:

> Open your mouth, judge (root is *špṭ*) righteously (*ṣedeq*),
> Uphold the cause of the poor and needy.

Though the terms "justice" and "righteousness" come through in English as denoting concepts, these passages illustrate *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* are not abstract nouns in Hebrew. They embody something one does. Together they point to a pattern of decisive actions (and there is overlap between them) that has "a certain relational and social commitment and . . . a certain relational and social vision."[68] We will continue to explore Israel's understanding of justice in other passages below. But, at this point, the above passages show that at the core of the "relational and social commitment" involved

[68] Goldingay, "Justice and Salvation," 175.

in the performance of justice and righteousness are the kinds of actions conventionally associated with social justice. In Scripture the absence of justice and righteousness results in social chaos that afflicts the most vulnerable. When one also considers Weinfeld's research on the Mesopotamian concept of *kittum u mīšarum* as standard vocabulary for activity fostering social well-being (and a functional parallel for Hebrew *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*), the case is more persuasive; namely, doing justice and righteousness is tied tightly to the just and compassionate goodness performed particularly on behalf of the marginalized.[69] As we will see below, Israel's vision of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* is a reflex of YHWH's own character and ways in the world.

2.5 EXCURSUS: IDENTIFYING THE POOR

In the Hebrew Bible the weaker members of society are frequently singled out as a notable concern wherever the topic of justice and righteousness comes up. The call for the protection and fair treatment of the poor permeates Israel's literature.[70] As has

[69] Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 268, offers this assessment after his survey of justice in the Hebrew Bible: "When we feel the impact of so much material emphasizing the necessity of doing justice, as a requirement from God, and when we put it alongside the obvious fact that, for God, doing justice means particularly attending to the needs of the weak and poor, *it makes us question whether the traditional understanding of justice as 'strict impartiality' is really at all appropriate in the biblical context*" (emphasis mine).

[70] Several books and articles provide broad surveys of this theme. Among the most thorough and/or useful are Robert Wafawanaka, *Am I Still My Brother's Keeper? Biblical Perspectives on Poverty* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012); David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 111-97; William Robert Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God: The Social Construction of Poverty Among Biblical Peasants* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); Leslie J. Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004); Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics*, OTS (London: T&T Clark, 2001), 161-184; J. David Pleins, "Poor, Poverty (Old Testament)" *ABD* 5:402-14; Hans Strauß,

become evident in the above discussion, Israel's neighbors also manifested a similar social concern for the poor. Indeed, Norbert Lohfink affirms that "[m]ost of the Old Testament statements on the poor belong in the ancient Near Eastern cultural context, often even in their linguistic formulation."[71] Unfortunately, the English gloss "poor" belies the wide semantic field of words used in the Hebrew Bible to identify this diverse population of people. Several Hebrew words are frequently translated "poor" in the English Bible.[72]

First, *'ebyôn* (61 times) commonly describes the economically or legally distraught (i.e., the destitute, the needy). The *'ebyônîm/nê* (pl) can connote day laborers who depend solely upon the good will of others for daily sustenance (Exod 23:11; Deut 15:7-11; 24:14). The prophets especially portray the manifold but typical vulnerabilities faced by the *'ebyônîm*. The *'ebyônîm* experience a lack of security and housing (Isa 14:30; 25:4; Amos 8:4), hunger and thirst (Isa 32:6-7; 41:7; Ezek 16:49), exploitation by

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"'Armut' und 'Reichtum' im Horizont biblischer, vor allum alttestamentlicher Aussagen," in *Was ist der Mensch…? Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Hans Walter Wolff zum 80. Geburtstag*, eds. Frank Crüsemann, Christof Hardmeier, and Rainer Kessler (München: Kaiser, 1992), 179-93; Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner," *Int* 41 (1987): 341-53; and the older but significant Peter D. Miscall, "The Concept of the Poor in the Old Testament" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1972). For the social background of poverty in ancient Israel, also see Douglas A. Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), and Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 18-51.

[71] Lohfink, *Option for the Poor*, 18. He shows a "lofty ethic" of concern for the poor was built on the conviction that the gods had a special interest in the plight of the downtrodden. See also his "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible," *TS* 52 (1991): 34-50. I issue important qualifications of this point in my discussion of Exodus's law collection (chs. 20-23) in ch. 5.

[72] This analysis is indebted to the work of Pleins, "Poor, Poverty," 5:402–14. The order of words discussed corresponds to his treatment with the exception of the placement of *'ānî*. Also, my citation of texts is meant to be representative rather than comprehensive.

rulers and others (Isa 29:19; Jer 2:34; 20:13; Ezek 18:12), injustice in the courts (Isa 32:7; Jer 5:28; 22:16), and general economic mistreatment (Amos 2:6; 8:6).[73]

Second, the *dal* (48 times) are the powerless, insignificant, and weak—physically and politically—who often fell victim to political and/or economic exploitation at the hands of powerful.[74] Pleins argues plausibly that in a number of texts the *dal* appears to be small, vulnerable agricultural farmers (perhaps landowners?) with some modest means (e.g., Lev 14:21; Judg 6:15; Amos 5:11; 2 Kgs 24:14; but cf. Jer 39:10).[75] The related term, *dallâ*, depicts the poorest social class left behind by the Babylonians in the aftermath of the invasion (2 Kgs 24:14; 25:12; Jer 40:17; 52:15-16).

Third, by far the most common word used in the Hebrew Bible to depict the poor is *ʿānî* (80 times).[76] The noun *ʿānî* means "humble, needy, or afflicted" by difficult circumstances and describes the economically exploited as well as the oppressed person.[77] The verbal form, *ʿnh*, meaning "bowed down, afflicted," likely comes from the

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[73] Pleins, "Poor, Poverty," 5:403. See also Exod 23:6; Pss 9:19; 72:4; 107:41; 109:16; Prov 31:20; Job 24:14; 29:16; 31:19.

[74] Exod 23:3; 30:15; Lev 14:21; 19:15; Judg 6:15; 2 Sam 3:1; Isa 10:2; 14:30; Jer 5:4; 39:10; Amos 4:1; 8:6; Zeph 3:12; Pss 41:2; 82:3; 113:7; Prov 14:31; 19:17; 21:13; 22:16; Job 20:10, 19; 31:16.

[75] Pleins, "Poor, Poverty," 5:405; M. Daniel Carroll R., "דָּלַל" *NIDOTTE* 1:951–54, also supports this interpretation. Yet, Amos 8:6 might include the *dal* among those subjected to forced labor.

[76] Exod 22:25; Lev 19:10; Deut 15:11; 24:15; 26:7; Pss 9:12 [13]; 12:6; 25:16; 69:30; 82:3; Prov 15:15; 22:22; Job 24:9; 29;12; Eccl 6:8; Isa 3:15; 10:12; 32:7; 41:7; Jer 22:16; Ezek 16:49; 18:12; Amos 8:4; Zech 7:10.

[77] Recent discussion over this word centers around its relationship to both *ʿānāw* and its plural form *ʿānāwîm*; see Pleins, *ABD* 5:411–13; W. J. Dumbrell, "עָנָו, עָנִי" *NIDOTTE* 3:454–56; R. Martin-Achard, "ענה" *TLOT* 2:931-37. Some have postulated that the *ʿānāwîm* (particularly in the Psalms) denotes a pious political movement among Israel's poor. Others believe *ʿānāwîm* is simply the plural form of *ʿānî*/*ʿānāw* and reflects a socio-economic understanding of the term. The former argument finds support only if the relationship between *ʿānî* and *ʿānāw* is distanced,

same root.[78] While *ʿānî* is clearly linked with physical oppression, there is also a sense of inward humiliation, although the judgment that *ʿānî* inevitably implies meekness is secondary to the core meaning of one humbled by concrete, oppressive circumstances.[79] It frequently occurs as a word pair with *ʾebyôn* (e.g., Deut 15:11; 24:14; Pss 70:5 [6]; 72:12; 140:12; Prov 30:14; 31:20; Isa 32:7; 41:7; Jer 22:16; Ezek 18:12; Amos 8:4) and this coupling may represent a stylized way of speaking about the poor as a group.[80]

The designations *ʾebyôn*, *dal*, and *ʿānî* constitute the majority of the language used for the poor in the Hebrew Bible. Three other terms occur with far less frequency and crop up predominantly in the wisdom literature. A fourth term, *maḥsôr* (13 times), primarily appears in Proverbs and represents those who lack or are in want of material goods.[81] In Proverbs *maḥsôr* may also carry the connotation of shame, reflecting a perspective of the wealthy who fear the ignominy of not being able to support one's

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leaving room to define *ʿānāw* in a metaphorical sense of humbleness with no connection to physical circumstances. However, the majority of texts suggest *ʿānî* and *ʿānāw* derive from the same root. Furthermore, the contexts in which *ʿānāw* and *ʿānāwîm* occur (when read in light of *ʿānî* texts) customarily envision an authentic distress or need. The Psalter occasionally uses these words to refer to a spiritualized poverty. In some cases, the poor in the Psalms are those who recognize their abject neediness before God. However, on the whole the word's socio-economic nuance is to be preferred. See Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor*, 128–29.

[78] *BDB* 776. Pleins, "Poor, Poverty," 410, notes the *piel* form, constituting 57 of the 80 occurrences of the verb, "has a very concrete sense, namely 'to oppress, abuse, rape.'" He cites the verb's appearance in the Moabite stele to underline the verb's connotation of political oppression. See also Jonathan Ben-Dov, "The Poor's Curse: Exodus XXII 20-26 and Curse Literature in the Ancient World," *VT* 56 (2006): 432-36.

[79] Sue Gillingham, "The Poor in the Psalms," *ExpTim* 100 (October 1988): 15-19; Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, 18.

[80] Pleins, "Poor, Poverty," 408.

[81] Prov 6:11; 11:24; 14:23; 21:5; 22:16; 24:34; Deut 15:8; Ps 34:9 [10]; Judg 18:10.

family.[82] Fifth, *miskēn* (4 times) is found only in Ecclesiastes. Because it is used so sparingly, it seems to be a late Hebrew word simply meaning poor.[83] The final term is *rāš* (22 times) and refers to the economically and socially inferior. In many cases, the principal cause of the poverty of the *rāš* is injustice (Prov 13:23), social alienation (Prov 14:20; 19:7) and powerlessness (Prov 18:23; 22:7).[84]

This short overview of the Hebrew words translated "poor" and "poverty" leads to two conclusions. First, the condition described usually denotes economic hardship and the lack of material resources. Second, the "poor" are also routinely politically disadvantaged and habitually experience oppression.[85] In fact, when one considers all the occurrences together, the sense predominates that vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of oppression, injustice, and the abuse of power is more closely linked with the "poor's" plight than any other condition or cause.[86] Of course, factors other than the aggressive agenda of the powerful contributed to the deprivation of the poor (e.g.,

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[82] Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, 16; Pleins, "Poor, Poverty," 5:407, declares that its usage in Proverbs reflects self-inflicted poverty as a result of laziness or excessive living.

[83] Eccl 4:13; 9:13-16. Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, 16, reads in this term the opposite of *maḥsôr*. The writer of Ecclesiastes is emphasizing the goal of seeking honor, whether rich or poor (*miskēn*).

[84] Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, 17. Cf. 2 Sam 12:1-4; Eccl 4:1.

[85] Even though nearly all the language insinuates economic and/or political categories, the factors of honor and shame also underlie thoughts about poverty. Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, passim, stresses the social stigma of shame experienced by the poor—somewhat of a foreign category in the Western world. Oppression is disempowering, and so can lead to a sense of shameful inferiority that exacerbates the feeling of disempowerment. Thus, Domeris contends "powerlessness goes a long way towards explaining the erosion of resistance of the peasants to poverty, but it is ultimately the shaming process that keeps the poor in poverty" (123).

[86] Rodd, *Glimpses*, 178-81, argues, contrary to Hoppe, that poverty as a societal condition was not the problem addressed by most biblical writers; rather, it was the poor's exploitation.

inadequate agricultural means, natural disasters, war).[87] Nonetheless, the exploitation of the poor's vulnerability and powerlessness remains by far the most dominant situation discussed in the context of poverty in the biblical witness.[88]

A recurrent theme in the Hebrew Bible pertinent to defining the "poor" involves care for the widow, orphan, and sojourner.[89] The Law and the Prophets in particular single out these three groups as in need of special attention due to their position of powerlessness and vulnerability.[90] The situations in which these groups found themselves normally were a result of inadvertent circumstances, and regularly their plight was permanent.[91] The widow (*'almānâ*) possessed no association or kinship ties with a

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[87] For a concise discussion, see Ronald Clements, "Poverty and the Kingdom of God—an Old Testament View," in *The Kingdom of God and Human Society*, ed. Robin S. Barbour (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 13-18. The intensity of poverty within the population of Israel fluctuated throughout history with the political and economic changes. See Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*; Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 18-51.

[88] On oppression and injustice of the poor (and similar conclusions), see Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression*, trans. James C. Decker (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 3-39; Wright, *Old Testament*, 169-71; Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You*; passim; Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, 95-127; Wafawanaka, *Am I Still My Brother's Keeper*, passim.

[89] There are thirty cases in which widow and orphan appear together and eighteen instances when all three appear. For example, see Deut 10:18; 24:17-22; Pss 94:6; 146:9; Jer 7:6; 22:23; Mal 3:5. See F. C. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan and the Poor," *JNES* 21 (1962): 129-39; Richard D. Patterson, "The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor," *BSac* 130 (1973): 223-34; Harold J. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 24-55; Baker, *Tight Fists*, 175-95. Care for the "orphan and widow" is formulaic in the ancient Near East literature, especially in royal texts.

[90] E.g., in the Torah: Exod 22:21-24; 23:9; Lev 19:10, 33; 23:22; Deut 16:11; 14:29; 24:17-22; and in the Prophets: Isa 1:23; 10:1-2; Jer 7:1-14; Ezek 22:6-7, 25, 29; Zech 7:9-10.

[91] Clements, "Poverty and the Kingdom," 14–16. H. Eberhard von Waldow, "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 185–87, maintains these persons did not enjoy the security of a natural kinship group. Thus, the law provided measures to aid these situations. But Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty," 347, notes the law assumed that such people worked to alleviate their harsh circumstances—they just needed regular assistance and

male figure commonly held responsible for her livelihood (husband, father-in-law, brothers, or adult sons). In the absence of male kin, her economic, social, and physical well-being fell under threat.[92] The orphan's circumstances were similar. A *yātôm* was fatherless and unable to support him/herself.[93]

Finally, the *gēr*[94] identifies a resident immigrant given some protection under the law.[95] Despite being able to work, the *gēr*'s predicament was one of uncertainty and vulnerability, often characterized by poverty, because he too had precarious links with the social support system of land ownership and family that served ancient Israel.[96] Taken together, these three groups constituted a subset of Israelite society virtually impotent in social power, dependent upon the goodwill and compassion of their neighbors, and

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protection. On the more general discussion of welfare measures in ancient Israel, see Stephen A. Kaufman, "A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems of Ancient Israel," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honour of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer, JSOTSup 31 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 277-86; Baker, *Tight Fists*, passim; Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 219-52.

[92] On the widow, see especially Paula S. Hiebert, "'Whence Shall Help Come to Me?': The Biblical Widow," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 125-41. There has been some discussion over whether or not a widow did own property. Hiebert makes clear that although property ownership for a widow was possible, it by no means could have supported her.

[93] Though Johan Renkema, "Does Hebrew *ytwm* Really Mean Fatherless?" *VT* 45 (1995): 119-22, argues an orphan has lost both father and mother.

[94] *Gēr* can be translated alien, stranger, or sojourner. The precise identification of the *gēr* has been subject to much debate (see Baker, *Tight Fists*, 178-82). The Hebrew word *tôšāb* more appropriately fits the designation of alien in the modern-day sense. The *tôšāb* is less integrated into society than the *gēr*; for example, the *tôšāb* cannot celebrate Passover (Exod 12:45). The noun *tôšāb* occurs 14 times, half of which are in Leviticus 25.

[95] Some laws pertaining to the *gēr* are Deut 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:14; Lev 17:8-16; 19:10; 24:22; 25:6. For more see Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), and the collection of essays in Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, and Jabok Wöhrle, eds. *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, BZABR 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

[96] Baker, *Tight Fists*, 188.

(hence) vulnerable to oppression. In fact, one commentator has called the triad of "widow, orphan, and resident immigrant" the "poor par excellence,"[97] though they may also represent a shorthand way of referring to the category of the poor in general.

The words translated "poor"—exemplified by the widow, orphan, and sojourner—reflect the vast majority of the Israelite powerless. The English term "poor" fails to portray the array of nuances of the Hebrew semantic domain. "Poor" has an assuredly economic dimension in Hebrew Scripture. However, the various Hebrew terms allow a broader sphere of interpretation which points also to political and social aspects that are equally if not more fundamental to the experience of poverty.[98] The lack of economic resources, social status, and honor, combined with vulnerability to exploitation and the inability to reverse the situation, contribute to the range of an individual's poverty in Israel. In a few words, *powerlessness* and *vulnerability* describe the core experience of the poor of the Hebrew Scriptures.

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[97] Mark Sneed, "Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?" *ZAW* 111 (1999): 500.

[98] For similar conclusions, see Miscall, "Concept of the Poor," 108-10; 178-79; 256; Domeris, *Touching the Heart*, 169-77. See also James Limburg, *The Prophets and the Powerless* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971), 25–38; Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty," 344; J. Emmette Weir, "The Poor are Powerless: A Response to R. J. Coggins," *ExpTim* 100 (1988): 13-15; Strauß, "Armut" und "Reichtum", 182-85; Rodd, *Glimpses*, 181-82; Stepfan Seiler, "Die theologische Dimension von Armut und Reichtum," 580-81.

2.6 THE CREATIONAL IMPRINT OF YHWH'S JUSTICE[99]

Just as among Israel's contemporaries in the ancient Near East, so Israel promulgated a tradition that the creation itself exhibited a divinely infused order characterized by *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*, justice and righteousness. For Israel, the world's order was just because it was established by YHWH the Creator who, simply, is "a God of justice (*mišpāṭ*)" (Isa 30:18; cf. Deut 32:4). YHWH loves justice and righteousness (e.g., Ps 11:7; 37:28; Isa 61:8), and in these qualities YHWH delights (Jer 9:24). In a word, "justice is what makes God conspicuous in the world."[100] In the following I consider selective texts across Israel's canon in order to observe some of the ways these writings witness to where and how YHWH's propensity for justice and righteousness impresses itself onto the created moral order.[101]

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[99] In the following exploration of texts, I have drawn from the helpful arrangement and exegesis of texts in Houston, *Justice*, 36-54. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 78-164, surveys more comprehensively the root *ṣdq* in the Hebrew scriptures (see his shorter summary article "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation"). The burden of his work is to show the conceptual background for the OT usage of *ṣdq* is the created order, and how Israel adapted, modified, or rejected this widespread view. Unfortunately, his work would have been strengthened if he had included other associated words, especially *mišpāṭ*. Yet, note his correlative work on the concept of peace in *Šālom: "Frieden" im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*, SBS 51 (Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1971).

[100] Davis, "Biblical Perspectives," 15, commenting specifically on Isa 5:16.

[101] Although I will take a different route to show the concept of YHWH's cosmic justice, I mention the under-appreciated work of Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*, repr. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007). He argues from a diverse set of texts (Gen 6-9; Isa 11; 24; 32-33; 54-55; Jer 33; Ezek 34; Hos 2; 4; Joel 1-2; Zeph 1; Pss 46; 72; 73-83; 89; Job 38; and Enoch) for the idea that there existed in Israel (shared with neighboring cultures) the idea of a cosmic covenant. This covenant was distinct from those associated with Abraham, Moses, or David, and entailed the belief in "a divinely willed order harmoniously linking heaven and earth" (he notes his reliance on H. H. Schmid). Though his thesis is provocative, he is not able to show conclusively, in my opinion, that the disparate collection of texts should be read as contributing to a coherent, "total picture of the cosmic covenant" (xxi). Nonetheless, Murray does succeed in illustrating the broadly held assumption of the symbiotic relationship of social and cosmic orders among the variety of texts. Humans

2.6.1 YHWH's Justice and Psalms

As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Israel believed justice flowed from heaven to earth. "Justice in the social realm is understood as a reflex of the order in the cosmic realm which is established at creation."[102] This is nowhere more apparent than in Israel's hymnic literature. For example, in Ps 33 the psalmist lauds YHWH's creation of the world (vv. 5-9). He sets the context (v. 4) by proclaiming that YHWH's "upright" (*yāšār*) word marks YHWH's work in "faithfulness" (*'ĕmûnâ*). The next line celebrates YHWH's commitment to justice: "[YHWH] loves righteousness and justice (*ṣədāqâ* and *mišpāṭ*), the earth is full of the lovingkindness (*ḥesed*) of YHWH." The created order reflects YHWH's commitment to righteousness and justice and results in the world teeming with YHWH's faithful care. It is this kind of God, who by the breath of his mouth (v. 6), made the heavens, closed up the watery chaos into storehouses (vv. 6-7), and fashions the hearts of humans (v. 15). In this psalm, justice and righteousness accord with other central characteristics of YHWH: uprightness, faithfulness, and lovingkindness. And the psalm indicates these all find expression in the creation because of the Creator who speaks and works it into existence.[103] In short, YHWH's creation is a cosmos interlaced with a just moral fabric. The appropriate response among all peoples is to fear YHWH (v. 8).

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collaborated in sustaining the order by maintaining justice with mercy and by ritual actions, in which kings played the major role.

[102] Houston, *Justice*, 36.

[103] Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 209, comments, "[i]n its attempt to validate justice and righteousness as the true guidelines for human history on earth, Psalm 33 must go back to creation and associate "justice and righteousness" (including YHWH's *ḥesed* in the ongoing existence of the cosmic order of the earth) with the creation of the world. Hence, creation theology not only offers the most comprehensive aspect, it also offers the most foundational criterion for the conduct of universal human history and for the critical evaluation of

Elsewhere, the poet of Ps 89 praises YHWH's cosmic conquest over the unruly forces in the universe. The poet imagines a world secure because "righteousness and justice (*ṣedeq* and *mišpāṭ*) are the foundation of your throne, loving loyalty (*ḥesed*) and truth (*'ĕmet*) go before you" (v. 14 [15]; cf. 9:8-9). This affirmation comes on the heels of a rehearsal of a creation tradition (vv. 7-11 [8-12]), well-attested in the ancient Near East, that describes creation in terms of a king-god's epic victory over chaos.[104] Although this version of the creation narrative is not pronounced in the familiar Gen 1-2 account, we will see that it provides significant background for understanding the movements of YHWH to establish justice in Exodus.[105] For now, though, we note the psalmist remembers YHWH's past defeat of mythical enemies of chaos as a way to affirm the right and just foundation on which the order of the present creation rests. YHWH is both creator and king among the gods; hence, the psalmist believes YHWH's values are the constitutive principles of YHWH's world.

YHWH's establishment of a just cosmic order is an affirmation scattered throughout other psalms. Even more, justice and righteousness are portrayed as something like God's modus operandi in creation.[106] In Ps 82 God pronounces judgment

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actual human history . . . YHWH is the God who loves history as justice and righteousness instead of power and might because he is the creator whose love for justice and righteousness is the basis for the initial and ongoing order of the world."

[104] Much has been written on this topic. For a concise introduction and ample bibliography, see F. J. Mabie, "Chaos and Death," *DOTWPW* 41-54.

[105] The idea of creation as an act of establishing cosmic harmony out of the chaos is evident elsewhere in Israel's poetry (e.g., Exod 15; Pss 74:12-17; 89:9-10 [10-11]; Isa 27:1; 51:9; Job 9:13; 38:8-11). I will return to this theme in chapter 4.

[106] Davis, "Biblical Perspectives," 16.

on the so-called gods in the divine assembly.[107] This psalm draws on a mythological tradition of a head god who has parceled out the government of particular territories of the world to other, lesser deities (cf. Deut 32:8-9). Israel's God, the "Most High" (*'elyôn*, v. 6), indicts the other divine beings (v. 2):

> How long will you judge (from the root *špṭ*) for the unjust?
> The faces of the wicked will you uphold?
> Give justice (from the root *špṭ*) to the helpless and orphan,
> to the powerless and poor do righteousness (from the root *ṣdq*)" (v. 3).

The Most High has evaluated the deputy gods' job performances and has determined them to be violators of just world rule (vv. 3-5). God names their failure specifically as their negligence of the poor. They do not protect the vulnerable and powerless which, according to this psalm, is a *sine qua non* of divine rule.[108] Their violation transgresses the moral framework of the cosmos, and so "all the foundations of the earth totter" (v. 5). The heavenly and human societies are in a chaotic tumult because the divine right order of creation has been destabilized. The psalmist ends by imploring the one true God to arise and exercise just dominion on the earth (v. 8) because there is no real hope from any other divine quarter.[109]

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[107] On the status of the divine council and other contextual background in Ps 82, see Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, trans. L. Maloney, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 329-31. See also S. B. Parker, "Council," *DDD* 204-208, and "Sons of (the) God(s)," *DDD* 788-94.

[108] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 333.

[109] Bernd Janowski, "Die rettende Gerechtigkeit. Zum Gerechtigkeitsdiskurs in den Psalmen," in *"Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben" (Gen. 18:19): Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag*, BZABR 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 362-76, explores Psalm 82 (and others) in the background of ancient Near Eastern texts to argue that God's justice and judgment is more often understood in terms of salvation and mercy than doom in the Psalms.

Psalm 96 (and its surrounding context) answers the closing plea of Ps 82.[110] It comes in a series of enthronement psalms that celebrate YHWH's kingship. In the poetic imagination of these psalms, YHWH's sovereignty over the earth and the nations appears as a recurrent motif (93:1; 94:2; 95:4; 96:1; 96:13; 97:1; 97:9; 98:3-4, 7-9; 99:2). YHWH's throne of rule is primordial, as ancient as the foundation of the world (93:1-2). Yet, the psalmist prays for the Creator's cosmic justice to once more shine forth with potent forcefulness against the opponents of justice (94:1-2). Psalm 96:10 declares, "Say among the nations, YHWH is king! Indeed the world is established, not to totter. He will judge the peoples with equity (*mêšārîm*) . . . He will judge the world in righteousness (*ṣedeq*) and peoples in His truth (*'ĕmûnâ*; vv. 10-13; cf. 98:9). The Creator-King comes to "judge," which implies his setting right the world's injustice. In the hymn that follows, Ps 97, we hear again that righteousness and justice form the foundation of the throne of the Lord of all the earth (v. 2). These psalms collectively call the nations and Israel to praise the Mighty King of the earth as a "lover of justice (*mišpāṭ*)" (99:4; cf. Ps 37:28; Jer 9:24 [23]). The natural world is itself caught up as an exuberant participant in the King's justice (93:3-4; 96:11-12; 97:4-6; 98:7-8; 99:1). The belief in YHWH's justice and righteousness—that it was inscribed in creation and experienced in the history of Israel (99:4)—shapes the praiseful prayer that YHWH will once more come to restore justice in the world.[111] Indeed, Israel is beckoned to herald this proclamation to the world with

[110] J. Clinton McCann, "The Single Most Important Text in the Entire Bible: Toward a Theology of the Psalms," in *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 66-70.

[111] Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 123: "[Justice] presupposes the idea of order, an order encompassing the whole world and all humanity. It is the order the Creator established in the

jubilation.[112] The King's anticipated, saving judgment is cause for worship among all peoples and even creation itself (e.g., 95:1-2; 96:1-2, 7-9, 11-12; 97:1; 98:4-8; 99:3, 8).

2.6.2 YHWH's Justice and Proverbs

Israel's hymnody frequently affirms that YHWH established just order at the creation of the world. The assumption is that YHWH will continue to maintain that order, even as the psalms demonstrate that YHWH welcomes impassioned, prodding prayer to speed the vindication of such justice. Much of the wisdom tradition also supposes a creational, ethical reality infused with justice and righteousness.[113] As an example, Proverbs teaches that YHWH has created heaven and earth according to the moral principle of wisdom (3:19-20; 8:22-31). Significantly, the prologue to the book of Proverbs summarizes that the aim of the entire book is gaining this wisdom (1:2), characterized by "righteousness (*ṣedeq*), justice (*mišpāṭ*), and equity (*mêšārîm*)" (Prov 1:3).[114] And again, in Prov 2 the upshot of acquiring wisdom, given by YHWH (2:6), is an

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world by his will and then expanded in the course of history. But in addition to the idea of established order, justice includes a dynamic dimension, one that is expressed in action in accordance with the established order. Its effect is either to return to others what belongs to them or to restore them to their proper position according to the design of the Creator."

[112] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 21-22: "Despite the fact that God's performance of justice and righteousness was directed toward three periods—past, present, and future—the distinction among these periods is generally not observed, due to their overlapping character . . . the distinction between past, present and future becomes blurred or obscured—that is, righteousness and justice, or the kindness and faithfulness of God, continue without interruption."

[113] For an overview of how creation theology interplays with the concern for just order in the wisdom corpus, see Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 271-380; Fretheim, *God and World*, 199-247.

[114] The same triad of virtues appears in Pss 9:8-9 and 99:4. Williamson, *He Has Shown You What is Good*, 50, submits that because the prologue was likely a late addition to the book of

understanding of "righteousness, justice, and equity—every good path" (2:9). To act in accordance with wisdom, therefore, is to act in concert with the established design of the universe—a foundational pathway constituted by justice and righteousness (8:20).[115] Unsurprisingly, then, a number of proverbs evidence concern for the kind of actions associated with justice and righteousness, particularly a social care focused on the poor and oppressed (e.g., 14:31; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13; 22:2, 9, 16; 22:22-23; 23:10-11, 28:27; 29:7; 31:9).[116] Moreover, such an attitude reflects the Creator's behavior toward the poor (e.g., 14:31; 15:25; 19:17; 22:2, 22-23).[117] Socially just treatment of others, then, derives

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Proverbs, "[i]t is likely, therefore, that the editor knows of such language [righteousness and justice] elsewhere in the Old Testament, including some of the prophets, where many scholars have found a more distinctive meaning . . . [I]t demonstrates that Proverbs was read at this late time as being compatible, at the least, with other biblical material while many scholars have sought to drive a wedge between this book and others."

[115] Many scholars have found connections between the creational order of righteousness and justice assumed by Proverbs and the Egyptian concept of *ma'at*. See n. 9; also H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur*, BZAW 101 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966); Christa Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung Ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*, WMANT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 93–139.

[116] I cannot here enter into the protracted debate about the social vision of wealth and poverty in the book of Proverbs. I am sympathetic to the following works, and in them one will find summaries of the history of the discussion: Timothy J. Sandoval, *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, BIS 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Walter J. Houston, "The Role of the Poor in Proverbs," in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson, JSOTSup 373 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 229-40; and Williamson, *He Has Shown You What is Good*, 49-63. In brief, I am unpersuaded by those who would interpret Proverbs's attitude as on the whole a vilification of the poor, or by those who read severe contradictions within Proverbs about the topic. Proverbs does warn that some destructive patterns of behavior can result in destitution, but the converse point that those in poverty deserve their plight is never made. To the contrary, while Proverbs accepts poverty as a social phenomenon as not always explainable (but cf. 13:23), it nevertheless issues consistent encouragement to care for the poor.

[117] Lyu, *Righteousness in Proverbs*, 32, contends Proverbs is unique in its social justice discourse by focusing on individual attitudes as well as the actions. Cf. Stefan Seiler, "Die

from a creaturely posture of YHWH-istic wisdom and is a matter of living in harmony with the established order of world.

Proverbs also endorses YHWH's role as the sustainer of cosmic justice by underscoring a connection between deeds and their consequences.[118] In other words, the foundational moral ethos underpinning creation works to foster reward to the just and punishment to the unjust. "The world, or to put it in theological terms, God's creation, is ordered and therefore exhibits justice; disorder and injustice exacts its price from those responsible, as the world asserts its true nature—or God protects it."[119] Proverbs is rich in maxims that attest to an inner-correspondence between an act and its consequence. For example, Prov 11:6, "Righteousness of the upright delivers them, but by their desire the treacherous are trapped"; or 25:19, "If anyone digs a pit, he will fall into it; whoever rolls a stone, it will roll back on him"; or 28:10, "He who misleads the upright in an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will receive goodness."[120] God's activity to

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theologische Dimension von Armut und Reichtum im Horizont alttestamentlicher Prophetie und Weisheit," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 590-94.

[118] In the following I am helped by the influential article by Klaus Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?" *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1-42 = in *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion and Recht des Alten Testaments*, ed. Klaus Koch, WdF 125 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 130-80 = [partial ET] "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, IRT 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 57-87; and reflections on Koch's thesis by Stephen B. Chapman, "Reading the Bible as Witness: Divine Retribution in the Old Testament," *PRSt* 31 (2004): 171-90, esp. 177-82; cf. Jan Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), 65.

[119] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 15. Cf. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 93.

[120] Koch, "Is There a Doctrine," also cites Prov 11:1, 3-6, 17-21, 27, 30-31; 25:19; 26:27-8; 28:1, 16b, 17, 18, 25b; 29:6, 23, 25. John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice," *JTS* 30 (1979): 10 = in *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 40, captures Koch's insight aptly: "According to Koch, one

bring about punishment and reward is not explicitly mentioned in many such proverbs. Rather, these proverbs point to God's role to see to the maintenance of an order wherein human actions create a "sphere of influence in which the built-in consequences of actions take effect."[121] Righteousness and justice, then, can be construed as something resembling spheres of blessing which can unleash their own reward to those who live in conformity with them; likewise, wickedness produces its own sphere of punishment.[122] So Prov 13:6, "Righteousness protects the one who is blameless on the way, but wickedness brings the sinner to ruin." YHWH's maintenance of the cosmos, therefore, at times looks more like a midwife than a micro-manager. YHWH sees to the facilitation of the act-consequence connection incubated within the cosmic order.[123] Now, to be sure, Proverbs does not espouse a world operating as a mechanistic, closed system. The world does not exist independent of YHWH's involvement. Additionally, YHWH's sovereign presence, however, does not mean the absence of ambiguity and irregularities in the

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might sum up Old Testament thinking about retribution more accurately in a phrase such as 'Die Tat ist die Saat'—I suppose, 'The deed is the seed.' Human actions in the Old Testament have their repercussions for the agent built into them; there is no gap between act and consequence into which a wedge of divine retribution can be inserted. God's role is simply to oil the works and check the switches."

[121] Koch, "Is There a Doctrine," 78.

[122] Koch, *Um das Prinzip*, 176; see also Koch, *The Prophets: Volume One: The Assyrian Period*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 56-62. Ho, *Ṣedeq and Ṣedaqah,* 144, speaks of a "blessed protective sphere." On the "sphere" of wickedness, compare Rolf Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965), 73-112, with Robert L. Hubbard, "Dynamistic and Legal Processes in Psalm 7," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 267-68.

[123] Koch, "Is There a Doctrine," 61.

world's order.[124] Proverbs invites its readers to take into account such complexity.[125] Moreover, Proverbs knows that YHWH can and does take a more active role in maintaining the justice in the world (e.g., 15:25, 29; 19:17).[126] In Proverbs wisdom is undeniably a dynamic phenomenon,[127] but one not autonomous from YHWH. Nonetheless, Proverbs (and wisdom literature in general[128]) assumes a creational theology in which there is a certain predictability and regularity in the moral, cause-effect order of the cosmos, albeit lively and not mechanical.[129] Humans through wisdom can discern patterns of appropriate conduct in the Creator's moral order.

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[124] David VanDrunen, "Wisdom and the Natural Moral Order: The Contribution of Proverbs to a Christian Theology of Natural Law," *JSCE* 33 (2013): 155: "There are, to be sure, exceptions to the usual course of things. And yet the very fact that they run counter to the grain of the universe, that they are exceptions, testifies to the reality of the regular order." Thus, Koch overstates the impersonal, automatic nature of the creational order, as numerous scholars have pointed out (see Chapman, "Reading the Bible," 181-82). For a recent, stringent critique of Koch, see Peter T. H. Hatton, *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel*, SOTS (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 83-116. Cf. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 94.

[125] That this is the case in Proverbs's discussion of wealth and poverty is illustrated by Sandoval, *Discourse on Wealth and Poverty.*

[126] Knierim's comments are apropos: "It must be especially noted that YHWH is not everywhere considered as merely confirming this principle of justice, let alone as being unconditionally subject to it. YHWH influences the process in various ways, thereby asserting not only his lordship but also additional and more inclusive criteria of justice. Nevertheless, the cause-and-effect concept of justice must be acknowledged because, on the one hand, it is massively documented throughout the Old Testament in juxtaposition to its variations and contestations, and because, on the other hand, is not invalidated through the equal or superior validity of alterations or alternatives" (*The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 94).

[127] See especially Fretheim, *God and World*, 199-247.

[128] The wisdom books of Job and Ecclesiastes are in dialogue with the notion of a creational justice. They, like Proverbs, probe the question, "What kind of world is this?" These books offer their own distinct answers that provide a counter-voice to Proverbs. For an introduction, see Angelika Berlejung, "Sin and Punishment: The Ethics of Divine Justice and Retribution in Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament Texts," *Int* 69 (2015): 272-87.

[129] William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science and the Ecology of Wonder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170-71, puts it nicely: "The ancient poet

2.6.3 YHWH's Justice and the Prophets

Classical prophecy in Israel was contemporaneous with several centuries of political, economic and social upheaval. From the prophetic corpus it is clear that these turbulent changes had particularly adverse effects on the vulnerable segments of the populace.[130] The prophets' preaching attends vigilantly to issues of social oppression,[131] and they regularly held up the standard of justice and righteousness as the measure by which YHWH judged Israel and the surrounding nations.[132] Furthermore, as in the Psalms,

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finds both Wisdom's liveliness and creation's orderliness as more than just coexistent; they are mutually supportive. Wisdom's passionate play is manifest within the setting of the cosmic order, and the cosmic order is set to serve Wisdom's lively involvement." See also Fretheim, *God and World*, 216-19.

[130] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 18-51, provides an overview of the various theories that attempt to explain the economic and social transitions of Israel/Judah during this time and their effect on the poor. He argues that though the introduction of monarchy led to the deterioration of traditional kinship structures, it was the lower class in the urban areas that took the harmful brunt of these changes. In other words, the oppression that concerned the prophets was mainly a city phenomenon. See further his "Exit the Oppressed Peasant? Rethinking the Background of Social Criticism in the Prophets," in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, LHBOTS 531 (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 101-116. Houston's discussion relies on the work of Avraham Faust, *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II*, trans. Ruth Ludlum (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

[131] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 74 provides a list of "the most significant passages denouncing social injustice": Isa 1:21-26; 3:13-15; 5:1-7, 8-10; 10:1-4; 58:1-12; Jer 2:34; 5:20-29; 7:1-7; 22:13-19; 34:8-22; Ezek 22:1-16, 23-31; 34:1-31; Amos 2:6-16; 3:9-15; 4:1-3; 5:10-12; 8:4-7; Mic 2:1-5, 6-11; 3:1-4, 9-12. Cf. the litany of texts surveyed by Malchow, *Social Justice*, 34-48. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 3-4, is worth quoting at length: "Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, [the reader of the prophets] is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the market place. Instead of showing us a way through the elegant mansions of the mind, the prophets take us to the slums. The world is a proud place, full of beauty, but the prophets are scandalized, and rave as if the whole world were a slum . . . To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence; to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world."

[132] E.g., Isa 1:21, 27; 5:7, 16; 9:7; 28:17; 32:16-17; 56:1; 59:9, 14; Jer 4:2; 5:1, 4; 9:24; 21:12; 22:3, 15; 33:15; Ezek 14:14; 18; 33:14; Hos 2:19 [21]; 10:12; 12:6; Amos 5:7, 15, 24;

the prophets foresee a time when YHWH will permanently establish justice in Israel and all the nations.[133]

It is true that in both the historical books (the "former prophets" in the Jewish canonical tradition) and the prophetic corpus YHWH is understood as an agent of judgment in history.[134] What is perhaps less appreciated is how the prophetic tradition of divine judgment espoused the idea of YHWH's creational order of justice, one similar in kind to what we noted in Proverbs. Accordingly, the prophetic understanding of YHWH's involvement in the execution of justice routinely presumes a connection between act and consequence that is not juridical.[135] Isaiah describes the choice the people have in such a way: "If you are willing and obey, you will eat the good of the earth, but if you refuse and rebel, you will be eaten by the sword, for the mouth of YHWH has spoken" (Isa 1:19-20). Elsewhere Isaiah diagnoses the people's disaster as their own doing, "Woe to them! Because they have brought disaster upon themselves" (3:9). Jeremiah casts the judgment

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6:12; Mic 3:1, 8-9; 6:8; Hab 1:4; Zeph 2:3; 3:5; Zech 7:9; 8:8; Mic 2:17. See further James Luther Mays, "Justice: Perspectives from the Prophetic Tradition," *Int* 37 (1983): 5-17; Hemchand Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets*, AUS 7, Theology and Religion 141 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); E. R. Hayes, "Justice, Righteousness," *DOTProphets* 466-72.

[133] E.g., Isa 2:1-4; 5:15-16; 11:1-5; 32:16-17; 42:1-4; 51:4-5; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15-16; Mic 7:9; Zech 8:8.

[134] In the twentieth century scholars debated the theological traditions that lie behind prophetic ethics. M. Daniel Carroll R., "Ethics," *DOTProphets* 186-87, distills the options into four positions: covenant, specific laws, clan wisdom, and creation. All of these find varied support in the texts. My focus here is on how a creational ethic of justice informed the prophetic tradition without necessarily denying the presence of other ethical influences.

[135] Valuable resources in this regard include Koch, "Is There a Doctrine," 64-69; Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Gene M. Tucker, "Sin and 'Judgment' in the Prophets," in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim*, ed. Henri T. Sun and Keith L. Eades (Grand

YHWH will bring upon Israel as the "fruit of their schemes" (6:19), and Hosea portrays the peoples' disaster as the natural consequence of their behavior, "for they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" (8:7). Ezekiel, too, makes the connection clear: "according to their ways I will deal with them, and by their own judgments I will judge them" (7:27). In these cases the judgment is connected intrinsically to the sin; the deed is the seed for its own punishment.[136]

The relationship between act and consequence is also illustrated with the specific vocabulary often used in these contexts. Language for evil or sin (*ra'/rā'â*, "wickedness" and *'āwōn*, "inquity") can be used equally to describe the consequent disaster, such that a line between the sin, the guilt, and the judgment/punishment for the wrongdoing is difficult to distinguish (e.g., Isa 65:6-7; Jer 6:19, 14:16; 18:18; Ezek 7:27; 21:23-24 [28-29]; Hos 5:5; 10:13). "The verbal linkage makes it clear that judgment experienced by the Israelites flows out of their own wickedness (*rā'āh* leads to *rā'āh*)."[137] The notion of the organic quality of divine judgment extends to YHWH's involvement in facilitating the connection between sin and its consequence. The language of God "giving up," "returning upon," or "repaying" Israel by the consequences of their own choices demonstrates God's involvement in the process, but it is an involvement that mediates rather than introduces the results of sin (e.g., Isa 34:2; 43:28; 47:6; 59:18; 64:7; Jer 16:18; 25:14; 29:21; Ezek 22:31; Hos 4:9; 12:2, 14; Joel 3:4, 7; cf. in the context of blessing, Isa

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 373-88; Fretheim, *God and World*, 163-65; Mark Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 115-39.

[136] Cf. Isa 5:8-10; Jer 2:3; 14:6; 17:10; 32:19; Ezek 7:27; Amos 3:3-8; Hos 4:1-4; 10:13-14.

[137] Fretheim, *God and World*, 164.

57:18; Joel 2:25). So, too, the verb typically translated "punish," *pqd*, may be better understood in most contexts as "visit" or "hold accountable" (e.g., Isa 13:11; 26:21; Jer 5:9; 21:14; 25:12; 36:3; Hos 4:9; 8:13; Amos 3:2). In other words, YHWH does not necessarily inject a new element into the judgment but "brings to maturation" the repercussions intrinsic in the wickedness.[138] Such prophetic language presupposes God's role in both the design and maintenance of the established order. YHWH acts in concert with the agency of the created moral order to sustain a just creation.[139]

It also appears that the prophets often assume a kind of creational justice in their prophecies of judgment. In many cases their pronouncements declare violations that do not rely explicitly on Israel's written law or covenant. John Barton has argued compellingly that the prophets frequently appeal to something akin to "natural law."[140] His case in point is Amos's oracles against the nations wherein the prophet decries

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[138] Biddle, *Missing the Mark*, 117-122, helpfully employs the language of maturation for sin's "afterlife."

[139] Hosea 10:12 shows the balance between YHWH and the moral order: "Sow for yourselves according to righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*); Reap lovingkindness (*ḥesed*); Break up the fallow ground for yourselves, for it is the time to seek YHWH, until he comes in order to shower righteousness (*ṣedeq*) upon you" (cf. Isa 45:8). Fretheim, *God and World*, 341, n. 28, states the issue well: "The interpreter, however, does not have to choose between God and the moral order; both are involved in every move from sin to consequence. The moral order is a divine agent, and God is genuinely active in and through that agent." Also, consider Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, Salvation," 106: "There is no substantial contradiction between the two, so long as the inner force of the order of creation and the action of the creator god are not differentiated."

[140] Barton, *Amos's Oracles Against the Nations*, SOTSMS 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) = *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 77-129, see also 32-44; ibid., *Ethics and the Old Testament* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 58-76. Barton's work is an important part of a larger, renewed appreciation of "natural law" or, preferably, "natural justice" (see Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, 63-64, for critique of the term "natural law"; also Williamson, *He Has Shown You*, 22-43) in the Scriptures in the last thirty years, particularly by Protestant scholars. On the subject more generally, see Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

atrocities among neighboring nations (Amos 1-2; cf. similar oracles in Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32; Nahum, Obadiah). Amos cites no explicit legislation in his denunciations of the nations for their atrocities and war-crimes, and most of the offenses which Amos enumerates are not even committed against Israel. Thus, Barton contends Amos's oracles of judgment are based on universally shared ethical convictions, "a kind of conventional or customary law about international conduct."[141] The prophets believe the nations can be held accountable for certain matters of universal justice, and that God avenges these breaches of morality. Yet, the basis of judgment is not Israel's revealed law. The universal reach of God's judgment, instead, presumes a base-line ethic operative among the nations—a self-evident standard of justice, a basic intuition embedded in the creatureliness of the created moral order. Furthermore, on the whole the prophets seldom describe even Israel's offense in terms of "breaking the covenantal law." Instead, more characteristically the prophet appeals "to known norms of humane conduct, of 'justice and righteousness', norms which are exemplified in the 'apodictic law', but cannot be limited by it."[142] Prophetic speech directed at the nations, in particular, signals most

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2011), 67-102; David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

[141] Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 78.

[142] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 70. Houston states this observation in a discussion about Amos, specifically Amos 2:8 and its relationship to Exodus 22:26-27 [25-26]. Other prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel make more of an appeal to God's commandments, as Houston notes (86, 85-86). I do not discount the notion that the prophets were deeply indebted to theological traditions that have parallel or are themselves indebted to Israel's narrative and law collections (on which see Malchow, *Social Justice*, 36-44; Gene M. Tucker, "The Law in the Eighth Century Prophets," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, eds. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 201-16; Terence Fretheim, "The Prophets and Social Justice: A *Conservative* Agenda*," WW* 28 (2008): 160-68). Nonetheless, as Houston concludes, "in

clearly how Israel assumes that a fundamental ethic of justice inhered in the created order.[143] YHWH's vindication of justice in the wider world —one rooted in creation theology—implicitly undergirds such texts.[144]

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prophetic texts judgment is *normally* made on social oppression not according to specific laws, nor by harking back to an imagined past or appealing to a formal idea pattern of society, but according to moral norms which are accepted universally in all human societies of which we have knowledge, norms which the authors of these texts clearly expect their audiences to share, and which they therefore did not create" (93, emphasis mine). Where the prophetic discourse does turn toward Israel's election, Knierim remarks that this "does not change the basic pattern to which Israel will receive what it does. Instead the presupposition of election and covenant, salvation and history itself, has reinforced the pattern of cause and effect and made their connections even more indissoluble" (*Task of Old Testament Theology*, 95-96). Williamson, *He Has Shown You What is Good*, 64-89, and Francolino J. Gonçalves, "Fondements du Message Social des Prophètes," in *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007*, ed. André Lemaire (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 597-620, argue toward a similar conclusion. In *Justice*, 47-48, Houston sums up the practical outcome of the ethic: "The content of this natural justice is much the same for every prophet, buts its application varies somewhat according to the issues uppermost for each. People should treat each other with honesty, generosity, and respect rather than with dishonesty, grasping and meanness, cruelty, violence and disrespect."

[143] Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, Salvation," 107, comments insightfully, "the circumstances in which the prophets appeared, the radical consistency of their indictment of the people, and the deadly earnestness with which they demand righteousness and justice comprise a specifically Israelite phenomenon quite without any ancient Near Eastern parallels; nevertheless the substance of their proclamation, the horizon and even the logic thereof, is that of the general Near Eastern view of the order of creation."

[144] Fretheim, *God and World*, 142, 166-68; Stefan Paas, *Creation and Judgment: Creation Texts in Some Eighth Century Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). The prophets announce God's involvement among the nations, for judgment and salvation (e.g., Amos 9:7!). What is also to be noted is the prophets' attentiveness to the nonhuman world. The frequent inclusion of creational imagery serves to communicate the interconnectedness of the moral infrastructure in God's creation. The moral and cosmic spheres are intertwined. Israel's and the nations' disruption of injustice in the moral order redounds in the creational order. For explication see Fretheim, *God and World,* 168-74; Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120-38; Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Murray, *Cosmic Covenant*, 14-26.

2.6.4 YHWH's Justice and the Law[145]

Finally, Israel's law collections can also lend support to the universal sense of justice.[146] The fact Israel was an heir to a shared concern for a just society from surrounding nations is borne out by the substantial number of laws in Israel that have recognizable parallels with other ancient Near Eastern laws.[147] The textual presentation of Israel's law collections depicts them as given by God; yet, a comparison to other ancient law collections at the very least suggests that much of Israel's legislation corresponds to and indeed even builds upon available ancient Near Eastern law or the collective wisdom of human social experience. James Barr explains:

> Biblical revelation, shall we say, took up into itself elements of legal and therefore of moral perception that already existed and were common ground to large human populations . . . the character of the laws of the Hebrew Bible . . . support the idea of a rational, knowable, accessible foundation for moral judgements that was, at least in principle, available to all humanity . . . The biblical laws, though given by revelation, could be seen to be in accord with reason of some kind. It could be seen . . . that they accorded with some sort of universal principles.[148]

Nevertheless, significant differences did exist—not the least of which was Israel's overall presentation of law in a covenantal context—but much of the individual building blocks

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[145] I return to the topic of law in ch. 5.

[146] See, e.g., James Barr, "Biblical Law and the Question of Natural Theology," in *The Law in the Bible and Its Environment*, ed. Timo Veijola, PFES 51 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1990), 1-22; Fretheim, *God and World*, 133-44.

[147] For a brief introduction, see Dale Patrick, "Law in the OT," *NIDB* 3:611-13. See also Baker, *Tight Fists*, who explores in detail Israel's social justice legislation in comparison to parallel legislation in the ancient Near East.

[148] James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford Lectures for 1991, Delivered in the University of Edinburgh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 98-100.

of the law were not tremendously distinctive.[149] In fact, Moses in Deut 4:6-8 presupposes that the nations can apply the standards of righteousness by which they recognize the discerning, divine wisdom inherent in the body of Israel's decrees. Although the canonical sequence indicates that Israel's law was promulgated after God's redemption of the people from Egypt, the similarities with other ancient legal corpora imply that Israel's law stood in continuity with creation, if not derived from a creational basis.[150] "[S]omehow God's giving of the law is thought to conform to the existing moral order, which could be discerned by those who were not people of God."[151] Hence, many of the laws point to a universal, cosmic sense of natural justice that was already in existence among Israel's neighboring societies to some degree.[152]

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[149] Baker, *Tight Fists*, 305-15, provides a nice summary of the similarities and differences with regard to social justice legislation. Importantly, he contends that "the differences far outnumber the similarities" (305). I will have much more to say in ch. 5 concerning the differences between Israel's law in Exod 20-23 and contemporaneous ANE collections. The laws pertaining to the resident alien are a good example of Israel's sharp distinctiveness.

[150] Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, Salvation," 105, describes the wide, creational basis of the legal order in the ANE: "Hammurabi's giving of the law comes in this creation context, and so does every ancient Near Eastern legal code with the same structure." See also Fretheim, *God and World*, 135-40. James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis*, JSOTSup 335 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 44-48, 76-211, passim, cogently demonstrates that stories in Gen 18-20 imply knowledge of law, law keeping, and law breaking and provide specific warrants for obeying that law—all before Sinai. Bruckner concludes the foundational context for law keeping in Torah is not first covenantal but creational. The Creator-created relationship grounds the "oughts" and "ought nots" for the Genesis characters.

[151] Fretheim, *God and World*, 137.

[152] Ibid., 141, notes helpfully "[t]he issue at stake in [the distinction between natural law and Israel's explicitly revealed laws] is not divine revelation as such, but the *kind* of revelation being referenced."

2.6.5 Summary

Evidence from Israel's poetic, wisdom, prophetic and legal traditions confirms in distinct but overlapping ways that the moral order of the world is a created reality in which justice and righteousness reside as constitutive elements. These cosmic traits describe YHWH's disposition, form the foundation of YHWH's royal throne, characterize YHWH's actions, and epitomize what is necessary to the functioning and well-being of YHWH's world. In addition, YHWH works through the created order to maintain and restore cosmic justice. Many biblical writings assume the cosmic imprint of justice, and this theological conviction undergirds a belief in an ethos of creational (natural) justice.[153] In the next section we will investigate in more detail how Israel understood the divine expectations for humans to live in accordance with the justice established and sustained by YHWH in creation.

2.7 HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR JUSTICE IN ISRAEL

Because YHWH has created the world in justice and righteousness, rules over a creation infused with justice and righteousness, and acts to uphold justice and righteousness, it follows that YHWH expects the performance of justice and righteousness from the earth's inhabitants. As we have seen, an ethos of justice imbues creation, and it is this creational criterion which is also supposed to suffuse Israel's own ethical

[153] Williamson, *He Has Shown You*, 104-9, argues even more strongly that the basis of social justice of Scripture is in the discernment of the Creator's design of the world.

posture.[154] Its perversion is an anathema among YHWH's people (e.g., Deut 16:19-20; Amos 5:7; Mic 3:9), and its implementation in social relationships is more desirable to YHWH than the operation of the cultus (e.g., Prov 21:3; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8; Isa 58).[155] Indeed, in Jeremiah the knowledge of YHWH is synonymous with the practice of justice and righteousness (cf. Jer 22:15-16; 9:6, 24). But just as in the wider ancient Near Eastern nations, many of Israel's tradents maintained that a special responsibility for social justice rested on the monarchy. Israel's expectations for the conduct and results of a righteous king's rule parallel those of the neighboring peoples. Yet, Israel's ideal human king performs justice and righteousness with a distinctive YHWH-istic cast. The king governs toward redemptive ends in an analogous way to YHWH's performance as the divine king over the cosmos.

2.7.1 Justice and the Human King

Justice resided at the heart of the ideal purpose of Israel's conception of kingship.[156] In the ancient world a deity would bestow on a king the gift for establishing justice and righteousness, and this gift was closely associated with wisdom. The story of

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[154] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 7, speaks of the execution of justice and righteousness in the prophets as the "fulfillment of this goal as the basis of the nation's existence." Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 168, describes it as "the reason for its election."

[155] See the discussion by Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 44-53.

[156] On this motif, see in addition to Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 45-74, passim, Whitelam, *The Just King*, and Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness*. Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 135-39, reminds that there are two opposing views of kingship in the Bible—one positive and another highly critical (e.g., 1 Sam 8; 1 Kgs 21; Jer 22; Ezek 34; Hos 8:4; Amos 7:9). "Although these groups of texts evaluate the experience of monarchy in opposite ways, they employ the same standard of evaluation" (135), namely, the standard of justice and righteousness especially to the poor.

Solomon's enthronement and rise to international fame bears this out. Near the commencement of his reign, Solomon asked YHWH in a dream for "a listening heart in order to judge (root is *špṭ*) your people, to discern between good and evil, for who is able to judge this great people?" When the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon, she witnesses Solomon's divinely-given wisdom and declares unambiguously the objective of his wise rule: "Blessed be YHWH, your God, who has delighted in you in order to place upon the throne of Israel! Because of YHWH's everlasting love for Israel he has set you as king in order to do justice and righteousness" (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ*; cf. 1 Kgs 10:9 (// 2 Chr 9:8)). The Queen articulates the view in the ancient world that a king's task to establish social justice was considered to be a divine gift, one associated with the possession of wisdom.[157] So, as another example, Isaiah's vision of the eschatological king connects the king's wisdom with the justice of his reign: "The spirit of YHWH will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and discernment . . . He will not judge by what his eyes see or mediate by what he hears, but he will judge the poor with righteousness and mediate with equity the lowly of the land" (Isa 11:2-4). A king reigns with wisdom in order to do justice and righteousness (e.g., 1 Kgs 3:28; Jer 23:5). To do justice was to do good (e.g., Mic 6:8; Amos 5:5; Prov 2:9, 20; Job 24:21) and to reap good (e.g., Jer 22:15) so that a discerning knowledge of the good as opposed to evil was critical to such a task.[158]

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[157] Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness*, 56-59; Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 61-65.

[158] Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness*, 52.

Other passages associate the king's coronation and reign with justice and righteousness,[159] but one of the most remarkable texts concerning the king's responsibility for justice is Ps 72. The psalm is a prayer to God on behalf of the king (perhaps at coronation).[160] The opening of the prayer affirms what we have already stated about the divine origin and purpose of the king's reign:

> O God, give your king your judgments (pl. of *mišpāṭ*),
> and your righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*) to the son of the king.
> Let him judge your people with righteousness (*ṣedeq*)
> and your oppressed ones with justice (*mišpāṭ*). (vv. 1-2)

The rest of the psalm gives a clear picture of the expected outcome of the king's divinely inspired power. The content of the psalm supports an understanding of "justice and righteousness" as activities of justice toward the poor. In multiple lines the prayer casts the nature of the king's just rule in terms of relieving the burdens of the defenseless ones:

> Let him judge the oppressed of the people,
> and deliver the children of the needy,
> and crush the oppressor. (v. 4)

> For he will rescue the needy who scream for help,
> and the oppressed who have no helper.
> He will look compassionately on the weak and needy,
> and he will deliver the lives of the needy.
> From oppression and violence he will rescue their lives;
> Their blood is precious in his eyes. (vv. 12-14)

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[159] E.g., Isa 9: 4, 6; 16:5; 42:1-7; Jer 22:15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 45:9; Ps 45; Prov 16:12. See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 9.

[160] Note, too, it is the only psalm specifically linked with Solomon. Thus, the superscription points to the connection between wisdom and justice, and the divine source of both.

In this psalm the divine gift of justice exercised on behalf of the poor is the fount (vv. 1-2 head the psalm) from which all other blessings flow to and from the king.[161] If the king's sense of justice comes from God, then it should be understood that his exercise of justice mirrors God's own activity.[162] In short, the king enacts God's rule. Thus, in this prayer for the king, the psalmist reminds the king and all who would listen about the kind of God who legitimates the king's reign. Implied is a critique of any monarch who does not meet God's standard of justice. Houston captures the psalm's challenge to royal power concisely: "A king who is not just, who does not care for the poor, who does not allow the prayer for God's righteousness to be fulfilled in himself, is not in reality God's king."[163]

Two other motifs in this psalm merit attention. First, insofar as the king establishes justice for the weaker members of society, the psalmist recognizes how this will mean that the king must overcome nefarious forces of oppression. At times the commitment to justice requires the forceful suppression of chaos ("crush the oppressor" (v. 4)), a chaos that characteristically asserts itself against the most vulnerable (cf. Ps 45:4-7 [5-8]). The militant side of the king's justice, again, mimics the cosmic rule of

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[161] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 141-42.

[162] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 216, note the verbs used in vv. 12-14 evoke YHWH's character in that they all describe actions YHWH takes in other biblical contexts. Note especially God's actions in Exod 2:23; 15:2, 13.

[163] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 148. He provides a sensitive treatment of the psalm (139-50) that considers the presence of royal propaganda. While he thinks the psalm too easily merges the interest of the king and the poor, he emphasizes it does so only by legitimating the king's rule by his implementation of justice for the poor.

YHWH on the earth.[164] Similarly, in Isaiah's vision of the king, the eradication of evil is the flip side of the deliverance of the poor and oppressed: "But he will judge the poor with righteousness and mediate with equity the lowly of the land. He will strike the land with the rod of his mouth and by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked" (Isa 11:4; cf. 61:1-2).[165] In Ps 72:8-10, 17, the king's rule of justice extends upon the world stage whereby his universal sovereignty mediates blessing to the whole earth (an intertextual echo of the promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3; 18:19; cf. 17:4-6). But by placing the concern for justice and righteousness at the head of psalm, the poet insists that these characteristics are the primary motivation and criteria (note the conjunctive "for" (*kî*) at the beginning of v. 12!) by which the king triumphs over the nations.

Second, the king's just rule is connected to the land's fertility.[166] The results of the royal exercise of justice and righteousness are worked out in creation's bounteous yield (v. 16), a return itself described by well-being (*šālôm*) and righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*) (v. 3). The king's reign is likened to "showers of rain (v. 6)," and it is linked with the endurance and restorative radiance of celestial bodies (vv. 5, 17).[167] A similar connection appears in David's "final words" where he likens a righteous ruler to "light of a morning at sunrise, a cloudless morning, like the brightness after the rain [bringing] the grass from

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[164] See the discussion of Pss 89 and 82 above; cf. Isa 1:24-28. The psalmist portrays the parallel of YHWH's cosmic power over inimical forces and the king's sovereignty as the elect of God. On the conflation of divine and human kingship in a cosmological nexus, see Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East.*

[165] Wienfeld, *Social Justice*, 50, thinks the imagery of the king's breath denotes action "through a royal decree akin to *mīšarum* which aids the poor and destroys the oppressor."

[166] On the following theme, see Dietrich, "Psalm 72 in Its Ancient Syrian Context."

[167] On the translation difficulty in 72:5, see ibid., 159; cf. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 52-53.

the earth" (2 Sam 23:3-4). As YHWH's agent of justice, Israel's monarch ensures perduring fertility.[168]

2.7.2 Justice and the Individual

The responsibility of the king for justice and righteousness in Israel did not dilute the call for justice on the individual. Indeed, "[i]f the general assumption in the ancient Near East, exemplified in Psalm 72 and messianic texts, was that the maintenance of 'justice and righteousness' in society was the responsibility of the king, it is significant that large parts of the Hebrew Bible refuse this assumption."[169] Though monarchy is mentioned in the Pentateuch, the covenantal law collections are clear that every member is enlisted in the practice of justice. Walter Houston notes that at least three texts envision a nation-wide participation in actions which redress economic relationships: the third year tithe in Deut 14:28-29; the seven-year remission of debts in Deut 15:1-3; and the Jubilee in Lev 25:8-13.[170] Deuteronomy 10:12-19 summarizes Israel's responsibility with five imperatives, one of which is to "walk in all [YHWH's] ways" (v. 12). The passage

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[168] Niehr, "Constitutive Principles," 122-23, remarks that justice and righteousness as cosmic traits are associated frequently with three fertility metaphors: plants (Isa 5:1-7; Hos 10:4; Amos 5:7; 6:12); water (Isa 32:1-2; 45:8; Amos 5:24; Hos 10:12; Ps 36:7); and light (Isa 42:1-3; 59:5; Hos 6:5; 10:12).

[169] Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 161. See his full survey of texts on individuals and justice (161-203).

[170] Ibid., 169-203; cf. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 152-78. Besides specific legislation, Houston describes a primary purpose of the laws (and Torah in general) as a reflex of a rhetorical aim; viz, setting out the ideal standards of justice and righteousness rather than actual juridical policy. In other words, the laws are aspirational and instructional rather than strictly procedural. The net result is that "while there may have been efforts, more or less successful, to enforce particular provisions, every member of the covenant people was in principle understood to be

describes these "ways" in vv. 17-19: "YHWH shows no partiality and takes no bribes; doing justice for the fatherless and widow, loving the resident immigrant by giving him food and clothing. So you must love the resident immigrant because you were resident immigrants in the land of Egypt." The "way of Israel" is a journey radiating the nature of YHWH's justice.

And, of course, the prophets address the whole community of YHWH with their call for justice. To be sure, some of their visions anticipate a revival of justice by a coming king (e.g., Isa 9:1-7; 11:1-9; 16:5; 42:1-4; 61:1-4; Jer 22:1-23:6; Ezek 34; esp. v. 23!), and this is surely how royal texts like Ps 72 were read after the monarchy ceased to exist in Israel.[171] But the prophets clearly expect justice to permeate the behavior of the people at large. Isaiah's "song of the vineyard" illustrates the nature of the national expectation. Isaiah 5 begins with a juridical parable that describes Israel as a vineyard (note the association of Israel's justice with fertility). YHWH delivers his verdict on the barrenness of Israel's production with paronomasia: He awaited justice (*mišpāṭ*); but, look, violence (*miśpāḥ*); for righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*); but, look, a scream for justice (*ṣəʿāqâ*)" (v. 7). James Mays summarizes the purpose of Israel's election according to Isaiah's song: "The entire history of Israel under God is subordinated to one purpose—righteousness expressed in justice" (cf. Isa 1:10-17).[172]

Finally, Ezek 18 is arguably the most explicit text in the Hebrew Bible on the

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responsible for exercising that justice and righteousness that the Torah demands and the covenant commits them to." I return to this thought in ch. 5.

[171] See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 57-74, for a discussion of texts referring to the eschatological king's justice. He takes up texts on the role of the individual on 215-30.

[172] Mays, "Justice," 8.

responsibility for justice by individuals. Ezekiel describes the character of individuals in alternating generations who will (or will not) survive divine judgment. His portrayal offers a case study in personal morals which all fall under the rubric of the "righteous (*ṣedeq*) man who does justice (*mišpāṭ*) and righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*)" (v. 5). The just man does not commit oppression, gives to the needy, judges fairly in controversy, and lends graciously (vv. 7-8). The thrust of Ezekiel's sermon is to get individuals to accept responsibility for performing justice in their day, and not to remain hostage to the character of a previous generation.[173] A host of other texts highlight the individual's responsibility to justice and righteousness (e.g., Isa 5:1-7; 58-59; Jer 7:1-11; Mic 6:6-8; cf. Ps 15; 106; Job 31). Suffice it to say, though justice was a divinely ordained task of the king, it was also (if not equally[174]) a standard ethical obligation for all community members. Each Israelite is held to the standard of justice reflective of the divine character (Deut 10:14-22).

2.8 JUSTICE IN GENESIS AS A PRELUDE TO EXODUS

Before I turn to examine in detail the theme of justice in Exodus, I wish to look briefly at YHWH's soliloquy and conversation with Abraham in Gen 18:17-33. In the

[173] The actions Ezekiel places under the heading of the "righteous man" are wider than "social justice." Thus, this context shows that the meaning of doing justice and righteousness can have a broader purview; yet, social justice behavior still makes up the dominant part of Ezekiel's meaning (Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 101).

[174] Williamson, *He Has Shown You*, 42, observes "within Israel the emphasis was upon the ideal that superior status implied enhanced responsibility to those lower down, and indeed we often find that the well-being of the nation and society is thought to have been dependent in rather a direct manner on the faithfulness of the king or other leaders."

words of one commentator, "this is the place in Genesis where the nature of God's rule in the world is aired most penetratingly."[175] Importantly, the narrative in Gen 18 marks the theme of justice as integral to the election, education, and vocation of YHWH's people in the context of creation. In the following chapters I will examine how Exodus carries forward and expands this trajectory. A closer look at this theme within Gen 18 and some of its connections to the larger plot of Genesis will thus prepare us for the way Exodus develops the motif of justice.

Genesis 18 is the prelude to the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The story begins with Abraham and Sarah's offer of hospitality to three mysterious visitors. The narrator has clued the reader into the (enigmatic) presence of YHWH among the guests.[176] The visitors deliver the startling message that Sarah, despite her old age, will soon give birth to the promised son of the covenant (cf. 17:6). Abraham accompanies them out in order to see them on their way, but the drama of the birth announcement is interrupted by the visitors' telltale glance at the city of Sodom (v. 16). Earlier in Gen 13:10-13 the narrator foreshadows the divine disaster that will befall the sinful cities of the plain. As of yet, though, YHWH has not brought the calamity. Abraham certainly does not know about the cities' destiny.[177] In this narrative moment, the Genesis author pulls

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[175] McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 44. Of course, much more could be said of the theme of justice in Genesis, e.g., Alan M. Dershowitz, *The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice that Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Law* (New York: Warner Books, 2000). In the following I am particularly indebted to McConville's discussion, 42-49.

[176] The exact nature of YHWH's appearance to Abraham need not detain us. It is not clear how Abraham comes to converse with YHWH in relationship to the three visitors.

[177] Moreover, in the narrative's development, even the (first-time) reader does not know if the time of Sodom and Gomorrah's judgment is imminent. This contrasts with many interpretations that presume that YHWH has already decided to destroy Sodom at this time.

back the cosmic curtain on YHWH's internal rumination about the divine decision to carry out judgment on the cities. YHWH deliberates over whether to disclose to Abraham the divine plan. YHWH poses and subsequently answers a question about the reason for Abraham's involvement:

> Then YHWH thought, "Will I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations of the earth will be blessed by him. For I have known him, so that he may instruct his children and his house after him to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice, so that YHWH may bring upon Abraham everything which he spoke upon him. (vv. 17-19)

This divine soliloquy sets the stage for the ensuing dialogue between YHWH and Abraham concerning the fate of the cities. As if as a reminder in light of the task of judgment at hand, YHWH reiterates the promise made to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3.[178] Genesis 12:1-3 outlines YHWH's creational agenda of blessing the world through Abraham, who is selected as the progenitor of YHWH's chosen (i.e., "known"—v. 19a) people.[179] The blessing rests upon Abraham, and correspondingly the blessing is made

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Nathan MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham—Listening to YHWH: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16-33," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 28-29, argues that this assumption is based on assumptions about the historical layering of the passage, viz., Gen 18:16-32 is a later (post-exilic) insertion (e.g., see Johannes Unsok Ro, "The Theological Concept of YHWH's Punitive Justice in the Hebrew Bible: Historical Development in the Context of the Judean Community in the Persian Period," *VT* (2011): 408-411, for a catalogue of scholars who take this line of interpretation). While historical layering is probable, in the final form of the narrative, as MacDonald points out, YHWH's soliloquy contains no unambiguous announcement of destruction. "Although, for the reader, the destruction of Sodom is an event waiting to happen, there is no prescription for how or when it should occur" (29). MacDonald insightfully argues that though Abraham's response in v. 23 assumes destruction, this begs the question of whether Abraham's query in vv. 20-21 understands rightly YHWH's intent.

[178] Note the migration of the language of blessing from "all the *families* of the earth" in Gen 12:3 to "all *nations* of the earth" in 18:18.

[179] Importantly, Abraham's election is not embedded within the cosmic order, but rather is a contingent part of God's creational agenda in light of events in Gen 1-11. This in contrast to other cosmologies, e.g., the Babylonian Genesis, wherein Marduk's creation culminates in the

available through Abraham to all nations of the earth.[180] Though the story will end tragically in the destruction of cities on the plain, the recapitulation of the promise effectively situates the coming judgment within the wider frame of YHWH's universal horizon of blessing.[181] Because Abraham is the vehicle of blessing to the nations, YHWH decides to involve Abraham in the adjudication of justice in an emblematic situation of judgment. In this wider, creational frame of reference, the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah thus represents a "paradigm of criteria by which nations, set to be blessed by Abraham, will be judged."[182]

But more is revealed about Abraham's chosen status. As a consequence of his chosenness, Abraham (and implicitly Abraham's progeny) is called to be an educator. YHWH has delineated to him a charge to instruct his household and descendants in the way of YHWH —a path typified by *ṣədāqâ* and *mišpāṭ*. The "way" of YHWH is a common

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construction of the city and temple of Babylon. The creational account of Genesis, on the contrary, culminates in the Sabbath. Hence, YHWH's creation does not underwrite any particular political order or people—even Israel (Jon D. Levenson, "The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 146-47).

[180] There is disagreement over how to translate the *niphal* perfect "to bless" in Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14. See most recently Benjamin J. Noonan, "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hitpael of ברק in the Patriarchal Narratives," *HS* (2010): 73-93, who cogently defends on linguistic and exegetical grounds a medio-passive translation ("be/become blessed"). Hence, Abraham's role is one of blessing mediation. This is not to deny that the emphasis in Gen 12:1-3 is on the magnitude of the blessing given to Abraham. Cf. Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), who offers a similar assessment.

[181] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 361. The immediate preceding story (18:1-15) includes a reiteration of the promises to Abraham's descendants.

[182] McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 44. In subsequent texts, these cities appear as exemplars of wickedness, and thus come to represent models of righteous judgment: e.g., Deut 29:23 [22]; 32:32; Isa 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18: 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46-56; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9.

metaphor in the Old Testament to summarize Israel's ethic of living.[183] Interestingly, Weinfeld shows that "way" language has parallels in ancient Near Eastern literature where it portrays specifically the performance of justice and righteousness by kings.[184] YHWH has already told Abraham twice in the previous chapter (17:6; 17:16) that his descendants will include kings of many nations (17:6; 16).[185] It is understandable, then, to find the expression "way of YHWH" in Gen 18:19 amended by the purpose clause "by doing righteousness and justice." Yet, the commission does not single out royal progeny but rather mentions all of Abraham's children and his house after him.[186]

There is apparently no record of YHWH issuing this pedagogical directive to Abraham (cf. 17:1). Nonetheless, YHWH candidly divulges here that the practice of righteousness and justice is the ethical burden of the call for Abraham and his entire

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[183] It occurs most frequently in the Deuteronomistic writings, e.g., Deut 5:33; 8:6; 19:9; 30:16; Josh 22:5; Jdg 2:22; 1 Kgs 2:3; 3:14; 8:36; 2 Kgs 21:22; Isa 30:21; 42:24; Jer 7:23; 42:3; Hos 14:10 [9]; Mic 4:2; Zech 3:7; Ps 119:2-3; 128:1.

[184] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 30-33. Cf. Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 89-90, who understands the "way" language as an indication of a legal procedure. Bruckner reads the dialogue between Abraham and God as a "pre-trial" procedure wherein "Abraham is receiving valuable adjudicatory experience" (90).

[185] On which see Daniel S. Diffey, "The Royal Promise in Genesis: The Often Underestimated Importance of Genesis 17:6, 17:16 and 35:11," *TynBul* 62 (2011): 313-16. YHWH's soliloquy in Gen 18:17-19, therefore, can be understood to include the particular royal responsibility for justice and righteousness. The responsibility laid on Abraham's seed extends among the nations by virtue of future "Abrahamic" kings. Indeed, the next two occurrences of the phrase "justice and righteousness" assign the task to kings (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9). This may also connect to the inclusion of Abraham's people as "powerful" (*ʿāsam*) which only occurs in Genesis. It next appears at the beginning of the Exodus narrative (1:7). In other words, because Abraham's people will be a people of "power," Abraham needs to know what it means to exercise power justly.

[186] The task is "democratized" to include all of Abraham's descendants (cf. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 216). Might this be the primary way YHWH's blessing of Abraham is mediated to the nations?

lineage.[187] Moreover, Gen 18:19 is the first mention of the binomial "righteousness and justice"—*ṣədāqâ* and *mišpāṭ*—in the Hebrew Bible.[188] These words continue to appear in Abraham's subsequent conversation with God (*mišpāṭ* in v. 25; the root *ṣdq* seven times in vv. 23-28). As we have seen, this phrase appears repeatedly throughout the Hebrew Bible (and its equivalent throughout the ancient Near East) as a rubric for actions of social justice, modeled on the character of YHWH.[189] YHWH is about to bring before Abraham a situation (significantly among a non-elect people) where YHWH's intentions for righteousness and justice are being flagrantly subverted. If Abraham's call is to bless the nations—and this linked with the task of doing justice and righteousness—then YHWH thinks it necessary that Abraham understand something of divine justice.[190] Indeed, the episode will teach Abraham through a real-life scenario more precisely the contours of YHWH-shaped justice and righteousness.[191]

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[187] Reuven Kimelman, "Prophecy as Arguing with God and the Ideal of Justice," *Int* 68 (2014): 18, asserts that Gen 18:19 is the only recorded explanation for the election of Abraham (cf. Deut 7:6-8; Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 85; Levenson, "Universial Horizon of Biblical Particularism," 154). He goes further to maintain that YHWH makes the promise contingent on Abraham's ability to persuade his descendants to behave accordingly.

[188] The second occurrence is not until 2 Samuel 8:15. There it describes the character of the reign of King David.

[189] Hence, it would be strange if the Genesis author did not have this background meaning in mind. Nonetheless, this is its first occurrence, and the phrase appears without explicit explanation. This leaves open the possibility that the narrative offers an opening, "canonical" moment to define the contours of "righteousness and justice" which Abraham is to learn from YHWH for the purpose of teaching his posterity.

[190] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *NIDB* 1, ed. Katherine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 468.

[191] Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 87, suggests that the context "has overtones of 'tutoring in wisdom' that is supposed to occur in a domestic context between fathers and mothers (e.g. Proverbs 3:1ff)." YHWH's pedagogical motivation in the dialogue has been argued by Nathan MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham—Listening to YHWH," and Jože Krašovec, *Reward,*

After deciding to take Abraham into his confidence, YHWH proceeds to report to him that YHWH will investigate the great "outcry" and grave sin of the cities (vv. 20-21).[192] The cry of a non-elect people against a city spurs YHWH into action. The terms used for the outcry (*zə'āqâ* or *ṣə'āqâ*) are technical words for legal complaints of injustice and oppression by the needy addressed to an authority.[193] Some people in and/or around Sodom and Gomorrah were allegedly suffering unjustly and crying out because of the cities' wickedness. Importantly, "the trigger for God's investigation and subsequent action is not only the appalling sin of Sodom but the protests and cries of their victims."[194] It is YHWH, not Abraham, who calls attention to the alleged injustice, and this in order to consult with Abraham about the inquiry. God admits the final verdict on the

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Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views, VTSup 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 57-60; Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 128-30. This is in contrast to an interpretation that views Abraham as YHWH's teacher (e.g., Brueggemann, *Genesis: in Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 162-77). In addition, Krasovec emphasizes the warning implicit to Abraham in the destruction; viz, if Abraham's descendants do not perform justice and righteousness, they too can face the possibility of destruction (57).

[192] The language "go down and see" (v. 21) follows an established pattern of God's judgment in Genesis (cf. 6:5; 11:5). Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 88-170, shows that juridical terminology pervades the text. Bruckner emphasizes that Abraham's concern is primarily about proper juridical procedure (e.g., 132, 140). Nonetheless, he does not limit Abraham's concern for justice only to the administrative sense (143).

[193] See Gen 4:10; 19:13; Exod 3:7; 22:23; Deut 15:9; 1 Sam 7:8; 2 Kgs 8:3; Isa 5:7; 19:20; 46:7; Jer 20:8; Hab 1:2; Pss 9:13; 34:18; 77:2; 88:2; 107:6, 28; Job 34:28. See Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 91-93; For an extended treatment of the language of "outcry," see Richard Boyce, *The Cry To God in the Old Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Note as well the paronomasia between the *zə'āqâ* against the city and the *ṣədāqâ* expected from Abraham (cf. Is 5:7).

[194] Wright, *Mission of God*, 367.

cities remains open ("if not"—v. 21) and thus creates genuine space for Abraham's contribution.[195]

Abraham takes YHWH's announcement as an invitation to dialogue with YHWH about the divine intent. The ensuing interchange takes on a theoretical character and raises a number of significant issues, only some of which I touch on for my purposes. First, as W. J. Lyons notes, the conversation between Abraham and YHWH is built on the premise that "it is possible for those outside the covenant between Abraham and YHWH to be considered 'righteous' by the investigating deity."[196] Second, Abraham presumes that YHWH is the judge of the earth. Abraham presses YHWH as the creational judge to exercise judgment which is faithful to the standards of justice inhering in YHWH's creation (v. 25). In other words, YHWH does not transcend his own norms;[197] Abraham

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[195] Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 468-69, argues for the integrity of the consultation: "God will consult with him to discover whether the situation is in fact so grave that it warrants the judgment that God has *preliminarily* drawn." Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 145, likewise argues that a "close juridical reading" means God's display of justice must be a public process. God's going down to see, then, implies God's commitment to a proper trial and intimate knowledge in "human form." Hence, it is not a "pre-emptive effort to assure Abraham he is indeed a just God" (as argued by Richard G. Smith, *The Fate of Justice and Righteousness During David's Reign: Narrative Ethics and Rereading the Court History According to 2 Samuel 8:15-20:26*, LHBOTS 508 (New York: T &T Clark, 2009), 47).

[196] William John Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis: Canonical Praxis and the Sodom Narrative*, JSOTSup 352 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 183. McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 45-46, states "this display of God's moral framework is made with a people that is not related to the chosen line, and therefore is declared (again) to be a universal criterion; and *tsedaqah*, as God's basic ethical requirement, is predicated of peoples as such in their dealings with each other."

[197] Thus, it is not the case, as Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, 54, argues, that "the writer depicts Abraham as setting up some standard over against God and by which he dares to judge God's proposed action." Rather, it is God's being true to his character of justice which inheres in creation. Lyu, *Righteousness in Proverbs*, 22, comments: "God may be transcendent in ontological terms, but God does not transcend his own norms. That God abides by certain moral norms is a basis of his credibility as the righteous judge and guardian of justice."

expects that YHWH will act in accordance with the "way of YHWH" required of Abraham and his descendants (v. 19).[198]

Third, James Bruckner demonstrates that Abraham's line of questioning assumes a connection between the moral order and physical (creational) order.[199] YHWH's creational commitment to justice and righteousness underwrites a "moral-physical cosmology" that links creational sin with creational consequences.[200] Abraham believes YHWH's execution of justice will have catastrophic consequences (the destruction of an entire valley) that may have imprecise effects (i.e., the righteous will suffer the same as the guilty). Though the judgment is YHWH's (19:24), YHWH works through the creational structures to bring it to fruition. So too, the deliverance of Lot's family illustrates that YHWH works within the parameters of the moral-physical cosmology to effect salvation. What is more, YHWH's rescue acts in concert with human cooperation.[201]

Fourth, the story teases out the texture of YHWH's justice. Abraham learns in the process of intercession, rather unexpectedly, that "his concerns are matched by God's."[202]

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[198] And this in contrast to the way of judgment-justice exercised by the Sodomites (Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 151-56).

[199] Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 158-69.

[200] Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 477, comments insightfully: "But does not *God* cause all the damage? The text links God to this catastrophe (19:24) as an ecological disaster of divine judgment. God sees to a *creational* form for this disaster; it corresponds to the *anticreational* form of human wickedness, focused especially in the language of outcry and the deprivation of life and well-being (18:20-21; 19:13). God midwifes or sees to the moral order, through already existing human or non-human agents." I will return to this thread of interpretation again in chapter four in the discussion of the plagues.

[201] Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 162-63.

[202] Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 469. It is not entirely clear why Abraham stops his intercession at ten righteous people. MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham—Listening to YHWH," 37-41, contends that Abraham does not go far enough with his request. Abraham fails to "plumb the depths of YHWH's grace" (40). Cf. Krasovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 58-61. I

YHWH's actions will not lead to an unjust "sweeping away" of the righteous with the wicked. The "judge of all the earth will do justice (*mišpāṭ*)" (18:25). But the dialogue is instructional: YHWH discloses to Abraham the content of divine justice, and it is not a strict weighing of the scales. The righteousness of YHWH's justice takes into account the victimization of the marginal, the communal responsibility of the cities, and the contaminating effect of rampant, community-wide sin (cf. 19:4), while working within the confines of the cosmology linking human sin and catastrophic disaster. As Fretheim notes:

> Abraham recognizes that God will indeed act justly concerning Sodom, and indeed any corporate entity. But, with respect to corporate justice, there comes a point when justice must be done, even radical surgery undertaken, even if some righteous people get caught up in the judgment. Other options are not finally tolerable, especially an option where the Sodomites would not be brought to account in any way for the terrible injustice they are visiting upon people. To avoid judgment would allow evil to go unchecked in the world.[203]

However, YHWH's exercise of justice does not preclude YHWH's mercy (especially toward Lot—19:16, 19; 29). Abraham learns YHWH's desire to show mercy (literally to "carry" (v. 24) the wickedness) is not incongruent with the practice of YHWH's justice.[204]

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think the answer likely lies elsewhere in the suggestion that ten represents the smallest, critical mass of a *community* which can garner redemptive effects for the community as a whole. See Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 469-70. Regardless, at the end of the exchange, Abraham is satisfied with God's commitment to justice.

[203] Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 478. He goes on to clarify what Abraham understands: "God agrees that the righteous few can often save a city. But Abraham recognizes that there comes a point when even the righteous are too few to turn a situation around (fewer than ten)."

[204] The dialogue has been portrayed in terms of an act of haggling that would fit the context of a Middle Eastern bazaar. In other words, Abraham attempts to extract a greater leniency from YHWH by means of "bidding" YHWH down from a standard of justice that is much too stringent. Yet, Nathan MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham—Listening to YHWH," 30-35, shows that this "bargaining" model does not fit the conversation. Rather, Abraham discovers YHWH is far more accommodating than he initially imagines: YHWH, as "judge of all the earth" (v. 25), unhesitatingly accepts each number of righteous people Abraham proposes necessary to

YHWH's justice is not best understood as a neat calibration of fairness. YHWH will forbear wickedness in order to give priority to the righteous; YHWH is not earnest to destroy.[205] Nonetheless, in this case the collective, concentrated wickedness overwhelms the righteousness of the place (19:4). Abraham thus comes to understand more precisely how YHWH's final judgment bears out YHWH's righteousness and justice. Thus, this is a pedagogical moment for Abraham that is intended to have reverberating, worldwide effects: as YHWH educates Abraham, so Abraham is to educate his descendants, so his descendants to the world.

Finally, it would be helpful to highlight a few connections to the larger narrative of Genesis. Genesis 18 is not the first time the reader has encountered "righteousness" (or its cognates) in Genesis. J. Gordon McConville helpfully points out that *ṣədāqâ* occurs at narratively significant moments in Gen 6:8-9 and 15:6.[206] In the former, Noah is identified as a righteous (*ṣaddîq*) man, in contrast to the wicked world. God establishes a covenant with righteous Noah (6:18). In similar fashion it is Abraham's *ṣədāqâ* that provides a necessary ingredient for God's covenant with him (15:6, 18), which advances

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forgo the divine judgment. If anything, YHWH subverts the pattern of haggling. MacDonald concludes, "If, as we have suggested, YHWH is Abraham's teacher, then the dialogue at Mamre is an important moment in the moral education of Abraham. It is the moment when YHWH seeks to instruct Abraham about "his way," and the dialogue is an interactive lesson in which Abraham learns the extent of YHWH's mercy toward his creation, so that Abraham and his descendants may follow in that same way" (41).

[205] Cf. Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 477-78. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 208-09. Von Rad brings up Hos 11:8-9 (cf. its explicit reference to Sodom and Gomorrah) "for the ultimate consequence not drawn in [Abraham and God's] conversation" (209).

[206] McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 42-44.

the promises of Gen 12:1-3.[207] Abraham's and Noah's righteousness, thus, adumbrates the quality that allows the forward movement—survival in Noah's case—of the divine agenda with the world, and ostensibly, represents God's prescribed goal for human behavior. Genesis 18 further refines the expectation of righteousness by placing it alongside justice as the vocation of Abraham's people. Abraham, as the bearer of the divine commission in YHWH's world, must exhibit and teach righteousness and justice. Genesis 18:19 links this vocation to YHWH's program to bless the nations.

McConville also calls attention to the fact that responsibility for righteous behavior includes those outside the covenant. As we have seen, the Sodom narrative indicates an expectation for righteousness and justice from cities. The very next story in Gen 20 continues this theme. Abraham deceives King Abimelech of Gerar by telling him that Sarah is his sister. King Abimelech subsequently takes Sarah into his harem. When the Canaanite king learns of Abraham's deception in a dream from God, he remonstrates against God's purported judgment of destruction for taking Sarah.[208] The king recognizes a breach of justice has occurred, but he states his innocence: "Lord, will you destroy a righteous people?" (20:4). Abimelech understands his whole community to be at risk for

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[207] Ibid., 43, defends understanding Abraham's faith, which was reckoned as righteousness (15:6), as a demonstration of Abraham's possession of righteousness and not merely as an acceptable substitute for it.

[208] Fretheim, "Book of Genesis," 483, explains the seeming discrepancy between God's words in v. 3 and v. 6: "God announces that Abimelech is a dead man because of what he has done (v. 3), even though v. 6 makes clear that God knew he was innocent. Hence, the announcement of v. 3 serves not as a forensic judgment, but as a matter-of-fact divine statement regarding the moral order and its effects on Abimelech. We learn from vv. 17-18 that Abimelech's death would have been caused by a malady that was capable of being healed and that the women of his household were unable to conceive. The moral order means that certain deeds have an effect just by virtue of their having happened, and people read the consequences quite apart from their intentions or their knowledge of what they have done."

his unwitting sin, a notion which God confirms (20:7; cf. v. 18).[209] In response, Abimelech promptly rectifies the wrong with Abraham and restores Sarah. He tellingly scolds Abraham for doing what "ought not to be done" (v. 9). He goes even further by making reparative payments and giving land to Abraham because he fears for his and his people's lives. McConville argues the favorable portrayal of Abimelech's behavior illustrates (again) that righteousness forms part of a universal ethic to which individuals and nations (both covenant and non-covenant) are held accountable. Not only does Abimelech's righteous conduct (and his community (vv. 4, 8) stand in contrast with the preceding story of unrighteous Sodom, but Abimelech's righteousness is at variance with Abraham's (a prophet! v. 7) own behavior. Thus, McConville concludes that inasmuch as Genesis lays out the possibility of righteousness among the nations, the narrative also displays how the elect can fumble in their task to embody it among the nations.[210] "The moral failures of Abraham and his line make it clear that 'rightness' will not inhere in the chosen line; rather its vocation will be subject to God's higher aim of seeing righteousness [and justice] established in the world."[211] In the sequel to Genesis, the book

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[209] Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 171-98, demonstrates that cosmological categories underlie Abimelech's response to Abraham concerning his deed. Even though God declares Abimelech righteous/innocent (20:6), the repercussions of his taking Sarah into his harem are nonetheless primarily felt in the physical sphere (i.e., barrenness and sickness (20:17-18)). Abimelech is caught in a cosmological web of consequences. The "cosmology is that the moral and created orders are connected. This connection means that immoral behavior under the judgment of God may result in the catastrophic convulsing of creation in the realm of that immoral behavior" (198).

[210] McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 48. He also mentions episodes of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) and Jacob's egregious claim of righteousness in Gen 30:33 as evidence for the paucity of righteousness among the chosen people.

[211] Ibid.

of Exodus continues to elaborate how the chosen people's responsibility for justice and righteousness plays out in light of God's creation-wide agenda.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered a selective survey of a wide range of material relating to justice in the ancient Near East and Israel. The following summarizes the main points of this chapter.

- Ancient Near Eastern civilizations shared a common ideology of justice as a fundamental principle inhering in the creation. The various spheres of society—legal, political, social, environmental—were expected to align with the comprehensive creational order of justice understood as wholeness. The concept of "justice and righteousness" as expressed in the Mesopotamian notion of *kittum* and *mīšarum* (and relatively analogously as *ma'at* in Egypt) described both the goal of this order and behavior that upheld it.
- The performance of justice and righteousness was particularly bound up with social acts of kindness on behalf of the poor. The king had a special responsibility for enacting *kittum* and *mīšarum* in his rule. The establishment of justice and righteousness was believed to result in a well-integrated and harmonious society reflective of the cosmic order.
- Israel shared the ancient Near Eastern sense of creational justice. The word-pair *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq*, "justice and righteousness" (a functional parallel to *kittum* and *mīšarum*), occurs frequently within the Old Testament as standard vocabulary to represent the kinds of actions customarily associated with the phrase

"social justice." Correspondingly, the performance of justice and righteousness is repeatedly associated with just and compassionate conduct toward the poor. The poor in the Hebrew Bible, typified by the triad of the widow, orphan, and sojourner, shared the core experience of vulnerability and powerlessness. For Israel, justice and righteousness characterized a signature feature of YHWH's disposition and way in creation. YHWH has imbued creation with these cosmic traits which is illustrated from a number of distinctive angles within various genres of Israel's canon.

- YWHW holds humanity accountable for conforming its behavior to justice and righteousness. Like their ancient Near Eastern contemporaries, Israel too considered these creational attributes as ideal behavior for kingship. Yet, Gen 18 states YHWH's election of Israel's patriarch Abraham laid on all of his descendants a particular responsibility to walk in accordance with and teach justice and righteousness. Indeed, the promises made to Abraham will come to fruition in the context of the performance (and instruction) of YHWH's way of justice and righteousness.[212]

The elect nation will learn more fully, like Abraham, what is entailed in their obligation to YHWH-shaped justice in their exodus from Egypt and pilgrimage to Mount Sinai.

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[212] Smith, *Justice and Righteousness*, 46.

3. JUSTICE UNDER THREAT: EXODUS 1-4

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Exodus is Israel's second book of beginnings.[1] By recording the birth, liberation, and formation of Jacob's tribal family into the nation of Israel, Exodus carries forward the plotline of origins set in motion in Genesis. The first eleven chapters of Genesis recount the origin story of the earth and its inhabitants. Genesis 12 abruptly funnels the universal focus of the storyline onto the particular couple Abram and Sarai, God's elected vessels of blessing in the world. The remainder of Genesis tells of their family's triumphs and trials in bearing the covenant blessing of YHWH. The Genesis narrative comes to a close with Jacob's family, Abraham's fourth generation, residing in Egypt, a land of prosperity but not the land of promise. Exodus continues with the narrowed focus on the chosen line of Abraham's family. Yet, as we will see, the narrative unfurls the family's expansion into a people against a creation-scape which recalls not only YHWH's specific promises to the ancestors but also YHWH's worldwide purposes related in Gen 1-11.

It would seem in the final chapters of Genesis that the chosen family's descent into Egypt is propitious. They are welcomed by Pharaoh, settled on verdant land in Goshen, and one of their own, Joseph, is second-in-command of Egypt. Indeed, God had assured Jacob that God will remain with him in his descent to and ascent from Egypt

[1] Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Schocken Bible: Vol 1 (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 241.

(46:1-4).[2] Nevertheless, earlier in Genesis readers have encountered harbingers of a foreboding Egyptian sojourn. Right after YHWH calls and blesses Abram in Gen 12:1-3, a famine forces Abram to sojourn in Egypt (12:10-20). There his experiences rudimentarily presage Exodus's story of liberation: fear of murder, Pharaonic possessiveness, plagues, and expulsion with great wealth.[3] More to the point, God's covenant ceremony with Abram in Gen 15 overtly and ominously prophesies a repressive Egyptian sojourn. Out of a great dreadful darkness, YHWH bluntly announces to Abram that his offspring will dwell as a resident immigrant (*gēr*) in a land not their own. For four hundred years his descendants will be servants/slaves, and they will be oppressed (*'nh*; 15:13).[4] For some

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[2] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 21-22, reads YHWH's assurance of Jacob as a sign that Jacob suspects Egypt might be a trap. Likewise, Joseph's request at the end of his life to take his bones up out of Egypt suggests that only an act of God would bring the children up from the land of Egypt, which might hint at the fact that an incipient hold on Israel's people begins in Joseph's day.

[3] Yehuda T. Radday, "The Spoils of Egypt," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute 12*, ed. G. Larsson (Leiden: Brill, 1983): 140, describes it well: "Abraham's sojourn in Egypt is a 'descent into Egypt' *in miniature*, and his departure from there, an exodus *in nuce*." On the correspondence between Abraham's Egyptian sojourn to Israel's experience in Exodus, the Midrash submits that "everything written in connection with Abraham is written in connection with his children" (*Genesis Rabbah* 40:6); see the expansion of this analogous reading by Seth D. Postell, "Abram as Israel, Israel as Abram: Literary Analogy as Macro-Structural Strategy in the Torah," *TynB* 67 (2016): 161-82. Genesis 12:10-20 contravenes the narrative in Exodus in at least one significant way. The Pharaoh in Gen 12 interprets rather immediately the plagues (*nəgā'îm*; cf. Exod 11:1) as a sign of his breach of creational justice (12:18-20; see Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative*, 83-84; Pietro Bovati, *Re-establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts, and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith, JSOTSup 105 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 118-119; 225). Other narratives in Genesis may prefigure the Exodus sojourn in subtler ways. See the discussion in Zakovitch, *'And You Shall Tell Your Son,'* 18-48; Thomas Römer, "Exodusmotive und Exoduspolemik in den Erzvätererzählungen," in *Berührungspunkte: Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ingo Kottsieper et al., AOAT 350 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2008), 3-20.

[4] Cf. 45:3-4; 50:24-25. Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son,"* 59-60, notices more allusions to the Exodus story in the Genesis covenant scene. On the chronological difficulty of

unexplained reason, the divine drama of salvation entails a horrific and prolonged exile and enslavement.[5] Shortly after the book of Exodus opens, Abraham's haunting night vision becomes terrible reality.

But that is not everything Abraham hears. His heirs will come out of their captivity to the land of promise (15:14; cf. 50:25) by an execution of YHWH's judgment (*dyn*).[6] The exodus experience, hence, will serve as an occasion of revelation of YHWH's justice. My interest in this chapter lies in demonstrating how the first four chapters of Exodus set the stage for the unfolding of this theme of YHWH's justice. My contention is that to understand rightly a thick account of justice in Exodus one must grapple with it as an outworking of YHWH's creational agenda.[7] This entails that we pay attention to the ways Exod 1-4 evokes and evolves creational motifs pertaining to YHWH's justice in Genesis.[8] In addition, I want also to be sensitive to how Exod 1-4 interweaves a pedagogical interest within the interrelation of the themes of justice and creation.

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reconciling the length of the Egyptian sojourn in 15:13, 16, and Exod 12:40, see Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 365, 415-16; Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:512-14.

[5] I will return to this issue in the ch. 5. Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son,"* 16-33, argues that sins committed by the ancestors give "covert" reason for the enslavement. Abraham's and Sarah's "sinful" descent into Egypt, Abraham and Sarah's treatment of Hagar, the brothers' treatment of Joseph, and Joseph's own oppressive behavior toward the Egyptians all offer justifications for Israelite enslavement as divine "punishment" or "purging" on the principle of "measure for measure."

[6] The verb *dyn* signals an act of judgment to establish order or maintain order (Ps 72:2; Jer 21:12; 22:16; Ps 96:10, 13). It has extensive semantic overlap with the more common verb *špṭ* (Schultz, "דִּין," *NIDOTTE* 1:922). Note the poetic parallelism in Ps 9:8[9] and Prov 31:9.

[7] Following our discussion in the previous chapter, we want to be sensitive to how the ancient Near Eastern background of justice and righteousness helps draw out Exodus's theology of justice.

[8] Some of which I noted at the end of the previous chapter.

3.2 EXODUS 1

3.2.1 Exodus 1:1-7

Exodus begins its story by remembering. In a retrospective prologue of seven verses (1:1-7), the opening of the book briskly transitions the reader from the closing events of Genesis to Exodus's new time. Accordingly, Exodus begins with the conjunction "and" (disjunctive *waw* copulative),[9] thus depending on readers to interpret Exodus as a sequential unfolding of the plot in the foregoing book.[10] The introduction recalls the formative, ancestral stories of Genesis by enumerating the names of Israel and his eleven sons who traveled, each with his respective household, to dwell in the land of Egypt with Joseph.[11] The list starts with the name Israel, Jacob's divinely bestowed moniker, which he received when YHWH confirmed the promise of blessing to him (Gen

[9] The LXX omits the conjunction "and," the significance of which is probed by Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 10-12, 18-20; cf. Graham I. Davies, "The Transition from Genesis to Exodus," in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festchrift to Honour John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, eds. Katherine J. Dell, Graham Davies, and Yee Von Koh (Boston: Brill, 2010), 59-61. Additionally, the first line of Exodus—"And these are the names of"—may be meant to echo the structuring *tôlĕdôt* formula in Genesis, "these are the generations" (e.g., Gen 2:4a; John D. Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation of the Book of Exodus," unpublished manuscript, 2009).

[10] Gordon F. Davies, *Israel in Egypt: Reading Exodus 1-2,* JSOTSup 135 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 28, puts it this way: "The narrative requires us to supply data from the previous pericope. We must remember the story of Israel and his sons and the promise that God made to propagate Abraham's descendants. Only with these data can we satisfy our natural curiosity about the reasons for the events here." Davies, "The Transition from Genesis to Exodus," 59-78, Joel Baden, "From Joseph to Moses: The Narratives of Exodus 1-2," *VT* 62 (2012): 133-58, and Ludwig Schmidt, "Die vorpriesterliche Verbindung von Erzvätern und Exodus durch die Josefsgeschichte (Gen 37; 39-50) und Exodus 1," *ZAW* 124 (2012): 19-37, give source-critical apologies for this (*pace* J. C. Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung: Untersuchungen zur Endredaktion des Pentateuch*, FRLANT 186 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*.

[11] The list seems an abridged recapitulation of Gen 46:8-27—note the repetition of "and these are the names of the sons of Israel"—though the order follows the listing in Gen 35:23-26.

35:10-12; cf. 32:28)—a promise passed down through Abraham and Isaac.[12] The name "Israel" readies the reader for the fulfillment of the promised expansion of the "sons of Israel" into the vast people that will bear the name Israel.[13] But the catalog may also hint at the creational significance of Israel's existence. Umberto Cassuto suggests that the number seventy—the total number of Jacob's family (Exod 1:5)—corresponds typologically to the seventy names listed in the inventory of nations in Gen 10. He surmises from this that Israel at the beginning of Exodus forms "a small world that parallels the great world, a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm."[14]

If Exod 1:5 implies the creational import of the sons of Israel, then 1:7 registers clearly the cosmic overtones of Israel's emergence in Egypt. Following the death of Joseph and his generation (1:6), the text describes "the spawning of a nation":[15]

> Now the sons of Israel became fruitful (*prh*) and swarmed (*šrṣ*) and became numerous (*rbh*) and they became exceedingly strong (*'ṣm*) so that the earth/land (*'ereṣ*) was full (*ml'*) of them.[16] (Exod 1:7)

Here is a composite intertextual echo of the proliferation formula first delivered to humanity in the primordial creation account:

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[12] Gen 17:1-10; 26:2-4; 28:1-4.

[13] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 24, observes that the expression "sons of Israel" occurs just twice in Genesis but 125 times in Exodus. Cf. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 65.

[14] Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 8. Seventy is a common cosmogonic number in the Bible and cognate literatures, on which see Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 121-22. Carol Meyers, 33, views the number as a way of representing that all *Israelites* participated in the exodus event.

[15] Avivah G. Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 2001), 18.

[16] Here as elsewhere I transliterate only the triradical roots of Hebrew verbs unless otherwise noted.

> God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful (*prh*) and become numerous (*rbh*) and fill (*ml'*) the earth/land (*'ereṣ*)." (Gen 1:28; cf. 1:22)

A version of the formula reappears twice in the aftermath of the flood:

> God blessed Noah and his sons, and he said to them, "Be fruitful (*prh*) and become numerous (*rbh*) and fill (*ml'*) the earth/land (*'ereṣ*)." (Gen 9:1)

> "And you, be fruitful (*prh*) and become numerous (*rbh*), swarm (*šrṣ*) in the earth/land (*'ereṣ*) and become numerous (*rbh*) in it." (Gen 9:7)

Though Exod 1:7 most closely resembles these primordial commands in vocabulary and structure,[17] the same rhetoric of blessing and fertility continues to appear repeatedly in the ancestral cycle, interwoven within the promises to the patriarchs (e.g., Gen 17:2, 6; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:13-15; 32:12 [13]; 48:4).[18] By echoing carefully the primordial blessing (with the language of the ancestral promises not far in the background), the author of Exodus signals that Israel's remarkable fecundity is an outworking of God's

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[17] James S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1-2)," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, eds. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw, Bible in Literature Courses (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 76-77; Carol M. Kaminski, *From Noah to Israel: Realization of the Primordial Blessing After the Flood*, JSOTSup 413 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 130-31. *Pace* Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:233, who insists Exod 1:7 only links with the patriarchal texts.

[18] In the ancestral cycle, cognates for "being fruitful" (*prh*) occur in 17:6, 20; 26:22; 28:3; 35:11; 41:52; 47:27. The language of "swarming" (*šrṣ*) does not occur except in Gen 1-11. Cognates of "being numerous" (*rbh*) appear in Gen 16:10; 17:2; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4. Cognates of "being strong" (*'ṣm*) appear in Gen 18:18 and 26:16. On these four verbs, Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 694, adds that "Israel is the arena in which God's verbs for creation become embodied and enacted." Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 1-14, notes how an emphasis on salvation history has privileged events of deliverance to the neglect of YHWH's activity of blessing. Blessing is the power of fruitfulness for life that leads to shalom (18-22). Westermann helpfully distinguishes between the God who is present in blessing and the God who comes in deliverance. Both are important and closely related to salvation in the Old Testament. Moreover, he contends the arrangement of the Pentateuch brackets deliverance (Exodus-Numbers) with blessing (Genesis, Deuteronomy), though I do not think this gives enough credence to the tabernacle complex as an avenue of blessing. Westermann's formulation, nonetheless, suggests that YHWH's work of deliverance is aimed at restoring the blessing temporarily thwarted by Pharaoh.

creational commands.[19] The trajectory begun in creation, transferred through the patriarchs, is reaching fulfillment in Israel's multiplication. Again, Cassuto astutely remarks, "The ancient blessing bestowed upon the macrocosm . . . and which was confirmed in particular to Abraham, the father of the microcosm, was completely fulfilled, in overflowing measure, in the descendants of Israel."[20] Israel's population explosion in the land of Egypt is to be viewed as YHWH's creative act, a testimony to YHWH's ongoing work to achieve YHWH's creational design for the world.[21] This, we must remember, is to have the reverberating effect of blessing on "all the families of the earth/land" (*'ereṣ*; Gen 12:3). And, of course, the extraordinary increase in numbers reflects only half of the ancestral promise. The other half of the promise—the inheritance of the land—beckons resolution.[22]

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[19] Kaminski, *From Noah to Israel*, presents an extended argument, against the scholarly consensus, that the primordial blessing is not fulfilled in the Table of Nations in Gen 10. Rather, the "scattering" motif that is present after the flood (Gen 9:19; 10:5, 18, 32; 11:4, 8, 9) is negative language and does not signal the fulfillment of the command to fill the earth. Though the primordial blessing is in the process of being fulfilled in the Table, it is reissued to Abraham's offspring, Jacob/Israel, through a divine promise (Gen 35:11, 22b-26). Yet it is not until Exod 1:1-7, where the author clearly recalls the blessing in creational language, that the blessing is fulfilled.

[20] Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 9. Cf. Nahum Sarna, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 4; Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 1:9.

[21] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 25. He adds: "The reader should be prepared to see other such realizations of creative design in Exodus." Some have noted that the widespread ancient Near Eastern mythological topos of overpopulation looms in the background, adding further support for the cosmogonic flavor in this passage. See Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:233-34; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 135.

[22] Baden, "From Joseph to Moses," 157, notes that from this point forward, whenever the patriarchal promises are brought up, only the land is mentioned (excepting Exod 32:12, see his n. 64). He deduces that Exod 1:7, therefore, constitutes the fulfillment of the progeny aspect of the promises.

3.2.2 Exodus 1:8-14

The satisfaction of fulfillment is short-lived. A new king "who did not know Joseph" (1:8) ascends to the throne. The king could represent a new dynasty,[23] but by withholding the specificity of a name—and the biblical record is not reticent to identify kings by name elsewhere—the narrator alerts us again that the character of this story transcends historical realities.[24] The events in Egypt take on creational significance, which has been marked already in 1:7 and will continue to be born out by the narrative. By their actions the Egyptian rulers of Exodus set Egypt on a path in opposition to God's life-giving purposes for Israel and God's larger world. Thus, in the story world of Exodus, Pharaoh represents a "*symbol for the anticreational forces of death*."[25]

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[23] Durham, *Exodus*, 7, believes the writer refers to a "radically changed situation, the drastic rearrangement that comes not when one king succeeds another king of the same family and with similar policies, but with the rise of a new succession of kings bring an inevitable set of changes . . . This new king is the first king of a new dynasty, and thus a king who has no obligation to respect, or even to inform himself of, any commitments to a non-native group within the territory of his reign." Also Sarna, *Exodus*, 4; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:235.

[24] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 26; Meyers, *Exodus*, 34. Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, 695: "The lack of historical, factual specificity about the king permits the account to become a paradigmatic presentation that, in every new generation of Israelites, can be reapplied and reasserted against whomever is the current agent of abusive power." I wonder, too, if, by using the title "king" instead of "Pharaoh," the text means to call to mind the royal overtones of Gen 1's theology of the *imago Dei*. Reading this in light of Gen 1-3 might also add another level of interpretation to the comment that the king "did not know." Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 109-12, proffers that the practice of not naming Pharaoh's enemy was peculiar to Egyptian New Kingdom inscriptions among ancient Near Eastern empires. See further Brent Strawn, "Pharaoh," *DOTPentateuch* 634-35. From a different angle, Hendel, "The Exodus as Cultural Memory," 65-71, notes that Egypt as a negative, political symbol has historical purchase in recent discussions about Israel's ethnogenesis; also cf. Bietak, "On the Historicity of the Exodus," 17-37.

[25] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 27; cf. Edward L. Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague and the Reading Process," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David P. Wright, David N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 558, n. 11.

The first thing we learn about this king of no name is his lack of knowledge of Joseph. To "know" (*yd'*), particularly to know YHWH, becomes a prominent theme in Exodus;[26] so there is probably more at work in this statement than just the king's ignorance of Joseph's contributions to the kingdom and/or the agreement of a previous Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to live in Goshen (Gen 46:33-47:11). The next Pharaoh belittles Moses's initial demands by scoffing, "Who is YHWH . . . I do not know YHWH" (5:2). In the plague cycle, YHWH repeatedly stresses that Pharaoh, Egypt, and Israel will come to know YHWH's sovereign power (e.g., 7:5, 17; 8:10 [6]; 9:29; 10:2). This king does not know, and therefore has no commitment to, the divine movements in Israel exemplified in Egypt's past by Joseph and presently confirmed by his family's fruitfulness.[27] The king's lack of knowledge will translate into an antagonistic posture vis-à-vis YHWH's creational agenda: instead of reading the prolific presence of the Israelites as a blessing, the nameless king calculates it as a threat to national security interests.[28] Pharaoh chooses not to know, which paves the road to injustice. In the second

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[26] The theme of knowledge appears at key points in 2:25; 3:7; 5:2, 6:3, 7; 7:5,17; 8:10 [6], 22 [18]: 9:14, 29; 10:2, 7; 11:7; 14:4; 16:6, 12; 18:16; 23:9; 29:46: 31:13; 33:13, 16, 17.

[27] Cf. e.g., Houtman, *Exodus* 1:30-31; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 124; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:10. There is likely a play on Joseph's name, which in form is the *qal* active participle of the verbal root *ysp*, meaning "one who adds." Pharaoh, who does not know Joseph, is one who does not know God's multiplication. In other words, he is unable to interpret the divine addition. I owe this insight to a personal communication with John Fortner.

[28] The king's fear may in one sense be justifiable (after all, the Israelites are destined for another land), but his subsequent actions are unprovoked and inexcusable according to the narrative. Cf. the reactions of "fearful" rulers in Gen 12:17-20 and 26:16. Likewise, the Pharaoh who appoints Joseph recognizes the divine blessing Joseph brings (41:39-40). Cf. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Volume One: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 328-29.

chapter of Exodus, the deliverance of Israel will commence because YHWH chooses to know (2:25; 3:7).

The regime's strategic, preemptive response begins with a royal address to the whole Egyptian people.[29] The king incites an ethnic xenophobia in the Egyptian populace that opens the door for a terrorizing policy.[30] Rhetorically, the king's speech is not only full of intertextual resonance but also thick with irony.[31] His words both echo and affirm the primordial blessing of multiplication (1:9) and also adumbrate the promised Israelite ascent into the land of inheritance ("and go up from the land" v. 10; cf. Gen 46:4; 50:24).[32] Pharaoh's sinister reasoning paradoxically divulges the creational intent for

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[29] Significantly, the narrative makes it clear *all* of Egypt is complicit in the actions that follow. Pharaoh speaks directly to the people, and the people collectively respond in vv. 11-14. Cf. Franz V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity*, LHBOTS 361 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 46-157, passim, who stresses the narrative's persistent differentiation between Egypt and Israel. The narrative itself will complicate this portrayal of non-Israelites as wholly opposed to God's agenda (e.g., Pharaoh's daughter!). Hence, I am more inclined to agree with Fretheim, *Exodus*, 28, who insightfully labels this as another example of symbolism in the story: "To speak of *all* Egyptians demonstrates the *symbolic character of 'Egyptian.'*" In other words, "Egypt"—or even "Egyptians"—in this narrative stands as a cipher, much as Pharaoh, for the forces opposed to God's creational agenda. George Fischer, "Who is Violent, and Why? Pharaoh and God in Exodus 1-15 as a Model for Violence in the Bible," *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, eds. Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia, BMW 55 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2013), 98-99, makes the same point in commenting on how to translate the ubiquitous Hebrew *miṣrayîm*, "Egypt," in the narrative.

[30] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 15, states Pharaoh's speech "turns on a series of hypothetical situations." Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:12, nicely describes Pharaoh's speech in terms of the "creation of a diseased imagination."

[31] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 47-55, gives a thorough-going rhetorical analysis of the speech. Irony abounds in the first two chapters of Exodus, as emphasized especially by Fretheim, *Exodus*, 23-49, *passim*.

[32] Pharaoh uses words from the roots *rbh*, "become numerous," and *'ṣm*, "become strong." "Go up from the land" (*wə'ālâ min-hā'āreṣ*) is a common expression for Israel leaving Egypt (e.g., Gen 13:1; 45:25; Exod 12:38; 13:18). To read Pharaoh's fear that they will "go up from the land" as insurrection and overthrow is to read the text more historically than canonically. "Go up" is the term for Israel's transition into the promise land. Pharaoh is presented as one who

Israel but plots a diametrically opposed reaction to it. In fact, his invitation, "Come, let us/we must," works as an inner-biblical allusion to the summons issued by the community in the Babel narrative (Gen 11:3, 4; and cf. v. 7). In the same way that Babel's builders united to construct a tower, in contradiction to YHWH's creational directive to fill the earth, Egypt will force Israel into construction projects that stymie YHWH's telos for humanity.[33] In another instance of irony, the king summons Egypt "to be wise/shrewd" (*ḥkm*) in their dealings toward Israel. The narrative likely means to parody Egyptian court wisdom which was renowned in the ancient world (cf. Exod 7:11). Here, though, Egypt's wisdom—a tradition centrally concerned with *ma'at* as the ideal[34]—paradoxically sets it at cross purposes with YHWH's creational order.[35] In any case, the king's jingoistic salvo underscores how vulnerable was the resident immigrant's position in society (cf. 1 Chr 8:7-8).

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thwarts Israel's YHWH-decreed destination. See Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 56: "Since Pharaoh is ignorant of Joseph and his family history, his derivative diction here like his argumentation is ironic at his expense. It belittles Pharaoh by reminding us that if he objects to the Hebrew's fertility, his opponent will be the God of the promises."

[33] Ackerman, "Literary Context," 81-81. The allusion is strengthened by the appearance of similar vocabulary in both passages, the most obvious of which is "mortar" and "brick" (v. 14) in Gen 11:3. Ackerman further observes that in the same way God descends in the Babel narrative, the reader should expect another powerful descent.

[34] See John L. Foster, "Wisdom Texts," *OEAE* 3:503-07, and Gerald Kadish, "Wisdom Tradition," *OEAE* 3:507-10. In Exodus, then, Egypt's wisdom, which results in injustice, is satirized as the distortion of *ma'at.* Cf. J. Edward Owens, "'Come, Let Us Be Wise': Qoheleth and Ben Sira on True Wisdom, with an Ear to Pharaoh's Folly," in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit*, eds. Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp, CBQMS 38 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 227–40.

[35] Ackerman, "Literary Context," 80. He also notices the pun on Joseph's name in Pharaoh's motivation, "lest . . . it happens that a war occurs and they are added (literally, "Josephed") to our enemies" (v.10). The policy is "a deliberate attempt to prevent the Joseph phenomenon from reoccurring among the Hebrews in Egypt." On the wisdom background of Exod 1-2 in general, see Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 13.

The imperial machinations develop in stages with the result that the Israelites toil indefinitely under the harsh subjugation of the Egyptian juggernaut. Hebrew prose is conventionally laconic in its commentary, so the copious amount of space devoted to describing Israel's plight means to catch the reader's attention.

> So they imposed over them taskmasters in order to oppress (*'nh*) with their slave labor. They built storage cities (*miskənôt*) for Pharaoh, namely Pithom and Ramases. But just as they oppressed (*'nh*) them thus they became numerous (*rbh*) and spread out, such that they dreaded the presence of the children of Israel. So Egypt made the children of Israel serve (*'bd*) ruthlessly (*perek*). They made their lives bitter with hard service (*'ăbōdâ*) by means of mortar and brick and by means of all service (*'ăbōdâ*) in the field. They were ruthless (*perek*) in all the service (*'ăbōdâ*) in which they made them served (*'bd*). (1:11-14)

These verses call to mind YHWH's inauspicious warning to Abraham in Gen 15:13: "Know certainly that your seed will be a resident immigrant in a land not their own and they will serve (*'bd*) them and they will oppress (*'nh*) them." The impressive burst of vocabulary of blessed multiplication in 1:7—five different words are used—is matched in 1:13-14 by the five-fold occurrence of the form of the Hebrew verb root for "serve" (*'bd*).[36] The laborious repetition rhetorically lays upon the reader the rigorous bondage that presses down upon the Israelites.[37]

The description makes clear that this is not just service; it is unjust oppression.[38] The twice repeated verb "oppress" (*'nh*) along with the twice repeated adverbial noun

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[36] Ackerman, "Literary Context," 83-84.

[37] "Service" (*'ăbōdâ*) and "serve" (*'bd*) are key themes in Exodus. I explore these in detail in the next chapters. Suffice it to say here, the narrator's excessive use of the root in 1:13-14 emphatically signals its importance at the beginning of the narrative.

[38] The corvée system of forced labor, common in the ancient Near East, likely forms the historical background for the Israelite slavery. Yet, the Egyptians go beyond labor conscription to oppressing the Israelites, even escalating the oppression when Moses arrives on the scene (5:4-19). Egypt has pushed beyond standard imperial practice. See Dexter E. Callender, Jr. "Servants

"ruthlessly" (*perek*)[39] casts this as an issue of injustice: "[The terms] indicate that the people of Israel not only suffer—they are wronged. Here and in other pericopes in Exod 1-2, their situation is described with a lexicon of juridical words. Injustice such as this calls for a judge."[40] Judgment will come (cf. Gen 15:14; Exod 12:12; Num 33:4), but not before Israel's identity is indelibly imprinted by this memory of oppression.[41] Israel in Egypt has become powerless and vulnerable, and the powers of Egypt exploit them with

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of God(s) and Servants of Kings in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *Semeia* 83 (1998): 77-79; John Robert Jackson, "Enjoying the Fruit of One's Labor: Attitudes Toward Male Work and Workers in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Duke University, 2005), 231-44.

[39] I am intrigued by the suggestion of Diana Lipton, *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 27, n. 41, who advocates for the translation "exploitative" for the Hebrew *perek.* Though typically translated as "ruthlessly" (or some equivalent), Lipton argues this does not make appropriate sense of its other occurrences in Lev 25:35-55 (cf. Ezek 34:4). In Leviticus, the subject matter, which is in conversation with Exod 1:13, is on the "terms and conditions of ownership of slaves, not about the quality of their treatment." It distinguishes ownership of Israelite versus non-Israelite. The text invokes the experience of Egypt to remind Israelites that they cannot be owned by each other or anyone else (25:55). The prohibition against behavior characterized by *perek* is used only in reference to Israelite slaves. A similar command is never repeated for Israelites owning non-Israelite slaves. This could be taken to mean that Israelites can treat non-Israelite slaves with *perek*. However, Lipton concludes, "Not only is this illogical, but it would come close to the use of Exodus to justify the abuse of foreigners." She then notes *perek* is paired with the formula "but you shall fear your God" in v. 43. This formula occurs three times out of four in relationship to vulnerable populations: the elderly (19:32); the blind (19:14); and the impoverished (25:36). "This suggests that *perek* might signify exploitation or taking advantage; the Israelites are warned not to exploit other Israelites at their time of need." Of course, this still leaves open why Lev 25 falls silent on the treatment of the Gentile slave, but could it be connected to the issue of perpetuity? If, on the other hand, we conclude that *perek* behavior is allowed in the case of the non-Israelite slave, then see Levenson's, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 227-28, for his comments on Maimonides's delicate exegesis of this passage.

[40] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 58. Davies also argues that in other instances where *yhb* is translated by the cohortative "come, let us," as in v. 10, it implies abuse of power (Gen 11:3, 4; 38:16).

[41] E.g., Exod 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deut 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:6-11; Josh 24:17; Judg 6:8; Jer 34:13; Mic 6:4; nonetheless, cf. the caution from Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 224: "Most of the references to the exodus in the Hebrew Bible make no mention of slavery. A surprisingly large portion of them speak of the God who took Israel out of Egypt without the appositive so familiar from the Decalogue, 'the house of bondage.'"

vigor.[42] This specific memory of slavery will provide future Israel with an orientation that demands a certain ethic toward the vulnerable and powerless in society.[43] Yet, for Exodus the tragedy is more than that Israel suffers as powerless victims of grave injustice.[44] The creational character of Exod 1 sets the backdrop for Pharaoh's pogrom against God's people; Israel's fate carries creational freight. Pharaoh's actions are not simply an atrocity committed against a powerless and vulnerable people. Because Pharaoh afflicts *Israel*, his oppression constitutes a cosmic affront to God's creative intentions for God's world. Abraham's descendants cannot fulfill their calling, which involves, ironically, a duty to model and to teach justice and righteousness (Gen 18). So, it is not just that a nation is oppressed, but that *Israel*, God's chosen people to bless the world, is obstructed from their magisterial, creational, even pedagogical vocation.[45] Here, at the start of the story

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[42] That is to say, Israel knows the core experiences associated with poverty, as I argued in the previous chapter.

[43] This is born out plainly by Israel's laws which refer to the indelible experience of slavery as motivation against similar, exploitative behavior toward the community's weaker members (e.g., Exod 22:21- 23; 23:9; Deut 26:5-9). Hence, Israel's suffering functions as a taut analog to the core experience of the oppressed and poor in the Hebrew Scriptures. To be sure, the vocabulary of poverty, common in other parts of the canon, is largely absent. For a list of terms, see the excursus in the previous chapter. One exception is the verb "oppress" (*'nh*) which likely comes from the same root as *'ānî*, the most common word used in the Hebrew Bible to describe the poor or vulnerable. Hence, the Israelites in Egyptian slavery are not conspicuously portrayed with the lexemes of poverty. This should caution against a reading of Exodus enamored with the plight of the poor *qua* poor (cf. Pleins, *Social Visions*, 171-72; Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 215-30).

[44] Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 17-20, critiques those who would single out the theme of liberation as a theological ideal in Exodus: "Victimhood—even when grounded in historical experience—is a shallow and ultimately unhelpful mechanism for constructing and promoting identity" (18).

[45] There is another subtle and ironic instance of word play connected to the motif of creation in the recital of Israel's descent into slavery. The Israelites build storage cities, *miskənôt*, for Pharaoh. The title "Pharaoh" itself means "great house" (Sarna, *Exodus*, 6). When Israel comes out of Egypt, YHWH will give detailed instructions (chs. 25-31, 35-40) for the construction of the tabernacle, the *miškān*, YHWH's "great house," as it were. In ch. 6 we will see that the

the author raises the stakes for Israel's survival: the future status of Israel ripples out with macrocosmic ramifications.[46]

As slaves of Pharaoh, though, Israel's identity is acutely threatened. Paulo Freire's sociological observations about the structure of domination help bring out this dimension of Israel's slavery that will become more apparent farther along in the narrative. In a culture of oppression, Freire contends, both oppressor and oppressed become dehumanized. "Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders a way of life and behavior for those caught up in it—oppressors and oppressed alike. Both are submerged in this situation, and both bear the marks of

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miškān is portrayed as a cosmos in miniature, one that mirrors God's world-creation in Gen 1. Here we note that Pharaoh's wisdom extracts out of the Israelites a slave labor that is a poor imitation of their much grander destiny. On the contrary, YHWH's wisdom inspires Israel's craftsmen (there is a concentration of wisdom language in Exod 35-36: e.g., 35:8, 10, 25, 31, 35; 36:1-2, 4) to fabricate the *miškān* out of Israel's voluntary contributions (35:5, 21). By means of paronomasia, the narrator foreshadows Israel's true destiny of service before YHWH, the one who will fill (and become) Israel's "great house" (40:34). In Egyptian servitude, though, Israel endures a perversion of the good work God intends.

Ellen Davis, "Slaves or Sabbath-Keepers? A Biblical Perspective on Human Work" *ATR* 83 (2001): 25-40, explores the contrast (and creational significance) between the work in Egypt and the work on the tabernacle. I will return to her insightful discussion in ch. 6. Although Davis does not make the connection, I think there may be another, quieter echo of Gen 1 in the report of the construction of storage cities. In her book *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 58, Davis proposes that Gen 1:26-30 links the image of God in humanity and charge of mastery over creation (1:26-28) with God's gift of adequate food supply (1:29-30). In other words, human identity and vocation is tied up with careful responsibility of the food economy. This vocation has been destabilized in Exod 1:11 by the note of Israel's construction projects. The *miskənôt* most likely refer to "royal granaries or warehouses . . . used to store the taxes of grain, wine, and oil collected by the government" (Frank S. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, SBLDS 36 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977): 136; cf. 1 Kgs 9:19; 2 Chr 17:12; 32:38; Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 116). Storage cities for the produce of the land correlates with the end of Genesis (41:35, 48-56). In other words, Pharaoh's food economy has warped another element of YHWH's creational mandate for humanity (i.e., food production) represented by Israel.

[46] Once again, the struggle between Egypt and YHWH's people, which will escalate in future chapters, transcends the historical moment.

oppression."[47] Fretheim takes Egypt's intensified dread at the Israelites (1:12) as an indication of the negative effect already tainting the oppressor.[48] From the other side, Israel does not have much of an identity at the onset of Exodus. Aside from its abundant growth, Israel is passive at the beginning of the book.[49] Indeed, it is Pharaoh who first identifies Israel as a "people" (*'am*; 1:9).[50] Slavery jeopardizes their distinct peoplehood. Fretheim's observation is apropos: "From Pharaoh's perspective there will be only one people and one heritage in the land of Egypt. Before there can be an escape from such a situation, Israel has to regain some sense of its own identity."[51] YHWH's upcoming,

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[47] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th aniv. ed (New York: Continuum, 2010), 58. I owe this reference to Paulo Freire to Fretheim, *Exodus*, 29. Cf. the amenable remarks of Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 46-49.

[48] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 29. Though Fretheim does not make the connection, the Egyptians' ethnic dread could allude thematically to God's post-diluvian command given to Noah to multiply: "God blessed Noah and his sons. He said to them, "Be fruitful and become numerous and fill the earth/land. The fear and terror [near synonyms for "dread" in Exod 1:12] of you will be upon every animal of the land and upon every bird of the heavens, and on everything that creeps on the soil and on all the fish of the sea." In reacting with dread to the Israelite fruitfulness, the Egyptians respond like the animal-kingdom. In other words, the Egyptians reveal their animal-like dehumanization. The midwives' defense offered to Pharaoh points, in turn, to the way the Israelites have become "animalized" in the imagination of Egypt. The midwives say to Pharaoh in v. 19, "Surely the women are not like the women of Egypt because they are 'lively' (*ḥāyôt*)." The adjectival "lively" only occurs here, but its nominal form (*ḥayyâ*), which means (wild) animal or beast, suggests it connotes an animal-like vigor that is sub-human (*HALOT* 1:310).

[49] Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 208.

[50] Pharaoh uses the same word, *'am*, for his people. Hence, he probably recognizes the "nascent national quality of the immigrants" (ibid.).

[51] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 29. Alternatively, Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 18-20, proposes that the phrase "they swarmed (*šrṣ*)" in 1:7 already indicates a lapse in Israelite identity. The verb insinuates a "reptilian fecundity . . . a repellant description for a family fallen from greatness." She references 16th century Jewish commentator Seforno, who argued that the nameable Israelites of 1:1-5 have now become a mass "of unindividuated 'insect-like' conformists."

explicit entrance into their situation not only "serves" to rescue Israel but also tutors them toward a new identity.[52]

3.2.3 Exodus 1:15-21

Ironically, Egypt's intensified oppression is unable to curb the Israelite proliferation. "Still not satisfied,"[53] Pharaoh resorts to a more covert and vile stratagem: he commands the "midwives of the Hebrews" to murder Israelite male children at birth. The nationality of these midwives has been a point of debate. Are they Hebrew, Egyptian, or some other non-Israelite present in Egypt?[54] The tradition is not univocal, and modern commentators disagree.[55] Because the grammar is ambiguous enough to support more than one option, we are left to determine their ethnicity by other factors. The women's Semitic names may at first seem to weigh in favor of an Israelite identity. Yet, Sarah's maidservant, Hagar (Gen 16:3; 21:9), appears to be an example of an Egyptian with a Semitic-sounding name, and there is other historical evidence that

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[52] As we will see in the following chapters, YHWH's deliverance of the people out of Egypt has an explicit educational dimension—for Israel, Egypt, and for the world. Exodus 1-4 establishes the need for this educative project by illuminating that Israel's identity has been disoriented by the oppression of Egypt. Abraham's descendants are hapless teachers of "justice and righteousness" until they themselves are instructed by YHWH.

[53] The translation given of the *waw* consecutive in 1:15 by John I. Durham*, Exodus*, WBC 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 10.

[54] At this point in the narrative world, only two groups have been distinguished: Israel and Egypt. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to think the implied audience would have suspected the presence of other non-Israelite, non-Egyptian peoples in Egypt (cf. Exod 12:28).

[55] See the overview of Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:251-52.

Egyptians with Semitic names were not unknown.[56] The context seems, however, to favor a non-Israelite if not an Egyptian identity. It is highly doubtful that Pharaoh would employ ethnically Hebrew midwives for the task of killing Hebrew newborns, much less accept their excuses (v. 19) if they were indeed Hebrew. Furthermore, the midwives are knowledgeable of Egyptian birthing practices. And, according to 1:22, Pharaoh issues the edict to kill the children to *all* the Egyptians, which implies that a select few of his own people (i.e., the midwives) had initially received the order.[57]

The midwives courageously defy the Pharaoh's edict and preserve the Hebrew male children because they "feared God" (1:17, 21). On two occasions in Genesis the phrase "fear of God" comes in stories in which it identifies a moral consciousness of divine sovereignty among non-Israelites. First, in Gen 20:11, Abraham justifies his deceit of Abimelech, king of Gerar, with the rationale that he thought, "there is no fear of God in this place." Second, as an incognito Egyptian, Joseph tests his brothers by detaining Simeon until they return to Egypt with their youngest brother Benjamin. He assures them

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[56] See "Semitic Slaves on a Middle Kingdom Estate," trans. Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 3.11:35-37); "Semitic Functionaries in Egypt," trans. Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 3.12:37); Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Egyptians and Hebrews, from Ra'amses to Jericho," in *The Origin of Early Israel--Current Debate: Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*, eds. Shmuel Ahituv and Eliezer D. Oren, Beer-Sheva: Studies by the Department of Bible and Ancient Near East, XII (Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1998), 65-131, esp. 88-91.

[57] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:252. That there is ambiguity at all about their ethnicity I take to be sufficient justification for considering them as righteous non-Israelites (cf. Sacks, *Exodus*, 22; J. Cheryl Exum, "'And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live': A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10" *Sem* 28 (1983): 72). Yet, Dozeman, *Exodus*, 75, suggests their ethnicity is unimportant to keep the point of the midwives' conduct: "But, since there is a break in tradition between Genesis and Exodus, along with the fact that God has been absent from the story until this point, the midwives' fear of God would be just as surprising from two Israelite women."

of his trustworthiness by saying, “Do this and live, for I fear God” (42:18).[58] Moshe Greenberg nicely summarizes the meaning of the phrase “fear of God” when applied to non-Israelites:

> Throughout biblical literature, the Gentiles are required to answer for breaking elementary moral laws, though nowhere is the ground for their responsibility set out. The moral impulse of Gentiles, what we might call their conscience, derives in the biblical conception from "godfearing" (*yir’at ’elohim*)—a common human virtue that has no reference to knowledge of or revelations from the true God. It keeps them from murder (Gen. 20:11), adultery (39:9), and breach of faith (39:8f.; 42:18); lack of it accounts for Amalek's dastardly attack on Israel's stragglers (Deut. 25:18). Evidently this common property of all men is ground enough to make them accountable for wrongdoing despite their ignorance of God’s laws (Ps. 147:20).[59]

The motivation and action of the non-Israelite midwives testifies to a reverence for human life that transcends ethnic boundaries—a fundamental ethic that is creational in character. Their conduct reveals them to be wise and undaunted exegetes of creation. They discern a divine normative order that they dare not transgress, even on the command of a human ruler who assumes god-like prerogatives.[60] The midwives are a witness to a basic aptitude for justice for the powerless (derivative from a recognition of one’s status in relationship to divine sovereignty). Their practice shows that a morality

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[58] It is noteworthy that the characters in both contexts connect the “fear of God” with behavior that refuses to exploit the vulnerable.

[59] Moshe Greenberg, “Mankind, Israel and the Nations in the Hebrew Heritage,” in *No Man is Alien: Essays on the Unity of Mankind*, ed. J. R. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 20. Cf. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 120: Fear of God “acts as the ultimate restraint upon perfidy and inhumanity, particularly in situations in which self-interest might tempt one to exploit the weak and the disadvantaged, and where the threat of legal sanctions does not exist.”

[60] The creational context (and wisdom background) is noted by Fretheim, *Exodus*, 32-33; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 73; Rita J. Burns, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, OTM (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 30. Interestingly, Meyers, *Exodus*, 40, suggests that midwives were

guided by a "fear of God"—one which overrides a fear of human judgment gone awry—is alive among the non-Israelite Egyptian populace. Juxtaposed to Pharaoh, they are positive examples of how non-Israelites cooperate with God's agenda to bear up Israel. The propriety of the midwives, then, cautions at the very beginning of the narrative against a blanket polarity between the Hebrews and Egyptians: they do not so much blur the ethnic boundaries as show that the boundaries are permeable.[61] These non-Israelite

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associated with wisdom in ancient Near Eastern cultures. It is highly ironic that the wisdom of the midwives outwits Pharaoh, Egypt's paragon of wisdom.

[61] Hence, inasmuch as Exodus 1 uses "Egypt" or "Egyptian" as a symbol of a force arrayed against YHWH's purposes (per Fretheim, *Exodus*, 27-28; Fisher, "Who is Violent and Why?" 98-99), the text also illustrates that "Egyptian" as over against "Israelite" is not a hermetically sealed category; cf. Greigenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 57-58.

A few commentators, most notably Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 44-45; "Book of Exodus" 690, 96-97, argue the designation "Hebrew" connotes not an ethnicity but a socio-economic class—a "collection of marginated people who have no communal identity of their own and are powerless to change their social circumstance" (690; cf. Meyers, *Exodus*, 36-37). This observation originates from the debatable relationship between the biblical appellative "Hebrew" and an ancient Near Eastern social group known as the *habiru*, a disreputable social class of Asiatics known from Late Bronze Age epigraphy. The Bible itself does not offer much support for a wider context beyond an ethnic designation. Nowhere does the Bible clearly identify "Hebrew" with a social class (though a few of the contexts of the OT occurrences of Hebrew show affinity with the description of the *habiru* in extrabiblical evidence, and the two categories need not be mutually exclusive; see Norman Gottwald, "Habiru, Hapiru," *NIDB* 2:710). More decisively, though, in many contexts the term is restricted to a gentilic for the people of Israelite descent (Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 26-27; Sarna, *Exodus*, 265-66; Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:123; William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 187). Nonetheless, it is tantalizing to consider that it is the *Egyptian* king who uses the term "Hebrew" to describe the people. Might this insinuate, from an Egyptian perspective, a class of people known well in Late Bronze Age Egypt to be outcasts, foreigners, and renegades? Unfortunately, most recent scholarship posits that the etymological relationship between Hebrew and *hapiru* is at best indirect. There is no direct line of continuity between the two groups. Hence, reading a social class into the designation "Hebrew" is dubious. Rather, Dozeman's conclusion is to be preferred: "The repeated use of "Hebrew" in the opening chapters of Exodus underscores the alienation and tension between Israelites and Egyptians, especially from the point of view of Egypt" (*Exodus*, 77). See further N. P. Lemche, "Ḫabiru, Ḫapiru," *ABD* 3:6-10; D. E. Fleming, "Hebrews," *DOTHB* 386-90.

"allies of life"[62] quite literally act as midwives to Israel's blessing under the threat of one who wants to curse Israel.[63] There endures an Israel to be saved because "pious pagans" believe an "undefined divinity . . . to be the guardian of right and justice."[64] They comport, unlike Pharaoh, to a natural justice in the world.[65] In other words, they work with the moral grain of the universe.[66]

The midwives' fear of God foreshadows the coming conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh's Egypt. If the question concerning the Hebrew slaves is "Whom does Israel serve?" then the correlative question for Egypt is "Whom do the Egyptians fear?" Fear of God/YHWH does play a significant role as a beginning point of Israel's own exodus journey (14:31).[67] Yet, Israel's involvement in YHWH's purposes takes them beyond fearful reverence to the distinctive goal of holy service. This is not YHWH's objective with Egypt. Instead (and to anticipate my discussion in the next chapter), YHWH hopes Egypt learns a fear of Israel's God as the unrivaled, sovereign Deity. The primary way

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[62] George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 7.

[63] The order of 1:20 shows the connection: "So God did good to the midwives and the people became numerous and very strong." God's good dealing with the midwives links with the people's multiplication. Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 222-24, offers an insightful take on how the midwives' actions anticipate YHWH's deliverance at the Sea.

[64] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 73.

[65] On "natural justice," see the previous chapter.

[66] This is a suggestive phrase I borrow from John Howard Yoder via Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 17. I am aware of the irony of my using this borrowed phrase from Yoder/Hauerwas in the same context where I am positing the existence of a "natural justice."

[67] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 75. Davies notes the word play, noticed by several commentators, present in both passages (1:16-17 and 14:31) between see (*r'h*) and fear (*yr'*).

the narrative expresses this goal for Egypt is in terms of "knowing" YHWH (e.g., Exod 7:5, 17; 8:10; 22; 9:14, 29; 14:4, 18). Such knowledge among the Egyptians in Exodus, which is a corollary of fear, is more than a cognitive awareness, but is of the kind that leads to a change of attitude and behavior.[68] It is this perspectival knowledge Pharaoh denies (5:2), but some Egyptians learn (in fear) in the process of the plague cycle (9:20; cf. 9:30). The knowledge expected from Egypt implies the "fearful" recognition of their contingent status before Israel's God, YHWH, the absolute authority "in the midst of the earth" (8:22). The midwives incipiently exhibit this "fear of God" by keeping the babies alive.[69] And God, who appears for the first time explicitly in the narrative, blesses these non-Israelites for it (1:20-21; cf. Gen 12:3a).[70]

3.3 EXODUS 2

The second chapter of Exodus focuses on three periods in Moses's early life prior to YHWH's call at the bush: his birth, two encounters as a young man in Egypt, and his

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[68] Job Y. Jindo, "On the Biblical Notion of Human Dignity: 'Fear of God' as a Condition for Authentic Existence," *BibInt* 19 (2011): 449-50.

[69] Jewish midrash understands the midwives' service to extend beyond delivery services to provision of food and shelter (Sarna, *Exodus*, 7).

[70] The sense of God's actions toward the midwives in v. 21 is less than obvious because the subject of the verb is undefined and the indirect object is masculine instead of the expected feminine. See Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:258-60, for a review of opinions on the meaning of "he dealt well with the midwives" (1:20a) and "he gave them families/houses" (1:21b). Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:22, and Cassuto, *Exodus*, 15, suggest that the midwives were rewarded "in equal measure" for their deeds. The "houses" they received from a behind-the-scenes God may witness to an "act-consequence" understanding. Regardless of how one interprets the phrases, the midwives stand as examples that those who "fear God" can participate favorably in God's creational work with Israel.

sojourn in the desert of Midian.[71] First impressions are crucial in the development of character in the biblical narrative.[72] No other human character features as prominently as Moses in the rest of Exodus—indeed the Pentateuch! Why then does the narrator include these specific stories in order to introduce such a important a figure? Further, how do the issues raised in these vignettes not only develop the character of Moses, but also establish trajectories for the storyline of Exodus as a whole? As a starting point, we note that the extended, biographical introduction of young Moses is exceptional in light of the Bible's general lack of interest in the childhood and "pre-prophetic" life of its major figures.[73] So why is such attention paid to Moses's early life? A potential answer lies in the Bible's propensity to use individuals or smaller groups to prefigure larger realities.[74] We have encountered this phenomenon already in Exod 1 in the numerous parallels and allusions that project Israel and Egypt as symbolic representatives in God's creation-wide intentions. The probability that this is the case is strengthened when one considers the parallels between Moses's life and Israel's experience. For example, Moses prefigures

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[71] Births form an inclusio for ch 2.

[72] Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 6, 148, gives three reasons for the importance of character introductions in biblical narrative. First, initial impressions are in general decisive for forming conceptions. Second, a narrative introduction is the place where the reader is most open to persuasion of the implied author. Third, introductions hint at the future development of a character throughout the story. "The first *rendezvous* between a character and the reader provides a background against which every action and development will be evaluated" (148).

[73] Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 43. The early lives of great figures are on the whole undeveloped in the biblical narrative, though Moses is not the only exception (e.g., Samuel, David). The key question for our purposes is, given the infrequency of biographical information on biblical characters' early lives, what purpose does it serve here?

[74] Cf. ibid., 42-43.

Israel's history as a firstborn,[75] one who is rescued from Pharaoh through the water, undergoes conflict in Egypt, is the object of Pharaoh's death warrant, comes out of Egypt into the desert, and encounters YHWH at the mountain. It would seem the narrative presents Moses as a microcosm of Israel.[76] Everett Fox's conclusion about the correspondence is on point: "In sum, Moshe's early biography leads us to ponder the 'growing up' process through which Israel must pass on their way out of Egypt."[77]

More specifically, though, Diana Lipton argues that Moses stands as a paradigm for Israel in regard to the theme of (the lack of) identity.[78] The identity of both Moses and Israel remains in large part hidden at the beginning of their respective stories. Thus, just as Moses comes to learn his true identity in light of YHWH's identity and purposes (the burden of Exod 3-4), so Israel must "grow up" in the relationship already in existence between the people and YHWH. Both Moses and Israel will reclaim their roots by

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[75] The peculiar way the text introduces Moses's parents and his conception (2:1-2) has given various commentators pause: why does a straightforward reading of the text seem to imply Moses was the couple's first child when the text later divulges the presence of an older sister (2:4), or even another older brother (6:20)? Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:272-73, gives a review of the history of interpretation. What appears to have been overlooked is the suggestion from Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story," 89, that just as Israel is God's firstborn (4:22), the text introduces (imaginatively) Moses as a prefigurement of Israel's firstborn status. In the same way, Moses's priestly heritage (from the house of Levi (2:1)) anticipates Israel's priestly status (19:6).

[76] Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 43-47; Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story," 96; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 42-43.

[77] Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 252. Fox states it in another helpful way: "the biblical portrayal of both God and Moshe has been reduced in our book to only such facts as will illuminate the relationship between Israel and its God."

[78] Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 42-47. Cf. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 59-69, 79-84.

discovering and comporting to their YHWH-ordained calling. Moses anticipates Israel in his journey of identity formation.

3.3.1 Exodus 1:22-2:10[79]

In spite of the inhumane intentions of the throne of Egypt, Israel continues to become numerous (*rbh*) and grow exceedingly strong (*ʿṣm*) near the close of the first chapter (1:20). God's creational directives and blessings move forward through Israel aided by marginal, non-Israelite, God-fearing women. But the action of the midwives is able only to stave off the effect of Pharaoh's genocidal furor for a time. After interrogating the women,[80] Pharaoh commands all his people to throw the baby boys into the Nile (1:22). His "final solution" sets the stage for the threat which looms over the birth and deliverance of infant Moses.

The potent force of Exod 2 is not YHWH but Pharaoh and the violent ethos of his Egypt. Yet, again, it is the daring ingenuity and bold compassion of women in 2:1-10 which subvert Pharaoh's unjust and cruel pogrom. None of the women are named (i.e., Moses's sister, mother, or Pharaoh's daughter) which serves to highlight the centrality of

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[79] On the coherent connection of 2:1-10 with what precedes it, see Childs, *Exodus*, 7-18; Exum, "You Shall Let Every Daughter Live," 63-82; J. Siebert-Hommes, "Die Geburtsgeschichte des Mose innerhalb des Erzählzusammenhangs von Exodus 1 und 2," *VT* 42 (1992): 398-404.

[80] Pharaoh's summons to the midwives uses the form and language of a juridical interrogation (see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 77-78; 118; 225; H. J. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtsleben im Alten Testament* (WMANT 14; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964), 30-31, 67. Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 80, posits that the juridical language is "an extension of the judicial motif . . . in Exod. 1.8-14, and it shows the same purpose of showing that the oppression of the Hebrews is a matter of injustice. The situation demands a true judge. Pharaoh is an unfit adjudicator since the injustice is his own deed."

the one who is eventually named, Moses (v. 10).[81] As in Exod 1, the narrative weaves a creational texture into the story of the infant's birth and deliverance. The cosmic significance of the birth narrative is signaled principally by two means. First, the Israelite mother's evaluation, "and she saw him—that he was good (*ṭôb*)" (2:2b), is an echo of God's seven-fold approbation of creation in Gen 1.[82] The mother's affectionate gaze over her newborn parallels God's joyous gaze over the budding potential of God's good, primordial world.[83] Her perception of the baby's goodness is a sign "this birth is a new act of creation, and an act of new creation."[84]

Second, because her nameless child[85] is soon in danger of detection, the mother constructs and places the child in a *tēbâ* and floats him among the reeds (2:3). The conventional translation for *tēbâ* is "papyrus basket." However, *tēbâ* appears elsewhere only in the flood narrative (Gen 6:14-9:18) where it designates the boat that saves Noah and his family from the worldwide deluge. The baby drifts in the reeds in a "little ark," as

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[81] Meyers, *Exodus*, 42.

[82] The phrase "X saw that it was good" is rare. Significantly, it also occurs in Gen 3:6 and Gen 6:6, both in situations of world-altering events. Unlike the judgment of the first woman about the tree (3:6) and the judgment of "sons of *'ĕlōhîm*" about the daughters of men (6:6), this mother's judgment opens an avenue toward cosmic salvation. In the story of Exodus, the mother's acuity of vision contrasts sharply with Pharaoh's failure to see God's creative purposes rightly (e.g., 10:10). Cf. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 46. For a fascinating history of interpretation of this text that explores the association of beauty with Israel's redemption, see James A. Loader, "The Beautiful Infant and Israel's Salvation," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67 (2011), Art. #913, 9 Pages. doi:10.4102/hts.v67i1.913.

[83] Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:25.

[84] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 699.

[85] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 154, keenly observes that the formula "she conceived and gave birth to a son" is followed routinely by "and called his name . . ." (Gen 21:2-3; 29:32, 33, 34, 35, etc.). The withholding of this formula until the end of the story not only heightens the suspense but points to the story's focus on the identity of this baby.

it were.[86] The word choice is not incidental: just as Noah emerged from the ark into a new creation, Moses's journey on the top of the Nile waters reflects the advent of a new era in salvation history.[87] Once again, a floating ark buoys the salvation of a people.[88] Hence, both the mother's pronouncement and her preparations point to the occasion as creation redux.

The striking role of the Egyptian princess also corresponds to the creational character of the birth narrative.[89] Although the grounds of her exploits are perhaps not as bold or motivated expressly by divine fear as are the midwives,[90] her behavior remarkably anticipates God's conduct toward Israel: she comes down, sees, sends (2:5), takes pity (2:6), and draws out (2:10; cf. God as the subject of the same verbs in 2:24-25; 3:7-8).[91] That one so close to the throne of Egyptian power is portrayed, not just

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[86] The translation of Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 263, and Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:25-26.

[87] Sarna, *Exodus*, 9. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 38: "Both Noah and Moses are adrift in a watery chaos, but they are divinely chosen ones in and through whom the good creation will be preserved. *The saving of Moses is thus seen to have cosmic significance.*" Exum, "And You Shall Let Every Daughter Live," 76, remarks that despite many commentators perceiving the parallel between Noah and Moses, many miss the parallel between Moses's mother and Noah. Both Noah and Moses's mother construct an ark that saves the destiny of a people.

[88] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, also proposes that the wider story (Exod 1:22-2:10) may also be in conversation with the *Epic of Atra-hasis*. If so, this would support reading the birth narrative in cosmogonic terms.

[89] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 38-39.

[90] Esther Schor, "Saviors and Liars: The Midwives of Exodus 1," in *From the Margins 1: Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives,* eds. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, BMW 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 35: "What sets the midwives apart from the Pharaoh's daughter is that their concern is not contingent—not prompted by the accidental glimpsing of a crying baby—but vocational and utterly self-conscious." Cf. Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152-53.

[91] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 38-39. The verbs "take pity" (*ḥml*) and "draw out" (*mšh*) are not used explicitly to describe what God does in Exodus; however, the ideas are surely parallel.

sympathetically, but with analogous theological language, is shocking. Indeed, the Egyptian princess names Israel's deliverer![92] Jonathan Sacks's comparison captures the scandal of the surprise:

> Instead of 'Pharaoh's daughter' read 'Hitler's daughter' or 'Stalin's daughter' and we see what is at stake . . . That the Torah itself tells the story the way it does has enormous implications. It means that when it comes to people, we must never generalize, never stereotype. The Egyptians were not all evil: even from Pharaoh himself a heroine is born. Nothing could signal more powerfully that the Torah is not an ethnocentric text; that we must recognise virtue wherever we find it, even among our enemies; and that the basic core of human values—humanity, compassion, courage—is truly universal. Holiness may not be; goodness is.[93]

The daughter of Pharaoh illustrates that despite the reigning policy of violence and oppression directed against the Israelites, there are pockets of resistance, however small, among the Egyptians. The Egyptians are not uniformly transgressors of God's creational order.[94] A sense of justice perseveres even in Pharaoh's palace halls, a dark corner of God's creation. And as if disobeying the genocidal policy was not defiance enough of her father's oppressive hand, the princess offers to pay Moses's mother for her maternal care of the child.[95] At least one Israelite receives wages for her service to the Egyptians. The whole episode is deeply ironic.[96] Pharaoh's final decree in 1:22 has initiated a whole

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[92] "This is the reward for those who do kindness. Although Moses had many names, the only one by which he is known in the whole Torah is the one given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh. Even the Holy One, blessed be He, did not call him by any other name" (*Exodus Rabba* 1:26).

[93] Sacks, *Exodus*, 28.

[94] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 39, sounds a similar note: "Basic human values such as compassion, justice, and courage as well as the active subversion of cruel and inhumane policies are seen to be present among God's creatures quite apart from their relationship to Israel; such are the product of God's activity in creation."

[95] Childs, "Birth," 113-14, states this likely signals a contract of wages (and not strictly monetary) that would indicate legal adoption in the ancient world.

[96] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 37.

chain of events that eventuate in Moses's birth, which foreshadows Israel's redemption. But what is more, Pharaoh's own family provides the nurture for Israel's deliverer. Pharaoh attempts to work against God's creational purposes in the world, but he ends up not only sowing but nourishing the seed, as it were, of Israel's future ascent and Egypt's demise.[97]

If the narrative deploys creational themes to indicate the cosmic gravity of this infant's birth, then the form of the story reveals that the issue of identity is also in the narrator's purview. Many commentators point out the assorted parallels between Moses's birth story and other ancient Near Eastern infancy narratives.[98] The most remarkable literary parallel exists with the Legend of Sargon.[99] The similarities include the anonymity and priestly pedigree of the child's parents, a secretive birth, a baby placed in a vessel of reeds fashioned with bitumen by the mother, a journey on the water, an adoption by a stranger, and an association of drawing water with a name.[100] The common pattern and its culmination in adoption suggests the theme of identity is a climactic motif in both accounts.[101] This finds additional support in the Exodus story's report, "and he

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[97] The narrative provides implicit testimony (through the irony) to the act-consequence structure of cosmic justice attested in other parts of Israel's canon (see previous chapter).

[98] Donald B. Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," *Numen* 14 (1967): 209-28, provides thirty-two accounts which incorporate this motif.

[99] *COS* 1.133. See further Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero Who Was Exposed at Birth*, ASOR 4 (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980), 211-72. Lewis catalogs more than sixty versions of the abandoned child legend. For comparison with the Moses story, see Berman, *Created Equal,* 135-66.

[100] The Exodus narrator puts the common element of exposure of a foundling on water to good use in developing Moses as an archetype for Israel; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 157; cf. Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 116-17.

[101] The stories thus move beyond mere fabled birth narratives, so George W. Coats, *Exodus 1-18*, FOTL 2A (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 27-28. Childs, "The Birth of Moses,"

became a son to her" (*wayhî-lâ ləbēn*; 2:10a), which reflects a common adoption formula in the ancient Near East.[102] Yet, in a significant departure from the heroic birth pattern, the child's ethnicity is never in doubt in Exodus.[103] The princess straightaway recognizes the child's Hebrew heritage (2:6). And it is the princess—not the mother—who names the infant, again underscoring the adoption of this child into the Egyptian culture. The question naturally arises, "Who(se) will this child grow to be?"

The name "Moses" (*mōšeh*) further solidifies identity as a central issue. Scholars dispute the derivation of the name. Two etymologies are suggested, and it is likely that disagreement among interpreters indicates both are at play. On the one hand, the name could derive from the Egyptian root *msi* which means simply "son" or "son of."[104] Clearly, the Egyptian princess names the boy, and it is most probable that her naming intends an Egyptian etymology. The Egyptian derivation signals that the Egyptian court will be the formative context for the growth and education of young Moses. Moses's

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JBL (1965): 109-15, also points to the close parallels of series of bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian legal texts known as *ana ittišu* that discuss the adoption of foundlings. The majority of the stories found in this genre are also royal in nature. Thus, through the use of this genre, the narrator is likely setting up the reader to expect the rise of a hero-king who will lead his people out from slavery. Hence, Moses's first deed in 2:11 takes on added, and ironic, significance. See Eckart Otto, "Mose und das Gesetz: Die Mose-Figur als Gegenentwurf Politischer Theologie zur neuassyrischen Königsideologie im 7.Jh. v. Chr.," in *Mose: Ägypten und das Alte Testament*, ed. Eckart Otto, SBS 189 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 47–67.

[102] Childs, "The Birth of Moses," 114.

[103] The origin of the child is usually unknown in the birth story genre. See Dozeman, *Exodus*, 84; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 158; Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 30-31.

[104] But *msi* could also be a diminutive form of a theophoric name built on the pattern of Thutmoses. Thus, the name Moses could imply the presence of a theophoric element —"son of [a god]." See Donald Redford, "Moses," *OEAE* 2:438; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*; James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 140-41; but cf. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 296-97.

Egyptian context further "enables him to grow up free of the crippling and physical effects of slavery."[105] On the other hand, the name could derive from the Hebrew verb *mšh*, meaning "to draw out."[106] This derivation points to Moses's Hebrew ethnicity and foreshadows his role as Israel's deliverer. Until he is weaned, the child Moses remains in the care of his mother, who surely imbues him with a consciousness of his Israelite lineage (in the next story Moses knows the Israelites are his brothers; see 2:11).[107] Regardless, the ambiguous origin of the child's name may be precisely the point: it tellingly reveals the uncertainty of the child's identification. Dual derivations point to dual identities. Moses will have to work out this unsettled ambiguity.[108]

3.3.2 Exodus 2:11-22

In ten short verses the story skips any detail of Moses's childhood and treats three episodes in his early adulthood (vv. 11-20). The section ends with his marriage and son's

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[105] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 42.

[106] The princess's explanation is somewhat curious in light of the Hebrew. The name *mōšeh* matches the active participle form, "he draws out," rather than the philologically more accurate passive participle form, *māšûy*—"drawn out" (seemingly intended by the princess (v.10b)). Alternatively, the narrator could be making a Hebrew pun on an Egyptian name (so Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 152) or simply offering an interpretation based not on etymology but assonance (so Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 43). In any case, the name foreshadows Moses as one "drawn out" of water to "draw out" Israel from Egypt through the waters (cf. 2 Sam 22:17; Isa 63:11).

[107] Admittedly, this reads into the story what is not there explicitly. Moses's relationship with the Israelites is left unanswered by the narrative. Nonetheless, George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 44, observes "the birth story of Moses is not intended to make Moses an Egyptian, but to place him in an Egyptian culture."

[108] Just as Moses works out (or perhaps better, is confronted with) his identity, so Israel must work out its identity. The sticking point for both is their role vis-à-vis YHWH's identity, which the coming chapters will bear out.

birth in Midian (vv. 21-22). The question "Who is Moses?" raised by the birth narrative remains an important thread through these vignettes.[109] So, for example, the first account twice repeats that Moses is aware of "his brothers" in slavery (2:11a,d). The reiteration coupled with his desire to see them suggests (at least) that Moses wishes to maintain a sympathetic kinship bond with the enslaved Israelites.[110] In the second episode, a Hebrew slave challenges Moses's authority by deridingly asking, "Who placed you as chief or judge over us? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (2:14). It is not obvious what the nameless Hebrew accuser makes of Moses's ethnicity, though he is positive that Moses is a killer.[111] In the following story, Jethro's daughters report to their father "an *Egyptian* man rescued us."[112] Finally, when Moses names his firstborn

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[109] Interestingly, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 41, remarks that the reader hears more from other characters about this than Moses himself.

[110] *BDB* 8.a., *HALOT* 3:1158-59, both state that the verb "see" (*r'h*), when followed by the preposition *bə* (as it is here), connotes a sympathetic involvement (cf. Gen 29:32; 1 Sam 1:11; Ps 106:44). There is some question whether the first occurrence of "his brothers" refers to Egyptian or Hebrew brothers (cf. Levy, "Moshe," 416, in conversation with Ibn Ezra). The second occurrence of the phrase at the end of the verse, however, clearly identifies "his brothers" as the Israelites. Nonetheless, one might pause over the ambiguity at the beginning of the verse (so Ibn Ezra) because the birth narrative has left the issue open-ended.

[111] Surely the man would not speak to an Egyptian, especially one from the court, this way (cf. 1:11!). Indeed, the guilty man's statement, "Are you going to kill me as you killed *the Egyptian*?" would be an awkward way to refer to one of Moses's own ethnic group. More probably, he regards Moses as a Hebrew. However, his antagonistic response to Moses indicates a definite hostility, even estrangement, unbecoming of true kinship. In this case, the guilty Hebrew recognizes Moses rather as a pretentious Hebrew assuming the role of a community elder. The great irony, of course is that "ruler and judge" is exactly the role that Moses will come to play in Israel's life. Moreover, the guilty one's hostility presages the kind of Israelite resistance with which Moses will contend through the rest of the Pentateuch. Yet, at this point Moses has not been appointed to the task or recognized by Israel. Moses presently practices vigilante justice (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 168), not justice which springs from divine appointment, aid, and law. Coats, *Moses*, 50, perceptively notes that the Hebrews are not called brothers in this story, perhaps pointing to Moses's approach under the auspices of an Egyptian judicial official.

[112] The phrase "the Egyptian man" is the only thing the women add in their retelling of the previous events to their father.

"Gershom," he offers the opaque commentary, "for I was a resident alien in a foreign land." Which is the foreign land? Egypt? Midian? And where is his homeland? Egypt? Midian? Or some other, as yet undiscovered land?[113] Moses's identity wanders homeless. The uncertainty will culminate in the next chapter in his reply to YHWH on the mountain of Horeb: "Who am I . . . ?" (3:11). The liminal events related in 2:11-22 make that question ripe for an answer.

In spite of the puzzle of Moses's identity in the previous birth story, the form and style of Exod 2:1-10 heightens the anticipation about the child's future: the heroic foundling tale leads the reader to "expect something extraordinary."[114] The next two episodes, however, present an inauspicious, vexed picture of Israel's future deliverer. In the first story, Moses kills an Egyptian, who was beating an Israelite, and hides the perpetrator's body in the sand. The following day Moses again attempts to break up an unjust beating, rebuking the "one in the wrong" (2:13b). In this instance the guilty party is an Israelite who batters a fellow Israelite. The confrontation flounders but reveals to Moses that his previous killing has been exposed. He absconds in fear to Midian to escape the retribution of Pharaoh. There he valiantly rescues Jethro's daughters from the maltreatment of local shepherds. What is the reader to make of this string of Moses's actions? The most troubling issue: what of his use of lethal violence in the first episode?

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[113] For discussion and review of scholarly interpretations, see Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 160-62. He calls Moses's statement "baffling." Davies remarks that Moses's explanation puts him in solidarity with not just Israel in Egypt, but with the "resident immigrant" patriarchs before him.

[114] Rolf Rendtorff, "Some Reflections on the Canonical Moses: Moses and Abraham," in *A Biblical Itinerary. In Search of Method, Form and Content. Essays in Honour of George W. Coats*, JSOTSup 240 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 12.

This section provides "no clear verdict," and the history of interpretation exhibits a range of possible readings—from laudatory to disapproving evaluation.[115] "Like Moses, whose identity straddles blurred boundaries of Hebrew or Egyptian or Midianite, the reader also straddles murky boundaries of right and wrong in contemplating Moses' slaying of the Egyptian."[116] If these encounters introduce Moses's moral convictions in a world of competing, often violent claims, then the reader must surely deliberate before giving a stamp of approval to their expression. Only in the last story, where Moses rescues the Midianite women, does his deed appear untarnished by controvertible circumstances.

What is unequivocal is that the three vignettes illustrate Moses's passion for justice, and it is a zeal transcending boundaries of nationality, gender, and kinship.[117] In all three cases Moses risks much by interjecting himself into situations in order to defend

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[115] Dennis T. Olson, "Violence for the Sake of Social Justice? Narrative, Ethics and Indeterminacy in Moses' Slaying of the Egyptian (Exodus 2.11-15)," in *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Charles H. Cosgrove, JSOTSup 411, The Bible in the Twenty-First Century 5 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 142. Olson gives a survey of interpretation (139-41). In addition, see Childs, *Exodus*, 27-46; J. M. G. Barclay, "Manipulating Moses: Exodus 2.10-15 in Egyptian Judaism and the New Testament," in *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson*, ed. D. M. R. Carroll, JSOTSup 138 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 28-46.

[116] Olson, "Violence for the Sake of Social Justice?" 144.

[117] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 45. Historic Jewish interpretation, understandably, holds Moses in high esteem and so wants to underline (generally) the nobility of his actions. Cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:43; Sarna, *Exodus*, 11; Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 27. Nevertheless, the ambivalence of Moses's slaying of the Egyptian has caused no little worry. Levy, "Moshe," 418-19, offers this summary: "How is it that the spiritual giant who comes to lead the Jewish people out of servitude embarks on his career with an act of murder? The Rabbis of the midrash found this behavior disturbingly discordant, and apply all of their interpretative powers to legitimate the deed and remove the onus of imprudence and guilt from Moshe."

a weaker party.[118] In the first instance, Moses goes out among his Hebrew kindred, sees an Egyptian beating an Israelite, and feels impelled to intervene.[119] Some commentators note the phrase "he saw that there was no man" (v. 12) finds an exact and exclusive parallel with God's redemption of Israel in Isaiah 59:15-16. Thus, the description can imply a positive, godly construal of Moses's consequent fatal striking of the Egyptian.[120] Moses's dedication to justice is illustrated again in the next two stories, though only in the latter one does he succeed in bringing about deliverance for the oppressed party. At a minimum, then, Moses reveals himself in the tripartite sequence to be concerned with, in the biblical idiom, "justice and righteousness."

And yet, Moses's conduct is not above reproach. The locution "he saw that there was no man" could just as well insinuate that Moses reckoned he would not be witnessed

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[118] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 165: "Moses does not meet misery by accident but seeks it from the start . . . The suffering that moves him is not the unfairness and pain of the entire human condition, but a specific situation of social injustice."

[119] Ibid., 163, insightfully comments that the picture of an Egyptian man smiting an Asiatic is a "stereotypical scene in Egyptian art as far back as c. 3000 B.C.E. [and] would understandably elicit visceral reaction" from an Israelite audience. See the images of Egyptian taskmasters in Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, Figures 8, 9. Propp also remarks that by identifying the offender as an "Egyptian man," the story depicts the situation as a conflict not between slave and master but between Israel and Egypt (166).

[120] Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:37, argues forcefully for the virtue of Moses's actions based on this parallel. So, too, the language of Moses's "seeing" (3x), which Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 25, captures well: "Moses seeing is Moses allowing himself to be affected, to suffer with those who are unexpectedly called 'his brothers.' This kind of seeing is contrasted with the seeing essential to Pharaoh's edict: 'Look at the birthstool . . .' (1:16). Pharaoh's was a seeing of disjunction and difference; while Moses' first significant act of maturity is an act of empathy with those who seem, physically, socially, and existentially, so different from him." Cf. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 702. In a similar fashion, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 42-43, argues Moses's actions anticipate God's action: Moses sees Israel's oppression, God sees the same (e.g., 2:24; 3:7); Moses strikes (*nkh*) the Egyptian, so will God strike Egypt (e.g., 12:12, 13, 29; 9:15); Moses helps (*yš'*) and delivers (*nṣl*) Jethro's daughters, so too God helps and delivers Israel (e.g., 12:27; 14:13, 30; 15:2).

if he fatally struck the Egyptian.[121] His clandestine disposal of the body surely betrays Moses's own sense of culpability. In his next encounter with the two Hebrews, Moses attempts presumptuously to step into the role of judge. Ironically, he finds himself instead among the accused.[122] Public awareness (and opinion) that his slaying of the Egyptian was murder debases and subverts his intent to bring justice.[123] That his deadly deed is publicly known elicits Moses's fear; but unlike the midwives, he fears Pharaoh and so flees for his life.[124] Kürle comments perceptively about the rhetorical effect brought about by these first two events:

> His moral waistcoat has a stain, his leadership abilities are certainly not great, as he could not even handle a situation as small as this, and the identification with the people erodes when he flees the country out of fear. Having read this story the

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[121] Furthermore, it is not clear whether the Egyptian was beating the man fatally, or even if the Israelite man was innocent in the affair. The participle used, from the verb *nkh*, can indicate a mortal blow but can just as well denote a non-lethal strike. Indeed, this is the same verb used in the next episode in which two Israelites fight. There it does not appear that the fight results in death (*pace* Dozeman, *Exodus*, 87). In addition, the participle rather than the finite verb could also point to a durative aspect (he continued to strike) or, perhaps, an imminent action (he was about to strike); see Joüon-Muraoko 131c,e. Nonetheless, it can be reasoned that Moses strikes a fatal blow because this is the kind of violence meted out by the Egyptian. Thus, Moses's act can be conceived as an example of "measure or measure" justice.

[122] The man's question reveals another aspect of Moses's identity crisis: his own self-contradiction. He cannot murder one day and act as judge the next. See further Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 137-41.

[123] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:293, reads the man's accusation thusly: "He seems to say; the beating you did is a lot less innocent than the beating I did." In other words, the man apparently believes Moses committed homicide.

[124] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 132. It is unclear what has been exposed. The text says simply "the affair (*dābār*) has become known" (2:14d), without further clarifying "the affair." This could refer to Moses's slaying but could also refer to his Hebrew heritage. That Pharaoh seeks to kill Moses points to the latter understanding, for surely Pharaoh would not require the death of an Egyptian prince for the murder of an Egyptian overseer of the slave-corps. If it were known that Moses was a Hebrew, his actions would more likely mark him as a dangerous insurgent inside the palace court. By his violent action, Moses identifies himself as one of the Hebrews. Pharaoh's manhunt, then, would be more understandable.

> reader must wonder how Moses actually achieved his great position in the tradition.[125]

Only the last incident in Midian begins to intimate a more hopeful picture of Moses's instinctive struggle against injustice.

These three encounters provide the lenses through which the narrator wants the reader to contemplate Moses's emergent identity and maturation.[126] What do we learn? First, inasmuch as we notice how the narrative continues with the issue of Moses's identity, we need also to take stock of the circumstances by which the narrator chooses to trace Moses's early history. The thread of identity is entwined in these episodes with three different moral crises that all spiral around the issue of justice. Hence, the narrative connects the issue of Moses's developing identity with his ethical formation, and his ethical formation centers on matters of justice. In other words, the starting point for Moses's maturation as Israel's future deliverer and leader centers on his evolving endeavors to practice justice. The point should not be understated: the pursuit of justice is the crucible from which the narrative explores Moses's moral education. If Moses is a prefigurement of Israel (as I asserted above), then we could anticipate that Israel will also "grow up" along a similar line, viz., Israel's maturation will also entail an education in justice.

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[125] *The Appeal of Exodus*, 157.

[126] Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:43. Bryna Jocheved Levy, "Moshe: Portrait of the Leader as a Young Man," in *Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts*, ed. Ora Wiskind Elper and Susan Handelman (New York: Urim Publications, 2000), 41, takes "and Moses grew up" (2:11a) as a "descriptive heading for the events to come." Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 146; 162, notes that the striking seven-fold occurrence of "man" (*'iš*) in 2:11-22, in contrast to the seven-fold occurrence of "child" (*yeled*) in 1:22-2:10, supports the idea that 2:11-22 represents Moses's "maturation and socialization."

I contend these episodes are critical for illustrating what is necessarily part of the journey toward learning a YHWH-shaped, creational justice for Moses (and Israel). Thomas Dozeman highlights how the category of creation becomes crucial for understanding the aim of these stories.[127] Egypt is an environment that Exod 1-2:10 paints as polluted by injustice because of the genocidal, anti-creational despotism of Pharaoh. Dozeman points to the linkage of the social setting and Moses's violent act against the Egyptian in Exod 2:11-12, arguing that "Moses' killing of the Egyptian probes the influence of Egyptian culture on the hero."[128] By emphasizing the adoption of Moses into Egyptian culture as an infant, the narrative bears out the effects of Egyptian culture on his "coming of age." Moses grows up in this corrupt, Pharaonic atmosphere—Pharaoh's perverted maintenance of *ma'at*—and consequently comes face to face with situations of violence "inescapable in an unjust society."[129] The first two episodes showcase the violent effects of Egypt's version of creational order. Moses witnesses the culture of violence in relations between Egyptians and Israelites *and among the Israelites themselves*.[130] The two Israelites fighting shows that not even the enslaved are immune

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[127] Thomas B. Dozeman, "Creation and Environment in the Character Development of Moses," in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 27-36. I owe much of the following to his perceptive analysis.

[128] Ibid., 32. He takes his cue from H. H. Schmid's insights into the tight connection between creation and ethics in the ancient world (see ch. 2 above). He also argues that the wisdom characteristics of these first chapters shore up the creational interpretation.

[129] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 703-704. "The narrative does not comment on the violence, but only voices it and lets us see it for what it is" (704). On *ma'at* see ch. 2 above.

[130] The same verbal root (*nkh*) is used for the Egyptian's deed (v. 11), Moses's deed (v. 12), and the unnamed Israelite's action (v. 13). The atmosphere of violence pervades them all. See the comments on Exod 1:8-14 above.

from the deforming zeitgeist of unjust Egypt.[131] Even more, Moses demonstrates he himself is entrenched in Pharaoh's world by his murder despite any good intentions. Dozeman remarks,

> [Moses] identifies with the Hebrews. Yet he acts in conformity with his environment. The royal ideology of Pharaoh permeates and perhaps even predominates Moses' action, for he seeks to liberate in secret through violence, recalling the characteristics of Pharaoh that introduced slavery and genocide into the land of Egypt . . . The inclination to liberate becomes murder in an environment already polluted with genocide.[132]

Moses's actions underscore the power of the social-political milieu to shape individual character. So, although Moses may have assimilated a sense of justice from his Egyptian (royal) environment, his practice there exposes his understanding to be ill-formed.[133] Pharaoh has marred Egypt, and Egypt has inculcated Moses.

Thus, the distance between Egypt and Midian in the last episode is more than geographical. Midian lies outside of Pharaoh's sphere of influence (2:15). Moses's virtuous deed of justice on behalf of Jethro's daughters (in comparison to his two

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[131] The narrative will reiterate more than once just how deep the patterns of Egypt are ingrained in the consciousness of the Israelites (e.g., 5:21; 14:11-12; 16:3, 27; 32:1-6).

[132] "Creation and Environment," 32. Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 133-35, intriguingly proposes that Moses's question put to the guilty Hebrew, "Why did you strike your brother?" uses diction and syntax of a judicial inquiry, the same used by Pharaoh in 1:18. Davies contends Moses tries to mimic Pharaoh: "Moses has "gone out" of the court, but has brought with him its pattern of speech" (137). Moses's conduct shows him to be a "failed parody of Pharaoh."

[133] Fretheim's judgment that Moses's nascent pursuit of justice is "significant testimony to God's work in creation among those outside the community of faith" misses the mark (*Exodus*, 45). But it does raise the query: What of the women in Exod 1-2 who offer a counter-narrative to Pharaoh's violent environment all the while being firmly entrenched within it? In a private correspondence with Dozeman, he suggested that these characters probably reinforce the argument, since they all represent marginal persons (women in different roles from different backgrounds) within the setting of the story. Cf. Jacqueline Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 80, who suspects a gendered critique of violence is at work in the women's deliverance in non-violent but effectively resistant ways.

previous attempts in Egypt) signals a shift away from the effects of a surrounding warped by Pharaoh's anti-creational culture of death. In Midian, when Moses rises up[134] and delivers the powerless, victimized daughters, his actions presage God's coming deliverance.[135] But there is more that moves the symbolism of this vignette beyond the previous two encounters. The setting in Midian intentionally calls to mind events in the lives of the ancestors of Genesis—a traveling stranger, women at a well, an invitation to a family feast, a marriage and a child (cf. Gen 24, 29)—as if to say that Moses has stumbled into the footsteps of Israel's fathers.[136] The archetypal *scene* of his actions betoken his pilgrimage toward transformation. Gordon Davies is worth quoting at length on this point:

> The self-contradiction that Moses showed in the Egyptian workfields raised the question about him that we had already asked of the Israelites: "Who is he in light of this divine project?" Now the element of repetition within this episode begins to answer the question by alluding to him as the successor of the Patriarchs. He who as a foundling lost his history now submits to it by copying his forefathers. Hotheaded in Egypt, he was a failed parody of Pharaoh. Now he imitates his ancestors and is successful. The incoherence of his two actions in Egypt is corrected by his insertion into the trajectory of his people's history traced by God's promises to the Patriarchs . . . The prelude, Exod 1.1-7, showed us by

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[134] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 157-8, observes that Pharaoh "rises up" (*qwm*) in 1:8 but with a much different outcome; cf. the similar vocabulary in 12:30-32. "Arise" (*qwm*) and "deliver" (*nṣl*) are verbs used elsewhere for what one does on behalf of justice for the poor and oppressed (e.g., Pss 76:8-9 [9-10]; 82:8). Davies concludes the juridical vocabulary "sets the story within the chapters' continuing theme that oppression is a matter of injustice and that true liberation requires adherence to a clearer moral vision of the world and entails a revaluing of creation" (159).

[135] Moses "saves" (*yš'*; v. 17) and "delivers" (*nṣl*: v. 19), as God will "save" (14:30; cf. 14:13; 15:2) and "deliver" (3:8; 6:6; 12:27). Brian Charles DiPalma, "De/Constructing Masculinity in Exodus 1-4," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 47, notes also that the narrative's language of deliverance in 2:17-19 does not use the violent language explicit in Moses's earlier actions.

[136] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 52-58, esp. 56-58; Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 146-49; cf. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 241-43.

> repeating motifs from Genesis that the Hebrews' past will shape their present, Exod. 2.16-22 now forms a thematic inclusion by applying this method and conclusion to Moses as well . . . He remains a powerful but opaque force reaching out toward Horeb and the future. But here he does gain a foothold in the past. He achieves a certain historical congruence that prepares him for his encounter with 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Exod. 3.6).[137]

In his exile Moses emulates the ancestors.[138] His child's name, Gershom, although signifying his migratory identity, also puts him in the good company of Israel's ancestors (e.g., Gen 21:23, 34; 23:4; 32:5).[139] But his connection to Israel's ancestors also points again to his prefigurement of Israel (e.g., Gen 15:14; 46:1-4). Just as Moses's salvation through the water foreshadows Israel's liberation through the sea, so Moses's exile into Midian anticipates Israel's exodus and future formation in the wilderness. Moses flees the Egyptian milieu, and the distance creates the space necessary to be shaped for God's purposes.[140] Moses will meet YHWH in the wilderness and discover his true identity and vocation. His return to Egypt will resurrect an order of justice different from the one pervading Egypt, one that flourishes on the moral vision of service/worship to YHWH. Israel, too, must come out of Egypt in order to learn its role of service/worship in God's creational agenda.

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[137] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 149-50.

[138] Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 262: "The Midyanite wilderness transforms Moshe into shepherd, foreigner, father, and seer—in short, into a son of the Patriarchs."

[139] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 44, also contends that Moses's marriage to a non-Israelite "again demonstrates the importance of creation theology . . . Israel is not a generically pure community; its leaders extend the family to include others."

[140] Dozeman, "Creation and Environment," 34, thus warns that the story is less about individual character formation and more about the "necessary foundations of a good creation and a pure environment as a basis for a just and healthy society."

3.3.3 Exodus 2:23-25

The narrative breaks away from Moses's Midian sojourn and returns the plotline to Egypt: "Many days passed and the king of Egypt died" (Exod 2:23a). The coronation of a new king in the ancient world was characteristically an occasion for the monarch to celebrate his ascension by granting liberation to debtors, captives, and slaves.[141] The Israelites, however, do not experience the change of leadership as a joyful time of release.[142] Israel's oppression instead intensifies, illustrated by the compounding language of their suffering:[143]

> The sons of Israel groaned (*'nḥ*) from the service (*'ăbōdâ*) and they cried out (*z'q*). Their scream for help (*šaw'â*) from their service (*'ăbōdâ*) rose up to God. And God heard their moans (*nə'āqâ*). (Exod 2:23b-24a)

For the first time Israel gives voice to the pain and cries out.[144] Their protests convey that Israel has turned a corner in regard to their acceptance of their affliction. The slaves

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[141] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 140-41, cites a hymn celebrating the ascension of Ramses IV: "It is a good day. Heaven and earth rejoice, because you are the great lord of Egypt. Fugitives have returned to their cities, those in hiding have come out . . . The chained are released, those who are bound rejoice" (*ANET* 378-79). This parallels a similar practice well-attested in Mesopotamia.

[142] Sarna, *Exodus*, 13, observes that Moses appears to have benefited from the death of the king in this way (4:19). Charles Isbell, "Exodus 1-2 in the Context of Exodus 1-14: Story Lines and Key Words," *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, eds. Alan J. Hauser, David J. A. Clines, and David M. Gunn, JSOTSup 19 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1982), 50-51, conjectures that Israel's groaning following the death of the tyrant is evidence that the oppression "involved more than a single evil individual; the fact that the trouble continues beyond the lifetime of the king means that his attitude to the Hebrews has been widely accepted among the Egyptians."

[143] In Hebrew four words for suffering are used out of sixteen total in the verse.

[144] In the Hebrew Bible the verb for cry (*z'q*), which occurs here, and its nominal form (*ṣə'āqâ*; a bi-form of *zə'āqâ*), which occurs in 3:7, frequently denote cries for help (to an authority) in the context of acute situations of injustice or suffering (cf. the discussion above on Gen 18:20-21); also see A. Konkel, "זָעַק," *NIDOTTE* 3:827–30; Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice*, 49-52; Boyce, *The Cry To God*, passim.

cannot alter their situation and express their deep distress with an emotive outcry. Yet, the text does not indicate to whom Israel directs their plea for relief. Israel cries out because of the injustice but not for or to the God of their ancestors.[145] Israel's inability to articulate a lament toward God signals that Israel has suppressed if not outright forgotten their Genesis-shaped history.[146] The service-slavery shackles their religious memory and, thus, their prayerful imagination. They are just as muddled in their lack of identity as Moses.[147] If they have any collective identity at all, it is a self-understanding shackled to their servitude: Israel in Egypt lives vulnerability and powerlessness. Nonetheless, although Pharaoh has cruelly stymied their ascent from Egypt, he is powerless to stymie the ascent of their cry. Like an offering of worship, Israel's cry from their vulnerability ascends to the ears of God. And God receives the offering.[148]

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[145] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 51, points out that the language is almost identical to the Sodom-Gomorrah story in Gen 18:20-21. The oppressed of those cities certainly did not cry out to YHWH (cf. Deut 26:7).

[146] Dozeman, *Exodus*, 93, also remarks that in forgetting their past life with God Israel's memory is like Pharaoh's.

[147] Although my interpretation of Israel's ignorance of God relies on an argument from silence, the parallels between Moses and Israel (noted above) offer strong evidence that Israel, like Moses, does not know its past with God. Exodus 2:23-25 is sandwiched between episodes in Moses's life, which also suggests the narrator wants to trade on the similarities between the two. Moreover, even if Israel does know something of the promises given to the ancestors, there is nothing in the story to suggest to Israel that this God has kept those promises. God is remote at best, forgotten at worst. Finally, the fact that Israel does not call on God's name is also supported by Moses's question in 3:14. See Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 25-61, for defense of this interpretation.

[148] As I will discuss below, the Hebrew nominal for "service-slavery" (*'ăbōdâ*) can also connote "service-worship." The word is twice used in 2:23 in redundant fashion for emphasis. So, too, the language of "go up" (*'lh*) overlaps with the semantic domain of activities associated with approaching God in worship, and in particular with sacrifice (e.g., Lev 2:12; 1 Kgs 18:29; Isa 60:7; Ps 51:21). Hence, the language here hints that Israel's suffering is received by God as an act of worship, even though Israel does not explicitly direct it to God. The Judge of all the world does not just hear the cries of the oppressed. He welcomes them as an offering of sacrifice. I thank John Fortner for pointing this out to me.

Up to this moment the text has been silent about God's presence in the experience of Israel and in the life of Moses.[149] It is true that YHWH's creational promises to Israel have advanced, but it is Pharaoh's tyrannical actions which have loomed large.[150] God's explicit hand has been as hidden as Moses's and Israel's identities. Israel's outcry, however, brings God's silence to an end.[151] In Exod 2:24-25 God breaks his cover with a fourfold iteration of God's name, whereby *Elohim* appears as the subject of four pivotal verbs:[152]

> God heard (*šm'*) their moans and God remembered (*zkr*) his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw (*r'h*) the sons of Israel, and God knew (*yd'*).[153]

A similar recital is repeated with some variation only seven verses later when God calls Moses at the bush:

> "I have surely seen (*r'h*) the oppression (*'ŏnî*) of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard (*šm'*) their outcry (*ṣə'āqâ*) because of their slave masters. Indeed, I know (*yd'*) their sufferings. And I have come down (*yrd*) to rescue them from the hand of Egypt and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land . . . And now, take note, the outcry (*ṣə'āqâ*) of the sons of Israel has come to me;

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[149] For a thoughtful meditation on the theme of God's absence in the first chapters of Exodus, see Gowan, *Theology of Exodus*, 4-5. Cf. Goldingay's insightful remark, *Israel's Gospel*, 307: "If we overemphasize the significance of God's permanent presence, we lose the ability to own God's real absence and to think of and speak of and plead for an occasional more real experience of God appearing and acting."

[150] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 25, stresses that God has not been totally absent in this period. God has worked blessing through his creation and its creatures.

[151] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 32: "This change—the human cry, the divine involvement in pain—is what makes redemption possible."

[152] Ibid., 36: "His name is repeated four times, without the palliative effect of pronouns. This is unusual—and inelegant—usage in biblical Hebrew. It indicates a new factor has entered the world of slavery; it is called God (*elohim*), and it works as perception of pain. And it is because of this new awareness that words of salvation become possible."

[153] The four actions of God match the four words describing Israel's suffering in 2:23a-24b.

> moreover, I have seen (*r'h*) the torment with which the Egyptians torment them." (3:7-9)

The emphasis on God's presence and response is palpable. God has chosen not to be indifferent to the outcry of the Israelites in their maltreatment. The verbiage drives the reader back to Genesis, wherein one encounters these verbs a host of times "to indicate the personal relationship of God to his suffering, pain-racked creatures."[154] But the rhetoric also pushes the reader toward the imminent future of God's endeavors.[155] Divine involvement—and not just an alteration in God's mental state—is implicit in each of these actions. These verbs are overtures into God's movement from behind-the-scenes work toward a visible and dramatic participation in changing Israel's situation.[156]

The narrative in 2:23-24 and 3:7-8 identifies two correlative triggers for God's redeeming initiative: God's memory of the ancestral promises and God's concern to rectify human injustice.[157] God's hearing recollects the covenant; God's seeing bears the

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[154] Cassuto, *Exodus*, 29; hear (*šm'*): 16:11: 17:20; 21:17; 29:33; 30:6, 17, 22; remember (*zkr*): Gen 8:1; 9:15, 16; 19:29; 30:22; 50:25; see (*r'h*): 9:16; 22:14; 29:31, 32; 31:42; the instances of know (*yd'*) are not as clear but cf. 18:19, 12; 20:6. See also Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 140, who observes that whereas Moses at the well mimics the Patriarchs to gain consistency, God "who sees, hears, and remembers here is repeating himself, demonstrating his self-consistency and hence his authority over time itself."

[155] Interestingly, Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 54, thinks there is an increasing vagueness to the objects of the four verbs in 2:24-25, with the final verb lacking an object entirely. He posits this heightens the reader's anticipation for God's upcoming action.

[156] So, it is not that God has gained a greater sensitivity to hear, has the divine memory jogged, has a better point of view, or has some new awareness of their situation. These verbs imply movement toward their object. They eventuate in action. The sequence of 3:7-10 illustrates this: God has seen, heard, and known; hence, he comes down to rescue (vv. 7-8). The cry has come to God, and God has seen; hence, God will send Moses to Pharaoh (vv. 9-10). See the discussions of Fretheim, *Exodus*, 48-49; Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 170-73.

[157] I borrow the language of triggers from the helpful discussion of Wright, *The Mission of God*, 272–75. On the legal ramifications of the language of "outcry" (*zə'āqâ*,/*ṣə'āqâ*), see ch. 2 above. Sarna, *Exodus*, 14, calls *zə'āqâ*,/*ṣə'āqâ* "one of the most powerful words in the language. Pervaded by moral outrage and soul-stirring passion, it denotes the anguished cry of the

burden of their plea for help.[158] On the one hand, the covenant promise is motivation for God's response, and thus much more is at play here than a mere concern for victims of injustice. Whereas Moses in Midian stumbled into the trajectory of the ancestors, God decisively determines to press forward the covenant trajectory and its promises initiated in Genesis. God mobilizes because it is *Israel* crying out, not just enslaved peoples.[159] The particularism of Israel—i.e., the covenant God made with the ancestors—is the immediate historical frame for coming to terms with the divine resolve. Israel's chosenness marks the slaves as the target for God's redemption.[160] God is now poised to honor the terms of the remembered covenant.

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oppressed, the agonized plea of the helpless victim." In addition to double occurrence of "outcry" in Exod 3:7-9, the passage piles on the words emphasizing Israel's oppression, implying the need for judgment.

[158] Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:46, regards the four verbs in 2:24 as two pair, each pair consisting of a perception and its psychological effect (so, too, Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 54). This parallelism can be seen to distinguish the two motivations of God's deliverance: remembering the covenant and rectifying injustice. If, on the contrary, we take the four verbs as a sequential progression, the point still stands. God both hears the cry of the enslaved (before and independent of the ancestral covenant), and remembers the covenant (Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 152). Greenberg also notices that the promise to the ancestors recedes somewhat into the background in 3:7-9, "submerged in the repeated declaration that it is Israel's anguish in Egypt that has moved God. Not that he was under the obligation of a covenant promise, but that he had taken note of Israel's present distress is the chief moment" (100).

[159] Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 152: "The point is not that it is Israel's *suffering* that brings about the exodus, but that it is *Israel* that suffers . . . Suffering alone does not qualify a people for an exodus." Cf. Nardoni*, Rise Up, O Judge*, 44, who flips the emphasis.

[160] God's actions focus on Israel, and Israel in Exodus cannot be exegetically diluted or metaphorically dismissed by a reading searching for the exodus's paradigmatic (or universal, or socio-ethical) appropriation. The former charge is the basis for Levenson's cogent criticism of liberation theologians' interpretation of Exodus typified by Pixley, *On Exodus*. See Levenson's "Exodus and Liberation," 127-59, an abbreviated form of which is "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 215-30. Also see "The Perils of Engaged Scholarship," 239-46). Levenson shows (persuasively to my mind) that Pixley et al. fail to reckon theologically with Israel's chosenness, or to note a tension with Israel's elect status and the "preferential option for the poor." The latter charge—that the exodus can be metaphorically understood and so transcend Israel's

On the other hand, the second trigger points to God's commitment to justice. God hears the groaning, and the sight of human injustice evokes God's compassion. Israel learns first hand in the exodus that protests of injustice catalyze God in apparent absence.[161] God goes beyond listening to Israel's cry of injustice and seeing the injustice imposed on them; the final clause of Exod 2:25 conveys an even deeper engagement. The verse ends strikingly with an objectless verb: "and God knew (*yd'*)." The fact the narrator left off an object beckons the reader to consider the full force of the verb.[162] In this context, the Hebrew verbal root *yd'* indicates more than cognitive knowledge, but a relational, experiential knowledge.[163] That God "knows" is a claim to an awareness that is inextricably linked with God's concomitant behavior. In contrast to Pharaoh, who "knew (*yd'*) not Joseph" (1:8), and therefore disregarded any previous fidelity to Israel,

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particularism—is the line defended by John Collins, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology," in his rebuttal of Levenson. While Collins does rightly stress the context of creation (251), he does so not only in a way that mistakenly pits biblical traditions against one another, but fails to reckon with the ubiquitous role of Israel's election in the prophetic texts he cites. Levenson expounds these criticisms in his response essay, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology: A Rejoinder to John J. Collins."

[161] Exodus 22:21-23 makes this clear with language of "outcry": "Do not oppress or torment a resident alien for you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt. Do not oppress any widow or orphan. If you oppress them in any way so that they cry out to me, I will surely hear their outcry. And my anger will burn and I will kill you all with the sword, and your women will be widows and your sons orphans." Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 4-12, compares Israel's cry with the psalms of lament. The exodus was the formative experience which introduced Israel to a God who heard and responded to lament.

[162] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 172, who cites André Lacocque, *Le Devenir de Dieu* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1967), 69. See Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:332, for various textual emendations that attempt to solve what God knew.

[163] W. Schottroff, "ידע," *TLOT* 2:514: "The meaning of *yd'* in Hebr. would be insufficiently stated if one were to limit it strictly to the cognitive aspect delineated to this point without simultaneously taking into account the contextual aspect of the meaning, e.g., the fact that *yd'* does not merely indicate a theoretical relation, a pure act of thought, but that knowledge, as *yd'* intends it, is realized through practical involvement with the obj. of knowledge." Also, Fretheim, "יָדַע," *NIDOTTE* 2:410–11.

God's knowing generates and is generated by a self-involving compassion and commitment on behalf of Israel. "And God knew" bespeaks God's willful involvement. But what exactly does God know? The narrator holds the reader in suspense until Exod 3:7: "but I know their sufferings." More than Moses who has only seen (*r'h*) the (his?) people's burdensome labor (2:11)—and subsequently fled from Israel's situation—God has *surely* seen[164] the oppression *and* attained a deep perception of the community's sufferings. Thus, in comparison to Pharaoh's refusal to know and Moses's seeing, God chooses to hear, see, and know intimately and resolutely. I think Fretheim's conjecture is as perceptive as it is profound:

> God has so entered into their sufferings as to have deeply felt what they are having to endure . . . God is not portrayed as a typical monarch dealing with the issue through subordinates or at some distance. God does not look at the suffering from the outside as through a window; God knows it from the inside. God is internally related to the suffering, entering fully into the oppressive situation and making it God's own.[165]

That God is moved by the outcry of the powerless is a fundamental conviction that grows out of Israel's exodus experience. Israel will learn through the exodus event that God is a champion of justice for the vulnerable. But even before this, the story reveals the distinctive understanding that this God, Israel's God, first draws near in a devoted

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[164] The infinitive absolute intensifies the meaning of the verb. Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 47, reads into the addition of the infinitive absolute: "The doubled verb for seeing gives an impression of stereoscopic vision: a depth of field accessible only to Him. Most significantly, knowing they are the object of this penetrating comprehensive gaze frees the people from the invisibility of their Egyptian fate, of being submerged under the building. This sense of being seen is the pure experience of redemptive love."

[165] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 60. Cf. Ackerman, "Literary Context," 119, who reads 3:7-8 to explain YHWH's "hiddenness" as not absence but "hidden" in total identification with God's people in their powerlessness."

solidarity born of participative knowledge of human misery.[166] In short, God is not only *for* oppressed Israel but also *with* them.

These two triggers—the memory of the covenant and the plea for justice—working in conjunction, prompt God's involvement.[167] Exodus 1-2 (and Exodus as a whole) is able to hold both of these together because of the way both are positioned in a larger, creational framework. Exodus affirms Israel's uniqueness and privilege within

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[166] Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 112: "Such a radical divine identification with human suffering and the plight of the dispossessed at the heart of Israel's birth story makes understandable the constant return throughout the canon to themes of God's special regard for the powerless, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized." Also, see Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 88-89.

[167] Cf. Exod 6:5: "I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom Egypt is enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant." It is significant that these tandem motivations have already materialized together in YHWH's conversation with Abraham on the eve of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:17-33). Remarkably, Gen 18:20-21 shares common vocabulary with Exod 2:23-25 and 3:7-9: "YHWH said, "The outcry (*zə'āqâ*, a by-form of *ṣə'āqâ*) against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is so grave! I will go down (*yrd*) to see (*r'h*) if they have done altogether according to the outcry (*ṣə'āqâ*) that has come to me, if not, I will know (*yd'*). Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 51, catches the "almost identical" language. Just as in Exodus, the anguished plea for help in the face of injustice of Sodom and Gomorrah reaches the divine ears; human misery captures the divine eye. The echo of the same language in God's response to Israel's slavery reminds the reader of Exod 2-3 that injustice of whatever stripe triggers God's sympathy. In other words, covenantal membership in Israel is not a prerequisite to be heard by God. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 152, draws this conclusion: "It is this element of universalism that prevents the story of the exodus from degenerating into a religio-ethnic parochialism without a larger ethical message—just another tale of national liberation, though couched in theological language."

Yet, Gen 18 also emphasizes the covenantal trigger. YHWH is moved to bring judgment, but YHWH includes Abraham in the divine adjudication because of Abraham's role as the chosen, covenant partner (Gen 18:17-19). A mindfulness of the covenant precedes the judgment. Of course, YHWH's recollection of the promise made to Abraham does not motivate YHWH to judgment in the same way as in Exod 2-3. The circumstances are different. In Gen 18:17-21 YHWH alerts Abraham, the carrier of the blessing, to the cry of injustice in order that Abraham might better grasp his vocation to do and teach the divine justice. In Exod 2:23-25 and 3:7-9, God intercedes on behalf of the chosen people because they are the victims of injustice and cannot fulfill the blessing or carry forward their ancestral vocation. In both stories, though, God's concern for justice works in combination with God's promises to the ancestors. Underlining both stories is God's creational agenda of justice and righteousness which flows through the blessed people.

God's creation.[168] As heirs of the covenant, Israel is God's people (Exod 3:7), God's firstborn (Exod 4:22), and God's chosen (Gen 18:19; cf. Exod 19:4-6) who are to "go up" to the land.[169] Israel's specialness is underlined by the creational substructure we have already pointed to in Exod 1-2: they are the microcosm of redemption. Hence, ethnic Israel cannot be read out of the Exodus story.

But Israel is also an heir to the covenant that mediates creational blessing. They are God's creational platform through whom God declares his intention to bless the world. God's concern for Israel evidences a larger concern for creation, and such concern continues to draw God to the aid of Israel both in the exodus and beyond. This, too, is part and parcel of the creational background of Exod 1-2: there is a macrocosmic corollary to the microcosm of Israel. If Israel cannot be read out of the story, then neither is Israel all of the story. The creational frame does not subsume but situates Israel.[170]

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[168] And Israel's uniqueness is not wholly reducible to an instrumental understanding of Israel's calling. A thoroughgoing "missionizing" of Israel's election is a particular modern Protestant deduction, on which see Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, 3-91. Joel S. Kaminsky, "Election Theology and the Problem of Universalism," *HBT* 33 (2011): 41, cautions against such a reading: "Yet, within the Bible, God never discloses the total meaning of his unique relationship to Israel and several seminal passages ground this relationship in the mystery of God's special love for the patriarchs and their later descendants, the nation of Israel (e.g., Deut 7:7-8). The God of the Hebrew Bible has an ongoing relationship with his people Israel, and thus, one needs to be cautious in employing the metaphor of service in a heavy-handed fashion that ignores the relational elements at the root of Israel's election." Israel's chosenness has a missional dimension, but this dimension cannot mute other rationales. Israel does have a role of service, but Israel's chosenness is privilege that cannot be fully explained by the logic of service. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 41-52, helpfully interprets election in the logic of love, which involves the corollary of service (without marking "service" as the core of election).

[169] In other words, there is a "preferential option" for Israel. Yet, the fact God is *with* and *for* Israel symbolizes that God is *with* and *for* the world.

[170] Creation does not trump election (*pace* Kneirim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 452), but creation does foreground election and contributes to its teleology. The creational framework, therefore, opens the way for a wider re-appropriation of God's redemption of Israel. In order to transcend the historical particularism, one must go through Israel (or perhaps better,

God's prior history recorded in Genesis with creation and the chosen family's place within it shapes the backdrop to God's response to the chosen in Exodus.

3.4 EXODUS 3-4

The situation has turned in Egypt. Now, God calls Moses to be an emissary to bring the people out. What follows in the next two chapters is the most elaborate and archetypical commissioning of a messenger in the Hebrew Bible.[171] Not since Gen 18 has there been such sustained dialogue between God and a human being.[172] If Exod 2 focuses on the character and identity of Moses, then Exod 3-4 revolves around the character and identity of YHWH. Nonetheless, the flow of the conversation illustrates the seriousness with which YHWH regards Moses and his participation in the divine plan. YHWH treats Moses's questions and reluctance—a series of five objections (3.11, 13; 4.1, 10, 13)—with long-suffering sincerity.[173] At the close of the exchange, YHWH even astoundingly adapts the divine agenda to mollify Moses's remonstrance (4:13-16). The last half of chapter four narrates Moses's (perilous!) sojourn back to Egypt, ending with his first—

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with Israel)—and not over—to broach the paradigmatic quality of the exodus. So, it is not quite the case that the chosenness of Israel "dominates" in Exod 2:23-25, as Levenson would have it ("Exodus and Liberation," 153). Such a reading does not give enough weight to how creation integrally forms the backdrop in Exod 1-2 for the focus on Israel.

[171] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 91. For more on the form of this call narrative, see Coats, *Exodus 1-18*, 34-42.

[172] Rendtorff, "Canonical Moses," 17. And like Abraham, the encounter is pedagogical for Moses.

[173] Cf. similar comments of Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 94, and Fretheim, *Exodus*, 56-58. Greenberg, 92-93, has a nice layout of the flow of the narrative (cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 71).

and seemingly successful—meeting with the Israelite slaves. In the following I briefly take up two matters arising in the encounters of Exod 3-4 which are germane to my discussion: Moses's identity "education" in light of YHWH's call and the second attempt on Moses's life.[174] These two issues each contribute to Exodus's construal of justice inasmuch as they also ready Moses (and the reader) for the events to follow in the rest of Exodus.

3.4.1 YHWH, Moses, and Identity

Moses roams farther than usual "beyond the wilderness" (3:1)[175] and arrives at Horeb, the mountain of God.[176] Upon seeing and inspecting a bizarre flaming bush, Moses enters into a protracted conversation with the holy God of Genesis.[177] YHWH's opening statements in vv. 7-10, echoing 2:24-25, inform Moses of the divine plan to redress the abuses of "my people"[178] (3:7a; 10b) Israel by bringing them out of Egypt to

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[174] I postpone for the following chapter other pertinent subjects impending on the issue of justice that are broached in Exod 3-4 but reappear later in the narrative. For example, I will discuss subsequently: (1) worship (*ʿăbōdâ*) as the stated goal of the Exodus (3:12b, 18); (2) the wonders YHWH performs in Egypt and Pharaoh's recalcitrance (3:19-20; 4:21-23); and (3) the plundering of the Egyptians (3:21-22).

[175] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 68.

[176] The setting is creationally significant. There was in the ancient Near East a "cosmic mountain" tradition associating mountains with the home of a god. The mountain was the place where heaven and earth connected, a sacred place of encounter with the god. Often, temples were built on the site in order to provide a sanctuary of worship to the god (cf. Exod 15:17). See further Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, HSM 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[177] The continuity with Genesis is underlined by God's self-introduction in 3:6 (cf. Gen 26:24; 28:13; 31:5, 42; 32:10; 46:3). The initial exchange (3:7-9) parallels Gen 46:1-5. Notice the repetition of the divine name *Elohim* before each patriarchal name.

[178] Rendtorff, "Canonical Moses," 16, notes this is the first place in the Hebrew Bible that God uses this expression. Greenberg, *Exodus*, 99, comments that God's possessive of care, "my

their own land. Importantly, YHWH has already come down and seen (vv. 7-9). Moses's commission is not investigative; rather, he will go to Egypt to join YHWH who has already come down among the people's anguish (e.g., v. 16) to arrange for their promised ascent.[179] After listening to YHWH's initiative, Moses questions his selection—"Who am I . . . ?"—which reminds readers of his failures in Egypt and underlines his own uncertainty over his identity in light of YHWH's enterprise.[180] YHWH redirects Moses's objection by assuring him "I will be with you" (v. 12). YHWH's answer leads Moses away from his fears and beckons for his faith in YHWH's accompaniment.[181] This places the burden not on Moses's confused identity, past floundering, or present inabilities but on the divine identity, initiative, and power to bring about the new future for Israel through Moses. Indeed, YHWH's promised "with you" is an inclusio to the conversation, encircling Moses's apprehension (cf. 4:12; 15).[182]

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people, sons of Israel," counters Pharaoh's declaration of hostility, "the people, sons of Israel," in 1:9. Exodus is not about the divine election of the people of Israel—their chosen status is a foregone conclusion (cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 59).

[179] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 34: "Pain . . . is precisely where God situates himself." Jewish midrash already saw the bush as a sign of God's participation in the people's suffering; see Louis Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews: Volume Two: From Joseph to the Exodus*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), 256.

[180] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:360-61, surveys a variety of ways to understand Moses's first objection, which is unexplained in the text. I am inclined to interpret Moses's first objection in line with the confusion over his identity which the previous stories highlight. I do not, however, think this explanation has to exhaust Moses's rationale for his assertion. A solid case can be made that Moses is daunted by the enormity of the task and wishes to evade YHWH's commission (e.g., Childs, *Exodus*, 73-74). Thus, Moses's question expresses his doubt about his capacity for the mission, but I think his anxiety is rooted in a deeper existential crisis that has been a theme of the previous chapter.

[181] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 55-65, shows that in the Old Testament the phrase "I will be with you" is not simply reassurance but a promise of help in dangerous circumstances, given to someone who appears unequal for the task to be done.

[182] Ibid., 54-55.

But YHWH's counter to Moses's "Who am I?" with "I will be with you" understandably leads Moses to question "Who are you?" (v. 13).[183] YHWH's ensuing response has evoked an extensive history of scholarly interpretation, one that I will not engage here except to make a few observations salient to my concerns.[184] God opens with the phrase "*'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*" (v. 14). The repeated imperfect verb *'ehyeh* is likely best read as the future active tense of the root *hyh*, picking up the previous context of v. 12a—"I will be (*hyh*) with you."[185] Hence, the expression is translated "I will be who I will be." This is not the sacred name, but a trailer statement before God reveals the divine tetragrammaton "YHWH" (v. 15).[186] The preliminary phrase (an *idem per idem* idiom) functions both to emphasize God's sovereign authority and freedom[187] and to point

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[183] Ibid., 76: "I will be with you" is a weak promise unless we know who the promiser is." I will return to the promise of the sign in the second half of v. 12 in the next chapter. At the moment, notice that in v. 13 Moses refers to "the God of *your* ancestors." Moses is still equivocating on his relationship to Israel and to this God (cf. v. 6a). Moses's question is best understood as a request for a personal name, which he will need as an emissary to Egypt (cf. 5:1-2; see ibid., 82).

[184] Ibid., 80-90, gives a lucid and succinct discussion of the options in interpretation; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:94-100. For extensive coverage see most recently Robert J. Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton: Western Christians and the Hebrew Name of God: From the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century*, SHCT 179 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[185] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 83. Gowan notes God occurs as the subject of the verbal root *hyh* 29 times, and in all but six of these, the verb has a future tense. The verb form occurs 9 times in the formula "I will be with you" and 11 times in the formula "I will be your God and you will be my people." Graham I. Davies, "The Exegesis of the Divine Name," in *The God of Israel*, ed. Robert P. Gordon, UCOP 64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 151: "It is natural to see the words of verse 14, not apart from that statement [v. 12], but rather using it to unpack (by etymology that may or may not be authentic) the deep significance for the Exodus tradition of the name 'YHWH' itself."

[186] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 83; Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 39-40.

[187] Jack R. Lundbom, "God's Use of the *idem per idem* to Terminate Debate," *HTR* 71 (1978): 193-201, is a well-reasoned defense of this aspect of YHWH's answer. Also see Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1978), 20-21;

toward God's manifest actions as providing the content for an understanding of God's identity.[188] Moses wants a handle on God's identity; God replies by declaring his identity inexhaustible but nonetheless accessible in his deeds.[189]

The divine tetragrammaton, YHWH, is disclosed in 3:15. The most common view is that the grammatical form "YHWH" is the third masculine singular imperfect of the root *hyh.* The verbal character of the name again places the emphasis foremost on YHWH's action and only secondarily on his essence.[190] In other words, the significance of the name "YHWH" is best discerned by looking at YHWH's activity, especially as it will be forthcoming in the engagements in Egypt to which YHWH calls Moses.[191] Immediately, though, YHWH twice connects the divine name to YHWH's past conduct in the history of the ancestors (vv. 15b, 16; cf. 3:6; 6:3-8). Thus, the name "YHWH" is to evoke for Moses

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Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:95. However, contrary to part of Lundbom's thesis, YHWH's answer does not terminate the debate nor does it appear that it is an obscuration, on which see Childs, *Exodus*, 75-76.

[188] Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology*, 21; Childs, *Exodus*, 76. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 337, captures this thought winsomely: "So YHWH's name suggests that YHWH may or can or will be anything that is appropriate or needed, or that YHWH decides to be. The giving of the name and the spelling out of its implications is thus both a revelation and a comment on the impossibility of offering a revelation. It is more like an open-ended promise. Whatever happens in the future, God will be there with Israel, and out of an infinitely resourced being, God will be what the situation requires."

[189] He can be addressed but not possessed (see Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 84).

[190] Cf. 4:12, 15; 6:7; 29:45; Gen 17:8; 26:3; 31:3; see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 135; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:72; Gowan, *Theology of Exodus*, 83.

[191] Childs, *Exodus*, 76. Cf. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 187: "In Israel there was less interest in the etymological significance of the divine name than in the concrete content which it conveyed, and which was to be deduced from quite a different source, namely the demonstrations in history of the power of its owner." YHWH's actions are also the focus of the name in the "recommissioning" of Moses in 6:2-8. There is substantial overlap with what YHWH has already told Moses in Exod 3-4, but in Exod 6 YHWH makes it even clearer that YHWH wishes to be known in connection with the exodus (in contrast to the revelation to the patriarchs).

and Israel the divine commitment to the covenant established with Israel's ancestors—to be with and for their people—"for every and all generations" (v. 15d).[192] Though YHWH is inexhaustible (v. 14), YHWH, who was with the ancestors, now "attends carefully" (*pqd*)[193] to Israel in Egypt in a way that means to make good on the covenantal trajectory (v. 16). "With respect to the patriarchs, God was the maker of promises;" with respect to Israel, God now "will be known, also, as the fulfiller of these promises."[194] The God of the ancestors now ties his identity to the new thing about to be accomplished in Israel's ascent out of Egypt.[195]

YHWH's patient refusal to simply override Moses's continual objections reveals YHWH intends the conversation for more than the enlistment of an envoy to Egypt. Though YHWH has been hitherto submerged in silence in Moses's and Israel's experience, in the bush YHWH surfaces to announce the divine identity such that Moses is summoned

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[192] Commentators are divided on whether Moses's inquiry and YHWH's response means that Israel does or does not know the divine name. I am inclined to the latter option, but the issue is finally unresolved in the narrative (Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 79, calls it "one of the enigmas of the book"). Regardless, Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:95-96, conjectures that the name adds nothing immediately new. Rather, God connects the name to the ancestors. "Within the context of the book of Exodus this means that He is the God who is involved in the plight of the people. Within the wider context it means that Moses can report to the Israelites that God is with the People just as He was with the patriarchs . . . 'Being with' was a characteristic trait of the god of the fathers." Cf. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 714: "Old memory contains everything Israel needs to know."

[193] The verbal root, *pqd*, has a remarkable semantic range (see *HALOT* 3:957-58). The verb frequently denotes judicial rectification, more often negative (i.e., retribution; cf. Exod 20:5; 32:34; 34:7) than positive. In our context the verb is an echo of Joseph's avowal in Gen 50:24 (cf. Exod 13:19), which carries a sense of careful examination on the way toward imminent, favorable action (cf. its use with *r'h* in Exod 4:31). W. Schottroff, "פקד," *TLOT* 2:1023-24, locates this sense within the wider ancient Near Eastern environment to refer to the gods responsibility for ruling their domain; cf. Tyler F. Williams, "פָּקַד," *NIDOTTE* 3:656-58.

[194] Kürle*, The Appeal of the Exodus*, 42.

[195] This becomes more explicit in YHWH's reassurance of Moses in 6:2-8.

(with full integrity) to locate his own self-understanding within the unfolding divine plan. Moses's lack of identity and dissent from YHWH's purposes provides the starting point in Exodus for the explicit unfolding of YHWH's nature and plan.[196] Exodus 3-4 draws forth the current that has been flowing in the subtext through the first two chapters: what will happen will be about YHWH's creational agenda. The divine commission to a befuddled and querulous Moses functions for him as "identity-orienting" education into the character and purpose of YHWH.[197] Whereas Exod 2 deconstructed Moses, his commission by YHWH in chs. 3-4 aims to reconstruct Moses as the leader of Israel by turning the focus to the authorizing power of YHWH which will uphold him (and ultimately define him).[198] YHWH's answers to Moses's objections are not the dismissal of Moses's identity and abilities (or lack thereof). It is their relativization by revelation.

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[196] On which see Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 64-69. It is Moses's uncertainty about his own abilities, even his own identity vis-à-vis the people of Israel, that leads to a fuller revelation of God.

[197] YHWH knows it will be necessary to continue to teach (*yrh*) Moses (and Aaron) through the entire process (4:12, 15). Moses learns to trust as he grows more confident in his identity in the process. At this point, he is finally not sure of the whole project (note the reason he gives to Jethro in 4:18), but he goes nonetheless. This is another way that Moses leads/anticipates Israel. Aaron's presence, which recedes in the background in the plague narrative as Moses grows into his role, can be understood to underline the pedagogical nature of YHWH's intent. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 90, points out Aaron's epithet, "the Levite" (4:14), looks ahead to the clerical service of the tribe (32:39; Deut 10:8). A Levite's role "was to be teacher and mediator to the people of God's revelation to Moses" (Lev 10:11; Deut 24:8). Aaron is fashioned here as (and prefigures) an archetypal teacher of revelation, "and that more for the benefit of the hearer (who could immediately perceive the reference to the later role) than for Moses." Aaron, thus, stands as a symbol for the ongoing and YHWH-appointed task to educate Israel about YHWH's action and revelation to Moses.

[198] Moses will need reassurance again after his initial and unsuccessful exchange with Pharaoh in Egypt (5:22-6:13). Throughout the conversation with YHWH at the bush, Moses's primary concern is not with Pharaoh's defiance but Israel's doubt. The signs of 4:1-9 are meant for the people as well as Moses (though cf. 4:21). Hence, Moses's objections presage similar reluctance on Israel's part (e.g., 5:21). Israel, too, will need an "identity-orienting" education, and this will come through the events of the exodus and beyond.

YHWH means to re-narrate Moses (and Israel) within the larger story of YHWH's creational power and agenda.[199] YHWH's summons initiates the divine pedagogy.

3.4.2 A Second Attempt on Moses's Life

Moses starts back to Egypt still with misgivings of the task and not yet fully settled in his identity.[200] Upon Moses's return journey to Egypt with his family, the text takes an unexpected and shocking twist. During a night encampment, YHWH "met him and sought to kill him."[201] Moses is saved by Zipporah's timely circumcision of her son

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[199] Commentators debate the exact nature of Moses's protest that he is "heavy of mouth and tongue" (see options in Jeffrey H. Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue': On Moses' Speech Difficulty," *BASOR* 231 (1978): 57-68). On how the issue of identity is entwined in Moses's "heavy" mouth, see also Nyasha Junior and Jeremy Schipper, "Mosaic Disability and Identity in Exodus 4:10; 6:12, 30," *BibInt* 16 (2008): 428-41. Moses "heavy" mouth looks ahead to Pharaoh's "heavy" heart. Both will be objects that reveal the creational power of YHWH but also YHWH's desire to work with his creation to effect his purposes (cf. 4:11!) In other words, Moses and Pharaoh have something in common, a "heaviness" that potentially renders them recalcitrant to YHWH's will. But they respond to YHWH's creational power in opposite ways. Scott B. Noegel, "Moses and Magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus," *JANES* 24 (1996): 54-55, offers an intriguing parallel with Egyptian magical texts. Egyptian magicians are associated with eloquent speech, and in magical texts "'magic' frequently appears as a synonym for . . . "god's words." This adds significance to Moses's charge to speak to Pharaoh as "God" (4:16; 7:1). More on this in the next chapter.

[200] Moses does not directly respond to YHWH's commission in 4:17, leaving the reader wondering how convinced he is by YHWH. Moses tells Jethro, "Let me go return to my brothers who are in Egypt to see if they are yet alive" (4:18). His concealment of the bush encounter from Jethro discloses that he is still not wholly persuaded. The fact, too, YHWH reasserts the charge in 4:21 likely also betrays Moses's hesitations. Moreover, the fact Moses has not circumcised his son—which will be divulged in 4:25—is evidence that he has not embraced fully his Israelite kinship. His uncircumcised firstborn is a witness to Moses's equivocation on his status as part of YHWH's firstborn (4:22). Cf. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 81-85. Athena E. Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity: An Ethical Reading of Exodus 4,* BSI 86 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 151-223, passim, argues cogently Exodus 4:18-26 is a liminal experience in Moses's transition to a new identity.

[201] The most natural antecedent for "him" is Moses and not Moses's son because the section concerns Moses's return to Egypt. Cf. comments of Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity*, 189-90.

when she touches the foreskin to his feet, or genitals (Moses's or his son's?). She declares cryptically, "you are *ḥătan-dāmîm* (traditionally: "a bloody bridegroom") to me" (v. 25). YHWH withdraws from the engagement, and Zipporah adds again, "A *ḥătan dāmîm* because of the circumcision" (v. 26).

The nocturnal skirmish is enigmatic, to say the least. It has elicited a host of different interpretations because of several (finally) insurmountable unknowns in this brief pericope.[202] A reading attuned to the themes I have traced thus far, nonetheless, can yield a few reasonable observations that suggestively advance the story. First, YHWH is not the first to seek Moses's life. YHWH's aggression in 4:24 is reminiscent of Pharaoh's manhunt for Moses in 2:15, and the narrative brings this back into focus in 4:19 shortly before the YHWH-Moses confrontation.[203] YHWH's attack, hence, can be feasibly inferred as connected to Moses's murder of an Egyptian.[204] William Propp suggests that in the Israelite imagination, Moses's homicide requires atonement, especially as he is about to

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[202] Thus, I am wary to place too much weight on my interpretation. Nonetheless, because it seemingly involves a potential act of injustice on the part of YHWH, I feel compelled to address it. Aside from the puzzling content, the lack of proper names with the presence of antecedents make the grammar of the passage ambiguous. John T. Willis, *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict: The Role of Exodus 4:24-26 in the Book of Exodus* (Bern: Lang, 2010), provides a survey of forty different approaches to the passage. The differences likely reveal that the ambiguity is quite deliberate, drawing the listener to consider the multi-valence of the passage.

[203] Pharaoh "seeks (*bqš*) to kill (*hrg*)" (2:15), "those are dead (*mwt*) who were seeking (*bqš*) your life" (4:19), and YHWH "seeks (*bqš*) to kill (*mwt*)" (4:24). This is noted by Lawrence Kaplan. "'And the Lord Sought to Kill Him' (Exod 4:24): Yet Once Again," *HAR* 5 (1981): 69-70. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 218-19, insightfully notes the *hiphil* of *mwt*, used in 4:24, can be synonymous with "kill" but often has judicial overtones of "execute" (Gen 18:25; Num 35:19; 2 Sam 14:7).

[204] See P. Middlekoop, "The Significance of the Story of the 'Bloody Bridegroom' (Ex 4 24-26)," *SEAJT* 8 (1966/67): 34-38; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 233-38. YHWH's motive is unstated. Moses's homicide of the Egyptian is the only thing actually mentioned in the text that might merit a death sentence.

return to the locale of the crime.[205] This supposition might seem specious, but Propp adds plausibility for his case by arguing that Zipporah's mysterious utterance is better understood, "you are a bridegroom of blood*guilt*," meaning, "a bridegroom who has shed blood."[206] Thus, Zipporah somehow discerns Moses's unexpiated and unjust crime of shedding blood. In response, Zipporah circumcises her son and applies the blood to Moses. The rite of circumcision appears (mysteriously) to have some vicarious, protective, perhaps even redemptive effect for Moses.[207] Moses is once again saved by the bravery and quick wits of a woman. Satisfied, YHWH leaves him alone. Moses can now return to Egypt, exempt (absolved?) of his past misdeed, in order to announce Pharaoh's injustice and YHWH's commensurate response (4:23).[208]

Second, it is also reasonable to assume the story portrays the galvanization of Moses's identity as YHWH's emissary.[209] The liminal encounter foreshadows the paschal event. The record of the night attack comes on the heels of YHWH's rehearsal of the

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[205] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 234-35. See his brief review of homicide and its redress in Israel's Scripture. He also suggests that by fleeing to Midian, Moses has in essence been granted asylum that will in the promised land be the function of the six cities of refuge (e.g., Num 35:9-34). Jonathan P. Burnside, "Exodus and Asylum: Uncovering the Relationship between Biblical Law and Narrative," *JSOT* 34 (2010): 243-66, adds detail support for this claim, but also interestingly contends that Israel's flight into desert is a collective experience of asylum-seeking (252-54). If so, then we have one more example of how Moses's life prefigures Israel.

[206] The fact that the nominal "blood" (*dām*) occurs in the plural (*dāmîm*) suggests "bloodguilt" and not merely "blood," so Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 219-20; 234-35; more extensively see William H. Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus IV 24-6)," *VT* (1993): 496-97, n. 10; 501-503; cf. *HALOT* 1:225.

[207] On the expiatory virtue of circumcision, see Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 236.

[208] Israel is YHWH's firstborn, yet Pharaoh will not release them. So, in language that evokes the judicial principle of *lex talionis*, YHWH will slay Pharaoh's firstborn. I will return to this speech in the next chapter.

[209] Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 79-84; Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity*, 194-197.

demands Moses will declare to Pharaoh. The speech portends the death of the firstborn in Egypt (and consequentially the institution of Passover; 11:4-12:32). Indeed, Zipporah's action of applying (*ng'*) the blood to Moses (v. 25) is the same word for what the Israelites are to do with the blood of the paschal lamb: they are to apply (*ng'*) it to their lintel and doorposts (12:22). The sign of the blood will protect the inhabitants from YHWH as he passes through Egypt (12:23). The firstborn males who participate in the Passover are required to bear the sign of the covenant, i.e, circumcision (12:43-49; cf. Josh 5:2-11). Zipporah's circumcision of her son is therefore layered with significance. Not only does her act protect her "bridegroom of bloodguilt," but she also rectifies another outstanding failure on Moses's part: to identify his family with Israel by circumcising the firstborn (e.g., Gen 17:10-14).[210] YHWH's envoy, Moses, now goes as one whose own family bears the mark of the ancestral covenant.[211] When he meets Aaron at the mountain of God (4:27-28), Moses appears resolute about his commission.[212] And he is shortly accepted by the community (4:29-31).[213]

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[210] Cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 100-1. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 155, observes the verb describing Zipporah's action is not the expected *mwl*, "circumcise," but *krt*, "cut," which also describes the act of making, or "cutting," a covenant (cf. Gen 15:18; Exod 34:27). The fact Moses's son is uncircumcised can be seen, then, to point to Moses's own reluctance to embrace his identity. Also see Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity*, 206-209.

[211] Moses is now a full member of the community of YHWH's "firstborn son" (4:23). Moses need not dither about his identity any longer, especially because YHWH has made it clear He will kill Pharaoh's firstborn (i.e., Egyptians). The night encounter may also be an effort to bring this dangerous truth to Moses's full attention. David Pettit, "When the LORD Seeks to Kill Moses: Reading Exodus 4.24-26 in its Literary Context," *JSOT* 40 (2015): 171-72, highlights the parallels this story has to Gen 22 and 32, which are also stories of identity.

[212] At least he is forthcoming to Aaron about his reasons for return, unlike his less than honest explanation to Jethro (4:18).

[213] Although Israel will have its doubts about Moses's commitments and loyalties in short order (5:21), it does not appear Moses again questions his Israelite *identity* in Exodus. He

3.5 CONCLUSION

Exodus 1-4 looks backward and forward. Its backward gaze casts the events in Exodus as a continuation and (partial) fulfillment of YHWH's creational trajectory established in Genesis. Its forward glance foreshadows how the events to come will carry through this creational trajectory,[214] all the while showing how the daring conduct of several women and the early life and call of Moses anticipate the redemption YHWH will enact. The following offers a summary of main points in this chapter:

- Through a number of inner-biblical echoes with Genesis, the beginning of Exodus presents Israel as a microcosm for YHWH's wider agenda in the world. Israel bears the promises and responsibilities of the covenant. What happens to Israel, therefore, carries cosmic ramifications.
- By oppressing Israel—YHWH's creational emissary of blessing—Pharaoh and his Egypt set themselves in opposition to YHWH's design for creation. The narrative elicits a symbolic, even metahistorical reading by casting Pharaoh and Egypt as anticreational forces that challenge YHWH's order.
- Israel experiences vulnerability and powerlessness in Egyptian slavery, which threaten to undercut and overwhelm Israel's role as YHWH's chosen people. The creational texture of the narrative shapes Israel's plight as a cosmic injustice, preparing the reader to see the coming redemptive events as not only a righting of

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certainly identifies with Israel before Pharaoh (note the first person language used throughout the plague narrative, e.g., 8:10 [6], 26-27 [22-23]).

[214] Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 72-76, explores the foreshadowing in more detail. He argues Exod 1-4 function as a "prologue" to the rest of Exodus.

wrongs, but, even more, a renewing act of YHWH's creational agenda.

- The bold behavior of the Hebrew midwives, the Egyptian princess, and Moses's mother and sister thwart the mighty Pharaoh. Their actions expose the ironic failure of Pharaoh's ill-fated policies. Pharaoh works against God's nature and purposes interwoven in creation; in so doing, he works against the grain of the cosmos. Despite the violent ethos of Egypt, the women, especially the midwives and princess, illustrate the (marginalized) sense and practice of creational justice still alive in Egypt.
- Moses's birth narrative and early life connect the ambiguity over identity with the ethics of justice. The zeitgeist of Egypt has marred both Moses and Israel. The pilgrimage of identity and moral development Moses goes through—from Egypt to Midian—knits him more fully into the fabric of the ancestral covenant. Furthermore, Moses's life anticipates the journey Israel will make toward YHWH's redemption and ethical formation as a community.
- Israel cries out. The human cry of injustice pulls God out of silence even as the memory of the covenant pushes God to commence the plan of deliverance.[215] The "push-pull" effect, when viewed through the lens of creation, holds together the chosenness of Israel and God's concern for justice. The purposes of God embrace but are not exhausted by Israel. YHWH has a creational agenda that puts Israel's chosenness into perspective.

[215] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 274, suggests the helpful "push-pull" imagery.

- God calls Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses's uncertainty about himself and the proposed task provides the backdrop for God's fuller revelation of the divine purpose and power. God's giving of the name "YHWH" indicates God wishes to communicate personal participation with, faithful availability to, and powerful advocacy of Israel in a way that has hitherto not been known by them. YHWH's revelation to Moses nurtures Moses toward a new identity. It is Zipporah who clinches Moses's new identity in the circumcision of her son. The journey of identity as told by Exodus is neither a story ultimately about Moses or Israel but a narrative about the character of YHWH.

The events in Exod 1-4 prepare for the revelation of YHWH's creational justice in Egypt. As Abraham's descendants, Israel is charged with doing and teaching "justice and righteousness" for the blessing of the world (Gen 18:17-19). Pharaoh has not only impeded Israel's calling; his oppression threatens to eradicate Israel's identity. This struggle is played out in microcosm in the life of Moses, whose struggle to practice justice is correlated with his confusion over his identity. When Moses encounters YHWH, he is gradually drawn back into YHWH's orbit. By the end of Exod 4, he is poised to declare YHWH's justice to Pharaoh. In the following chapters I explore how YHWH (re)asserts the divine agenda with power in Egypt. In so doing, YHWH reclaims and begins to reshape Israel for his creational purposes.

4. JUSTICE CHAMPIONED: EXODUS 5-15

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Exodus 1-4 sets the stage for the captivating confrontation between YHWH and Pharaoh in Egypt narrated in Exod 5-15. Before a newly commissioned Moses returns to Pharaoh's territory, YHWH anticipates to Moses both the hostile nature and lethal outcome of his assignment in Egypt:

> Then you and the elders of Israel go to the king of Egypt and say to them: "YHWH, God of the Hebrews has met us, and now, let us go a three days journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to YHWH our God." But I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go except by a strong hand.[1] So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in its midst, after which, he will send you out. (3:18-20)

> YHWH said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your hand, but I will strengthen his heart and he will not send the people out. Then say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says YHWH: My firstborn son is Israel. I have said to you: "Send out my son so that he may worship me," but if you refuse to send him out, indeed, I will slay your firstborn son.'" (4:21-23)

In order to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, YHWH orchestrates a power encounter that will showcase a series of divine wonders in Egypt. In the plagues and at the sea, as we will see, YHWH declares through the natural order that Pharaoh's maintenance of "justice

[1] The translation "except by a strong hand" assumes (with the next verse) YHWH is referring to divine pressure that will eventually force Pharaoh to release the people (cf. 7:4-5; 6:1; with the LXX and 4QExod). The Hebrew text is admittedly difficult and open to different interpretations, on which see Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:377-79. For a succinct argument in favor of my translation, see David Rolph Seely, "The Image of the Hand of God in the Book of Exodus," in *God's Word for our World: Volume One: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., JSOTSup 388 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 41-44; cf. Peter Addinall, "Exodus iii 19b and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative," *VT* 49 (1999): 289–300; Jean Louis Ska, "Note sur la traduction de *welo'* en Exode iii 19b," *VT* 44 (1994): 60–65.

and righteousness" is bankrupt. At the same time, YHWH's spectacular deliverance of Israel brings the broken creation back into alignment with YHWH's creational agenda. The narrative underlines the educational function of YHWH's mighty deeds, viz., YHWH intends that the wonders prevail upon Pharaoh to obey the divine command to send out the Israelites. The primary attention of the narrative, consequently, shifts from Moses's development and pedagogy vis-á-vis YHWH's agenda (chs. 2-4) to Pharaoh's repeated failure to learn and respond rightly to the God of the Hebrews (chs. 7-11). Israel, too, is called to mark out its relationship with YHWH on the doorposts in the final plague. When the struggle with Egypt reaches its climax at the sea, Pharaonic Egypt meets its final demise by the creational power of Israel's warrior king. The section closes with Israel's poetic celebration of YHWH's just triumph over the historical and cosmic enemy.

For many contemporary commentators, YHWH's modus operandi in delivering Israel from bondage presents a distinct challenge to a sympathetic (even less, a paradigmatic) interpretation of Exodus which highlights justice for the vulnerable.[2] For example, neither YHWH's bombardment of Egypt with wonders, YHWH's "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart, nor YHWH's final attack against the Egyptian firstborn—on their face—appears to be compatible with a tenable ethic promoting justice for the poor. In the present chapter I will explicate the motif of justice in Exod 5-15 on its own narrative terms, giving particular consideration to those issues and texts that provoke ethical unease among interpreters. On the whole I will continue to trace out what and how these

[2] E.g., Lyle Eslinger, "Freedom or Knowledge? Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1-15)," *JSOT* (1991): 43-60, esp. 58-60; Pleins, *Social Visions*, 171-72; McCarthy, "The Characterization of YHWH, the God of Israel," 6-20; Houston, *Justice*, 57-58.

chapters add to a theological account of YHWH's justice in Exodus by both carrying forward the creational topos already established in Exod 1-4 and exploring other prominent themes raised in the story, not the least of which is the motif of YHWH's pedagogical intentions.

4.2 EXODUS 5-6

4.2.1 "Send out my people so that they may serve me."

The warm reception Moses and Aaron receive from the Israelite slave community upon their arrival in Egypt (4:29-31) quickly grows cold after a failed first meeting with Pharaoh (5:20-21). Relations begin to deteriorate when Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh with a pointed, prophetic message: "Thus says YHWH God of Israel: Send out my people so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness."[3] They relay YHWH's terse order, a demand they announce seven times in their negotiations (5:1; 7:16; 8:1 [7:26]; 8:20 [16]; 9:1, 13; 10:3).[4] The imperative "Send out my people" entails both command and claim. The command "send out" (*piel* imperative of *šlḥ*) indicates in these contexts the release of the Israelites from Pharaoh's power or authority, precisely because of the polemical claim that the Israelites are YHWH's people.[5] Hence, the command "send

[3] The pair's opening line, "Thus says YHWH," is a prophetic formula and follows from Moses's prophetic commission in Exod 3-4 (Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 98-106). This formula continues throughout (e.g., 7:17; 8:1 [7:26]; 8:20 [16]; 9:1, 13). Given their prophetic mantle, Pharaoh soon accuses Moses and Aaron of false prophecy in 5:9c = "do not look to ways of deceit (*šeqer*; cf. similar use of *šeqer* in Jer 5:31; 14:14; 20:6).

[4] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 252.

[5] Daube, *The Exodus Pattern*, 29-30; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:115; William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses: Explaining the Lord's Action in the Exodus Plague Narrative*, PBM (Milton

out *my people*" stipulates something more than a humanitarian bidding for the emancipation of a slave class.[6] YHWH means to reclaim what, or rather who, is rightfully YHWH's out from under the fraudulent rule of Pharaoh (cf. 4:22).[7] In sending the people out, Pharaoh must accede to YHWH's just ownership of Egypt's Hebrew slave populace.

"Send out my people" does not complete the divine mandate.[8] YHWH's command and claim delivered to Pharaoh is *always* followed throughout the plague narrative by a purpose clause indicating the goal of service to YHWH. The most frequent (and compact) form of the motive phrase is "so that they may serve (*'bd*) me."[9] YHWH's prerogative is to

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Keynes: Paternoster, 2006) 31-34. The distinction between "my [YHWH's] people" and "your [Pharaoh's] people" becomes a heightened theme as the narrative progresses (e.g., 8:2-4 [7:27-29]; 8:21-23 [17-19]; 9:4; 10:4-6.) See further Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 86-94.

[6] We should not import a modern concept of freedom into the various expressions used to depict Israel's release. Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 38-39, although commenting on a different verbal root to describe the exodus—*yṣ'*, "to go out/bring out"—observes many English versions persist in translating the word with the verb "go free." Her comments are apropos to our discussion: "That 'bringing out' is not synonymous for 'liberating' is indicated by the jarring juxtaposition in the NJPS of the announcements that the LORD 'freed' the Israelites from Egypt (12.51) and that every firstborn *belongs* to God (13.2). This hardly sounds like freedom as usually construed."

[7] Cf. Daube, *The Exodus Pattern*, 42-43. Thus, I am baffled by Brueggemann's, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 31, characterization of Israel's place in the plot as "necessary, but almost accidental" to what he regards as the paramount theme of God's claim to omnipotence (on which Brueggemann approvingly cites Eslinger, "Freedom or Knowledge?" 43-60). Such an assessment grates against one of the text's main rationales for YHWH's intervention: Israel is to go forth out of Egypt for service to YHWH. One side effect of Brueggemann's reading is to reduce the text to a socio-economic tract about the practice of justice (see his comments on p. 29). Brueggemann is right to point out the convergence in Israel between the exodus and the practice of justice. Nonetheless, his explication of Israel's practice of justice apart from Israel's fundamental role in YHWH's creational agenda runs the risk of bifurcating that practice of justice from the larger, orienting perspective of YHWH-service.

[8] Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 144, fittingly observes that to summarize the exodus with the popular slogan "let my people go" misses half the challenge delivered to Pharaoh.

[9] See 7:16; 8:1 [7:26]; 8:20 [16]; 9:1, 13; 10:3. Variations on this purpose clause appear early in the negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh as "to celebrate a festival" (5:1) or "to offer

enlist Israel into the divine service (*ʿăbōdâ*). "Service" in its various lexical forms (verbal root "to serve" = *ʿbd*; "servant"=*ʿebed*; "service" = *ʿăbōdâ*) is another of the central

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sacrifices" (5:3). Do these ways of stating the purpose of their release—seemingly for a short furlough (not unknown in Egypt, see Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 248; 553, n. 10)—represent a deception as part of a stratagem to outwit Pharaoh? Some scholars read it as such, e.g., Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 84-86; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 207; Dean Andrew Nichols, *The Trickster Revisited: Deception as a Motif in the Pentateuch*, StBibLit 117 (New York: Lang, 2009), 63-67; cf. review in Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:376, and more extensively, Ken Esau, "Divine Deception in the Exodus Event?" *Direction* 35 (2006): 4-17. Alternatively, others contend this way of phrasing the request admits no promise to return, but may have been a more diplomatic expression (Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:376) or an initial way of exposing/provoking Pharaoh's obstinacy (Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 43; Sarna, *Exodus*, 19; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 66; Jacob, *The Second Book*, 1:120).

In the commissioning narrative, YHWH instructs Moses to present the demand as a journey to sacrifice (3:18; 4:23). Moses repeats this to Pharaoh in his first encounter, and the request for a trip to sacrifice continues to occur in the exchanges between Moses and Pharaoh (8:8 [4]; 25-29 [21-25]; 10:9; 24-26; 12:31-32; 14:5). Sacrifice alternates closely with the motif of service throughout the negotiations (see the helpful listing by Leder, "An Iconography of Order," 233). As Leder observes, "the close interrelationship between *ʿbd* ["to serve"] and *zbḥ* ["to sacrifice"] . . . is confirmed by a demand-response pattern in which the demand to sacrifice is met by a response using *ʿbd* and vice-versa" (234). And we should not underestimate the charged political ramifications of "mere" sacrifice. Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 37, 46, asserts that empires depend on ritual acts of worship to legitimate their claims to power. Worship of another divinity can be a subversive counterclaim that threatens any empire's ideology of authority. Moreover, in the narrative arc of Exodus, Sinai represents the realization of the goal of service. Sinai involves a covenant ratification ceremony that includes sacrifices (24:4-5). Hence, the claim that Israel will go to sacrifice is no mere ruse. Sacrifice at Sinai represents an important link in Israel's transition into YHWH's service.

Nonetheless, the root *ʿbd* and its cognates have a wide semantic range (Carpenter, "עָבַד," *NIDOTTE* 3:303-08; Schultz, "Servant, Slave," *NIDOTTE* 4:1180-1196). As Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 31-41, keenly remarks, YHWH's demand is likely deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, "send my people out so that they can serve me," can indicate nothing more than a demand for a furlough for a cultic ceremony. The request, especially when followed by the language of "to celebrate a festival" and/or "to sacrifice," *could* give the impression of a short religious pilgrimage. Indeed, Pharaoh seems to bargain on this narrower meaning in his negotiations with Moses (e.g., 8:25-29 [21-25]; 10:9; 24-26). On the other hand, the demand is blunt, includes language of "my people," and uses the language of "service" that is lexically in direct contrast to the description of Pharaoh's relationship vis-à-vis Israel (e.g., 14:5). The meaning depends, in part, on how Pharaoh *wants to interpret* YHWH's demand. Ford argues that the fact YHWH *makes* a demand of Pharaoh is significant. It is not YHWH's intent just to remove the people from Egypt; Pharaoh must choose to send them. Along with Ford, I will argue that the ambiguity, as well as YHWH's will that Pharaoh decide to send the people, is a key to illuminating the evolution of the plague narrative.

motifs throughout the book of Exodus.[10] The lexeme covers a wide context of relationships in different realms.[11] For example, it can describe the conditions and/or persons involved in forced labor; in other contexts, it is used theologically with respect to a human's subordination to a god, especially as it pertains to the performance and maintenance of the religious cult. The nature of the service involved has much to do with the nature of the master.[12]

The author of Exodus capitalizes on the polysemy of the language of service. In the first chapter of Exodus, the narrator uses the lexeme excessively to portray Egypt's ruthless subjugation of Israel (1:11-14). By the close of the first chapter, it is painfully obvious that "service" in the form of oppressive bondage depicts the state of relations between Egypt and Israel. At the burning bush, however, God apprises Moses of the

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[10] Georges Azou, *De la Servitude au Service. Étude du Livre de L'Exode* (Paris: Editions de L'orante, 1961), 78-82; 377-89; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 30; Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 60; Leder, "An Iconography of Order," 134-39. The root occurs 97 times in the narrative and, at key points, in three main forms:

1. The verbal "to serve" = *'bd* (1:13-14; 3:12; 4:23; 5:18; 6:5; 7:16, 26; 8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7-8, 11, 24, 26; 12:31; 13:5; 14:5, 12; 20:5, 9; 21:2, 6; 23:24-25, 33; 34:21);

2.The nominal "servant" = *'ebed* (4:10; 5:15-16, 21; 7:10, 20, 28-29; 8:5, 7, 17, 20, 25, 27; 9:14, 20-21, 30, 34; 10:1, 6-7; 11:3, 8; 12:30, 44; 13:3, 14; 14:5, 31; 20:2, 10, 17; 21:2, 5, 7, 20, 26-27, 32; 32:13);

3. A second, abstract nominal "service" = *'ăbōdâ* (1:14; 2:23; 5:9, 11; 6:6, 9; 12:25-26; 13:5; 27:19; 30:16; 35:21, 24; 36:1, 3, 5; 38:21; 39:32, 40, 42).

The largest grouping of terms occurs at the beginning of the narrative. The next large cluster occurs around and within the law collection (chs. 20-24), and the third noteworthy grouping is attested in the account of the construction of the tabernacle (chs. 35-40).

[11] A nice summary article is provided by Carpenter, *NIDOTTE* 3:303-8; cf. *HALOT* 2:773-75; 776-77; *BDB* 712-15. On the wider nature of work in the Hebrew Bible, see Jackson, "Enjoying the Fruit."

[12] Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 144, states it thus, "The point of the exodus is not freedom in the sense of self-determination, but *service*, the service of the loving, redeeming, and delivering God of Israel, rather than the state and its proud king."

"service" objective of his mission: "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve (*'bd*) God on this mountain" (3:12; cf. 4:23).[13] In Moses's repeated meetings with Pharaoh, YHWH characterizes the release and relationship YHWH wants with Israel in similar terms of service. Israel's service to YHWH will consist of obedience to the Sinai covenant, worship of the one true God anchored by cultic observance, on a journey toward the land promised to their ancestors. In short, the divine purposes for bringing Israel out are wrapped up in a transferal of service.[14] YHWH's liberation entails deliverance but not freedom.[15]

The corresponding vocabulary suggests the question "Whom will Israel serve?" underlies the confrontation between Pharaoh and YHWH.[16] Hence, the problem in Exodus

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[13] On the controverted question concerning how to understand the sign in 3:12 as "promised proof," see the discussion of options in Houtman, *Exodus,* 1:364-65. Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:63-64, offers this succinct summary: "The Exodus from Egypt was not considered finished *until the people had reached Sinai* . . . The phrase 'I will be with you' marked the beginning, and the service of God at Sinai, the end."

[14] Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 226-28; David M. Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart': Plot, Character, and Theology in Exodus 1-14," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, eds. Alan J. Hauser, David J. A. Clines, and David M. Gunn, JSOTSup 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 80-81. Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 231-42, following Daube, *The Exodus Pattern*, 23-46, argues the Israelite exodus is modeled on the ancient Near Eastern legal custom whereby a slave (or a slave people) to a human king is liberated into the service of a god. He points to passages such as Exod 6:6-7; 15:13-17; and Lev 25:42, 55 as rooted in this legal setting.

[15] At least, it is not "freedom" as typically construed in modern parlance. This notion is captured in Göran Larsson's deliberately ambiguously titled book, *Bound For Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). In a private correspondence, John Fortner suggested that Israel's freedom entails a "binding but not a bondage."

[16] Leder, "An Iconography of Order," 134-39, calls the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh concerning the object of Israel's service a "dominant narrative icon." It is not a question of "to serve [Pharaoh] or not to serve [i.e., freedom from Pharaoh]." Israel will serve someone or something. Israel, as a microcosm of humanity, epitomizes this human condition of existence. As

is that rival sovereigns vie for Israel's vassalage. It is constructive to read both the discourse of "service" and "knowledge" in this initial encounter through the matrix of the ancient Near Eastern lord-vassal *realpolitik*.[17] The Hebrews are (implicitly if not explicitly) subjected by Pharaoh to be his servant-vassals.[18] Once Israel is out of Egypt, YHWH will draw Israel into a vassal relationship ratified by covenant and sealed by sacrifice—i.e., "to serve (*'bd*) God on this mountain" (3:12; 23:24-25; 24:3-11; cf. Lev

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Claus Westermann, "עָבַד" *TLOT* 2:824, asserts, "*'bd* indicates an essential and inalterable characteristic of human life."

[17] Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 31-32, advances the thesis that "YHWH's intrusive action in Egypt concerns the punishment, and finally the nullification, of a recalcitrant vassal who refuses to implement the policies of YHWH, the overlord." Brueggemann suggests this presumption, which he contends is everywhere assumed in the narrative but nowhere stated explicitly, is built upon Israel's "sweeping theopolitical claim" that the rulers of the nations "belonged to YHWH's *imperium*, that they held power only by YHWH's leave and on condition of practicing YHWH's policies" (33). On this analysis, YHWH's vengeance is the act of power implemented "to curb action judged illegitimate by the sovereign power." Brueggemann credits and extends the insights of George Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 69-104; and G. E. Wright, "The Nations in Hebrew Prophecy," *Enc* 26 (1965): 225-37. Brueggemann, 35-37, rightly grounds much of his argument in the language of "knowing" (*yd'*) in the narrative. He argues that "knowing" places the conversation within the wider discourse of political vassalage in the ancient Near East. Support for his position can be found in Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *yāda'*," *BASOR* 181 (1966): 31-27; Herbert B. Huffmon and Simon B. Parker, "A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew *yāda'*," *BASOR* 184 (1966): 36-38. A stronger case can be made with the rhetoric of *'bd*, which also corresponds to ancient Near Eastern sovereign-vassal relationships. On this connection, see Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, AnBib 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 66-79, 93-97; Leder, "Iconography of Order," 225-35; Ziony Zevit, "The Use of עבד as Diplomatic Term in Jeremiah," *JBL* 88 (1969): 74-77. Likewise, the terminology of "father-son" (Exod 4:22-23) can fit a similar discourse; see Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 98-99; F. Charles Fensham, "Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971), 121-35.

[18] In Exod 5:15-16, the Israelite foremen appeal to Pharaoh on the basis of their servant status (cf. 14:12). Of course, there is no formal declaration of a covenant between these two parties, but "vassalage" seems to be a fair description of the relationship. See further Leder, "Iconography of Order," 226-27.

24:55).[19] Though YHWH first legitimates his sovereignty of Israel to Pharaoh on the basis of his rightful ownership of Israel, i.e., "my people" (5:1; cf. 4:22),[20] in the ensuing confrontations YHWH will progressively reveal to Pharaoh the worldwide jurisdiction of YHWH's rule. YHWH attempts to teach a begrudging Pharaoh he "has no distinct domain that is not at the same time subject to YHWH's purposes."[21]

The theopolitical claim of YHWH's sovereignty arises naturally out of the creational backdrop of the narrative.[22] Exodus 1-4 has already tilted the narrative toward the stark contrast in creational categories between the two, rival visions of "service." Egyptian "service" stymies YHWH's creational agenda by enslaving Israel, buttressing Pharaoh's oppressive socio-economic arrangement. Pharaoh has usurped YHWH's sovereign purpose for Israel and for creation's blessing. YHWH's "service," on the contrary, means to form Israel as a community of worshippers who can fulfill the creational vocation initiated in Abraham's calling.[23] Ironically, it is Pharaoh who

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[19] The literature on this topic is vast. For an overview on the relationship, see George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, "Covenant," *ABD* 1:1179-1202, esp., 1183-88. Cf. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 26-45.

[20] It should not be minimized that YHWH chooses to introduce himself with passionate empathy not as a universal monarch but as a God intimately concerned with the plight of the Hebrew slaves.

[21] Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 37.

[22] This is a point which Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," simply misses. He does, however, later recognize the category of creation in the Exodus narrative within his discussion of "The Nations as YHWH's Partner" in his *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 504-5.

[23] The legitimacy of Pharaoh's rule is tied to acknowledging YHWH's rightful cosmic rule and order (and, accordingly, Israel's place within that order). As long as Pharaoh continues to "kick against the goads" of YHWH's rule—to grind, in effect, against the grain of the universe—his empire will experience the repercussions of the creational disruption. Or, in the words of the Abrahamic call, Egypt will become a recipient of the curse rather than a beneficiary of the

unwittingly (re-)asserts the creational character of the contest in 5:5: "Look, now, how many (*rabbîm*) are the people of the land! And you have caused them to rest (*hiphil* of *šbt*) from their slave labors!"[24] Pharaoh's exclamation confirms the primordial promise of multiplication (echoing his predecessor in 1:8) while indignantly impugning Moses's and Aaron's "solution": a sabbath rest.[25] In other words, the story construes Pharaoh's system of slave work as at odds with the order of creation because it takes no account of YHWH's established creational rhythm of Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:8-11; 23; and esp. 23:12).[26] Devoid of Sabbath, Egypt has perverted the creationally commanded good of human service (Gen 2:15).[27] And it is the rhythm and theology of Sabbath that YHWH will teach Israel soon after exiting Egypt's slavery (Exod 16:23-30; 20:8-11).

Inherent within these rival visions of service are different conceptions of justice. As if to drive home the point, Exod 5 paints (again) a detailed, incriminating picture of the "just order" (i.e., *ma'at*) of Egypt. After Pharaoh initially rebuffs Moses and Aaron

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blessing (Gen 12:2-3). The plagues function as creational signs of Pharaoh's imperious overreach (see below).

[24] For discussion and defense of this translation see Mathilde Frey, "Sabbath in Egypt? An Examination of Exodus 5," *JSOT* 39 (2015): 254-57. Cf. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 252.

[25] Frey, "Sabbath in Egypt?" 257: "Of 71 occurrences of [*šbt*] there are only two places where the Hebrew Bible associates this verb with a word for work with the preposition 'from' [*min*], and this is in Gen. 2.2-3 and Exod. 5.5. On the seventh day of the creation week God rested 'from all his work' . . . The Hebrew Bible identifies this day as the Sabbath (Exod. 20.8-11) and not as a mere interruption or an undefined cessation from work. By speaking of [*šbt*] as resting 'from work', Exod. 5.5 creates a direct link to the only other occurrence of rest from work, the creation Sabbath."

[26] The Israelites cannot keep Pharaoh's statute (*ḥōq*; 5:14). YHWH will teach them his own statute that will memorialize their exit (12:24) and form them into a community of YHWH (15:25-26; 18:16, 20) even before they reach Sinai!

[27] "To serve" [*'bd*] the garden is one of the primeval assignments given to the *'ādām*. On the theme of work, creation, and Sabbath in Exodus 5, see the insightful remarks of Ellen Davis, "Slaves or Sabbath-Keepers?" 30-35; also, McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 53-54.

(5:1-3), the king issues new orders to squash any potential uprising in the slave ranks of the "highly organized machinery of the [Egyptian] system."[28] The imperial sanctions react specifically against the wording of YHWH's demand.[29] Pharaoh retaliates against "Thus says YHWH" (5:1) and the introductory "Let us go" (5:3) with his own "Thus says Pharaoh" (5:10), "Go to your labors" (5:4), "Let them go gather straw," (5:7, 11), and "Let the service (*ʿăbōdâ*) weigh heavy on the men" (5:9).[30] In fact, the language of "service" occurs seven times in 5:9-21, all expressive of subjection to Pharaoh. The regime enforces its violent climate with arduous vindictiveness. And Pharaoh will hear nothing of the calls for relief, turning a deaf ear to the Israelites' crying out (verbal cognate of *ṣəʿāqâ*; 5:8) for justice. Instead, he responds by tactically "blaming the victim" (5:8, 17), effectively dismantling Israelite support for Moses and Aaron.[31] In the dramatic sequence of dialogue down (and back up) the imperial chain of command, the narrative chronicles how "Pharaoh counters God's claim on Israel's service with his own."[32] In Pharaoh's maintenance of *maʿat*, he will cede nothing of his rule of Israel to this unknown divine challenger. Pharaoh operates opposed to YHWH's creational agenda and order.

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[28] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 106.

[29] On the following observations, see Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 127-28.

[30] Greenberg astutely describes the echoes in Pharaoh's (and Egypt's) response as "the language of redemption turned sour" (ibid.).

[31] Meyers, *Exodus*, 67.

[32] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 128. Cf. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 71. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 83, adds that the function of the language of serving in chapter five is to set the issue of Israel's service "unmistakably before the reader."

4.2.2 "Who is YHWH that I should heed his voice . . . ? I know not YHWH."

Pharaoh's opening reply to YHWH's imperative (5:2) merits more attention. Pharaoh leads with a sardonic question asked neither out of ignorance nor honesty.[33] Rather, the whole retort is an uncompromising, defiant dismissal of YHWH's demand.[34] It is, in fact, "the first direct challenge to YHWH's authority in the Pentateuch."[35] Like his predecessor (who has since died—see 4:19), Pharaoh does not know (cf. 1:8), and his obstructive actions will follow accordingly.[36] But beyond his predecessor, the narrative reports that this Pharaoh has arrogantly and explicitly refused to know.[37] Thus, "in all that

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[33] Coats, *Exodus 1-18*, 52, labels the question a "stereotyped insult formula" (cf. Judg 9:28; 1 Sam 17:26; 25:10).

[34] Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 66, calls it "overweening hauteur." Cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:121; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 122; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 252-53; Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:462.

[35] Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 86. Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:462, adds Pharaoh's reply "must have sounded like blasphemy to Israelite ears."

[36] Exod 5:3 is the first occasion the reader hears from the Pharaoh of the exodus. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 74, emphasizes the primacy of introductory dialogue in a character's development: "In any given narrative event, and especially at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of the character." It is to be noted that this Pharaoh's lack of knowledge, as well as his unwillingness to listen, are an expansion of the first Pharaoh's incomprehension (1:8)—and this in contrast to YHWH who does "know" (2:25; 3:7). As Gunn, "Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 74, indicates, the second Pharaoh fits tightly the "character mold" already established by Exod 1. Cf. also Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague and the Reading Process," 558, n. 11.

[37] Cf. Moses's response in ch. 3, who also did not know YHWH. What is shocking, and unacceptable even in Egyptian ideology, are the lengths to which Pharaoh goes to refuse to acknowledge YHWH. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 252, comments a "true Egyptian (excepting Akhenaten and his circle) would not spurn foreign gods or their messengers. The Egyptians adopted many Asiatic deities."

follows, Pharaoh's insolent Godlessness, here expressed quintessentially, must be kept in view; his challenge to God provoked the ensuing calamities that befell him and Egypt."[38]

In the development of the plague cycle, knowledge of YHWH (or rejection thereof) is the key expression that the narrative returns to repeatedly—a leitmotif already signaled in Exod 1:8 (cf. 2:25; 3:7). Moses's and Pharaoh's negotiations revolve around the issue of "knowing YHWH." It is the point of departure stipulated by Pharaoh himself.[39] In reference to Pharaoh and/or Egypt, the recognition formula—"so that you/they may know that (*yd' kî*) I am YHWH"—appears in 7:5, 17; 8:10 [6], 22 [18]; 9:14; 9:29; 11:7; 14:4; 14:8.[40] This formula conveys that the rationale for the signs and wonders lies in Pharaoh's (and Egypt's) acknowledgement of YHWH.[41] Where the recognition formula occurs in the wider canon, the context indicates that the knowledge of YHWH is related to (and generally follows from) YHWH's actions.[42] In the same way in Exodus, "so that you/they may know that I am YHWH" is correlated with the deeds of YHWH: "And Egypt

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[38] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 127.

[39] From the first announcement of this goal to Pharaoh in 7:17, Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 47, recognizes that "nearly all the encounters between Pharaoh and YHWH that contain any dialogue raise the theme of Pharaoh "knowing that . . ." in relation to YHWH. Thus it appears that this concept of 'knowledge' arises in response to Pharaoh's initial words."

[40] The formula occurs in reference to Moses/Israel in 6:7 and 10:2.

[41] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 134: "Missing from chapters 5-15, then, are words for oppression and suffering. Judgment occurs three times . . . redemption twice; and deliverance twice. But "know," with either the Egyptians or the Israelites as its subject, runs through the whole account, like the thread that holds it all together."

[42] On the formula see the classic work of Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, ed. W. Brueggemann (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 29-98, esp. 64-69; cf. John F. Evans, "An Inner-Biblical Interpretation and Intertextual Reading of Ezekiel's Recognition Formulae with the Book of Exodus," (ThD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2006), 285-91. Evans lists all the occurrences of the formula on 139-44 and 167-74. The emphasis is not knowledge founded upon human reasoning, meditation, or speculation. According to Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 64,

will know that I am YHWH *when* I stretch out my hand against Egypt to bring out the children of Israel from their midst" (7:5; cf. 8:10 [6], 22 [18]; 9:29). The bottom line: "the disease of Egypt is not knowing," and "a basic indisposition to not listen is Pharaoh's pathology."[43] YHWH cares about Egypt's knowing, not just Israel's release.[44]

But what is it Pharaoh and Egypt are to know? One obvious answer to this question comes by way of the variant explanatory clauses appended to the recurring recognition formula. These clauses provide additional, explicit content to YHWH's tutelage of Pharaoh. Permutations include:

- "that there is no one like YHWH our God" (8:10 [6])
- "that I am YHWH in the midst of the land" (8:22 [18])
- "that there is no one like me in all the earth" (9:14)
- "that the earth is YHWH's" (9:29)
- "that YHWH makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (11:7)

According to these clauses, the plagues point to a constellation of messages all related to YHWH's sovereignty vis-à-vis Egypt: YHWH is powerful, incomparable, dominant over the earth/land (*'ereṣ*), and has a special relationship with Israel.[45] A corollary of YHWH's sovereignty specific to Pharaoh's education is, to be sure, that Egyptian authority is

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"Nowhere does the statement of recognition speak of recognition apart from the divine acts which nourish it." In fact, knowledge is the goal of the deed (50).

[43] Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 45, 108, respectively.

[44] Indeed, Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 142, observes "YHWH's main aim in this process does not seem to be to release Israel as quickly and easily as possible."

[45] Cf. Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 36-37; Charles M. Trimm, "'YHWH Fights For Them!': The Divine Warrior in the Exodus Narrative" (PhD diss., Wheaton College, 2012), 156-74.

subservient to YHWH's command.[46] Thus, YHWH's potent "signs and wonders" are an epistemic strategy designed to show the limits of Egyptian sovereignty and the futility of Pharaonic resistance. The didactic purpose of the plagues is directed principally in the story to Pharaoh and his Egyptian populace. However, Israel, too, is expected to learn from the signs and wonders (10:2; cf. 6:7).[47]

If the phrase "so that they might serve/worship (*'bd*) me" encapsulates YHWH's goal for Israel's exodus, then the recognition formula "so that you [i.e., Pharaoh/Egypt] might know that I am YHWH" epitomizes YHWH's desire for Pharaoh (and Egypt) in the plague narrative per Pharaoh's initial rejection. Moreover, the goal of knowledge of YHWH cannot be demonstrated apart from Pharaoh's conduct. For Pharaoh to know YHWH in this context is for Pharaoh to yield to YHWH's demands to send Israel out. It is apparent Pharaoh makes that connection by his adamant rejoinder in 5:2, "I know not YHWH; moreover, I will not send Israel out."[48] Pharaoh will pay lip-service to Moses's demands throughout the plague narrative. But when push comes to shove, Pharaoh will either reverse his capitulation or his concessions will come up short of YHWH's end game (e.g., 8:8, 15 [4, 11]; 9:27-28, 35; 10:8-11; 10:24). Pharaoh will not surrender, for he

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[46] Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 33-37.

[47] The goal of the learning is different for Egypt and Israel. YHWH wants acknowledgement from Egypt, not service, as in Israel's case. YHWH's signs and wonders are revelatory but not directed toward the wholesale conversion of the Egyptian populace into YHWH -worshipers. Pharaoh and Egypt can respond appropriately by general confession, "fearing," and in Pharaoh's case, "sending." These all seem to fall under the rubric of what it means for Egypt to "know that I am YHWH." Such responses are on display (to a limited extent) in 8:19 [15]; 9:27; 10:16, and 14:25. Cf. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 137; Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, 75-76.

[48] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 253, suggests the particle *gam* in 5:2 may be an emphatic explicative "therefore, of course."

knows "in yielding mastery, [he] loses not merely a workforce, but a significant narrative of meaning, a conviction that his words most truly describe the world."[49]

Pharaoh's backlash in Exod 5 tightens his unjust grip on the Israelite slaves.[50] In effect, he chastises Moses to cease "acting as a pharaoh" to the people (5:4).[51] He erupts with a cascade of demands (v. 4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19) that can be summed up by the command for the slaves to "make more bricks."[52] The fallout from the initial encounter undermines Moses's confidence (5:22-23; 6:30) and extinguishes the hopes of the enslaved (5:21; 5:9), even as it confirms YHWH's prescience in 3:19. Moses returns to YHWH with a lament (5:22). YHWH uses the nadir as an opportunity to reassert Moses's commission and the assured sovereign purposes.[53] YHWH responds with seven clauses of promise: "I will bring out . . . and I will deliver . . . and I will redeem . . . and I will take . . . and I will be . . . and I will bring . . . and I will give" (6:6-8).[54] These are bracketed by the phrase, "I am YHWH" (vv. 6, 8). The message both provides an answer to Pharaoh's contemptuous question in 5:2 and counters Pharaoh's seven-fold imposition of service-

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[49] Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 158.

[50] The people are firmly in the ideological grip of Pharaoh, as evidenced by how they refer to themselves as Pharaoh's people in 5:15-16, cf. v. 21; 6:9).

[51] Exodus 5:4 contains this pun: "The king of Egypt said to them, "Why, Moses and Aaron, do you let the people off (*hiphil* of *pr'*) from their services?" The triradical verb root *pr'* mirrors the first three radicals of Pharaoh's title in Hebrew, *pr'h.* In other words, Moses and Aaron are playing the role of *pr'h* (Pharaoh) by their act of *pr'* (letting the people loose). This paranomasia will reappear in Exod 32:25, when the Israelites are "out of control" (*qal* of *pr'*) at the foot of the mountain.

[52] Walter Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2011), 80.

[53] Dozeman, *Exodus*, 162-68, provides a nice discussion on the parallel structure of the two commissions in ch. 3 and 6.

[54] Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 80.

slavery noted in Exod 5. "I am YHWH" re-imagines Israel's future by making an alternate narrative available. The "tremendous theocentric emphasis"[55] on the presence and commitment of YHWH to bring out the Israelites in Exod 6 contrasts sharply with the systematic Egyptian oppression depicted in the previous chapter. Here, YHWH strengthens Moses's heart before the struggle, that is the plague narrative, begins.[56] YHWH is poised to make good on his covenant. The battle lines have been drawn. The anticipated judgment (Gen 15:14; cf. Exod 6:6; 7:4) is imminent.

4.3 EXODUS 7-13

Moses returns to the court of Pharaoh after receiving divine reassurance that neither Pharaoh's obstinacies nor his own faltering lips (6:12, 30) will stymie YHWH's purposes for Israel's deliverance. Over the course of the next several chapters, the narrative treats the reader to a drama-filled series of plagues wrought by the powerful "hand of YHWH" (7:4-5; cf. 3:19-20), climaxing in the departure of Israel from Egypt.[57] In the following I treat four issues that are of particular relevance to the narrative's theology of justice: (1) the role of the plagues; (2) the vexed topic of Pharaoh's hard

[55] Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 119.

[56] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 268.

[57] Helpful in explicating the expressions dealing with "hand" and "arm" in Exodus is Seely, "The Image of the Hand of God," 38-54 (esp. 38, n. 4). Seely demonstrates that the hand-arm formulations are idioms of strength that draw especially on ancient Near Eastern martial imagery. James K. Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narrative," *Bib* 67 (1986): 378-87, shows the arm/hand imagery exploits Egyptian ideology about the militaristic arm/hand of Pharaoh; cf. Manfred Görg, "'Der starke Arm Pharaos': Beobachtungen zum Belegspektrum—Einer Metaphor in Palastina und Ägypten," in *Hommages à François Daumas*, ed. C. Berger et al. (Montpellier: Université de Montpellier, 1986), 323-30.

heart, (3) the death of the firstborn, and (4) the despoliation of Egypt. I continue to note how a creational-pedagogical perspective offers a significant heuristic frame of reference for coming to terms with these matters. In particular, it will become apparent this frame enhances the reader's interpretation of the way the narrative draws on Egyptian cosmological imagery and ideology.[58] A creational-pedagogical angle coupled with a keen awareness of the Egyptian background will pay dividends in explicating the narrative's theology of justice.

4.3.1 The Plagues

Most scholars agree that the plague narrative exhibits literary design, though (unsurprisingly) there is a range of proposals for what the structure is and how it came to be. Attempts to detect a structure—despite their disagreement—have in general shown that the received form of the composition evinces deliberate symmetry, repetition, and thematic progression. One proposal for the structure that has garnered widespread support

[58] On the issue of Egyptian background in Exodus, see especially the work of Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch," *Hen* 10 (1988): 3-15; ibid., "Moses as Equal to Pharaoh," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, eds. Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis, BJS 346 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 201-19; ibid., "Moses the Magician," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Thomas E. Levy et al. (New York: Springer, 2015), 243-58; also note John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), esp. 83-120; Noegel, "Moses and Magic;" and the compilation presented by Brad C. Sparks, "Egyptian Texts relating to the Exodus: Discussions of Exodus Parallels in the Egyptology Literature," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Thomas E. Levy et al. (New York: Springer, 2015), 259-81. For general observations on Egyptian background in Exodus, see the cautions raised by John R. Huddlestun, "'Who Is This That Rises Like the Nile?' Some Egyptian Texts on the Inundation and a Prophetic Trope," in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of D. N. Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 341-47.

among interpreters, both ancient and modern, is a division of the first nine plagues into a triad of triplets (3 + 3 + 3), with the tenth plague capping the series.[59] This patterning manifests a gradual heightening of the destruction caused by the three series of plagues.[60] The devastation climaxes in the final plague of the killing of the firstborn (Exod 11:1-10; 12:29-30). The literary architecture indicates a carefully crafted text that escalates in the description of the destruction as well as rhetorical effect.[61]

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[59] The triads parallel one another in their patterning. So, for example, in the first plague of every triad (1, 4, and 7), Moses takes a stand to warn Pharaoh in the morning (7:15; 8:20 [16]; 9:13). The second plague of each triad (2, 5, and 8) includes a warning presumably issued in the palace ("go to Pharaoh"; 8:1 [7:26]; 9:1; 10:1); the third plague in each triad contains no warning (8:16 [12]; 9:8; 10:21). Cf. the discussion of this structure in Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 92-93; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:180-81; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 170-76; Ziony Zevit, "The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," *JQR* 66 (1976): 193-211; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 321; Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 146-47; Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, 134-35; Rendsburg, "The Literary Unity," 113-19.

Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, 135, sensibly comments "the fact that the vast majority of commentators at least recognize the reasonability of the above noted pattern, whatever importance or lack of it they may ascribe to it, can give one some confidence in exploring its possibilities in terms of illuminating the text." Ford rightly cautions against setting up too rigid of a structure on p. 137; cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 149-50. For an argument for a different structure, cf. the proposals by Dennis J. McCarthy, "Moses' Dealings with Pharaoh: Ex. 7,8-10,27," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 336-47; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 200-3; and Jonathan Grossman, "The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues Narrative and the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *VT* 64 (2014): 588-610.

[60] The plagues in each triad are similar in severity. For example, the first three (water, frogs, gnats) are irritations causing discomfort. The middle triad (flies, livestock, boils) threatens Egypt's food supply and health, but does not explicitly cause human death. The final triad causes human death (hail), completely wipes out Egypt's food supply (locusts), and immobilizes all of Egypt for three days (darkness). In terms of severity, the last series of plagues (7-9) is much worse in degree than the previous two triads. Cf. e.g., Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 318; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:183; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 170; Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, 136, 146.

[61] The story's redactional aesthetics have suggested to some scholars that the plague narrative reflects a "liturgical drama," a kind of elevated narrative recital seemingly fit for (cultic?) performance. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 722, points to Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture I*-II, repr. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 728-37, as an early exponent of this view, an assessment Brueggemann himself endorses. Cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:23-24. Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 92-182, passim, argues that the narrative leaves hints of a vestigial epic poem behind the story. Also cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 107. At the very least, the account's artful stylization accords with the paradigmatic merit it held in Israel's imagination (cf. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 722).

A creational perspective on the plagues assists in unveiling the fact that the manner in which YHWH acts is part and parcel of the message YHWH wishes Egypt (and Israel) to learn. In the following I sketch four ways that the creational dimensions of the plague narrative assist in interpreting the plagues.[62]

First, the plagues are a public matter.[63] Though popularly known as the ten "plagues," strictly speaking, the vocabulary of "plague" is one of a number of descriptors for the events that befall Egypt.[64] In fact, the language of YHWH's "signs" and/or "wonders" (e.g., 7:3) is more prominent both in Exodus and in the canonical memory of the exodus.[65] The designation of these occurrences as "signs and wonders" emphasizes their theocentric and revelatory quality. As we have already noted, the recognition

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[62] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 105-12, is foremost in arguing for creation theology as "the most basic perspective" for reading the plagues (106). I owe much of my discussion to his work. See also his "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," *JBL* 110 (1991): 385-96; ibid., *God and World*, 109-26. Helpful as well is Ziony Zevit, "The Priestly Redaction," 193-211; ibid., "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues," *BRev* 6 (1990): 16-23; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 208-344, passim. Less sanguine about the relevance of creation theology are Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 345-46, and Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 130, 140. In spurning a creational perspective these authors underplay the way the narrative has already woven creational theology into the warp and woof of the story up to the plague narrative and beyond it.

[63] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 94-95.

[64] "Plague" is a catchall translation of several terms: *deber* in 9:3, 15 (also "pestilence"), *maggēpâ* in 9:14; *nega'* in 11:1; and *negep* in 12:13. Other nominal descriptors include "judgments" (*šəpāṭîm*) in 6:6; 7:4; 12:12 and "miraculous acts" (*niplā'ôt*) in 3:20 . A sample of Hebrew verbs that describe YHWH's actions is as follows: "smite" (*nkh*) in e.g., 3:20; 7:17, 25; 8:17 [13]; 9:15; 12:12; "strike" (*ngp*) in e.g., 7:27; 12:23, 27; "send" (*šlḥ*) in e.g., 8:21 [17]; 9:14; "bring" (*bw'*) in 10:4. Jubilees 48:7 is the first attestation of a tally of ten wonders.

[65] "Sign" (*'ôt*) in 4:17; 7:3; 8:23 [19]; 10:1, 2, 12:13; cf. 4:8-9, 17, 28, 31; "wonder" (*môpēt*) in 4:21; 7:3, 9; 11:9, 10. For "signs" and/or "wonders" outside of Exodus, cf. Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; Pss 78:43-51; 105:27; 135:9; Jer 32:20-21; Neh 9:10. For sake of convention, I continue to use the nomenclature of "plagues" alongside "signs and wonders."

formula "so that you may know" depicts the plagues as divine educative measures.[66] The recipients of YHWH's "wonder-full" instruction are, in narrative sequence, Israel (6:6-7), Egypt (7:4-5), and Pharaoh (7:17). Eventually, YHWH broadens the audience of reception to a creation-wide horizon before the seventh plague of hail: "However, on account of this I have sustained you [Pharaoh]: in order to show you my power, and to make my name known in all the earth/land (*'ereṣ*)" (9:16).[67] The public, epic nature of the plagues undoubtedly demonstrates the scope and power of YHWH's sovereignty. But more than a flexing of the divine muscle over the land, the plagues offer international testimony to YHWH's creational purposes with and through Israel.[68] The world is a witness to the folly of one nation's unjust treatment of YHWH's blessed people (and their leader's persistent obstinance toward YHWH's claim on the people's service; see 9:17).

There is a negative flip-side to the global testimony. The plagues issue a historic, public judgment for Egypt's creational offense.

> What Pharaoh and the Egyptians have done to God's work of life and blessing in the world will not be overlooked . . . Acts of cruelty and ruthlessness . . . must be brought to justice and publicly exposed for what they are, so that the world will know that such anticreation deeds will not be tolerated . . . For Egypt and others to know that YHWH is God is to recognize that God will be about preserving the creation, of moving resolutely against all those who are antilife and antiblessing.[69]

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[66] Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," 197, remarks that 7:4-5 and 14:30-31 form an inclusio around the plague-exodus narratives. These two texts articulate the educative purpose behind YHWH's dealings with Egypt.

[67] Furthermore, the purview extends generationally among Israelites in 10:1-2. On these verses see Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 60-67. Nonetheless, within the plague narrative itself, Pharaoh (and to a lesser degree Egypt) is the main target of the YHWH's educative intentions.

[68] Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 94-95. Such is confirmed in Exod 15:14-16; 18:1, 10-11 (cf. Num 14:13-16; Josh 2:9-13).

[69] Ibid., 95; cf. Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 48-49.

The public scale of the plagues, then, reveals the "justice and righteousness" of YHWH's creational power and purposes in the particulars of Israel's plight. Egypt has become the negative proving ground for how justice is to be enacted within YHWH's world. Something larger than Israel is at work, but it is at work in Israel. In the aftermath of the hail, Pharaoh confesses a collective guilt (albeit, a limited and less than genuine confession) in transgressing against YHWH: "Then Pharaoh sent and summoned Moses and Aaron. He said to them, 'I have sinned this time. YHWH is in the right (*ṣaddîq*), but I and my people are in the wrong'" (9:27).[70] When heard from the creational backdrop of YHWH's preceding speech in 9:13-19, Pharaoh's declaration is a tacit moral admission of an outside standard—a creational justice at work in the world—that calls his faux order to justice.[71]

Second, the events involve realia of the natural world. Some of the plagues resemble occurrences of natural phenomena well known in and around Egypt. For this reason, many commentators have attempted to provide ecological explanations for their appearances and sequence.[72] While this interpretation does recognize, quite rightly, the

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[70] See further Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 101-5.

[71] Cf. Pharaoh's response to plagues in Gen 12:17-20. On Pharaoh's confession in 9:27, see comparable comments by Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 86; Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 77-78; Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 98-99; Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," 39; McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 66.

[72] E.g., see the chart in Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 251. For bibliography and discussion on naturalistic explanations, see John R. Huddlestun, "Redactors, Rationalists, and (Bloodied) Rivers: Some Comments on the First Biblical Plague," in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, eds. David S. Vanderhooft and Abraham Winitzer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 207-22; Bénédicte Lemmelijn, "Historicity versus Theology in the 'Plague Narrative' (Ex 7–11)," *OTE* 20 (2007): 396–404. Naturalistic explanations are particularly common in more popular treatments of the plagues.

plagues as natural calamities, a *purely* naturalistic explanation violates the explicit theological texture of the narrative.[73] Furthermore, in the ancient Near East, there was no disjunction between the human and natural spheres. The natural/cosmic order was symbiotically intertwined with the moral order.[74] A solitary ecological explanation for the plagues fails to make the pivotal connection, viz., disruption in the non-human world signals disruption in the human sphere. As goes the moral life of the earth/land's inhabitants, so goes the viability of the physical creation. Human injustice has disastrous environmental effects.

Third, the plagues are a revocation of creation's inherent, good order.[75] In the plagues, creation becomes abnormally volatile and violent, thus jeopardizing the stability (*ma'at*) of the natural order that engenders blessing. Egypt experiences a breakdown of creational boundaries: water turns to blood, frogs inundate human dwellings, flying creatures swarm the land, plague strikes livestock and human flesh, weather patterns reek

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[73] Many interpreters make this point. See, e.g., Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 168; Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 723; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 347-48.

[74] The symbiosis is evident as early as Gen 3:17-18 and highlighted in 6:5-9. The connection undergirds the curse literature of Lev 26:14-26 and Deut 28:15-68. The prophets regularly observe the relationship (e.g., Hos 4:1-3; Jer 9:10-22). On this topic, see most concisely, Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation." Refer to discussion above in ch. 2. Also note Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

[75] Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," interprets the Exodus plague narrative as an "anti-creation" account. He attempts to correlate the plagues intertextually with the ten creation words of Gen 1 (vv. 1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, and 29). The specific linkages with some plagues are unconvincing, so that his thesis that the ten plagues follow a strict pattern of a reversal of Gen 1 overreaches the evidence. Nevertheless, Zevit does show sufficient textual overlap between the two accounts to merit *associating* the plagues with a creational context; cf. the more circumspect treatment of the linkages in Dozeman, *Exodus*, 210-53, passim. B. Lemmelijm, "Genesis' Creation Narrative: The Literary Model for the So-Called Plague-Tradition?" in *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, ed. A. Wénin (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 416, mentions that this interpretative line goes back at least to the church fathers.

unimagined havoc, even the rhythm of time itself is suspended.[76] The scale, timing, and intensity of the plagues stretch considerably beyond the possible, random vicissitudes of the created order. Fretheim aptly describes the effect of the plagues as "hypernatural," which is to say elements within the created order run wildly amok of their God-intended functions.[77] The predictable, life-giving processes of creation give way to anti-creational forces of destruction, chaos, darkness, and death. Their cumulative effect results in a world turned upside down.[78] In a word, creation goes berserk.[79]

Fourth, the plagues serve as an assault on Egyptian royal and (connected) cosmological ideology. YHWH's declaration in 12:12 that the final plague will execute judgment (*šəpāṭîm*) on all the gods of Egypt (also Num 33:4; cf. Exod 6:6; 7:4; 15:11; 18:11; Gen 15:14) has led a few commentators to posit that the individual plagues target specific deities within the pantheon of Egypt.[80] It may be reasonable to infer some correspondence between various plagues and Egyptian deities.[81] But the focus of the

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[76] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 168, keenly observes the ninth plague of darkness "disrupts the basic structures of time [which] God had promised, after the Flood, never would again be disrupted."

[77] Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs," 394; ibid., *Exodus*, 109; cf. Laura Feldt, "Religious Narrative and the Literary Fantastic: Ambiguity and Uncertainty in Ex. 1-18," *Religion* 41 (2011): 256-64.

[78] Leder, "An Iconography of Order," 215. Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," 220, says by the end of the plagues Egypt is a "land in which creation is undone." Cf. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down," *JBL* 105 (1986): 599-610.

[79] Fretheim, *God and World*, 120: "It is a picture of creation gone berserk. The world is reverting to its precreation state. It is a kind of flood story in one corner of the world—that corner where God's creational purposes were beginning to be realized."

[80] E.g., Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 78-80; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 108-13; Zevit, "Three Ways," 21.

[81] There is no strict one-to-one correspondence, but several of the plagues attack elements associated with particular deities, e.g., the Nile god Hapi; the frog goddess Heqt; the sun god

narrative lies on the confrontation between the competing dominion of YHWH and Pharaoh. This becomes apparent right at the beginning of the plague narrative. YHWH elevates Moses before he confronts Pharaoh a second time in 7:1: "See, I have set you up as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet." YHWH's "upgrading" of Moses plays on Egyptian royal ideology. As representative of Horus and the embodiment of the sun god Re, Pharaoh was a divine figure in Egyptian royal ideology.[82] The Pharaoh's identity was equally creational:

> Not only was he identified with Horus, he was also associated with the omniscient creator gods who had brought original order out of chaos during primeval times—Atum, Ptah, Re, and all other cosmogonic deities. It was probably for this reason that the new king was shown or described offering *ma'at* to the creator gods. He, like them, had set the world aright, a role repeatedly portrayed in temple scenes and ritual literature.[83]

He was both the chief justice, "the fount of all laws and thus the foundation of

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Amon-Re. In addition to the sources in the previous note, see Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch," 3-15.

[82] Leprohon, "Royal Ideology," 1:274. On the controverted issue of the divine status of the Pharaoh, see ibid., 1:275; David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 58–87; ibid., "The Nature of Egyptian Kingship," in *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, eds. David O'Conner and David P. Silverman (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 49-94; Marie-Ange Bonhême, "Kingship," *OEAE* 2:243; Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell, 2001), 111–60; Strawn, "Pharaoh," 631-36, gives a concise survey of scholarship on the question. The pharaonic institution evolved over the more than three thousand years of Egyptian history. Scholars are more circumspect today than those of the early twentieth century in declaring the divinity of the Egyptian king. Suffice it to say, the Pharaoh enjoyed a sort of double nature that participated in both the mortal world of humans and the divinity of the gods. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 67, suggests the helpful bifurcation between "office" and "being." The former was always divine, the latter originally mortal. "Both of these original components remain recognizable, although the distinction between them may be clearer in some periods than in others."

[83] Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 70.

moral righteousness," and the supreme high priest, "who guaranteed the triumph of order over chaos."[84] He was considered the wise guardian of the divinely ordained cosmic harmony—*ma'at*—of the land. The pharaonic institution was the earthly source and cipher for the cosmic will of the Egyptian divinities established at creation but eternally recurring everyday. In short, the divine-king was to perpetuate on earth the order of "the creation, the 'first time.'"[85] YHWH promotes Moses to god-like status to match Pharaoh's respective mythic stature (cf. 4:16) in Egyptian royal and cosmic ideology. In effect, YHWH makes the contest a battle between equals, viz., Egyptian god-sovereign vs. Israelite god-sovereign.[86]

The staff-serpent competition between Moses, Aaron, and the Egyptian magicians similarly presages the cosmic caliber of the ensuing plague narrative (7:8-12).[87] In the confrontation the staffs of both parties change into snakes. When Aaron's staff-snake swallows (*bl'*) the magicians' staff-snakes, the imagery has ominous overtones in Egypt's

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[84] Leprohon, "Royal Ideology,"1:273-74. See also Jan Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik*, Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo 7 (Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1970), 17-22.

[85] Bonhême, "Kingship," 2:243.

[86] Rendsburg, "Moses as Equal to Pharaoh," 201-5. Rendsburg recognizes the remarkable nature of this comparison given Israelite theological sensibilities: "[Exod 7:1; 4:16] indicate the extent to which the biblical author was willing to reflect the Egyptian background of the story. Literary flavor overrides biblical theology. If the exigency of the moment calls for Moses's elevation to the divine plane, even if this position violates a basic tenet of the ancient Israelites, the biblical author was ready and willing to present the episode in just such a manner" (204).

[87] Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 85-86, describes the serpent encounter as a paradigm of the plague narratives. Various commentators argue that it forms an introduction to the plague narrative, e.g., Cassuto, *Exodus*, 94; Childs, *Exodus*, 151; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 113. Arie Leder, "Hearing Exodus 7:8-13 to Preach the Gospel: The Ancient Adversary in Today's World," *CTJ* (2008): 94-96, contends that the jussive of 7:9-10 ("and let it become a snake . . . and it became a

belief system.[88] First, the Egyptian magicians, who are the "true professional theologians in Egypt,"[89] walk away empty-handed, their staffs conquered in the contest. This portends that the best of Egypt's magic and religion will, quite literally, not be able to stand before YHWH's power (9:11).[90] Second, in this pericope the word used for snake is *tannîn* (vv. 9-10, 12). The term *tannîn* notably differs from the word for snake, *nāḥaš*, which previously designated the transmutation of Moses's staff at the burning bush (4:3; cf. 7:15). A *tannîn* is a "grander word" for snake, used especially in mythopoetic contexts where it denotes a serpentine, primordial chaos monster of the deep (Ezek 29:3; 32:2; cf. Isa 27:1; 51:9; Ps 74:13).[91] Moreover, in Egypt the snake was a ubiquitous creature whose image was charged with both negative and positive symbolism, especially because of its lethal capacity.[92] On the negative side, Apophis, the snake-god of the underworld, personified cosmic chaos. As the enemy of *ma'at*, Apophis did nightly battle against the sun god Re as he circuited the underworld.[93] On the positive side, the *uraeus*, a rearing

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snake") evokes the divine speech in Gen 1. He notes other elements of the contest that suggest a "cosmic" interpretation.

[88] Noegel, "Moses and Magic," 46.

[89] J. F. Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt," *CANE* 3:1784. Cf. Herman te Velde, "Theology, Priests, and Worship," *CANE* 3:1731-49.

[90] Rendsburg, "Moses the Magician," 248: "The attack on the lector-priests by extension represents an assault on the heart of Egyptian religion, for without the priestly service in the temples, the cults are inoperative, the deities are ineffective, and all of Egypt descends into turmoil."

[91] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 322; Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 47-56; R. S. Hendel, "Serpent," *DDD* 744-47; G. C. Heider, "Tannin," *DDD* 834-36. In Ezek 29:3 and 32:2, Pharaoh himself is described as a *tannîn*! Cf. discussion by Noegel, "Moses and Magic," 47-48.

[92] Nicole B. Hansen, "Snakes," *OAEA* 3:296-99, and Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 87-88, note this duality.

[93] Hansen, "Snakes," 3:297; Noegel, "Moses and Magic," 47. See further, Erik Hornung, "The Triumph of Magic: The Sun God's Victory over Apophis," in *The Valley of the Kings:*

cobra positioned on the front of Pharaoh's headdress, was emblematic of the ruler's deific power and terrorizing force.[94] Hence, when Aaron's staff-snake swallows the other staff-snakes, this portends YHWH's eventual triumph over Egypt. YHWH's *tannîm,* like Apophis, overcomes Egypt's snake-emblem of sovereignty. In a word, divine chaos envelops Pharaoh and his people.[95] This is what happens conclusively when the underworld (*'ereṣ*) swallows (*bl'*) the Egyptians at the Sea (15:12).[96] The "staff-combat" symbolizes what is at stake in the ensuing plagues, namely, the supremacy of the will and authority of YHWH over the will and authority of Pharaoh.[97] Nonetheless, Pharaoh does not discern the sign.

Horizon of Eternity, trans. David Warburton (London: Timkin, 1990), 103-13; Ludwig D. Morenz, "Apophis: On the Origin, Name, and Nature of an Ancient Egyptian Anti-God," *JNES* 63 (2004): 201-5.

[94] Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 89-92. Moreover, Rendsburg, "Moses as Equal," 212-13, shows that a snake grasped as a staff by the tail (a feature of 4:4 but not explicit in 7:8-12) has a parallel in Egyptian iconography. Pharaoh is frequently depicted wielding a staff-snake in the act of animal husbandry, symbolizing the king's shepherding prowess. On the staff as a symbol of royal authority in Egypt, see Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 154-55; Jennifer A. Amy-Dressier, "Moses and the Rod," *PEGLMBS* 6 (1986): 18-31.

[95] Or, as Fortner, "Theological and Literary Interpretations," puts it: "chaos [*tannîn*] swallows chaos (Egypt as the personification of anti-creation forces)." Noegel, "Moses and Magic," 48-49, suggests there is an additional symbolism at work here: "Of greater interest, however, is the representation of one serpent poised atop or striking another. According to Ritner: 'When snakes are directed against snakes, opponents are made to function as allies and 'assistant' means only 'subjected opponent'." Ritner's observation bears significantly on Exod. 7:8–13, for it explains why, despite the magicians' ability to reproduce the first three plagues, they in effect exacerbate the situation. They conjure more bloody water and more frogs, and thus, assist Moses in his plight. In essence, they have become 'subjected opponents.'"

[96] The verb "swallow" (*bl'*) appears in Exodus only in 7:12 and 15:12, providing an inclusio to the Egyptian confrontation; cf. Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 85; Leder, "Hearing Exodus 7:8-13," 100-101; Noegel, "Moses and Magic," 49-50, notes that "swallowing" is a common Egyptian act reference that is symbolic of destruction but also of acquisition (i.e., consumption) of power.

[97] Dennis J. McCarthy, "'Creation' Motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 393: the contest portrays "a struggle between adversaries for control of an apparently organized world."

As a final example, the creational polemic at work in the plagues is perhaps most evident in the ninth wonder of darkness. Darkness may at first glance appear out of place in the sequence of the plagues in terms of the pattern of intensification of the plagues' severity.[98] When viewed from a creational perspective, however, the removal of light and the spread of darkness represents a reversal of the ur-event of creation.[99] That is, to interpret the plague as the elongation of night is to miss its creational character.[100] Darkness is the primordial opposite to light, and the Egyptians cannot even produce artificial light "at their positions" (10:23a). They are paralyzed by darkness for three days.[101] "The imagery suggests something like a black hole where light is not simply absent but consumed."[102] In an occasion that mimics Gen 1, darkness is separate from the light, and the Israelites bask in primordial effulgence in their homes (10:23b).[103] Furthermore, the plague strikes at the heart of Egyptian religious-royal ideology.

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[98] Candida R. Moss and Jeffrey Stackert, "The Devastation of Darkness: Disability in Exodus 10:21-23, 27, and Intensification in the Plagues," *JR* 92 (2012): 362-72, detail the attempts scholars have made to make this plague fit the pattern.

[99] Cf. Isa 45:19; Jer 4:23; Zevit, "Priestly Redaction," 209; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 129-30.

[100] Dozeman, *Exodus*, 246. Moss and Stackert, "The Devastation of Darkness," overlook the creational dimensions by interpreting the darkness in terms of blindness and lameness.

[101] Jeffrey Stackert, "Why Does the Plague of Darkness Last for Three Days? Source Ascription and Literary Motif in Exodus 10:21-23, 27," *VT* 61 (2011): 669-70, suggests the Egyptian darkness provides the Israelites the respite they need from their hard labor (6:9) to prepare for the exodus journey. In other words, the darkness affords them a holiday to prepare for their coming journey. Note as well the period of three days corresponds to the three-day journey Moses had requested from Pharaoh (5:1-3). It is likely that this suggests a retributive aspect of the plague (so Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague," 557-58).

[102] Dozeman, *Exodus*, 246.

[103] Darkness, or night, is a repeated motif in the last triad, the tenth plague (11:4; 12:12, 31), and the Egyptians' pursuit of Israel (14:20). The redundancy makes the point that darkness subsumes Egypt. The land descends into chaos, a disordered *tōhû wābōhû* (Gen 1:2). Darkness is a typical and potent metaphor for ethical chaos in the ancient Near East (Nel, "Conception of Righteousness," 5), such that the darkness in Egypt is a sign of their ethical degeneration.

> The sun embodies for the Egyptians more than power in heaven or power over earth; the daily guarantee of sunrise after sunset of yesterday offered a bright and tangible promise of resurrection, and for this reason the sun-god was considered the central and original power of creation.[104]

In bringing darkness YHWH eviscerates this "most important god of the Egyptian pantheon" by effectively commandeering his primal responsibility.[105] And because of Re's tight linkage with the figure of Pharaoh, the conquest of one was concomitant with the conquest of the other.

4.3.2 Summary

In review of the discussion thus far, I want to summarize the theology of justice on display in the plague narrative. The creation perspective shows that the "signs and wonders" are more than assertions of raw, divine force over nature, aiming for Pharaoh's capitulation to YHWH's dominance.[106] The narrative has already unmasked Pharaoh, the monarch who oppresses Israel, as a "symbol for the anti-creational forces of death" opposed to YHWH's creation-wide agenda of blessing.[107] Pharaoh has threatened YHWH's

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[104] Stephen Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 22-23. I owe this citation to Dozeman, *Exodus*, 147. Cf. Maya Müller, "Re and Re-horakhty," *OEAE* 3:123-26. In Egyptian cosmogonies, order comes at the dawn of creation, an act that involved an act of separation, an act that recurs and reestablishes justice daily. It could be said that separation is the originating act of justice, which might also indicate another significant part of the separation of light and dark in the ninth plague. See further James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, YES 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

[105] Müller, "Re and Re-horakhty," 3:123.

[106] They are not less than that, but contra Eslinger, "Freedom or Knowledge?" and Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal," the plagues reveal a more nuanced picture of YHWH's creational power and agenda—one that involves and does not override Israel.

[107] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 27.

mission to re-actualize the promise of creation through Israel. Thus, the Egyptian kingdom has transgressed, not just against Israel, but against the creational order and agenda superintended by YHWH.[108] Because of the symbiotic relationship between the moral and natural order, the plagues both reveal and respond to this creational breach.

> The plagues are thus *not an arbitrary chosen divine response* to Pharaoh's sins, as if the vehicle could just as well have been foreign armies or an internal revolution. The consequences are cosmic because the sins are creational. God thereby acts to reestablish the *rightness* of the created order (ironically confessed by Pharaoh himself in 9:27: "the Lord is in the right" [*ṣaddîq*]. The divine power over all forms of pharaonic power is demonstrated through the moral order for the purpose of re-creating justice and righteousness in the world order.[109]

In order for YHWH to "re-create justice and righteousness" in Israel's corner of creation, Pharaoh's fraudulent order must first be "decreated," as it were. The plagues are an appropriate revocation on Pharaoh's *ma'at*. Individually, the plagues are not presented as acts of punishment. As an aggregate, however, they form a correspondent judgment for Pharaoh's anti-creational sins.[110] The plagues make a mockery (10:2) of the contrived,

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[108] Thus, in Fretheim's words, "the concern stretches far beyond the historical moment for Israel; the future of creation is at stake" (27). If it stretches beyond Israel, it does so by stretching through Israel. In other words, its creational impact is mediated by Israel.

[109] Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs," 395-96. The wider context of this quotation also comments on how the judgment is intrinsic to the sin.

[110] YHWH "will not leave the guilty unpunished" (cf. 34:7 and my discussion there). Moreover, the "measure for measure" principle explicitly expressed in the final plague in 4:23 is broadly applicable to all the plagues when understood creationally. The creational frame helps avoid two extremes when observing the "measure for measure" feature of the plagues. On the one hand, rabbinic midrash, adopting a "measure for measure" interpretation, often attempts to correlate specific sins with the plagues. This seems to strain the text, for as some commentators note, words for punishment are not prevalent in the narrative (e.g., Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 133; cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:182). On the other hand, others deny the category of "punishment" altogether for the plagues (so, e.g., Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 316; cf. Gowan, Jacob). This extreme overlooks the correspondent qualities manifest in some of the plagues (e.g., blood, darkness, firstborn); see Sacks, *Exodus*, 73-74; Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs," 394-95).

creational justice of Egypt, but they do so by exposing the impotence and illegitimacy of Pharaoh's ability to maintain justice.[111] The plagues are much more than targeted assaults on individual deities. Rather, they are an all-out blitzkrieg on the Egyptian corruption of creational order as mediated by the Pharaonic institution.[112] Creational chaos is a consequence of the Pharaonic chaos that threatens to nullify YHWH's good creation, which is uniquely manifested in Israel's role in YHWH's creational agenda. The plagues offer testimony to an overarching "natural justice" in history: they requite judgment on Egypt's injustices writ large on the cosmic screen.[113] And, as a continuation of the narrative of Genesis, the plagues of Exodus vindicate the converse of YHWH's promise to Abraham: "the one who curses you I will curse" (12:3b).[114] The plagues bring down the creational curse upon the nation, led by Pharaoh, that has cursed the chosen people of

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[111] So Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 153: "The legitimate king who rules by [*ma'at*] can expect the Nile to flood properly and bring the fertility to the land, and additionally the sun and moon to operate according to the created order . . . Rather it is YHWH and his agents, Moses and Aaron, who overcome in the cosmic struggle, demonstrating who really control the forces of nature."

[112] Thus, Trimm, "YHWH Fights For Them!" 206, observes that they are consequently polemical judgments against the gods, but only secondarily. Jethro connects the two in 18:10-11. Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation," nicely summarizes the point: "Exod 7-12 depicts the systematic dismantling of the Egyptian cosmic, social and religious order as God through Moses and Aaron brings down curses upon Pharaoh ("great house") and his land via the ten plagues. Since the Egyptian king was guardian over the physical, social and religious order of the land, their demise in any form would be attributable to one or more social, religious, or cultic failures on Pharaoh's part."

[113] Which is to say, they uphold the deed-consequence structure of YHWH's creation.

[114] Patrick Miller, "Syntax and Theology in Genesis XII 3a," *VT* 34 (1984): 472-76. Note that the singular "one" is used in contrast to the plural "I will bless *those* who bless you." Nathan MacDonald, "Did God Choose the Patriarchs? Reading for Election in the Book of Genesis," in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, eds. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 255, avers that the imbalance suggests "the one who opposes Abraham and his seed is the exception. Or, to put it another way, God has a propensity toward blessing."

blessing.[115] In Pharaoh's adieu to Moses before the Israelites leave, he audaciously requests he be beneficiary of the other side of the Abrahamic equation: "and you (2nd per. pl.) bless me as well!" (12:32; cf. Gen 47:7).

4.3.3 Pharaoh's Hard Heart

No other issue in Exodus has caused more turmoil over the justness of God's actions than the state of Pharaoh's heart.[116] On a cursory reading of the story, it seems as if YHWH, with the promise to harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3), takes away at the outset Pharaoh's ability to send the people out—the very thing YHWH demands Pharaoh do.[117] The "hard heart" motif provokes several questions. Does Pharaoh lose his freedom of will in these encounters? Why does YHWH not rather soften Pharaoh's heart and thus refrain from the destruction and suffering of the plagues?[118] Are the plagues just "a gruesome game,"[119] played by a sadistic god intent on making sport of Pharaoh? Does God only

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[115] Mann, *The Book of Torah*, 171-72, n. 23: "[T]he corollary theme of curse pervades this literary unit [Exod 1-15] despite the complete absence of the word, especially since plague is one of the most prominent manifestations of divine curse, as are the destruction of crops, the spoiling of water, and the death of first-born offspring—all obviously connected to fertility or its opposite, sterility. Cf. the covenant curses in Lev. 26:14-26; Deut. 28:15-68 and note in the latter the explicit references to the Egyptian plagues in vv. 60, 67."

[116] A history of interpretation appears in Edgar Kellenberger, *Die Verstockung Pharaos: Exegetische und auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Exodus 1-15*, BWANT 171 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 182-279. See also Claire Mathews McGinnis, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Christian and Jewish Interpretation," *JTI* 6 (2012): 43-64; Childs, *Exodus*, 164-75.

[117] Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 79: "Not infrequently exegetes understand [the hard heart] passages literally, conscious as they are of the disastrous consequences of 'hardening.' God is cast as an incalculable despot who penalizes the very error he wishes to bring about."

[118] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 128.

[119] Phrase used by Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:103.

harden Pharaoh's heart in order to prolong the divine demonstration of supremacy? If the Exodus narrative is paradigmatic, then what does YHWH's hardening of Pharaoh's heart say about YHWH's characteristic way of salvation? These queries go to the heart, as it were, of Exodus's theology of justice. In the following I argue YHWH's treatment of Pharaoh does not overrule the king's own obdurate will. Rather, YHWH genuinely wants Pharaoh to send the people out; and the divine hardening does not inhibit, but preserves, this option for Pharaoh. Nevertheless, Pharaoh refuses to capitulate to YHWH's demands. In the end Pharaoh's obstinance is the ultimate cause for his empire's descent into chaos and death. I will advance my argument in a series of seven observations.

1. *The narrative uses three verbal roots to depict the disposition of Pharaoh's heart. Although each has a subtle nuance, collectively they point to an unyielding disposition within Pharaoh's will.*

The three verbal roots are, in order of decreasing frequency, *ḥzq* (12x),[120] *kbd* (6x),[121] and *qšh* (2x).[122] The root *ḥzq* has a nuance of demonstrating strength or courage of heart in the face of opposition, *kbd* indicates a heart that is heavy in the sense of insensitive or unresponsive, and *qšh* suggests a heart that is stubborn.[123] Jointly they describe an intransigent quality to Pharaoh's heart. There appears to be no obvious

[120] Exod 4:21; 7:13, 22; 8:19 [15]; 9:12, 35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17. For two helpful charts on the following observations, see McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 346-47.

[121] Exod 7:14; 8:15 [11], 32 [28]; 9:7, 34; 10:1.

[122] Exod 7:3; 13:15. The last occurrence does not include "heart" in the context. There are two additional occurrences with other verbal roots. In 7:23, Pharaoh does not "take to heart even this." In 14:5, the "heart of Pharaoh and his servants was changed (*hpk*) toward the people."

[123] McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 333-40, provides an extensive discussion of each root; cf. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 11-12; Kellenberger, *Die Verstockung Pharaos*, 32-44. As noted by McAffee, 339, n. 47, the gloss "hard/harden" is typically used to translate all three; although, if one were to pick a single gloss, strong/strengthen would more accurately reflect the predominant use of the root *ḥzq*.

rationale for the way the roots are interchanged through the narrative.[124] Both *ḥzq* and *kbd* appear in stative (*qal*) and non-stative stems (i.e., factitive (*piel*) and/or causative (*hiphil*)). The *qal* statives are intransitive verbs and thus describe the state of Pharaoh's heart (i.e., "it was strong/heavy/hard").[125] The non-stative stems occur as transitive verbs and have Pharaoh or YHWH as their subject and "heart" as their object (i.e., "Pharaoh/YHWH strengthened/hardened/made heavy his heart").[126] In my discussion I will use "strong/hard" and "strengthen/harden" interchangeably. The word heart, *lēb*, includes the totality of the human's inner life—the cognitive, affective, and psychological aspects. Most important for this discursus, the heart is the seat of a person's will and deliberation.[127]

2. *YHWH tells Moses he will strengthen/harden Pharaoh's heart twice before the plague narrative (4:21; 7:3). YHWH does not, however, specifically identify the time of the divine hardening.*

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[124] Some attribute the distribution to different sources behind the text, e.g., Robert R. Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 18-36. Rendsburg, "The Literary Unity," 119-25, concisely refutes this reading. Regardless of what one thinks of these attempts, Childs, *Exodus*, 149, perceptively observes that "the essential problem . . . is not ultimately form-critical in nature, but profoundly theological. The interpreter is still faced with the task of penetrating the mystery of God's power before human pride."

[125] *Qal* statives occur 6x: *ḥzq* in 7:13, 22; 8:19 [15]; 9:35; *kbd* in 7:14 (may be a verbal adjective) and 9:7. While *qal* stative verbs can carry a dynamic or progressive sense (e.g., "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened = increased in hardness"), McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 341-43, demonstrates that the necessary syntactical factors that signal a dynamic reading are absent in these six occurrences of the *qal* statives.

[126] Non-stative stems occur 15x: *ḥzq* in 4:21; 9:12, 34; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; *kbd* in 8:15 [11], 32 [28]; 9:34; 10:1; *qšh* in 7:3 and 13:15.

[127] *HALOT* 2:513-15; F. Stolz, "לֵב," *TLOT* 2:638-43; Alex Luc, "לֵב," *NIDOTTE* 2:742-48; N. Shupak, "Some Idioms Connected with the Concept of 'Heart' in Egypt and the Bible," in *Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 202; Erik Hornung, "Ancient Egyptian Religious Iconography," *CANE* 3:1720-22.

The first two mentions of the hard heart motif come as preparatory, summary statements of what YHWH will do. The narrative of the plagues expands these summaries with significant details. It is unwarranted to simply assume these summary statements apply indiscriminately to every occasion that makes mention of hardening.[128] The text can explicitly name YHWH as the agent of strengthening (10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). We should be cautious, however, not to presume YHWH is the cause of every instance of hardening, especially where the text is reticent to name an agent or explicitly names Pharaoh as the agent of his own hardening. YHWH is first named explicitly as the agent in 9:12.[129]

3. *In the plague narrative there is a clear progression in the state and agency of the strengthening/hardening, moving from Pharaoh to YHWH.*

After the initial two summary statements in 4:21 and 7:3, the next four appearances of the heart motif indicate the obdurate state of Pharaoh's heart (7:13, 14, 22, 23; the motif occurs again in 8:19 [15]; 9:7; 9:35). An explicit agent is not named for these actions; rather, the statements are intransitive and describe Pharaoh's existing heart

[128] Moreover, Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 89-90, demonstrates that the context of 4:21-23 and 7:1-5 suggests YHWH is looking ahead to the denouement of the plagues. Ford (94-98) persuasively refutes the counter-argument put forward by G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans," *TJ* 5 (1984): 140-41, that the refrain "as YHWH said," (7:13, 22; 8:15 [11], 19 [15]; 9:12, 35) corresponds to YHWH's promise to harden Pharaoh's heart in 4:21 and 7:3. Instead, the phrase refers to Pharaoh's act of not listening or sending. In other words, Pharaoh's behavior does not catch YHWH by surprise. Also see McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 349-51.

[129] For an argument that the prediction in 4:21 finds its "best contextual realization" in 9:12, see McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 347-49, 351-52. McAffee also points out the prediction in 7:3 uses the *hiphil* imperfective root of *qšh.* The only other occurrence of this root is 13:15, which could indicate 13:15 is a reflection on the fulfillment of 7:3.

condition.[130] It is not the case that these declarations describe a change or progression in Pharaoh's heart. It does not "become" hard/strong. Pharaoh's heart is and remains matter-of-factly unyielding.[131] Indeed, Pharaoh has already revealed himself to be stubborn in his initial confrontation with Moses in Exod 5.

As the narrative progresses, Pharaoh becomes the subject of transitive verbs beginning in 8:15 [11]: "When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened (*hiphil* of *kbd*) his heart and he did not listen to them."[132] In other words, Pharaoh further hardens what is already his hard heart, an action he repeats in 8:32 [28].[133] The first time YHWH steps in to harden Pharaoh's heart occurs in 9:12: "But YHWH hardened (*piel* of *ḥzq*) the heart of Pharaoh and he did not listen to them. After YHWH's initial intervention, Pharaoh once more hardens his heart (9:34). In the next verse (9:35), the narrative returns to the intransitive: "the heart of Pharaoh was strong (*qal* of *ḥzq*)." The second time YHWH occurs as the subject is in the following verse (10:1), and thereafter YHWH appears as the

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[130] Nonetheless, McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 344, shrewdly points out, just because no agent is stated, this does not mean the action is passive. These initial references indicate the starting point, as it were, of Pharaoh's heart, viz., Pharaoh's heart is a characteristically hardened entity.

[131] McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 340-43, defends this line of interpretation in detail. Against the view that Pharaoh's intransigent heart is at the beginning of the plague narrative an implicit fulfillment of YHWH's word in 4:21, see McAffee, 343, 49, and Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 100. As Ford makes clear, the refrain "Pharaoh's heart remained hard" comes in contexts where he does not negotiate with Moses. Where Pharaoh actively hardens his heart, this action comes in response to some concession Pharaoh previously made to end the plague.

[132] Pharaoh is the subject again in 8:32 [28]; 9:7; 9:34; cf. 13:15.

[133] Between these two occurrences the narrator again says in 8:19 [15] that Pharaoh's heart was strong (*qal* stative of *ḥzq*). After 8:32 [28] the narrator again informs the reader of the hard state of Pharaoh's heart in 9:7 (*qal* stative of *kbd*).

subject of the hardening action in all but one instance (13:15).[134] It would appear that from 9:12 to 10:1 the narrative reveals an interplay between the human and divine actors in the hardening process while also portraying a definite shift from human to divine agency.[135]

4. *It is important to YHWH that Pharaoh decides to send the Israelites out. This response would signal that Pharaoh has come to know about YHWH (what he denies in 5:2)—fulfilling in part the explicit pedagogical goal of the plagues. YHWH's patience with Pharaoh, mercifully desisting from the full brunt of possible judgment, showcases a different mode of power and justice.*

Before the seventh plague of hail, YHWH gives the longest speech in the plague narrative (9:13-19).[136] The address is delivered to Pharaoh. YHWH announces and explains a change in the divine action toward Egypt:

> YHWH said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh. Say to him, 'Thus says YHWH God of the Hebrews: Send out my people so that they may serve/worship ('bd) me. For at this time I am about to send out all my plagues on your heart and your servants and your people so that you may know there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have sent out my hand in order to strike you and your people with pestilence and you would have been effaced from the earth. Nonetheless, on account of this I have caused you to stand: to show you my power and in order to make known my name in all the earth. Yet still you exalt yourself over my people by not sending them out! (9:13-17)[137]

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[134] YHWH is the subject in 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17. Exod 13:15 is a retrospective statement made by Moses.

[135] McAffee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 351-52. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 139, notes "[t]his fluctuation in verse 9:35 and 10:1 would have sufficed by itself to cast doubt on the significance of the shift in the expressions—it being arguable that 'self-motivation' was illusory, the facts being governed by 7:3 and 10:1. But the distribution of expressions is otherwise so markedly unequal that it strongly indicates the narrator's preference for self-motivation during the first half of the plague series and for divine compulsion during the second half."

[136] Significantly, this is at the beginning of the third triad.

[137] See the cogent defense for this translation in Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, 41-76. I owe much of my discussion to his fine exegesis.

Once again, YHWH calls on Pharaoh to respond by sending the people out to worship YHWH (v. 13). And once again, YHWH underlines that the divine exit strategy for Israel includes Pharaoh's acknowledgement (v. 14). Not only has Pharaoh failed to respond appropriately, he continues arrogantly to exalt himself over Israel as their master (v. 17). YHWH notifies Pharaoh of the severe irony of the monarch's position: the king only remains in power because YHWH has desisted from his total annihilation. YHWH has heretofore communicated with escalating displays of power—no doubt a language Pharaoh should understand.[138] Yet, Pharaoh needs to grasp that the plagues' potency has been mercifully restrained. In this YHWH rules with a power in judgment unfamiliar to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh appears unable to comprehend it. YHWH has acted with restraint, and even reveals Himself as the King willing to listen and respond to the cry for relief (under conditions of warranted judgment!).[139] YHWH has caused Pharaoh to remain in

[138] Carolyn M. Jones, "Moses: Identity and Community in Exodus," in *In Good Company: Essays in Honor of Robert Detweiler*, ed. David Jasper and Mark Ledbetter (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 376; Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 330. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 739, observes the contest of power lends political realism to the story.

[139] Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 64-65, makes the compelling case that YHWH displays power through restraint. Moreover, Ford astutely points out that the removal of the plagues is just as much a part of a demonstration of power than their imposition. "Only twice is the sending of a plague announced to him as the means of YHWH's revelation (7:17; 9:14). In other places the revelation is linked to the removal of the plague (8:10 [6]; 9:29), or the exemption of Israel or Goshen from it (8:22 [18]; 11:7). What Egypt and Pharaoh are learning is not, primarily, that YHWH sends plagues, but that he does not send them on his people, and that he ends them when asked . . . would it be fair to say that picture of YHWH that Pharaoh is meant to receive is not primarily of a god who shows himself in the power of destruction, but rather of one who refrains from greater destruction?" (80; cf. 132). Ford goes on to assert that not only does YHWH demonstrate a contrasting mode of power (i.e., power of restraint), but YHWH reveals a different mode of response to the cry for relief. "YHWH does not wait until Pharaoh has released the people before he removes the plagues; rather he responds to a request for relief by bringing relief (8:13 [9]; cf. 2:23-25). Pharaoh, in contrast, responds to a request for relief from suffering by increasing that suffering (5:3, 7-9, 17-18); thus attempting to silence that request (5:9). Just as

order to display this different mode of justice and power. This is not only for Pharaoh and Egypt's benefit (v. 14), but for the benefit of YHWH's name being known in all the earth (v. 16). YHWH is quite capable of bringing an abrupt end to the whole affair. Yet:

> God wants Pharaoh to come to a personal recognition of His power; it is [Pharaoh's] narrative that God desires, his awareness that his own starting point—"I do know God!" (5:2)—has been repudiated. Such a narrative will surely be worth having . . . It justifies the risk in the ambiguous, repetitive, and protracted narrative of the plagues—the risk, that is of generating an adversary narrative, telling of weakness and inability to accomplish His will.[140]

YHWH wishes to provoke the right response from Pharaoh; but Pharaoh, by continuing to exalt himself, has seriously and persistently misinterpreted the pedagogic objective of YHWH's patient restraint.[141] Hence, YHWH appears to be exasperated by Pharaoh's continuing recalcitrance (v. 17; cf. 10:3).[142]

Pharaoh and Egypt are unlike YHWH in their inability to remove the plague, so they are unlike him in their methods of dealing with the powerless" (139). Cf. Dozeman, *God At War*, 131-32.

[140] Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 152.

[141] Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 73: "Thus for [Pharaoh], YHWH's actions, far from demonstrating power, have confirmed his original views of YHWH as one who can be ignored. YHWH's use of power (through restraint) is so different from Pharaoh's concept of power (through domination), that for him it appears as weakness."

[142] Moses seems to be exasperated as well by Pharaoh's duplicitous ways in 9:29-30, and with good reason. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 102-124, gives persuasive evidence to interpret YHWH's speech to Moses in 10:1-2 as a response to Moses' frustration (perhaps discouragement). By YHWH's comment that He is "toying with" Pharaoh, YHWH means to reassure Moses in order to continue his mission. YHWH's rationale in 10:1-2 is troubling in that it appears to give a contrary explanation for Pharaoh's recalcitrance, viz., Pharaoh is not responding because YHWH is, by hardening his heart, making a mockery of him. But Ford rightly observes that this speech must be heard in the context of "insider-speech." In other words, the function of 10:1-2 is motivation to Moses to continue to go to Pharaoh, despite Moses's own suspicions and hesitations.

This speech, coming at the beginning of the third triad (the seventh plague), marks a watershed in YHWH's dealings with Pharaoh.[143] YHWH will no longer be so restrained: "all my plagues" are coming, says YHWH.[144] The last three plagues exceed any of the previous plagues—indeed, anything in the memory of Egypt—in their destructiveness.[145] Unlike the previous plagues, YHWH stipulates no "if you do not send, I will send" condition to the coming onslaught.[146] The plague will happen regardless. But YHWH mercifully provides a way for Pharaoh to mitigate the disaster, namely if Egypt brings their livestock indoors. To issue such an order, however, means Pharaoh must tacitly admit "fear of the word of YHWH." He refuses to take appropriate measures. Meanwhile, the internal support for Pharaoh's rigid stance begins to rupture. Some of his own courtiers heed YHWH's warning (9:20), and in the next plague, his court intelligentsia plead with him to appease Moses's demands (10:7).

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[143] Ibid., 42-43; cf. Scott B. Noegel, "The Significance of the Seventh Plague," *Bib* 76 (1995): 532-39; Grossman, "The Structural Paradigm," 588-610.

[144] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 161.

[145] The heightening of the last triad is signaled by the "explosion" of usage of the words "all" (*kōl*) and "earth/land" (*'ereṣ*) as noted by Fretheim, *Exodus*, 107. The expression of the incomparability of the plagues is also only found in the last triad (9:19, 24; 10:6, 14). Not only is their effect more devastating, but it may also be the case that the seventh plague is more explicitly theophanic in character. Fire mixed with other typically theophanic elements (e.g., thunder and hail) suggests to some the category of divine epiphany (cf. Leder, "Iconography of Order," 220-23; Durham, *Exodus*, 128; Grossman, "The Structural Paradigm," 592). We should also note that it is only before the seventh plague that YHWH begins to harden Pharaoh's heart.

[146] Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 42. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 99, makes the point that the conditional language used throughout the plagues assumes Pharaoh's genuine ability to choose. Even when YHWH apprises Moses and Aaron of the divine hardening (10:1), they continue to use conditional language (10:3-4) in their address to Pharaoh. Apparently, they think Pharaoh can still choose to send the people, even if Moses thinks it hardly likely (9:30).

5. *In order for Pharaoh to make a willful decision to send the people, without being overwhelmed and ultimately coerced by the plagues, YHWH must step in. YHWH begins to harden/strengthen Pharaoh's heart when the plagues significantly intensify in the third triad. YHWH's hardening maintains some level of ambiguity of the signs for Pharaoh. YHWH pressures Pharaoh but does not compel him.*

Throughout the plagues YHWH remains interested in Pharaoh's response. Pharaoh's riposte in 5:2—"Who is YHWH that I should heed him?"—inadvertently invites YHWH to respond with a potential antidote for Pharaoh's arrogant ignorance. The God of the Hebrews will provide Pharaoh the opportunity "to know that I am YHWH" through the experience of the plagues.[147] Hence, the plagues are characterized as "signs and wonders." Signs and wonders point beyond themselves to divine truth that enjoins response.[148] Yet, because they are signs, they also require interpretation, which is to say, they are open to more than one explanation of meaning. Another way to put the matter is to say a sign is susceptible to a "double-readability."[149] A single sign can be quite ambiguous, especially when it has a ready-made parallel.[150] This is the case at the

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[147] Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 63, draws the comparison to getting to know God with getting to know a person: "how could knowing [God] involve anything less than *coming to know* him in ways analogous to those we have for getting acquainted with other persons—namely, through *our experiences of them over time*?"

[148] YHWH gives signs to persuade (e.g., 4:1-9, 21-23). Of course, the underlying assumption is that Pharaoh can rightly interpret YHWH's deeds of power. That is, he is not ultimately impeded by the hardness of his heart. On the following observations, cf. Andre LaCocque, "Moses' Competition with Pharaoh's Magicians," in *Miracles: God, Science, and Psychology in the Paranormal: Volume 1: Religious and Spiritual Events*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008), 87-102; Feldt, "Religious Narrative," 259-61.

[149] Feldt, "Religious Narrative," 251-83, shows that the "double readability" of these events is woven throughout the narrative.

[150] Indeed, YHWH recognizes that even the Israelites will likely need several signs in order to be initially persuaded by the veracity of Moses's message (4:8-9). And even then, these signs do not secure the Israelites' conviction in Moses. In 10:1-2 YHWH emphasizes the importance of the sign value of the plagues for Israel.

beginning of the plagues where the first few signs look similar to Egyptian sorcery.[151] The magicians are able to duplicate Moses's performance with the staff-snake and the first two plagues (blood to water, frogs). Pharaoh remains unswayed even as he calls on Moses to take the frogs away.[152] His early reactions reveal his characteristic obstinate heart (e.g., 7:13), as well as his predilection for both further hardening his heart (e.g., 8:15 [11]) and political subterfuge. Even so, the ambiguity of these early signs maintains a level of plausibility for Pharaoh's recalcitrance.[153]

As the signs multiply, however, their ambiguity dissipates. The accumulation of the signs and wonders forms a larger, more conspicuous pattern of meaning that is much harder to ignore.[154] With the progression of the plagues, their divine import—or pattern of meaning—becomes increasingly absurd for Pharaoh to deny.

The ambiguity starts to dissipate at the conclusion of the third plague. Pharaoh's magicians reach the limits of their magic arts and admit the divine genesis of the plague

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[151] LaCocque, "Moses' Competition," 90: "The competition with the Egyptians has an aspect of compassion. Moses' purpose is not to destroy his competitors but to convince them. From this perspective, there *must* be a margin of freedom left to the magicians in their response to Moses." What is more, the narrative appears to accept the viability of the magicians' feats (see Rendsburg, "Moses the Magician," 254-55). Of course, the magicians will eventually concede a divine involvement that is beyond them in the fourth plague (8:19 [15]), and they will be utterly disabled from further competition by the sixth plague (9:11). Nonetheless, Pharaoh as Egypt's representative authority holds on stubbornly to his attenuating "margin of freedom." Cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 152.

[152] Moses gives Pharaoh the privilege of naming the time for the removal of the frogs so that Pharaoh "will know that there is no one like YHWH our God." Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 327: "So as not to appear desperate, [Pharaoh] casually answers, 'Oh, tomorrow would be fine.'"

[153] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 141. That the magicians' work only worsens the plagues is ironic. The irony is sharpened by the fact Egyptian magic was characteristically apotropaic (Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt," 3:1776).

[154] Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 71-2.

(8:19 [15]).[155] Ironically, Pharaoh does not heed the wisdom of his "chief theologians," and his heart remains unyielding. The second triad of plagues (4-6) is more intense than the first triad—flies ruin the land/earth (8:24 [20]); "all" the livestock of Egypt dies (9:6); and Egyptians and their beasts are afflicted with painful boils (9:10). In addition YHWH introduces the new element of Israel's exemption at the beginning of the triad (8:22-23 [18-19]).[156] YHWH notifies Pharaoh that Israel's exemption should serve as a sign for him: "so that you [Pharaoh] will know that I, YHWH, am in the midst of the land/earth" (8:22 [18]).[157] In order to end the fourth plague (8:25-29 [21-25]), Pharaoh parleys with Moses but reneges on his side of the bargain (once the flies are gone) by hardening his heart (8:32 [28]). His calculated reversal—a consequence of his progressively hardening heart—discloses his continuing failure to correctly interpret the second wave of YHWH's signs and wonders. Tellingly, the final mention of the magicians comes at the end of this triad. They are utterly defeated, unable even to appear before Pharaoh because of the boils (9:11). Their downfall further lessens the ambiguity of the signs. YHWH is reducing Pharaoh's alternatives for explanation.

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[155] On the magician's expression "This is the finger of God!" see Gerald A. Klingbeil, "The *Finger of God* in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 112 (2000): 409-15.

[156] The theme of Israel's separation occurs again in 9:4, 6, 26; 10:23; 11:7. On this theme see Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 142-45; Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 101-13. Pharaoh uses the proper name "Israel" for the last time in 5:2. It could well be that this points to Pharaoh's refusal to recognize YHWH's people as a distinct entity (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 252; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:121).

[157] Israel as a community becomes a sign for Egypt. Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 79, points out that this foreshadows Israel's role as a people, viz., to be the "surest evidence that the Lord himself is still alive in the midst of creation, having neither abandoned nor abjured it, no matter how great that creation's inhumanity or ungodliness may be."

The "double-readability" of the plagues stretches to the breaking point in the third triad.[158] YHWH informs Pharaoh that the next plague will be incomparable in scope and power (9:18; cf. 10:6). The plagues will continue, YHWH says, because Pharaoh has not yet responded by sending the people (9:13-19).[159] How is it possible that Pharaoh stubbornly perseveres in the face of the mounting evidence presented by the historically unparalleled onslaught of hail, locusts and darkness? The answer: YHWH steps in to strengthen Pharaoh's heart (the first mention is 9:12 just before the seventh plague).[160] In so doing YHWH preserves a level of ambiguity in the events for Pharaoh. But why? YHWH is not just interested in liberating Israel; otherwise, YHWH would have already dispensed with the monarch (which YHWH tells Pharaoh in 9:15). Rather, by the plagues YHWH works to influence Pharaoh's willful choice to send the Israelites out[161]—an act that by definition will signal Pharaoh's acknowledgement of YHWH. By strengthening the king's heart, YHWH maintains a margin of freedom necessary for this choice.[162] For Pharaoh,

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[158] My following observations owe much to Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 152-56.

[159] Just previous to YHWH's speech to Pharaoh, YHWH has hardened Pharaoh's heart (9:11). Yet, YHWH clearly still expects Pharaoh to respond after hardening his heart. He makes it clear in the speech delivered to Pharaoh (9:13-17) and gives him opportunity to choose to mitigate the effect of the plague in 9:19. If the offer is taken seriously, YHWH does not demand of Pharaoh what YHWH has made impossible.

[160] Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart,'" 78, correctly observes "Pharaoh's turnabouts appear ludicrous if not for their divine help," though he draws a very different conclusion than the one offered here.

[161] Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 154.

[162] Two rabbis, Albo, *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim*, 4:25 and Sforno, commentary to Exodus 7:3, argue this interpretation, viz., by hardening his heart, God gives Pharaoh the requisite courage not to act under compulsion. In a somewhat similar vein, Mathews McGinnis, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 43-64, shows that both Origen and Gregory of Nyssa contend mercy and hardening can be different outcomes of a single operation. The Egyptian king does not receive God's word—not because YHWH places resistance in Pharaoh's soul—but because Pharaoh's inclination toward evil will not allow him to receive YHWH's word as grace. In other words,

then, the final triad of plagues retains a modicum of double readability—precisely because of YHWH's hardening—though it is an "increasingly-under-pressure ambiguity."[163]

Pharaoh's obstinacy shows signs of cracking under the pressure when he is urgently more willing to negotiate concessions in this last triad (9:27-28; 10:8-11; 16-17). Nonetheless, though he resentfully and incrementally yields toward an appropriate response, he never wholly concedes to YHWH's demands in the first nine plagues.[164] He will not send the people without some qualification (10:10-11, 24). The cost is too high for him. His stubbornness shelters the delusion of his independent sovereignty. The full "sign"-ificance of the wonders remains shrouded by Pharaoh's divinely-protected contumacy.

6. *The strengthening of Pharaoh's heart results in the exposure of the perversity of his stubbornness even as it allows Pharaoh to reap the consequences of his own, maniacal machinations. In other words, by hardening his heart YHWH delivers Pharaoh up to the violence he has committed against YHWH's creational agenda. At the finale of Pharaoh's life, his self-destructive obstinacy is made ultimately to glorify YHWH.*

YHWH's hardening enables Pharaoh to continue in his obstinate ways. Nine plagues do not suffice to move Pharaoh. Pharaoh's strong heart now forces the strong hand of God in the last plague (3:19; 7:4; 13:3). YHWH had informed Moses from the beginning that it would come to this (4:22-23). This final plague, YHWH tells Moses, will

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YHWH's activity becomes a negative hardening when it encounters the unyielding proclivity of Pharaoh's heart.

[163] Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 156. It should be noted that Pharaoh is not passive in the matter. He hardens his own heart, as do his officials, once again at the end of the seventh plague (9:34).

[164] Cf. Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 76-77.

penetrate the king's intransigence, at least, for time enough that he drives the Israelites out of the land (11:1). The death of the firstborn in Egypt does seemingly break Pharaoh's resolve so that he grants Moses's request (12:31-32).[165] Yet, the passage of time reveals his (and his officials') inability ultimately to come to terms with Israel's departure: their "hearts are turned" about the people's release (14:5).[166] Pharaoh's stubbornness once again has its day, but this time, its final day. In the end he forces Egypt to its watery death, despite Egypt's penultimate confession: "And Egypt said, 'Let us flee from Israel, for YHWH fights for them against Egypt!'" (14:25). The reorientation required by the revelation is too little and too late for Egypt's war machine because of their leader's intransigence. Pharaoh pursued the death of Israel only to be subsumed by the creational chaos he unleashed.[167] The tragic result of Pharaoh's defiant will washes up on the shoreline to Yhwh's glorification (14:17-18, 30-31).

7. *Finally, the drama of Pharaoh's heart plays upon Egyptian ideology about the judgment of the dead to show Pharaoh's ethical corruption of the creational, moral order.*

The condition of one's heart was central to Egyptian ideology concerning each human's destiny in the afterlife.[168] The "most developed form" of Egyptian beliefs about

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[165] Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:199, thinks Pharaoh's use of the phrase "as you requested" indicates that Pharaoh still sees himself as Israel's master who grants the servant's request.

[166] Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 176-77, cogently defends that the behavior in 14:5 is not an outworking of YHWH's promise to Moses to strengthen Pharaoh's heart in 14:4. Rather, YHWH strengthens Pharaoh in 14:8 and the Egyptians in 14:17.

[167] Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 81, offers a similar assessment "Pharaoh's forces are undermining the orderly structure of the world, so God must abandon them to the destruction that they themselves have devised and set in motion."

[168] On the following comments, see Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 96-98.

the post-mortem judgment appears in spell 125 of the *Book of the Dead*.[169] The deceased enters the Hall of Two Truths (or Two *Ma'ats*), wherein a tribunal of gods oversees the weighing of the deceased's heart on a scale against *ma'at*, symbolized by a feather. The scale reveals the relationship between the deceased's earthly conduct and *ma'at*. If the balance is even, then the deceased lived in conformity with *ma'at* and is permitted to transition to blessed immortality. An individual's transgressions, however, can cause the heart to weigh heavily in the balance, exposing a life lived out of kilter with the standard of *ma'at*. In this case, the fate of the guilty party is the second death.[170]

The courtroom drama is the most likely explanation for why the narrative describes Pharaoh's heart with the root *kbd* (heavy).[171] Post-mortem judgment "was one of the central religious ideas of Egypt . . . The concept of the Judgment of the Dead came

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[169] Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 126. For translation and commentary of the Book of the Dead in papyrus Ani, see *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth By Day*, ed. Eva Von Dassow, trans. Raymond O. Faulkner, comm. Ogen Goelet, 2nd rev. ed. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998). For a general overview, see Stephen G. J. Quirke, "Judgment of the Dead," *OEAE* 2:211-14.

[170] John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 35-39, provides a succinct discussion of the drama. For more detail, see Assmann, *Ma'at*, 92-121.

[171] Unlike the language of *qšh* (stubborn), both the verbal roots *ḥzq* (strengthen) and *kbd* (make heavy) used in reference to the heart are not common language in scripture (each occurs only once outside of Exodus, in Ezek 2:4 and 1 Sam 6:6, respectively). Nili Shupak, "Ḥzq, Kbd, Qšh Lēb, The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-15:21: Seen Negatively in the Bible but Favorably in Egyptian Sources," in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch, Problem der Ägyptologie 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 389-404, suggests the choice of these two words draws on and subverts equivalent Egyptian idioms of "stout-heartedness," (e.g., *dns ib*, *shm ib*). I find her arguments reasonable, but she unnecessarily rejects the further interpretation I take here on a tenuous linguistic basis. My view is that the Exodus author is familiar with Egyptian beliefs and practices—particularly the well-known judgment of the dead scene—and out of this knowledge constructs a significant, allusive critique of Pharaoh's heart with Hebrew expressions. It does not

to acquire a towering importance among the images of death that influenced the reality of life for the ancient Egyptians."[172] By illuminating the process of the "heavying" of Pharaoh's heart in the plague narrative, the narrator deftly discloses (in categories exploiting Egyptian ideology) the correlation between the weighty degeneration of *ma'at* in Pharaoh's heart and in Pharaoh's kingdom. Pharaoh's heart grows progressively out of balance with the very standard of justice and righteousness that the Egyptian ruler is tasked to protect and uphold.[173] As a result, judgment befalls Pharaoh's world, both within and without.

4.3.4 Summary

Zornberg summarizes well the theological predicament of Pharaoh's heart: "If it was impossible for Pharaoh to repent—obviously a theologically offensive notion—the plague story becomes a narrative of vengeful abuse, of a morally paralyzed victim bombarded by all the armaments of a powerful but immoral deity."[174] In response, I have argued that the narrative presents Pharaoh's stubbornness as something he brings to the

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depend on the lexical equivalence that Shupak finds lacking. My thanks to Dr. Scott Noegel and Dr. John Fortner for corresponding with me concerning Shupak's objections.

[172] Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 73; see also his comments on the pervasiveness of the concept on p. 83.

[173] Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation," comments: "Exod 7-12 programmatically shows that the world of Pharaoh which was ordered by the principle of *ma'at* self-destructs in direct proportion to the increasing heaviness/hardness/insensibility of Pharaoh's heart."

[174] *The Particulars of Rapture*, 142. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 102, also phrases it in terms of God's reputation: "It should be noted that these events would not redound much to the glory of God if it were only a matter of God's outwitting a wind-up toy. If Pharaoh is an automaton, a 'puppet in the hands of God,' then God is not shown to be much of a God at all."

story. It should be remembered that the precipitant of the plague crisis rests in Pharaonic anti-creational violence against Israel in Exod 1-2, which the Pharaoh of the exodus only intensifies in reaction to his first meeting with Moses (5:4-18).[175] Throughout the plague narrative YHWH summons Pharaoh to respond appropriately by sending the people. Though there is some variation in Pharaoh's reactions—even momentary concessions—his hard heart not only endures but the despot hardens it further. Pharaoh is unwilling to concede to YHWH's judgment, despite even YHWH's merciful patience on display in the plagues. The seventh plague marks a change in YHWH's strategy. Along with a significant escalation in the severity of the plagues (which also considerably reduces their ambiguity), YHWH begins actively to strengthen Pharaoh's heart—just as he anticipated to Moses (4:21; 7:3). Pharaoh's genuine ability to repent, far from taken away by YHWH's hardening/strengthening, is actually preserved by the divine influence. While YHWH's intervention protects Pharaoh from being overcome by the tremendous pressure exerted by the plagues, the upshot is an exacerbation of Pharaoh's obdurate proclivities.[176] YHWH's hardening allows Pharaoh's basic disposition to mature and ripen under extraordinary circumstances such that Pharaoh leads his people to reap the devastating harvest of his "deep-seeded," anticreational unrighteousness.[177] His unyielding

[175] That is, before one even hears of Pharaoh's heart, it is obvious Pharaoh's heart is inclined toward violence; his "strong heart" answers Israel's cry for mercy with increased brutality. See further Fisher, "Who is Violent, and Why?" 102.

[176] Because of YHWH's intervention Pharaoh is able to confirm and deepen his stubbornness again and again (cf. Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 81). In effect, YHWH gives Pharaoh enough rope to hang himself. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 764, compares him to Saul who is fated by God but also chooses his own destruction.

[177] Hence, in this sense YHWH's hardening is part of the judgment. It "greases the wheels" of Pharaoh's destruction. In other words, the hardening becomes just retribution, not

disposition persists and finally subverts the power of Egypt. It is a tragic story of how human dominion, itself dominated by sinful recalcitrance and compounded by haughty ignorance, is destined for utter destructive judgment.

The drama of Pharaoh's heart delivers poetic justice to the king's perversion of justice.[178] Pharaoh is shown to be the one in unredeemable bondage: he is a victim not of God's removal of freedom but his own slavery to a heavily corrupted heart.[179] The nameless Pharaoh perishes rather than submit. His defiant demise, ironically, redounds to the glory of the Name he would not acknowledge. To be sure, Pharaoh is a character in

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because YHWH incapacitates Pharaoh, but because YHWH allows Pharaoh to reap the fruit of his behavior. This is a good illustration of YHWH "visiting" (*pqd*) the sin of Pharaoh upon Pharaoh and those in his charge. A "just retribution" interpretation is particularly prominent in Jewish midrash (see examples catalogued by McGinnis, "Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 50-52).

[178] The three lexical roots used to depict Pharaoh's hardening heart appear already in the actions of Pharaoh against the Israelites. Pharaoh embitters the lives of the Israelites with hard (*qšh*) labor (1:14), he orders his taskmasters to put heavier (*kbd*) work, and he continues to hold (*ḥzq*) Israel in his grasp (9:2). Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 13, is on target: "It seems unlikely that these 'other' uses of [the vocabulary] bear no relation to their use in respect to 'hardening'." I would posit that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is but one more example of the "measure for measure" theme in the narrative. Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague," 556-59, offers a nice, succinct summary (with extensive bibliography) of the various elements that support a "measure for measure" principle at work in the plague narrative.

[179] Some scholars talk about a "point of no-return" for Pharaoh (e.g., Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 139; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 101). Though I would disagree with the language of "losing his free will," Pharaoh effectively reaches a point of no return. But it is a point entirely of his own doing. Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 80, is closer to the mark with his formulation: "The declaration that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh encapsulates the secret of the chain reaction of iniquity from start to finish. This involves two paradoxes . . . On the one hand, humans who have succumbed to evil do not respond to punishment by desiring reform, but become even more self-centred and harden their heart; they end up slaves to their own arbitrariness. On the other hand, God, even in a situation that promises no success, does not cease to admonish them, using as his instrument signs of power that have totally a positive aim." From another perspective, Pharaoh appears by the end to be something less than human, impervious to anything other than the inhumane desires of his heart (cf. Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 83-84). Like a crazed beast detached from reality, he leads Egypt headlong to its final destruction in the sea.

extremis, a symbol of anti-creational chaos arrayed against YHWH.[180] As such he offers a pedagogical, paradigmatic case writ large on the cosmic screen of what happens when human rule imperiously attempts to trample down YHWH's creational agenda.[181] The narrative teaches, at its "heart," that although rebellious forces are real and can inflict terrible injustice on YHWH's people and plan, they are not finally sovereign over the creation. Another way of just power (and mercy) will defeat such violence. YHWH asserts his sovereign, salvific purposes, but the drama of demonstration does not annul but accounts for human freedom. Because of his failure to interpret the signs, Pharaoh leads Egypt to become itself a sign to Israel and the world of YHWH's glory (9:16; 10:2; 14:4, 8).

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[180] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 117-178: "As a proto-typical anti-God his portrayal has importance for the biblical understanding of human sinfulness . . . He is an extreme character, hyperbolized, like the narrative, to make fuzzy boundaries more concrete for didactic purposes." Yet, Pharaoh's stubbornness is one firmly grounded in history wherein "human rulers have clung to power so desperately that even the most ridiculous methods of self-defence have been invoked when they felt endangered, and the biblical writers were consequently able to predict fairly clearly what Pharaoh's answer to God's demand would be . . . This forecast possesses the stamp of certainty and is a reflection of past experience of the response of human potentates to higher righteousness and loftier powers" (Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 80).

[181] Fischer, "Who is Violent and Why?" 104-6, gives several reasons why Exod 1-15 is a "model conflict," a "deliberate literary construct" that interprets "the figure of Pharaoh as the 'stylized opponent' of God, and his actions and violent behavior as a model for resistance against God and his plans." Cf. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 351: "But the specialness of the situation in this story means that what YHWH does here is not necessarily a guide to what God regularly does—only to what God can do." Also cf. the more circumspect remarks of McGinnis, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 61; Gowan, *Theology of Exodus*, 138-39. Dorian G. Coover Cox, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts," *BSac* 163 (2006), 297, makes the astute observation that while YHWH's power and judgment (and even plagues) are nothing wholly new to the Genesis-Exodus narrative, a "detailed look at a rebel" is.

4.3.5 The Final Plague on the Firstborn

Pharaoh persistently refuses to "to know" YHWH on YHWH's terms in the first nine signs and wonders.[182] In the last plague, the God of the Hebrews will himself come through the midst of Egypt at midnight (11:4; 12:12, 29; cf. 12:23). Unlike any of the previous plagues, the final plague explicitly seeks to take life. The plague results in the death of all firstborns not identified with Israel, including not only "the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne," but also the firstborn of the slave-girl, the captive, even of the cattle (11:5; 12:29). YHWH's actions understandably cause concern for an understanding of divine justice in Exodus, namely, what to make of the seemingly "indiscriminate" nature of YHWH's judgment.[183] It would appear Pharaoh alone is the one to blame for Israel's woes. Why, then, does the assault target the likes of the Egyptian slave-girl, the captive, and the animals? Are these not "victims of the Egyptian machine of exploitation equally with the Israelites"?[184] And why must innocent children feel the lethal force of YHWH's attack?

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[182] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 166: "Pharaoh was willing to be "God-fearing" within the bounds of his sovereignty; to grant the freedom that Moses was demanding for Israel, was tantamount, in Pharaoh's view, to abdicating the throne."

[183] I place "indiscriminate" in quotation marks because it is not the case that any death would do. It is specifically the firstborn of every family. YHWH does not "react irrationally and beyond measure for Israel" (so Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 771). In fact, some reasonably suggest that God's retribution is not proportionate to Pharaoh's transgression because God only takes the firstborn of the family. Moreover, the plague does not wipe Pharaoh and his people off the earth (9:15). There is mercy exhibited even in this judgment.

[184] Houston, *Justice*, 58. For similar objections, see McCarthy, "The Characterization of YHWH," 6–20, and Nancy C. Lee, "Genocide's Lament: Moses, Pharaoh's Daughter, and the Former Yugoslavia," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann,* eds. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 66–82. Sarna, *Exodus*, 52, points out that some post-biblical rabbinic commentators sought to justify the troubling addition of the slave-girl and captive by explaining that "they had gloated over the sufferings of the Israelites." Meyers, *Exodus*, 104, notes that since the 1940s liberal Jews have omitted reciting the Ten Plagues from

Questions about innocent victims of the final plague push for further clarity on the narrative's theology of justice. Before confronting these directly, we should note first how the literary arrangement of the final plague conveys the sacred character of the occasion. The plague is set within a liturgical framework.[185] The recounting of the event is spliced by large bodies of instruction concerned with the practice of the festival of unleavened bread (12:14-20; 13:3-10), passover (12:1-13, 21-28, 40-51), and the redemption of the firstborn (13:1-2, 11-16). The redactional effect lifts "the plague out of ordinary time and places it within liturgical time."[186] Furthermore, the liturgical appropriation of the event occupies the bulk of the narrative. The story of the actual taking-of-life is comparatively quite brief (12:29-30). The emphasis of the text, hence, is clearly not on savoring the Egyptian slaughter but on Israel's traditioned rehearsal of YHWH's salvation. And the high cost of that salvation receives a special place in Israel's ongoing ritual remembering in 13:14-16:

> Now when your son asks in time to come, "What is this about?" you will say to him, "By a strong hand YHWH brought us out of Egypt from the house of slavery. It was because Pharaoh stubbornly refused to send us out that YHWH killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, the firstborn of both human and beast. Therefore, I am sacrificing to YHWH every first male offspring to open the womb and redeem every firstborn son." It will be a sign upon your hand and frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand YHWH brought us out of Egypt.

Fretheim observes about this passage:

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the traditional Seder. This change was introduced because of objections to commemorating an experience that caused the sufferings of others.

[185] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 133-36. Fretheim also underlines the creational themes woven within the text (137-49).

[186] Ibid., 136.

> It is noteworthy that the redeemed Israelite children of passover night are not explicitly mentioned, only the sacrificed Egyptian firstborn, followed by "Therefore." Is it possible that the firstborn belong to God not only because Israelite children were saved but also because Egyptian children were killed? This is thus an everlasting reminder in Israel at what cost Israel's firstborn were redeemed. The death of the firstborn of the Egyptians is thus not forgotten; it is seared on Israel's memory forever.[187]

Directives for the Passover ceremony and the dedication of Israelite firstborn to YHWH solemnize but do not celebrate the high Egyptian price of their deliverance. Like Israel's firstborn, the record of the terrible night of YHWH's passing is consecrated by textual design.

The literary arrangement also indicates a decisive shift in focus from the education of Egypt (e.g., 7:5) to the education of Israel (e.g., 6:6-7).[188] That is, before Israel journeys out of Egypt and through the walls of water, the narrative walks its listeners through a set of regulations for ritual reenactment. The reenactment serves pedagogical reiteration. If the exodus will birth a people of salvation, then the regulations will ensure the cultural memory remains an authoritative identity marker for future generations. The Israelites are expected to learn so that they in turn have something to

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[187] Ibid., 149.

[188] Shortly before the announcement of the tenth plague, the Egyptian monarch cuts off negotiations with Moses with a death threat (10:28). In so doing, Pharaoh effectively quashes YHWH's pedagogical aim for him in the signs and wonders. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 169: "If we are seeing Ex. 3-7 as focussing on Moses and whether he will obey YHWH, with Ex. 7-11 asking the same question of Pharaoh, then we could see Ex. 12-15 (and afterwards) as Israel's equivalent." Grossman, "The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues," 588-610, puts forth the intriguing theory that the first seven plagues specifically target Egyptian knowing and the last three aim for Israelite education. This two-fold division follows a two-fold aim of the plagues (6:6-7; 7:5; on this see J. L. Ska, "La sortie d'Egypte [Ex 7-14] dans le récit sacerdotal et la tradition prophétique," *Bib* 60 (1979): 191-215). Grossman is able to offer some compelling reasons for seeing a definite shift after plague seven. Nevertheless, he does not to my mind satisfactorily explain Moses's dialogue with Pharaoh in 10:3-6, which holds out hope that Pharaoh can still respond appropriately.

teach (e.g., 12:26-27; 13:8, 14).[189] The liturgical framework binds the memory with the responsibility to transmit its significance, orienting the past for the sake of the future.[190]

For the first time in the engagement Israel has an active role to play in YHWH's deliverance. Up to this point, YHWH has made the distinction between Egypt and Israel (8:23 [19]; 9:4; 11:7). In this final plague Israel must now self-identify as Israel in order to be saved: those who put blood on their doorposts will avoid the plague.[191] The blood is specifically a sign for Israel (12:13), and anyone among Israel can refuse the sign just as Pharaoh has done hitherto. Though the instructions for salvation are given only to Israel (e.g., 12:3, 21), the possibility is not ruled out that Egyptian neighbors (cf. 3:22; 11:2-3) might follow Israel's example (cf. 9:20).[192] That a "mixed multitude" travels out of Egypt

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[189] See Sacks, *Exodus*, 78.

[190] Consider the helpful description of the Seder by Assmann, "Exodus and Memory," 11: it is "a transformation of semantic memory, i.e., something we have learned, into episodic memory, something we have lived, albeit in the form of a ritual play, of an 'as if.'"

[191] Previously Israel had vacillated on identifying as YHWH's people (5:10-11). Now Israel must choose to side with YHWH (Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 100-101; Sacks, *Exodus*, 83-90; Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 86-113; Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 37-38). Assmann, "Exodus and Memory, 12, observes that "difference is a key word in the Seder ceremony."

[192] The Passover assumes aliens might want to be included (12:48-49)—what Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 784, calls "a readiness to let this festival define one's life in the world." Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 46, argues that "[a]ccording to the narrative's own logic, Egyptians who observe the activity of their neighbours and decided to follow suit could have avoided the firstborn plague and left with everyone else. Israelites who ignored the warning, on the other hand, would have perished along with the Egyptians." Lipton goes on to point out that a midrash on the *ḥămūšîm* ("fifths/column") in 13:18 claims that only a small proportion of Israelites left Egypt! Cf. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 125: "The mark of blood demonstrates that living within Goshen would be no guarantee of membership in YHWH's people, nor would living without it be an automatic exclusion; only drawing the line in blood would demonstrate or be a sign (12:13) of one's inclusion in 'us'. The other side of the same coin is that, at least theoretically, those not yet counted among Israel could also draw the line in blood and be included . . . although the narrative certainly contains no explicit warrant for it." Also see Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 116, n. 11.

with Israel is evidence "the division was neither strictly ethnic nor class-based, but based on those who chose to throw in their lot" with the God of the Hebrews.[193] Regardless, in Israel's response—a solemn ritual of "planned panic"[194]— Israel begins its education into the service (*'ăbōdâ*: 12:25-26; 13:5) of YHWH. Those who would be Israel must respond appropriately, and must continue to remember, the deathly rupture that created their freedom. In sum, then, the liturgical structure ensures the event is kept alive as a transformative memory. At the same time, it carefully guards the memory against degenerating into a platform for celebrating jingoistic revenge or ethnic superiority.

Now to address forthrightly the disturbing issue of the innocent victims. The scope of the final plague throws into sharp relief a significant but challenging facet of Exodus's theology of justice, namely, the corporate nature of creational judgment—more specifically, "ruler judgment." David Daube defines ruler judgment as the following: "the case where the wrong committed by a ruler is repaid to him by a move against those under his rule, by taking away or damaging his free subjects."[195] This appears to be the rationale when the final plague is first mentioned by YHWH in 4:22-23:

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[193] Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 47; see also her discussion on pp. 33-37. I take up again the issue of the "mixed multitude" below.

[194] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 173.

[195] David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 160-82. He says further "a sinner might be punished by being deprived of human 'property' (his men if he was a king, his son is he was a father, his wife if he was a husband) just as well as being being deprived of any other goods." Daube makes a distinction between ruler punishment and corporate responsibility. Ruler punishment does not necessarily entail corporate responsibility, viz., that the subjects are in fact guilty or are being punished. For discussion see Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 196 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 30-54; Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 110-59.

> Then you will say to Pharaoh, "Thus says YHWH: Israel is my firstborn son. I have said to you, "Send out my son so that he might serve me," but you have refused to send him out. Now I myself will kill your firstborn son." (4:22-23)

The death of the firstborn is the only plague that the narrative explicitly casts as an instance of poetic justice, and it does so *in regard to Pharaoh's actions* alone. Pharaoh's own savagery toward Israel, YHWH's firstborn, would bring corresponding savagery on his own firstborn.[196] As Israel cried (2:23; 3:7), so a cry will echo through Egypt (12:30). In a later explanation of the redemption of the firstborn in 13:13-15, Israel is to perform ritually YHWH's claim over Israel by redeeming all of its firstborn males. Israel learns in this that YHWH's right to the firstborn is an assertion of ownership.[197] Israel alone is YHWH's firstborn, which might well imply there are others in YHWH's family, viz, other peoples, even Egyptians (e.g., Isa 19:25).[198] But the firstborn in the family has prerogatives that YHWH will not allow to be compromised (e.g., Deut 21:15-17), and Pharaoh has co-opted for his use what was by right only YHWH's. Hence, on the principle

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[196] The firstborn of Pharaoh in 4:23 is specified (or extended) in 11:5 to every firstborn of Egypt. As the firstborn of YHWH is the people "Israel" in 4:22, so it is not a stretch to read "firstborn of Pharaoh" as a collective and not just Pharaoh's first child (*pace* Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague," 560).

[197] Claire R. Mathews McGinnis, "Exodus as a 'Text of Terror' for Children," in *The Child in the Bible*, eds. Marcia J. Bunge, with Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 36-37. On the firstborn in Israel's imagination, cf. Exod 22:29-30; 23:19; 34:19-26; Lev 27:26-27; Num 3:13, 40-46; 8:17-18; 18:15-17; Deut 15:19; 21:15-17; Zech 12:10; Isa 14:30; Ps 89:28; Job 18:13.

[198] As such, the language of firstborn can evoke Israel's place in YHWH's creational agenda, especially when read as a continuation of God's work among the peoples in Genesis (see Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:105; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:430). It follows, too, that the firstborn's right is not just about privilege but also about strategic responsibility, namely carrying on the father's name/reputation to benefit the whole (Deut 25:6; see Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 320). Furthermore, the blessing of the firstborn is not a guarantee. Reading Genesis as a prelude to Exodus underlines the point.

of "measure for measure" justice, YHWH reclaims what Egypt's leader has arrogated for Egypt's glory.[199]

To be sure, the text implicates "Egypt" as a nation in the unjust treatment of Israel (1:11-14). But the oppressive relationship has its genesis in and continues to pivot upon the leadership and symbolic figure of Pharaoh.[200] Hence, even though the plagues aim more broadly at Egyptian acknowledgement, the focus of the contest rests squarely on Pharaoh's response (e.g., 7:1-5). It is Pharaoh whose obduracy prolongs the plagues (e.g., 9:17; 10:3). And in Israel's ongoing memory it is not the Egyptians, but their king's failure of right and responsive governance that triggered the corporate fallout of the tenth plague:

> Now when your son asks in time to come, "What is this about?" you will say to him, "By a strong hand YHWH brought us out of Egypt from the house of slavery. *It was because Pharaoh stubbornly refused to send us out* that YHWH killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, the firstborn of both human and beast. (13:14)

The idea that there is single destiny shared by a people and their ruler is a persistent and central idea in Israel's scriptures.[201] Indeed, general human experience bears this out.[202]

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[199] I do not take it to be the case that YHWH demonstrates his right to Egypt's firstborn (e.g., Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague," 566). Rather, Egypt has usurped YHWH's right to Israel. Said differently, it is not that the firstborn of Egypt belongs to YHWH in the same way as Israel as "firstborn" belongs to YHWH. Thus, the plague on Egypt's firstborn is not firstly about a demonstration of YHWH's sovereignty over Egypt, then, as much as it is a retributive sign that Israel belongs to YHWH.

[200] Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, 170, 73-76, undersells this point when he characterizes the firstborn plague as primarily an example of communal responsibility with a "secondary purpose" of ruler punishment. I think the text patently affirms ruler punishment, but the issue of corporate responsibility in the final plague is less clear.

[201] Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 30-54, argues a similar corporate logic of judgment is prevalent in the deuteronomistic explanation of the Israel's exile. "[J]ust as the king was responsible for the sins of the general populace, the general populace also became implicated in the sins of monarch. The king was no ordinary individual but was God's vicar on earth, the single most important mediator between the people and their God. If the king sinned, he

Simply put, the lives of the Egyptians and their land (the first nine plagues!) are knit together with their ruler's piety and policies—for both blessing and curse.[203] And Pharaoh has insisted that YHWH's work of justice means curse for his land. The final plague strikes with clear-cut, symbolic force: those who fall under the realm of Pharaoh (i.e., the conduit of the "gods of Egypt," 12:12) experience judgment as distinct from those who identify with the realm of YHWH (11:7). The "hardened" separation between the two communities, which first appeared in the fourth plague (8:22-23 [18-19]), comes despite the fact the narrative hints that the two communities are geographically intermingled, even porous.[204] The division of the judgment, though troubling, is symbolically potent: the retribution on Pharaonic Egypt wraps up the innocent (children!) who are adversely interconnected with the guilty, especially because the guilty hold the reigns of power.[205]

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endangered the welfare of the populace in two ways. First of all, this sin was done by the nation's representative before God and thus the monarch never truly acts only on his own behalf. Secondly, the king set the tone of official state worship and thus automatically implicated the people in any cultic sins that he committed because they were bound to follow his lead in cultic matters" (52).

[202] Ibid., 184-87; Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 153; Barbara W. Tuchman, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1985).

[203] Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 330; cf. e.g., Gen 12:17; 2 Sam 24; 1 Kgs 15:34; 2 Kgs 21; Isa 53:11; Jer 3:14-22; 15:1-4; Ps 72.

[204] Cf., for example, the Israelites and the Egyptians are "neighbors" in 3:22 and 11:2-3. The porous quality of the two communities is already on display in Exod 1-2 with characters such as the midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, and Moses. These instances foreshadow the "mixed multitude" (12:38) that joins Israel in the exodus (cf. 9:20). At the sea the categories are hermetically sealed by the pillar of cloud and fire (14:19-20). For more discussion on this topic, see Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 74-79; Greifenhagen provides a nice discussion on "Goshen" as a symbolic territory on pp. 103-6; also see Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, 20-42, esp. 31-37.

[205] Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 103, observes that the narrative is realistically potent as well: "[F]rom the standpoint of the Jewish master story, any description of human existence

4.3.6 The Despoliation of Egypt

> Once the final plague strikes, Pharaoh's response is swift:
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> He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, "Arise, go out from the midst of my people, both you and the children of Israel! Go, serve[206] YHWH just as you said. Moreover, take your flocks and herds just as you said and go, but bless me too!" (12:31)

Pharaoh is not the only one eager to see the people leave. Egypt "urges" (from the root *ḥzq*)[207] Israel to exit the land with haste, because they feared for their lives (12:33). On their way out Israel follows the orders given by Moses, dictated twice before by YHWH (3:21-22; 11:2-3; cf. Gen 15:14), to ask the Egyptians for gold, silver, and clothing (12:35). YHWH gives the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and the Egyptians grant the Israelites' requests. By this act the narrative reports "they plundered Egypt" (12:36; cf. 3:22).

The "plundering" of Egypt has been a perennial source of embarrassment in the history of exegesis.[208] The motif has called forth various attempts to explain an alleged ethical quandary, namely, does Israel duplicitously "rob" Egypt of its valuables? The

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that denies or underestimates the full repercussions of a community's life for the life of an individual offers an account which is in the last analysis no more than a fairy tale." See as well the comments of Fretheim, *God and World*, 160; Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 330-31. On the symbolism of Egypt, see Fischer, "Who is Violent, and Why?" 98-100, 104-6.

[206] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 128, notes that Pharaoh's plea, "go and serve," ironically mirrors Pharaoh's earlier demand to the Israelite foremen in 5:18.

[207] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 411-12, makes the intriguing observation that the verb "urge" is feminine singular, whereas Egypt is generally treated as a masculine singular in the narrative (1:13; 3:9; 6:5; 7:5, 19, 24; 14:4, 9, 18, 23). He suggests that the later feminine singular, "land," may be behind the choice of the feminine verb. "And there may be even an effort to portray, by hyperbole, the very land of Egypt as expelling the Hebrews."

[208] For an extensive overview of early interpretations, see Joel S. Allen, *The Despoliation of Egypt in Pre-Rabbinic, Rabbinic, and Patristic Traditions*, VCSup 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2008). A more concise survey is provided by Radday, "The Spoils of Egypt," 127-32.

charge is felt acutely when the verb used to describe Israel's request, *š'l*, is (mis)translated as "to borrow" rather than "to ask."[209] Though the semantic range of *š'l* includes both "to borrow" and "to ask," it strains the narrative logic to suppose that the Egyptians, freshly defeated and afraid for their lives, would be obtuse enough to expect Israel to return borrowed property.[210] Rather, Egypt wants Israel to depart as soon as possible, and the story attributes their motivation in part to God-inspired suasion.[211]

The text, nonetheless, never gives a justification for the request, which has left commentators to fill in the gap. One line of interpretation suggests that Israel despoils Egypt as victors would in battle.[212] Taking booty (gold, silver, and clothing) after a military victory was a common ancient Near Eastern practice,[213] and a background in war dovetails nicely with the larger theme and imagery of combat between YHWH and

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[209] The translation "to borrow" or "to lend" is much less attested than "to ask." See *HALOT* 4:1371-73; *TLOT* 3:1282-83; cf. Nina L. Collins, "Evidence in the Septuagint of a Tradition in Which the Israelites Left Egypt without Pharaoh's Consent," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 442–48; Allen, *The Despoliation of Egypt*, 26–28.

[210] The idea that the Egyptians believe the items are on loan to Israel hinges on the unrealistic notion that Egypt still assumes, at the end of the plague cycle, Israel would only be taking a three-day leave-of-absence.

[211] Childs, *Exodus*, 176: "There is no indication that a pretext was involved." See also *BDB* 981; Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 57. In contrast to Pharaoh, when the Egyptian populace has the opportunity to release Israel, they send them out straightaway. While the text is not clear about how YHWH caused Egypt to favor Israel, Gen 12:14-20 offers an intriguing parallel. In Gen 12 plagues fall on the house of the king of Egypt because he takes Sarai into his harem. The king responds to the plagues by sending Abraham and Sarai on their way, along with all the wealth Abraham acquired from the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh is both afraid and highly motivated by the plagues to "favor" Abraham's brisk departure.

[212] E.g., Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 208; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 139; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:383; Childs, *Exodus*, 177. The closest parallel of the verb typically translated as "to plunder," the *piel* of *nṣl*, occurs in 2 Chr 20:25. The context is military victory, but this passage appears to be modeled on the Exodus passages (see Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Tradition and Transformation: Aspects of Innerbiblical Interpretation in 2 Chronicles 20," *Bib* 74 (1993): 258-68.

[213] Cf. Num 31:9-12; Deut 20:10-20; Ezek 29:19.

Pharaonic Egypt.[214] Others suggest that the background is payment to released slaves, either as remuneration and/or as a "start-up fund" for newly released slaves.[215] YHWH is concerned that Israel not go out "empty handed" (3:21), which calls to mind the command given to masters in Deut 15:13 about the proper release of a slave: "If you send him out, you must not send him out empty handed." This interpretation, for obvious reasons, also has merit within the plot of Exodus.

The wider context of Exodus can shed additional light upon the verb typically translated "so they 'plundered' (*nṣl*) Egypt." The choice of the verb *nṣl* in the *piel* is unusual. It occurs in the *piel* form only four times: twice in Exodus (3:22; 12:36), once in 2 Chron 20:25—which appears to be based on the Exodus account—and once in Ezek 14:14.[216] It is highly attested in other Hebrew stems (predominately in the *hiphil*) where it carries the sense of "to deliver," "to save," or "to pull/snatch out." If the narrative wanted to state straightforwardly Israel plundered Egypt, there were other, more befitting verb choices (cf. Exod 15:9!).[217] I contend the narrative's peculiar use of the *piel* of *nṣl* in this context is theologically motivated. Significantly, the root *nṣl* occurs elsewhere in Exodus (all in the *hiphil*) as a key verb, "to save/deliver," to identify YHWH's work of salvation in Egypt (5:23, 6:6, 18:4, 8). Thus, the odd use of the *piel* form of the verb "so they

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[214] See especially Trimm, "YHWH Fights for Them!"

[215] E.g., Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 44; Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 56-61; Roland Gradwohl, "*Nissal* and *hissîl* als Rechtsbegriffe im Sklavenrecht," *ZAW* 111 (1999): 187–95.

[216] The *piel* form of the verb is disputed by commentators in Ezek 14:14 based on the *hiphil* forms in 14:16, 18, 20. See *TLOT* 2:762; *NIDOTTE* 3:142.

[217] See the semantic domain of plunder and stealing listed by William R. Domeris, "בָּזַז," *NIDOTTE* 1:620; 5:145.

'plundered' the Egyptians" is intentionally meant to relate the "plundering" with YHWH's salvation.[218] But how should one understand the connection? Some Jewish commentators assert Israel "saves" Egypt in the sense that the bestowal of items insures the parting "is done with goodwill, with some symbolic compensation."[219] The act proscribes any future reprisals, in effect, "delivering" both the peoples of Egypt and Israel from a cycle of revenge and hate (cf. Deut 23:7).

Although this interpretation takes an imaginative leap, the literary structure of the passage points in an analogous direction. Aaron Sherwood cogently argues that 12:35-36 occurs as a part of a larger *ABB′A′* chiasm in 12:34-39.[220]

A: Unleavened dough (v. 34)

B: Israel's plunder of Egypt (vv. 35-36)

B′: God's plunder of Egypt (vv. 37-38)

A′: Unleavened dough (v. 39)

The passage is bracketed by notices (*A, A′*) of the Israelites carrying unleavened bread hastily out of Egypt (vv. 33-34; 39).[221] The inner ring of the chiasm (*B, B′*) consists of Israel's "plunder" of Egypt (vv. 35-36) and a description of the group leaving Egypt—

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[218] It appears that *nṣl* in Ezek 14:14 has the connotation of saving. Radday, "The Spoils of Egypt," 142-44, defends an identical meaning of the *piel* and *hiphil*.

[219] Sacks, *Exodus*, 91-94; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:337-46; Radday, "The Spoils of Egypt," 127-47. In 33:6 Israel "strips themselves" (*hithpael* of *nṣl*) as a sign of their repentance. Might the "stripping" the Egyptians of their valuables also be a sign showing Egyptian repentance?

[220] Aaron Sherwood, "The Mixed Multitude in Exodus 12:38: Glorification, Creation, and YHWH's Plunder of Israel and the Nations," *HBT* 34 (2012): 146.

[221] I would broaden the chiasm to 12:33-39 based on the inclusion of the "urging" of the Egyptians in v. 33 and (albeit passively) in v. 39.

Israel and a non-Israelite "mixed multitude" (*ʿēreb rab*)[222] and large droves of livestock (vv. 37-38). Sherwood believes vv. 37-38 are YHWH's plunder of Egypt, mirroring Israel's plunder of Egypt in vv. 35-36. Both mark the first stage of the deliverance from and victory over Egypt. Yet, it is a victory and a deliverance that includes not just Israel but a conglomeration of folk from Egypt.[223] What the narrative has only hinted at—with characters like the midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, and even a contingent of Pharaoh's officials (9:20; cf. 11:3)—namely, that other God-fearers are among the Egyptian populace, becomes an open secret in the departure. At least some non-Israelites in Egypt have decided to set out on the journey toward YHWH's service. They are a sign that YHWH's epistemic strategy for Egypt—indeed, for the world—has been mildly successful despite Pharaoh's recalcitrance. YHWH's work of just reclamation in Exodus is not rangebound to ethnic Israel—the "other" joins the journey of Israel's foundational narrative. The mixed multitude, therefore, functions as a proleptic forerunner of the creational scope of YHWH's salvation.

Sherwood further notes that 12:35-38 sits within a structural hinge in the narrative. The hinge (12:34-42) fulfills 3:19-22, a pericope that proleptically summarizes

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[222] See *BDB* 786; *HALOT* 2:878; *NIDOTTE* 3:517-18. Shaul Bar, "Who Were the Mixed Multitude?" *HS* 49 (2008): 27-39, provides a well-documented overview of the different ways interpreters have identified the group (e.g., other, non-Israelite slaves of Egypt; people descended from mixed (Israelite-non-Israelite) marriages; mercenaries). I am less concerned with their precise identity outside of their *non-Israelite, ethnically diverse* status, which I take to be the most significant point of the text, in contrast to the Israelites who left Egypt.

[223] Sherwood, "The Mixed Multitude," 153, observes: "That the larger narrative is overwhelmingly concerned with Israel's deliverance only makes the mention of the [mixed multitude]—in conjunction with the 'sons of Israel'—that much more noteworthy."

the events leading up to the exodus from Egypt and prepares for the second stage of crossing of the Sea.[224]

> [W]ithout explaining why it should be the case, the narrator makes a point to locate representatives of the nations within the structural and thematic nexus of the larger narrative of 12:37-38. The mixed multitude of 12:38 thus marks an implicit instance of the nations being unified with Israel to be God's people, and one that is unargued, unexplained, and unassuming.[225]

In short, Israel's "plundering" of Egypt fulfills YHWH's word in 3:19-22, but the paronomastic use of *nṣl* to describe the "plundering," when coupled with the chiastic structure of vv. 33-39, elegantly and imaginatively illustrates that the spoils of Egypt are not just mere objects of gold, silver and clothing. Out of Egypt come the most impressive "spoils" of salvation—a multi-ethnic aggregate of people delivered (*nṣl*) by the mighty hand of YHWH. Both possessions and people are pulled/snatched out of Egypt. The emerging exodus community is a testimony to YHWH's creational sovereignty, and the mixed multitude is a prototypical actualization of the "whole earth" coming to know the name of YHWH (9:16).

4.4 EXODUS 14-15

The events at the sea represent the culmination and resolution of YHWH's struggle with Pharaonic Egypt.[226] Pharaoh and the Egyptian war machine, short on memory,[227]

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[224] The summary of 12:40-42 only further confirms these verses as a transitional hinge in the narrative action.

[225] Sherwood, "The Mixed Multitude," 153.

[226] Leder, "Iconography of Order," 139-43, lists several narrative features of Exod 14-15 that allude to narrative elements already encountered in Exod 1-2, thus creating a cohesive and

pursue Israel into the wilderness in order to recapture their service (14:5). Undeterred by Pharaoh's army or Israel's fearful misgivings (14:12),[228] YHWH definitively answers the question "Whom will Israel serve?" at the sea. Salvation for Israel, though, is judgment for Pharaoh, whose destruction gains glory for YHWH (14:4). The drowning of Pharaoh's army in the sea is the conclusion of a "long, continuous resistance by the reigning Pharaoh."[229] The final result: Egypt knows that "I am YHWH" (14:4, 18, 25) and Israel fears and trusts YHWH, singing and celebrating in their God's triumph (14:31-15:21).

The account of the crossing, related in both narrative (ch. 14) and poetry (ch. 15),[230] has stimulated a massive amount of commentary from a host of angles.[231] I limit my interest mainly to the manner in which the story draws on cosmological categories to relate the significance of Israel's redemption at the sea. Many commentators recognize

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culminating frame for Exod 1-15. Also cf. Dennis J. McCarthy, "Plagues and Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5-14," *JBL* 85 (1966): 150-58.

[227] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 793, notes the ironic juxtaposition of Pharaoh's court's short-term memory following the last chapter block emphasizing Israel's long-term memory.

[228] J. L. Ska, "The Crossing of the Sea," *Landas* 17 (2003): 40, notes both Israel and Egypt want the same thing: to return slaves to the oppressor.

[229] Fischer, "Who is Violent, and Why?" 96. He goes on to assert: "The sufferings inflicted on Egypt in Exodus 12 and 14 are the result of repeated breaking of promises, and as such are merely the ultimate way in which God deals with resistance, showing the extremes to which God will go if nothing else works. It is a wonder that God restrained himself for such a long time." Sarna, *Exodus*, 70, adds that tradition history for the most part does not celebrate much less mention the drowning of the Egyptians.

[230] Richard D. Patterson, "Victory at Sea: Prose and Poetry in Exodus 14-15," *BSac* 161 (2004): 42-54, catalogs examples in Egyptian literature of setting forth a historical event in prose followed by a poetry; cf. James W. Watts, "Song and the Ancient Reader," *PRSt* 22 (1995): 135-47. Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 80, notes "with regard to the plot development the poem in Exod. 15 is unnecessary. But, for the rhetorical strategy of the book, it is central. It causes the reader to slow down and reflect upon his earlier reading."

[231] For introduction to the issues, see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 298-344; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 461-572; Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:221-95.

that the poem in ch. 15 and, to lesser extent, the narrative in ch. 14 employ familiar tropes of an archetypal, ancient Near Eastern combat myth.[232] The myth had many versions represented in narrative epics, royal annals, liturgy, and various other iconography.[233] Its storyline describes a king-god's subjugation of the rival forces of disorder (typically associated with water and the monstrous creatures that live therein) that threaten the stability and prosperity of the cosmos.[234] The pattern of the combat myth is comprised by

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[232] E.g., Peter C. Craigie, "The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," *TynB* 22 (1971): 3-31, esp. 19-24; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 79-194; Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 80–102; Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel,* HSM 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 113-17; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament,* UCOP 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 97-100; Bernard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Conflict: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 353-56; Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 104-17; Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 236-57; Leder, "Iconography of Order," 118-28; Tremper Longman and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 83-88; N. Wyatt, "Arms and the King: The Earliest Allusions to the *Chaoskampf* Motif and Their Implications for the Interpretation of the Ugaritic and Biblical Traditions," in "*Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf": Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient,* eds. Manfried Dietrich and Ingo Kottsieper, AOAT 250 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 833–82; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 554-60. The combat myth is attested in such biblical texts as Isa 51:9-10; Pss 29; 74:12-17; 77:11-21; 89:10-15; Job 26:12-13. For a prudent defense against recent challenges to the presence of the combat motif across biblical texts, e.g., Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of "Chaos" in the Hebrew Bible,* BZAW 341 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005); David T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the* Chaoskampf *Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), see Bernard F. Batto, "The Combat Myth in Israelite Tradition Revisited," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's* Chaoskampf *Hypothesis,* eds. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 217-36.

[233] Batto, "The Combat Myth," 230: "It would be more accurate to speak of ancient Near Eastern Combat *Myths*, since each culture or region developed its own version of cosmogonic conflict, adapted to its particular theological assumptions about its god(s) and their involvement with the world. Nevertheless, there were shared motifs, derived from common larger culture, and thus, it is not inappropriate to refer to this phenomenon as if it were a phenomenon."

[234] To what extent the combat myth influenced Egyptian ideology is unclear (e.g., see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 43–48, 116–18, 231–236). Joanna Töyräänvuori, "The Northwest Semitic Combat

the following (typically sequential) elements: conflict, war, victory, kingship, temple/palace construction. Exodus 14-15 portrays YHWH in language that draws upon the pattern and imagery of the combat motif. In addition, these chapters (yet again) "cross-reference" the exodus event with parallel language and themes from Israel's creation traditions, particularly the beginning of Genesis.[235] So, for example, YHWH, the

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Myth and Egyptian Sources from the Middle and New Kingdoms," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's* Chaoskampf *Hypothesis*, eds. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 112-26, surveys the evidence for the conflict myth in Ancient Egyptian sources, including Re's battle with Apophis (113-16). She finds, against common opinion, that where the conflict myth is present in Egyptian sources, Egypt was the borrower of the Northwest Semitic myth (124). She concludes: "All in all, there seem to be very few instances of a conflict myth, let alone the Northwest Semitic conflict myth, to be found in ancient Egypt mythology. This may be due to the fact that myths of conflict in ancient Egypt were presented not in actual mythology of creation and divine beings but in the person of the pharaoh. The focus was on historical, political myths. The pharaoh was the hero-warrior, the conqueror of the 'seven-bows,' whose triumphs were told again and again . . . of pharaoh after pharaoh. These conquest narratives may have had some historical basis on some occasions, but often they exemplified idealized political mythology, an imagined history that became a reality because it was so written." Although Töyräänvuori's observation may understate the presence of the combat motif in Egypt (though she is accurate in comparison to the Mesopotamian or Canaanite contexts), her comments are nevertheless particularly pertinent to the Exodus account in light of the way the narrative focuses the conflict on the person of Pharaoh—as the personification of Re—as compared to (a much lesser extent) the gods of Egypt (e.g., 12:12). From a related angle, Joshua Berman, "The Kadesh Inscription of Ramesses II and the Exodus Sea Account (Exodus 13:17-15:19)," in "*Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?" Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narrative*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg, BBRSup 13 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 93-112, compares Exod 15 to the Kadesh Poem of Ramesses II to great effect, noting a similar sequence and extraordinarily large number of parallel themes between them. Berman argues that the Exodus Sea account was composed with an awareness of the Kadesh Poem. Cf. a parallel argument of Hendel, "Exodus as Cultural Memory," 71-76, though Hendel seems unaware of Berman's work.

[235] See especially Jean-Louis Ska, *The passage de la mer. Etude sure la construction du style et de la symbolique d'Ex 14:1-31*, AnBib 109 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1986); ibid., "The Crossing of the Sea," 36-50; Zakovitch, "*And You Shall Tell Your Son,*" 101-5; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 152-70. How the combat myth relates to creation traditions in both biblical and extra-biblical sources is a disputed topic in scholarship. It appears the combat motif describes world creation at times (cosmology), but is more frequently used to legitimate the post-cosmogonic re-assertion of that order (see Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 244-46; cf. Batto, "Combat Myth," 229-36). Hence, though the combat myth is not necessarily cosmological, the "two genres continually overlap" (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 557).

divine warrior (14:14, 25; 15:3), separates the waters (14:16b; 21c // Gen 1:6) by a strong wind (14:21 // Gen 1:2; 8:1). God causes the separation of light and darkness (14:19-20 // Gen 1:4) and causes dry ground to appear in the waters (14:16c, 21b // Gen 1:9; 8:13-14). God employs elements of creation to broker the moral order. It is Pharaoh, not the waters, who has heretofore embodied a mythic force of chaos.[236] In a theologically significant departure from the combat pattern,[237] chaos is "historicized" in the symbolic figure of Pharaoh,[238] and God utilizes the depths—variously identified in the song as the "sea of end/reeds" (*yam-sûp*; 15:4),[239] with deep waters (*məṣôlōt*; 15:5), and the primordial depths (*təhōmōt*; 15:5) associated with the underworld (*'ereṣ*; 15:12)[240]—to cover (15:5, 10) and swallow (15:12) the Egyptians. For the Israelites, their journey is nothing less than a new creation event: they walk through the waters on dry ground as "people whom [YHWH] has created (*qnh*)" (15:16).[241] They travel from a fear of their oppressors (14:10, 14) to a fear of YHWH (14:31). They emerge on the other side, celebrating in song the

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[236] For water as an instrument of judgment, see further P. Kyle McCarter, "The River Ordeal in Israelite Literature," *HTR* 66 (1973): 403-12.

[237] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 167.

[238] Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "Fighting the Powers of Chaos and Hell—Towards the Biblical Portrait of God," *ST* 39 (1985): 29, 31; Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 18-22, 57. On the assimilation of Egypt with the primordial opponent, see Ezek 19:3-5; 32:2-10; Isa 11:15; 30:7; Jer 46:7-8; Ps 87:4. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 560, calls the assimilation "almost inevitable." Cf. Berman, "Kadesh Inscription," 99, 108.

[239] N. H. Snaith, "ים־סוף. The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea," *VT* 15 (1965): 395-98; Batto, *Slaying the Dragon*, 115-18; cf. Jon 2:4, 6.

[240] For a defense of this translation, see Brian D. Russell, *The Song of the Sea: The Date of Composition and Influence of Exodus 15:1-21*, SBL 101 (New York: Lang, 2007), 16; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 529-31.

[241] Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, 16.

victory of their incomparable warrior-king who ushers them to his dwelling (15:17-18) as the nations look on (15:14-16).[242] "The Sea of End becomes a sea of beginning."[243]

Creation themes crafted together with the mythic pattern of combat provide the interpretative matrix for assessing the meaning of the event.[244] The mythic themes portray the struggle in cosmic-moral terms—a triumph of YHWH's kingship over a false claimant, YHWH's justice over Pharaoh's distorted promulgation of creational order. The conflict myth is historicized in the sea crossing, but it does not follow that this means the occasion is stripped of cosmological import.[245] Rather, the historic happening is ratcheted up with creational-mythic significance. Creational categories "cosmologize" a redemptive, historical event: YHWH as warrior overthrows "Chaos" in order to re-establish a just order. Israel's watery deliverance becomes "a reactualization of a primordial cosmic event, historical redemption becomes a species of world restoration and the dynamics of history reiterate creative acts of divine power."[246] What happens for Israel is related in such world-making, mythological categories, not only to signify the cosmic proportions of the event, but to magnify the cosmic implications of Israel's

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[242] That is, the peoples heard not just that a group of slaves escaped through a watery avenue. The Song interprets what happens at the sea as a cosmic event of the Creator showing up on behalf of his creational intentions through this people.

[243] Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 365; cf. Ska, "The Crossing of the Sea," 45.

[244] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 168: "While the mythic pattern accomplishes [putting the exodus into a universal framework], it simply provides a capstone to the imagery seen to be so dominant in the text to this point."

[245] Similarly Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 357; Mettinger, "Fighting the Powers," 33; Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation," 357; Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 109-17.

[246] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 357. Cf. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 82: "history concretizes cosmology, and cosmology lifts history above the level of the mundane."

salvation as an event *for* the world. "*It is precisely because what happens here is cosmic that it has universal effects*."[247] YHWH's creational agenda is renewed in Israel, but YHWH's redemptive move *for* and *through* Israel also moves *beyond* Israel by dint of creational evocation.[248]

So too, the sea is the "watershed" moment when Israel learns about the nature of the kingship of YHWH. Up to this point in the narrative, Pharaoh alone has been repeatedly described as "king."[249] Now Israel confesses, "YHWH reigns" (15:18). It is King YHWH's justice prerogative that reverses the power arrangements of Egypt to create a new beginning. Israel's salvation song summons the world—specifically, potentially hostile leaders (15:15)—to take panicked notice as the oppressive, disordered powers arrayed against YHWH concede defeat (14:25) and are eliminated (15:9-10). The community of the crossing proclaims in polemical poetry the unrivaled, incomparable rule of YHWH (15:11, 18)—the God of the fathers (15:2) who has acted through creation to unleash life over death. Israel sings exuberantly because of the concretized hope YHWH's reign inspires. The song does not celebrate the end of all human oppression, but the song does offer praiseful witness to the reality of a creation where surging threats against human well-being are swallowed up by YHWH's redemption.[250] Doxology to the true king has answered the cry for justice against the pretender to the throne (2:23). The

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[247] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 168. See his wider discussion on 165-70.

[248] Landes, "Creation and Liberation," 143: "It is because the Creator-God is the Liberator-God that liberation has universal dimensions."

[249] Leder, "Iconography of Order," 138. Kingship, argues Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 331, is a contextual metaphor for God that arises in this context because another king asserts power over God's people.

king of creation is also Israel's divine warrior who administers the world with justice and righteousness.[251]

Though Exod 14-15 builds upon the mythopoetic combat storyline, the macro-structure of the book of Exodus also generally follows the pattern.[252] In broad strokes there is conflict (chs. 1-6), war (7-14), victory (14-15), kingship (15, 19-24), and temple/palace construction (25-31, 35-40). Two observations follow from the overarching mythic configuration of the Exodus as a book. First, the pattern underlines the significance of understanding Exodus as a coherent text about the re-establishment of creational order. The organization reflecting the mythic combat pattern implies YHWH's defeat of Egypt is a sovereign, cosmological defeat of chaos and the inauguration of a (re)new(ed) order. By use of familiar ancient Near Eastern tropes, the organization of the book of Exodus makes a statement about its function, viz., YHWH's work for and with Israel is a world-making (and world-encompassing) enterprise. Furthermore, the

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[250] Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 114.

[251] Cf. Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture. Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 57-58, comments after a review of divine warrior texts that "the Lord's roles as judge and warrior provide significant qualifications for the warlike imagery and language for God. It indicates at least that the label 'warrior' for God was not used lightly. It was also not used to argue for God's favor for Israel . . . Rather, [it] emphasizes the actions of God were just because Israel's enemies violated an agreement or a standard of fairness."

[252] This observation is underappreciated by most commentators, but see William W. Hallo, "Exodus and Ancient Near Eastern Literature," in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. G. Plaut (New York: UAHC, 1981) 372-77; and esp. Leder, "Iconography of Order," passim, esp. 120-31; ibid., "Coherence of Exodus: Narrative Unity and Meaning," *CTJ* 36 (2001): 251-69. Leder illuminates the structure of Exodus by comparing it with the narrative structure of ancient Near Eastern iconography ("Iconography of Order," 83-115). In this he follows Keel, *The Symbolism of Biblical World*, 7-14; see also figs. 43 and 240. He does not claim that the kingship pattern rigidly structures Exodus; rather, the kingship pattern underlines the coherence of the entire narrative.

patterning reveals the paradigmatic quality of the exodus event. Nardoni captures this point well:

> By virtue of God's presence, the Exodus event transcends its supposed facticity and becomes a foundational event, a memorial, and a paradigm of liberation. One might even say that the biblical Exodus is not a paradigm in itself, *rather it is the application of a paradigm*—the fight of the God of order against the power of chaos. Since the Exodus from Egypt is, however, the event par excellence that embodies the extension of creative action into history, one could say that it is paradigmatic for any possible later Exodus. In fact, the mythical battle that pervades the narrative gives it a suprahistorical dimension, and it makes it applicable to similar situations. Moreover, since the struggle is that of God the creator against the power of chaos and because all people come from the hands of the same creator, the lessons of Exodus can be extended to all people who suffer the tragedy of oppression in its diverse forms.[253]

The macro-literary pattern is laden with cosmological significance that is continually reinforced in the literary units within the narrative. And just order is a central concern in ancient cosmology.

Second, in order to grasp the full imaginative force of the story, one must appreciate the narrative development from beginning to end. Exodus moves from chaos to recreation, from one service to another. The movement binds Israel's exodus from Egypt to the events on and around Sinai. Just as the song of Moses celebrates both exit (15:1-2) and entry (15:13-18), the pattern suggests that the conflict of chs.1-14, though punctuated by the victory of king YHWH (chs. 14-15), finds its necessary literary and theological development in chs. 16-40. The Israelites cross the sea but their journey is just beginning. YHWH will establish his kingship over Israel (chs. 19-24), which entails, according to the pattern, the indispensable construction of YHWH's dwelling place (chs.

[253] Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 59-60 (emphasis mine).

25-40). To express the point another way, a theology of justice developed from Exodus that does not account for the telic encounter at Mount Sinai and the construction of the Deity's dwelling place is, at best, partial. As I will show in the next chapter, the journey to Sinai and the events at the mountain provide an ordering of just community that functions as the counter-complement to Egypt's disorder of injustice. We cannot discern a theology of justice in Exodus without continuing through to the construction of and indwelling of God in the tabernacle.

Finally, the sea continues the motif of worship-service. The songs of Moses and Miriam summon Israel to a collective liturgical recital of God's victory over the powers of darkness at the Sea. This liturgical act underscores the integral role that Israel's worship plays in accomplishing God's purposes in the exodus (and his salvific work more generally).[254] Besides expressing gratitude, Israel's praise testifies before the world that YHWH has done what he said he would do. Thus, Israel's worship in a significant way participates in and contributes to the purpose of the exodus as articulated in 9:16: "so that my name may be proclaimed throughout all the earth." The Egyptians as well are involved in the elaboration on the theme of worship (e.g., 14:4, 18). Though it is an overstatement to say the Egyptians become worshipers of YHWH, the narrative nevertheless traces YHWH's desire for them to acknowledge YHWH as the true God.[255]

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[254] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 163-64.

[255] E.g., Exod 5:2; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 9:14; 10:3, 16; 14:4, 18.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In Exodus 5-15 the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh takes center stage. The events recount the wonder-full demise of Pharaoh's Egypt and exodus of YHWH's people. My investigation, stimulated by the recent trend in interpretation that challenges the morality of YHWH's exit strategy for Israel, has explored what this part of the story contributes to a theology of justice. In much of my discussion I have used creation theology and the pedagogical interest of the story as interpretative reference points. These help to calibrate the ethic of justice in Exod 5-15 to YHWH's larger, creational agenda already evoked in Exod 1-4 (and all of this a continuation of Genesis).[256] The following offers a summary of the main points in this chapter:

- Two rival sovereigns vie for Israel's vassalage. YHWH's mandate to Pharaoh, "Send out my people so that they may worship me," both lays claim to Israel as YHWH's people and locates the purpose of their exodus in their service to YHWH. This objective heard in a creational key not only makes Pharaoh's subjugation unjust but creationally untenable. Inherent within these rival visions of service are different conceptions of justice.
- By his derisive dismissal of YHWH's command—refusing "to know" YHWH—Pharaoh unwittingly sets the stage for YHWH's epistemic program in the wonders and signs. YHWH's strategy carries revelatory and educative intent for Pharaoh and Egypt—there is much more to the plagues than Israel's release. YHWH's plagues are

[256] Conversely, a failure to appreciate the creational moorings of the plagues-exodus story heightens the risk of misconstruing the nature of justice inherent in YHWH's dealings with Egypt and Pharaoh (and Israel's role therein).

public, creational judgments that correspond to Egypt's anti-creational offense in oppressing Israel. They illuminate the ethical chaos of Pharaoh's "just" order through the chaotic disruption of the physical creation.

- It is important to YHWH that Pharaoh, Egypt's leader, decides to send the people away. Pharaoh's heart is unyielding in spite of YHWH's first six wonders and signs. In the last triad of plagues (7-9), YHWH's restraint in power grows thin. YHWH escalates the plagues' severity and actively strengthens Pharaoh's heart. YHWH's "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart preserves Pharaoh's ability to choose to heed the divine command. Yet, because Pharaoh persists in his recalcitrance, he leads his people to reap the just harvest of Egypt's violation against creational order.
- The tenth plague against the firstborn provides the landmark occasion for public (and perpetual) proclamation of Israel's complete belonging to YHWH. The event ensures the education of those who would identify as Israel. The death of the firstborn afflicts all identified with Pharaoh, whose stubbornness triggers the judgment. The final plague, hence, bespeaks the corporate consequences of a ruler's failed governance.
- Several connections with the larger narrative help to explain the emphasis on Israel's "plundering" of Egypt of possessions. In particular, Israel's plundering parallels YHWH's plundering of Egypt of people. Not only does YHWH rescue native Israelites, but a mixed multitude departs with the people. They are a signal *in nuce* that YHWH's sovereignty encompasses the whole world and YHWH's justice is not ethnically restricted.

- The crossing of the sea offers an epitome of how the Exodus narrative presents Israel's historical journey of salvation in creational terms. It is a dramatic and graphic picture of the defeat of historical foe that is spun into YHWH's mythic victory over the recalcitrant, cosmic Enemy. Israel's worship participates in and liturgically preserves the event so that YHWH's name might be known.

The drama allows for the stark unmasking of Pharaoh's (sub)version of justice as he continually refuses to release YHWH's people. From a canonical perspective the narrative bears out the negative outworking of the Abrahamic covenant: the leader of Egypt chooses to curse the people, and consequently, his realm experiences the curse. God has brought the covenant people out from their captivity, executing justice, just as he promised Abraham (Gen 15:14). "The liberation of Israel is an act of justice inasmuch as it is an action adjusted to the order of the creation and adjusted to the promise—it puts Israel in the right position according to God's will."[257] The injustice of Egyptian slavery comes to an end, but the struggle to work out the implications of Israel's transition into YHWH's just service now begins.

[257] Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 61-62.

5. SUMMONED TO JUSTICE: EXODUS 15-24

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Israel celebrates on the other side of the Sea after witnessing YHWH's mighty judgment on the Egyptian oppressor. They can now be on their way, launched by a powerful exhibition of YHWH's justice. The liberated people's journey has the ultimate destination of the land of promise (3:8, 17), but YHWH has already informed Moses that the route includes a rendezvous at the mountain where they will serve God (3:12). At the sacred mountain Israel will start to fulfill the second part of YHWH's command to Pharaoh: "send the people out *so that they may worship-serve* (*'bd*) *me*" (e.g., 7:16; 8:1; 9:1).[1] In other words, Israel's *exodus* remains incomplete apart from the *entrance* into YHWH's service at the mountain.[2] But even more to the point, the definitive (paradigmatic) demonstration of YHWH's justice in Exodus includes Israel's entrance in service-worship at Sinai just as much as the exit from the Egyptian taskmaster. A theology of the justice of Exodus, hence, needs to reckon with how Israel's sojourn to and at Sinai thickens its exposition.

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[1] The tendency in much historical scholarship has been to treat the wilderness and Sinai materials as discrete literary strands. One unfortunate outcome of this approach is that their connection to the aggregate narrative of Exodus (and the Pentateuch as a whole) has been downplayed. My interest remains on what is to be gained by reading these episodes, not as compartmentalized literary strands, but as consciously continuing the themes woven through the previous narrative of Israel's exodus from Egypt.

[2] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 78: "From the start, God intended the liberation to be only the precondition of a greater event: making Israel his people. 'Serving God' instead of Pharaoh is the goal toward which Israel will march." Leder, "Iconongraphy of Order," 201-49, argues that the themes of the mountain, theophanic fire, service and the itineraries closely link chs. 1-15 to chs. 19-24. Cf. the sage comments of Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace*, 77.

The covenantal law collection in Exod 20-23 is an obvious text to examine in order to analyze the contours of Israel's understanding of justice.[3] Yet, their march to the mountain (chs. 15-18) is not inconsequential for their development as YHWH's just community. Just as Moses experiences conflict that challenges him to mature in justice (2:11-22) before the call of God at the bush (*səneh*), so too the freshly liberated community has growing pains related to justice on the way to their Mount Sinai (*sînay*) encounter.[4] The wilderness trek functions as a period of counter-formation; it is a time for Israel, whose habitus bears the stamp of Pharaoh's "diseased" order, to be directly initiated into life defined by YHWH's justice. Israel's wilderness trials ready them to respond to YHWH's summons to their vocation of creational justice upon their arrival to the mountain. YHWH's opening address at Sinai (19:4-6) highlights Israel's election in a way that adds essential texture to the relationship between the people's privilege and responsibility in YHWH's creational agenda. The law collection further fills out how Israel is to embody YHWH's creational justice in the shadow of their exodus experience. In short, Israel learns both in their journey to and their stay at Sinai what it means to behave as the exodus-shaped people of YHWH, liberated from (and never to return to) the

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[3] Many of the general studies on justice in the Bible contain chapter-length treatments on the law collections (e.g., Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 68-94; Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 20-30; Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, 151-68; Pleins, *Social Visions*, 41-91; Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 105-117; 169-203), but see the extensive work of Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*. More narrowly on justice legislation relating to the poor, see Baker, *Tight Fists*. For specialized studies of the covenant laws in Exodus, see Shalom M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law*, VT Sup 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1970); L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Bundesbuch (Ex 20,22-23,33)*, BZAW 188 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990); Joe M. Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach*, JSOTSup 174 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); see further the bibliography listed in Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:78-80 [esp. 81, n. 9].

[4] See above discussion in ch. 3; cf. Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 72-76.

injustice of Pharaoh. In the following—again employing the thematic lenses of creation and pedagogy—I consider how the wilderness journey, the initial Sinai summons (19:4-6), and the law collection contribute to Exodus's theology of justice, especially as it is related to the poor.

5.2 EXODUS 15:22-18:27

It is significant that the narrative does not directly record the people's arrival at the mountain. Instead, the journey through the liminal desert locale between Egypt and Sinai is presented as integral to the story of Israel's exodus.[5] The hazardous passage in the wilderness demonstrates YHWH's reliable deliverance (again) to Israel (18:8).[6] Equally, if not more so, the trek serves as a pilgrimage that means to incubate trust in the unfamiliar and untried rule of YHWH, Israel's new king (15:18). There is provision (15:22-17:7), protection (17:8-16), and polity (18:1-27), all geographically as well as metaphorically traveling away from the lethal system of Pharaoh toward the fuller expression of covenant community at Sinai. In this manner the wilderness forms a distinct counter-context to Egypt, one that is advantageous for training Israel's heart to

[5] Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies*, AARSR 23 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 7-23, insightfully applies Victor Turner's ritual theory to Israel's wilderness narratives. In particular, Cohn explores how the features of Turner's concept of liminality characterize the transitional period.

[6] George W. Coats, "The Wilderness Itinerary," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 147, relates the genre of the wilderness narrative to ancient Near Eastern royal annals, which characteristically stress a king's exploits in leading his people through hostile situations. Cf. G. I. Davies, "The Wilderness Itineraries: A Comparative Study," *TynB* 25 (1974): 46-81.

live as and into YHWH's new community of justice (cf. Deut 8:2-5).[7] Hence, these episodes all serve to acculturate Israel "on the way" to their being more wholly inducted into the "way of justice" to be more fully disclosed at Sinai.

5.2.1 Wilderness "Testing" as Pedagogy

The wilderness provides the context for YHWH's leading Israel through a series of "teachable moments" as the people grow into their identity. The theme of "testing" especially signals this pedagogical dimension of the wilderness. The vocabulary of "testing" (*nsh*) frontloads the wilderness experience (15:25; 16:4; 17:2, 7), and so offers a significant guidepost by which to understand the theological purpose of the pre-Sinai wilderness as a whole (15:22-18:27).

The first two stories lay out how the "testing" in the wilderness functions formatively for the emerging people of God. The first incident (15:22-26) begins with a report that after a three-day journey the Israelite caravan arrives parched at Marah, an oasis of bitter water.[8] The people grumble about their circumstances (v. 24)—a behavior

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[7] Cf. Deut 32:10-14; Jer 2:1-3; Hos 2:14-16 [16-18]; 13:4-6, for positive construals of the wilderness period. We have already seen the power of the social environment on moral formation played out in the life of Moses (see ch. 3 above; and Dozeman, "Creation and Environment," 33; Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*). Israel's education, as we will see, is presented in contrast to the plague narrative's focus on the (largely unsuccessful) education of Pharaoh and Egypt.

[8] Three days is the amount of time, one remembers, that Moses demanded to travel in order to sacrifice to YHWH (3:18; 5:3). If we read the phrase more evocatively than chronologically, we might expect the people to arrive at an expected place of worship. Instead, the people reach an oasis of bitter water, where they will learn something about service to this God.

that comes to characterize their wilderness wanderings.[9] In ready response, YHWH instructs Moses to throw some wood into the water in order to sweeten it. The narrative interprets YHWH's activity: "there [YHWH] placed on them a statute and judgment (*ḥōq ûmišpāṭ*)" (v. 25). The concise explanation is puzzling. It is not obvious to what the "statute and judgment" refer[10] or how the desalination of the water relates to divine decreeing. The following clause and verse shed light on the ambiguity:

> And there [YHWH] tested (*nsh*) them. He said, "If you diligently listen to the voice of YHWH your God and you do what is just in his eyes and you give ear to his commandments and you keep all his statutes, all the disease which I placed upon Egypt I will not place upon you, for I am YHWH your healer." (15:25-26)

The story labels the event as a test, but it is a test that does not develop as an evaluation of Israel. Rather, YHWH's following speech construes the test as an occasion for instruction on heeding the divine way.[11] YHWH's words to Israel do not mention any specific command. Dozeman insightfully takes "the absence of a specific law [as] the key

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[9] The murmuring motif appears later in 16:7-9, 12; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11; 17:6, 20, 25 (though Dozeman, *Exodus*, 349, remarks the idea was already introduced in 14:11-12). Before Sinai, YHWH deals more compassionately toward a "murmuring" Israel than is the case after Sinai (so Childs, *Exodus*, 258-60; cf. George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 51; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 349-51). These authors argue the complaints pre-Sinai function differently than in Numbers (Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 170, notes that there is no talk of sin in Exod 15-18). The major difference is that Israel complains about genuine needs in Exodus, and YHWH cares for them. While not wholly positive, the pre-Sinai stories have a more constructive aspect of establishing the YHWH-Israel relationship. After Sinai, the murmuring stories are largely destructive to this relationship.

[10] This ambiguity has led to a variety of suggestions from scholars that need not detain us here, but see the review of Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:312-13; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:436-37.

[11] Cf. Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 68: "The Lord tests primarily to instruct. If Israel 'passes' the test, then the Lord's faithfulness to maintain her well-being, demonstrated in the exodus from Egypt, is further confirmed in a new setting . . . If Israel 'fails' the test . . . the failure provides the opportunity for explicit instruction concerning both the Lord's expectations for Israel and the consequence Israel can expect for her compliance or lack thereof. In either case the testing provides Israel the opportunity to know the Lord her God."

to interpretation. The speech is a proposal for law in general, not legislation of a particular law."[12] Thus, instead of reporting a "pass/fail" outcome to this introductory test, the Marah episode accents the pedagogical intent of the trial. YHWH is Israel's educator, which is cleverly intimated by the suggestive verb in the phrase "and YHWH directed (*hiphil* of *yrh*) him [to] a stick." The root verb, *yrh*, means "to teach"—its nominal form is *tôrâ*! This verb used in such close proximity with the words "statute" (2x), "judgment," and "commandments" casts clear overtones of *tôrâ* teaching.[13] The Marah "test," then, is less a probing of Israel's obedience to a specific injunction than an invitation to Israel to follow the teaching of YHWH.[14] More divine words will come soon enough in the form of statutes, commands, and judgments. At this juncture, the emphasis rests on learning to listen to YHWH in trust. Listening was not possible in Egypt, because Pharaoh was not interested in dialogic engagement. Israel now has a role in relationship; they are valued above and beyond their capacity for production. YHWH empowers Israel to be an obedient servant rather than a mindless slave. And YHWH's compassionate provision in this early phase in the relationship looks to cultivate Israel's trust, not merely in new commands, but in their new Commander.[15]

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[12] Dozeman, *Exodus*, 370. Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 178-79; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 577. Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:313, takes "statute and judgment" as a hendiadys "binding statute." He interprets the phrase and YHWH's speech as emphasizing the requirement of obedience, which is "the charter, the constitution, for YHWH's relationship with Israel."

[13] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 577. Propp also observes that the word for stick, *'ēṣ*, is a likely pun on *'ēṣâ*, counsel or wisdom, which fits well as an object of the verb *yrh* (cf. Jer 18:18; Ezk 7:26). Cf. Sarna, *Exodus*, 84; Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:309-10.

[14] Berge, "Didacticism in Exodus?" 5-7, calls the episode an example of "torah didacticism."

[15] There is an implicit threat in 15:26, viz., the disease can and will continue if Israel refuses to maintain separation from Egypt. The promise of health, however, is what YHWH

The following, much longer episode in ch. 16 develops the notion of "testing" in similar fashion. Israel once more grumbles (but with more ardor) about a lack of food (v. 3), and once again YHWH responds promptly with a plan to alleviate their distress. This time YHWH will rain down food from heaven. YHWH confides to Moses that he plans in Israel's gathering of the food to "test them . . . whether or not they walk in my teaching (*tôrâ*)" (v. 4).[16] Moses and Aaron, in turn, deliver instructions about how the community is to glean YHWH's heavenly groceries (vv. 6-12). Significantly, YHWH's aim of testing is conspicuously absent from their instructions; rather, Moses emphasizes what Israel is expected to learn from the event[17]—and in language reminiscent of YHWH's pedagogical intent in Egypt: "In the evening you will know that YHWH brought you from the land of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of YHWH . . . Then you will know that I am YHWH your God" (vv. 6-7, 12). Moreover, the *daily* repetition of gathering manna *for forty years* (v. 35) couches YHWH's "test" in terms of a routine training exercise instead of a one-shot appraisal of Israel's obedience.[18] That the community has trouble obeying YHWH's commands and teachings (vv. 20, 28) illustrates that the educational enterprise requires a long view. Indeed, the third and last story to use "testing" language narrates an ominous reversal: Israel tests YHWH (17:7). At Rephidim Israel reveals their growing

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chooses to emphasize here (see discussion of Frederick J. Gaiser, *Healing in the Bible: Theological Insight for Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 26-28).

[16] It is not altogether clear precisely what the test is, or for that matter, the logical sequence of the first part of the story (cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 276).

[17] Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 78-79.

[18] Ibid. Moberly points out that this is precisely how Deut 8:2-5 interprets the wilderness testing.

capacity to resist the divine training, foreshadowing an inveterate rebelliousness that will eventually become disastrous on the other side of Sinai.[19] But, so too, Israel's grumbling is a foil that displays YHWH's capacity for long-suffering in the relationship toward the goal of reordering their desires (unlike Israel's former oppressor, Pharaoh).

The pedagogical trajectory extends beyond the episodes that speak explicitly of "testing" to tie them together thematically with Amalek's attack (17:8-16) and Jethro's visit (18:1-27). In these Israel takes a more active role in the training while YHWH's immediate presence recedes.[20] Israel does not "stand still" in the battle against Amalek, in contrast to their instructions at the Sea (14:13-14). The battle relies in part on Israel exercising courage and the will to survive in a way that the people have not yet experienced. Nonetheless, the people learn by the visual of Moses's raised staff that YHWH fights for them.[21] Exodus 18 develops the pedagogical motif in at least two ways. First, the initial exchange between Moses and Jethro (18:1-12) provides a window into Israel's larger educational purpose among the nations. Word has spread about Israel's divine exodus (v. 1; cf. 15:4). Upon Jethro's arrival, Moses reports to his father-in-law all that happened (v. 8). Moses's account of YHWH's deeds—as mirrored in Jethro's reciprocal synopsis (vv. 9-12)— exemplifies *in nuce* what is Israel's role in testimony

[19] A progression in Israel's grumbling occurs in chs. 16-17. In the final episode that mentions Israel's complaint (17:1-7), Israel does not merely grumble (17:3) but issues a *rîb* (17:2, 7), a term for a dispute in a court of law.

[20] Victor Ber, "Moses and Jethro: Harmony and Conflict in the Interpretation of Exodus 18," *CV* 50 (2008): 147-70.

[21] See Sacks, *Exodus*, 115-23, for an eloquent meditation on Israel's maturation through the battle of Amalek.

vis-à-vis the outsider:[22] to evidence the revelation of YHWH's exodus-justice within YHWH's world (cf. 19:6; Gen 18:19).[23] Unlike Pharaoh or Amalek, Jethro responds by extolling YHWH's deliverance.[24] But Jethro's presence does more than illustrate Israel's positive pedagogical potential; he crucially refines Israel's capacity to continue its exodus witness. Strikingly, Jethro, an outsider, steps into the role as teacher. He coaches Moses to embrace his central task: "enlighten[25] [the people] of the statutes and judgments, make known to them the way in which they should walk and the work they should do" (v. 20). He also directs Moses to appoint others to join him in the administration of justice. Jethro widens the responsibility for disseminating YHWH's commands and statutes to the community. In so doing, Jethro's advice provides necessary structure for a more effective

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[22] Cf. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 825: "Moses' brief speech is an abbreviated form of the narrative credo recital of Israel."

[23] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 196, remarks that Moses's testimony is the first record of the carrying out of God's purposes—to announce (*spr*) YHWH's might geographically (9:16) and generationally (10:2).

[24] Jethro's response is also exemplary of the public acknowledgement by the outsider to Israel as a YHWH-delivered community. Many commentators believe, rightly I think, that the placement of the Jethro episode on the heels of Amalek's attack draws a purposeful contrast between two reactions to the presence of Israel among the nations; e.g., Cassuto, *Exodus*, 211-12; Sarna, *Exodus*, 128-29; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 634; Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:401. On the antithesis of Jethro to Pharaoh, note the remarks of Eugene Carpenter, "Exodus 18: Its Structure, Style, Motifs and Function in the Book of Exodus," in *A Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form and Content. Essays in Honor of George W. Coats*, ed. E. Carpenter, JSOTSup 240 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 103: "Jethro's 'now I know' (18:11) contrasts beautifully with Pharaoh's 'I do not know' and his reluctant admittance of the power of YHWH (10:17) . . . the contrast between Pharaoh's tragic end and Jethro's comic rebirth is based upon their individual responses to 'Who is YHWH?'" The contrast is also seen in Jethro's alacrity to sacrifice with Israel (v. 12) versus Pharaoh's unwillingness to allow Israel to sacrifice (10:25, 28). Adriane Leveen, "Inside Out: Jethro, the Midianites and a Biblical Construction of the Outsider," *JSOT* 34 (2010): 408, makes the further point that Jethro's praise also stands in contrast to and critiques Israel's grumbling response.

[25] On the translation of *zhr* as "enlighten," see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 407.

implementation of YHWH's charge at the beginning of the wilderness journey (15:26).[26] Israel will learn through routine practice of justice how to cultivate a community in which YHWH's shalom can flourish (18:23).

5.2.2 Learning YHWH's Creational Justice in the Wilderness

The reason for Israel's need for reorientation in the wilderness is not hard to surmise. They have emerged from Egypt's oppressive reality which has for generations absorbed, submerged, and domesticated the people's consciousness (cf. 6:9).[27] Although the people are freshly separated from their former identity as Pharaoh's slaves, the vulnerability of their wilderness circumstances generates an anxious pining for the security of Egypt—the only existence they have known. The people enunciate their "Egyptian-shaped hopes"[28] most graphically in 16:3: "If only we had died by the hand of YHWH in the land of Egypt when we sat by fleshpots and we ate food to satisfaction."[29] They may have come out of Egypt, but the risks of the desert uncover that Egypt still enslaves their desires. Or, in YHWH's words at Marah, the "disease of Egypt" infects their

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[26] From this perspective Jethro's instructions form an inclusio with YHWH's instructions in 15:26 around the wilderness journey.

[27] I borrow language from Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 51. For an intriguing study of the way the people's grumbling functions as a sign of an emerging but divided consciousness of freedom, see Jane Falk, "Rhetorical Questions: The First Words of the Children of Israel," in *Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts*, eds. Ora Wiskind Elper and Susan Handelman (New York: Urim Publications, 2000), 430-46.

[28] Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 11; cf. Num 16:13. For more on Israel's complex attitude toward the oppressor, see Walzer, *Exodus*, 43-49; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 43-69.

[29] The word for satisfaction in 16:3, *śōba'*, is a cognate to *śābā'*, the word used extensively in Gen 41:29-53 to describe Egypt's seven years of plenty.

imaginations (15:26). The phrase "disease of Egypt" most immediately recalls certain physical maladies that struck Egypt in the plague narrative (9:1-12).[30] Taken more broadly, however, the "disease of Egypt" constitutes a metonym for the malignant, immoral universe of Egypt that YHWH diagnosed and dismantled in the plagues (cf. Deut 7:15).[31]

If Israel's heart carries Egypt's pathogens, then YHWH identifies himself at the onset of their wilderness journey as their healer (15:26).[32] Obedience to the divine voice is Israel's antidote (15:26). The imagery of community health provides a helpful way to grasp the pedagogical import of the wilderness, viz., the journey becomes a gradual "training-in-treatment" for Israel's self-identity over against (and out of) the "sick society" of Egypt.[33] The wilderness operates as a theater to diagnose some fundamental contrasts between life under Pharaoh and life under YHWH. To mix in another metaphor, their journey is a "road test," as it were, for YHWH's prescription toward the healthy practice of just community.[34] In this Israel begins to be fashioned into the distinct

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[30] The word for disease in v. 26, *maḥălâ*, is not used in the plague narrative.

[31] The language of public health likely plays on Egypt's reputation as an epicenter of medicinal progress that was "unsurpassed" in the ancient world (Kent R. Weeks, "Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health in Ancient Egypt," *CANE* 3:1793). Cf. Deut 7:15; 28:27, 60. YHWH's identification as "healer" is, thus, not without irony. It redefines for the people the contaminated, Egyptian environment from which they have emerged and their need for wholeness.

[32] See further on this theme Gaiser, *Healing in the Bible*, 28-34.

[33] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 71; Norbert Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 93; Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:516; McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 55; cf. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map*, 137-43: "[T]he identity of Israel as not-Egypt is here revealed, not as a given or divinely mandated fact, but as a contingency dependent upon constant obedience to the world-defining rules of YHWH."

servants of YHWH, recuperating from their malformation as slaves under Pharaoh. And because the disorder of Egypt was one preeminently poisoned by injustice, especially as it related to the vulnerable in society,[35] it is apt to explore how the wilderness trek forms Israel according to YHWH's alternative regimen of justice.

It is noteworthy that the concern for justice arises explicitly at the start and the end of the wilderness travel. In the beginning episode at Marah, tucked into the middle of

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[34] The narrative signals this "contrastive diagnosis" by threading Israel's wilderness experience with deliberate allusions to their past bondage in Egypt. Two examples that bookend the wilderness illustrate the point. First, right out of the gate when Israel arrives at Marah, four times in 15:23 the text repeats the root for bitter (*mrh*). The elaboration is much more than just a detail about the grave nature of their plight. It intentionally recalls Israel's embittered (*mrr*) servitude under Pharaoh (1:14; cf. 12:8). The repetition alerts the listener to hear the Marah event in comparison to Israel's recent, past oppression. The brief episode further promotes a comparison by the evocative motif of undrinkable water, bringing to mind the first plague Moses performs before Pharaoh (7:14-25). In addition (and more subtly), YHWH gives the people a statute (*ḥōq*), portraying himself as Israel's healer (from root *rp'*). The Israelites cannot fulfill Pharaoh's demanded statute (*ḥōq*; 5:14) of bricks. Rather than Israel's healer, Pharaoh accuses Israel of being slackers (from root *rph*; 5:8, 17). One might also intuit allusions to the plague cycle in Egypt in the fact that Moses casts (*šlk*) a piece of wood into the water. The same verb is used in the paradigmatic "snake encounter," when Aaron casts (*šlk*) the wooden rod before Pharaoh (7:9).

Second, in the final episode Jethro counsels Moses to place (*śym*) officials (*śārîm*) over the people who can judge the people. Both the language and themes in this passage evoke the account where Pharaoh places (*śym*) taskmasters (*śārê missîm*) over the people in order to oppress them. We might go further to note (admittedly more conjectural) that Moses is to appoint men of competence (*ḥayil*) who are God-fearing (*yir'ê 'ĕlōhîm*). It is at the sea that Pharaoh's army (*ḥayil*) learns the fear of God (14:25). The lexical and thematic "cross references" effectively juxtapose Israel's organization for justice with the unjust arrangement of society in Egypt.

These examples typify a larger pattern peppering the wilderness period. Several other narrative motifs introduced in Egypt reappear in the wilderness: YHWH's causing it to rain (16:4 // 9:18, 23); animals coming up and covering the land (16:13 // 8:2; 10:5, 15); the recognition formula, "you shall know that I am YHWH" (16:12 // e.g., 7:5, 17); sabbath (16:22-30 // 5:5), the hand of YHWH and of Moses (16:3; 17:11-16; 18:9-10 // e.g., 3:20; 7:4; 9:3; 10:12; 14:16); the staff of Moses (17:5, 9 // e.g., 4:17; 7:15, 14:16); and Moses as judge (18:13 // 2:14; 5:21). See more examples listed by Carpenter, "Exodus 18," 101-5, and Fretheim, *God and World*, 126-27. All of these motifs demonstrate how the wilderness happenings invite contrast between learning YHWH's good order with Egypt's diseased disorder.

[35] Recall the discussion above in ch. 3 that Moses's own maturation (from Egypt to Midian) is traced in relationship to issues of justice.

YHWH's summons to Israel in 15:26, is the phrase, "do what is just (*yāšār*) in [YHWH's] eyes." This is the first occurrence of the adjective *yāšār* in the biblical canon. Along with its derivative forms (especially the substantive *mêšārîm*), it is a primary term in the Old Testament's semantic field of justice. The *yšr* root denotes an ethical standard commensurate with justice and righteousness that infuses YHWH's character, commands, and creation.[36] In 15:26 the phrase "to do what is just in [YHWH's] eyes" comes second in a series of parallel expressions: "If (1) you diligently listen to the voice of YHWH your God (2) and you do what is just in his eyes (3) and you give ear to his commandments (4) and you keep all his statutes" (15:26). The parallelism underlines, on the one hand, that God's commands are descriptively just. On the other hand, it prescribes that the practice of true justice aligns with YHWH's revelation. In a word, learning to follow YHWH, according to the summons, corresponds to learning to do what is just (*yāšār*). From the start of Israel's wilderness reorientation, then, YHWH emphasizes the fundamental nature of justice in their burgeoning relationship. What is more, these other phrases recall the language of the Abrahamic promise (Gen 22:18; 26:5). Likewise, YHWH's charge "to do what is just" reasserts in synonymous terms Israel's Abrahamic vocation "to do justice (*mišpāṭ*) and righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*)" (Gen 18:19). At Marah, then, YHWH recruits Israel

[36] *HALOT* 2:450; *BDB* 448; G. Liedke, "ישׁר," *TLOT* 2:588-90; Hannes Olivier, "יָשַׁר," *NIDOTTE* 2:555-60. It frequently appears in poetic parallel to *mišpāṭ* (justice) and/or *ṣədāqâ/ṣedeq* (righteousness); e.g., Deut 32:4; Isa 11:4; Mic 3:9; Hab 2:4; Pss 98:9; 99:4, 8; Prov 2:9. The Hebrew root *yšr* is etymologically related to the second term in the Mesopotamian expression "*kittum* and *mīšarum*." The particular idiom, "to do what is just in the eyes of YHWH," is almost exclusive to the Deuteronomistic history as a way to assess the reigns of Israel's kings. See 1 Kgs 15:11 // 2 Chr 14:1; 1 Kgs 22:43 // 2 Chr 20:32; 2 Kgs 12:3 // 2 Chr 24:2; 2 Kgs 14:3 // 2 Chr 25:2; 2 Kgs 15:3 // 2 Chr 26:4; 2 Kgs 15:34 // 2 Chr 27:2; 2 Kgs 16:2 // 2 Chr 28:1; 2 Kgs 18:3 // 2 Chr 29:2; 2 Kgs 22:2 // 2 Chr 34:2; 2 Chr 31:20.

to their identity as recipients of covenantal promise and blessing and, equally, their responsibility to obedience. Crucial to their covenant identity is the call for justice.[37] As a consequence, Israel's practice of YHWH-shaped justice will lead to a public health inoculated against Egypt's disease.[38] The episode ends with Israel's arrival at Elim, a verdant place of twelve springs and seventy palm trees. In Elim creation offers a hospitable place to Israel[39]—"a case in point of what the new life looks like when the commands and assurances of [YHWH] are taken seriously."[40]

The close of the wilderness narrative in Exod 18 narrates Jethro's visit to the Israelite camp at the mountain of God.[41] Though Jethro's recommendations to Moses on the second day address the practice of justice within the community directly, the sequence of the narrative couches Jethro's juridical correctives as an outworking of his profession and worship on the first day.[42] That is, Jethro's confession of YHWH, a God

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[37] In other words, the character of the justice to which Israel is called is covenantal. YHWH's summons is proleptic preparation for the full disclosure at Sinai (cf. the parallel language of 19:5). Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 581, insightfully dubs 15:22-26 "a covenant in miniature, with one benefit (water), one stipulation (obedience), one implicit curse (disease) and one explicit blessing (health)." Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 178.

[38] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 809: "The systemic pathologies of an exploitative system can be escaped only if one stops colluding with the system. The way to stop such collusion, says the decree of Yahweh, is to commit to a different pattern of obedience that is rooted in a different vision."

[39] The numbers twelve and seventy recall Israel's migration to Egypt (1:1-5), a time in which they flourished (1:7).

[40] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 808.

[41] For a review of proposals about the (mis)placement of the Jethro narrative within the Exodus narrative, see Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 627-28.

[42] There has been a tendency in scholarship to read ch. 18 in two distinct sections (vv. 1-12, 13-27) based on the text's alleged prehistory (see the review in Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:397-402), but Carpenter, "Exodus 18," has argued cogently for the literary unity of the chapter in its received form. Once the unity is assumed, one can see more clearly how the motif of justice informs the entire encounter, even though it is more pronounced in the second half (e.g.,

who has liberated Israel from Egypt (vv. 10-11), lays the foundation for his contribution to how YHWH's people should pursue the exodus-justice in the community. To say it another way, Jethro seeks to rectify the incongruity he sees between Israel's identity as an exodus people (first day) and Israel's actualization of that identity in terms of the societal practice of justice (second day).

On the second day Jethro recognizes that Israel's administration of justice is unhealthily reliant on Moses. The shalom of the community is in danger if matters continue as they are (v. 23). In fact, Jethro's discourse, when read with attention to the larger narrative, contains subtle, barbed warnings that the "disease of Egypt" threatens Moses's modus operandi of judgment.[43] Jethro bluntly tells Moses what he is doing is

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Carpenter, "Exodus 18," 98-99, remarks that the root *špṭ* is used 6x in vv. 13-27). Jethro's instructions about the judicial procedure in vv. 13-27 flow out of his confession of YHWH recorded vv. 1-12. In Carpenter's words, "The basic action in the second half of the chapter . . . is possible because of the result of the action in the first half" (97). This is one reason why Jethro points Moses to his duty to teach people about YHWH's ways (v. 20). He recognizes the concretization of justice builds on the knowledge of the Just One. Although Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 827, underplays the unity of the chapter, he sees the theological payoff of relating the two sections: "The juxtaposition affirms that this liberated community must develop institutions that will sustain and stabilize the exodus vision in daily social practice . . . the power and passion that made the exodus possible are the same power and passion that can make possible a society free of exploitation." Cf. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 155-56.

[43] We could read the (enigmatic) appearance of Zipporah and Moses's two sons in this way. When Zipporah last appears in the story, she intervenes for Moses in a situation of justice, rescuing him by atoning for his injustice and sealing his identity as an Israelite (as opposed to an Egyptian). In parallel fashion Jethro now arrives to rescue Moses in a communal matter of justice (cf. Ber, "Moses and Jethro," 147-170). Both Zipporah and Jethro prove crucial to Moses's mission in terms of the execution of justice. Moses's second son might be seen in a similar light. He names him Eliezer because "the God of my father has been my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." This explanation sensibly applies to Moses's past, but it also anticipates Jethro's council to Moses in vv. 13-27. Jethro is the closest thing Moses has to a father in the narrative—he is referred to as Moses's father-in-law 13 times in ch. 18! How might Jethro, father-in-law to Moses, deliver Moses from the sword of Pharaoh, as Eliezer's name implies? Israel refers to Pharaoh's sword in 5:21 when they complain that Moses's initial attempts to bring deliverance has resulted in more violent circumstances. Ironically, they ask YHWH to judge Moses. In ch. 18, Jethro saves Moses from the "sword of Pharaoh" by wise administrative

"not good" (v. 17); he attempts the task alone (vv. 14, 18). Jethro's critique echoes the creation account (Gen 2:18), highlighting both the integral relationship between the order of human affairs and the cosmic order and the fact that Moses's solo routine is out of kilter with creational design.[44] Moses will foolishly wear out himself and the community (v. 18).[45] Jethro deduces that the job is too heavy (*kābēd*) a burden for him to carry by himself. This diagnosis reminds the reader of the heavy (*kābēd*) heart of Pharaoh (e.g., 7:14), who by the end of the plague narrative sat defeated and alone in his role as mediator for the people. Jethro's analysis, thus, cleverly suggests Moses's current practice runs the risk of devolving into an anti-creational, Egyptian-like (sub)version of justice. Moses is not to become another "heavied" Pharaoh. He should rather invite others to lighten the burden of communal justice. Instead of a Pharaonic army (*ḥayil*) of the sword to enforce "justice" among the people (cf. Exod 5), Jethro enjoins Moses to select men of integrity (*ḥayil*) to adjudicate the people's minor disputes.[46] On the one hand, Jethro's council to Israel's leader provides a social structure for the decentralization and dissemination of justice within and by the community.[47] On the other hand, Jethro also

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guidance that ensures peace, not the sword, will rule. Jethro's council does save Moses from the sword of Pharaoh by realigning the judicial administration to reflect the (creational) desires of YHWH.

[44] Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 198.

[45] The verb *nbl*, "to grow tired," offers a wordplay on the homonymous root *nbl*, "to be foolish."

[46] See discussion in Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 125. Meyers, *Exodus*, 139, helpfully adds: "The list in v. 21 of qualifications for these officials . . . reveals the ideal that implementation of justice rests on the shoulders of those with impeccable moral and spiritual credentials. Judging means being an arbiter of disputes and restorer of community peace more than conducting trials as such."

[47] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 828, thinks this guards against absolutizing the Mosaic office. Cf. Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 123-24. Burnside argues the story "shows

protects Moses's special task to admonish the people in the way of YHWH's justice (18:15, 20).[48] It is Moses's duty to tutor the community in "the way they must walk and the work they must do" (v. 20). Justice, Jethro recognizes, is "ultimately the expression of the will of God communicated through the human judge."[49] Yet, it is the wise and discerning among the community who must give aid to Moses so that he can mediate YHWH's will to the people. Jethro's contribution to Israel's polity prepares the people as a community to receive and effectively implement YHWH's *mišpāṭ* received at Sinai.[50]

The happenings between the first and last wilderness episodes offer additional, distinctive details on the topic of justice, a significant few of which I will briefly mention. In Exod 16 the themes of pedagogy, worship, creation, and justice intertwine in Israel's receipt of God's heavenly fare. YHWH's instructions in the daily reception of food means to school Israel into a new order of life, one that is in explicit contrast with Egypt's food economy.[51] Both Moses and YHWH point to the revelatory, pedagogical nature of the miraculous food distribution by recollecting the recognition formula—"you will know

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that there is a trend toward involving human beings increasingly in matters of divine judgment" (124).

[48] What is more, Ber, "Moses and Jethro," 168-69, ingeniously argues the meeting between Jethro and Moses contains the real potential for conflict. Thus, the encounter itself is an illustration of the "kind of conciliatory peace that Jethro's recommendations aim to effect."

[49] Sarna, *Exodus*, 100.

[50] See Carpenter, "Exodus 18," for further ways this passage points forward to Sinai; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:401; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 633.

[51] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 66-79, astutely demonstrates that the manna episode forms a counter-narrative to Egypt. My commentary owes much to her exegesis. She observes that "the fact that food constitutes the litmus test of Israel's separation from the culture and mindset of Egypt confirms . . . [that] eating is the most basic of all cultural and economic acts. Therefore, at this liminal moment in the wilderness, the formation of Israel as a counterculture to Egypt begins with a negotiation between God and Israel that clarifies the

that YHWH . . .” (16:6, 12). Yet, there is a new element included: the appearance of YHWH’s *kābôd*—God’s glory (vv. 7, 10).[52] It is fitting, then, that the appearance of the divine food draws Israel into a posture of ritual worship appropriate for the revelatory occasion.[53] The delivery of the food according to the rhythm of “evening then morning” (vv. 8, 12), culminating in a seventh day rest, evokes the pattern of the first creation week. Like the signs and wonders of Egypt, the manna demonstrates the different character of YHWH’s lordship over creation and over the people. God’s glory is revealed in creation, but unlike in Egypt, the created order in the wilderness brings blessing. Unlike Pharaoh, YHWH graciously hears and responds to Israel’s complaints.

The people must learn, however, that a providentially ordered creation entails a new, just comportment of being. In order to procure the day-to-day provision, YHWH lays out disciplines of collection that aim to habituate the people into the virtues of restraint (vv. 4, 18, 20), Sabbath rest (vv. 5, 22-23), and remembrance (vv. 32-35). These three stand in marked contrast to the unjust mores of Egypt, where oppressive opportunism (1:11), anxious toil (5:6-18), and self-serving forgetfulness (1:8; 9:27-35) typify the

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principles and restrictions pertinent to the moral economy of eating.” Cf. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 77-85; Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 812-14.

[52] This is the first occurrence of the “glory of God” in the canon. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 595, defines YHWH’s glory as “the portion of his essence visible on the terrestrial plane.” Pharaoh’s techniques of slavery for the service of the Egyptian machinery contrast sharply with YHWH’s sovereign gifting of food for the benefit of all. If the first publicizes Egypt’s power and glory, the manna and quail reveal a different glory, a sign of a different Presence “in the midst of the land.”

[53] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 74, observes the constellation of language of “the whole congregation of Israel,” “drawing near before YHWH,” and “the glory of YHWH” are all features in the Priestly corpus with reference to cultic encounter (e.g., Lev 16:1).

societal treatment of the vulnerable.[54] Israel's rhythm of work, restraint, rest, and remembering embodies a different morality altogether (cf. Deut 5:12-15)—one that evidences a non-competitive, leveling solidarity among neighbors.[55] Moreover, Ellen Davis notes that the striking repetition of the verb "to glean" (*lqṭ* occurs 9x) "serves to identify the Israelites with the vulnerable, namely the sojourners and the other poor whose interests are elsewhere protected by the injunction against making a clean sweep of the harvest" (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22).[56] By gleaning for a meal, Israel ingests a communal ethic of solidarity with the poor. The quotidian work of manna collection steadily re-orients the people to inhabit the divine dispositions of "justice and righteousness." It is true the reincorporation into a new social justice structure is not without difficulty (vv. 20-21, 27-28).[57] Nonetheless, the wilderness becomes a space where the gift of daily bread, in contrast to the mandate of the daily quota (5:13, 19),[58] shows Israel how moral order works in harmony with ecological order to support God's creational purposes.

Finally, Amalek's sudden, hostile engagement against Israel (17:8-16) presents a troublesome ethical issue with regard to the issue of justice in the wilderness journey.

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[54] Weeks, "Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health in Ancient Egypt," 1788, notes worms were thought to cause disease in Egypt. This makes sense of the worms that contaminated the saved manna (16:20). They are a visible sign of the "disease of Egypt" in the camp.

[55] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 813-14.

[56] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 75. Israel's discipline of daily gathering eschews hoarding, prohibiting Israelite tents from becoming "a silo; the Israelite camp cannot be a storage city" (cf. 1:11).

[57] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 246, comments on the wilderness journey: "God takes the indirect route, says the midrash with a startling simplicity, so that they may traverse the wilderness, eat manna, drink of this well—'and the Torah will settle in their bodies.' It is their bodies that are to house the Torah."

[58] Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 78, draws attention to the phrase *dəbar-yôm bəyômô,* "the matter of a day in its day," in 5:13, 19, and 16:4.

After the defeat of Amalek, YHWH tells Moses to "write this as a remembrance (*zikkārôn*) in a book . . . I will utterly blot out the memory (*zēker*) of Amalek from under heaven . . . YHWH will have war against Amalek from generation to generation" (17:14-16). What should be made of the justice of YHWH's "institutional demonization" of Amalek?[59] There is no easy answer, and I can only here adumbrate a perspective that tempers, though surely does not fully blunt, the unsettling edge of this story.[60] In short, Amalek represents in the story the resurgence of the chaotic, irreconcilable evil that threatens Israel's existence (and hence, YHWH's creational agenda) previously encountered and defeated in the persona of Pharaoh. At least three reasons arising from a close, literary reading of the text cumulatively suggest that YHWH's judgment on Amalek is symbolic. First, the passage contains various allusions that link Amalek's aggression to the battle waged between YHWH and Pharaoh. The language of "tomorrow" (v. 9)[61] and "heavy" (*kābēd*; v. 12), coupled with the imagery of Moses's staff (v. 9) and raised hands (vv. 11-12), combine to cast Amalek's abrupt appearance as a "Pharaoh redivivus."[62] Second, the

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[59] I borrow the language from Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 822, who provides searching commentary on this passage.

[60] In the following I am indebted to the sensitive treatment of Stephen B. Chapman, "Perpetual War: The Case of Amalek," in *The Bible and Spirituality: Exploratory Essays in Reading Scripture Spiritually*, ed. Andrew T. Lincoln, J. Gordon McConville, and Lloyd K. Pietersen (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 1-19. In particular, Chapman challenges a straightforward connection between Exod 17:8-16 and 1 Sam 15.

[61] Peter E. Enns, *Exodus* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 346, says that "tomorrow" in Exodus "is when something 'big' happens." Cf. 8:23, 29; 9:5, 18; 10:4. On raising the hands in the plague narrative, see 9:22; 10:12; 14:16.

[62] Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:377. Elsewhere, Houtman states, "Amalek's attack is tantamount to a rebirth, outside of Egypt, of Pharaoh" (2:370). Cf. Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:490. Amalek's "rebirth" in the biblical storyline is noted especially by Henry F. Knight, "Coming to Terms with Amalek: Testing the Limits of Hospitality," in *Confronting Genocide: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, ed. Steven L. Jacobs (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 226-28.

passage is peculiarly cryptic about the nature and aftermath of the conflict.[63] For example, the battle hinges on Moses's raised hands—not the typical tactics of war. While it is clear that Moses's arm movements are the key to victory, the function of his gestures and why they result in success for Israel remain ambiguous.[64] Furthermore, Joshua's victory is oddly described as a "weakening" (*ḥlš*) of Amalek rather than a straightforward defeating of his army. And others have noticed the singular focus on "Amalek" rather than the "Amalekites."[65] At the very least these issues lend themselves to a metaphorical interpretation of the episode.[66] Third, the divine judgment to be written down does not mention "killing" the Amalekites. Rather, YHWH will "blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." YHWH's pronouncement is an admittedly obscure way to describe the fate of Amalek's ilk if YHWH means to command genocide. The oblique judgment more likely suggests a figurative, *textual* obliteration of evil that must occur perpetually, even if the story itself indicates an actual, historical defeat of the people of Amalek.[67]

All these features lean into a metaphorical reading of the figure of Amalek. His unprovoked attack warns Israel of the menace of primordial resistance to YHWH's creational agenda which lurks outside of Egypt.[68] As Fretheim notes, "Pharaoh may be

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[63] Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:485-86.

[64] For a survey of options, see Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:383-84.

[65] Jacob, *Second Book*, 1:491-92.

[66] Chapman, "Perpetual War," 9-10. Earlier in the article (pp. 2-8) he surveys how some traditional interpretation has adopted a metaphorical reading.

[67] Ibid., 10-11.

[68] Ibid., 12-16. Chapman also considers the fact there is no reason given for Amalek's attack. In other words, Amalek's attack may have been thought particularly wicked precisely because it was unprovoked. Deut 25:18 heightens the egregious nature of the attack by stating

dead, but Israel is not thereby forever free from such chaotic powers."[69] Hence, the occasion is another learning experience for Israel. And in this instance Israel shows promising signs of maturity. YHWH was concerned at the beginning with Israel's courage in the face of military threat (13:17). Israel now rises up to become a contributing participant in YHWH's salvation on the other side of the sea.[70] In both the encounter with Amalek and Jethro, Israel shifts to a more active role in the divine-human relationship. The shift prepares for Israel's coming appropriation of YHWH's *tôrâ* at Sinai.[71]

5.2.3 Summary

The wilderness journey gives time, space, and freedom for the conversion of Israel's imagination.[72] The testing motif signals YHWH's intentions to begin training Israel's inclinations out of the unjust patterns inscribed on them in Egypt. The wilderness is an initiation of maturation, a period of counter-formation to nurture a burgeoning trust in their Lord who is to order their society, in preparation for Sinai. Furthermore, in several of these episodes the wilderness environment illustrates the intrinsic connection between the moral order and the physical order but in converse to the plagues. If the

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that Amalek chose to overtake the vulnerable ones in the rear. The text says bluntly, "he did not fear God." Cf. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 120-22.

[69] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 192. Cf. Knight, "Coming to Terms," 228-30.

[70] This is particularly acute because Amalek's attack follows abruptly after Israel's question: "Is YHWH among us or not?" (17:7).

[71] Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 75-76; cf. Sacks, *Exodus*, 120-21.

[72] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture,* 204: "Their 'crooked road' into the wilderness gives them, paradoxically, a freedom to think, to ask their subversive, sarcastic questions. It gives them, also, the outrageous freedom to 'zigzag,' not only geographically but intellectually, emotionally."

plagues pronounced judgment on the sick, Egyptian moral order, then YHWH's care of Israel in the wilderness attests to the beneficence of YHWH's nourishing order. Creation exhibits its capacity not to be a curse but a blessing, but its capacity correlates to the obedience practiced by Israel. At the moral center of their growth into the order of YHWH is a reorientation to YHWH's justice. A pedagogy of justice is highlighted especially in the first and last episodes of the wilderness, but the theme of justice in creation also provides a fruitful viewpoint by which to interpret the intervening episodes.

5.3 EXODUS 19-24[73]

Exodus 19:1 marks the significance of Israel's arrival to Sinai by dating it precisely from their departure from Egypt.[74] So begins Israel's year-long encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exod 19:1-Num 10:10).[75] At the mountain Israel enters into

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The phrase "conversion of the imagination" I borrow from Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

[73] Pentateuchal scholarship in the last century, dominated by form and source criticism, exhibited a tendency to interpret the Sinai unit separately from the traditions of Exodus 1-18. The fragmentation of the received text muffled the narrative's own theological and literary linkage of the exodus events with the Sinai pericope. An unfortunate consequence of this separation was to divide God's gracious activity on behalf of Israel from God's covenant with Israel. See the succinct review in Dozeman, *Exodus*, 419-24; and the sensible comments of Childs, *Exodus*, 337-39. To pit grace against law is fundamentally at odds with Scripture's presentation of the grace of law.

[74] See Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 223-24, on 19:1 as a marker of a new period in Israel's life. The chronology is creationally significant. He suggests that their arrival on the "third new moon" begins the seventh week after their departure. Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, OTB (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 122-23, 126-27, carries this observation further: the timeframe synchronizes Sinai with the heptadic week of creation. After six weeks of "work," Israel enters a sabbath-like experience at Sinai.

[75] Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, 120, comments, "The events that transpire at Sinai occupy just one year out of the 2,706 years that the Pentateuch covers between the creation of the world and the death of Moses in the plains of Moab. In terms of the Pentateuch's own

deeper relationship with YHWH through the gracious, sheltering summons of the covenant.[76] The covenant entails the invitation and challenge of covenantal obedience to YHWH's law. Israel's acceptance of the covenant in 19:8 and 24:3-8 bookends the revelation of the law vouchsafed in Exod 20-23.[77]

The mountain meeting has been a goal since YHWH summoned Moses (3:12). The mountain, more than a geographical setting, signals the creational import of Israel's vassalage to YHWH. Sinai is the cosmic mountain over which the theophanic glory descends (19:14-20; 20:18),[78] above which YHWH sits enthroned (24:1, 9-11),[79] and from which YHWH issues forth decrees of justice and righteousness (20-23; cf. Ps 97:1-2). Leder observes, "Sinai is therefore not only representative of YHWH's cultic presence but of his cosmic claims, claims unmistakably disclosed in the conflict with Pharaoh and

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chronology, the year at Sinai might well have been allotted little more than a footnote in the overall story. But the Torah's vision is quite different. In its final arrangement, it understands the year at Sinai to be the constitutive experience in the formation of the community of faith."

[76] Leder, "Iconography of Order," 249, rightly insists that portraying the movement of Exodus as one from gospel to law is anachronistic and fails "to reckon with the purpose of royal conflict . . . and the protective character of the covenant."

[77] For the relationship between the acceptance of covenant in chs. 19 and 24, see Frank Polak, "The Covenant at Mount Sinai in the Light of Texts from Mari," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism*, eds. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 119-34. C. H. Park, "From Mount Sinai to the Tabernacle: A Reading of Exodus 24:12-40:38 as a Case of Intercalated Double Plot" (PhD diss., University of Gloucestershire, 2002), 139-41, notes that many interpreters discern 19:7-8 and 24:3-7 form an inclusio.

[78] Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 107-31, discusses the cosmic mountain imagery associated with Sinai. See also Seung Il Kang, "Creation, Eden, Temple and Mountain: Textual Presentations of Sacred Space in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2008), 149-52, 167-72.

[79] Thomas B. Dozeman, *God on the Mountain: A Study of Redaction, Theology, and Canon in Exodus 19-24*, SBLMS 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 115.

celebrated in the Song of the Sea."[80] The laws and events at Sinai will cement YHWH's kingship over Israel, which was previously celebrated in 15:18. In chs. 19-24 the cosmic claims of Israel's King now find particular expression in Israel's societal ethic. Like the people themselves, the life-giving *tôrâ*-order revealed at the mountain emerges out of, and is a counter to, the death-dealing injustice of Egypt.

My goal to investigate the theme of justice especially for the poor in Exod 19-24 could develop a detailed treatment of various laws pertinent to the vulnerable in Israel's society.[81] Instead of commenting on specific "social justice" laws, however, I take a more "bird's-eye" view of the wider relationship of the law collection to ancient Near Eastern counterparts and what it contributes to a reading of justice in Exodus. But before examining the law collection, I reflect on YHWH's word in 19:3-6 because of its

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[80] Leder, "Iconography of Order," 158.

[81] See n. 3 above. A small but significant group of scholars have offered a decisively negative judgment of the justice of Israel's laws in regard to the vulnerable. Three stand out in this regard: David J. Clines, "The Ten Commandments, Reading from Left to Right," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26-45; Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal*; and Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice*. Using an ideological-critical approach (the latter two also employ critical legal theory), these three deconstruct the biblical laws as part of a strategy by privileged elites to benefit their economic and social interests. Their works have helpfully spurred on the discussion about the social contexts where many of these laws might have played out. Regardless, I am not convinced by their overall approach. Their studies largely ignore the narrative context of social laws, do not deal adequately with the genre of biblical law (and thus are not sufficient to account for the similarities and differences with comparative legislation), and are too beholden to speculative historical reconstruction. But even if they are correct, the texts they deconstruct still harbor a moral imagination that upholds normative, communal responsibility for the vulnerable. Cf. the critique of Bernard S. Jackson, "Revolution in Biblical Law: Some Reflections on the Role of Theory in Methodology," *JSS* 50 (2005): 83-115; Jackson, "Enjoying the Fruits," 272-77. For a more persuasive attempt to exegete the complexity of power and motives behind the law collections, see Houston, *Contending for Justice*, passim, but esp. 10-15, 105-18, 169-203, 219-22.

significance in introducing the role of vocation and the covenant in Israel's life. My discussion continues to utilize the themes of creation and pedagogy.

5.3.1 Exodus 19:4-6: A Priestly Royalty and Holy Nation

Interpreters largely agree that the narrative sequence of Exod 19 is problematic at best.[82] To cite a few examples, it is unclear how many times Moses travels up and down the mountain, or the location of God vis-à-vis the mountain, or whether the people are expected to ascend the mountain or to keep a safe distance. The disjointedness suggests several traditions converge—and clash—in Exod 19. Many recent commentators, resigned to a degree of ambiguity with regard to the chronological progression and internal logic, have concluded the chapter's unwieldy compositeness points to its theological gravitas. That is, the significance of this juncture in Israel's collective memory has attracted an unusual number of redactional hands. The resulting "literary density" of the final form conveys the heightened profundity (and mystery) of what takes place at the mountain.[83] Nevertheless, within this redactionally elaborate tapestry,

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[82] For an overview see G. C. Chirichigno, "The Narrative Structure of Exod 19-24," *Bib* 68 (1987): 457-79; Thomas B. Dozeman, "Spatial Form in Exod 19:1-8a and in the Larger Sinai Narrative," *Sem* 46 (1989): 87-101; Brooks Schramm, "Exodus 19 and Its Christian Appropriation," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, eds. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, SBL SymS 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2000), 327-37; and Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Many Faces of God in Exodus 19," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, eds. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, SBL SymS 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2000), 353-67.

[83] Schramm, "Exodus 19," 332: "Exodus 19 is a chapter in which understanding is elusive, where reading is slow, careful, and meticulous because the material to which the reader is beckoned to return to again and again is precisely that which introduces the core elements of Judaism." Cf. Brettler, "Many Faces," 354-57; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 141-54; Moshe Greenberg and S. David Sperling, "Exodus, Book of," *EncJud*, 2nd ed., 6:616. The density of the narrative extends to the diversity of narrative genres and motifs included in Exod 19. Dozeman, *Exodus*,

YHWH's brief opening speech to the Israelites in 19:3-6 reads as a unified, even poetic preamble to the Sinai encounter.[84] If its poetic style and placement at the head of the Sinai pericope underscore the magnitude of this word, then the content captures *in nuce* what many interpreters regard as the essence of Israel's budding relationship with YHWH.[85] Hence, Exod 19:3-6 merits closer attention as the significant first word that orients the covenantal bond between YHWH and Israel.

The speech starts by leaning backward into Israel's history. The introductory formula "Thus you will say to the house of Jacob" is a unique appellation for "the sons of Israel" in the Pentateuch.[86] The title's occurrence here invokes the beginnings of Exodus (1:1; cf. Gen 46:27) and the linkage to the ancestors. The opening address thus evocatively anchors the Sinai audience to the ancestral promises and purposes percolating throughout Genesis.[87] The first complete statement brings the events of Exod 1-18 into purview: "you yourselves (2nd per. pl.) have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore

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433-35, insightfully extends this insight to the literary structure of the whole of Exod 19-24: "The scenes of the story do not progress in one direction, but are juxtaposed to one another, providing a different perspective on the same core event—the revelation of God on the mountain" (434).

[84] A classic exposition is James Muilenburg, "The Form and Structure of Covenantal Formulations," *VT* 9 (1959): 347-65; see also Childs, *Exodus*, 360; John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, JSOTSup 395 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 32-38.

[85] E.g., Muilenburg, "Form and Structure," 352: "*in nuce* the *fons et origo* of the many covenantal pericopes;" Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 834: "the most programmatic [speech] for Israelite faith;" Sarna, *Exodus*, 103: "the essence of the covenant idea;" Jacob, *Second Book*, 2:528: "Magna Charta (*sic*) of Israel;" Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 87: "Israel's mission statement;" E. Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 47: "die ideale Gottesbeziehung." Of course, commentators do not agree on the meaning of Exod 19:3-6.

[86] And it is an uncommon designation in the rest of the Hebrew Bible: Isaiah (9x); Jeremiah (2x); Ezekiel (1x); Amos (2x); Obad (2x); Mic (2x); Ps (1x).

[87] Jacob, *Second Book*, 2:526; Meyers, *Exodus*, 144.

you on vulture's wings and brought you to myself" (19:6).[88] The assertion is a terse, three-fold summary highlighting the formidable but gracious rescue of the people. The vulture imagery—not the eagle preferred by most English translations[89]—is striking if not somewhat jarring to modern readers who do not hold the vulture in the same esteem as the ancients.[90] Yet, vulture iconography was prevalent across the ancient Near East, especially in Egypt and its royal ideology.[91] Depictions of the vulture associated the bird and its wings with (motherly) protection, strength, and even regeneration in periods of momentous transition (e.g., birth and death).[92] This strong, maternal portrayal of YHWH is

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[88] Many commentators rightly emphasize that YHWH addresses the whole community. As Jo Bailey Wells, "The Book of Exodus," in *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture*, eds. Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 68, puts it, the speech is "socially inclusive and corporately empowering."

[89] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 156; Silvia Schroer, "'Under the Shadow of Your Wings': The Metaphor of God's Wings in the Psalms, Exodus 19.4, Deuteronomy 32.11 and Malachi 3.20, as Seen through the Perspectives of Feminism and the History of Religions," in *Wisdom and Psalms*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine, FCB 2nd series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 270, n. 9: "the eagle was paid no attention in Ancient Egypt and very little in many parts of the Ancient Near East. It is only on Ptolemaic coins that the eagle enters Palestine triumphantly as a symbol."

[90] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 257: "The fact that a metaphor is used at this most significant and *serious* moment, theologically considered, in world history, is in itself surprising. Indeed, except for the poetic text of the Song of the Sea, this is the only metaphor in the Exodus narrative."

[91] The biblical texts and comparative background are nicely laid out by Schroer, "Under the Shadow," 267-80; on Egypt see more expansively, Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer, ed., *Between Heaven and Earth: Birds in Ancient Egypt*, OIMP 25 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 49-59. Hendrik G. L. Peels, "On the Wings of the Eagle (Dtn 32,11)—An Old Misunderstanding," *ZAW* 106 (1994): 300-303, shows that the imagery is not pedagogical—i.e., God teaching young Israel to fly. There is no evidence for birds carrying their young on their wings. Instead, Peels rightly sees an elaboration on the imagery, viz., God as a mother bird has gone beyond what birds can do for their young by not only sheltering them with wings but making them mobile (302); cf. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 40.

[92] The fact YHWH appropriates an image that was closely associated with Egypt and its kingship, moreover, likely carries on the polemic against Egypt (re)accentuated at the beginning

followed by relational, even matrimonial language in the final phrase "and brought you to myself."[93] Israel's election is here assumed just as it has been up to this point in the narrative.[94] Sinai does not establish the Israel-YHWH relationship. Rather, YHWH's compassionate extraction of Israel from Egypt presupposes Israel's elect status. This recitation of history forms the foundation for fuller entry into the service enjoined at Sinai.

Beginning with the "and now" (v. 5), the address pivots from past narration to Israel's present circumstance.[95] The next line "if you truly obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be . . ." calls Israel to embrace covenantal obedience as the appropriate response to YHWH's gracious action toward them. But what covenant is in view? It would be shortsighted to assume "my covenant" is solely an anticipatory reference to the revelation that follows in chs. 19-24.[96] Instead, the language of "my covenant" first harkens back to the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15)—the only covenant that has been mentioned up to this point in the story (2:24; 3:15-17; 6:4-5). The

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of the wilderness journey (15:26). Of course, the polemic against Egypt and Pharaoh reaches farther back than 15:26. Yet, a comparison of the two texts is encouraged by the fact that Exod 15:26 and 19:4-6 both appear at the head of major text divisions and correspond in their connection between obedience and Israel's status (see Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:435).

[93] Jacob, *Exodus*, 2:527, suggests "it was a picture of a bride led into her new community." Cf. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 77. Sinai pictured in marital terms is frequent in rabbinic commentary, on which see Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 78-87.

[94] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 208-9. Fretheim points to language of "firstborn son" (4:22-23) and "my people" (3:7, 10; 5:1; 7:4, 16; 8:1, 20-22; 9:1, 13, 17; 10:3-4).

[95] H. A. Brongers, "Bemerkungen zum Gebrauch des adverbialen we'attāh im Alten Testament (ein lexikologischer Beitrag)," *VT* 15 (1965): 290-92; Propp, *Exodus 18-40*, 156.

[96] As done for example by many commentators, e.g., Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 227; Childs, *Exodus*, 360; Sarna, *Exodus*, 103; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 443-44.

covenantal language assuredly looks forward to the Sinai covenant and ceremony of ch. 24. Yet, the title "sons of Jacob" (19:3) coupled with the language of "my covenant" suggests Sinai is moored in God's previous dealings in the world.[97] Indeed, Israel's entrance into this covenant is more richly interpreted as emerging out of the Genesis creational trajectory—as we will see—that flows through the calling and covenant with Abraham.

YHWH pledges three identities to Israel in covenant: they will be "to me" (1) a "treasured possession," (2) a "priestly royalty," and (3) a "holy nation" (19:5-6).[98] The first title, "treasured possession," is a translation of *səgullâ*, a legal-commercial term

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[97] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 209; Jacob, *Exodus*, 527; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, rev. and enl. ed. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 111. Ostensibly, Israel knows something of the covenant to which they assent in 19:8, and yet this is before hearing the stipulations of Sinai. Other, subtler Abrahamic language and themes appear in the address, such as "obeying the voice of God," (Gen 22:18; 26:5), mention of royalty and a nation (17:16), and the worldwide purview of God's purposes (Gen 12:3).

[98] The conditional protasis "if you truly obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be . . ." might appear to make the honorific titles in the apodosis ("treasured possession," "priestly royalty," "holy nation") contingent on Israel's obedience. The narrative, however, admits no simple "cause-effect" reading. As Dale Patrick, "The Covenant Code Source," *VT* 27 (1977): 149, has pointed out, the "protasis is a *definition* of the requirements of the position or vocation designated by the titles in the apodosis." I am indebted to the further parsing out of Patrick's observations in Wells, "The Book of Exodus," 71-72, and Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 43-46, 178-83). The conditional signals not the *pre*conditions that have to be met to establish Israel's status but the obligations inherent within privileges granted. Indeed, the question about Israel's capability actually to fulfill the obligations (and the consequences of their failure) is "put off until a later time" (Schramm, "Exodus 19," 335). The emphasis of YHWH's speech falls on the pronouncement of Israel's identity and invites Israel to live into it. YHWH beckons Israel, "Become who you are so that 'your special status is underwritten by your own acts'" (Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 256). Or, as Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 43, phrases it: "The emphasis on this reading falls on the divine initiative, not on a *quid-pro-quo* arrangement. The relationship already exists and is the basis for the appeal for (continued) loyalty" (cf. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 177-78). Davies also argues this understanding is supported by parallel statements in Deuteronomy which show that obedience is assumed because of a presupposed identity as God's people (4:40; 6:20-24; 11:7-8; 26:18-19). Moreover, both Davies, 178-82, and Schramm, 337-42, show that the supposed conditionality of Sinai has been too sharply contrasted with the

designating private property.[99] Aside from the meaning of personal possession, the word also carries royal associations. *Səgullâ* (and its ancient Near Eastern cognates) describes not only the personal property of a king,[100] but the personal relationship an inferior vassal-king has to a superior king or god in distinction from other relationships.[101] Israel's identity as a "priestly royalty" in the next verse endorses reading the royal overtones into its meaning. Thus, Israel as YHWH's *səgullâ* "enjoy[s] the status at least of a favoured royal retainer, if not royal status themselves . . . uniquely among the nations."[102]

The peculiarity of Israel's relationship with YHWH is featured in the next two parallel clauses, "from among all peoples; for the whole earth is mine."[103] These two clauses underscore that the distinction YHWH confers upon Israel is in relation to those outside Israel: other peoples (*'ammîm*) and the earth (*'ereṣ*) itself. This triangular YHWH-Israel-World relationship is doubly emphasized, pointing to the worldwide context as integral for what YHWH makes known to Israel about their distinctive calling (again, note the resonance with Abraham's calling in Gen 12:1-3). If the goal was solely to draw

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unconditionality of the covenants with Abraham and David (see also Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 85-91).

[99] Moshe Greenberg, "Hebrew *segullā*: Akkadian *sikiltu*," *JAOS* 71 (1951): 172-74; Hans Wilderberger, "סגלה," *TLOT* 2:791-93.

[100] 1 Chr 29:3; Eccl 2:8.

[101] Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 53-54, also gives a nice catalogue of the evidence in extrabiblical sources.

[102] Ibid., 55. Cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal 3:17; Ps 135:4.

[103] The syntactical parallelism of the two clauses is defended by Rudolf Mosis, "Exod 19,5b-6a: Syntaktische Aufbau und lexicalische Semantik," *BZ* 22 (1978): 1-25, and further supported by Wells, "Book of Exodus," 69-70, 73-74, and Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 59. Mosis

attention to Israel's special separateness from the nations, the first clause would have sufficed. But the presence of the second, *kî* clause—"for (*kî*) all the earth is mine"—suggests an additional, more textured explication of Israel's derivative *səgullâ* status.[104] Israel's identity as "possessed by YHWH" is not quantitatively unique, for the whole earth belongs to YHWH.[105] Rather, YHWH's ownership of Israel is qualitatively different, and the two succeeding appellations in 19:6a more fully spell out how to understand the qualitative distinction in relation to the nations.

"But you," YHWH asserts, "will be for me a priestly royalty (*mamleket kōhănîm*) and a holy nation (*gôy qādôš*)" (19:6a).[106] The titles are unique expressions, most naturally understood in the poetic context as balancing, parallel constructions.[107] The

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argues that the first phrase "from among all peoples" closes the first part of 19:5. The second phrase "For all the earth is mine" begins the next thought which includes 19:6a.

[104] Thus, on the one hand, to read these clauses as a declaration of "God's commitment" to the world, as does Wells, "Book of Exodus, 70, overinterprets the reference to the nations. On the other hand, to maintain these clauses indicate only "YHWH's universal *dominion* and *power* so as rhetorically and existentially to highlight the order of His choice of Israel," as does Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 48, is to understate the double emphasis on the nations, particularly in light of the resonance the verse carries with the Abrahamic promise. Moreover, that this comes right after stories about engagement with other peoples (Amalek, the Midianite Jethro) is not inconsequential to my point.

On the explanatory function of the *kî* clause, see Mosis, "Exod 19,5b-6a," 13-16; Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 55-59. Both survey other possible interpretations for the *kî* clause (causal, concessive, emphatic) and demonstrate why an explanatory function is to be preferred.

[105] Wells, "Book of Exodus," 74; Meyers, *Exodus*, 147. Consider the description of David Hartman, "Sinai and Exodus," *RelS* 14 (1978): 385-86: "As a paradigm of particular covenantal history, Sinai is best characterized as but one moment within a universalistic framework, the latter symbolized by the creation of mankind. Sinai need not exhaust the meaning of Creation. The covenantal giving and acceptance of the Law expresses particular special intimacy and does not negate the possibility of other intimacies."

[106] The phrase opens with a disjunctive *wāw* followed by the pronoun + verb. This signals a contrast between Israel and the aforementioned nations (Mosis, "Exod 19,5b-6a," 13-14).

[107] Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 83-84, 93-94; Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:445-46. The designations contain corresponding nouns (royalty, nation) modified with corresponding

exact meaning of the first construction, *mamleket kōhănîm*, has been debated by commentators.[108] The verbal noun *mamleket* is most often translated by the passive term "kingdom" (i.e., a territory or dominion), but a more active sense meaning "the exercise or office of kingship, royalty" is an alternative that better suits the syntactic construction.[109] In either case, YHWH attributes royal qualities corporately to all of Israel (already intimated by *səgullâ*), and does not, as some have suggested, only have in mind a subgroup of ruling elite.[110] But in what sense does Israel embody a royal status, especially in light of the kingship of YHWH (cf. 15:18)? John Davies contends the concept finds a befitting parallel in the ancient Near Eastern royal or divine grant of kingly authority:

> In such texts either the great king or the god grants the office of kingship to a specific mortal or lesser deity who then exercises his rule under the aegis and

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attributives with adjectival force (priestly, a nominal; holy, an adjective). I employ the translation "priestly royalty, holy nation" to maintain the parallelism (see also Mosis, "Exod 19,5b-6a," 21). The nouns *mamlākâ* (royalty, kingdom) and *gôy* often occur in close relationship (e.g., 1 Kgs 18:10; Isa 60:11, 12; Jer 18:7; 27:7-8; Ps 46:6 [7]; 105:12; 2 Chr 32:15). The terms "priests" and "holy" are obviously connected.

[108] The following discussion is dependent on the fine, detailed work of Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 62-102; cf. the overviews of G. Steins, "Preisterherrschaft, Volk von Priestern oder was sonst? Zur Interpretation von Ex 19,6," *BZ* 45 (2001): 20-36, and the older R. B. Y. Scott, "A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus xix 6)," *OTS* 8 (1950): 213-19.

[109] See *HALOT* 2:595; *BDB* 575. For a defense of this translation, see Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 77-85; Henri Cazelles, "Royaume de prêtres et nation consacrée, (Exode XIX,6)," in *Humanisme et foi chrétienne*, ed. C. Kennenigiessar and Y. Marchasson, Mélanges scientifiques du centenaire de l'institut catholique de Paris (Paris: Beuchesne, 1975), 541-45; William L. Moran, "A Kingdom of Priests," in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. John L. McKenzie (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), 7-20; Georg Fohrer, "'Priesterliches Königtum,' Ex. 19,6," *TZ* 19 (1963): 359-62. When *mamleket* stands in a construct expression, as it does here with *kōhănîm*, the preponderance of such constructions occurs with a subjective genitive, which fits better with the more active, collective sense of Israel as "royalty." The passive sense of a "kingdom" requires an objective or appositional genitive.

[110] Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 77-81, shows on both syntactical, thematic, and intertextual grounds why a subgroup within Israel is not in view. Cf. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 158.

> protection of the deity or monarch. Israel, on this analogy, would be a corporate monarch, enjoying the grant of this status and patronage of YHWH . . . The primary thrust of the cotext of Exod. 19.6 suggests that the 'royalty' or 'sovereignty' enjoyed by Israel is an honorific status—an endowment which enhances their perception of the privileged and treasured relationship being granted them, and which, in association with the grant of 'priesthood' equips Israel to participate in the royal court of the divine king.[111]

YHWH's conferral of honorific royalty on Israel raises the question of whether this regal status has any functional implication in Israel's life.[112] One possibility lies close at hand

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[111] Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 85-86. He explores this model more fully on 170-88, esp. 183-87. He deftly places the "covenant of grant" hypothesis within the larger scholarly discussion of ancient Near Eastern covenants. He contends that commentators too narrowly focus on the suzerainty (vassal) treaties as the (only) relevant parallel for the covenant at Sinai. Without denying that suzerain treaties offer a fruitful parallel, Davies argues that the covenant of grant (à la Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant," *JAOS* 90 (1970): 184-203) also provides a helpful framework for the Sinai covenant. He documents grants of both kingship and priesthood wherein faithfulness is expected and threats are made for disloyalty. However, he notes that the "primary emphasis is not on the imposition of terms, but of the high honour bestowed on the favoured recipient" (186). I think Davies demonstrates how a covenant of grant model illuminates Exod 19:4-6, but whether this or a suzerain model is more determinative for interpretation of the Sinai covenant remains an open question. Davies himself recognizes that the categories of suzerainty and grant probably exist more on a continuum than as polar opposites. Sinai sits somewhere on this continuum, drawing on elements of both.

[112] The question concerning the significance of Israel's royal status in 19:6 is largely ignored by the majority of recent commentators. There are at least two reasons for this neglect. First, many interpret *mamleket* as a more passive concept, i.e., "kingdom." Hence, Israel is just a domain over which YHWH reigns—any active participation that Israel has as a royal entity is thereby downplayed. Second, discussion of Exod 19:6a gravitates toward the meaning of Israel's priestliness. Davies's otherwise masterful study fails to probe the full significance of Israel's royal status (85-86). He instead reads the notion of Israel's royalty principally through the filter of priesthood (e.g., 152-55, 157-59, 165-69; cf. Steins, "Preisterherrschaft," 33-35). Davies also draws too rigid a distinction between functional and ontological definitions (97-98). His ontological category for a priest (the priest is one who has access to the divine presence) is, in fact, also a *function* of the priest. That is, what a priest *is* is difficult (perhaps impossible) to dissociate from what a priest *does* (cf. Deborah W. Rooke, "Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship Between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 188-92). Exodus 19, Davies argues, is not about obligation (i.e., function); it is about grant (i.e., ontology). The titles point toward who Israel is rather than what Israel is to do. Without denying that the emphasis may be on Israel's identity in Exod 19:4-6, the following laws and tabernacle instructions indicate clearly that obligation is still very much in view (Exod 19:5 raises the very issue of Israel's future obedience). Therefore, I think it is a fair reading of the text to probe the functional implications of Israel's

in the following law collection (chs. 20-24): the responsibility to realize YHWH's "justice and righteousness" as a society. As noted above in my second chapter, it was the kingly prerogative to mediate the justice of the divine sphere on earth, especially as it related to the well-being of the vulnerable. At Sinai Israel has no human king; therefore, the royal identity and consequent vocation of manifesting and maintaining the divine King's order is made the privilege and duty of the covenant member collective.[113] Israel becomes a vice-regent of YHWH, and thus inherently, also a conduit for YHWH's justice—a justice that the law will more fully parse out. Here, though, Israel's royalty stands in some kind of relation to those in YHWH's wider world as the previous two clauses indicate. But how to construe this relationship cannot be answered without first considering the rest of the line.

It is not royal position alone YHWH bestows: Israel is to be a *priestly* royalty (*mamleket kōhănîm*). What does it mean that Israel's royalty is qualified specifically as priestly? In the immediate context, priestliness is associated with drawing near to a holy

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"royalty" in the relationship. Israel's royal-priestly status carries responsibility that, though it may not be the ground of the relationship, is nevertheless intrinsic to it (cf. Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 231-33).

[113] Cf. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 31: "Here as a reward for loyalty in the covenant, YHWH confers upon Israel the status of royalty. Their special position in a world entirely God's is the position of priestly kings . . . The commandments, which are stipulations of covenant, delineate a service which is also a form of lordship, an aristocracy of humility." Danny Mathews, *Royal Motifs in the Pentateuchal Portrayal of Moses*, LBS (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 44-136, draws attention to the presentation of Moses as a royal figure in Exodus. I do not deny what Mathews demonstrates to be the case. Nonetheless, Moses's royal status does not thereby negate Israel's status, but rather fits within it. In the same way Israel's priestly nature allows for a subset within Israel to function as priests in the community (i.e., Exod 28-29), so Israel's royal status does not necessarily circumscribe a role for a royal figure—though it will be several generations before this fuller development.

God (19:22, 24).[114] A wider, canonical presentation of the priesthood in Israel confirms that the privilege to approach the divine presence is primary to the concept of the priesthood.[115] Priests are chosen custodians of the cult, and such a role is paramount in the establishment of the priesthood in Exodus (cf. chs. 28-30). This portrait of the priest as a sanctified minister of YHWH who could enter the divine presence is metaphorically extended in Exod 19:6 to the whole people of Israel.[116] That is, Israel is the elect people who have unique relational proximity to the holy God (cf. 24:2-8!) among the nations. The next expression, "holy nation" (*gôy qādôš*), assigns Israel a holy stature that underlines their consecrated access and intimate belonging to God.[117] The honor of

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[114] Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 98; Wells, "Book of Exodus," 76. That Israelite priests appear without introduction in 19:22 has led to much speculation about who these men are. This need not detain us, other than to note that the narrative assumes some level of familiarity with the category of priest.

[115] The following texts describe the identity and tasks of priests: Deut 10:8-9; 33:8-11; Lev 10:10-11; 1 Sam 2:28; 1 Chr 23:13. Rather than attempt to cite a ream of additional Scripture passages about the nature of the priesthood, I refer the reader to the fine overviews in Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), passim, but esp. 55-82; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 66-115; and the more concise systematic, theological summaries in Philip Jenson, "כָּהַן" *NIDOTTE*, 2:592-97; Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 87-100, 149-169; R. K. Duke, "Priests, Priesthood," *DOTPentateuch* 646-55; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Volume Three: Israel's Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 746-58.

[116] The remainder of ch. 19 relates Israel's preparations for drawing near to holy God.

[117] Holiness is a repeated motif in ch. 19 (vv. 6, 10, 14, 22, 23). Peter Gentry, "The Meaning of 'Holy' in the Old Testament," *BSac* 170 (2013): 400-17, shows that holiness in Exodus is much more about consecration and belonging in meeting with the divine than it is separation or delimitation (e.g., 28:43-46). Cf. *BDB* 871-73; *HALOT* 3:1066-67; Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 99, 159; Wells, "Book of Exodus," 60-61; P. P. Jenson, "Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the Old Testament," in *Holiness Past and Present*, ed. S. C. Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 93-121 (esp. 93-94).

special access and sole devotion (holiness) to YHWH energizes the repeated concern for which YHWH brought Israel out of Egypt, i.e., "so that they may serve (*'bd*) me."[118]

Yet, many commentators have understood Israel's priestliness not principally in terms of the vertical privilege of access to the holy God but the horizontal duty of mediating that privilege to the community.[119] The role of the priest in Israel was an intermediate position which entailed the bi-directional task of representing YHWH to the people and the people to YHWH. This responsibility involved the priest in the outward-oriented ministries of blessing, oracles, prayer, teaching, judgment, and administration.[120] The priestly role in Exod 19:6a, it is claimed, is primarily about how Israel functions outwardly in relation to the nations. In a similar way an Israelite priest has a vocation of service to the community, so the people of Israel are called to a priestly service to the nations.[121]

This "missional" interpretation has come under fire. Critics charge that it inappropriately instrumentalizes Israel's priestliness while also devaluing the

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[118] The tabernacle narrative in Exod 25-31, 35-40 confirms that the issue of access and service to YHWH's presence is a central concern of Israel's priestly character. Yet, it is shortsighted to limit the gambit of "priestly holiness" to the cultic realm based on the way holiness is applied generally of Israel in 19:6. See Jenson, "Holiness," 112-13; Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12-17; 35:1-3 in Exegetical and Theological Perspective*, FRLANT 227 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 92-96.

[119] For example, see the references cited by Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 94-96; Wright, *Mission of God*, 329-33; Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 89-92.

[120] In the previous chapter, Jethro, the *priest of Midian*, is concerned with the vertical and horizontal responsibilities of the priestly office.

[121] Childs, *Exodus*, 367; Sarna, *Exodus*, 104.

exclusiveness of Israel's election.[122] The critique rightly points out that a service to the nations is nowhere expounded upon in Exodus. Rather, the emphasis of the chapter—and indeed the rest of Exodus—falls on the extraordinary relationship YHWH grants to Israel (and their right response to what that entails). Israel's chosenness should not be reduced to or eclipsed by any implied intercessory role to the nations.[123]

We can agree Exod 19:6 does not justify outward service as the raison d'être of Israel's standing as YHWH's "treasured possession."[124] We also affirm that Israel's priestly identity and role derives its essence from its orientation toward YHWH.[125] Nonetheless, the context of Exod 19:4-6 situates Israel's privileged status within the wider ambit of YHWH's creational program through the double reference to the nations and interspersed echoes of YHWH's calling of Abraham. We have already observed intertextual markers that nest Sinai within the earlier promises to the ancestors, and the last phrase again bears out this linkage. YHWH describes Israel as a holy *nation* (*gôy*). The choice of nation (*gôy*) to designate Israel, rather than far more common holy *people* (*'am*), offers a conspicuous inner-biblical allusion to God's promise to Abraham (cf. Gen

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[122] E.g., Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:446; Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 96-98; Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 47-48; Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, 204-5.

[123] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 85.

[124] YHWH's election of Israel precedes any call to the divine service and thus cannot be exhausted by responsibility integral to that role (nor does Israel's failure in service ultimately forfeit Israel's worth). Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 302: "Before Israel is chosen for service, Israel is chosen for fellowship." More pointedly, Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 48: "Even if that love [for Israel] brings with it a call to serve, that service is a corollary to being loved, not the core of being loved." Cf. Levenson, "Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism," 154-57.

[125] Wells, "Book of Exodus," 71, following Muilenburg, "Form and Structure," 353, contends "holy people" is actually the climax of the whole speech. Hence, "the notion of belonging to YHWH —as a jewel in God's crown—is the overarching message."

12:2; 17:6, 16; 18:18; 35:11).[126] The term signals that Israel is a particularization of the Abrahamic covenant and highlights (again) Israel's special relationship vis-à-vis the other nations (a holy *gôy* among the *gôyîm*).[127] The various intimations to the ancestral promises scattered within Exod 19:4-6 combine to form a resonant remix of what God first announced to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 (cf. Gen 17:6!).[128] So, though it is too much to say Exod 19:4-6 renders to Israel an explicit mission to the nations, it does thread Israel's identity within the Abrahamic trajectory that will reach its goal in the blessing of the nations. Granted, the remainder of Exodus does not linger over this mediatory dimension among the nations.[129] The focus remains squarely on Israel's formation into a just, worshiping community of YHWH.[130] However, "to keep the way of YHWH by doing what is just and right" is itself an outworking of the Abrahamic trajectory (Gen 18:19; cf.

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[126] The term *'am* is the preferred way that scriptures refer to Israel as a population—"people" or "holy people" (e.g., Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19, 28:9). In addition to the ancestral promise passages, *gôy* is used in Exod 33:13; Num 14:12; Is 60:22; Ezk 35:10; Ps 106:5. See Aelred Cody, "When Is the Chosen People Called a *gôy*?" *VT* 14 (1964):1-6.

[127] Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 114. Wells, "Book of Exodus," 76, relies on E. A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' of Israel," *JBL* 79 (1960):157-63, to draw out the significance of the choice of *gôy*. The term *gôy* "suggests that Israel is not necessarily a group made up of kinship ties in the sense of close family connections and blood ties [as denoted by *'am*]." On the one hand, this term identifies Israel with the nations, placing them in a similar category. On the other hand, its qualifier *qādôš* reminds them that they are uniquely devoted to YHWH. "It is this tie that brings them together and holds them together." Cf. Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 93.

[128] Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 116-17; Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, 200. When Exod 19:4-6 is read as an echo of Gen 12:1-3, the specific priestly task of blessing takes on added significance in Exod 19:6a.

[129] Nonetheless, it is suggestive in this direction. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 324-56, 454-500, shows how Exod 19:4-6 fits within a larger missional narrative in the Old Testament that includes the nations.

[130] It might be better to say that in Exodus Israel begins to learn how to become fully themselves. One outcome of Israel's ordered life under YHWH will be service to the nations.

26:5).[131] Exod 19:4-6 is the preamble that tellingly accents the wider, universal agenda before the revelation of the particulars of Israel's covenant life.[132] Israel is for YHWH, and YHWH for Israel. But YHWH for Israel is also for the world through Israel.

How YHWH is for Israel for the world can be further teased out by considering that "priestly royalty" and "holy nation" are expressions which unite the political and cultic spheres. The phrases are unique, but the thematic combination is not. The two spheres often overlap in the ancient Near East and expressly converge in the office of the king.[133] What is more, it is none other than Egypt's Pharaoh who is the example *par excellence* of this political-cultic fusion. In order to maintain *ma'at,* Pharaoh exercised two main duties: he ensured justice (legislatively and judicially) and carried out the cultic rites.[134] As to the second duty Pharaoh was theoretically the only authority qualified to build and

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[131] One might hear as well an emphasis on the priestly task of teaching (e.g., Lev 10:11; Deut 17:8-11; 24:8; 33:8-10) within the Abrahamic thread (Gen 18:19). Cf. Unterman, *Justice for All*, 31.

[132] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 371: "Israel's calling to be holy is not set over against the nations and the whole earth but *in context of living among them for God*." Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 212.

[133] For this convergence in Israel, see Rooke, "Kingship as Priesthood," 187-208. Rooke points out that the king was priestly—"an *ex officio* priest" (198)—but the priest was not in the same sense kingly. The biblical tradition of Melchizedek is the clearest example of how royalty could be conceived of as priestly (Gen 14:18; Ps 110:4; cf. 2 Sam 8:18; 1 Kgs 12:26-13:1; 2 Kgs 16:10-14; 18:1-4; 23:1-24). See also Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, 98-107; Henri Cazalles, "Sacral Kingship," *ABD* 5:863-66. On the wider phenomena of priestly kings in the Ancient Near East, see M. Hutter, "Adam als Gärter und König," *BZ* 30 (1986): 258-62; Sidney Smith, "The Practice of Kingship in Early Semitic Kingdoms," in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, ed. Samuel H. Hooke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 31-32; Gregory McMahon, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Hittite Anatolia," *CANE* 3:1990-91; Te Velde, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Egypt," 3:1731-32.

[134] A Middle Kingdom text describes the role of the kingship as "judging humanity and propitiating the gods, [thus] maintaining *ma'at* in the place of disorder." See Assmann, "Der König als Sonnenpriester," 17-22.

support temples and to officiate before the gods. In practice, of course, Pharaoh had to delegate the massive task of worshiping all the gods to his priestly officials. The legitimacy of the priests, nonetheless, always and in everything derived from the authority of the king.[135]

Given that Pharaoh (and his Egypt) serves as the foil for YHWH's formation of Israel in Exod 1-18, there is good reason to suspect that the distinct title "priestly royalty" also harbors a deliberate subversion of Pharaonic ideology. In contrast to the one Pharaoh who personifies and perpetuates the Egyptian vision of *ma'at*, the society of Israel by their "priestly royal" status will epitomize and mediate YHWH's vision of creational justice. Israel is chosen to be the holy exemplar of YHWH's order on earth, both by their practice of YHWH's justice and their attendance to YHWH's presence.[136] Moreover, Israel's Scriptures root this paired, royal-priestly responsibility in YHWH's design of creation itself. The dual accounts of creation in Gen 1-2 draw on royal and priestly language and imagery to describe the vocation of humanity. For example, humanity created "in the image of God" is charged to "rule over" God's good world—a royal task

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[135] Velde, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Egypt," 3:1731-32: "[T]he theological doctrine that [Pharaoh] alone could build temples and perform the rituals was maintained, and the representatives of temple ritual show the king officiating, even though the rituals were actually celebrated by priests. The officiating high priest of a temple seems to have been dressed like a king. Whether this was the case or not, the priest had to say at the beginning of the daily temple ritual: 'It is the king who sends me.' In theory the authority of the high priest and the validity of a ritual derived more from this royal mission or ordination than from any other factor such as ritual purity, initiation, sacred knowledge, or heredity. Even offerings made by private persons such as those depicted in tombs could be fully efficacious only if presented in the name of the king." See further Serge Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, new ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 28-36.

[136] These two responsibilities nicely set the stage for the next two narrative blocks of the book of Exodus: YHWH will instruct Israel in the divine politic (chs. 20-23) and cult (chs. 25-31, 35-40).

(Gen 1:27-28).[137] The first human is also charged within creation—God's cosmic temple—"to serve and keep" the garden—a priestly role (Gen 2:15).[138] At the cosmic mountain Israel takes up the primordial, "royal priestly" vocation of humanity as an alternative to Pharaoh's arrogant perversion of it. The creational intention for humanity, woven through the ancestral promises, here is reiterated in and represented not solely by a nation's king-priest, but a priestly-kingly "holy nation."[139]

In sum, YHWH has rescued Israel from Egypt in order to call Israel to a creational vocation. Israel is royalty, so they mediate the order of God ruling as the divine image. Israel is priestly, so they mediate the presence of God through holiness. In a word, elect Israel represents humanity's original vocation. Israel learns by way of the covenant—through the Abrahamic and into the Mosaic—to live as a holy nation, distinctly embodying the creational "justice and righteousness" of YHWH before the nations. Israel's "mission" begins and ends in service to YHWH. By their worship-service

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[137] See Middleton, *Liberating Image*; cf. Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

[138] The verbs of "to serve (*'bd*) and to keep (*šmr*)" in Gen 2:15 are not typical horticultural actions. Rather, they are used together in contexts of priests serving God and keeping charge of the tabernacle (e.g., Num 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14). See further G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 67-68; cf. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 79-86. That this task has priestly overtones is further strengthened by the temple symbolism in the creation accounts, on which see John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 66-80.

[139] Berman, *Created Equal*, 28-49, discusses the radical political implications of Israel's vision of "kingliness" among ANE cultures. He underlines Israel's distinctive understanding that the common man is viewed as having the status of royalty.

(*ʿăbōdâ*), the holy people become the model through whom YHWH's justice agenda is exhibited among and for the nations.[140]

5.3.2 The Law Collection[141]

There is likely no better example of how the wider study of ancient Near Eastern civilizations has shaped biblical scholarship than on the subject of Israel's law.[142] In roughly the last one hundred years, thousands of documents relating to ancient Near Eastern law have been discovered from disparate sites and across various ancient time periods. The findings fall into two general categories.[143] The first category, and by far the larger of the two, consists predominantly of records of legal transactions of diverse

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[140] Cf. Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, 205: "The existence of Israel is an expression of God's mission in the world. Israel's was not a missionary faith, but it was a faith that made universal claims. Israel embodies the fact that the people of God does not have a mission that it has to undertake. It is more the vehicle of God's mission, a movement from God in which Israel has its origin and arrives at its own movement, but which goes beyond Israel, finding its goal in the consummation of all creation in God. The reason for Israel's existence lies in God's purpose for the world that goes back to creation. And the point of its existence is to be the means of God's reign spreading in the world—that is, of fulfilling God's original purpose that humanity should subdue the earth, make the earth a place under its control and thus (!) under God's control, fulfilling God's purpose."

[141] Israel's law in Exodus includes the Decalogue (20:1-17) and the Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:19; cf. 24:4, 7), or so-called Covenant Code. My discussion deals with the laws contained in the Book of the Covenant/Covenant Code. The term law "collection," which I adopt here rather than the more traditional law "code," avoids the idea that these laws formed or functioned as a systematic, comprehensive body of regulations. On terminology see further Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice*, 12-16; and S. J. Claassens, "The So-Called 'Mesopotamian Law Codes': What is in a Name?" *Journal for Semitics* 19 (2010): 481-98.

[142] Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 28: "No area of biblical studies has benefited more from the recovery of ancient Near Eastern literature than law."

[143] On the following see the concise analysis of Raymond Westbrook and Bruce Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 20-25.

kinds—sales of land, loans, private contracts—though a smaller group is comprised of records of litigation. Notably, these records rarely discuss or cite actual legal statutes, but they do offer a window into the way law was practiced.[144] The second, much smaller category consists of direct statements of law—decrees, treaties, and law collections.[145] Both categories testify broadly to a common legal tradition across the ancient Near East which remained largely static for millennia.

The law collections, particularly from Mesopotamia, are most significant for our discussion because they provide the closest analogy to biblical law. When placed in comparison, it is evident the laws in Exodus are very much at home within this tradition. They exhibit striking parallels and overlap in both form and content to other law collections, most if not all of which antedate biblical law.[146] This is not to deny significant differences in correlation (a significant few of which I mention below).[147] Nevertheless, "the parallels between the biblical and cuneiform laws are the closest any

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[144] For references see Raymond Westbrook, ed., *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, HdO 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Bruce Wells, "What Is Biblical Law? A Look at Pentateuchal Rules and Near Eastern Practice," *CBQ* 70 (2008): 232-41, surveys some of these "documents of practice" as they impinge on the implementation of Israelite law.

[145] For a handy summary and bibliography of the materials in this category, see Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 417-34. A more extensive survey is provided by Boecker, *Law and Administration*, 53-133. Texts and translations are provided by Roth*, Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*.

[146] On the laws in Exodus and their parallels, see the extensive treatment in R. Rothenbusch, *Die kasuistische Rechtssammlung im "Bundesbuch" (Ex 21,2-11.18-22,16) und ihr literarischer Kontext im Licht altorientalischer Parallelen,* AOAT 259 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000); for a succinct overview with relevant bibliography, see Bruce Wells, "The Interpretation of Legal Traditions in Ancient Israel," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 4 (2015): 237-46.

[147] Differences between Israel and ANE law, particularly in relationship to ethics, are highlighted by Berman, *Created Equal*, passim, and Unterman, *Justice for All*, 15-40.

literary genre in the Bible has with an external source."[148] And though scholars debate how and to what degree the relationship developed between biblical and peri-biblical law collections,[149] it is accepted fact that the law collection in Exodus participated in "long-established, widespread, standardized patterns" of ancient Near Eastern legal tradition.[150]

A comparison between biblical and peri-biblical law, when read with an eye toward the themes of pedagogy and creation, adds texture to a theological account of justice in Exodus. First, the theme of pedagogy. Recent debate over the function of ancient Near Eastern law collections has called attention to the instructional nature of law. Little evidence exists to suggest ancient law collections were used in adjudicating legislative disputes in a court setting.[151] The records describing ancient legal proceedings or verdicts rarely mention any authoritative body of law.[152] Evidence for the explicit use

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[148] Westbrook and Wells, *Everyday Law*, 24.

[149] Ibid., 24-25. The disagreement is principally over to what extent Israel's law collections depend on this tradition. David P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16-24, surveys the history of debate. Wright himself argues the Covenant Code is a direct reworking/imitation of the Laws of Hammurabi.

[150] Sarna, *Exodus*, 273.

[151] Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, *The Transformation of Torah from Scribal Advice to Law*, JSOTSup 287 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 81-145 (esp. 85-87); Martha T. Roth, "The Law Collection of King Hammurabi: Toward an Understanding of Codification and Text," in *La Codification des lois dans l'antiquité: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 27-29 Novembre 1997*, ed. Edmond Lévy, Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce antiques 16 (Paris: De Boccard, 2000), 9-31; Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*, JSOTSup 314 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 114-43; Raymond Westbrook, "Biblical and Cuneiform Law Codes," in *Folk Law, Essays in the Theory and Practice of Lex Non Scripta*, eds. Alison Dundes Renteln and Alan Dundes, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 495–511.

[152] See Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*, 114-21, and further Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:86-88; Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 190-98; Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 111-16.

of the Bible's laws in adjudication is also slight. In fact, the charges given to judges contain little to no reference of applying a written rule of law (e.g., 2 Chr 19:5-11; Deut 1:9-19; 16:18-20; Exod 18:18-22; cf. 2 Chr 17:7-9).[153] In addition, the lack of comprehensiveness in ancient Near Eastern law collections—a feature mirrored in biblical law—suggests they were not meant to regulate society as would a modern-day code of law.[154] These observations do not mean there was no relationship between the laws and legal practice.[155] Nonetheless, there is a growing agreement among historians that ancient Near Eastern law collections themselves more likely functioned as educational discourses aimed at guiding or shaping morality (and, as an extension, legal reasoning) more so than actually legislating it.[156] This deduction is further fortified by

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[153] Jackson, *Studies in Semiotics*, 188-121.

[154] A point noted by many, see e.g., Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 199; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:86; Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 18-19.

[155] Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. On this matter see Wells, "What is Biblical Law?"; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:86-88.

[156] Scholars have put forward alternative explanations for the purposes of the law collections, ranging from their use as scholastic texts, political propaganda, legally descriptive reference material, or non-legal sapiential treatises (these are categories offered by Wells, "What is Biblical Law," 224-32; cf. Fitzpatrick-McKinley, *Transformation of Torah*, 81-112; Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics*, 114-17). Most who reject the traditional "legislative" view think the laws served some kind of educational enterprise akin to other "scientific" or "academic" treatises. Such treatises were instructional texts, containing lists of the received wisdom in areas such as flora, grammatical forms, gods, mathematics, medical diagnoses, and omen practices. The law collections resemble these treatises in form. To be sure, the proposals differ in terms of law's target audience (scribes, judges, general population?) and to what degree the collections were meant to influence the actual practice of law. Nonetheless, the law corpora understood more on the model of a pedagogical guide rather than legislative benchmark makes helpful, contextual sense of the relative gap between the law collections and the actual practice of law.

indications that the law collections spring from, overlap with, and/or depend on a wisdom background.[157]

These historical-critical judgments about the pedagogical function of ancient law collections help to bolster recent literary analysis of biblical law. James Watts has persuasively demonstrated that biblical law's characteristics of second person address, motivational clauses, repetition, and variation indicate deliberate rhetorical shaping of the material for the purpose of both persuasion and teaching (cf. 24:12).[158] So, too, a number of commentators have stressed how the law's integration within a larger narrative framework betrays its fundamental didactic intention.[159] The literary placement of law

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[157] Though with different, even competing, emphases, see Fitzpatrick-McKinley, 114-77; Bernard S. Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the* Mishpatim *of Exodus 21:1-22:16* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[158] James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch*, BibSem 59 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 61-88. That is, the rhetorical conventions within biblical law "aim to win adherence to a programmatic ideal of the Torah as the religion's definitive expression" (136); cf. Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 198-200; Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant*, 203-5. In comparison to ancient Near Eastern law collections, Unterman, *Justice for All*, 18-23, makes the case that the law collections in the Old Testament are distinct in that (1) God directly addresses all people; and (2) the expectation is that each Israelite is to be knowledgeable about the law (Exod 21:1).

[159] On the following see Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 158-72; Watts, *Reading Law*, Fretheim, *Exodus*, 201-7; Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*; Joe. M. Sprinkle, "Law and Narrative in Exodus 19-24," *JETS* 47 (2004): 235-52; Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 80-124; Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 11-22; cf. Unterman, *Justice for All*, 19-33. For a selective survey of the "literary turn" in the study of the Covenant Code, see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 460-62. Bernard S. Jackson, "Law, Wisdom, and Narrative," in *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts*, ed. G. J. Brooke and J. -D. Kaestli, BETL 149 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 31-51; ibid., *Studies in the Semiotics*, passim, but esp. 75-81, develops the intriguing thesis that biblical law, unlike modern law, depends on narrative interpretation in contrast to a more literal, or semantic, approach. He argues that individual laws evoke narrative images shared by a group through common social knowledge. Thereby, the laws are not in a sense a "code" because they do not spell out the details. Rather, they rely more on the application of wisdom (intuitive judgment).

within and interspersed by narrative in Exodus[160] indicates law was meant to be comprehended in relation to the story.[161]

When the law is read as part of the sequence within the story, one is better able to appreciate how the law carries forward the concern for Israel's moral formation in contrast to Egypt's subversion of socio-political order. It is no accident, for example, that the regulations for a just society are bookended by prescriptions protecting Israel's worship and loyalty to YHWH (20:22-26; 23:13-33; cf. 20:1-11). The framing concern for right service to the deity echoes the issue of service-worship (*'ăbōdâ*) at the core of YHWH's confrontation with Pharaoh. The structural emphasis underlines that Israel must learn "to 'get it right' about YHWH, in order to 'get it right' about the neighbor."[162] As another case in point, the narrative-law sequence helps to elucidate the high value placed on protection of vulnerable people in the laws.[163] It is a remarkable feature that the first

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[160] Note the interplay: 19:1-25: narrative; 20:1-17: law; 20:18-21: narrative; 20:22-23:33: law; 24:1-11: narrative. See further Chirichigno, "Narrative Structure,"; Sprinkle, "Law and Narrative," 242; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 202-3.

[161] Watts, *Reading Law*, 32-60, contends that the narrative structure shows that law is meant to be read in sequence with the story. He supports this claim further (15-31) by noting the occasions of reading books of the law aloud in public forums (Exod 24:3-4, 7; Deut 31:11; Josh 8:34-35; 2 Kgs 23:2-3; 2 Chr 34:30-31; Neh 8:1, 3, 5). He demonstrates that ancient literature did combine narrative with various kind of lists, but nothing on the scale or with the variety that is on display in the Pentateuch. Harry P. Nasuti, "Identity, Identification, and Imitation: The Narrative Hermeneutics of Biblical Law," *JLR* 4 (1986): 23, helpfully adds "part of the function of the legal material in the Bible is precisely to keep the reader from 'getting on with the story.' It forces the reader to stop and consider who he or she is and what he or she does. It specifies who such a reader must be if he or she wants to read the text correctly."

[162] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 839; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:81, 95. Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 133-36. The very structure of the law collection indicates that allegiance to the true Creator is the beginning and end for a righteous exercise of justice in the community.

[163] The Covenant Code goes over and beyond other ancient Near Eastern law collections in the volume and variety of its protections for the poor, uniquely so in relationship to laws protecting the *gēr*. Lohfink, "Poverty in the Laws," 37-38, observes that social legislation on the

non-cultic laws given are slave laws—surely a placement that trades on the fresh memory of Israel's own enslavement.[164] The intrinsic connection to the exodus story is made explicit in the commands prohibiting unjust treatment of widows and orphans (22:22-24 [21-23]), dependent neighbors (22:27 [26]), and resident aliens (22:21 [20]; 23:9).[165] Widow, orphan, and needy neighbor are singled out as particular beneficiaries of YHWH's attentiveness to the crying out (*ṣ'q*) against injustice (22:23 [22])—an "exodus trigger" (2:23; 3:7).[166] The concern for the resident alien is the most obvious instance of the entwinement of story and statute. Israel is commanded not to oppress the resident alien because "you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt" (22:21 [20]; 23:9).[167] Their identification with the oppressed is (astoundingly) linked with the preservation of their

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poor is almost absent from the actual laws in Mesopotamian law collections (the exceptions are inheritance laws that concern the widow and orphan, see Baker, *Tight Fists*, 190). This is despite the fact the prologues and epilogues to law collections typically claim a lofty ethic toward the poor. Lohfink concludes: "The most important novelty for those coming from the study of other Ancient Near Eastern lawcodes is the very presence of provisions concerning the poor" (39). See the similar conclusion in the discussion of Pleins, *Social Visions*, 50-54: "By framing the poverty question as both a matter of persons and structures, and by invoking laws to regulate these circumstances, the Covenant Code far surpasses its ancient Near Eastern counterparts" (53). See comparable discussion and conclusions in Baker, *Tight Fists*, 111-95, 311-15; Unterman, *Justice for All*, 41-84. For a contrasting opinion on the actual "justness" of Israel's social legislation, see Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal*, and Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice*, 24-86. I thank Bruce Wells for corresponding with me on this matter.

[164] Sprinkle, "Law and Narrative," 244, points out that such a priority in placement is distinctive among ancient Near Eastern law collections, as is the beneficent attention given to slaves throughout the law collection (20:10; 21:20-21, 26-27, 32; 23:12). See more extensively Baker, *Tight Fists*, 111-30; 136-42.

[165] Note the passion and personal divine vendetta in the language of 22:20-27. And there is simply no parallel for the robust concern for the resident alien outside of Israel (see ch. 2 above and van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*).

[166] On the trigger language, see ch. 3 above.

[167] Thus, the exodus event is more than a motivator of behavior, though it is that. The memory aims to shape identity that naturally results in, not merely motivates, conduct.

identity.[168] These examples point to the interplay between narrative and law that aims to produce moral vision and motivation that is larger than the sum of the parts.[169] More than just specifying a set of actions, the law both assumes and advocates for a particular identity and posture characterized by justice (e.g., 23:6-8) consonant with the God of Egyptian deliverance.[170] Hence, regardless to what extent the laws affected the actual enactment of justice, their narrative nesting and rhetorical complexion fashions the canonical law collection as wise, moral pedagogy (cf. Exod 24:12) that seeks to mold "the conscience of the community."[171]

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[168] On this point see especially Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible, With a New Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 44-52; cf. Baker, *Tight Fists*, 182-84. The first command in 22:21 [20] uses the *hiphil* of *ynh*, which is more commonly used in contexts of Israelites oppressing the vulnerable in their own society. The second command in 23:9 uses the *qal* of *lḥṣ*, which echoes Egypt's treatment of Israel in Exod 3:9.

[169] Other connections are surveyed by Sprinkle, "Law and Narrative." Together, law and narrative function as *tôrâ*, or instruction. Or, to put it another way, Israel's charge to "listen to YHWH's voice" (15:26; 19:5) is inclusive of, but more expansive than, keeping regulations. McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 68, holds that the unsystematic nature of the law collection, and the presence of multiple—sometimes conflicting—law collections in the Pentateuch argues the point. "Justice cannot ultimately be measured against adherence to any particular set of laws, since all such bear the marks of their time and place. Canonically, the untidiness of this concatenation of codes has the effect of emphasizing the obligation to seek justice itself." Similar arguments are made by Williamson, *He Has Shown You*, 36-41, 105; Fretheim, *God and World*, 152-54.

[170] Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 165-66; Nasuti, "Identity, Identification, and Imitation," 9-23; McConville, *God and Earthly Power*, 66.

[171] Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 200. Patrick's phrase is "to *create* the conscience of the community," which to my mind is too strong a claim for the law collection alone. Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 107, adds the helpful observation that "no laws are of any use in establishing a just society unless the members of society want to behave with justice. Law has to be backed up with moral education. Justice has to be *taught* rather than enforced." What is noteworthy about Israel's education by law is how it is tied much more tightly to the real concern for the *personae miserae*, especially by individuals in society, than any of its ancient counterparts. As mentioned above, actual laws of ANE law collections have scarcely little on provisions for the poor. However, prologues and epilogues do discuss the obligation to do justice

Second, there is also fresh appreciation among interpreters for the creational dimension of biblical law. A key reason for this appraisal comes from the recognition that, *in general*, Exodus's law collection *qua* law collection is not extraordinarily original.[172] Israel adopted and adapted social norms, customs, and legal forms from their neighbors. The congruence points to an implicit "natural justice" percolating behind and within Israel's law collection and the ancient Near Eastern traditions more broadly.[173] As Fretheim observes, "the revelation of the law given by God at Sinai builds upon human insights regarding morality that were available over a wide spectrum of ancient Near Eastern society."[174] Israel's revealed law affirms a universal, knowable, and good moral order (of certain norms), which entails the graceful presence of God at work among the nations. Continuity occurs between the particulars of Israel's revelation at Sinai and the general, moral knowledge innate in YHWH's world.[175] Put simply, Israel does not hold a

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for the vulnerable, but responsibility for such was the charge (and glory) of royalty alone (Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 223-25).

[172] Wells, "Interpretation of Legal Traditions," 239, describes the Mishpatim (Exod 21:2-22:16)—what he calls the "core provisions of the Covenant Code"—as "remarkably conventional." Cf. Barr, "Biblical Law," 18, on the horizontal commands of the Decalogue. The correspondence is *generally* the case; in other words, I am not hereby denying the differences noted above particularly in the laws concerning the poor.

[173] For discussion of the term "natural justice," see ch. 2 above.

[174] *God and World*, 141. See his wider discussion on 133-44. Fretheim riffs off of observations of Barr, *Biblical Faith*, 97-98. Cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:85.

[175] Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 81-84; VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 297-300. This point is already at work implicitly in the wilderness wanderings. Moses judges the people by *tôrâ* (18:13, 16) in ch. 18, showing that law is operative independent to the Sinai covenant. Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 216, makes the case: "The canonical position of Exodus 18 with its Midianite administrator of justice, and with the pre-Sinai Moses teaching 'statutes' and 'laws' and judging cases, demonstrates the creative activity of God in the realm of law with humanity before the Sinai covenant."

monopoly on just legislation. Israel's law tradition implies justice inheres in and is accessible within creation.

It is in the relationship between the creational dimension of the law and the narrative context of the law that the distinctiveness of Israel's theology of justice, especially as it relates to the poor, emerges quite strikingly. On the one hand, the parallels to ancient Near Eastern law imply Israel's law embodies a creational justice. On the other hand, Israel's law collection is couched in a narrative context that flows out of and depends on the exodus plot line. These two observations should not be kept apart.[176] Rather, their literary sequence and synthesis yield a deeper genius in Israel's justice theology which is played out in the law. Israel's law points to the fact justice can come through the discernment of ethical principles that underlie creation. Israel's experience in Egypt, however, stands as a solemn reminder to how a creational ethic can be co-opted and corrupted by a pharaonic rule at the expense of the marginal. The story (with the law as a part of it) is the antidote for injustice masquerading as creational order. The plotline of the book of Exodus insists that the understanding of creational "justice and righteousness"—up to and throughout chs. 19-24— be refracted through the revelatory, exodus experience. Yes, Israel's law is creational, but Israel's exodus makes clear that the *Character* who upholds creation makes all the difference.[177] And the true Character of

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[176] The thoroughgoing integration of law within story is exceptional in the ancient Near East, a reality frequently minimized by source and form critical methodologies that sever the law from the wider narrative context. See Childs, *Exodus*, 337-339.

[177] Both J. Gordon McConville, "Biblical Law and Human Formation," *Political Theology* 14 (2013): 628-40, and Richard Neville, "On Exaggerating Creation's Role in Biblical Law and Ethics," *TynBul* 66 (2015): 1-17, have recently raised concerns that creation theology blunts the subversive edge of biblical ethics. I contend that the laws taken within the framework

creation has revealed himself in the exodus (Exod 19:4; 20:2). Now, YHWH, who has delivered Israel out of Egypt, appears as the legislating sovereign and covenant suzerain (e.g., 20:2; 24:7-8).[178] The direct divine origin of Israel's law—a distinct feature in the ancient context[179]—both heightens the law's authority and secures its longevity.[180] But more than that, the law's divine origin suffuses the law with YHWH's own ethos and values, which have been on display in the story of chs. 1-18.[181] The law as part of the story thus becomes a continuing revelation of the character of the lawgiver.[182] The take away, on the whole, is that the lawgiver's character and concerns, epitomized in the

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of the story keep the law's grounding in creation from having a "universally benign character" (McConville, 637).

[178] Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 91, comments on the oddity of YHWH as lawgiver and law enforcer: "It is not new or astonishing in the ancient Near Eastern world that YHWH, a god, appears as final authority in the determination of humanly impossible legal decisions. But that a god would actually take up and, thus, supersede the legislative authority of a king does not coincide with the legal concept of the time. This contrast encourages the reader to think of YHWH in a new way, a way which goes beyond the conventional talk of the divine. In merging the concepts of the covenant God and the legislating king the author suggests that YHWH is a worthy king, able to order the social and religious life of his followers who, also, happen to be his covenant partners."

[179] Brettler, "The Many Faces of God," 359: "[There is] no other case in the ancient Near Eastern world where the law was attributed to divine revelation. As with Hammurabi, a deity might 'request' that a king establish law; there might be a general expectation that kings should establish justice in the land, but nowhere else is a body of law 'revealed' to either a king or to the population as a whole." Brettler comments specifically on the relief atop the Code of Hammurabi as an example of the king worshipping the god Shamash, but not receiving the law from Shamash (as it was once thought). This was noted long ago by Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. Menachem Haran (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 9-11; cf. Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law*, trans. Allan W. Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 15; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:94.

[180] Kürle*, The Appeal of Exodus*, 80-89.

[181] Ibid., This is seen explicitly in the introduction of the Decalogue (20:2) and in the motive clauses scattered throughout the laws.

[182] Ibid., 89-124; James W. Watts, "The Legal Characterization of God in the Pentateuch," *HUCA* 67 (1997): 1-14.

exodus, guides the proper orientation of the creational justice implied by the law.[183] This linkage both guards against the potential misuse of the law (especially as a weapon against the vulnerable) and expands the law's claim of justice beyond what is even legislatively enforceable.[184] In other words, the law collection's storied *Gestalt* calibrates the creational justice of the law. The exodus event, then, is not opposed to or even paralleled to a creational justice. Israel's exodus is an exegesis of creational justice in Israel's life and for Israel's life. The exodus thereby becomes not just prolegomena but the clarifying hermeneutic for the proper practice of Israel's law in YHWH's world.

I close with a final observation. No explicit rationale is given in Exodus or anywhere else in Scripture for the oppression Israel had to endure in Egypt.[185] Yet the question might be asked: Could so powerful and persistent an ethic of "justice and righteousness" emerge apart from Israel's suffering? It is impossible to know. Nonetheless, what is apparent is that Israel's endurance of the terrible reality of oppression in Egypt is constitutive of the perduring potency of Israel's ethical vision. The link conveyed clearly in the law between the Israel's Egyptian oppression and Israel's mandated social behavior ("you remember what it is like to be a resident alien"), while offering no explanation for their slavery, does bring redemptive —even vocational— significance to it. YHWH exercises justice on behalf of Israel and by way of Israel for the

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[183] Cf. Fretheim, "Reclamation of Creation," 362-64.

[184] See further Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 91-116 (esp. 104-8); Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:83. But see comments by Michael Welker, "The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law," *JLR* 29 (2014): 225-35.

[185] Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son,"* 15-45, believes while no overt reasons exist, there are a number of covert answers hinted at in Genesis that place the blame on the sins of the ancestors.

world not only through their victorious exit from Egypt but also through Israel's suffering stay in Egypt.

5.3.3 Summary

In Exod 19-24 YHWH summons Israel to "live lives worthy of their calling." They are a people rescued by YHWH from chaos who now participate with YHWH in covenant to actualize YHWH's order on earth. This is Israel's creational vocation—to be the holy, priestly-royalty of YHWH—as the great nation promised to Abraham (Gen 12:2; 17:6!). Their calling is now not just made possible by the exodus but refined by their exodus experience. Israel is commanded to worship YHWH alone and, in attending to YHWH, to embody YHWH's prerogatives revealed in the exodus. Sinai order is an exodus-shaped order. But Sinai does not cast aside creational law. As Jonathan Burnside puts it, much of Israel's law "is profoundly affirming of the emerging human sense of that which is right. Yet it is more than a mere reminder of what [Israel] already know[s]. It deepens [Israel's] understanding and fills it out. [Israel] goes further up and further in."[186] The exodus is the hermeneutical wardrobe through which Israel learns to "go further up and further in" to YHWH's creational justice. Israel, as God's "holy possession," is a concrete expression of YHWH's desires. By keeping YHWH's law—built upon and filtered through the exodus—Israel shows that YHWH's justice means, especially, a determined, compassionate attentiveness to injustice against the vulnerable (22:27 [26]). Sinai order is creational order interpreted through the exodus, and so it connects to the wider world but also holds

[186] Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 84.

within it a radical, subversive potential in that world. By their obedience God's creational presence and justice is extended in, to, and for the world.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In Exod 16-24 Israel walks away from Pharaoh's rule of oppression and into the dominion of YHWH's just covenant. Though Israel begins as God's firstborn son before taking a step toward Sinai, Israel matures further into that identity in their march to and encounter at the mountain. A central theme of the journey, indeed, a central thread to their identity, is Israel's acculturation into the justice that accords with their service-worship of YHWH. The sojourn and stay offers space to learn YHWH's way of justice that more faithfully aligns with YHWH's creation. The following provides a summary of the main observations in this chapter:

- The wilderness is an environment conducive to teaching Israel. The pedagogical function of the wilderness is indicated at the forefront by the language of "testing." YHWH schools Israel through provision, protection, and polity as a way to cultivate the people's trust and habituate them into just patterns of behaviors that bring life.
- The "disease of Egypt" (15:26) infects Israel's imagination. In the wilderness YHWH begins to heal Israel by reorienting the people's understanding and implementation of true justice—over against the injustice of Egypt. As Jethro points out, their practice of justice must correspond to their exodus experience in order to guard against a reversion to Pharaonic structures of oppression. Each wilderness episode presents an opportunity for Israel to digest (quite literally in the manna story!) YHWH's reordering of their habitus. Their experience of the

beneficence of creation and, in the case of Amalek, the hostile forces within creation support their maturation into a people shaped by YHWH's "justice and righteousness."

- YHWH's opening speech to Israel at the mountain (19:4-6) describes their identity and vocation. YHWH anchors Israel's identity in their history, both their blessed ancestry and unmerited divine rescue from Egypt. YHWH then points Israel forward by emphasizing their calling to live into their identity. They are to be YHWH's treasured possession, a priestly royalty, and a holy people. These appellations tell of Israel's chosenness while at the same time underlining their responsibility to epitomize and mediate YHWH's vision of creational justice. Their calling into the Mosaic covenant carries forward the purposes of the Abrahamic covenant and realizes YHWH's creational agenda for all of humanity.
- If the exodus was an exhibition of YHWH's justice imprinted on Israel's past, then the law collection inscribes the exodus onto Israel's future ethic. In other words, Sinai institutionalizes the exodus.[187] Israel's right practice of justice hinges on their loyal worship-service to the true Creator who has shown them his priorities in the exodus. The story and the law inextricably link worship of the Creator and Liberator to a creational and liberating law.[188] Israel is not exceptional in law. The collection parallels much of the received creational wisdom of other ancient Near Eastern law corpora. Yet, the exodus gives a distinct hermeneutical edge to Israel's

[187] To adapt a turn of phrase from Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 184.

[188] Many have noted that the blending of social and ritual laws serves to draw Israel's social ethic into the realm of Israel's holiness and vice versa.

ethic in God's creation. From now on the nation will live in the shadow of Sinai, but Sinai's shadow is cast from the light of YHWH's antecedent, saving, and orienting act of the exodus that dawns from a creational horizon.

6. BUILDING FOR JUSTICE: EXODUS 25-40

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study has been to explore the theology of "justice and righteousness" in the book of Exodus with attention to the themes of creation and pedagogy. My investigation has traced how Exodus tells the story of YHWH championing justice for Israel against the injustice of Egypt. YHWH then moves to educate Israel into the way of justice on their trek to Sinai. The pedagogical journey leads to the mountain where YHWH summons Israel to model and mediate the divine justice by keeping the law within and for creation. What remains to be explored in this last exegetical chapter is how my reading of Exodus 25-40 thickens the book's theology of justice.

One could be forgiven for surmising that the final sixteen chapters, dominated as they are by the tabernacle—with a brief interlude involving Israel's apostasy (chs. 32-34), yield much less that is promising for an examination of the motif of "justice and righteousness" compared to the previous story. The liberation from Egypt and the revelation at Sinai tackle head on YHWH's desire to establish justice on earth. Is this predominant theme then stifled by the "narrow" cultic concerns of the tabernacle? To be succinct, no. Argument for my answer begins by pointing to the difference between reading Exodus as one narrative as opposed to a series of discrete, loosely related sub-plots or themes. The book could be compared to a symphony with several movements that each contains recognizable, thematic crescendos. It is understandable and helpful to consider these movements separately. Nonetheless, a literary reading keyed to the

canonical form of the book must finally listen to the entirety of the symphony as a cohesive piece. Keeping the whole book of Exodus in view ensures that a provisional climax, such as Exod 15 (liberation[1]) or Exod 24 (covenant[2]), does not dominate unduly the book's interpretative horizon.[3] Rather, from the perspective of the received form of the book, it is the chapters concerned with the tabernacle (25-31; 35-40) that come at the climatic end of Exodus's narrative arc. That such is the case is evident in the way the tabernacle account carries forward themes woven throughout the book (as we shall see) such as worship, work, sabbath, divine presence, holiness, glory, and—the principal burden of my discussion—justice. In addition, many of the theological motifs introduced at the beginning of Exodus coalesce and find resolution in the final chapters of Exodus. A few examples:[4]

- Moses's blessing (39:43) recalls Israel's blessed status in Egypt (1:7)
- YHWH filling (*ml'*) the tabernacle (40:34-35) anticipates (and reengages) Israel's redemptive vocation to fill (*ml'*) the land/earth (1:7)

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[1] For example, see J. Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Orbis Books, 1978).

[2] For example, Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 25-132.

[3] Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:297, speaks of provisional climaxes versus the absolute climax in Exod 40. For similar warnings on the risks of (mis)construing the theology of the book of Exodus based on provisional climaxes, see Graham Davies, "The Theology of Exodus," in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, ed. Edward Ball, LHBOTS 300 (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 137-40; Arie C. Leder, "Reading Exodus to Learn and Learning to Read Exodus," *CTJ* 34 (1999): 11-35.

[4] I adapt this list from Leder, "Reading to Learn," 17-22; cf. Ralph W. Klein, "Back to the Future: The Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus," *Int* 50 (1996): 264. I note more connections in the ensuing discussion, where I will also address how the tabernacle account echoes and rounds out issues raised in Genesis.

- Israel transitions from building storehouses (*miskənôt*) for shrewd (*ḥkm*) Pharaoh (1:10-11) to building the tabernacle (*miškān*) in skillful wisdom (*ḥokmâ*) for YHWH.
- Israel has "gone up" (1:10) from the land of ruthless slavery (*ʿăbōdâ*) and is now positioned to "go up" to the good land of promise (3:8) in holy service-worship (*ʿăbōdâ*).

But more than thematic linkages, Arie Leder has cogently argued that the overall structure of the book of Exodus corresponds generally to the well-attested ancient Near Eastern combat pattern.[5] The sequence of conflict (chs. 1-6), war (7-14), victory (14-15), kingship (15, 19-24), and temple/palace construction (25-31, 35-40) means that the tabernacle text as the conclusion of Exodus, far from an infelicitous intrusion, is a befitting climax.[6] Hence, the structure of the book itself warrants exploring what the tabernacle might contribute, or more pointedly, how the tabernacle might cap off the salient theme of justice that we have traced through the book thus far.

In this chapter I interpret the last sixteen chapters of Exodus as dealing with Israel's charge (and dramatic failure) to "build" toward justice. The tabernacle is depicted as a heaven-on-earth reification of the cosmic order of the victorious king YHWH. Not only is Israel to build the tabernacle to reflect an alternative, cultic universe of YHWH's universal justice, the story also focuses on the manner Israel builds as revealing something of the practice of justice. However, before Israel begins to build on the pattern

[5] See ch. 4 above.

[6] Leder, "Iconography of Order," 250; ibid., "Coherence," 266-68. While the tabernacle may be introduced abruptly into the narrative, it is not the case that it "makes little narrative sense" as posited by Mark K. George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space*, AIL 2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 4-5.

laid out by YHWH to Moses on the mountain in chs. 25-31, the people corrupt themselves by building an idolatrous golden calf. The golden calf interrupts the implementation of YHWH's planned dwelling, placing the covenantal relationship in severe limbo. The path toward restoration between YHWH and Israel climaxes in a revelation that deepens the book's portrayal of YHWH's justice. As a forgiven people Israel obediently builds the tabernacle, which is finally filled full by the glory of YHWH at the conclusion of the book. I begin with a brief excursus on the language for the tabernacle before launching into my exegetical observations.

6.2 EXCURSUS: IDENTIFYING THE TABERNACLE

Three different nouns designate Israel's sacred structure. The first noun, *miqdāš*, comes in YHWH's initial rationale for the construction project: "And they will make for me a sanctuary (*miqdāš*) in order that I might dwell among them" (25:8). Despite its prevalence elsewhere as a descriptor of the tabernacle, *miqdāš* appears in only one other place in Exodus—at the climax of the Song of the Sea (15:17). Its second appearance in 25:8 thus reminds the reader that the front side of Exodus—Israel's departure from Egypt—finds partial fulfillment in the back end of Exodus—Israel's introduction into YHWH's cultic provisions on the mountain. I say "partial" because scholars debate what the referent is in Exod 15:17, i.e., Sinai, Zion, or Canaan. The song certainly envisions the journey into the land (15:14-16), but Propp makes a good case that the imagery in

v. 17 is deliberately multi-referential.[7] The word derives from the root *qdš* which in various forms in Scripture identifies a person, place, thing, or time as wholly set aside for YHWH as opposed to common.[8] Israel has already been called to holy living among the nations (19:5-6), but the people have also been warned of casually interfacing with the presence of this holy God (19:9-15, 21-24). The noun *miqdāš* underlines that the shrine space is the dangerous, volatile, holy domain of YHWH.[9] It maximizes nearness of God's presence (accessibility) by instituting carefully planned procedures that retain a necessary, protective distance (inaccessibility).[10]

The second noun, *miškān*, appears first in 25:9: "According to all that I show you—the model of the tabernacle (*miškān*) and the model of all its furnishings—thus you will make it." YHWH is holy transcendent, but YHWH's intention to dwell (*škn*) in the tabernacle (*miškān*) bespeaks the deity's desire for immanence.[11] The *miškān* "makes perceptible and tangible the conception of God's immanence," giving the ineffable

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[7] See Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 562-68, for survey of options; cf. Mark S. Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 190-91, 205-18.

[8] Richard E. Averbeck, "מִקְדָּשׁ," *NIDOTTE* 2:1070-1078; H. P. Müller, "קדשׁ," *TLOT* 3:1103-1118.

[9] Both Gary A. Anderson, "Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle and Its Furniture," in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, Jointly Sponsored by the Hebrew University Center for the Study of Christianity, 11-13 January, 2004*, ed. Ruth A. Clements and Daniel R. Schwartz, STDJ 84 (Leiden: Brill 2009): 167, and Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 689-90, suggest the metaphor of a nuclear power plant.

[10] See further Dozeman, *Exodus*, 656-67; Angel M. Rodríguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," *AUSS* (1986): 135.

[11] Cf. 29:45-46; see Richard E. Averbeck, "Tabernacle," *DOTPentateuch* 809-10.

presence an incarnate physicality and durability in the midst of the people.[12] Indeed, whatever else the furniture of the tabernacle conveys, the bread, table, lampstand, and incense communicate a house meant to be a home.[13]

Third, beginning in 27:21 the sacred shrine is also called the *'ōhel mô'ēd*, the "tent of meeting." The terminology shifts from *miškān* to *'ōhel mô'ēd* when the cultic function of the habitation as a space of encounter between divine and human is in view.[14] The deity dwells in the tabernacle, but that dwelling provides the possibility for regular, relational, ritual engagement. Exodus 29:42-46 is another key passage on the rationale for the tabernacle where YHWH proclaims that this dual purpose of dwelling-meeting is on the trajectory of the liberation from Egypt. Divine dwelling and cultic meeting are not only given as a culmination of the exodus, but the active dwelling-meeting will result in Israel knowing YHWH—and the exodus story—more fully in practice.[15] Both meeting and dwelling presuppose continual encounter (29:42). An emphasis on the ongoing communication between YHWH and Israel is likely the reason that the ark and the atonement "cover" is the first object traced out in the instructions for construction (25:10-

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[12] Sarna, *Exodus*, 158; cf. 17:7 and especially Anderson, "Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle."

[13] Menahem Haran, *Temple and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the History Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 78, 216-21; Anderson, "Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle," passim, but esp. 162-64.

[14] Ralph E. Hendrix, "Miškān and 'Ōhel Mô'ēḏ: Etymology, Lexical Definitions, and Extra-Biblical Usage," *AUSS* 29 (1991): 213-24; ibid., "The Use of Miškān and 'Ōhel Mô'ēḏ in Exodus 25-40," *AUSS* 30 (1992): 3-13.

[15] See comments of Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 914, and Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 148-50.

22).[16] The ark stores the covenant testimony received at Sinai (25:16; cf. 31:18; 32:15; 34:28-29; 40:20). Symbolically, then, the covenant is authoritative and foundational for the correspondence; the base of continual communication rests on the covenant stipulations. Regardless of whether the ark and/or the cover was conceived of as a throne or footstool, or neither,[17] the space above the ark is the specific location where divine and human meet. It is where YHWH "will speak to you all which I command the children of Israel" (25:22; cf. 30:6, 36). The tabernacle, therefore, would continue to be a place for the issuing of divine judgments and teaching built on the sealed covenant and perpetual promise of meeting.

6.3 THE TABERNACLE: EXODUS 25-31, 35-40

Following the establishment of the covenant (24:1-8), Israel's leadership is granted a vision of God in heaven (24:9-11). Moses then ascends further up the mountain at YHWH's behest. Over the next forty days and forty nights (24:18), he is shown the model or plan (*tabnît*[18]; 25:9) for the shrine which will make the heavenly vision an

[16] Robert E. Longacre, "Building of the Worship of God: Exodus 25:1-30:10," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. W. R. Bodine, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 32-33.

[17] This is a protracted debate, on which see Pekka Pitkänen, "Temple Building and Exodus 25-40," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny, AOAT 366 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 268-75.

[18] Some question exists as to the best translation for *tabnît*: is it a model, a blueprint, or the original itself? For discussion of the options, see Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical* τυπος *Structures*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 367-88; cf. the contrasting opinions of Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:345-46, and Victor A. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*,

earthly reality.[19] It is clear just in terms of the number of verses (457) that the instruction for (chs. 25-31) and construction of (chs. 35-40) the tabernacle are of utmost importance to the Exodus narrative.[20] Indeed, no other object in the Pentateuch is given more textual detail than the tabernacle.[21] For most modern readers, however, this mass of text fails to inspire a similar level of interest. Commentators offer various reasons for the discrepancy: its "tedious" literary style; a modern (particularly Protestant) impatience with holy shrines, ritual, and mystery; and/or the text's presumed paucity of theological reflection.[22] This last charge is in no small measure a consequence of nineteenth century source criticism's negative judgment on the tabernacle material. Source critics judged the tradition as late, fictional, and saddled by priestly (read deficient) theological

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JSOTSup 115 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 168-70. The precise nature of the *tabnît* is less important for my purposes than the idea that, whatever Moses sees, the tabernacle corresponds to the heavenly archetype. Such correspondence (among other features—see more below) places the tabernacle revelation in the genre of ancient Near Eastern temple building accounts, on which see Victor A. Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle," *JAOS* 105 (1985): 21-30; ibid., *I Have Built You*, 110-13; 169-70; Elias Brasil de Souza, "The Heavenly Sanctuary in the Ancient Near Eastern Literature," in *Earthly Shadows and Heavenly Realities: Temple-Sanctuary Cosmology in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Jewish Literature*, ed. Kim Papaioannou and Ioannis Giantzaklidis (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2017), 9-28; George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 174-75.

[19] Dozeman, *Exodus*, 567, 583; Childs, *Exodus*, 503.

[20] The tabernacle occupies roughly 38% of the total verses in Exodus. George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 1-2, compares the tabernacle account to the construction of Solomon's temple (94 verses) and the second temple (54 verses). This leads him to comment: "It is rather paradoxical that a space with no physical permanence—no foundation, mere curtains for walls, poles to carry certain tabernacle objects—obtained more permanence and presence in the literary traditions of Israel than either temple."

[21] Klein, "Back to the Future," 264. The account prescribes (chs. 25-31) and then describes (chs. 35-40), repeating many details twice as if to belabor their significance. Hurowitz, "Priestly Account," 25-26, shows the sequence has ancient Near Eastern analogues.

[22] Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 122-24, catalogues the disproportionate neglect of the tabernacle section in several commentaries. He lays out reasons for such neglect. Cf. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 890-91; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 710-11.

perspectives.[23] Much twentieth century scholarship for its part tended to study either the historicity of the tabernacle[24] or the historicity of the textual traditions behind the tabernacle.[25] Both of these directions are prone to shortchange theological assessments of the tabernacle and/or to cordon off the text from the larger narrative of Exodus itself.[26] My own treatment draws on (more recent) literary studies of the tabernacle text to develop a reading sensitive to the theology of the tabernacle as the climax of the Exodus story.[27]

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[23] The classic statement is Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 38-45; cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 529-32; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:325-31; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 183-84.

[24] Multiple interpreters have discussed the historical plausibility of a mobile tent shrine. While there is sufficient comparative evidence to suggest that the tabernacle could have existed in early Israel (the most extensive study is Michael M. Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel! The Terminology, Function, Form and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,* CHANE 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); see also the sensible comments of George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 11-14), it is equally the case that the lack of crucial details in the text make it impossible to reproduce the tabernacle with precision. On the problems and prospects of duplication, see Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 495-521; Homan, *To Your Tents*, 85-189; Bohdan Hrobon, "Shaping Up the Form of the Tabernacle," *VT* (2013): 555-65. Cf. George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 67-71.

[25] Durham, *Exodus*, 351-53. Aside from ongoing debates over sources, redactional layers, and dating of the material (see an overview in Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 365-71), Hurowitz's work on literary conventions of ancient Near Eastern temple construction accounts has in particular shed significant light on the structural features of the text. Nonetheless, see the important caveats to Hurowitz in Amy H. C. Robertson, "'He Kept the Measurements in His Memory as a Treasure': The Role of the Tabernacle in Religious Experience" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2010), 24-27, 79-89; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 573-74.

[26] Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 122-25. He notes many Jewish commentators have shown more theological interest in the tabernacle material than their Protestant counterparts. While these two directions account for much of the scholarship on the tabernacle, another significant stream of interpretation (much of it more devotional in nature) has explored the symbolism of the tabernacle. See Childs, *Exodus*, 537-49.

[27] On the literary integrity of Exod 25-40, see Ralph E. Hendrix, "A Literary Structural Overview of Exod 25-40," *AUSS* 30 (1992): 123-38; Park, "From Mount Sinai to the Tabernacle;" and the proposals catalogued by Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 29-32; cf. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 710-20.

My argument up to this point has highlighted how Israel's extraordinary passage out of Egypt is marked by YHWH's maturation of Israel as a people formed by and for YHWH's creational order of justice. Israel has come to Sinai, but Israel must eventually leave the mountain. YHWH provides a way through the tabernacle to mobilize the Sinai encounter, making the new, holy social configuration established at the mountain a portable possibility.[28] But the tabernacle account does more than just describe the assemblage of a sanctuary fit for divine-human encounter. In the storyline the tabernacle offers another occasion in Exodus—the crowning occasion, as it were—to fashion Israel as YHWH's distinct people, this time through Israel's fashioning of a worship space.[29]

The physical space of the tabernacle is shaped by YHWH in order to shape Israel's identity. Spatial theory contends space is practiced or performed, that is, how space is built, configured, and inhabited by humans expresses an understanding of social meaning

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[28] Many interpreters have noted the tabernacle mobilizes the Sinai experience so that what happens at Sinai does not stay at Sinai, e.g., Jacob, *Second Book*, 2:759; Childs, *Exodus*, 536, 540; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 274; Sarna, *Exodus*, 536; Angel M. Rodriguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," *AUSS* 24 (1986): 134; P. Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung: Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Sinaigeschichte," *RB* 95 (1988): 363; Leder, "Iconography of Order," 266-96; Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 317. There are linguistic and structural links between the Sinai and tabernacle sections. For example, Sinai has three graded zones of holiness, each that require a different level of sanctity: at the foot of the mountain (19:12-13, 21-24); the mountain (19:22; 24:1, 9-11); and the top of the mountain (19:20; 24:12-18). So, too, the tabernacle evinces a tripartite structure of graded holiness: the courtyard (27:9-19), the holy place, and the holy of holies. This and other parallels are concisely limned by Rodríguez, "Sanctuary Theology," 131-37. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 277, states that the law and the tabernacle are the two mobile "institutions" given in the wilderness (to which I would add the Sabbath). God's presence descends on the mountain but then moves out in the midst of Israel.

[29] Sacks, *Exodus*, 293, overstates the case but makes a thoughtful point nonetheless: "Until the making of the Tabernacle, the story of the Israelites is a sequence of events in which God acted for the people."

and vocation.[30] Constructed space, in turn, continues to impress that meaning on those who experience it. Henri Lefebvre calls attention to the importance of the practice of space in the task of creating lasting social change:

> A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language, and on space—though its impact need not occur at the same rate, or with equal force, in each of these areas.[31]

It is no revelation to say the tabernacle is symbolic space, but Lefebvre's insight encourages us to look for the symbolism of the tabernacle's space in view of Israel's recent transition out of Egyptian captivity. From this perspective the tabernacle account, coming at the end of the book, offers a study in contrasts with Israel's construction of "space" at the beginning of Exodus. The name of the sacred shrine itself already artistically primes the reader for such a comparison: construction of the tabernacle, YHWH's *miškān* (25:9), serves as counter-construction to Egypt's store cities, Pharaoh's *miskənôt* (1:11). Moreover, Ellen Davis suggests it is no coincidence that the length of the tabernacle account (13 chs.) roughly mirrors the same amount of space devoted to

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[30] See George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, passim, but esp. 7-8, 45-48, 141-46. Consider his strong statement: "The tabernacle is . . . a space expressing something of the social identity of Israel. The tabernacle *is* Israel in the world" (8). In addition to George's treatment on the space of the tabernacle, which draws on Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory (see next note), see also Matias H. Kung, "The Ritual Dimensions in the Tabernacle Worship and Their Missiological Implications" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2001), 190-96. Kung insightfully applies Yi-Fu Tuan's spatial theory to the tabernacle.

[31] Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 4th ed. (Paris: Anthropos, 2000), 66. I owe this citation to George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 42. George follows many modern critical commentators in interpreting Israel's exile as the background context for the tabernacle account. While I am not opposed to this more historical approach, my interpretation stays with the narrative world that places the recent escape of Israel from Egyptian bondage as the backdrop for the tabernacle account.

Israel's stay in Egypt (chs. 1-13).[32] If the first chapters of Exodus deal with the deconstruction of Egypt's counterfeit administration of injustice, then I submit one can interpret the final chapters as relating to the counter-construction toward YHWH's true justice. Hence, my discussion explores how YHWH's alternative order is conveyed through the tabernacle account. I first discuss how the activity relayed in the description of and construction of the tabernacle functions pedagogically by modeling a just method of building. Second, I note how creational symbolism undergirding the tabernacle account gives reason to understand the tabernacle as a space symbolizing an ideal creational order.

6.3.1 Learning to Serve-Worship YHWH by Building Justly

YHWH brought Israel out of Egypt to worship-serve (*'bd*) YHWH (e.g., 3:12; 7:16). The tabernacle account advances Israel's transition from one service to another, making the point that YHWH "is not merely intent on liberating slaves but on reclaiming worshipers"—"worshipers" understood as a quintessence of what it means for the tribal community to embody God's agenda.[33] At the mountain Israel agrees to keep the terms of the covenant with YHWH, but their fidelity is as yet untested. It is not insignificant that YHWH prescribes the erection of the tabernacle as the lead-off action by which Israel's call to be "priestly royalty and a holy nation" (19:6) commences. Israel's covenantal

[32] Davis, "Slaves or Sabbath Keepers," 30.

[33] Wright, *Mission of God*, 270. As Pleins, *Social Visions,* 162, notes, "To truly realize the exodus trajectory, the text points toward the ultimate purpose of such a freeing: The community must find a way to structure itself ritually and legally so that an enduring community might function in the wilderness and beyond."

existence is to be first actualized in rightly-ordered worship (24:1-11); the warp of oppression in Egypt must now be counteracted with a movable space that models what it means to serve the cosmic, yet immanent, King.[34] At the beginning of Exodus, Israel is serving, and building for, an impostor king. Israel will learn to worship-serve YHWH (20:3) in light of their covenant commitment by first building God's space among themselves.[35] The focus on *what* Israel builds, however, ought not overlook the pedagogical import of *how* Israel builds. In fact, the narrative in Exodus draws the reader's attention to the processes and the qualities of character involved in constructing the tabernacle.[36] In the following I note how grateful obedience, wisdom, and Sabbath all inform the *how* of Israel's building activity. These virtues quite literally give just shape to the tabernacle project—Israel's first apprenticeship in YHWH's creational agenda.

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[34] And it is no accident that Israel first stumbles in the practice of idolatrous worship. See Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 131-42, for the balance of the cosmic and immanence in the tabernacle.

[35] The command for Israel to build would be disquieting were it not intended as a direct counter-model to Egypt, for as Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 323, observes, "one might imagine a visceral Israelite revulsion to the idea of an elaborate construction project."

[36] This is in comparison to Leviticus that concentrates more on the priestly hustle and bustle around and within the tabernacle once it is erected. My comments in this section draw from the line of argument developed by Ellen Davis in her two articles "Slaves or Sabbath Keepers," and "The Tabernacle is Not a Storehouse," *STRev* 49 (2006): 305-18. In my discussion I intentionally set to the side work done from the viewpoint of ritual studies, which requires drawing on Leviticus as well. Such studies have helpfully shown that the tabernacle rituals maintain and restore divine order in creation, which supports my argument. My focus, however, remains on the tabernacle account in the context of Exodus, specifically how it flows from the liberation and Sinai encounter. Leviticus more heavily focuses on the ritual activity in the completed temple—though I recognize these bleed heavily into each other. For an introduction to and study of ritual studies in the scholarship on the tabernacle, see the discussion and helpful survey by Michael B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle*, FAT 50 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

First, the manner in which Israel learns to build is grounded in dignifying, grateful obedience. YHWH begins the work by inviting the whole community—"each one whose heart is stirred" (25:2; cf. 35:21)—to contribute materials and skills freely to the construction. Israel responds with heart-felt alacrity in abundance (35:5, 20-29; 36:5-7).[37] The tabernacle thereby becomes a collective building achievement wrought, not by Pharaonic corvée labor,[38] but by the voluntary gifts and inspired work of the tribal congregation.[39] By inviting Israel's response, YHWH designs the "tabernacle raising" as more than a demonstration of Israel's earnest obedience.[40] Yes, Israel obeys YHWH's directives—the repetition of the account underlines the importance of Israel's careful

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[37] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 960-61: "The picture presented is a community so convinced of its covenantal affirmations and so taken up in its conviction of the truth of its liberation narrative that it acts completely beyond the usual calculations of prudence and caution."

[38] See Callendar, "Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings," 78-79; George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 64-67. In contrast, when Solomon builds the temple, he conscripts the labor force (1 Kgs 5:13-18).

[39] Jackson "Enjoying the Fruit," 300-303, notes that though the summary of the tabernacle work highlights the participation of all Israel in the work (39:32-43), the main account emphasizes the work of the artisans (overseen by Bezalel and Oholiab). The artisans are representative of the people as a whole; all have a "willingness of heart" as inspiration (25:2; 35:5, 21, 22, 29). Jackson also observes that the work of the Tabernacle attributed to the "sons of Israel" (39:32, 42-43) echoes the use of the name for those who are enslaved by Pharaoh (e.g., 1:1, 7, 9, 12, 13) at the beginning of the book (302, n. 35).

[40] The project includes both divine and human giving and receiving. Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 479, even suggests the differences between the instruction and construction accounts hint at a level of improvisation of the artist. While Israel's collaboration is genuine, it also seems to be derivative. At least some of the materials (gold and silver), if not most, Israel acquired from the divinely induced plundering of the Egyptians (3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36). YHWH also inspires Bezalel, Oholiab, and others to construct the tabernacle (35:30-36:2). So lest Israel claim too much, the text intimates that (some, if not the vast majority of) the contributions the people make to the task are themselves gifts divine in origin.

compliance.[41] Israel has already demonstrated the ability to obey building instructions . . . in Egypt! What makes this project different is not only Israel's *willing* obedience, but how YHWH's orchestration makes room for Israel to be a genuine collaborator in the craftsmanship of the tabernacle. Israel has value/ables to bestow on the sacred work; the worshipful process of construction preserves the dignity of obeying, giving, and working. Israel's King puts the servant-people into a position to share, to cooperate, and to develop a healthy self-respect in their ability to build within YHWH's purposes. The picture that emerges is of the practice of *just* obedience to command. The introductory emphasis on the communal, non-compulsory nature of the offering casts the attention to detail demanded by the shrine in a distinctive light, viz., Israel's participation springs forth from a collaborative obedience born of gratitude that, correspondingly, nurtures the people's identity and morale.[42]

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[41] The emphasis is even more notable in light of Israel's disobedience in chs. 32-34, which I will take up below. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 272, contends the narrative tilts the emphasis toward the people's obedience, not their building, as the fundamental act that provides a home for God. In the next section I will discuss the parallels of the tabernacle account with the first chapter of Genesis, but here I mention that many commentators have suggested that the repetition between chs. 25-31 and 35-40 evokes the command-fulfillment structure of Gen 1 (see especially the fulfillment language in Exod 39–i.e., "as YHWH commanded Moses"; on this structure see Horowitz, "Priestly Account," 25-26). One effect of the repetition is to highlight human compliance: the tabernacle comes about by heeding YHWH's express will. While I do not want to understate the significance of obedience, I also do not want this point to stop short of the quality of involvement that true obedience to YHWH engenders. Through their obedience Israel becomes a responsible participant with YHWH in the construction. Israel is an empowered actor. Enabled by God, the people become in a qualified sense co-creators through their obedience (cf. George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 187-88). Thus, they act out their God-"imaged-ness," which Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 476-78, suggests is reflected in Bezalel's name. Michael Welker, "What is Creation? Rereading Genesis 1 and 2," *ThTo* 48 (1991): 56-71, makes the point that this dynamic is itself modeled in the creation account (cf. Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos*, 82-86).

[42] Sacks, *Exodus*, 193-97, compares the tabernacle to the temple in this regard. His comments are worth repeating: "The Temple was intended to stand at the heart, geographical and spiritual, of a nation that had been taken by God from slavery to freedom. The faith of Israel

Second, Israel learns to build with wisdom. The narrative accentuates the virtue of divinely-inspired wisdom among those called to construction (28:3; 31:3-6; 35:10, 25-26, 31, 35; 36:1-8).[43] In contrast, Egypt's wisdom—venerable as it was in the ancient world— subjected Israel to the empire's anti-creational mortar and brick edifices (1:10-11). In the tabernacle Israel builds to the true plumb line of creational wisdom. The virtue of wisdom was regularly invoked in the context of ancient Near Eastern building accounts.[44] Wisdom is what enabled human building of temples and ordinary houses to correspond to the cosmic architecture of creation (more on cosmic architecture in the next section). As such, wisdom is not in the tabernacle report merely a spiritual disposition nor purely a matter of the quality of craftsmanship, though it encompasses these meanings.[45] Wisdom in building names the nexus where intellect, character, and creativity converge to produce a human, material reality *imitatio dei*.[46] As a work engineered with wisdom, YHWH blesses the erstwhile slaves with the capacity to build (and to teach to build; see

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therefore had to be an expression of liberty. Its Temple should have been built out of voluntary contributions, just as was the Tabernacle. This was no minor detail. It lay at the very heart of the project itself. Faith, coerced, is not faith. Worship, forced, is not true worship . . . It was thus not accidental, but of the essence, that the first house of God—small, fragile, portable; the opposite of the grandeur of the Temple—was built through free, uncoerced, voluntary contributions. For God lives not in houses of wood and stone, but in the minds and souls of free human beings . . . in the willing heart" (197).

[43] Davis, "Slaves or Sabbath Keepers," 34, observes "the concentration of wisdom language is greater in this small section of Exodus than anywhere outside the book of Proverbs."

[44] See the survey of Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Cosmos, Temple, House: Building and Wisdom in Mesopotamia and Israel," in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 67-90.

[45] Ibid., 86-87.

[46] Ibid., 81-82. Van Leeuwen points out (pp. 84-85) that the triad "wisdom, skill, and knowledge" in 31:3 and 35:31 (cf. 35:35 and 36:1) uses the same vocabulary and order of God's work of creation in Prov 3:19-20 (also see Prov 24:3-4).

35:34) in harmony with YHWH's own ordering and provisioning of the cosmos. Through constructing a space for YHWH, Israel's builders labor with a spiritual wisdom that enables them to grasp their "proper place within the created order and thus to render true worship to the God who made heaven and earth."[47]

Third, Israel learns a sabbatical rhythm in building. Regulations concerning Sabbath observance appear at two telling junctures in the tabernacle account. The first mention comes as the climatic seventh speech of YHWH's descriptive instructions for building (31:12-17), and the second occurs at the beginning of the construction report (35:1-3).[48] Sarna elucidates the significance:

> This structural pattern is intended to make an emphatic statement about the hierarchy of values that informs the Torah: The Tabernacle enshrines the concept of the holiness of space; the Sabbath embodies the concept of the holiness of time. The latter takes precedence over the former, and the work of the Tabernacle must yield each week to the Sabbath rest.[49]

Egypt's industry is no respecter of rest (5:5).[50] In contrast, YHWH's work ethic—on display in the creation of heaven and earth—makes a priority of Sabbath rest (31:17; cf.

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[47] Davis, "The Tabernacle is Not a Storehouse," 312.

[48] For more on the literary context of the sabbath commands, see Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath,* 28-60.

[49] Sarna, *Exodus*, 201. The discussion in 31:12-17 is introduced distinctively with the particle *'ak* (v. 13), which Jacob, *Second Book*, 845-56, argues, emphasizes the need to observe the Sabbath during the construction phase despite any Israelite anxiety to complete the tabernacle work (so too Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 491).

[50] See ch. 4 above; also Davis, "Slaves or Sabbath Keepers," 31. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 923, points out that the severe punishment of death for breaking the Sabbath is explained by virtue of the exodus story. The Sabbath protects Israel lest they replicate the patterns of Egypt's production, "which will predictably end in slavery. Thus 'profaning' the Sabbath means jeopardizing all that is most precious and definitional about Israel's existence in the world and its loyalty to YHWH."

20:11).[51] Israel's most sacred building project halts for the "making" of something holier: Sabbath rest in imitation of the Creator.[52] As rested the Builder, so rest the builders. This creational rhythm of work stoppage reminds Israel of their creatureliness (and their inherent limits) in their creative endeavor by sharpening their awareness of the holy Creator for whom they build the sanctuary.[53] Sabbath is, as it were, a weekly exodus from work that, left unchecked, could devolve into Pharaonic aggrandizement of human-centered production.[54] Moreover, YHWH states that keeping the Sabbath—not the tabernacle sacrifices and offerings later prescribed—reminds Israel that YHWH alone sanctifies the people. Perhaps surprisingly, given the copious attention paid to the tabernacle, the holy shrine is not the tangible symbol of the Sinai-sealed relationship between YHWH and Israel. Rather, Sabbath is the sign of the covenant (31:17). Hence, the Sabbath will remain a sign in perpetuity (31:16) for the covenantal work ethic incarnated

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[51] Indeed, Exod 31:17 goes beyond the fourth commandment by opening a window into the impact of Sabbath rest for the very life of God. God *yinnāpaš* (*niphal* of *npš*), translated "refreshed," "revitalized," or "caught his breath," on the Sabbath, as should animals and slaves (23:12; see further comment by Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 924). Here one should recall that Israel experiences "shortness of breath" (*qōṣer rûah*) in Pharaoh's economy (6:9).

[52] There is pregnant playfulness in the language of the Sabbath command in 31:16: "The sons of Israel will keep the Sabbath, doing/making (*la'ăśôt*) the Sabbath" (evocative of Gen 2:2-3). Sabbath is something Israel must do/make by not doing. As Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 494, comments: "The main point is that the Sabbath does not just happen. Even merely noticing it is insufficient. The Sabbath must be 'made,' just as the Tabernacle and the world itself were both made."

[53] Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 462, provocatively calls the sabbath command a "kind of *anti-Mishkan* principle," viz., Israel's building, even for the habitation of God, does not override the "work" of the Sabbath. Davis, "Slave or Sabbath Keepers," 36-37, notices the Sabbath restriction is matched by a Mosaic limitation on the offerings brought by the Israelites (36:4-7; also, ibid., "The Tabernacle is Not a Storehouse," 314-15).

[54] For more on the ways that Sabbath protects the exploitation of workers, particularly the vulnerable, see Jackson, "Enjoying the Fruits," 272-87.

in the tabernacle project long after the tabernacle is completed (or gone).[55] Work done in sabbatical rhythm properly acknowledges YHWH as creator and the appropriate boundaries of human toil.[56] And like the signs displayed in Egypt, the "space" of the Sabbath testifies to Israel's special, holy identity.[57]

In sum Israel builds to YHWH's glory, and in so doing, the people manifest God's presence and order—with gratitude, obedience, wisdom, and rest—just as the finished, functioning shrine itself will do. The tabernacle building crystallizes Israel's identity as a priestly-royalty who build justly toward a common, sacred good.[58] YHWH's instructions and the report of the community's construction chart a different vision for service-worship (*ʿăbōdâ*) than the nation's ruthless slavery under Pharaoh. In effect, Israel learns what it means to build as a people in justice, that is, the way of building with the grain of

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[55] Durham, *Exodus*, 413.

[56] The fact the report of the construction *begins* with sabbath—after the Golden Calf debacle—is also significant (35:1-3). Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 496, observes "in some pristine universe, Shabbat may serve as a palliative to the productive frenzy of the six days; but in the world of more complex knowledge that follows the Golden Calf, Shabbat must come first." Taking a different angle, Sacks, *Exodus*, 280-81, remarks that Sabbath at the start of the construction effectively reveals to Israel the "end at the beginning." In other words, God shows the goal of the tabernacle (rest) before Israel commences its construction.

[57] Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 71-74, 96-102, makes the cogent case that YHWH's statement "you may know that I am YHWH who sanctifies you," paired with the theme of Sabbath rest, refers to a present and eschatological anticipation of YHWH's sanctification not just of Israel, but of the whole creation.

[58] Temple building was a royal prerogative in the ancient Near East (see Stephanie Dalley, "Temple Building in the Ancient Near East: A Synthesis and Reflection," *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds., Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny, AOAT 366 (Ugarit-Verlag: Münster, 2010), 242-43; Hurowitz, *I Have Built You*, 312-13). In Exodus the human king is not in view; the emphasis on kingship falls on the kingship of YHWH. Yet, as George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 164-66, observes, the actions typically credited to the king in ancient building reports are in Exodus ascribed to the people. Thus, the tabernacle report is an illustration of Israel's royal status in the midst of cultic construction. Here again, there is a fusion of Israel's "priestly-royalty" identity noted in my previous chapter (cf. 186-88; Van Leeuwen, "Cosmos, Temple, House," 89).

the universe. If the *way* Israel builds witnesses to YHWH's alternative to the injustice of Egypt, then it is no less the case that *what* Israel constructs symbolically communicates the same transformative order. The best evidence for this claim comes by appreciating how creation theology pervades the tabernacle account.

6.3.2 The Creational Anatomy of the Tabernacle Account

The prototypical apogee of ancient creation accounts—after the warrior deity conquered the forces of chaos—was the construction of a heavenly abode for the divine victor.[59] From this central, heavenly temple the enthroned god rested and ruled over

[59] For documentation for the claims made in the following paragraphs about temple building and cosmology, I refer the reader to the overview in John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 106-119, 187-92. He builds especially on the work of Clifford, *Creation Accounts*; Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 111-76; Hurowitz, *I Have Built You*, passim, but esp. 335-37; Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 64 (1984): 275-98; ibid., *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 78-120; and Assmann, *The Search for God*, 27-36. In addition, see L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, BTS 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012); ibid., ed., *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting Toward a Temple-Centered Theology*, BTS 18 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014); John Lundquist, "What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 206-19; Bernd Janowski, "Tempel und Schöpfung: Schöpfungstheologische Aspekte der priesterschriftlichen Heiligtumskonzeption," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 5 (1990): 37-56 (39-46); ibid., "Der Himmel auf Erden," in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte*, ed. B. Janowski and B. Ego (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 229-60; ibid., "Der Tempel als Kosmos—zur Kosmologischen Bedeutung des Tempels in der Umwelt Israels," in *Egypt—Temple of the Whole World: Studies in Honour of Jan Assmann*, ed. Sibylle Meyer, Numen Books 97 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 163-89; Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung," 368-71; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 29-80; Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "'Who is the King of Glory?' Solomon's Temples and Its Symbolism," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M. D. Coogan, J. C. Exum, and L. E. Stager (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 18-31; Paas, *Creation and Judgment*, 81-97; Van Leeuwen, "Cosmos, Temple, House;" George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 181-89; Pitkänen, "Temple Building and Exodus," 25-40; Elias Brasil De Souza, "Sanctuary: Cosmos, Covenant and Creation," *JATS* 23 (2013): 25-41; and ibid., "The Heavenly Sanctuary," 9-28.

creation.[60] The ancients constructed earthly temples as functional counterparts to the celestial, divine temples. Temples were thus built to reflect and to refract this creational topography. The temple home of the god was understood as simultaneously located in heaven and on earth. It was the hub of the cosmos, uniting heaven with earth.[61] The cosmological backdrop for making sense of ancient sanctuaries is evident in the way (1) temple building was reported in cosmic terms, (2) temples were related (especially through their names) to cosmic functions, (3) temples were depicted as places of divine rest and rule, and (4) temples were symbolically designed as microcosms of the cosmos.[62] Because of the manifold correspondences between temple and cosmos, the two entities are recognized as homologies, that is, their structures implicate and reinforce each other.[63] Carol Meyers describes the association:

> It is axiomatic that every sanctuary is constituted as an *imago mundi*, with the cosmos as a paradigmatic model . . . Sanctuaries are structures which, in attempting to render permanent the experience of the holy, are characterized by the homologizing of their architectural features to the cosmos. The space enclosed

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[60] De Souza, "The Heavenly Sanctuary," 28, concludes "From a functional perspective, in addition to serving as the dwelling of the deities, the heavenly temple was conceived as a token of kingship and the command center for the administration of the world. From the heavenly temple the deity would issue decrees and make decisions affecting the world. As such, it was a place of judgment, which was a prominent concept and function connected with the heavenly temple." Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 175, connects the enthronement of the god to his previous defeat of cosmic evil: "In Israel's environment, the temple is a place where the ordered and enlivened world emerged after the conquest of chaos. It stands on the spot from which chaos was first banished."

[61] The theme of the cosmic mountain connects with the temple as the meeting point of heaven and earth; see esp. Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*.

[62] The list follows the categories laid out by Walton, *Genesis 1*, 102-19.

[63] See esp. Levenson, *Creation and Persistence of Evil*, 82-83, 99; on p. 86 he also uses the term "double directionality" to describe the phenomenon. Cf. Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 12-14; Walton, *Genesis 1*, 109.

by the structure thus shares the same sacred reality as the primeval world structure.[64]

The temple models the creational reality, and homologously, creation discloses a "temple-structured" world.[65]

Many commentators have noticed that the tabernacle account is redolent with echoes and imagery of creation. The following list is a catalog of inner-biblical and thematic connections linking the tabernacle with creation.[66]

- Exodus 25-31 parallels the seven-day, first week of Gen 1. It divides into seven speeches, each beginning with "YHWH spoke (or said) to Moses" (25:1; 30:11; 17; 22; 34; 31:1; 12). The seventh speech is about the Sabbath, specifically mentioning the creation of heaven and earth (31:17).[67]

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[64] Carol Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah*, ASOR Diss 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 171. I owe this reference to Walton, *Genesis 1*, 106. William A. Ward, "Temples and Sanctuaries (Egypt)," *ABD* 6:369, makes this point particularly with regard to Egyptian sanctuaries: "The cult temple as a building symbolized the divine creation of the universe. It represented the eternal existence of an ordered universe as opposed to the chaotic forces which, according to myth, once attempted to destroy that order. This struggle between order and chaos—that is, good and evil—was part of all ancient thought, including that of Egypt."

[65] My discussion will review the evidence for the claim that the tabernacle account reflects creation, but I will not survey the converse claim that creation is depicted as a macrocosmic sanctuary. For more on this, specifically from Israel's literature, see Levenson, "Temple and World," 295-97; *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 87-90; Walton, *Genesis 1*, 178-92; Jeff Morrow, "Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1-3," *The Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 2 (2009): 1-13, http://www.ocabs.org/journal/index.php/jocabs/article/viewFile/43/18; Pass, *Creation and Judgment*, 81-84; Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, 81-95; Brown, *Seven Pillars*, 33-77; Van Leeuwen, "Cosmos, Temple, House." This view becomes more explicit in Jewish authors toward the end of the Second Temple period (see De Souza, "Sanctuary," 28-30) and in Rabbinic interpretation (Sacks, *Exodus*, 200-2; Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 95-99).

[66] Many of these are noted by several different authors. I have tried to list sources that provide the most influential and/or fullest discussion.

[67] Peter J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25-40," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 375-87. Kearney attempts to link each of the seven speeches in Exodus to the corresponding day of creation, but his connections strain the evidence. For reservations about

- A heptadic pattern with the words "as YHWH commanded Moses" occurs twice more in Exod 39 (vv. 1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31) and Exod 40:17-33 (vv. 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). Both patterns of seven tell of the fulfillment of commands given previously (Exod 39 fulfills Exod 38; Exod 40 fulfills 40:1-15). The command-fulfillment pattern further relates the building of the tabernacle to the seven-fold creation of the world in Genesis.[68]
- Moses's work of setting up the tabernacle verbally parallels God's creation of the cosmos:
    - Moses saw all the work (39:43) // God saw everything that he made (Gen 1:31)
    - And Moses blessed them (39:43) // And God blessed the seventh day (Gen 2:3)
    - Thus all the work of the tabernacle . . . was done (39:32) // Thus the heavens and earth were finished (Gen 2:2)
    - You shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle . . . so that it shall be holy (40:9, cf. 11) // And God blessed . . . And declared it holy (Gen 2:3)

Kearney's pattern, see Nathan MacDonald, "Recasting the Golden Calf: Imaginative Potential of the Old Testament's Portrayal of Idolatry," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Stephen Barton (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 34.

[68] See especially Gary Anderson, "Inauguration of the Tabernacle Service at Sinai," in *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to the Messiah: In Honor of Professor Lewis H. Feldman*, ed. Steven Fine, BRLA 29 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1-15. Anderson shows the commands of Exod 40:1-15 actually require 40:17-33 and Lev 8 to be wholly completed.

- When Moses had finished the work . . . the Presence of YHWH filled the tabernacle (40:33-34) // On the seventh day God finished the work . . . and he ceased on the seventh day from all the work (Gen 2:2)[69]

- Various thematic connections exist between the tabernacle account and Genesis:
  - The spirit of God is involved in both (Exod 31:3; 35:31; Gen 1:2).[70]
  - The tabernacle is erected on New Year's Day in the Spring (40:2), paralleling the primordial creation and the new beginning after the flood (Gen 8:13).[71]
  - Both accounts highlight shape, order, and design[72] as well as the task of boundary setting and separation.[73]

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[69] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* (1976): 275-92, (280-82); Moshe Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord: The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1.1-2.3," in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor, AOAT 212 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 501-12; Erich Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerke, 1983), 170-75; Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 85-86.

[70] Blenkinsopp, "Structure of P," 282; Levenson, *Creation and Persistence of Evil*, 84; cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 269.

[71] Blenkinsopp, "Structure of P," 283-84; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 268-69; cf. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You*, 226-27. Fretheim makes additional connections with the Flood narrative (cf. Blenkinsopp, "Structure of P," 276).

[72] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 270-71; Sacks, *Exodus*, 297-301; George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 90-91.

[73] Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, 82-95, 139-40; Balentine draws on the seminal work of Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 158-65, 175-88, and Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual Space: Space, Time, and Status in Priestly Theology*, JSOT 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 40-46.

- Finally, many of the tabernacle's features are anticipated in the Garden of Eden:[74] the presence of the holy,[75] the presence of cherubim,[76] a priestly service,[77] a special tree (= menorah),[78] and an easterly orientation.[79]

Admittedly, some connections are stronger than others, but the cumulative case can leave little doubt the tabernacle account offers a pastiche of parallels to the world's beginnings as related in Genesis.[80]

These evocations to creation in the tabernacle account cast the construction of the sanctuary as an act of world building analogous to YHWH's cosmic construction.[81] In transitioning out of Egypt, Israel fashions a worship space that imagines creation

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[74] On this generally see Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, ed. M. Goshen-Gottstein and D. Assaf (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19-24; more comprehensive is Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 66-80; Peet J. Van Dyk, "In Search of Eden: A Cosmological Interpretation of Genesis 2-3," *OTE* 27 (2014): 651-65. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 676, perceptively remarks: "Because we read the Bible forward, first Genesis then Exodus, we naturally perceive the Tabernacle recapitulating Creation. The reverse is equally true, perhaps even truer: Creation anticipates the Tabernacle." Cf. similar remarks of Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 99.

[75] Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 80-86.

[76] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 516-18.

[77] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 66-70; Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 82-86.

[78] Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah*, 95-164.

[79] George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 79-82. Cf. Christopher Woods, "At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia," *JANER* 9 (2009): 183-239.

[80] Sacks, *Exodus*, 335: "So human creation mirrors divine creation. The home God makes for humanity is counterbalanced by the home humanity makes for God. The end of Exodus brings us back to the beginnings of Genesis."

[81] Horowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House*, 242, explains how the act of construction provides a link for the homology: "The numerous biblical and extra-biblical texts containing the very expressions which link the Tabernacle and Creation stories show clearly that the natural habitat of such expressions in the building story. Their appearance in the Creation

according to YHWH's new order, according to their transformative summons.[82] It is not *only* that the tabernacle provides a safe, paradisiacal receptacle for the divine presence in the community's midst. Israel's tabernacle is meant to mirror YHWH's created universe. As such, it is a microcosm of order modeled on YHWH's macrocosmic order. Levenson captures the meaning:

> Collectively, the function of these correspondences is to underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is, a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive.[83]

The sanctuary constructs and publicizes God's universal theocracy in a particular locale within creation. The tent mimics in miniature YHWH's cosmic, ruling rest over creation (and concomitantly YHWH's victory over chaos). The "creational anatomy" signals that the sanctuary is a hot spot of renewal of God's cosmogonic agenda. It symbolizes order come amidst a disordered world. YHWH's creational aims, which were activated in Genesis, are here actualized in the culmination of Israel engaged in the work of the sanctuary.

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story, therefore, must be interpreted as an attempt to describe Creation in terms of building! By employing the building terminology in the Creation story, the priestly author has done nothing new, but has joined other biblical writers who describe the world as a building, the Creation as an act of building, and the Creator as a wise, knowledgeable and discerning architect" (cf. Van Leeuwen, *Cosmos, Temple, House*, 81)

[82] Leder, "Iconography of Order," 308-18; Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 468, observes: "The 'world' constantly asks to be remade, reformed, by the human being . . . God suggests a possible recuperative reforming of the stipulations of 'reality.' At the same time, other worlds, less redemptive, remain potentially makeable." Another "world" will be on offer in the golden calf narrative.

[83] Levenson, *Creation and Persistence of Evil*, 86; see also 99.

How does the creational anatomy of the tabernacle account inform a theology of justice in Exodus? First, the tabernacle reiterates what was suggested in the worship frame around Israel's covenantal collection of laws (20:22-26; 23:13-33), namely, the work of worship calibrates Israel's covenantal life. The ethical compass is oriented by liturgy. Second, the tabernacle account, as the narrative climax of Exodus, sharpens the claim for justice by implying that the societal order of justice finds its telos in an obedient, worshipping people building for God at their center.[84] The sacred, tabernacle order not only protects and sustains but aims the just, moral order. Conversely, then, without the tabernacle Israel's creational calling to justice lacks its indispensable ordering center and teleological lodestar.[85] Sacks's conclusion about the matter is worth quoting in full.

> With this we reach perhaps the deepest and most controversial thesis implicit in the book of Exodus, and central to Tanakh as a whole. *Without God, human beings will fail to create a just society.* Without the Divine Presence symbolised in the Tabernacle at the heart of the camp, human beings will do what they have always done: oppress one another, fight with one another, and exploit one another. There can be no just society without some form of *yirat shamayim*, some "reverence for heaven" . . . That is why Exodus culminates in the construction and placement of the Tabernacle at the centre of the camp. Without the visible presence of God, there is no justice. Without justice, there is no human equality

[84] Cf. Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 65-70, on this point.

[85] On the "sacred center" in Exodus, see Michael A. Fishbane, "The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible," in *Text and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum M. Glatzer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday by His Students*, ed. M. Fishbane and P. A. Flohr (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 7-27 (14-18). Fretheim, *Exodus*, 271, states it well: "This is one spot in the midst of a world of disorder where God's creative, ordering work is completed according to the divine intention just as it was in the beginning." Cf. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 396.

> and dignity. Without reverence for heaven, society becomes the rule of the strong over the weak.[86]

The creational-ethical ramifications of the tabernacle, then, belie any hard break between Israel's sojourn out of Egypt to Sinai and the tabernacle.[87] The performance of the shrine shields Israel from the violation of the ethical warp and woof of creation (as did Pharaoh's Egypt[88]) by inviting Israel to participate cultically in the divine ordering of the world. The tabernacle is a heaven-on-earth GPS, aligning Israel's societal ethic through a liturgy of creational coordinates. The tabernacle as a cosmic microcosm of YHWH's world makes true justice possible by the true, creational vision of the world it offers in worship.

The creational anatomy of the account correlates building the tabernacle with the task of building toward a world of justice. Hence, the narrative of tabernacle building is as much about shaping the people to be a proper reflection of the Creator's order as it is about shaping a sanctuary reflective of the Creator's habitation. In short, Israel is made by what—and how—Israel makes.[89] This recognition adds a layer of significance to the mobility of the tabernacle.[90] Like the report of the account itself, world construction is a

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[86] Sacks, *Exodus*, 313-14. Sacks's conclusion echoes the observation of St. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX 21: apart from true worship there is no true justice. Note Sacks's larger discussion on 311-19 and his further comments on 336-37.

[87] Again, Sacks, *Exodus*, 291, who perceptively asks, "Why was this long narrative included within the book of Exodus, whose subject is *the making of a nation*? It belongs more naturally to the book of Leviticus, which deals with the service of the Tabernacle itself. What is it doing in the book dedicated to the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and their birth as a nation under the sovereignty of God?" Sacks's question presses the interpreter to grapple with the unified coherence of the book.

[88] And as we will see, Israel themselves do the same in the golden calf account!

[89] Sacks, *Exodus*, 295.

[90] George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 75, contends the tabernacle's portability is "so obvious that scholars tend to overlook its importance." But it is its portability that in fact makes it most distinct from other temple projects.

perennial venture.[91] Each time Israel reassembles the tabernacle in a new location, Israel is summoned experientially to re-envision the world as it is supposed to be under the rule of YHWH.[92] Portability gives way to pedagogy. But the portability also gestures toward an eschatology, viz., YHWH's creational will is extendable throughout creation. As Fretheim notes, "this microcosm of creation is the beginning of a macrocosmic effort on God's part. In and through this people, God is on the move to a new creation for all. God's presence in the tabernacle is a statement about God's intended presence in the entire world."[93] The tent's portability effectively curbs the tendency to identify any one particular location with YHWH's presence but instead locates YHWH's presence with a people, wherever they wander.[94] The mobility does not trivialize place so much as shows

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[91] Robertson, "'He Kept the Measurements," cogently advances the thesis that the literary presentation of the tabernacle means to offer a ritualized experience to the listener. The formalism, repetition, and ambiguity entice the reader toward an "imaginative visual experience" (143). In this way the text itself does what Israel would have to do with each relocation of the tent; cf. Kung, "The Ritual Dimensions in the Tabernacle Worship," 185-89.

[92] Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 274: "It is in the ongoing dismantling and reassembling of the tabernacle, day in and day out, that the new creation is being formed and shaped." George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 79-82, reads the emphasis on the cardinal orientation of the tabernacle in a similar direction. He observes the concern with orientation is unusual in comparative temple building accounts. The tabernacle's movement meant that Israel had to continually reorient themselves in the world each time the tabernacle was reassembled.

[93] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 271; ibid., *God and World*, 128; Gorman, *Ideology of Ritual*, 9,18, 230-34. Cf. George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 192-93.

[94] The portability of the tabernacle slants the emphasis away from locative to more locomotive conceptions of divine dwelling (on which see Benjamin D. Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 48-49; John Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 17). In addition to moving the emphasis from static location to dynamic movement, Dozeman, *Exodus*, 610, argues the movability serves to take the focus off the sanctuary itself and place it on the people (cf. Sacks, *Exodus*, 189-92).

the potential for any place to become a domicile for the divine.[95] YHWH dwells with the "priestly royalty and holy nation," but YHWH also moves with Israel outward into YHWH's wider world, adumbrating in the sacred simulacrum the goal for all of the creation.[96]

6.3.3 Summary

The tabernacle transmits a universe of meaning through the symbolism of space. Israel learns how to practice the just order of YHWH in the construction and ongoing maintenance of the tabernacle.[97] The literary arrangement of the book of Exodus, culminating in the tabernacle, implies that the people's social transformation finds its goal in liturgy. The tabernacle becomes the ordering center where all is as it should be as intended by God, in explicit contrast to the injustice imposed by Egypt. At the end of Exodus YHWH rests as an enthroned, victorious king in the midst of the people. Israel is

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[95] George, *Israel's Tabernacle*, 179: "In symbolic terms, the cultural force of YHWH not having [one] place is the claim that he is the God of all space." Cf. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 574-75; Kung, "The Ritual Dimensions in the Tabernacle Worship," 190-96.

[96] Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 149-50, helpfully points out that although God's dwelling in the tabernacle is an end in itself, that does not therefore exhaust the possible ends of the tabernacle. That the purpose of the tabernacle was for YHWH to fellowship with Israel does not mean its significance is thereby limited to Israel. Blackburn thinks that 29:45-46 bears this out. In 29:45-46 YHWH offers a summary of the tabernacle: "I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel and I will be their God. They will know that I am YHWH their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt to dwell in their midst. I am YHWH their God." Blackburn notices that the repetition of "I am YHWH their God" echoes the creational purposes of the plagues. In other words, the speech connects the purposes of the exodus with the purposes of the tabernacle.

[97] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 901: "As in all of these instructions, Israel has long known that *the actual practice* of the presence in and through these objects is essential. It will not do to 'think' the presence or intend it; it must be done in bodily engagement." Cf. Klein, "Back to the Future," 270.

invited in the tabernacle worship to participate in Yhwh's ongoing recreative work in the world. Apart from the creational vision provided in the tabernacle, Israel will fail to build toward a just society, failing in their vocation to be a priestly people and holy nation. The tabernacle implements a sacred creational pedagogy that envisages a restored world oriented to YHWH's justice.

6.4 THE GOLDEN CALF DEBACLE: EXODUS 32-34[98]

In Exod 32 something goes desperately wrong. The reader expects upon the conclusion of YHWH's building commands in 31:17 that the awesome task of constructing the sanctuary would immediately ensue.[99] At the foot of the mountain, however, the people have proceeded with building arrangements of their own design (32:1-6). Their fabrication of a molten calf precipitates a massive crisis in the covenantal relationship

[98] Exodus 32-34 is well-known for the complexity of its composition, a complexity that has defied a consensus among source critics (for an overview, see Craig A. Evans, "The Composition of the Golden Calf Episode in the Book of Exodus," (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2011), 11-44). I will focus on the received form of the text, which I contend exhibits a satisfactory level of coherence, though I readily acknowledge that the composite nature of the text complicates any straightforward literary reading (cf. the judicious analysis of Rachel M. Billings, "The Problem of the Divine Presence: Source-Critical Suggestions for the Analysis of Exodus XXXIII 12-23," *VT* 54 (2004): 427-28). For a defense of reading the text as a composite unity, see Cassuto, *Exodus*, 432; Childs, *Exodus*, 557-58; R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 12-13, and passim; Herbert C. Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 1-44; and Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:605-6. In addition, I cannot mention much less discuss the myriad exegetical issues that arise within chs. 32-34. I refer the reader to the excellent and thorough exegesis of Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32-34 and Numbers 13-14*, FAT 2.8 (Tübigen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

[99] That is, fulfillment would immediately follow command as it is patterned in Gen 1.

between YHWH and Israel.[100] The offense, Israel's "inaugural act of idolatry,"[101] draws Moses and YHWH into a high drama of intense negotiation for Israel's future. Their deliberation revolves around if and how the sinful people can host the presence of the tabernacling God in their ascent to the promised land (32:7-33:23). The tortuous process of negotiation builds to yet another provisional climax in the book of Exodus. YHWH audibly discloses the divine glory to Moses in the declaration of 34:6-7, restoring the covenant (34:10-27), and setting in motion the tabernacle construction.

The position of Exod 32-34 is literarily strategic and theologically significant.[102] A variety of interpreters observe how the golden calf story interrupts the larger tabernacle narrative to form a creation (chs. 25-31), fall (chs. 32-33), recreation (chs. 34-40) sequence.[103] The creational anatomy of the tabernacle account (25-31, 35-40), as well as

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[100] Although I think it better translated "bull" rather than "calf" (see below), I alternate between calf and bull for the sake of convention.

[101] Nathan MacDonald, "Recasting the Golden Calf," 29, n. 23. The archetypical nature of the sin is affirmed by Deut 9:7-10:11; 1 Kgs 12:25-33; Neh 9:16-18; and Ps 106:19-23. Commentators designate the sin with analogous descriptions, e.g., Leivy Smolar and Moshe Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature," *HUCA* 39 (1968), 106, summarizing the rabbis, call it "the nearest Jewish equivalent to the concept of original sin"; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 566: "archetypical apostasy"; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:624: the "ur sin . . . Perennial and great temptation—*the sin without equal*, a sin so great that it jeopardizes Israel's existence as a nation"; Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 406: "master narrative of infidelity."

[102] Traditional source and historical analysis has generally ignored the placement of chs. 32-34 in the broader tabernacle account. Recent literary and canonical interpretations have cogently defended the coherence of chs. 32-34 in the flow of the final form of the book. For an overview of scholarship on the issue, see Park, "From Mount Sinai to the Tabernacle," 7-24.

[103] E.g., Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy," 375-85; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 279-80; Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 927; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 221. Less sanguine about the pattern is Gary A. Anderson, "Biblical Origins and the Problem of the Fall," *ProEccl* 10 (2001): 68; and MacDonald, "Recasting the Golden Calf," 34-35. From a related angle, Leder, "An Iconography of Order," 191-96, intriguingly suggests that the interruption of 32-34 has parallel in the ancient combat myth pattern. He shows that the transitions of complaining in the desert (chs. 16-18) and the rebellion at the mountain (ch. 32) have ANE analogs in the complaints

creational motifs within 32-34 (as I will show), encourage reading the trajectory of 25-40 as an allusive parallel to the narrative arc of Gen 1-9, viz., Gen 1-2 (creation); Gen 3-8 (falling); Gen 9 (recreation). In this wider creational frame, the rupture of Exod 32 echoes the primeval falling of humanity—"Genesis 3 all over again."[104] What is more, I will argue the story also skillfully presents the people's sin as a reversion to Pharaonic disorder, itself a species of primordial chaos. Egypt no longer pursues Israel, but tragically Israel now pursues Egypt. Israel's golden calf debacle jeopardizes the possibility of YHWH's tabernacling presence among the elect and so imperils YHWH's creational agenda of justice through the elect reanimated by their exodus from Egypt.

Exodus 32-34 not only looks backward; it also forms a fundamental testimony that ripples forward canonically. Negatively, the story soberly presages Israel's chronic covenantal unfaithfulness.[105] Stated positively, Exod 32-34, and in particular the decisive declaration of 34:6-7, is a canonical touchstone of YHWH's stunning, re-creative

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and rebellion often associated with assertion and expansion of kingship. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You*, 111, notes a similar "interruption-pattern" in ancient Near East temple-building accounts. From another angle, Rolf Knierim, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Papers*, ed. K. H. Richards (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 404-6, and more extensively, Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19-40*, JSOTSup 323 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), illuminate how the golden calf narrative interrupts the ascent-descent pattern established in chs. 19-24.

[104] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 279. I might alter this to "Genesis 3-8 all over again," in order to include the flood account, which looms large in Exod 32-34 (as Fretheim himself shows).

[105] Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 437, comments that the sin helps the reader to recognize the Israel that emerges in Numbers and beyond. This story's "rippling" effect is seen not least in Deut 9:7-10:11 and 1 Kgs 12:25-33 (though Jeroboam recently returned from Egypt!). The stories appear to be interdependent, and scholars continue to debate their relationship (see reviews in Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:620-24 and Dozeman, *Exodus*, 688-700). A recent, comprehensive treatment of Israel's failure with the calf in Israel's canon is Youn Ho Chung, *The Sin of the Calf: The Rise of the Bible's Negative Attitude toward the Golden Calf*, LHBOTS 523 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

faithfulness in the face of Israel's infidelity. The numerous reappearances of the climatic declaration in 34:6-7 (or parts thereof) across Israel's literature attests to the extraordinary pedagogical significance of this story.[106] The declaration captures the essential categories by which YHWH desires Israel to understand the divine nature, especially in relationship to justice, sin, and forgiveness among the covenanted people. Thus, Exod 32-34 as a whole is instructive for the way it both realistically characterizes Israel's sin and, more importantly for our purposes, wrestles with and resolves the exercise of YHWH's justice set between the poles of mercy and retribution. In my treatment I explore how the catastrophe and its aftermath add further texture to Exodus's didactic portrayal of YHWH's justice.

6.4.1 Exodus 32: Creational Chaos, Egyptian Disorder

In the following I highlight two interrelated perspectives by which the story depicts the sin of the golden calf.[107] The narrative crafts the community's construction and consequent celebration in terms of both (1) a creational catastrophe and (2) a return to the ways of Egypt. I examine these in order. As noted above, several commentators recognize a larger creation-fall-recreation structure of Exod 25-40. In this framework Israel's covenantal misconduct in chs. 32-34 unravels as a creational catastrophe

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[106] Exod 20:5-7; 33:19; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9-11; 7:9; 2 Kgs 13:23; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:17; 31, Pss 25:6; 78:38; 86:5, 15; 99:8; 103:8; 106:45; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Jer 30:11; 32:18; Dan 9:9; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3; Mic 7:18-20. See the discussion of these echoes by Nathan C. Lane, *The Compassionate but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6-7* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

[107] The two perspectives I focus upon are not the only ones present. See MacDonald, "Recasting the Golden Calf," for alternative characterizations (e.g., spiritual adultery).

comparable to the world's deluge in Gen 6-9. The narrative registers the connection to the flood by a network of inner-biblical verbal links and parallel themes.[108]

- An early allusion appears when YHWH apprises Moses of the people's sin in 32:7: "Go down, because your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have behaved corruptly (*šḥt*)." The same verbal root is used three times in Gen 6:11-12 to describe the moral corruption of humanity upon the earth.[109] The corruption is the rationale for YHWH's destruction of humankind in the flood. The worship of the bull at Sinai similarly threatens the corruption of YHWH's good, creative, covenantal intentions. YHWH will again propose a purgation that has creational ramifications.
- In Gen 6 YHWH sees (*r'h*) the wickedness and corruption upon the earth (Gen 6:5, 12). This leads to a divine decision to wipe out (*mḥh*) humankind and animals (Gen 6:7). YHWH then announces this plan to Noah to put an end to humanity with a universal deluge (Gen 6:13). God's seeing and consequent pronouncement parallels the sequence in Exod 32:9-10: "I have seen (*r'h*) this people . . . now, leave me alone, that my anger might burn against them and I will end them." God later

[108] The connection is explored by Wiemar, "Sinai und Schöpfung," 337-85; Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 91-93; Rolf Rendtorff, "'Covenant' as a Structuring Concept in Genesis and Exodus," *JBL* 108 (1989): 385-93; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 303-305; Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation"; and especially Jean-Pierre Sonnet, "God's Repentance and 'False Starts' in Biblical History (Genesis 6-9; Exodus 32-34; 1 Samuel 15 and 2 Samuel 7)," in *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007*, ed. André Lemaire, VTSup 133 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 469-94.

[109] The verbal root *šḥt* is a leitmotif in the flood account, occurring a total of seven times (Gen 6:11, 12 (2x), 13, 17, 9:11, 15). It appears at the beginning and end as a literary envelope. The idea of corruption in Genesis may also point to a nuance of violence in Israel's corruption in Exod 32 because in Genesis the corruption is related to violence (6:11, 13).

denies Moses's request to wipe out (*mḥh*) his name from God's book if forgiveness for the people is unattainable (32:32).

- Noah "finds favor in the sight of YHWH" (Gen 6:8), and through him YHWH restarts the creational project. The only other person in the Hebrew Bible of whom it is said "finds favor in the sight of YHWH" is Moses (33:12-17 (4x); 34:9). Likewise, in Exod 32:10 YHWH proposes to renew the creational project with Moses ("I will make you a great nation").[110] Both of these men hold within them the prospect of a new day beyond the destruction.[111]
- Both accounts include a divine change of mind (*nḥm*; Gen 6:7; Exod 32:12, 14) and divine remembering (*zkr*; Gen 8:1; 9:14-16; Exod 32:13). Furthermore, in both stories the cause of the judgment at the beginning is, paradoxically, the ground for the deployment of God's grace at the end.[112] Before the flood YHWH observes that humanity's intentions are perpetually evil (Gen 6:5). Yet, this same judgment is cause (*kî* clause) for the divine mercy in Gen 8:21 after the flood subsides. An analogous paradox appears in the golden bull debacle. YHWH cites the stiff-necked quality of the people as reason for their annihilation (32:9-10). Later in the climax

[110] YHWH's language redeploys the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:2; 18:18) onto Moses's lineage. Childs, *Exodus*, 567, states the proposal gives "Moses his strongest argument by which to counter the threat" (see 32:13); cf. Jacob, *Exodus*, 2:944.

[111] The name Noah (*nōaḥ*) is cognate with the verbal root "to rest" (*nûḥ*). YHWH promises to give rest (*nûḥ*) to Moses in Exod 33:14. The Genesis author also plays on the aural association between the giving of comfort/relief (*piel* of *nḥm*) and Noah's name (Gen 5:29). The *qal* of *nḥm* is a keyword in both accounts (Gen 6:6-7; Exod 32:12-14). Moreover, Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 92-93, points out that mercy toward sinful humanity comes through the mediation of both Noah (by sacrifice; Gen 8:21) and Moses (by prophetic prayer; 32:11-13; 33:12-16, 18)

[112] On the following see Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 91; Sonnet, "God's Repentance," 474-76; Sacks, *Exodus*, 251-58; Widmer, *Moses*, 208-9.

of the story, however, Moses implores YHWH to go with them precisely because (*kî*) Israel is a stiff-necked people (34:9).

- Both stories reach a resolution that includes a divine pledge of mercy (Gen 8:21-22; Exod 34:5-7), a renewed commitment to covenant by YHWH (Gen 9:9-17; Exod 34:10, 27-28), and adapted covenant regulations (Gen 9:1-7; Exod 34:11-26).[113]

These parallels invite the reader to assess what is at stake in Israel's offense. The apostasy may be a local event but it carries global consequences. The corruption of the covenant is an anti-creational rupture: it "threatens a repetition of the primordial corruption of humankind that had once nullified God's entire creational design."[114] Therefore, what the reader learns in the resolution of the golden calf debacle has ramifications not just for the YHWH-Israel relationship but also for the creational project at large.[115]

The flood account is not the only period of time past that the Exodus narrative invokes to characterize Israel's collapse. If earlier chapters in Exodus portray Pharaonic Egypt as anti-creational, then the golden bull account reveals that the sin of Israel, anti-creational as it is, has a familiar Pharaonic cast. The first clue comes at the beginning of the story. When the people see that Moses tarries on the mountain, they "gang up against"[116] Aaron to build "gods (*'ĕlōhîm*) who will go before" them on their journey.

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[113] Sonnet, "God's Repentance," 470-79. He further adds the covenantal regulations in both are occupied with life-giving cycles of time (472-73).

[114] Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, 142-43.

[115] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 304-305, draws this point out.

[116] Brichto, "Worship of the Golden Calf," 4, vivid translation of the *niphal wayīqāhēl* + *'al* in 32:1 (cf. Num 16:3; 17:7; 20:2).

Their shocking demand, if interpreted from the narrative perspective of Israel's subjugation in Egypt, signals a people regressing to the pathological (15:26), polytheistic (12:12) ideology of Egypt.[117] Other (often subtle) features of the story corroborate this interpretation:

- Aaron casts a golden *'ēgel*, which most translations render as calf but is probably better understood as a young bull.[118] The bull was a symbol of vigor, vitality, and virility in the ancient Near East.[119] In Egypt particularly the bull was a prevalent symbol operating at the nexus of religion, cosmology, and kingship.[120] The bull was closely associated from early on with the monarch's rule and warrior prowess. The bull's association with the king led to a transferral of the bull's characteristics to the gods. The bull often appeared as a representative avatar of the creator sun

[117] I am not denying that association of the story with other religious impulses that tempt Israel in Canaan or beyond (see Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:626-27). My argument aims to read forward with the text (Egypt is behind, Canaan is ahead) without discrediting other correlations (cf. the comments of Rendsburg, "Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch," 10-11, n. 33). With that said, it would appear that the plural noun "gods" and modifiers "these" is deliberate, although there is only one image crafted. Nonetheless, the grammar is not wholly consistent, nor is it clear what precisely the image represents. Confusion abounds, which itself may be the point. One thing is clear from YHWH's perspective: this is not (of) YHWH. It is a major breach of the covenant. See further the discussion in Rolf A. Jacobson, "Moses, the Golden Calf, and False Images of the True God," *WW* 33 (2013): 134-36; and Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 551-52, 581-82.

[118] Cf. Ps. 106:19–20. See the discussion in Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 549-51, 580-81, who advocates for "bull" rather than the disparaging term "calf." One should not miss that the people tear off their gold earrings (32:2, 3)—presumably a part of the plunder of the Egyptians (11:2-3; 12:35-36)—as raw material for the cast image. The gifted gold plundered from the Egyptians becomes the vehicle by which they "return" to Egypt.

[119] Catalogued with illustrations in Renate Marian Van Dijk, "The Motif of the Bull in the Ancient Near East: An Iconographic Study," MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2011.

[120] For a concise summary see Dieter Kessler, "Bull Gods," *OEAE* 1:209-13; for more comprehensive treatment, with particular reference to kingship ideology, see Shih-Wei Hsu, "Der Stier als Symbol des altägyptischen Königtums," *AuOr* 33 (2015): 243-54; also, Van Dijk, "The Motif of the Bull," 96-106. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:626-27, notes that until the 19th century commentators regularly noted that the Egyptian Apis bull was Aaron's inspiration.

god Re as well as other primeval and high gods (looming large in the royal and administrative cults of Memphis and Heliopolis). The golden bull image, therefore, can be taken as Israel's veneration of an evocative emblem of Egyptian power.[121]

- There are probable allusions to the Egyptian sun-god Re (*r'*) in the story.[122] Moses's entreaty to YHWH (32:12) asks why the Egyptians should say that *bĕrā'â* (typically translated "for evil/misfortune,") did YHWH bring them out (cf. 10:10). Aaron's defensive explanation of the catastrophe (32:22) tags Israel as a people who are *bĕrā'* (something like "bent on evil/misfortune"). In the story the author cleverly plays on the fact the noun *ra'* means "misfortune, evil" in Hebrew but connotes paranomastically Egypt's chief deity.[123]

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[121] When the golden bull is introduced, the people "eat, drink, and revel (*ṣḥq*)" in 32:6. J. Gerald Janzen, "The Character of the Calf and Its Cult in Exodus 32," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 600-02, questions a sexual interpretation of this activity. Rather, he cites evidence for the word pair "eating and drinking" in the context of celebration of ritual and military power (Judg 9:27; 1 Sam 30:16) that includes joyful (playful) activity. Jack Sasson, "The Worship of the Golden Calf," in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner, AOAT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 154-57, suggests the translation "to make sport" for *ṣḥq*. He notes other ancient Near Eastern examples of mock fighting forming part of the celebration before a deity. On the militarized and Egyptian character of the celebration, see also Stephen C. Russell, *Images of Egypt in Early Biblical Literature: Cisjordan-Israelite, Transjordan-Israelite, and Judahite Portrayals* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 24-55 (esp. 51-54). In the end I think the description in 32:6 is deliberately multivalent (cf. the sexualized meaning of *ṣḥq* in Gen 26:8), but I join Janzen in his desire to bring out the political nuance of the revelry.

[122] See especially Rendsburg, "Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch," 3-15 [8-10]; but also Cassuto, *Exodus*, 126; Joachim Hahn, *Das "Golden Kalb": Die Jahwe-Verehrung bei Stierbildern in der Geschichte Israels,* EHAT 154 (Bern: Lang, 1981), 313-26; Allan Langner, "The Golden Calf and Ra," *JBQ* 31 (2003): 43-47. On the Egyptian sun-god more generally, see Müller, "Re and Re-horakhty," 3:123-26.

[123] Hebrew has a wide vocabulary for sin (e.g., 34:6), so it is not insignificant that *r'* is the word of choice. We could also add 32:17 where Joshua perceives the noise of the camp *bĕrē'ōh* ("in [their] shouting"). The root word "shouting" (*rē'a*) derives from a different but homologous root to *ra'*.

- In YHWH's report to Moses in 32:7-10, YHWH brands Israel as *qĕšēh ʿōrep* (v. 9; also 33:3, 5; 34:9), usually translated "stiff-necked." This becomes a favored characterization of Israel in their future, rebellious obstinacy.[124] But in the context of their previous oppression it reminds the reader of the arduous captivity (1:14; 6:9)[125] and Pharaoh's own intractable "stiffness."[126]
- Moses's explanation of the activity in the camp (32:18) is a traditional interpreter's crux.[127] Joshua hears what he perceives as the sound of war (*qôl milḥāmâ*; v. 17). Moses corrects Joshua's interpretation of battle sounds with a poetic rejoinder: "It is not the sound of *ʿanôt* of might, nor is it the sound of *ʿanôt* of weakness, but the sound of the *ʿannôt* that I hear!" The translation difficulty arises because the homonym *ʿnh* can be identified with four different root verbs, but most commentators prefer either the meanings "singing" or "answering." John Makujina cogently argues Moses contrasts the sounds of "answering" (v. 18ab) in battle—in either victory shouts or cries of defeat[128]—with the sound of "singing" (i.e., cultic

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[124] See variations in Deut 9:6; 13; 10:16; 31:27; 2 Kgs 17;14; 2 Chr 30:8; Neh 9:16, 17; Prov 29:1; Jer 7:26; 17:23.

[125] Has their hard labor calcified earlier loyalties? See further Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 408-12.

[126] In both 7:3 and 13:15 a form of *qšh* is used to describe Pharaoh. The desire to connect Israel's stiff-necked behavior to Pharaoh's heart may be a reason *qšh* is employed earlier in the narrative.

[127] John Makujina, "Additional Considerations for Determining the Meaning of ʿĂNÔT and ʿANNÔT in Exod. XXXII 18," *VT* 55 (2005): 39-46.

[128] Krasovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 90, reads this as a merism for "every possible battle cry."

jubilation).[129] Moses hears not Israel fighting against enemies but of Israel engaging in false worship. But what is more, the homonym *ʿnh* shrewdly recalls another significant root meaning used earlier: Egypt "oppresses" (*ʿnh*) Israel (1:11-12).[130] Thus, Moses could be interpreted as saying, "it is the sound of *oppressing* that I hear!" The point of the literary polysemy: Moses discerns Israel festively welcoming back the Egyptian injustice from which they were set free.[131]

- Finally, when Moses arrives at the camp, he sees the bull and the dancing (32:19). The term for Israel's dancing, *měḥōlōt*, aurally resonates with the disease (*maḥălâ*) of Egypt (15:26).[132] What is perhaps most telling, however, is the striking choice of verb for the people's behavior in 32:25. Moses sees the people, that they are

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[129] Makujina, "Additional Considerations," 39-46. He rejects "singing" as the meaning of the first two because he rightly understands the contrast Moses is trying to make between the sounds of battle and sounds of celebration (40-42). See similar argument in Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 557. Cf. the translation of Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 444, who translates the first two as "sing" but nevertheless gets the contrast with the third: "Not the sound of the song of prevailing, nor the sound of the song of failing, sound of choral-song is what I hear!" Makujina (43-45) makes the additional case that the story echoes the Amalek conflict by keywords—*gbr* (17:11) and *gĕbûrâ* (32:18); *mḥh* (17:14; 32:33) and especially *ḥlš* (17:13; 32:18)—and context, e.g., Moses and Joshua on a mountain with the people sounding off below. He concludes the connection pits Israel in the precarious position of Amalek—Israel has become YHWH's enemy. If one reads the Amalek story as "Pharaoh redivivus," (see ch. 5 above), then the argument that the worship of bull is a return to Egypt is strengthened.

[130] I have found this suggestion of the use of *ʿnh* in 32:18 to allude to oppression only in Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation."

[131] Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 421, provocatively dubs Israel's singing as the "harmonies of old pieties."

[132] I owe this and the following observation to Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation."

"running wild (*pr'*), for Aaron had allowed them to run wild (*pr'*)." The verb (twice repeated) contains the same first three radicals as the title Pharaoh (*pr'h*).[133] Through artistic wordplay, the narrator communicates that the people have relapsed into "pharaoh" service.

The bull meets the people's stated desire to have a symbol of divine presence and protection within the ideology of their former oppressor.[134] Israel's "great sin" (32:21, 31-32)[135] around the bull smacks of Egyptian divinity worship (*r'*) while also revealing (and reveling in) concomitant patterns of obstinance and incipient practices of injustice. In a word, the people have been "'Pharaohed' [*pr'*] once more."[136] The narrative adroitly paints their departure from the covenant of Sinai via a disastrous return to Egyptian cultic

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[133] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 562, notes that R. E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 284, catches the wordplay, but Propp thinks it is incidental.

[134] Janzen, "The Character of the Calf," 597-607, provides a particularly instructive analysis on this point. He argues the golden calf is a war emblem that directly addresses the people's concern for divine protection on the journey ("gods who will go before us"). Their request has been a concern of YHWH throughout (13:21; 14:19; 23:20, 23, 27). Janzen builds a solid case that the celebrations of the people (32:6, 18, 25) and the destruction of the bull (32:20) all carry political, military connotations. He contends this line of interpretation is obscured by understanding the golden bull primarily as a fertility symbol. Though I am more open to the presence of themes of sexual infidelity than Janzen, I contend he offers a good corrective on the significance of the motif of political order. Cf. MacDonald, "Recasting the Golden Calf," 29-33.

[135] Interestingly, the label "great sin" may also reflect an Egyptian milieu (cf. Gen 20:9). The description "great sin" identifies adultery in extant ancient Egyptian marriage contracts (J. J. Rabinowitz, "The 'Great Sin' in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts," *JNES* 18 (1959): 73), though it is also found in Ugaritic texts (see W. L. Moran, "The Scandal of the 'Great Sin' at Ugarit," *JNES* 18 (1959): 280-81).

[136] Fortner, "Literary and Theological Interpretation." He points out the irony that "Pharaoh" means "great house," the very thing YHWH has prepared with Moses for Israel to build. In another echo of Pharaoh's Egypt, the people strip (*nṭl*) themselves of their ornaments (33:6). In other words, the people's actions force them to admit at some level their identification with the Egyptians (12:26; cf. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 938).

and moral disorder.[137] The anti-creational devolution of Israel manifests the disease of Egypt. Israel risks becoming like what they worship.

6.4.2 Exodus 32-33: Mediation of the Justice Crisis

Israel's dramatic failure sparks a series of dialogues between YHWH and Moses. My analysis in this section and the next attends to how the sequence mulls over the problem and prospect of the exercise of divine justice in YHWH's relationship with a debauched Israel. After reporting the people's idolatry, the story shifts to an urgent dialogue between YHWH and Moses above on the mountain. YHWH first informs Moses of the situation below in language that makes clear the people have violated YHWH's direct commands, indeed, the very essence of the covenant (32:7-8; cf. with 20:2-4, 23).[138] Israel's corruption provokes YHWH's jealous anger and disastrous but warranted judgment (cf. 20:5; 22:20 [19]; 23:21). YHWH announces a plan to bring an end to the stiff-necked people and to begin anew with Moses. Despite the apparent hopelessness for Israel, the divine decision "has not reached an irretrievable point" as before in the flood.[139] YHWH's paradoxical instruction, "Leave me alone" (32:10), covertly summons

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[137] From another angle the incident offers an ironic parody of Israel's experience with YHWH, especially the covenant ceremony in ch. 24. Consider these parallels: they rise early in the morning, offer sacrifices on an altar, eat and drink in celebration all before a god. See further Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain*, 64-72.

[138] S. Dean McBride, Jr. "The Essence of Orthodoxy: Deuteronomy 5:6-10 and Exodus 20:2-6," *Int* 60 (2006): 133-50. Widmer, *Moses,* 91-93, argues that though the exact nature of the "great sin" is unclear (because the imagery of the bull is unclear), the final form of the text leaves no doubt that Israel's transgression is condemned in the strongest possible terms. I am indebted to Widmer's wider treatment throughout this and the following section.

[139] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 283. Interestingly, Lena-Sofia Tienmeyer, "The Compassionate God of Traditional Jewish and Christian Exegesis," *TynBul* 58 (2007): 183-207, documents a

Moses into prophetic deliberation of how to proceed (cf. Gen 18:7-8).[140] Israel's leader steps into the tension between divine retribution and mercy. It is a tension born from upholding recalcitrant Israel's position within YHWH's creational agenda without undermining the moral structure of the YHWH's world.[141]

Moses's first intercession appeals to three reasons for YHWH to withdraw from imminent destruction: YHWH's integrity to the exodus motive (v. 11), YHWH's reputation among the Egyptians (v. 12), and YHWH's promise to the ancestors (v. 13).[142] Moses cannily but faithfully questions whether these reasons—all of which are staked on YHWH's previous proclamations—can be so cleanly severed from the survival of this elect people.[143] For better or worse, "[h]ow YHWH treats Israel, and how Israel fares in

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veritable tradition within classic Jewish and Christian readings that argues for the possibility of intercession and repentance in the Noah narrative.

[140] There is a strong Jewish and Christian tradition that believes by apprising Moses of the plan, YHWH subtly elicits Moses's participation. For an overview see Widmer, *Moses,* 94-103.

[141] David N. Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," *Western Watch* 6 (1955): 8-10.

[142] Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 285-86, who lists "reasonableness" as the first reason, which I think is not strong enough to convey the force of Moses's objection.

[143] Widmer, *Moses*, 109-10, argues persuasively Moses's first reason is verbally and conceptually dependent on Exod 6:2-8. The second appeal to YHWH's reputation is a motif running throughout the narrative (e.g., 9:14; 14:4; 15:11; 18:11). YHWH risks the non-elect mis-"knowing" the divine justice displayed in the exodus (cf. Widmer, *Moses*, 111). The third reason is not a reminder to YHWH to keep his promise to the ancestors. YHWH's invitation to begin anew with Moses shows YHWH is loyal to the previous commitments. Moses, however, ignores YHWH's proposal. Widmer, *Moses*, 113-18, surveys the various ways Moses's appeal to the ancestors has been understood. He reads it as an appeal to YHWH's "parental involvement in the formation of Israel," and not to the merits of the patriarchs. Regardless, the broader point is captured by Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 932: "Moses seeks to contextualize the present crisis for God by situating Israel in the midst of the old promises of Genesis."

the world, are taken as data for how powerful or reliable YHWH is."[144] And YHWH relents; there will be no starting over.[145] Moses's "loyal opposition" succeeds only (at this point) in averting YHWH's immediate and total destruction of the people.[146] No mention is made of forgiveness or reconciliation, nor does YHWH's change of mind eliminate the prospect of other, future forms of judgment.[147] The way forward is not clear. The question remains: What does it mean for YHWH to be a God of justice in this crucible?

Moses descends with the heavenly tablets only to smash them when he surveys the ruckus at the foot of the mountain.[148] Straightaway he grinds the bull down to powder, scatters it in water, and forces Israel to drink the concoction. After questioning

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[144] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 297. I owe this reference to Widmer, *Moses*, 112.

[145] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 225-26, concludes after a short review of the *niphal* of *nḥm* (variously translated "relent," "repent," or "change one's mind") that the preponderance of the occurrences of the verb with God as subject shows God's proclivity to move from vengeance to mercy. "Moses's insistence that God change was clearly based on his conviction as to what is unchangeable in God, namely his unwavering intention to save" (225). Widmer, *Moses*, 122, issues an important counter: "Although Moses' prayer presents a God who is genuinely open to change, it has to be qualified, that according to the OT, YHWH is said to change His mind only in the context of an intended judgment against sinful Israel who either show themselves genuinely repentant and/or are covered by prophetic intercession." On the theme of God's change of mind in the wider canon, see Terence Fretheim, "The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk," *HBT* 10 (1988): 47-70; Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., "Does God 'Change His Mind'?" *BSac* 152 (1995): 387-99; and David N. Freedman, "When God Repents," in *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel Freedman*, ed. J. R. Huddleston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1:409-46.

[146] The theme of obedience to God expressed as loyal challenge to God's plans is explored by George W. Coats, "The King's Loyal Opposition: Obedience and Authority in Exodus 32-34," in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. George W. Coats and Bernard O. Long (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 91-109.

[147] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 286-87; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:651; Widmer, *Exodus*, 119-22.

[148] Moses's smashing of the tablets signals the fractured state of the covenant. Ancient Near Eastern parallels identify the breaking of contract tablets with the breaking of the contract/covenant (Sarna, *Exodus*, 207; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 558).

Aaron, he musters "whoever belongs to YHWH" to pass through the camp with divine license to kill the offenders. The Levites respond, slaying three thousand, and thus "win" a blessing of ordination. This sequence of events is both puzzling and troubling, especially with regard to the application of divine justice.[149] On the one hand, the text does not shy away from the deadly seriousness of the situation. At the very least, Moses's violent approach aggressively halts the flagrant, shameful disobedience.[150] So, too, the ferocity exercised toward the idol and community offenders highlights at minimum the severity of the sin.[151] YHWH's plan to wipe out the entire community may have been

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[149] Consider Moses's explicit interpretation of the Levites' slaughter as commanded by YHWH (v. 27-29). The complexity of the source-critical background and the laconic character of the text leave a host of gaps for the interpreter to fill. Many commentators have attempted to fill these gaps in a way as to mitigate the apparent viciousness of Moses's actions. Leslie Brisman, "Sacred Butchery: Exodus 32:25-29," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathyrn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 162-81, tallies the gaps in the text (though I think he overstates the number) and various attempts to bring clarity and/or to offer apology (also cf. Stuart Lasine, "Levite Violence, Fratricide and Sacrifice in the Bible and Later Revolutionary Rhetoric," in *Curing Violence*, eds. Theophus Smith and Mark Wallace (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1994), 204-29). Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 567-74, discusses what many consider to be the history behind the text, viz., a rivalry between the Levitical and the Aaronide priests. This historical-critical interpretation is finally insufficient to explain the literary logic of the text, and itself is open to serious question as shown by James W. Watts, "Aaron and the Golden Calf in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch," *JBL* 130 (2011): 417-30.

[150] Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 181-82, surveys various of translations of the difficult phrase *ləšimṣâ bəqāmêhem* in 32:25. Whatever Israel's behavior, Blackburn helpfully remarks Moses is concerned with Israel's actions before the enemies. He further suggests Moses's immediate concern is the shame brought upon YHWH in the eyes of adversaries. He surmises "the urgency and immediacy of the slaughter would be better viewed not primarily as a vehicle for retribution, but rather as an extreme measure to stop the public disgrace Israel was bringing upon the Lord" (182).

[151] Widmer, *Moses*, 125-26. Christopher T. Begg, "The Destruction of the Calf (Exod 32,20/Deut 9,21)," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, ed. Norbert Lohfink, BETL 68 (Leuven: Leuven University, 1985), 208-229, surveys the extra-biblical parallels (note Egyptian evidence (215-17)) to the calf's destruction. He aptly shows that Moses's treatment of the bull follows a stereotypical ANE procedure for the elimination of an idol, wherein the idol's pulverization illustrates the utter defeat and repudiation of a deity (cf. Exod 23:24-25; 2 Kgs 23:4-5, 15). The powdery mixture Israel is made to drink viscerally underlines the idol's complete elimination by causing the people to (quite literary) digest its—and their—

shelved (v. 10), but this does not stop Moses from enacting at least a partial judgment of the same (divine) order (20:5-6).[152] The gravity of Israel's rebellion—and the precariousness of Israel's status—requires drastic measures.[153] On the other hand, the affront of the "sacred butchery" is tempered somewhat when one recognizes that the slaughter was avoidable. Moses's call in v. 26 gives the community a chance to declare loyalty to YHWH.[154] Fretheim observes,

> The great majority of people, however, remain unmoved; their silent indifference to the call is deafening. In other words, this is an *intensification of the apostasy* evident in the golden calf episode; it is revealing of deep levels of disloyalty.[155]

Some commentators maintain only the ringleaders are targeted,[156] but this must be read

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ignominy (see Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 559-60, for a survey of the range of interpretations for the symbolism of drinking the water). The action likely also represents a trial by ordeal (resembling, though far from exact, the procedure in Num 5:12-31) that may be meant at least to identify, if not punish, the guilty (see Sarna, *Exodus*, 207; Janzen, "The Character of the Calf," 606-7; Brichto, "Worship of the Golden Calf," 16).

[152] Widmer, *Moses*, 125. He believes Moses's behavior reflects the two-fold nature of the prophet (80-86, 138). Moses advocates for the people before God (vv. 11-13), but Moses also enacts God's prerogatives before (or on) the people. In this way, Moses foreshadows both the mercy and the judgment that coincide in the heart of God (34:7).

[153] The analysis of Fretheim, *Exodus*, 289, is on point: "For this juncture in Israel's life, when its entire future is at stake, radical sin is believed to call for radical measures; continued life for the community is believed to be possible only through the death of some. Declining Moses' call to stand for YHWH is not an open matter for Israel. The relationship with God even takes priority over all other relationships."

[154] Cf. my comments on the Passover legislation above in ch. 4 where a similar kind of invitation is offered.

[155] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 289; cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:665. In view of how I argue the calf episode reprises Egyptian ideology, the people essentially side with Pharaoh's Egypt over against YHWH. Like the announcement of the death of the firstborn in Egypt, the Israelites in the wake of the apostasy must decide which side they are on. The deadly judgment falls on those who tacitly identify themselves under the rebellious "rule" represented by the bull. In doing so they are open to facing the same destruction as the bull—the same fate as the firstborn of Egypt.

[156] E.g., Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf," 16, 18; Sarna, *Exodus*, 209; Krasovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 92.

into the text. More evident is that the whole community stands subject to YHWH's wrath, adjudicated by Moses and the Levites, though only (a likely symbolic) 3000 are executed (v. 28).[157] The judgment—horrific indeed—neither removes the need for atonement (see v. 30) nor stems the threat of future retribution (see v. 35). I think Widmer's summary captures the hard truth of the events as well as sets the scene for the dialogue that follows:

> [V]erses 25–29 seek to underline in the strongest possible way that YHWH abhors anything within the range of physical representation, syncretism, and idol worship (cf. 20:3–7), and that this kind of sin evokes consequences of the most serious nature. It also underscores that the eventually received divine mercy and grace is costly and far from the notion of "cheap grace." The logic seems to suggest that only when the idol and those who bowed down to it are destroyed does Israel have a future with YHWH worth living. Through his radical and consistent action, Moses creates a condition for a new beginning.[158]

Israel's future remains yet unresolved, existing somewhere between eradication and forgiveness.

The following day Moses announces his intention to seek atonement. Moses confesses the people's collective transgression before he probes YHWH's desire to "bear"

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[157] It is a corporate judgment that is not corporately, but symbolically, meted out. YHWH's threat of plague in v. 35 shows that judgment still hangs over Israel, so the slaughter by the Levites cannot be understood to have totally mollified YHWH's wrath. Moreover, the three "punishments" bring to fruition judgments that Israel either feared in Egypt (5:21 = the sword) or befell Egypt (contaminated water, plagues). Sarna, *Exodus*, 208-9, suggests that the three thousand may be a number representing the firstborn, who "quite likely . . . played a leading role in the worship of the golden calf and for that reason were displaced as cultic officiants" by the Levites. According to Num 3:8, 12; 8:14-18, Levites act as surrogates for Israel's firstborn. His suggestion is intriguing for the way it calls to mind the symbolic final blow to the Egyptians. Also cf. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 418-19, where he speaks about symbolic "pruning" in corporate judgment.

[158] Widmer, *Moses*, 126. Cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:616. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 289, adds "such methods are obviously not available to modern communities of faith, even if their future should ride in the balance. But the seriousness with which Israel takes the matter should occasion critical

(*nś'*) Israel's sin (32:32).[159] If YHWH's "bearing" is not possible, then Moses stipulates that he suffer "blotting out" from God's book in solidarity with the people.[160] YHWH rebuffs Moses's solution with the rejoinder: only the guilty will be blotted out. The divine command to go forward (32:34; 33:1-3) indicates Moses's prayer succeeds only in postponing a coming judgment (32:34).[161] YHWH intends for Israel to reach the land promised to the ancestors (33:1). However, not only will the people travel under looming judgment, they are to ascend to the land without the divine presence prepared for in chs. 26-31.[162] And yet, the ambiguity of the judgment (timing, scope, manner) and the revised, vaguer persona of the messenger (cf. v. 34; 33:2-3 with 23:20-33) leave much

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reflection by those of us who live in an age where virtually anything that goes by the name of religion is tolerated."

[159] The apodosis of the sentence is absent, casting the request with a tone of hopeful uncertainty about what YHWH might say, perhaps even exercising caution (so Widmer, *Moses*, 129). Propp, *Exodus*, 564, suggests Moses would rather YHWH finish the extraordinary thought. Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 934, thinks Moses "cannot think of a gain to be made by the sheer forgiveness of YHWH."

[160] Cassuto, *Exodus*, 423. Widmer, *Moses*, 131-34, cogently argues Moses's offer is to share Israel's fate of being "blotted out" (v. 33) from the divine register (cf. 17:14, Ps 69:29; Neh 13:14; Dan 12:1-2). It is a request to die as did the perpetrators in v. 28. This is in contrast to some form of vicarious ransom. For a fuller treatment of the "book" of God, see succinctly Meyers, *Exodus*, 261-62, and more comprehensively Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "The Heavenly Books of Life and of Human Deeds," *JATS* 13 (2002): 10-26 (esp. 16-18).

[161] Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:674: "The conclusion can only be: Israel has forfeited her life . . . According to 32:34, for the time being the judgment is put on hold. Perhaps that may be seen as the fruit of Moses' intercession . . . YHWH goes on with his work, but from now on the shadow of judgment lies over Israel." Widmer, *Moses*, 135, 139, contends God's concession to endure Israel's sin until some future moment foreshadows God's patience made clear in 34:6-7.

[162] "I will not go up *in your midst* (*bəqirbəkā*)" (33:3, 5) is a revocation of YHWH's tabernacling intentions announced in 25:8 and 29:45, "I will dwell *in the midst* (*bətôk*) of the sons of Israel." The focus of the conversation moving forward shifts to the further consequence of the loss of YHWH's presence for the journey.

unanswered.[163] As a matter of fact, even YHWH is less than certain about how to proceed following Israel's penitent removal of the ornaments (33:5).[164] In short, Israel's long-term future in YHWH's agenda is still up in the air. Justice remains under deliberation. The situation beckons for further intercession.[165]

Moses erects an ad hoc "tent of meeting" *outside the camp*—a sharp contrast to YHWH's original intention to dwell in the midst of the people (33:7-11).[166] Because of the people's sin, YHWH's presence is now impermanent and marginalized.[167] As a whole the

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[163] The heavenly emissary, once an assurance of YHWH's presence (23:20-33), now symbolizes the safe distance God's presence must keep from Israel (33:5). The angel is thus simultaneously a sign of judgment— YHWH is not "in the midst of the people"—but also a sign of grace— YHWH will fulfill the promise to the ancestors and not annihilate Israel (cf. Widmer, *Moses*, 145-56).

[164] Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 61-62, believes the removal is a sign of remorse and not repentance. However, the people corporately demonstrate some kind of change of heart, and their behavior when Moses enters the tent evidences reverence (33:8, 10). See the discussion of Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 185-89, 202-3.

[165] Widmer, *Moses*, 140-41. Some believe the plague notice of v. 35 is summative to what has already occurred (e.g., Krasovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 94; Sarna, *Exodus*, 210), but it more likely refers to something yet to happen in the community's future. The narrator informs the reader that the plague has come and gone, so that the reader is assured that God's threat is no longer hanging over them. Nonetheless, it does serve as a warning to future generations (see Brichto, "Worship of the Golden Calf," 19).

[166] The distance of the tent from the camp is a point emphasized three times in 33:7. The literary history, placement, and meaning of the "tent of meeting" in 33:7-11 has elicited a diversity of interpretation. See most recently the survey of opinions by Max Rogland, "'Moses Used to Take a Tent'? Reconsidering the Function and Significance of the Verb Forms in Exodus 33:7-11," *JTS* 63 (2012): 449-66. Rogland suggests vv. 7-11 are not historical narrative but rather continue YHWH's discourse to Moses, which I find very suggestive. In brief, I think the "tent of meeting" is a provisional meeting place that is deliberately meant to contrast with the proposed tabernacle (Hauge, *Descent from the Mountain*, 73-78). In its present form the composition moves the narrative forward in at least four significant ways: (1) it highlights the authority of Moses; (2) it emphasizes the forfeiture of the original "tent of meeting" laid out in chs. 26-31; (3) it indicates Israel's contrite change of heart; and (4) it locates the intercession of vv. 12ff.

[167] But significantly, God is not entirely isolated from individual seekers in Israel (33:7). This shows incipient movement toward mercy already on God's part (so Widmer, *Moses*, 144).

people reverentially watch from a distance as Moses re-enters his "face to face" mediation with YHWH inside the tent.[168] The dialogue recorded in 33:12ff. swirls around the dilemma of YHWH's presence among the people, but that dilemma ultimately arises out of the larger tension between YHWH's mercy and wrath. In other words, the goal of YHWH's tabernacling presence hinges on YHWH's "ways" (v. 13), which given the burden of the dialogue, stand for nothing less than the essence of YHWH's justice.[169] Sarna adds precision to this point:

> From God's response to [Moses's request to see YHWH's "ways"], as given in 34:6-7, it is clear that Moses here asks to comprehend God's essential personality, the attributes that guide His actions in His dealings with humankind, the norms by which He operates in His governance of the world . . . Moses' request, like the assertion of Abraham before him—'Shall not the Judge of the earth deal justly?'—rests on the postulate that God is not capricious but acts according to norms that human beings can try to understand.[170]

This helps explain why Moses persistently presses YHWH in 33:12-18, even when YHWH appears to concede Moses's requests (e.g., vv. 15, 17).[171] Moses is much aware of the

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[168] Israel may have responded with contrition and reverence, but the breach is still real as the distance from the camp to the tent tells. Every time Moses goes out to the tent, Israel is reminded of the distance that remains. The trek for Moses, in other words, is pedagogical for Israel. Nonetheless, they have in Moses one who can intimately approach YHWH on their behalf.

[169] Cf. Gen 18:19: "to keep the *way* of YHWH by doing what is just and right." Cf. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 30-33, who shows "way" language is a typical in ancient Near Eastern royal talk for performance of justice and righteousness.

[170] Sarna, *Exodus*, 213. Cf. the similar remarks by Cassuto, *Exodus*, 433; Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 73; and Widmer, *Moses*, 148-50. Hence, YHWH does not rage irrationally (*pace* R. N. Whybray, "The Immorality of God: Reflections on Some Passages in Genesis, Job, Exodus, and Numbers," *JSOT* 72 (1996): 89-120, esp. 117-118). The story showcases a dialogical God who wants Israel to understand the contours of divine justice—its peril, cost, and promise.

[171] The brevity and ambiguity of YHWH's replies leave Moses (and the reader) still unsure of what exactly is being pledged. YHWH could be hedging on the promise of presence *with the people*, for YHWH never explicitly states this in either v. 15 or v. 17. These can be taken as personal assurances for Moses (sing. "you") apart from the people. For his part, Moses's "I" shades into "we" throughout the negotiation. He first leverages his favored status before YHWH in

theological quandary presented by Israel's corruption in YHWH's moral economy.[172] Hence, despite the pledge from YHWH that "even this word which you spoke I will do" (33:17)—namely, (the original plan) that the divine presence go with the people (33:15-16)—Moses continues to prod, "Show me your glory." It is a bold request, but not because it is principally for a personal theophany.[173] The glory of God elsewhere in Exodus represents God's guiding presence manifested among his people (16:7, 10; 24:16-17; 40:34, 38).[174] Moses wants visual confirmation that YHWH will indeed accompany Israel in the tabernacling glory as anticipated in 29:42-46 (cf. 40:34-35). Such a sign, however, will do more than certify divine reconciliation with the people. The tabernacling glory will ensure Israel's "distinctiveness" among the community of nations (33:16), thus buoying YHWH's covenantal purposes through Israel on behalf of the world. (cf. 19:6).[175] And it is only after this final plea, which harkens back to the vocational

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order to keep YHWH's presence *with the people* front and center in v. 12. He goes further in vv. 15-16: "I and your people" can only remain distinct among the nations if God goes with Israel. Here Moses reintroduces the wider, creational purposes of Israel (cf. 19:6) as reason to grant his request.

[172] God's reticence effectively underlines the tremendous risk inherent in Moses's request (see Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 231).

[173] I think it is a mistake to cast Moses's prayer as an impromptu desire for a private, mystical encounter (representative of this view is Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 436). The thrust of his mediation has been to persuade YHWH to be present with the people. However, I do not dismiss the need Moses might feel for reassurance of his own leadership, which the new role for the messenger may have put into question.

[174] There is much disagreement over what exactly Moses asks for, but here I agree with the interpretation of Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 232-33. He adds, "Moses' request to see God's glory would seem to be the expected next step" based on how YHWH's glory functions in Exodus. Also supportive of this reading is Jacob, *Exodus*, 2:973; and Widmer, *Moses*, 157-58.

[175] Drawing out Israel's distinction (*plh*) was a focus in the plague account (8:22; 9:4: 11:7).

vision of Exod 19:6, that YHWH agrees to do "the very thing you have asked" (33:17).[176] Moses appeals to see YHWH's glory because YHWH's concession in v. 17 seems too facile. After all, Israel is still a sinful, stiff-necked people. Moreover, it is not at all evident how YHWH's earlier assessment—that divine presence among the people would mean annihilation—can now be avoided. Moses wishes to see the actuality of God's tabernacling glory among the people, or said differently, God's justice worked out.

Moses has requested to see the glory, but he will receive much more. He *asks for* visual confirmation of the accompanying presence. YHWH knows, however, Moses (and the people he mediates for) *need* an aural, educational revelation that details how the glory of the presence can be made possible among an immoral Israel.[177] Both the preparation for the theophany (33:19-34:4) and the theophany itself (34:5-7) emphasize the "glory" Moses hears rather than the "glory" Moses sees.[178] The preparation begins by YHWH adjusting Moses's entreaty: the divine "goodness" (*ṭûb*) will pass before Moses. The revelation of glory Moses seeks will be manifested and exegeted under the rubric of YHWH's goodness—a term used elsewhere to signify God's gracious commitment toward

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[176] YHWH goes on to say, "for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name" (33:17). Moses's favor is undoubtedly a factor in his successful intercession with YHWH. But as Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 177, points out, the new element in Moses's intercession in v. 16 is YHWH's purposes with Israel (not Moses's favored status—see vv. 12-13). This is what "clinches" the response from YHWH. It is also noteworthy that Moses does not appeal to YHWH's mercy, but rather aims to persuade YHWH based on YHWH's larger agenda.

[177] This is Moses's "Mamre moment" (Gen 18; see ch. 2). Beginning in v. 19, God reassumes the active role in the mediation which signals that what is about to happen depends solely on divine initiative (Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 75).

[178] Based on the way the actual event is reported (34:5-7), the appearance is more of a "theo*phony*" than a theo*phany*.

Israel.[179] The passing "glory as goodness" will also entail a proclamation of YHWH's nature (i.e., the Name (34:6-7)). YHWH's further qualification, "I will have grace on whom I show grace and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion," underlines the connection between the coming display of the glory/goodness/Name and the deeper issue of YHWH's justice. It is an *idem per idem* idiom that emphasizes YHWH's freedom (similar to the disclosure of the divine name in 3:14), but the idiom does so in a way that accentuates the divine proclivity toward mercy.[180] This provides the first hint of YHWH's "ways" (v. 13) toward reconciling the tension between grace and wrath. An additional stipulation to bring a second, blank set of tablets up the mountain anticipates that the encounter will result in a reestablishment of covenant (34:1-2).[181] This, in turn, also adumbrates a resolution of mercy and judgment within YHWH's exercise of justice that has flowed as an undercurrent through these last two chapters.

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[179] Cf. Gen 32:10; Deut 23:7; Josh 24:20; 1 Sam 25:30; Jer 18:10; Pss 25:7, 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 145:9. See Childs, *Exodus*, 596; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 607. Sarna, *Exodus*, 214, notes *ṭûb* "bears the technical, legal meaning of covenantal friendship, that is, amity established by the conclusion of a pact" in ancient Near Eastern treaties. From another angle, Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 606, suggests (following Rashbam and Luzzatto) that the language of "passing by" also carries connotations of covenantal renewal by virtue of the parallel to Gen 15:17 (cf. Jer 34:18, 19).

[180] It is a statement of freedom, but there is no mention of punishment! Cf. 32:33; see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 730; *pace* Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 607. It does not follow that this is a blanket promise to withhold punishment (*pace* Fretheim, *Exodus*, 306), but it is grounds to trust that YHWH's compassion will characterize the situation (Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:702).

[181] Childs, *Exodus*, 611. Diana Lipton, "God's Back! What Did Moses See on Sinai?" in *Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity*, eds. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, TBN 12 (Boston: Brill, 2008), 287-311, revives a prevalent, ancient interpretation that understood YHWH's "back" (*'āḥôr*) not as an anatomical but a temporal reference, i.e., the future. She argues that in Biblical Hebrew what is located behind is in the future. This interpretation accords well with Moses's anxiety over the future presence of God leading the people. YHWH's answer to see the "behind" (future certainty) fits as an answer to Moses's concern.

6.4.3 Exodus 34: The Justice of Restoration

Moses ascends with blank tablets ready to encounter YHWH. As promised YHWH descends, the "goodness" passes by, and YHWH discloses the divine name. The declaration begins with a double utterance of the name "YHWH," which is followed by extended commentary on the content of that name.[182] The proclamation is the fullest expression of the most celebrated formula of YHWH's core, relational disposition within Israel's canon.[183] The declaration's meaning, nonetheless, is circumscribed if it is distanced from the literary context of the intense conundrum caused by Israel's apostasy.[184] It is the backdrop of Israel's "great sin" as not just a stark betrayal of the covenant (via a return to Egypt) but a rupture in creation itself that makes the declaration shine most brilliantly. Rather than give specific attention to each word or phrase,[185] I offer the following general observations on how the confession develops the narrative concern for YHWH's justice exercised toward Israel.

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[182] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 609, usefully dubs the whole declaration "one long divine name." Not only is the declaration in vv. 6-7 an interpretation of the name proclaimed in v. 5, it can be understood as an expansion of 3:13-15. The twice repeated name could be translated "YHWH is and remains YHWH." This translation recalls the original *idem per idem* construction in 3:13-15 and so expands the explication of the name given there (cf. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 735; Jacob, *Exodus*, 968).

[183] See the citations listed above in n. 106. The number and range of the echoes attest that this confession lies at the heart of Israel's understanding of YHWH. Laarson, *Bound for Freedom*, 387, compares its significance for Jews to that of John 3:16 for Christians.

[184] Widmer, *Moses*, 169, 175-83, ably documents this tendency and notes the surprisingly attenuated treatment of this text by many commentators.

[185] Helpful in this regard are the studies by Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," 6-24; Thomas Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" *HBT* 13 (1991): 38-58; Hermann Spieckermann, "Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr," *ZAW* 102 (1990): 1-18; Lane, *The Compassionate but Punishing God*, 27-31; and more extensively Mattias Franz, *Der barmherzige und gnädige Gott: Die Gnadenrede vom Sinai (Exodus 34, 6-7) und ihre Parallelen im alten*

First, the declaration is lopsided in its emphasis of YHWH's awesome graciousness. The literary structure of the confession has at least two possible arrangements, each of which breaks the confession into two main parts.[186] The first, more common structuring splits it into two parts at the adversative *waw* in v. 7b ("*however*, [YHWH] will surely not leave unpunished . . ."). This results in a confession that highlights seven positive expressions at the beginning (vv. 6b-7a) compared to two negative phrases at the end (v. 7b-c).[187] The second option treats "YHWH, YHWH" as a heading, followed by two parts: (1) five positive attributes (v. 6) state YHWH's fundamental nature, and (2) four phrases—two positive, two negative (v. 7)—fill out how the attributes are enacted.[188] Either structure privileges the compassionate, long-suffering lovingkindness of YHWH.[189] Hence, the declaration's structure showcases that YHWH

Testament und seiner Umwelt, BWANT 160/20 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 43-93; and Widmer, *Moses*, 183-202.

[186] On the following two ways of structuring, see Lane, *The Compassionate and Punishing God*, 25-27.

[187] Interestingly, both halves in this division are comprised of a total of 15 words each in Hebrew.

[188] Widmer, *Moses*, 189. The last four phrases are tilted toward the positive as well: YHWH will exercise *ḥesed* toward a thousand generations but will visit the iniquity only up to four generations.

[189] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 946, comments "[t]he use of the seven terms [in vv. 6b-7a] has cumulative impact. It is not possible or necessary to delineate precisely the meaning of each term by itself, for the effect of the whole is to assure Moses (and Israel) that God is deeply committed to sustaining covenant with Israel, even when the other party is careless and unresponsive . . . It is crucial and precisely characteristic of this God that the statement of self-disclosure is given in the moment when God is most deeply offended and Israel is most profoundly in jeopardy."

wants to be understood first and predominantly as a God of grace in relation to "iniquity, rebellion and sin."[190]

Second, the declaration is a significant recalibration of YHWH's previous, related self-description in the Decalogue (20:5-6). The earlier formula in 20:5-6 focuses first on YHWH's jealousy in wrath against the one who opposes YHWH and then concludes with a briefer pledge of love to those who keep the commandments. Here, in contrast, YHWH flips the order of the attributes—from judgment-mercy to mercy-judgment—and greatly expands the theme of mercy.[191] The inversion testifies to a change of approach in YHWH's covenantal comportment toward Israel: YHWH now leads in relationship with compassionate loving loyalty (*ḥesed*).[192] YHWH is "a jealous God" (20:5b), but YHWH resolves to be jealous first for grace in relationship. Jealousy expressed through vengeance will be slowed, even subdued, by patient mercy.[193] Furthermore, the

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[190] The three-fold description of transgression, "iniquity, rebellion, and sin," emphasizes the comprehensive range of Israel's sin that YHWH bears (cf. Lev 16:21; Ps 32:1-2). On this vocabulary see Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament*, 229-35.

[191] On this point see esp. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 736-38, who calls 34:6-7 "an inner-biblical transformation of the Decalogue;" cf. Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 87-88; Jacob, *Exodus*, 982-83; Sarna, *Exodus*, 216; Widmer, *Moses*, 184. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 236, observes "God's compassion has been kept fairly well hidden until now, but the fact that it is the first word to be used in his self-description may thus be very important in revealing something of the struggle that has been going on with the deity himself."

[192] The term *ḥesed*, which I translate as "loving loyalty," is the only one mentioned in 20:6 and the only one mentioned twice in 34:6-7. It carries with it the idea of an action of unmerited favor. See further Gordon R. Clark, *The Word* Hesed *in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 157 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 166, suggests that the parallel with 20:5-6 means to stress the positive outworking of jealousy, i.e., jealousy is the basis of *ḥesed* and not judgment alone (cf. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 737: "grace builds on jealousy").

[193] Cf. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 737-38; Widmer, *Moses*, 186-87. Both Dozeman and Widmer want to see a progression in the narrative concerning the expression of YHWH's wrath: YHWH resolves in 34:6-7 not to react as swiftly with divine recompense as in 32:10-11. If v. 7 is

contingency of YHWH's graciousness for "those who love me and keep my commandments" mentioned in 20:6 is absent in 34:6-7.[194] YHWH declares now that loving loyalty is categorically preserved for "thousands [of generations]."[195]

Third, YHWH can indeed respond with faithfulness toward a faithless Israel because YHWH chooses to "bear" (*nś'*) Israel's sin.[196] The metaphor of YHWH's "bearing" sin implies something about the cost of disarming sin that is lost by the common translation "forgiving:" YHWH shoulders the burden of sin's punishment and/or guilt. Rolf Knierim explains the metaphor:

> Though there is forgiveness of sin, this does not mean that sin is ever forgotten, said not to have happened, or understood not to continue to be a destructive possibility. The one who forgives bears and suffers the burden of suffered violation her/himself, thereby relieving the sinner at least forensically by declaring that the sin has lost its right to oppress or destroy the sinner's life and future. Who, having suffered violation, can also suffer its effects so that the guilty are free to live, even in death, except God? If there is liberation from a guilt-determined fate, it is through the suffering of God, who "is bearing guilt and crime and sin."[197]

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understood as an expression of the divine attributes rather than constitutive of them, one could argue further that divine wrath is a circumstantial response rather than a representative element of YHWH's core identity (cf. Jacob, *Exodus*, 983-84; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 302; Widmer, *Moses*, 337).

[194] Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 87-88.

[195] The confession is within the context about what Israel may expect from YHWH when seeking restoration. The text does not have in view those who remain as unrepentant sinners within the covenant (see further Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 422). On the translation of *'ălāpîm* as thousands (of generations), see Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 173.

[196] Widmer, *Moses*, 191, insightfully remarks that YHWH may be taking up the suggestion of Moses in 32:32.

[197] Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 447. For a larger discussion see Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament*, 73-91, 220-22; Mark E. Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 122-27. In this metaphor the burden of sin is not so much eradicated as transferred to God, which is missed with the gloss "forgive" (Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe*, 221).

In the context of Exod 32-34, YHWH's core, merciful character expressed in "bearing sin" means Israel's rebellion will not prevent the rehabilitation of covenant and, more to the point, the tabernacling glory. Israel's sin cannot, finally, shatter the covenantal bond. Moses asks for YHWH to "forgive" (*slḥ*) and YHWH grants the restoration of the relationship (vv. 9-10). How exactly God "bears" the burden of sin remains a mystery at this point in Exodus.[198]

Fourth, the declaration—as well as the commandments which follow (34:11-26)—underscores that YHWH's commitment to lead with loving loyalty does not forfeit moral order or retribution. The final, negative phrases of the declaration (v. 7b) are admittedly more challenging to understand and to square with the previous positive statements. However one construes these verses—and I will offer an interpretation—the bottom line takeaway is that YHWH's merciful *ḥesed* does not soft-pedal sin. The declaration pivots from mercy to judgment with an adversative *wāw* ("but" or "yet") followed by the phrase "[YHWH] will not completely empty out/leave unremitted" (*wənaqqēh lō' yənaqqeh*) sin of its negative repercussions. What this verbal expression means precisely is less than clear,[199] but at the very least it indicates that YHWH's

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[198] There has been no means introduced for atonement (cf. 32:30). In this respect the confession prepares for Leviticus. Cf. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 237.

[199] See the survey of options by Widmer, *Moses*, 192-93. C. Van Leeuwen, "נקה," *TLOT* 2:763-67, says the verb *nqh* has at its core the meaning "to empty out." It is common in legal contexts where it "indicates freedom from (socio)ethical obligations, punishment, or guilt" (766). The verbal phrase (a *piel* infinitive absolute followed by a *piel* imperfect) has no direct object, so one is left to supply what is not emptied out. Since the previous statement declares that YHWH bears sin, I do not see why this phrase should be taken as its expressed opposite (e.g., "YHWH will not forgive/clear sin/guilt"). Rather, it offers nuance to YHWH's proclivity toward mercy in judgment. For a wider treatment of the verb *nqh* with reflections on YHWH's vengeance in the wider biblical canon, see H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM*

deployment of abundant mercy does not automatically preclude every consequence that follows in sin's wake.

The next participial phrase helps to fill out some of its implications. YHWH will "visit sin (*pōqēd ʿăwōn*) of the fathers upon the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation" (v. 7d).[200] The idea of "visiting sin" builds off a recognition of the organic nature of sin in the divine moral order.[201] Sin is more than a discrete act; rather, sinful deeds have consequences that can mature over time, some of which are irreversible even if forgiven. That is—in this instance—though YHWH is merciful to the people and will take them as "inheritance" (34:10), YHWH's grace does not necessarily obviate all repercussions for their sin (e.g., 32:25-29, 34-35). YHWH's "visitation" of sin attests to an active, divine mediation of the moral order (the deed-consequence nexus). The unfortunate reality is that sin, once unleashed in the world, can negatively affect a continuum (or collective) of folk. Children (and grandchildren) often must live with the realities of parents' sin. The phrase "to the third and fourth generation" attests to this aspect of sin's reach; that is, successive generations, regardless of their moral standing, often endure (and even participate in) sin's consequences.[202] Yet, the extent of sin's

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and the Function of the NQM- Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament, OTS 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

[200] Unfortunately, the meaning of the phrase "sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" has also occasioned much discussion and disagreement (see the survey of Widmer, *Moses*, 194-200). The debate itself shows that (1) the phrase is vague enough to legitimize more than one interpretation and (2) any interpretation must rely on other texts.

[201] See ch. 2 above.

[202] See the helpful discussion of Biddle, *Missing the Mark*, 120-21, 127-30. Sin can produce consequences and so pervert conditions that subsequent generations are predisposed to sin. The notion that God "visits the sins . . . to the third and fourth generation" can be understood to point in this direction. As Biddle puts it, "ancestral guilt is not a debt left for later generations

visitation is limited to the number of generations alive in the guilty party's (i.e., the parent) lifetime.[203] I take the limitation of YHWH's "visitation" to the largest conceivable family unit at one time to be the point of emphasis here, given that "three to four generations" stands in unbalanced parallelism to the "thousands" of generations with whom YHWH preserves loving loyalty. In other words, sin's visitation will be restricted to the lifetime of the guilty one, which could affect three to four generations. These final phrases of the declaration do not definitely answer how YHWH's "not completely emptying out" and "visiting" sin's consequences work out in the complex web of human living.[204] In this way the declaration calls to be probed by the continuing story of YHWH's relationship with Israel even as it forms an anchoring point for the story.[205] In sum, the last phrases serve as testimony that YHWH's tremendous compassion toward sin does not

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to pay, but a heritage in which subsequent generations participate, a tradition that they continue" (120). The previous form of the declaration in Exod 20:5 would appear to assume that "visitation" falls on the third and fourth generations because they are guilty of hating God. In other words, the third and fourth generations are judged for their perpetuation of their ancestors' sin. Nonetheless, the declaration is also open to be understood that the "third and fourth generation" bear the repercussions of their parents' sin without themselves being morally culpable. Widmer, *Moses*, 198-201, 311-28, argues forcefully for this interpretation. He regards the intertext of Num 14:20-35 as the hermeneutical key to 34:7b, viz., Num 14 is a complementary commentary on the complex notion of visiting the father's sin on subsequent generations. He argues rightly that YHWH's judgment in Num 14 affects primarily the sinful generation. Other, younger generations must bear the effects of the sin by wandering in the wilderness for forty years because of the sinful generation. But the notion that they have to pay for the sins of the fathers is not present. Instead, the sinful generation's death marks an opportunity for the "children and grandchildren" to proceed no longer under judgment (Num 14:33). They become the potential bearers of the divine promise. He argues further that "visiting sin" is better captured by the idea that YHWH comes "to examine or access the moral standing of successive generations before appropriate measures are being taken" (202).

[203] Cf. 2 Kgs 10:30; 15:12.

[204] Cf. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 440.

[205] Or to use another metaphor, Israel's ongoing story works as the "fine print" of the declaration.

mean YHWH condones sin.[206] YHWH upholds a divine order of justice, which, though characterized by copious mercy, *ḥesed*, and bearing of sin, must not be presumed upon.

In response to the divine declaration, Moses bows in worship and then prays for YHWH's presence with the people (v. 9).[207] He admits Israel's recalcitrance, which had previously prohibited YHWH's "in the midst" presence on threat of annihilation (33:3). Now, he paradoxically proffers that obstinance as the very reason for YHWH to "go in our midst" (v. 9).[208] Israel has not changed, but YHWH's revelation has disclosed a deeper "way" (34:13) that can bear with, and be with, Israel. As I mentioned above, this paradox, viz., the cause for God's wrath becoming the cause for God's mercy, mirrors the dynamic at work in the flood (Gen 6:5; 8:21). The parallel suggests Israel's relationship with

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[206] To use the phrases of the confession, YHWH "bears sin" but he also "visits sin." The conclusion of Widmer, *Moses*, 338, is helpful: "Patience, in the light of YHWH's willingness to bear Israel's sins, is the restraint of deserved wrath; it is the divine enduring of disloyalty and personal offence in the hope that Israel will ultimately recognise YHWH as Lord and God without having to assert it with power and judgment (cf. Pss. 78:38–40, 89:29–35). Although God's moral demands are upheld and punishment is exerted if necessary, the fact that YHWH has adjusted His priorities out of His inmost nature and Moses' mediation, reveals that He is fundamentally graciously and loyally committed to His people." Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, has made this declaration a centerpiece of his theology. He argues in several places (e.g., 227, 270-271,276, 307-311) that the statement reveals a profound disjunction in the life of God, and God's wrath and mercy stand in unreconciled tension. While I have appreciation for Brueggemann's contention that the confession "alerts Israel to the reality that YHWH's full character is not subsumed under YHWH's commitment to Israel in solidarity," I am less sanguine about his attempt to read an unresolved ambiguity into YHWH's justice. For an incisive refutation of this plank in Brueggemann's thesis on exegetical grounds, see Widmer, *Moses*, 180-83, 305-11.

[207] Moses's response shows that he had Israel in mind when he asked to see the glory. Moses does not thank YHWH for a personal mystical vision but instead understands the theophany as an occasion to underline YHWH's presence with the people.

[208] Widmer, *Moses*, 208, lists the support for ascribing causative force to the *kî*. Daniel C. Timmer, "Small Lexemes, Large Semantics: Prepositions and Theology in the Golden Calf Episode (Exodus 32-34)," *Bib* 88 (2007): 92-99, argues that Moses's careful use of "in our midst" (*bəqirbēnû*) echoes the ideal of the tabernacle (*bətôk*; 25:8; 29:45). This signals more than YHWH's concession to go "with" (*'am*; 33:12, 15, 16).

YHWH is as dependent on YHWH's gracious nature as is humanity at large.[209] Moses appeals for the forgiveness they need if YHWH is to be present among them as planned in the tabernacle. Finally, and climatically, YHWH renews the covenant with Moses and the people (34:10; cf. v. 27).[210] YHWH employs creational language to express the marvel of the new development: "I will make wonders (*niplā'ōt*) which have never been created (*br'*)[211] in all the earth/land or in all people" (v. 10).[212] That is, what YHWH does in renewing the covenant with Israel and what this act anticipates will be done through Israel is creational in scope, both in its magnificence and its effect. The commandments that follow do not annul any previous demands; rather, this rendition highlights those commands more relevant in light of the proclivities of the people revealed by the sin of

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[209] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 304-5, draws out this point further: "God's actions toward Israel are not unique: This is the way of God with the world . . . It may thus be claimed that it is as creator that God makes these moves on Israel's behalf; this is God's way with the world generally. God's creation-wide ways are here realized at the microscopic level. Yet Israel's particular participation in this divine way with the world has a special place; it holds promise for particular participation of other peoples . . . Indeed, 34:10 has this world already in view." While I agree that 34:9 places Israel's restoration on a similar ground with the world in the flood, what YHWH does with Israel goes beyond any "wonder" that has transpired in the past (34:10). Cf. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 420-21.

[210] YHWH cuts the covenant with Moses in v. 10, but v. 27 makes clear the covenant is with Moses and the people (see further Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:719-20). I once heard my teacher Ellen Davis report David Hartman's vivid definition of covenant that captures the moment in Exod 34: covenant is God's decision to withhold God's wrath and maintain a realistic view of God's creation. I might add that covenant is not just God's decision to withhold, but God's decision to give just mercy.

[211] Only YHWH is said to *br'* (create) in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 1:1).

[212] The created wonders can refer to the covenant renewal, to wonders that will occur in Israel's future journey to the land (v. 11), and to the wonder of Moses's transfiguration (vv. 29-35). Widner, *Moses*, 213-15, wisely suggests that one need not choose between these. The use of "wonders" (*nipl'ōt*) from the verbal root *pl'* recalls both the wonders YHWH wrought in Egypt with the plagues (3:20; 15:11) and also plays off the distinction motif (*plh* a by-form of *pl'*) in 33:16 (cf. 8:18 [22]; 9:4; 11:7; so Sarna, *Exodus*, 217). Hence, the wonders here gesture toward much the same function as the signs in Egypt.

the golden calf.[213] The laws underline the jealousy of YHWH for complete obedience as they look ahead to the temptations that will come in the habitation of the land. The emphasis falls on liturgical implementation of exclusive allegiance to YHWH in the land. The laws connect *ritual* allegiance to socio-economic practice in a way that reflects Israel's covenantal commitment.[214] Hence, the significance of liturgy's role in envisioning and sustaining a socially just community adds to the importance of the liturgical implementation of the tabernacle in chs. 35-40. Chapter 34 closes when Moses returns with the second set of tablets and commences the process of building the tabernacle.

Israel moves into the future as not only redeemed but now forgiven.[215] YHWH has proven powerful and compassionate enough not only to rescue Israel from oppressors but to rescue Israel from destroying themselves. What kind of justice is revealed in the latter rescue? The climactic declaration acts as a prism, refracting the variegated attributes that express YHWH's justice, i.e., the divine ways (33:13) of ordering the world.[216] YHWH's

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[213] Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 96; Sarna, *Exodus*, 217. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 742-45, provides an extensive discussion about the relationship between vv. 10-27 (the "cultic Decalogue") and the Book of the Covenant. He perceptively observes that the Messenger is absent in vv. 10-27 though its presence is prevalent in 23:20-33, where many of the laws repeated in vv. 10-27 are found.

[214] Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 949-52, stresses this point.

[215] Widmer, *Moses*, 208-211, 316-20, 338-40, argues at length that Moses's request for forgiveness (*slḥ*) does not mean the eradication of sin or the dismissal of punishment but only the gracious renewal of the covenant. In other words, Israel *as a privileged people* may continue, but the generation may yet face the "visitation" of their sins. Israel gets to continue, but the flipside of the story relativizes any one generation of Israel. For now this generation will carry forward YHWH's promises and goals; nonetheless, any particular generation of Israel is dispensable. Cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:711.

[216] In the foregoing discussion I have deliberately refrained from describing the situation as mercy triumphing over *justice*. This description works with a definition of justice that is

justice is so revealed as YHWH's goodness-glory, characterized fundamentally by divine *ḥesed*, long-suffering patience, and mercy. Forgiveness is held out as an expression of YHWH's justice, not its contradiction. David N. Freedman explains:

> The establishment of the moral order of the universe, and the principle of justice in human affairs, were acts of grace. They exemplified the compassion and loyalty of God. At the same time, forgiveness was itself a part of the process of justice. In the Bible, justice is not conceived as a rigid system of retribution for wrong-doing, but a flexible process by which good is promoted and evil restrained . . . If punishment was the normal procedure with the guilty, it was not, at the same time, the only procedure. It was not even the preferred method. For mercy in the Bible is held to be a higher form of justice. Forgiveness does not contradict judgment; it is based upon it.[217]

YHWH's disclosure of glory does not announce that patient mercy triumphs over just retribution for sin (consequently compromising moral judgment). YHWH remains committed to moral judgment and its administration; hence, divine wrath stands always as a reserved possibility against sin (v. 7b). Mercy is not automatic, cheap, or exploitable.[218] But YHWH's moral economy of justice is revealed to be larger than the justice of strict retribution or "fairness." There are better, deeper, more enduring expressions of justice than others.[219] Moses and Israel learn YHWH's justice flows from

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primarily about YHWH's wrath or retribution. Although retribution is certainly an aspect of Old Testament justice, I am here working with a wider definition of justice as YHWH's intention for harmonious order (see ch. 2).

[217] Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," 14-15. Cf. Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive," 46-47; Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 109; Widmer, *Moses*, 337; Houston, *Justice*, 65.

[218] R. W. L. Moberly, "How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 53 (2002): 200.

[219] Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 102, 109, 122. Knierim recognizes that justice is "subject to the criterion for what is good or better. It serves that criterion." He contends justice as pardon is "an act of better justice." He continues to argue for the complexities inherent in the practice of justice. Justice is about "balancing the contentions of many coexisting factors for their rightful place in the world" (118). However, Knierim elsewhere maintains that Israel's

the divine character and serves the divine ordering of the world.[220] In the deliberation of justice in Exod 32-34, YHWH confronts the wrong, invites human intercession, remembers covenantal promises, and takes account of the larger creational agenda.[221] Through all of these considerations, YHWH (with Moses) weighs coinciding concerns which then are revealed to filter through the YHWH's essential glory-goodness. And then YHWH acts justly. YHWH does not forfeit just retribution, but neither is YHWH's justice beholden to an inflexible calculus of forensic retribution. The revelation declares YHWH's justice slants toward mercy. Israel's covenantal life is made possible by YHWH's patient, *and just*, graciousness.

6.4.4 Summary

Israel's cultic innovation below the mountain ushers chaos into the community reminiscent of the catastrophe of the flood. The narrative also describes it as a portal for a Pharaonic order that threatens concomitant injustice. It is a paradigmatic sin whereby

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"nationalist covenant justice" is incompatible with a broader universal justice. To my mind Knierim fails to fully account for the fact that the ends for which God elects Israel are part of the "coexisting factors" that God considers in adjudicating justice in Israel and in the world. The deliberation over justice in Exod 32-34 acknowledges both particularistic and universal concerns, and these do not appear to be incompatible as much as in need of ordering them in the right "balance."

[220] The character of divine justice as long-suffering and merciful as well as "visiting sins" is already on display in YHWH's interaction with Pharaoh (see ch. 4, passim, but esp. n. 139). Of course, Pharaoh is not a covenant partner, so there is a difference in expectations. Nonetheless, I have suggested that God exercises patience with Pharaoh, forbearing his opposition for a period of time until a day of judgment comes. Divine forbearance is not unlimited. Exodus 32-34 reveals something beyond what was revealed to Egypt in the plague narrative, but something that is commensurate with it. YHWH is gracious and compassionate but does not leave guilty unpunished; and YHWH's justice serves the divine creational agenda.

[221] The same happens in Gen 18.

Israel reveals themselves as dependably disobedient, in need of liberation from the interior oppression of moral decay. The sequence of episodes following the bull worship grapple with the "if" and "how" of the way forward in this new set of circumstances. At the heart of the dilemma is the nature of YHWH's justice. The story advances in stages toward a theophany of YHWH's glory-goodness that climaxes in the declaration of Exod 34:6-7. The declaration proclaims YHWH is inclined toward abundant mercy without dispensing with judgment. It is the glory, goodness, and justice of YHWH to bear the sin of Israel, but that just, glorious good cannot abide sin indefinitely without judgment. The revelation walks Israel through the doorway to renewed covenantal relationship without making YHWH's justice a doormat to sin. Israel's past liberation, present restoration, and future service to YHWH have all been earmarked with creational wonders. The *just* presence of YHWH can now come into their midst.

6.5 RETURN TO THE TABERNACLE

The remaining chapters of Exodus return to the storyline of ch. 31. Israel begins to build the tabernacle, but the Israel by and among whom the tabernacle is now erected looks different. As Everett Fox puts it, "without [chs. 32-34] the book of Exodus would be incomplete or at least hopelessly idealistic and idealized."[222] The interruption of the golden calf "in the midst of" the tabernacle account (creation, fall, recreation pattern) highlights that Israel shares the sin problem of all of humanity. Anti-creational chaos

[222] Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 437.

threatens within the elect, too.[223] The people need and want a divine presence, but left to their own devices, they are unable to build for worship-service beyond their own malformed (Pharaonic) creaturely desire and design. They disobey the divine command and fashion a counterfeit *miškān* that reflects an "Egyptianized" universe of order (Pharaonic *miskənôt*, as it were).[224] Their actions show the importance of worship by narrating the severe consequence of getting it wrong (i.e., idolatry). Humans in general, and Israel in particular, need YHWH's commanding kingship—and the "space" it creates—to help elevate their liturgical imaginations in order to fund an alternative existence.[225] Their abject failure in making the golden bull makes good sense of the emphasis placed on gratitude and obedience in the tabernacle's construction in chs. 35-40. But it also keeps Israel's incredible privilege (their election) in building for justice

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[223] The tragic sin of the golden bull right on the heels of Israel's commitment at Sinai offers a paradigmatic word about the failure inherent in the elect's covenantal commitment. Childs, *Exodus*, 175-76 is worth quoting at length: "The canonical function of Ex. 32-34 is to place the institutions of Israel's worship within the theological framework of sin and forgiveness. Moses had not even descended from the mountain with the blueprint for worship (32.1ff.) before Israel turned to false worship. The covenant relationship stood under the shadow of human disobedience from the outset. The golden calf incident in ch. 32 is portrayed, not as an accidental misdeed, but as a representative reaction, constitutive to human resistance to divine imperatives. The worship inaugurated at Sinai did not reflect an ideal period of obedience on Israel's part, but the response of a people who were portrayed from the outset as the forgiven and the restored community. If ever there were a danger of misunderstanding Sinai as a pact between partners, the positioning of Ex. 32-34 made clear that the foundation of covenant was, above all, divine mercy and forgiveness." Cf. similar remarks of Jacobson, "Moses, the Golden Calf," 137.

[224] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 280-81, notes several ironic parallels between the golden bull and the tabernacle. Also see Childs, *Exodus*, 542-43; Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 466-81.

[225] Or as Sacks, *Exodus*, 204, eloquently puts it, "[t]he Tabernacle mirrored the universe to tell us that we too can be creators of universes, but only if we heed the will of God. Without that, we will eventually become destroyers of the universe." Also see the reflections of Davis, "Tabernacle is Not a Storehouse."

from becoming an arrogant swagger of possessing justice.[226] The story is rigorously self-critical. It is a chastened Israel, enlivened by their liberation from evil both without and within, that now engages the good work of building for justice in a way reflecting YHWH's character.[227]

This is all to say that the golden calf interruption of the tabernacle account heightens the latter's decidedly moral foundation and ethical frame. The resumption of the tabernacle happens only because YHWH's forgiveness creates space for Israel to fulfill the tabernacle commands.[228] Moreover, Exod 32-34 not only tells of the loss and restoration of the presence in the midst of Israel, but it helps to fill out what the presence "in the midst" means. Hosting the holy, while attending to the portable shrine's "beauty of holiness" (Ps 96:9), means also attending to the moral beauty of YHWH's attributes. When Israel sees the glory of YHWH fill the completed Tabernacle in ch. 40, then, Israel knows goodness, *ḥesed*, and mercy—i.e., the just ways of YHWH—fill the tabernacle.[229] In short, when the transcendent glory becomes visibly immanent in the midst of the

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[226] Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 101, notes it always remains a balance for Israel between "overestimating its own significance" and disparaging "its place in YHWH's purpose for the world."

[227] One might even say, drawing on the comparisons to Pharaoh's Egypt, that Israel as a chaotic force has been "conquered" by YHWH's justice for the purpose of representing YHWH's cosmic reign.

[228] This fact curtails a triumphalist rendering of Israel's construction of the tabernacle.

[229] The tabernacle assemblage happens on the first day of the new year (40:2), which echoes the beginning of the new world in wake of the flood (Gen 8:13; Weimar, "Sinai and Schöpfung," 369-72). Yet, as Leder, "Iconography of Order," 321, points out, the new creation following Noah takes place only after the waters of chaos have been quelled. Thus, the new creation depicted by the tabernacle building happens after Pharaoh (12:1, 25-26) *and* Israel's chaos have been dealt with.

camp, Israel's counter-cosmic vision beholden to the presence of YHWH has moral justice at its center.

For Israel the portable dwelling of YHWH remaps the world's moral topography according to YHWH's good, creational justice. The echoes of the beginning of Genesis at the conclusion of the tabernacle account place Israel's building within a creational horizon and YHWH's universal claim of rule (as set up by the echoes at the first of, and throughout, Exodus). The climax of Exodus in the tabernacle, with its homological linkage to creation, underlines that YHWH has acted in Israel to "point to and actualize the meaning of creation."[230] Deliverance, covenant, and restoration of the elect all serve the creational end of YHWH's just order on earth.[231] The book of Exodus has moved from the liberation from the "great house" of Egypt (i.e., Pharaoh) to the building of YHWH's "great house," and in doing so, it has put Israel's story back in step with YHWH's rule of "justice and righteousness" that inheres in the "great house" of the cosmos (Gen 1).[232] The sacred space memorializes the true King's victorious rest over the chaos threatening

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[230] Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 181. Knierim engages in a lengthy discussion about whether creation serves Israel's existence or whether the purpose of Israel serves creation (171-224). He cogently defends the latter position (though I think his reading of creation as liberative is misguided—see Landes, "Creation and Liberation"), but his reasoning sits in ambiguous tension with his arguments in his essay on Old Testament justice (94-100).

[231] As Leder, "Iconography of Order," 295, puts it, the allusions "frame the historical acts of YHWH within his acts of creation with the result that Israel is required to hear about [themselves] and the actions from the point of view of the creation order." Moreover, as Leder points out in "Coherence," 267-68, that the evocations signal that the fundamental problem of conflict in Gen 3 finds "tentative resolution" in God's indwelling presence among Israel.

[232] Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus*, 23, points out that "the completion of the construction of Pharaoh's storage cities is never recorded, whereas the completion of YHWH's dwelling is elaborately narrated."

creation. Israel is poised to realize the moral order that reflects YHWH's creational agenda.

6.6 CONCLUSION

If Sinai institutionalizes the exodus, then the tabernacle as YHWH's portable dwelling institutionalizes (and mobilizes) the Sinai experience. The instructions and construction of the tabernacle (25-31, 35-40), interrupted by the idolatry of the calf and its aftermath (32-34), shape Israel more deeply for their vocation of "building" toward justice. The trajectory of justice we have followed through the book of Exodus climaxes in the dwelling of YHWH in the tabernacle among the people. The justice of YHWH finds ongoing expression in the redeemed, priestly-royal, *worshipping* community of Israel. The following summarizes the main points in this chapter:

- Israel's experience in Egypt demonstrates that human ingenuity and power left to themselves know all too well how to build in ways that result in injustice. With the tabernacle YHWH commands and Israel responds with a different habitus for properly ordered worship-service. The narrative attends to how Israel builds with gratitude, obedience, wisdom, and Sabbath rest in order to display an alternative to Pharaoh's ethic. The construction of the tabernacle is Israel's first apprenticeship in YHWH's creational justice.
- Ancients built sanctuaries to be symbolically reflective of the cosmic order. The tabernacle narrative follows this convention, which is seen not least in the way it calls to mind the creation of the world in Genesis in a variety of echoes, thematic connections, and literary parallels. These allusions imply that the sanctuary, the literary climax of the Exodus story, is a "carefully calibrated universe" that

emblematizes YHWH's creational ethic.[233] Hence, Israel's vocation to do justice finds its telos and orienting center in the portable tabernacle and its routinized worship.

- Israel's sin with the bull is narrated with echoes of the flood narrative and the former Egyptian oppressor, depicting the worship of the bull as a creational pivot point that endangers the covenant. Moses and YHWH have a series of intense exchanges that revolve around the nature of YHWH's justice in dwelling among a covenant-breaking people. Israel's paradigmatic sin touches off a paradigmatic declaration of YHWH's good and just glory. The declaration emphasizes YHWH's justice leads with abundant resources of mercy without forfeiting the moral order.
- The golden calf episode in the middle of the tabernacle narrative accents the tabernacle's moral shape. The glory that fills the tabernacle in ch. 40 symbolizes the divine King in victorious rest over all that would oppose. Exodus ends with a picture of Israel in harmonious worship-service to the enthroned God in their midst. The chaos that threatened creation since Gen 3 is overcome. Creational justice is on display for the world to see.

[233] Sacks, *Exodus*, 282.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In Psalm 99:4 the poet extols YHWH for His reign of justice and righteousness:

> Strong King, He loves justice (*mišpāṭ*);
> You have established equity (*mêšārîm*);
> You have done justice (*mišpāṭ*) and righteousness (*ṣədāqâ*) in Jacob. (v. 4)

The psalm opens by calling all peoples of the earth to tremble before YHWH the king (v. 1). Indeed, this proclamation comes on the heels of the previous psalm's summons for all of creation to await joyfully the advent of YHWH (98:7-8), for "[YHWH] is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples with equity" (98:9). Yet, in 99:4 the psalmist locates the epitome of the execution of YHWH's just rule as actualized already *in Jacob*. The justice anticipated by creation and its creatures has been prophetically showcased among the strong King's elect people.

My purpose in this study was to explore how Exodus showcases YHWH's "justice and righteousness" in the reclamation of Jacob's enslaved descendants from Egypt. Exodus is not the first word or the last word on justice, but it is Israel's archetypical word in its witness to and for the world. The exodus motif is, according to Michael Fishbane, the "consummate expression of divine power and national redemption . . . the temporal historical paradigm in whose image all future restorations of the nation are to be manifest."[1] Or as Yair Zakovitch nicely puts it, "[a]ll the raw materials needed to

[1] Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 121.

construct scenarios of the future redemption are found in the traditions of the past redemption, the Exodus, sometimes amalgamated with elements borrowed from Creation traditions."[2] Exodus is the codified, pedagogical memory that gives normative direction to YHWH's charge to Abraham's heirs "to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice" (Gen 18:19). I have argued that YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egypt and sojourn at Sinai function as the pivotal experience for Israel's educative re-orientation to YHWH's creational justice, especially justice in relationship to the poor. In this final chapter, I do not offer a synopsis of my findings, which I have provided at the end of each chapter. Instead, I return to the tensions on the justice of Exodus noted in ch. 1 as a means to offer some brief, summarizing reflections about the contours of justice revealed in Israel's foundational story.

7.2 UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR JUSTICE IN EXODUS

Does Exodus evince two discordant concepts of justice, one rooted in YHWH's kingly, impartial rule of the world and another arising from YHWH's partisan patronage of Israel? My investigation has shown that these two categories of justice are not juxtaposed in (confused) tension; rather, Exodus presents the latter as in service to the former. The pervasive creational categories at work in Exodus, which depend on and develop the creational trajectory set in Genesis, urge an interpretation of YHWH's action (toward Israel and non-Israel) as nested within YHWH's creational agenda. Israel stands as the recipient of the privilege of the Abrahamic promise (12:1-3) but also receives the

[2] Zakovitch, *And You Shall Tell Your Sons*, 57.

responsibility of its vocation with regard to justice (Gen 18:17-19). YHWH's execution of justice on behalf of Israel in Egypt, while triggered by the particular covenantal promises (2:24), preserves and promotes the creational justice toward which Israel is called. Israel's summons to justice in the covenant and the tabernacle point to Israel's telic role in actualizing YHWH's just rule on earth. Israel's fate in Exodus carries cosmic consequences. Thus, YHWH's patronage of Israel carries forward YHWH's kingly order over and for the world.

What, then, of the charge that YHWH's justice in rescuing Israel results in YHWH's behaving unjustly toward Pharaoh and, more to the point, the innocents in his regime? Is YHWH indifferent to the suffering of Egyptians? I have argued that YHWH's judgment of Pharaoh is an example of YHWH's universal, kingly justice that upholds an overarching (natural) justice.[3] From the get-go the narrative's creational categories expose Pharaoh's rule as flagrantly violating YHWH's good, creative purposes—particularly Israel's role therein.[4] Egypt's anticreational reality under Pharaoh is the narrative's antithesis for a society constituted by justice. Accordingly, the plagues are public, creational judgments that correspond to Pharaonic Egypt's transgression of YHWH's cosmic order—a transgression expressed by the oppression of Israel who bears the creational blessing. Nonetheless, the narrative states that YHWH gives opportunities for Pharaoh and Egypt to

[3] I also suggested (ch. 6, n. 221) that YHWH's response to Israel's obstinance in Exod 32-34 and YHWH's response to Pharaoh's obstinance may be different in degree but not in type.

[4] This discussion challenges the idea that justice *as fairness* is the best (and broadest) way to conceive the justice of Exodus—notice that this is the definition Houston, *Justice*, 1, gives in the first line of his book on justice in the Bible. Contemporary definitions of justice as fairness, impartiality, or even deliverance of the oppressed, fail to account for the larger creational agenda and good that the justice of Exodus assumes. I return to this below.

mitigate the deathly destruction (9:19-21).[5] Indeed, the story does not rule out the possibility that Egyptians could join Israel in the Passover preparations. It is even more plausible that some Egyptians join Israel in the departure (12:31).[6] These are indications that push back against a description of YHWH's judgment of Egypt as indiscriminate or heedless of Egyptian suffering.

A straightforward historical reading, moreover, misses how the narrative's creational-pedagogical categories effectively lift the drama up as a meta-historical battle pitting YHWH against Pharaoh. In the drama Pharaoh becomes a representative of anti-creational Chaos.[7] Egypt as *Pharaoh's* domain, thus, accrues symbolic significance as a rival dominion uncompromisingly arrayed against YHWH.[8] This more symbolic reading further dilutes the charge that YHWH targets innocent bystanders, Egyptians or otherwise, in the quest to deliver justice to Israel.[9] The story instead spotlights the mythopoetic portrayal of the clash of two, unevenly matched opponents: YHWH against Pharaoh's Egypt. The mythopoetic symbolism serves the theological agenda of the story, viz.,

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[5] I have also defended the view that YHWH's "strengthening" of Pharaoh, far from a calculated strategy to prevent Pharaoh's repentance, actually preserves the possibility for Pharaoh to willfully choose to do justice and righteousness.

[6] Because of the promises to the ancestors, YHWH brings Israel out of the land. But because of Egypt's calcified, unjust milieu (Pharaoh's heart is a reflection of it), the promised extrication out of the land results in a just dismantling of the system. To state it another way, the justice of Exodus does not derive from two dissimilar (and in tension) concepts. They are layered outworkings of the one creational agenda of the faithful God.

[7] This portrayal is part and parcel of a larger, mythopoetic structure that encompasses the whole book.

[8] I have argued that a similar move is evident in the Amalek episode of Exod 17.

[9] Notably, the text only acknowledges two groups, Israel and Egypt. Exodus uses "Egypt" or "Egyptian" as a symbol of a force arrayed against YHWH's purposes, but the text also illustrates that "Egypt/ian" as opposed to "Israel/ite" is not a hermetically sealed category.

YHWH judges unjust Chaos to re-establish creational order in the world. The symbolism furthermore helps to highlight who is indicted for the suffering entailed in creational injustice. What happens to the empire of Egypt pivots squarely on Pharaoh's obdurate, failed leadership (13:14). The tyrant will not concede to YHWH's "signs and wonders." *Pharaoh* is responsible for bringing catastrophe on his realm and the innocents therein (13:14). In this way the story also underlines the historical realism that a people's fate is intertwined with its ruler's governance.[10]

7.3 EXODUS, CREATION THEOLOGY, AND TRANSFORMATION OF OPPRESSIVE HEGEMONY

Given the tendency of creation theology to preserve the status quo, does Exodus's widespread use of creational categories sabotage the book's revolutionary witness against injustice? To be sure Israel was not distinct among its contemporaries in understanding its identity and destiny in creational categories. Ancient empires characteristically appealed to cosmogony in order to legitimate their societal orders.[11] Israel's historical experience was marked by the propensity of world powers (even Israel's own rulers[12]) to

[10] I recognize that I have avoided any discussion about the alleged in/justice involved in the dispossession of the Canaanites. The event is forecasted in 3:8 and (more extensively) in 23:20-33. Inasmuch as I have attempted to stay within the action of the storyline of Exodus, I have not discussed the Israelite entry into the land. Inasmuch as the issue of the Canaanite dispossession has been the focus of much recent theological work, especially with regard to the morality of YHWH, I am sure I could not have dealt "justly" with the topic within the limits of this project.

[11] See ch. 1, n. 54.

[12] See e.g., Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 101-21, for criticism of royal psalms in this regard.

justify their authority on the malleable categories of creation. These circumstances frequently resulted in a hegemonic status quo of injustice (exhibit A: Pharaoh's Egypt!). Furthermore, the ancient Near Eastern ideal of "justice and righteousness," which was anchored in creation theology, did not aim to transform social inequity but only to restore the vulnerable to their divinely-ordained stations in life.

Yet, this milieu did not vitiate Israel's tradents from using creation theology to cast a different vision of justice. I have shown how Exodus employs creational and pedagogical motifs (to a large extent reverberations of Genesis) both to couch and to narrate YHWH's transformative activity in Egypt and at Sinai. The upshot of this literary move is twofold with respect to this discussion. First, Exodus reads as an application of creational justice. The book tells the story of YHWH reclaiming the good purposes of macrocosmic creation in microcosmic Israel.[13] Consequently, Exodus sharpens the distinctiveness of Israel's creational vision by distilling creation theology's definitive application. By appropriating and extending the creation traditions manifest in Genesis and elsewhere, Exodus perspicaciously narrates a *just* implementation of YHWH's creational agenda. Exodus is creation theology properly "concretized" for and in Israel, paradigmatically on display for the world to witness. And given the paradigmatic nature of this story in Israel's scriptures, Exodus is understood as the normative, canonical expression of creational justice.

Second, Exodus makes clear that at the heart of a "justice and righteousness"

[13] Noted particularly well by Fretheim, "Reclamation of Creation." Cf. Middleton, "Is Creation Theology Inherently Conservative," 265-70.

calibrated to YHWH's creation is an insistent, unparalleled attentiveness to the vulnerable as part of a new society. YHWH is the Creator who hears, remembers, suffers with, redeems, dignifies, and summons—in a word, *transforms* powerless and vulnerable slaves into priestly-royal servants of the one true King. The Exodus memory fetters Israel's identity and ethic to a God who works this kind of "justice and righteousness"—where the marginal are no longer marginal. Israel did not have a monopoly on justice in the ancient world. Nonetheless, by rooting Israel's identity and ethic in the exodus experience (from Egypt to Sinai), the exodus becomes the clarifying, revolutionary hermeneutic for Israel's creational self-understanding, law, and vocation. For Israel not to pray, remember, work for, and, if called upon, suffer for a community where the poor are heard, delivered, and dignified would be for Israel to deny their very identity. The story thus generates an ethical imagination that moves beyond restoration of a status quo toward transformation of a disparate group into a redefined, creationally-just society—a human community participating in YHWH's "preferential option for the ordering of a neighborly community."[14] To conclude, then, Israel's creation theology does have a (quite good and necessary) orienting, stabilizing function. But by presenting Exodus as the paradigmatic application of YHWH's creation agenda, the memory of Exodus challenges any use of creation theology which would contravene those purposes.[15]

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[14] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 193. See further Lohfink, *Option for the Poor*, 32-37. He maintains, rightly in my view, that the fact YHWH removes the "poor" out of Egypt and into a new society reveals a revolutionary ethic in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern social ideology. Lohfink does not, however, give enough credence to the ethical ramifications of YHWH's dismantling of the Egyptian system.

[15] As an application of creation, Exodus encourages one to interpret Genesis and other creation texts as evincing corresponding liberative proclivities. See Brueggemann, "Response to

7.4 EXODUS, DELIVERANCE, AND ELECTION

Does the staunch particularism of Israel's election subvert the universal implications of the Exodus story?[16] Israel of the exodus is YHWH's blessed elect, heir of the divine endeavors in Genesis. The ancestral promises move YHWH to reclaim Israel. How, then, can what happens to Israel be paradigmatic for a wider ethic of justice? Once again, a creational-pedagogical framework serves as the primary way the narrative affirms and extends its universal import. This framework offers a viable way, emerging from within the text, to uphold the inviolable nature of the covenantal promise to the ancestors and to justifiably project Israel's vision of justice onto a universal stage. Tapping into the creational and pedagogical substrata brings to the foreground how the story of the Exodus negotiates Israel's experience in relationship to the nations, or better, for the nations. When read in light of these underpinnings, especially as a sequel to

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J. Richard Middleton," 288-89. From a different historical perspective, consider John Coffey's response to Mark Noll in "*Exodus and Liberation*," 220-21: "The second problem Noll identifies is the *problem of plasticity*. The book repeatedly shows that Exodus was twisted to fit a host of rival agendas. Its reception history can look like a case study in 'narrative self-fashioning.' So was it simply a useful literary trope adopted at will to clothe and legitimise incompatible causes? Readers of the book will make up their own minds from the evidence presented, but I think it shows that the Exodus story carried a potentially explosive theological claim that proved hard to defuse. As the great historian of slavery, David Brion Davis, has noted, Exodus 'has conveyed the astounding message that in the past God actually heard the cries of the oppressed and was willing to free slaves from their masters.' Those who co-opted the Exodus narrative to bolster their own power frequently found that this core message was turned against them . . . Thus while the Exodus story has been commandeered for a host of rival agendas, it has been difficult to control. It has forced its Christian readers to reckon with a vision of God who sides with a downtrodden and marginalised people against the empires of the ancient world. Exodus has often been invoked by the powerful (Constantine, Cromwell, Lincoln), but in such cases the powerful have had to present themselves, and even to act, as defenders of the weak. To use Exodus was to make oneself vulnerable to critique from those on the underside of history (and their defenders)."

[16] This question returns to the concern addressed in section 7.3 but with a specific focus on election.

Genesis's creational trajectory, the justice of Exodus takes on metahistorical significance. "The events of history are prismatic openings to the transhistorical"[17] such that Israel's experience "stands as and stands for a story about all peoples everywhere."[18] Yet still, it is Israel's story, which means that YHWH's emancipation of slaves cannot be neatly severed from YHWH's formation of those slaves into holy community. These are not so much competing dimensions in the canonical text as different junctures in the redemptive sequence.[19] Faithful appropriation must reckon with each phase of Israel's salvation, and a creational-pedagogical framework situates these phases into a coherent whole.

If ethnic Israel cannot be read out of the story, then it is also true that they are not the whole story. In this regard it is significant that Israel's foundational story positively affirms non-elect participation on behalf of Israel. The midwives, the Egyptian princess, and Jethro all appear at pivotal moments to keep the possibility of promised Israel buoyant. Indeed, the midwives and Jethro attest to the reality of creational justice alive among outsiders; Jethro even instructs the elect in justice's proper application! And, as I have argued, the mixed multitude as a part of Israel's exodus is a proleptic foretaste of the scope of YHWH's creation-wide salvation. On the flipside, Exodus presents Israel as just as inclined to the allure of the patterns of injustice that enveloped their former captors (Exod 32). That these examples of blessing by other peoples and Israel's own failures abide in Israel's national origin narrative leads to a proper humility about the

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[17] Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 140.

[18] Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 26.

[19] This fact is underlined by how Exodus's structure resembles the ancient Near Eastern combat pattern.

non-elect. Israel is God's firstborn, but this status hardly nullifies—and could be taken as an implicit indication of—others who come later in the birth order but who are no less loved.[20]

Israel's election is nowhere fully explained; it remains finally a mystery of divine love. Yet, what is not mysterious is that Israel's election is bound up with YHWH's desire to bless the world (Exod 19:5-6). And Israel's mediation of justice and righteousness is at the heart of this agenda (Gen 18:17-19). Exodus is Israel's training ground in justice for the sake of the world. YHWH is for Israel, but YHWH is for the world through Israel.

7.5 THE JUSTICE OF EXODUS FOR THE CHURCH

7.5.1 The Justice of Exodus and the Church's Justice

In this final section I gesture toward two areas where my research intersects more explicitly with the Christian church's theology and practice of justice. First, how does the justice of Exodus relate to a contemporary theological ethic of justice? On this question I find that Daniel Bell's account of justice favorably aligns with the vision of justice I have traced in Exodus.[21] Bell believes two notions of justice are dominant in contemporary Christian understandings of justice and Scripture. On the one hand, a "social justice

[20] Hartman, "Sinai and Exodus," 386, says God's chosenness of Israel "expresses particular special intimacy and does not negate the possibility of other intimacies."

[21] Bell develops his exposition, which I can only here summarize in the briefest of terms, in two articles: "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," *ExAud* 22 (2006): 86-111; "Deliberating: Justice and Liberation," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 182-95. I have also benefited from Stanley Hauerwas's review of Bell's work in "Jesus, the Justice of God," in *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 99-116.

advocacy" approach uses Scripture as a resource to be mined for the norms and values of justice—alternatively labeled as the preferential option for the poor, freedom and equality, or human rights. On the other hand, a "justice as justification" approach regards social justice as secondary to the more foundational matter of individuals entering into a saving relationship with Jesus.

Both accounts, Bell contends, capitulate to modernity's individualistic and thin definition of justice (usually expressed as a concern for human rights) rather than remain robustly theological and ecclesial. He faults both for displacing Scripture and the church as necessary for showing what it is to know and to do justice. The first assumes an external standard by which Scripture and the church's tradition is "evaluated, valued, and pruned according to how it serves or hinders social justice."[22] The second makes a similar move by positioning Jesus as the victim of divine justice understood essentially in the pagan category of *suum cuique*—"to each his due." Both end up privatizing theological claims about socially just relations. Scripture and the church can and should inspire justice, but they are finally irrelevant in defining and doing justice. It is assumed in both that justice is extrinsic to Scripture and the heritage of the church.

In contrast, Bell advocates a Christological vision of justice that entails Jesus as the fullest disclosure of God's justice. In Jesus God shows his relentless fidelity to the biblical trajectory of promise, blessing, and salvation. Justice is displayed "as the divine redemptive solidarity that has as its end the restoration and renewal of the communion of

[22] Bell, "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," 89.

all in God."[23] One forceful consequence of Bell's reading is the displacement of the classical notion of justice as defined by *suum cuique*.[24] Jesus is not the victim of justice but its embodiment. Jesus in his faithfulness and obedience manifests God's desire for restored relationship in the world. In contrast to the worldly idea of justice as a strict rendering of what is due, Jesus as the embodiment of God's justice subsumes *suum cuique* in the larger divine agenda, i.e., the divine order of love. Justice as retribution is re-calibrated toward the end of restoring shalom with God.

> Justice is inseparable from the scriptural drama of redemption, of the renewal and restoration of the communion of all in divine love in accord with the divine creative intent . . . Jesus is the climax of the covenant, the promise of redemption, the justice of God who in his person breaks down the walls of hostility and restores the communion of all in God. Thus, the call to justice is the call to be joined to Christ and so to Christ's body, the church, whose life is just insofar as its life is centered in and ordered by Jesus who is the justice of God.[25]

Justice is never limited to a strict economy of retribution.[26] Mercy and grace are not opposing logics to justice; "rather, they share a single end: the return of all love, the sociality of desire, in God."[27]

Bell's account of justice corresponds with Exodus's presentation of justice as oriented within God's redemptive agenda in the world (which Bell describes as the divine

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[23] Ibid., 95.

[24] Bell, "Deliberating," 189, states Jesus as God's justice "plays havoc with justice understood simply as *suum cuique*." David Johnston, *A Brief History of Justice* (Malden, MA; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), argues that reciprocity—his description of the notion "to each his due"—is the fundamental idea of justice through the ages. Retribution rests on this principle of reciprocity.

[25] Bell, "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," 100.

[26] Bell, "Deliberating,"189.

[27] Bell, "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," 100.

order of charity).[28] I have shown that justice as a strict accounting for what is due (i.e., fairness, impartiality) is not the final arbiter for YHWH's justice in Exodus. Though YHWH remains committed to moral judgment—and does indeed redress injustice—mercy and forgiveness remain the vanguard expression of YHWH's exercise of justice. Justice serves YHWH's creational agenda, and as such is not beholden to a fixed logic of forensic retribution, or for that matter, a presumption of mercy. Bell himself recognizes that his articulation of biblical justice synchronizes with the more restorative vision of "justice and righteousness" in the Old Testament.[29]

Two ramifications Bell draws out from his proposal are even more suggestive for the practice of justice by the church.[30] First, his vision emphasizes (in parallel to my findings in Exodus) the importance of liturgical participation as the pathway into knowing and doing YHWH's justice. For Christians the work of justice is shaped in gifted participation in the service-worship of Jesus. This includes first the liturgical practices that form the church into Christ's body. Through immersion in ecclesial life—e.g., baptism, Eucharist, and worship—the church as a justified, communal entity is oriented toward and learns to embody union with God as the correlate of true justice. Second, Bell believes the justified set forth to do justice in the wider world. The people of God are to be an exegesis and are to exegete justice in the larger world. But if justice has as its end

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[28] Bell develops his account in conversation with the apostle Paul, Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. It is Aquinas who gives him the language of "divine order of charity."

[29] Bell, "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," 99-100; ibid., "Deliberating," 190-91. He draws principally on Weinfeld, *Social Justice*.

[30] These are the two Bell spells out in "Deliberating," 192-94 He ruminates in further ways on the particularism and universalism of justice (against the charge of sectarianism) in "Jesus, the Jews, and the Politics of God's Justice," 101-6.

reconciliation of all in God, and if justice leads with mercy, then the church practices justice in works of holistic mercy that are oriented toward bringing others into the triune fellowship. Works of mercy as justice move beyond modern philanthropy to address the rupture of sin in personal, social, and spiritual dimensions.

I have given only a précis of Bell's account, but one I submit demonstrates valuable congruence with the justice of Exodus. This is not to say Bell's proposal is without difficulty. I think Bell could benefit from a more robust creational framing of the telos of God's justice. Creation theology would locate deeper, more enduring convergence between the justice of the church and (natural) justice in the broader world.[31] Bell does not consider how (or if) a retributive notion of justice fits within his "divine order of charity." Exodus challenges any notion of justice that leads with grace and mercy not to dilute God's corollary commitment to an order that can (and does) employ vengeance.[32] Nonetheless, I recognize in Bell's account an instructive partner in extending many of the contours of justice I have argued are woven through Exodus.

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[31] See for example the effort by Jodie Boyer Hatlem, "On Law and the Noachic Covenant: 'Can the Judge of the Whole World Not Himself Do Justice?'" *ExAud* 30 (2014): 69-87.

[32] I would criticize Bell's imprecise use of "justice" in this regard. In places it seems to be limited to the principle of *suum cuique*, while in other places he wants (rightly) to broaden the term to include mercy and forgiveness.

7.5.2 Justice and Pedagogy

The second area I want to reflect upon briefly arises out of Exodus's pedagogical concern for justice. In the introduction I noted how the category of cultural memory alerts interpreters to the educative intent of the text. The text is explicit about its educational agenda at times (Exod 12:26; 13:8, 14), but in my exegesis I highlighted how a pedagogical motif percolates throughout the story. More specifically, I demonstrated how Exodus communicates a passion for moral formation *into justice*. From the first episodes of Moses's life, to the dismantling of Pharaoh's corrupt *ma'at*, and throughout Israel's strides, stumbles, and summons from Egypt to Sinai, the book of Exodus attends not just to the substance of justice but to the process of nurturing a social imaginary that abides in YHWH's justice. In short, Exodus can be read as a "journey toward justice."[33]

If Exodus reveals something of a journey toward justice, how might it compare to a contemporary theological proposal for teaching/learning justice? Roger Bergman's *Catholic Social Learning* develops such a pedagogy of justice that is rich with examples from his nearly 30 years of teaching experience.[34] The focus of his account is on the

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[33] I borrow from the title of Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Journey Toward Justice: Personal Encounters in the Global South*, Turning South: Christian Scholars in an Age of World Christianity (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). Wolterstorff, himself a major theorist on the philosophy of justice, has shown particular interest in the subject of pedagogy and justice. See his "Teaching for Justice: On Shaping How Students Are Disposed to Act," in *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, ed. Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 135-54; and "Teaching Justly for Justice." *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 10 (2006): 23-37.

[34] Roger Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith That Does Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

education of the non-poor on behalf of the poor[35]—how one learns faith that does justice—a theme he finds woefully lacking in official Catholic social teaching. He writes especially but not exclusively for the instruction of emerging adults, whom he thinks are "particularly ripe for the experience of vocation," in Catholic higher education.[36] Two questions, he states, have guided his reflection as a social justice educator: "(1) How is a commitment to the difficult work of social justice provoked in the first place? and (2) How is that commitment sustained over a lifetime?"[37]

Bergman builds his proposal on a process he dubs the "pedagogical circle"—an educational strategy for transformation that moves through encounter with the poor and injustice, social analysis, theological reflection, and vocational discernment.[38] He stresses the importance of extended, personal encounter with the experiences of the poor.[39] Bergman commends Peter-Hans Kolvenbach's directive:

> Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think,

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[35] The language of "non-poor" is used and explored in the fine essays found in Alice Frazer Evans, Robert E. Evans and William B. Kennedy, eds. *Pedagogies of the Non-Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987).

[36] Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning*, 161; see also 66-70.

[37] Ibid., 39.

[38] He builds on the "pastoral circle" proffered by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983). Holland and Henriot, in turn, were inspired by Paulo Freire's "circle of praxis," which was elaborated upon by Juan Luis Segundo.

[39] Two observations guide his emphasis on personal encounter: a Haitian proverb "What the eye doesn't see, doesn't move the heart;" and philosopher Gabriel Marcel's contention that change happens "through personal encounters. Nothing else ever changes anyone in an important way."

> judge, choose and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed.[40]

Empathetic participation (through an immersion experience or service learning) can trigger a disorienting crisis. This then leads through critical reflection to a constructive commitment on behalf of the poor.[41] An insightful theme in Bergman's vision is the integral place of disruptive pain and/or shame—"moral anguish"—in the conversion from naïveté to mature engagement in solidarity with the poor. The conversion is also well aided, argues Bergman, by attending to "moral exemplars," viz., men and women in history who embody the virtues and practices relevant to the pursuit of justice. He stresses too the need for a shared community of practice to nurture the commitment.

Bergman develops an intellectually rigorous account in conversation with a host of other perspectives, prominent among them are Alasdair MacIntyre's moral philosophy, Aristotle's moral education theory, and Ignatian pedagogy (he interacts less with Freire and Merizow; Groome is also noticeably missing). Conspicuously absent in his otherwise excellent analysis is thoughtful engagement with the biblical text or scholarship.[42] One could find an instructive analogy for Bergman's pedagogical circle in the arc of Moses's conversion from Egyptian privilege to Israelite leader. Moses's naïveté is disrupted early

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[40] Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning*, 31. The quotation comes from Kolvenbach's address entitled "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education" at Santa Clara University in 2000.

[41] Bergman is indebted to the educational theory developed by Paulo Freire and Jack Merizow.

[42] To be fair, Bergman does outline a curricular plan that includes the classes "Catholic Social Teaching" and "Faith and Moral Development." Still, there is little integration in his theoretical portion with Scripture. This may indicate the paucity of resources from the biblical guild on Bergman's topic.

when he "lets the gritty reality of the world" into his life (2:11-22).[43] His disillusionment leads to a literal and metaphorical journey away from the Egyptian "shared community of practice" toward a new identity and calling. In parallel fashion YHWH guides the erstwhile slaves through the wilderness in order to reshape their habitus and to prepare them to receive a new vocation. Both the disillusionment of Moses and Israel's trek illustrate the necessity and grace of "stumbling" through disconcerting wilderness. Exodus, however, is clear to point out that it is their encounter with YHWH in the disorientation that fundamentally alters their perspective—a point on which Bergman is rather thin. Moral formation in Israel is first about telling the story in which YHWH is "the subject of active verbs of liberation and nurture."[44] The reorientation to the neighbor is preceded and undergirded by a reorientation to one's identity and calling in light of YHWH's reality.

Finally, one of the more unambiguous affirmations Exodus makes about the journey toward justice, and one that poses a challenge to many contemporary theological pedagogies (including Bergman), is the covenantal and liturgical contour of the journey. According to the Exodus, true justice finds its telos in the creation of a covenantal community of redeemed worshippers. The exodus from oppression does not remove the specter of Pharaonic injustice from again threatening the liberated. Justice requires the covenantal, participatory construction of a counter-community centered around the

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[43] On the flipside, Pharaoh attempts to cordon himself off from such grittiness. And though he cannot escape the signs and wonders from impinging on his life (even entering his bedchamber!), he does not allow the grittiness to touch his heart.

[44] Walter Brueggemann, "Passion and Perspective: Two Dimensions of Education in the Bible," *ThTo* 42 (1985): 173.

dwelling presence of a holy God.[45] An exodus-shaped pedagogy, therefore, unites passion for the vulnerable with the passion for the formation of worshipping communities—all under the rubric of doing justice. "Without the holiness of God, the justice of neighbor becomes a crusade rather than a vocation."[46] True justice is formed by and ends in a communal response of awe, gratitude, delight and celebration for the God whose gift is justice.

7.7 CONCLUSION

Moses implores YHWH: "Show me your ways" (33:13); "Show me your glory" (33:18). Exodus is a kaleidoscopic display of the glorious ways of YHWH's justice in Jacob. The justice that Israel first experiences and then comes to know is rooted in YHWH's redemption, ordered by YHWH's service-worship, and aimed toward YHWH's restoration of creation. But Exodus continues to make the past present. Exodus endures.

> The Exodus was such an event as only a crudely superficial eye could read as an event that happened and ended, and that has remained as a magnificent memory in the history of Israel and in the general history of mankind. But in reality, with a penetrating consciousness, we come to realize that the essential event of the Exodus is one that *never ceases at all*. The public and manifest revelation of God's hand in world history is an explosion of the light of the divine soul which lives and acts throughout the world and which Israel, through its greatness and training in holiness, merits to disseminate powerfully through all the habitations of darkness to all generations. The essential work of the Exodus continues to have its effect; the divine seed which achieved Israel's redemption from Egypt is still

[45] On this point see the interesting exchange between Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Justice as a Condition of Authentic Liturgy," *ThTo* 48 (1991): 6-21, and Dennis Olson, "Which Comes First, Justice or Worship? A Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff," *ThTo* 48 (1991): 22-25.

[46] Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 37.

> constantly active, in the process of becoming, without interruption or disturbance.[47]

Exodus endures because YHWH, the strong King, loves justice. May those who follow in the train of Israel's God continue to exegete YHWH's creational justice and righteousness, especially on behalf of the poor, among and for the world.

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[47] Rabbi Kook, *Olath Re'iya* , 26-27, as quoted by Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 10-11.

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