

CHAPTER 2.

THE EXODUS NARRATIVES OF PRESENCE AND REDEMPTION.

2 A. THE CONCERNED GOD IS PRESENT, AND INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

Though the children of Israel had not yet seen themselves as a nation, they knew that they were a people who belonged together because they had the same roots, and that they were different to the other nations because of those roots. They had as their forebears' names of men who had a personal relationship with God. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were men who had a special covenant with God. The promises of God to these forebears also applied to them in some way.

There has been a longstanding consensus that covenant is a prominent concept in the Old Testament. Others have even seen it as the center of Old Testament theology (Odendaal 1989: 143-151), and they are correct to say that covenant theology proves, on closer examination, to hold the key to a question that has occupied the attention of Old Testament scholars: the question of the distinctiveness of Israel's religious faith. Their very political paradigm has been transformed into a religious metaphor giving expression to a unique relationship between Yahweh and his people. By covenant the bond between Yahweh and his people is guarded from degenerating into a natural physical union. But at the same time his people stand in a most intimate relationship to him of knowing him in a real personal way (p.146–147).

While man in general is the concern in the Primal biblical history (Gen.1-11), in the Patriarchal history with Abraham and later, Yahweh's concern is with individuals through whom he may provide salvation. The process of salvation operates in and through individuals whose very lives become the medium of accomplishment of the divine intention (Yarchin 1980:172). This time that individual is Moses for the benefit of Israel, the people of God and the offspring of Abraham.

Besides their roots-identity, the exodus (salvation) from Egypt would become the foundational marker to their nationhood. Their relationship with Yahweh is marked by the exodus. Whenever Yahweh relates to them, he reminds them that he is the God who took them from the hand of the Egyptians. He is the one who took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. He is the God who redeemed them with a mighty hand. In the light of this, Yahweh can speak of himself as *being their God* and them *being his People*. This clause would become the core covenant phrase in this relationship. This core covenant phrase also expresses itself throughout the Bible, and finally includes also those who are in Jesus Christ. This core covenant is by no means a minor aspect of the programme of God and of the relationship he is to have with his people. Maybe, a list of the appearance of this core covenant in the Bible is appropriate, showing it as a central motif in God's programme in this world - Gen.17:8; Ex.29:45; Jer.24:7; Jer.31:33; Jer.32:38; Ez.11:20; Ez.14:11; Ez.34:24; Ez.37:23, 27; 2Co.6:16; Heb.8:10 and Rev.21:3.

Certainly, this covenant clause already found itself in their forebears' vocabulary when God made a covenant with Abraham, and when he promised: *The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God* (Gen.17:8). The formula developed more completely, expressing the relationship in the statement, *I will be your God and you will be my people*. We do not mean to indicate a unilateral action as might be emphasized in this formula (van den Eynde 1999:124), but that the relationship and action is indeed reciprocal. This relationship became even more meaningful when God later revealed his name to them as his people. His name in many ways would clarify his own attributes, his redemptive activity and his relationship with them. To know God's name, is to know him and to know his character. If they were to identify with God as his people, they would have to emulate his character.

Yahweh was a God who was for them and with them. The fact that he was with them actually became the proof that he was for them. When God later gives them his laws, telling them how he is to be worshiped, he introduces it with the reminder that he is with them, and for them, because he has redeemed them. As being with

them and for them, God reveals profound insights about himself to them. Moses' and Miriam's (their) song acknowledged that there is no one like the Lord; *he is majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders* (Ex.15:11).

The theology of redemption is strongly emphasized. The most suitable biblical term for God's purpose with his creation is 'salvation' or 'redemption'. The redemption relationship includes salvation, the sealing of the covenant, and above all, his presence with them. While we see the Law as part of the covenant relationship, Breuggemann (1994:680) separates them only to see a convergence of what he recognizes as the four main themes of Exodus, namely, Liberation, Law, Covenant and Presence. He continues to say that we do well to recognize that this narrative is of a peculiar genre, a vehicle for the appearance of God's presence, God's first presence in the exodus narrative (1994:711). By his presence with them and through the covenant, they discovered his attributes of justice, truthfulness, mercy, faithfulness and holiness. If they were to be for him as he is for them, they would have to reflect these same attributes to the other nations. This relationship certainly had ethical significance. The foundation of biblical ethics and morality is laid out first in the character of Yahweh as revealed in the exodus itself and in the Book of the Covenant (Ex.20:22 – 23:33).

True worship was to glorify Yahweh by accepting his salvation, obeying his covenant and acknowledging his presence. His presence with them was first mediated through Moses, then through various theophanies, and finally through the tabernacle. The omnipotent, unchanging and transcendent God of the universe was with them. His gracious nearness showed that he was not only mighty on their behalf, but that he was also present in their midst. His presence made all the difference for them and their on-lookers, whether friend or foe!

Moses tried to be the mediator for this slave-people by defending a Hebrew man against his Egyptian overlord. His mediation was rejected by the retort, "...who made you ruler and judge over us?" (Ex.2:14). As his people were exiled in Egypt, Moses found himself exiled in Midian. What both Moses and the Israelites did not realize, was that their exile and enslavement contrasted with the free movement

that God promised them to have in their own land (van den Eynde 1999:136). Before God was going to meet with his exiled people, God first had to meet with the exiled man who now understood where his people were at.

God heard the groaning of the Israelites, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. God's man, Moses was in training for what God wanted him to do. Moses was called from tending the flock of his father-in-law to be the shepherd of God's people. The presence of God was the place at which Moses was appointed over God's people.

Ex.3:1-4:17 records the first encounter that Moses had with Yahweh. It is a narrative of theophany, it is a narrative of call, and it is a narrative of sending. The theophany happens in two parts, namely, the *visible* element which evokes the response of covering, and the *speech* element which evokes some boldness on Moses' part. In this encounter Yahweh called him to be the deliverer of his people from the hand of Pharaoh. The call and the sending of Moses constitute his commissioning by God. Moses tries to get out of this commissioning, but God provides answers to all his excuses. Moses was God's man in the remedy of the Israelite situation, and Aaron was to be his helper. We shall now consider this text.

Exodus 3:1 – 4:17.

1. Translation:

3:1 Now Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethrow, his father-in-law, a priest in Midian, and he led the flock² along the west side³ of the desert and came to Horeb⁴, the mountain of God.

² The idea here refers to small animals with the emphasis on sheep and goats. It has the idea of a flock consisting of the staple animals, providing milk, food and wool.

- 2 Then the Angel of the Yahweh⁵ appeared⁶ to him in fire coming from within⁷ a thorny⁸ bush. When he inspected it, behold, he saw⁹ that the bush, though it was burning, was not being consumed.
- 3 So Moses said to himself¹⁰, “Turn aside now, and go and inspect this marvelous spectacle to see why the bush does not burn up”.
- 4 When the Yahweh saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him from within the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!”. Then he answered, “Here I am”.
- 5 And God said, “Do not come near here. Take your footwear off your feet, because the place you are standing upon is holy ground.”¹¹
- 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”. Then Moses concealed his face¹² because he was afraid to look at God.
- 7 Then Yahweh said, “I have surely seen the oppression of my people in Egypt; and I have heard their cry in the presence¹³ of their oppressors, and I know¹⁴ their anguish”.
- 8 And I have come down¹⁵ to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land into a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the habitation¹⁶ of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.
- 9 And now, see, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and indeed, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.
- 10 So now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people¹⁷, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.
- 11 Then Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and also that I should bring with me the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”
- 12 And he said, “Surely, I will be with you. This will be the sign to you that it is I who sent you. When you have brought all the people out of Egypt, together you will worship God at¹⁸ this mountain.”

³ Literally, “the behind-side or the far-side” (that is in relation to the rising of the sun and the location of Midian).

⁴ The name, Horeb, literally means, “waste-land” or “desert”. It is another name for Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Law from God.

⁵ Elsewhere “LORD” may be a translation of the tetragrammaton.

⁶ The Niphal verb here could be expressed in the reflexive, “showed himself”.

⁷ Literally, “the midst”

⁸ The unused root of **שָׁבֵן** means “to prick”, thus “thorny bush”

⁹ Being an interjection-particle, it more accurately translates, “behold!” or “look!”

¹⁰ That is to say in his heart.

¹¹ The verse ends with a 3ms pronoun, **לְךָ** (to him), which would imply that the ground was to be considered holy by Moses.

¹² The Hiphil of the verb, to conceal, may have a double causative (to have two objects; either or both). So Moses could have concealed God from his sight.

¹³ Literally, “Before the faces”

¹⁴ God is in close proximity with their pain.

¹⁵ Literally, “from above to the earth”

¹⁶ The word, **מְקֹם־אֱלֹהִים** can also be translated “stronghold”

¹⁷ **אַת־עָמִים** has the connotation of a king. Yahweh presents himself as the King of Israel.

¹⁸ Literally, “on” or “upon”

- 13 And Moses said to God, “Behold, if I go to the sons of Israel and say, ‘the God of your fathers has sent me to you’, and they ask me, ‘what is his name?’ What shall I say to them?”
- 14 Then God said to Moses, “I am that I am”¹⁹. And then he said, “This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’”
- 15 And again God said to Moses, “This is what you must say to the sons of Israel, ‘Yahweh²⁰, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’. This is my name forever and it will be to my remembrance from generation to generation.”
- 16 “Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has appeared to me.’ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says, ‘I have seen²¹ and have taken stock of what was done to you in Egypt.’”
- 17 “Therefore I have declared that I²² will bring you out of your misery in Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites; to a land flowing with milk and honey.”
- 18 “Then, when the elders had heard your message²³, go with the elders²⁴ of Israel to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews²⁵, met with us. So now, please let us go a journey of three days into the desert and offer a sacrifice to Yahweh, our God.’”
- 19 “But I know that the king of Egypt will not give in to you. He will not let you go, until by my mighty hand *he does*²⁶”
- 20 “Then I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt²⁷ with all my performing²⁸ wonders which I will do in his midst. Then after this, he will send you away.”
- 21 “And for this people, I will put favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and when you go they²⁹ will surely not let you leave empty-handed.”
- 22 “So, every woman must ask from her female neighbor and other women in her house for articles of silver, and articles of gold, and clothing which you will put on your sons and on your daughters. So will you strip the Egyptians.”

4:1 Moses answered, and he said, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me, and say, ‘Yahweh did not appear to you.’?”

¹⁹ Or, “I will be what/who I will be”

²⁰ Here, the tetragrammaton is used as a proper name, even though in some translations it is used as a title “Lord” connected with the definite article.

²¹ The two words בְּקָרְבָּנִי used together, has the effect of, “seeing, I have noticed”, or, “counting, I have taken stock”

²² Though אֶתְחַכֵּם is not translated, the effect is one of personal connection denoting close proximity.

²³ Literally, “your voice”

²⁴ It also has reference to the chiefs, leaders or prominent ones of the people.

²⁵ This is a use often to distinguish them from the other nations. An ethnic group connected to Abraham, a stranger from the Euphrates area. Hebrew means, “one from beyond”.

²⁶ “he does” is added.

²⁷ We have selected the singular “Egypt” (rather than “Egyptians”) to facilitate for the singular בְּקָרְבָּנִי “in his midst”

²⁸ The Niphal participle necessitates “my performing wonders”; otherwise it can be translated, “my judging” in which case the plural nuance might be missed.

²⁹ The verb וְהִיא is Qal perfect 3rd person singular, but a plural translation is unavoidable.

- 2 And Yahweh said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he answered, “A staff.”
- 3 And he, *Yahweh*³⁰, said, “Throw it³⁰ to the ground.” And he threw it³⁰ to the ground, and it³⁰ became a snake. And Moses fled from its³¹ presence³².
- 4 Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Put³³ out your hand and take hold of its tail.” And he put out his hand and took hold of it³⁰, and it³⁰ became a staff in his hand.
- 5 “This,” *the Lord said*³⁴, “is so that they will believe that I, Yahweh, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, have appeared to you.”
- 6 And Yahweh said to him again, “Please put your hand into your bosom.” And he put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand being³⁵ leprous, was like snow.
- 7 And he said, “Return your hand into your cloak.” He returned his hand into his cloak, and when he brought it out from his cloak; here, it was as before; like *the rest of*³⁶ his flesh.
- 8 “Then if it is that they do not believe you, nor pay attention to the first sign, they will believe the next sign.”
- 9 “And if it happens they also do not believe the second of these signs, nor heed your voice, you shall take from the waters of the Nile and pour it out on dry ground, and the waters you took from the Nile, shall become blood on the dry ground.”
- 10 And Moses said to Yahweh, “Please my Lord, I am not a man of words, nor have I ever been before and after you spoke to your servant. Indeed, I am heavy³⁷ of mouth and slow³⁶ of tongue.”
- 11 Then Yahweh said to him, “Who gave man his mouth, or who makes him *to be*³⁸ mute, or deaf, or sighted or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh?”
- 12 “So, go now and I myself will be with your mouth. I will instruct you what you must speak.”
- 13 Then *Moses*³⁹ said, “Please Lord; please send whoever else you will send.”
- 14 Then Yahweh became very angry⁴⁰ with Moses and said, “Why not your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that surely he can speak well⁴¹. Besides⁴², see he is coming out to meet you; and he will rejoice in his heart when he sees you.”

³⁰ Implied. Not in the Hebrew text.

³¹ These are really in the masculine.

³² This noun is in the masculine plural.

³³ Actually, “send out”

³⁴ Implied. Not in the Hebrew text.

³⁵ The verb, **מִצְרָעַת**, as a Pual participle requires this translation.

³⁶ Implied.

³⁷ **כַּפֵּר** is more often translated “heavy” (11 times), rather than “slow” (twice)

³⁸ Added

³⁹ Implied. Not in the Hebrew text.

⁴⁰ The Hebrew literally says, “the nose of Yahweh became hot”

⁴¹ The verb “speak” is repeated to give this effect.

⁴² Or “also”

- 15 "And you shall speak to him and place words in his mouth. And I myself will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will instruct you (both) what to do."
- 16 "And he will speak to the people for you, and it shall happen that he shall be as your mouth, and you shall be as his god."
- 17 "And you must take this staff in your hand, so that you can do signs with it."

2. Exegesis:

Exodus contains the most fundamental and sublime revelations of God regarding his nature and will, and describes the beginnings of the theocratic constitution of the Israelitic people and the foundations of its ethics, law, customs, and worship. God as revealed in Exodus is not a new, hitherto unknown God: He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob – the fathers of the people – who has protected them and has been worshiped by them. (Hirsch, Jacob and Driver 2007:5).

In relation to this text, it is of importance to Jewish and Christian groups, and within all Christian denominations it is accepted as a story of importance, and there is not much disagreement theologically. Its theological applications may have varied foci, from evangelical to liberationist. God uses his power for moral purposes in order to establish law and liberty in the world, by destroying the wicked and saving the oppressed (3:8), in whose hands are given judgment and salvation. (Hirsch, Jacob & Driver 2007:5).

Now, we shall do an exegesis, looking first at the issue of genre; then, at some structural issues of this pericope; and finally, by providing a fairly comprehensive commentary on this text. We shall then do a theological reflection on the present text from which we will later derive ethical principles for application in our dissertation.

2.1 Genre.

It may be said that the literary typing of this text is generally classified as *narrative*. It certainly sets out to recount the story of Moses' call to deliver the Israelites. The story tells us that Moses was really unwilling to be Israel's deliverer, but that he finally gives in to the promise that Yahweh, the God of his forefathers, will be with him. This promise, however, does not completely satisfy him. So Yahweh also provides the presence of Aaron. This is more accurately a call-narrative which becomes paradigmatic in Israel's history.

The story this narrative sets out to recount is regarded, more accurately, as a *traditional* story. Even if one may not hold the source theories posited by critical scholarship, it is to be regarded as a traditional story because it becomes that in the subsequent religious and historical identity of the Israelites.

Furthermore, this traditional story is about Yahweh, the protagonist, and Moses, his agent, as the heroic characters about to save the Israelites from the cruel oppression of their Egyptian overlords and Pharaoh, the antagonist. Any long heroic story is also called a *saga*, and so we classify this story as *saga*.

This saga is told in *prose* format, in that it is written without rhyme or meter. It includes no poetic sections in the Hebrew text, and there is no particular aesthetic linguistic structure noticeable either. Many constructions have been made of thematic structures though.

2.2 Structural Considerations.

In the intellectual discourse arena, this text, as with the exodus event, has varied responses from the Historical-critical camp. Some see an accurate historiography, while others not. These two camps and everything in-between are expressed in other disciplines such as Source-, Form- and Textual criticism on the one hand, and archeology on the other hand. We agree with P.J. van Dyk's conclusions that

the Documentary Hypothesis is seriously questioned as an explanation for the origin of the Pentateuch and that important Yahwist materials should be re-dated. He goes on to say that the bastions of Pentateuch Criticism have fallen from grace or are currently seriously undermined. We cannot simply accept the Documentary Hypothesis as a working hypothesis, and neither can we speak with certainty about the dating of the different Pentateuchal layers. (1990:198f). We therefore are intent on discussing this text, and later texts in our research, purely as the final or matured text accepted by the Israelite religious community.

Whatever the process of formation of this text was, we shall consider only the biblical tradition in its final form. In taking this approach, we are seeking to do justice to the fact that the faith of Israel, in its drive toward verbal and literary expression, displayed restlessness with every preliminary form until it came to rest in the form of the text as we have it. (Janzen 1979:230). In Kruger's words, the canon as the canon is the outcome of social (and religio-political) conflict, insisting on a certain settlement of the conflict (1995:251). Rendtorff (1989:386) cites Childs, saying, The Old Testament texts in their present form are theological by nature. The final canonical literature reflects a long history of development in which the received tradition was selected, transmitted and shaped by hundreds of decisions ... resist easy diachronic reconstructions which fracture the witness of the whole. We deliberately adopt a synchronic reading of the text. While the diachronic reading may have its value, it often disregards the literary unity of the canonical text.

While there is considerable disagreement among commentators on fixing the limits of this section, with respect to the beginning and the end of the unit (Childs 1974:51), we need to state at the outset that Exodus 3:1 - 4:17 cannot be further subdivided without affecting its theological message. That it may be regarded by some as a secondary unit in terms of the history of traditions or as a literary interpolation (Noth), and whether or not it can be proven that there is an original literary connection between 2:23a and 4:19, it has to be accepted that this pericope is a well established unit. There has been more unity in the present text than has been generally recognized.

Certainly, the unit can be extended to 6:1 (e.g. Driver), or somewhere in-between, but the majority of commentators prefer to divide between the commission of Moses and the first encounter with Pharaoh. Fretheim recognizes a re-statement of the call narrative in Ex.6:2-7:7 (1991:51). Some of the difficulty in determining the end of the section stems from the secondary expansion in 4:21ff. Since it does not contribute to our particular purpose, we shall not here deal with the problem of sources, which can result in the undue atomization of the text. We therefore agree with Bäntsche and Childs (1974:52) in ending the commission section at 4:17, especially since it is widely accepted that 4:18 – 31 serves as a transition moving Moses back from Midian to Egypt (Breuggemann 1994:717).

Canonically, this can be seen as a paradigmatic call narrative. There are striking parallels with later call narratives (Jg.6, Jer.1, 1Kg.22 and Is.6) and it confirms a stereotyped structure. Our present text is, however, a greatly expanded form of the basic call narrative. This call includes the giving of a sign (3:12) and it has a prophetic commission making use of local tradition, and thus the setting is not mythological. Besides, the tradition of the holy place of the burning bush in the wilderness has now entered the Israelite tradition to give a concrete background to the story of Moses' first encounter with God (Noth 1959:39).

The unity of our text is demonstrated by the clustering of strategic verbs, and the recurrence of certain phrases showing a thematic unity. These will be demonstrated below. The extended dialogue between Yahweh and Moses further demonstrates the unity of the text.

2.2.1 Text Outline.

- a) 3:1 – 6. Yahweh appears to Moses.
 - i) 1 – 4 Yahweh appears in the burning bush.
 - ii) 5 – 6 Yahweh introduces himself
- b) 3: 7 – 10. Yahweh commissions Moses.
 - i) 7 – 9 Yahweh intervenes for Israel
 - ii) 10 Yahweh sends Moses
- c) 3: 11 – 22. Yahweh answers Moses and gives him a message.
 - i) 11 – 12 Moses' first objection and Yahweh's answer.
 - ii) 13 – 15 Moses' second objection and Yahweh's answer.
 - iii) 16 – 22 Moses given a message for the Elders.
- d) 4: 1 – 9. Yahweh answers Moses and gives him signs.
 - i) 1 – 5 Yahweh answers Moses' third objection with a sign.
 - II) 6 – 9 Yahweh gives Moses two more signs.
- e) 4: 10 – 17. Yahweh answers Moses and gives him a helper.
 - i) 10 – 12 Yahweh answers Moses' fourth objection.
 - ii) 13 – 17 Yahweh answers Moses' final objection with a helper.

2.2.2 Linguistic, Grammatical and Rhetorical Characteristics.

2.2.2.1 Important Recurring Verbs (by stem)

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
רָאַת	see	12	3:2	appeared and he saw
			3:3	inspect and saw
			3:4	saw and to see
			3:7	surely ⁴³ and I have seen
			3:9	I have seen
			3:16	appeared
			4:1	appear
			4:5	appeared
			4:14	sees

⁴³ The duplication of the verb in this context functions as emphasis, hence “surely”

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
שָׁלֹחַ	send	11	3:10 3:12 3:13 3:14 3:15 3:20 4:4 4:13	<i>I am sending</i> <i>I sent</i> <i>has sent me</i> <i>has sent me</i> <i>has sent me</i> <i>I will stretch out⁴⁴ and he will send</i> <i>put out⁴⁵ (twice)</i> <i>you send (twice)</i>
הָלֹךְ	go	8	3:10 3:11 3:16 3:18 3:19 3:21 4:12	<i>go</i> <i>I should go</i> <i>Go</i> <i>let us go</i> <i>to go</i> <i>you go and you leave</i> <i>go</i>
אֲצַרְתִּי	bring out	6	3:10 3:11 3:12 4:6 4:7 4:14	<i>to bring</i> <i>I should bring</i> <i>You have brought</i> <i>he took out</i> <i>he brought out</i> <i>is coming</i>
שָׁמַע	hear	5	3:7 3:18 4:1 4:8 4:9	<i>I have heard</i> <i>had heard</i> <i>listen</i> <i>pay attention</i> <i>heed</i>
אָמַן	believe	5	4:1 4:5 4:8 4:9	<i>they...believe me</i> <i>they will believe</i> <i>they...believe and they will believe</i> <i>they...believe</i>
יֵדַע	know	3	3:7 3:19 4:14	<i>I know</i> <i>I know</i> <i>I know</i>

⁴⁴ This could be translated “send out”

⁴⁵ This could be translated “send out”, meaning “reach out”

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
שִׁמְ	place	4	3:22 4:11 4:15	<i>you shall put on</i> <i>gave and makes</i> <i>you shall...place</i>
דָּבָר	speak	6	4:10 4:12 4:14 4:15 4:16	<i>you spoke</i> <i>you must speak</i> <i>surely⁴⁶ and he can speak</i> <i>you shall speak</i> <i>he will speak</i>
לְקַחַ	take	3	4:9 4:17	<i>you shall take and you took</i> <i>you must take</i>

2.2.2.2 Important Recurring Nouns (by stem)

While there are obviously other important recurring nouns in our text, we shall here list only those we wish to emphasize later in our commentary.

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
סָנָה	bush	5	3:2 3:3 3:4	<i>thorny bush, it⁴⁷ and bush</i> <i>bush</i> <i>bush</i>
פָּנָה	face	3	3:6 3:7 4:3	<i>face</i> <i>in the presence</i> <i>its presence</i>
עַם	people	5	3:7 3:10 3:12 3:21 4:16	<i>my people</i> <i>my people</i> <i>the people</i> <i>this people</i> <i>the people</i>

⁴⁶ The duplication of the verb in this context functions as emphasis, hence “surely”

⁴⁷ We simply referred to the bush as “it”

Stem	Meaning	Occurrences	Verse	Translated as
תְּ	hand	13	3:8 3:19 3:20 4:2 4:4 4:6 4:7 4:13 4:17	hand <i>by my...hand</i> <i>my hand</i> <i>in your hand</i> <i>your hand and his hand</i> ⁴⁸ <i>your hand and his hand</i> (twice) <i>your hand and his hand</i> <i>whoever else</i> ⁴⁹ <i>your hand</i>
לְאָרֶן	land	7	3:8 3:17 4:3	<i>out of (that) land & to a land</i> (twice) <i>(to the) land and to a land</i> <i>the ground</i> (twice)
נְזֵן	sign	5	3:12 4:8 4:9 4:17	<i>the sign</i> <i>the... sign</i> (twice) <i>(these) signs</i> <i>signs</i>
בָּן	son	7	3:9 3:10 3:11 3:13 3:14 3:15 3:22	<i>the sons</i> <i>the sons</i> <i>the sons</i> <i>the sons</i> <i>the sons</i> <i>the sons</i> <i>your sons</i>
בָּבָן	(fore-) father	5	3:6 3:13 3:15 3:16 4:5	<i>your father</i> <i>your fathers</i> <i>your fathers</i> <i>your fathers</i> <i>their fathers</i>
שֵׁם	name	3	3:13 3:15 4:11	<i>his name</i> <i>my name</i> <i>gave</i> ⁵⁰

⁴⁸ בְּכַפְּרִים is also translated “hand” in this verse. It is different from תְּ, which could also mean “finger”.

⁴⁹ Literally “by the hand”

⁵⁰ Literally “named”



Stem	Meaning	Occurrences	Verse	Translated as
קָרְבָּן	midst	2	3:5	near ⁵¹
			3:20	in his midst
מֶטֶה	staff	3	4:2	a staff
			4:4	(to) a staff
			4:17	(this) staff
חִיקָּה	cloak	5	4:6	your bosom and your cloak
			4:7	your cloak and his cloak (twice)
פֶּה	mouth	7	4:10	(heavy of) mouth
			4:11	his mouth
			4:12	(with) your mouth
			4:15	in his mouth; your mouth and his mouth.
			4:16	your mouth
עָבֵד	servant	2	3:12	you will worship ⁵²
			4:10	your servant
אֲדֹנָן	lord	2	4:10	my Lord
			4:13	Lord

⁵¹ Literally “in the midst”

⁵² Literally “serve”

2.2.2.3 I Am / I will Progression.

3:2	Moses	<i>Here I am</i>
3:6	Yahweh	<i>I am the God ...</i>
3:10	Yahweh	<i>I am sending you</i>
3:11	Moses	<i>Who am I</i>
3:12	Yahweh	<i>I will be with you</i>
3:14	Yahweh Yahweh	<i>I am that I am (I will be whom I will be)</i> <i>I am has sent you</i>
3:17	Yahweh	<i>I will bring you out</i>
3:20	Yahweh Yahweh	<i>I will stretch out my hand</i> <i>I will do this</i>
3:21	Yahweh	<i>I will put favor...eyes</i>
4:10	Moses Moses	<i>I am not a man of words</i> <i>I am heavy of mouth</i>
4:12	Yahweh Yahweh	<i>I will be with your mouth</i> <i>I will instruct you</i>
4:15	Yahweh Yahweh	<i>I will be with your mouth</i> <i>I will instruct you</i>

As a rhetorical device, it is undeniable with the progression demonstrated above, that the Name of Yahweh operates for the certain and successful future of his people. We notice that only Yahweh uses the '*I will*' statement. This makes a strong case for 3:14 to be translated as *I will be whom I will be*. Furthermore, Yahweh's statements, on the one hand, are expressions of his strength. Moses' *I am* statements, on the other hand, are expressions of his weakness. It is because of Moses' statements of weakness that Yahweh's *I will* statements are meaningful. The people's future depends upon their confidence in Yahweh's future.

2.2.2.4 Observable Thematic Progression.

3: 2	appeared*	
	inspected	
	saw	
3	inspect	
	to see	
4	saw**	
7	surely seen**, heard, know	
8		hand (Egyptians)
9	see	
	seen**	
16	appeared*	
	seen**	
	taken stock**	
17		
18	met with us*	
19		mighty hand**
20		my hand**
21	in the eyes	
4: 1	not appear*	
2		your hand
4		your hand
		his hand
		his hand
5	appeared*	
6		your hand
		his hand
		his hand
7		your hand
		his hand
10		not a man of words
		you spoke**
		heavy of mouth
		slow of tongue
		gave...mouth
		makes...mute**
11	sighted	
12		with your mouth**
14	he sees	instruct...must speak**
15		surely he can speak well
		you... speak to him
		place words in his mouth
		with your mouth**
		with his mouth**
16		he will speak to...people
17		he...as your mouth
		your hand

* with reference to the theophany

** Yahweh's action / attribute.

2.3 Commentary.

There had been over four hundred years of silence, since God last appeared to anyone; and in that instance it was to Jacob (Gen.46). Then it was to confirm the relationship with Jacob, who was now the recipient of God's covenant promises previously given to his grand-father, Abraham. But now, God was going to appear to Moses. God has decided to reveal to him that he was going to rescue the Israelites, who had Jacob as their ancestor, from the hands of the oppressive Egyptians. Moses is the man God had chosen to lead his people out of slavery. Moses, who had been trained in leading another's flock, was now going to lead the flock of God. Mackay rightly asserts that this is no sudden impulse on the part of God. He prepared Moses for just such a time as this. (2001:64). It is reasonable to conclude with Fretheim that Moses' call is portrayed in terms of a prophetic paradigm. Moses is called to be a messenger of the word of God; canonically, he is the first such person to be so called (1991:51). The aspect of the verbal involvement of Moses is emphasized by the repeated use of the word "mouth" and its cognates as reflected in the thematic progression above.

There is an almost unspoken contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh, and Yahweh was going to free the Israelites by his mighty hand. He was to snatch his people from the hand of their oppressive overlord. While God prepared Moses for this project, Moses is really caught unprepared when God calls him. This chapter marks a decisive turning point in Moses' life story. He is called upon to change from his fugitive mentality to one of confrontation. The Israelites living in Egypt are oppressed by forced labor, imposed upon them by a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, and who desired to destroy them (Hirsch, Jacob & Driver 2007:1). Egypt, who was once life-supporting to Joseph's people, has now become life-threatening to them (Janzen 1979:232). Again, the rhetorical use of the oft-repeated concept, "hand", shows that Moses too, as God's messenger, applies his own hand on Yahweh's behalf in this contest with Pharaoh.

Moses' earlier attempts to deliver Israel had failed. Because Moses had already tried to intervene on behalf of the Israelites, he knows their situation, he knows

himself, he knows the Israelites, and he knows the power of Egypt (Janzen 1979:234). Having experienced that failure, and having his knowledge, he was willing to rather lead a quiet married life. He was quite happy tending his father-in-law's sheep; even after forty years since he fled from Egypt. While he was content with the well-being of Jethro's flock, Yahweh was concerned with the well-being of his own flock, the children of Jacob. Jacob was the one with whom Yahweh confirmed his covenant which he had with Abraham when he appeared to him. Of course, the patriarchal experience is not the only instance of divine self-disclosure in the history of Israel; it was soon to be superseded by the appearance to Moses, God's servant. (Nürnberg 1993:6). Yahweh has an on-going commitment to his people.

On the one hand Pharaoh seems to be a completely free character who is 'asked' to set the Israelite slaves free. In this case God, as a character in the story, leaves Pharaoh room for his own decisions. Yahweh knows that Pharaoh is the kind of person who will be stubborn and will not let the people go unless compelled to. Only when God has worked wonders will Pharaoh let them go (Fretheim 1991:66) God aims with his powerful deeds to impress Pharaoh to such an extent that he will in the end let the people free. By this strong action God wants Pharaoh, who says he does not know Yahweh and sees no compulsion to do what he says, to finally acknowledge him when he sets the slaves free. (Deist 1989:38-39).

So then, the social situation has to be transformed from oppression to freedom. Breuggemann (1994:678-9) is enormously helpful by recognizing that the social transformation of revolutionary proportion is wrought through the holy intentionality of a "new God", whose name is only known in and through this wondrous happening. God has revealed himself as being full of holy zeal against wickedness – a zeal, however, which is counteracted by the immeasurably greater power of his love, mercy, and forgiveness, for these are inexhaustible (Hirsch, Jacob & Driver 2007:6). Yahweh's zeal is that which distinguishes him from the other gods. The uniqueness of Yahweh, over against the gods, centres in his dealing with his creation in a new creative way. He is able to save. The limitations set on a god in the ancient Near East do not apply to Yahweh (Kruger 1995:252).

This God has appeared, and through theophany he will show that his covenant is grounded in authority. Theophany is taken as most plausible (for granted). The authority is really the confirmation that under-girds his covenant with his people, and the relationship that comes through the covenant, requires the freed slaves to organize under the Law. Their identity will finally be characterized by Yahweh's presence. He promises this presence first to Moses, and it later becomes the traveling assurance to the people. So, Davis is correct in saying that the emphasis of this text is on revelational matters relating to the divine presence, perfection and protection as expressed within God's covenant faithfulness (1972:39). It is this passage where God reveals who he is to Moses and the significance of his character for the Israelites in their present situation (Petersen 2007:2). Yahweh's appearance to Moses impresses both on his life and on those he comes into contact with thereafter. Again, it can be noticed how the concept of sight (with over eighteen allusions) is used as a rhetorical device in our text. Moses' enquiry forces him to look at a burning bush in the same way that Yahweh took close notice of Israel's suffering, and to the point of "coming down" to experience it with them.

a) Ex. 3:1 – 6. Yahweh Appears to Moses.

Moses found himself hosted by three different nations so far during his lifetime. Now, he finds himself living in Midian for the last forty years of his life. His wife was Midianite. He was born into the nation Israel from Israelite parents, Amran and Jochebed (Ex.6:20; Num.26:59), of the tribe of Levi. He was the younger brother of Aaron (Ex.4:14; 7:1-2,7) and of Miriam (Num.26:59). He was brought up in Egypt by the daughter of Pharaoh. She gave him his name.

From Egyptian etymology Moses had the meaning of "drawn out". In Hebrew the proper name has the meaning "drawer out" or "he who draws out". One cannot but notice that his name had mimetic significance. He was going to be the one whom God uses to draw the Israelites out of their difficulty. Having said so, we should not

deny the historicity by suggesting that a story rose as an etiology of a name, i.e. the story was fabricated to answer the query, “Why was he named Moses?”

Moses is here in the wilderness. The wilderness is that “outlaw” region beyond the reach of Egypt’s organized power where Moses may find fugitive asylum (Janzen 1979:233). It is a formless wasteland, and is best depicted by the name Horeb. Moses was a fugitive doing what the Egyptians intensely disliked – shepherding; maybe because it reminded them about the Hyksos, or shepherd kings, who ruled for a short time in Egypt until they were expelled about 1600BC (Drane 2000:58) Unlike the owner of the sheep, Moses is not a priest or a prophet; it is an ordinary, everyday journey for him with no “religious” intention (Fretheim 1991:54). The main motivation why he is here is to find pasture for the flock. It is in this wilderness that Yahweh comes to Moses, introducing himself in an intimate way and expresses his saving intention clearly and persuasively.

i) 3:1 – 4. Yahweh Appears in the Burning Bush.

In verse 1 we only hear the voice of the narrator. *Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, a priest in Midian.* Moses’ father-in-law occupied a place of honor in Midianite society; he was a priest. By virtue of this position he could also have been a royal adviser. We cannot really comment on Jethro’s religion, and to what extent he was acquainted with the religion of Yahweh, as he does later seem to influence Moses in the task of leading God’s people. It was also common place for a man to work for his father-in-law. Jethro was also called Reuel (Ex.2:18), which means *friend of God*. The name Jethro (*his abundance*), could have been used to accentuate the fact that the flock Moses was tending was a large one. That in itself was going to demonstrate the wealth of God whose flock Moses was later to lead. What Moses was doing for the last forty years, was tending the sheep and small staple animals of another. Though Moses himself does not know it, he was in fact being prepared for what Yahweh was later to call him for.

Midian was an area in north-west Arabia. Though here in this context the Medianites are viewed favorably, they are otherwise seen in an unfavorable light (McNutt 1995:115). When *he led the flock along the west side of the desert*, its location is given relative to Midian, we believe. The word translated *west side* is literally *the behind side*. That is, the side of the setting sun. This is where Moses *led* the flock. His action means, to cause movement by actions of guiding and directing. We prefer the word *led* rather than *drove*, which could imply force. *Desert* could simply be understood as *wilderness*. There obviously must have been grazing for the flock. It makes sense that Moses should go west, because to the east, we find real desert.

Moses brought his flock to *Horeb, the mountain of God*. Opinion is divided as to whether Horeb is here called the mountain of God because it was already a revered religious site or whether the title is being used proleptically, i.e. reflecting a later accepted usage. Mountains, especially Horeb, or Sinai as it is also known in the Old Testament, figure largely in the spiritual history of Moses. Horeb and Sinai are alternate names for the same site, although some commentators suggest that Horeb may be a slightly wider term than Sinai (Enns 2000:95). It was known as the mountain of revelation. (Motyer 2005:48). The name Horeb appears three times in the book of Exodus; here, in Ex.17:6 (where it is a place of revelation, miracles and provision) and Ex.33:6 (where it is the place of idolatry and repentance). This same mountain would become the mountain where the freed slaves were to serve Yahweh (3:12).

In verse 2 again, we have the narrator speaking. Suddenly and unexpectedly *the Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses*. Rather, the Angel showed himself to Moses. The Hebrew word in the niphil frequently occurs in the context of theophany as *appear*. The word is understood as a self disclosure of the divine, but for Moses all this was evidenced by physical sight. We know this because later Moses covers his face, not wanting to look at God. The Angel of the LORD is frequently equated with God. He is described in terms befitting the deity, and often calls himself God (cf. verses 6 and 14) (Rooker 2003:864).

While *messenger* may be translated from the Hebrew, it is an inadequate term for the range of tasks carried out by the Old Testament מֶלֶךְ (*māl'āk*). In this instance the messenger is a supernatural being, and a special representative of God. Angels can represent God's nature in different ways, but in the Angel of the LORD, he is fully present. Knight (1959:78) calls the Angel an 'alter ego of God himself'. There are many references to angels, but the Angel of the LORD, by this and other titles accorded him, stands out as a unique personage (Motyer 2005:51). This messenger is a visible manifestation of God, and God chose to disclose himself to Moses. Though he frequently receives respect, worship and honor reserved only for God, the Angel of the LORD was consistently distinguished from God (Kaiser 1978:85).

The Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses *in fire coming from within a thorny bush*. This is a supernatural flame of fire. Enns notes, a common element that regularly accompanies God's self-revelation is fire, here seen in the bush (2000:96). This fire is also a prelude to the subsequent great theophany at Sinai in which Moses took part (Noth 1959:40). The preposition clearly indicates that the appearance of the Angel of Yahweh is out of (from within) the burning bush. The fire was the emanation of the angel's presence. Moses' interest is wholly phenomenal; what he is seeing is indeed a strange sight, considering this is a thorny bush.

Identifying biblical plants has always been a difficult task, partly because people continue to identify the biblical elm, sycamore, lily, rose, and vine with modern plants, and also because they assume that all the plants now growing in the Holy Land were there in ancient biblical days, or that the plants referred to in the Bible are still to be found there today. Unfortunately, many plants now quite common in the Holy Land were not there in biblical days. Many plants that once grew in abundance in the Holy Land are now extinct. (Elwell & Comfort 2001: 1047).

Many believe that the root for חַנֵּה means *to prick*, hence the translation thorny bush. Thorny bushes were a common sight in the area; and so were, what others think (blackberry bushes), too. It does not matter whether it was a thorny bush, a

blackberry bush, or any other bush; it was burning. If it was a thorn bush, then it was expected to burn up quickly and with a crackling noise. The word *bush* occurs six times in the Old Testament; five times in Exodus in our present text.

When he inspected it, behold, he saw that the bush, though it was burning, was not being consumed. This is what made the sight more marvelous; it was not being consumed. The fire's natural property was temporarily suspended. Moses never forgot this sight (Dt.33:16, the only other text where "bush" occurs). He was filled with a sense of wonder. The particle interjection translated as *behold*, functions to emphasize the information that follows it. The fact that the bush is not consumed is here being emphasized. Freedman (1969:245) observes that the verb "to burn" in the Hebrew can be construed to mean "burn, blaze" and "burn up, consume". The two verses in harmony remove the difficulty. It shows that the same word is used in two different ways in the same context. This marvelous sight is something that Moses felt must be inspected.

So Moses said to himself, "Turn aside now, and go and inspect this marvelous spectacle to see why this bush does not burn up". This is what Moses said in his heart. Here we have a soliloquy, which shows the narrator's omniscience. To *turn aside* was to change in direction from an intended course or path. The purpose of his inspection was to "find out", "discover" and "learn" information about this strange sight. He has a particular question that he wants answered, namely, '*Why is this bush not burning up?*' He expected it to be consumed, but it is not. He actually does not find the answer, but makes an altogether different discovery; one that would change his life forever.

When Yahweh saw that he had turned aside to look, God called from within the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" Yahweh saw and called from within the bush. Yahweh is God, and later we are told that "Yahweh" is the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v14-15). That the Lord *saw* is understood as anthropomorphic, because it expresses the fact that God knows. Yahweh is present and able to see what Moses' intention is. Moses intends to inspect the burning bush, and in order to do so, he has to approach "ground-zero"; the midst of

the bush, where Yahweh was speaking from. The narrator gives this as part of the discourse. The first words uttered, comes from Yahweh, and it is an urgent address to Moses. It is framed as direct speech. While the word spoken is the focus of the theophany, the sight seen is not simply an accessory to the word (Fretheim 1991:54). Sight plays an important role in Moses' hearing as there would have been no hearing if the sight had not been attended to. The root word for seeing occurs 12 times in our text, demonstrating its rhetorical weight.

The urgency is demonstrated when Yahweh calls out Moses' name twice. This call was a loud summoning. It is clear that Moses is known, but he, himself does not know who is speaking to him from within the bush. The word *within* is here the marker of the source of the voice. Moses – the Hebrew turned Egyptian, turned exile, turned shepherd – has an audience with Yahweh (Enns 2000:97), but he does not know who's company he is in.

First, he was surprised by a sight, and now he is surprised by a sound; the voice of an unknown entity. When Moses answers as direct speech, '*Here I am*', he opens the dialogue. This is his first encounter with Yahweh, the God of Israel, and thus the first time he addresses him directly. Before we can discuss the dialogue, we need briefly to reflect on the etiological significance of this burning bush.

This burning bush was a demonstration of Israel's present experience. Yahweh was going to intimate to Moses that he had seen and knew Israel's experience. They were as it were 'on fire', but like the bush, they are miraculously not consumed. Their cruel oppression was unable to destroy them. As with the bush, Yahweh himself was in their midst, and was *within* their burning. The holy God enters into the suffering of the people. Yahweh is calling Moses from there. The real reason why the children of Israel are not being consumed is because Yahweh is present with them, and in fact, they are holy because he is with them. The presence of Yahweh with his people becomes an important theme in the book of Exodus. While in this interpretation the flame would represent Israel's affliction, we have to admit (with Mackay) that it is more probably a representation of God's presence (2001:68).

Fretheim's observation is helpful when he says that this is not an ecstatic vision. While it is unusual, what is seen is within the world. As with other theophanies, God uses nature as a vehicle for "clothing" that which is not natural. The natural does not stand over against the divine but serves as an instrument for the purposes of God, evoking holiness, passion, and mystery (fire) and down-to-earthness (bush). (1991:55). God's own pre-emptive presence is here.

ii) 3:5 – 6 Yahweh Introduces Himself.

The God who called Moses from within the bush, is referred to here in verse 5 as the one who speaks to him. God instructs him, '*Do not come near here*'. The prohibition was for Moses not to approach the bush, and that was exactly what Moses was going to do. The urgency of God's call might have already stopped him in his tracks, but the instruction not to approach definitely would have. It was not that Yahweh did not want Moses in his presence, but he knows that nobody can approach his immediate presence and live. He, however, makes it possible for Moses to be in his presence, by giving him a further instruction; and even then that instruction needs to be motivated. His presence means grace; it sanctifies; for he is gloriously holy. It is interesting to note that whenever Yahweh speaks, it is framed as direct speech emphasizing his presence there.

The second instruction he is given is one that was clearly understood in those days. The motivation is given with it. God said to him, *Take your footwear off your feet, because the place you are standing upon is holy ground*. Still, Moses does not know who is commanding him, but we may believe that he responds exactly in the way he is commanded to. Removing one's footwear in a holy place was not uncommon, for it was a token of reverence. Shoes were not worn in the temple or on any holy ground (Ex 3:5; Jos 5:15) and were also taken off when a person was in a house. It was customary to remove the sandals at a time of mourning (Elwell & Beitzel 1988:777). Moses is told that the place he is standing on is holy ground, and that is the reason he is told to remove his shoes. While the verses do not say

that Yahweh is holy, they imply that holiness is where Yahweh is, and unassisted humankind cannot approach him. That presence transforms everything at hand, including the place and the conversation. God's holiness requires a respectful distance (Breuggemann 1994:712). Before Moses removed his shoes he certainly was not in a posture of reverence. He is standing, straight and vertical, and anyone standing in the presence of God in that way was standing in front of a superior as an offering, or to be evaluated, and Moses did neither.

While we agree with Fretheim to some extent when he says, "The recognition of holiness does not lead to passivity in the presence of God. Passivity in the presence of God will close down the revelatory possibilities", we cannot accept that God's way into the future is not dictated solely by God's sovereign intention (1991:52-53), unless by "divine word and will" he means something less than sovereign intention. He cannot make the conclusion that the intention was any differently conceived by God. Surely, we come from the presupposition that God is omniscient and sovereign.

What is understood by "holy" is not always clear, but we know that the ground was holy, and it could not be stood upon in a flippant manner. One thing we may deduce is that the ground was in a state of consecration affected by the presence and the wonder. Yahweh's presence made the place holy. The place was transformed by the speech and the presence of God. Not only was the place consecrated, but Moses, by removing his footwear, was sanctified. This mountain is called the Mountain of God because his presence will become frequent at this mountain. It is his presence that makes this place holy. Moses himself was to consider this place holy. This, Moses did not know until God introduces himself to him.

God introduces himself to Moses saying, *I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*. The statement that Yahweh is the God of the patriarchs is mentioned four times in our present text (3:6, 15, 16 and 4:5). The frequency of restatement is a rhetorical demonstration of its emphasis. In this statement Yahweh also makes a declaration. There was a

historical connection between Moses and Yahweh. A longstanding relationship must be taken for granted. The book of Exodus begins with the fact that God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (2:24-25). That God remembered the covenant does not mean that he had previously forgotten about it, but that now the time had come for God to actively intervene in the circumstances of his people. It is on the basis of the covenant that he hears their cry “out from the heaviness of their slavery in Egypt” (Linington 2002:696-7). Loader makes an important remark; that the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham becomes the threat to God’s plan, for the Egyptians persecute Israel because they are so numerous. In this persecution, we are made aware of the extent of human wickedness, especially when it comes as a response against the blessings that God gives his people. Yahweh intervenes and saves his people. (1998:490).

Yahweh is the God of the present and the past. First of all, he is the God of Moses’ father. Many interpreters take this as plural. The text is definitely using a masculine singular construct noun with a second person masculine singular suffix. He was the God of Amran. He was the God of Moses’ family religion, and therefore Moses had a personal obligation to him. This explains Moses’ response to this introduction.

He is also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Immediately, he declares himself to be the God who is in a covenant relationship with Israel by the covenant he made with their ancestors. His promise meant taking sides with oppressed Israel (Fretheim 1991:57). These three names were identifiable to Moses, and the fact that he was now communicating with their God, left him with no option but to respond as he did. *Moses concealed his face because he was afraid to look at God.* The narrator informs us of Moses’ reason why he responds in the way he does. God is visible but must not be seen.

The concealment of Moses’ face is in fact heightened by the double causative hiphil which has two objects. Firstly, Moses was absenting himself, and secondly, he was hiding God from his sight; as Noth alludes that there was a God to be seen in some visible way (1959:38). Either way, he covered his face to protect himself, for no one can look at God and live. We would be remiss to give the impression

that Moses' fear was solely that of dread; no, it was also an expression of profound respect and deep reverence. We are certain that Yahweh had Moses' full attention and right attitude, because he had just received a crash course in holy etiquette (Enns 2000:98).

b) Ex. 3:7 – 10 Yahweh Commissions Moses.

Why did Yahweh call this audience with Moses? Why did he appear to Moses? This question is at the heart of this present pericope. God reveals himself to man, and informs him visibly and audibly of his presence and agenda. Here we find out what this whole encounter is all about. Yahweh wants to do something and he wants to invite Moses to get involved in his agenda. Though much bigger than Moses, yet Yahweh decided that he will not do what he intends doing without Moses, as they both confront Pharaoh. It is clear that Yahweh is the protagonist of the story, while Pharaoh is the antagonist. The confrontation between Yahweh and Pharaoh constitutes a divine battle: Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt personified and embodied in the pharaoh (Deist 1989:41).

i) 3:7 – 9 Yahweh Intervenes for Israel.

Yahweh has experienced Israel's situation in a profound way. It is precisely this experience that moves Yahweh to do what he is going to do. Moses had already experienced it to some extent, when he tried to be deliverer forty years ago, but he might have forgotten about it. Maybe he was just disillusioned by his failed attempt as deliverer. Yet, unless he saw Yahweh's heart on this matter, he will himself remain apathetic. The only way that Yahweh can convince Moses of his experience, is to communicate it to him and to call him to service.

Then Yahweh said, I have surely seen the oppression of my people in Egypt The direct speech is a declaration made by Yahweh. When he said that he was Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's God, Yahweh was saying that he is Israel's God too

(Gen.17:8), and that they are his people. This was God's pledge to be the protector of his people, and the one who provides for their well-being. The center of Yahweh's Covenant with them is; "I will be your God, and you will be *my people*". They were Yahweh's treasured possession (Ex. 19:5). Yahweh was on the side of the Israelites.

God's people were *in Egypt*. Their ancestors went to Egypt during the time of Joseph. We may therefore accept the unity of the Pentateuch which is attested to in various portions of the Old Testament, as well as in portions of the New Testament. Even the opening phrase of the Book of Exodus, "Now these are the names," provides clear evidence to that unity. The Hebrew prefix that is translated "now" is the common form of the conjunction in Hebrew (most often translated "and" or "but") and indicates that there was some other book which preceded the Book of Exodus. (Zodhiates and Baker 2000:n.p). The unity between Genesis and Exodus is demonstrated in Exodus 13:19 (cf. Gen.50:25). This is also the case with the repeated reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Their ancestors came to Egypt during the life of Joseph. Then, the Egyptians provided sustenance and life, but now they were bent on destroying the Israelites. Already when Moses was born, the new Pharaoh saw their increasing numbers as a threat to Egypt and instructed the midwives to kill all the boy babies. The increased hard labor was intended to make the Israelites infertile. Their slave-drivers were oppressing them with a heavy hand.

When Yahweh says, *I have surely seen the oppression* he means that he has indeed noticed their plight. God was in close proximity with their pain. The verb, **הִנֵּה** is repeated here to emphasize Yahweh's action; *I have surely seen* or "I have definitely seen", or "I have looked intently". Yahweh is absolutely and completely involved in Israel's circumstances. He participates in their suffering. What Yahweh sees is *the oppression* of his people.

The oppression the Israelites were suffering was severe, and Yahweh will certainly save them. The three verbs, *seen*, *heard* and *know* used together, show the intensity of Yahweh's experience. His participation in their suffering is truly intense. *I have heard their cry in the presence of their oppressors, and I know their anguish.* Yahweh has paid attention and heeded the cry of his people. It is a hearing that renders a response. As God had heard, they too will be exhorted to hear in their covenantal confession, "Hear O Israel", known as the Shema. God saves and man obeys. Redemption is the ground and motivation for obedience to Yahweh.

Israel's *cry* in the presence of their oppressors is a cry of deep anguish. It is really an outcry that indicates sorrow, despair and pain. It is a cry for help under great distress. It is a cry in desperation. God heard their desperate cry and he wants to save them from their situation. Their anguish was displayed *in the presence* of their oppressors. Their anguish was literally "in the faces" of their oppressors. The Egyptians knew their anguish but they would not relent.

When Yahweh said, *I know their anguish* he meant that he was more than familiar with their suffering. He actually shared their pain with them. He had an intimate experience of their anguish. He understood both their physical pain and their mental suffering. This verb (*יָדַעַת*) expresses Yahweh's compassion for his people in their deep affliction.

When the Egyptians provided sustenance and life to God's people, they were instrumental in fulfilling the seed promise of God's covenant to his people. But when God had blessed them by multiplying them, the Egyptians turned against their guests. It was time for God to give them their own land. The only way they would be willing to move away from Egypt, would be because of the oppression they were suffering, and because they knew that Yahweh would bring them out of that land. Yahweh promises to do just that.

When Yahweh said, *I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians* he came from above to the earth; that is, to the place where humans

live. The oft-asked question, “Who will deliver the people; Yahweh or Moses?” is misdirected. It fails to recognize the simple fact that Yahweh is inviting Moses to be part of his redemptive activity. Noth sees that Yahweh is seen as the deliverer by J, while Moses is posited as such by E (1959:40-41). This too is unnecessary. Be that as it may, the narrator takes for granted a sort of dualistic view in terms of God as from above (3:8 ‘*I have come down...*’). This nuance is seen in the fact that their cry has come up to Yahweh (3:9). The situation required divine intervention, and Yahweh was willing to presence himself in the midst of his peoples’ suffering. In Enns’ words, the phrase is typical biblical language to describe what God does when he intervenes in human affairs (2000:99). In order to deliver them he needed to *come down*. That does not mean that God is not omnipresent, but what it does mean is that he is present to identify with his people and to act on their behalf. Breuggemann (1994:712) is more graphic in his explanation: “... God is now physically (!) mobilized to be present in the midst of the trouble”.

He had already expressed the fact of his identifying with his people when he said to Moses, *I have seen their oppression ... I have heard their cry... I know their anguish*. How will he act on their behalf? He will *deliver them* from the hand of the Egyptians. He will bring them up from the flames of their affliction. He came down to bring them up! This deliverance will demonstrate the urgency about God’s action on behalf of his people. His deliverance will be quick and decisive, leaving the Egyptians empty-handed. He will snatch them up as it were.

God will deliver then *out of the hand* of the Egyptians, The Egyptians will lose their grip over God’s people. The hand evokes the idea of power and strength. The Egyptians will no longer have authority over the Israelites when Yahweh delivers them. They will have no strength to hold them because their hand cannot match the mighty hand of Yahweh. By Yahweh’s mighty hand Pharaoh will let the Israelites go (3:19). We can hardly miss the imagery that there is a contest between the hand of Egypt and that of Yahweh.

When Yahweh has delivered his people, *he will bring them out of that land*. The Egyptians will have power over the Israelites for as long as they are in their land.

What God promised Jacob will come true. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you and I will surely bring you back again.” (Gen.46:3-4). God knows that they will only truly be free from Egyptian oppression when they are out of that land, and Yahweh has undertaken to bring them out. But where will they go to? They are a nation without a land, and the way things are now, they have no destiny. Surely, God must remember his promise to Abraham; to give his seed a land clearly demarcated in Genesis 15:18f? He does. As Fretheim so eloquently states, that God will not leave Israel in a halfway house, redeemed but left in a chaotic wilderness. Deliverance for God is finally not only *from* something, it is *to* something, enabling the people to move from redemption to creation. God’s historical goal is a creational end. The goal is not reform, to make life more bearable in Egypt. It is removal from the situation. This makes it clear that God chooses Moses for activity in the sociopolitical arena; it is no ecclesiastical office to which Moses is called. (1991:59-61).

He promises to bring them *into a good and spacious land*. The word *good* includes the ideas of a land that is pleasing, beautiful, pleasant and agreeable to its inhabitants. The word *spacious* includes the ideas of a land which is large, open, wide and broad. Certainly, this is not only compared with the space they occupied in Goshen, but it speaks of more than adequate space for their whole population. It speaks of a fertile land that will provide adequately for them all. The land’s ability to provide lavishly is expressed in the phrase, *to a land flowing with milk and honey*. The participle נָתַן can equally be translated as “gushing”. *Milk and honey* are figurative expressions indicating the abundance of the land, providing nourishment and sweetness (delight). According to Mackay it depicts, not cultivated land, but pastoral land (2001:72).

So far we have discovered *what kind* of land Yahweh would give the Israelites. It will be a land of abundance. Now we discover *which* land God will give to them. The description really coincides with the promise to Abraham, except that there Abraham is told the geographic location as described by its boundaries. Here we

are given, more-or-less, the same portion as described by the peoples currently inhabiting it. Yahweh will take them to *the habitation of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.* Yahweh would have to dispossess these nations of their land and give it to the Israelites. The gift of the land is a new place for life and blessing. God's redemptive act leads to a new creation, and to a new way of life. The word *habitation* may also be translated "stronghold", meaning that the dispossession will come by means of war.

Verse 9 reiterates what was stated in verse 7, but this time Yahweh invites Moses to experience some of what he has experienced. *Now, see, the cry of the sons of Israel.* Moses is invited to take note that the Israelites' cry has reached God; that God was aware of their cry. An interjection demanding Moses' attention is used here. Again, emphasis is made of God's awareness of the oppression the Israelites are suffering. Their suffering is put squarely at the door of the Egyptians. They are the cause; they are the perpetrators of the oppression of the Israelites. It is called *the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.* Putting it in this way could also describe an oppression characteristic of the Egyptians. They oppressed with specific oppression-know-how. It was a specialized ability to trouble. God's intervention was warranted, and Moses was to be his agent. Israel is not to be like Egypt; they are not ever to become oppressors of others.

ii) 3:10 Yahweh Sends Moses.

So far, Yahweh spoke only of what he intended to do. Now, he is about to tell Moses how he fits into all of this. This is the crux of our present text. From verse 10 the narrator follows the typical logical argumentative progression in its rhetoric. Yahweh makes an assertion, *I am sending you to Pharaoh*; and he gives the reason, *to bring my people out of Egypt*; which Moses counters, *Who am I ...*; Yahweh provides an analogy, *this is the sign...;* and gives himself as an example, *I will stretch out my hand...;* and the conclusion is, *I will bring you to a land.* After a massive intrusion of God, the exodus has suddenly become a human enterprise.

Moses will meet with Pharaoh, and Moses will bring the people up with him. (Breuggemann 1994:713).

Yahweh finally tells Moses, *So now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.* Moses has a two-fold imperative, namely, to *go to Pharaoh* and to *bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt.* Immediately, Moses recognizes what Yahweh is asking him to do. In Moses' mind it certainly is an ambitious request. There is no ambiguity about what Yahweh is asking Moses to do. He has got to go to Pharaoh. The second part of the imperative gives him the reason why he is to go to Pharaoh; to tell him to let the Israelites leave Egypt. At least, the clause, *I am sending you*, gives Moses a mandate from Yahweh and with Yahweh's authority.

Pharaoh is the official title borne by the Egyptian kings down to the time when that country was conquered by the Greeks. Easton (1996: n.p.) suggests that the rise of the Nineteenth Dynasty, the founder of which, Rameses I., we must see as the "new king, who knew not Joseph." His grandson, Rameses II., reigned sixty-seven years (1348-1281), and was an indefatigable builder. As Pithom, excavated by Dr. Naville in 1883, was one of the cities he built, he must have been the Pharaoh of the Oppression. The Pharaoh of the Exodus may have been one of his immediate successors, whose reigns were short. Under them Egypt lost its empire in Asia, and was itself attacked by barbarians from Libya and the north.

Moses must go to the king of Egypt and claim his slaves as belonging to Yahweh. The command to go assumes access. What the protocol for such access is, the text does not say. When Yahweh tells Moses to "bring *my people* out of Egypt", he speaks as a king about a people he is responsible for. These people are Yahweh's peculiar possession. He is their king. He has a covenant relationship with them by unconditional royal grant to Abraham (*c.f.* Merrill 1996:168); and by his deliverance, he will seal that relationship. He will be their God, and they will be his people. God sends Moses with a clear mandate, but he is not keen to go.

c) Ex. 3:11 – 22 Yahweh Answers Moses and Gives Him A Message.

Thus far, Yahweh has done all the talking. The only thing that Moses spoke was the response, “Here I am”, to God calling out his name. Besides that, Moses listened to Yahweh fully stating his case. That was all that Yahweh needed to say, but because there is some tension created by Moses’ unwillingness to accede to God’s command, the dialogue continues further. God does not enforce his will upon Moses. God is open to use gentleness to nurse Moses along the path of his irreversible sovereignty. In a real sense, each of the subsequent objections arises from a perspective of past experience, and each of God’s replies points him forward to a new reality of faith which has been promised (Childs 1974:73). Yahweh is, nevertheless, willing to listen to Moses, giving him the right to raise, sometimes valid, objections and to dialogue with him.

i) 3:11 – 12 Moses’ First Objection and Yahweh’s Answer.

Moses does not comment on Yahweh’s plan. The plan seems good, and one would have expected Moses to respond with excitement. His lack of enthusiasm is not because the prospect of Israel’s deliverance is not exciting, but because Moses actually doubts himself. It is interesting to see that the second time he speaks, his opening words are nearly the same as his only words spoken thus far; instead of *Here am I*, it is now, *Who am I?* He considers himself a ‘nobody’. Moses sees no significance in himself. He sees himself as too small for this great task. Yes, he assumes a stance of humility too, but his error is that he is looking at himself and his ability. Surely, one can only gain immeasurably by being honest with God, as there is nothing we cannot say to him, and nothing he does not know.

Moses has tried before to be deliverer to the Israelites, but they had rejected him, and they were the cause of him becoming a refugee in Midian. Moses’ previous failure may have prompted such a response. But in his response he shows that he

fully understands what Yahweh was asking him to do, because he repeats Yahweh's instruction to him with exact accuracy. The two-fold imperative is accurately restated; "Who am I that *I should go to Pharaoh*, and also that *I should bring with me the sons of Israel out of Egypt?*" Moses fully understands his task, but he doubts whether he is able to pull it off. This, the first of Moses' five objections, is a sense of personal inadequacy.

Yahweh's answer to Moses' need is also the answer to the nation's need; not only to deliver them, but also for their future. When Yahweh said, *Surely, I will be with you*, he was really saying that "it matters not who you are, but who I am and I will be with you". The promise *I will be with you* means quite literally that God will be present with and for Moses. This promise was to exemplify the name of God. By virtue of God's answer, who Moses is, can henceforth be measured adequately only by including a reference to Yahweh who is present with him. If who Moses is, is to be defined henceforth with reference to the presence of Yahweh, then who Moses is depends to that degree on who Yahweh is (Janzen 1979:234). Moses is challenged to move beyond who he knows himself to be and to re-define himself as one who is promised the presence of God himself. Yahweh met Moses' inadequacy with the pledge of his own sufficiency.

It is important to note that the Lord does not promise Moses to take away his inadequacy, or to give him boldness, or to make him eloquent. Moses is called upon to trust in Yahweh. He needs to rest in Yahweh's presence, bearing simple testimony to the revelation he has received and doing what Yahweh instructs him to do. (Motyer 2005:61). When Yahweh said, *I will be with you*, it was as if the divine name was announced even before the question of verse 13 was asked. In itself the promise of Yahweh's presence will also serve as a sign to Moses.

This will be the sign to you that it is I who sent you. God will confirm his calling of Moses by his presence with him. This will also become the affirmation of Moses' calling to the Israelites. The problem for many scholars is what does the demonstrative, *this* (זֶה), refer to? Without feeling the need to discuss it, we can

immediately dismiss the notion of it referring to the bush itself. While we have translated this verse like we have, in order to reflect our interpretation of the sign, we know that other scholars relate the sign solely to Mount Horeb. The sign will be the actual worshipping of the Israelites at the mountain. Most of them recognize the problem with this interpretation; it is really a fulfillment, and would benefit Moses nothing in his present difficulty. A sign should precede the fulfillment (Childs 1974:57). How can it encourage Moses to do what he does not want to do, because, in this case, the sign would only come after his going? The sign is really meant to encourage and to function as the confirmation of the calling of Moses to take this assignment. The fact that they will worship at this mountain is an indication that success is guaranteed. We take the line that the sign refers to the preceding statement, *I will be with you.*

Let us now consider the precise statement. *When you have brought all the people out of Egypt, together you will worship God at this mountain.* Here, we have in fact a two-fold promise. In the first instance, we see that Yahweh promises that *all the people* will come out of Egypt. None of the Israelites will be left behind. Secondly, they will *together worship God at* (or upon) *this mountain.* It anticipates the exodus and the successful escape of the Israelites from the Egyptians. It also reflects the unity that they as a nation will enjoy. They will worship God *together.* Bringing the people out of Egypt is not an end in itself. It is a prelude to bringing them into a living, personal relationship with Yahweh himself.

It does not matter whether *this mountain* refers to a specific peak or a range, as is often the contention, but what is important, is that the people will *worship* God there. It is perhaps for this reason that it is called “the mountain of God” in 3:1. To worship their God, is after all the reason given to Pharaoh for him to release the Israelites. The idea of worship includes the concept of obedient service. There at the mountain of God they will give their energy and devotion to Yahweh. God has told Moses that though he thinks of himself as inadequate, he can nevertheless be used to fulfill this great task. The answer is not in his personal ability, but in the ability of the God who is with him. The God, who is with him, will give him success. God fully answered Moses’ first objection.

ii) 3:13 – 15 Moses' Second Objection and Yahweh's Answer.

Moses' second objection expresses his doubt in his reception by the Israelites. When at first he saw himself as inadequate, Moses now sees himself as ignorant. This second objection is really only a hypothetical problem he raises. At least, it is also a hypothetical agreement to go. Thus far, Yahweh only spoke of his approach to Pharaoh, but Moses knows that it is inevitable for him to approach the Israelites in order for them to be led out by him. It is this inevitable approach which Moses brings to the fore, when he says, *Behold, if I go to the sons of Israel....* He is calling this to God's attention. He would need to gain their trust. He would need to authenticate his mandate. He would need to convince them. His objection is that he does not quite know how to answer all these questions.

He knows what to say when he introduces himself to the Israelites. He would say, *The God of your fathers has sent me to you*, but he does not think that that is enough. False prophets can make the same claim, when in fact they are not sent by God. If he could demonstrate some intimacy with this God, he might convince them. But he does not even know his name. His ignorance will be eliminated when he is able to answer the one really important question, namely, if *they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?* Why does he think they would want to know? Is it not really that he wants to know? Moses was saying to God, 'Identify yourself more fully'. According to Childs, the projected response of the people to Moses' proclamation is not regarded as a remote reaction, but as the natural one which he is sure to expect. The question suggests that the verification of Moses' commission is integrally tied to the revelation of the divine name. (1974:66).

Names often had serious significance in those days. In the case of God's name; his name was his story. It summed up who he was, and what he wanted to make known about himself. (Motyer 2005:68). Whereas, in the first objection Moses was asking, 'Who am I?' In the second objection he is now asking, 'Who are you?' (Durham 1987:37). What's in the name of Israel's God, Yahweh? What is in that name, is its actual history, and the future as claimed by that history. (Janzen

1979:227). Moses' role as true apostle is reaffirmed in the light of his relationship with the one who sent him; he knows his true name. What then does Yahweh answer Moses?

God said to Moses, *I am that I am*. As we have said above, there is a good case for 'I will be what/who I will be', and in this case it has the force of God saying, I will be God for you. Not only will he be present, but he will be faithfully God for them. It means to exist in the absolute sense. It is his dynamic and powerful presence for Moses and for the people. God is saying, "I am truly he who exists and who will be dynamically present then and there in the situation to which I am sending you". (Gæbelein 1990:319-21). He is the God who makes himself known by his active-presence among his people. God's name was his person, his character, his authority, his power and his reputation (Petersen 2007:4). *I am that I am* says that God is sovereign, inexhaustible and independent. With this statement Moses is given the full name, but he is told what exactly *to say to the sons of Israel*. To them he must say, *I am has sent me to you*.

The cluster of the verb שֶׁלַח־נִי (*shelach-an*) here shows its significance. The root of this verb occurs 11 times in our present text. Moses comes with a definite mandate and authorization, being sent from the one who is sovereign and powerful. Moses is to go with confidence to the Israelites because he is one sent. It is to them, and to Pharaoh, that Moses is sent.

Moses was to give them the shorter version of the name, אֲהֵה (*ehyeh*) given to him. The proper name *Yahweh* (*yhwh*) given in verse 15, and *I am* (*ehyeh*) are apparently derived from the same root. Enns is of the opinion that the statement, *I am that I am*, is not God's name, but a preparatory comment that introduces the following announcement. According to him the divine name seems to be *I am*. (2000:103). God is not named by others; he gives his own name. We appreciate Fretheim's comment that when God gave his name, he was willing to join the historical community and break the distance typical of an unnamed entity (1991:65). We disagree, however, that the having of a name makes God

“vulnerable” (*ibid*), because the very meaning of the name is one that includes the facts of God’s sovereign and creative power. ‘*I am*’ is the name Moses was given to give to the Israelites.

The tetragrammaton, יהוה, is the proper name of the God of Israel. It is often used in combination. It was regarded as a *nomen ineffibile* called by the Jews. The pronunciation *Jehovah* was unknown until the 1520’s. Even though this name was so revered that it was hardly used in speech, or that it was used in a surrogate form, the transmission of Scriptural usage was meticulous. Howard says in his article, “Perhaps the most significant observation we can draw from the pattern of variegated usage of the divine name is that the Tetragram was held to be very sacred... But in copying the biblical text itself the Tetragram was carefully guarded.” (1977:73). Many scholars see it as the Hiphil of the verb היה, which points to God as creator. Most scholars see it as the Qal of that verb, which points to God as ever existing and sovereign.

From v15 to the end of the chapter, we find only divine speech. Moses will say nothing for the rest of this chapter. Verse 15, however, rounds off what is said in verses 13 and 14. Yahweh reiterates what he said in verse 14, except that there are a few additions to what was said. *And again God said to Moses*, demonstrates the reiteration by adding the word ‘again’. Moses is told what to say, and whom to say it to. He is to say what he must say to *the sons of Israel*.

There are two things he must tell them. The first is, *Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you*. Yahweh is the God of their ancestors, and he has sent Moses to them. He is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. The covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was a royal grant, and was a covenant of which they too were the beneficiaries. Yahweh’s relationship with the Israelites is unique. It is as valid now as it had been with Abraham. This selfsame God, Yahweh, had sent Moses to them. Moses was definitely one sent by Yahweh himself.

Unconditional royal grants were fairly common in the time of Abraham. An example of four occurrences is found in the Hittite Laws dating to ca. 1650-1500 BC - translated by Harry A. Hoffner (2000:106-119). This collection was later than the Sumerian law collections of Ur-Nammu and Lipit-Ishtar and the Akkadian laws of Eshnunna and Hammurabi, but earlier than the Middle Assyrian laws and the laws of the Hebrew Bible. The Abrahamic Covenant must be taken as an underlying aspect of this whole redemptive narrative and of God's actions on Israel's behalf. Under this kind of covenant, fiefs are granted to loyal servants by the king and require no further action on behalf of the grantee (Achtemeier 1985: 191).

Yahweh had not forgotten his covenant and his relationship with the Israelites. So, Israel too is not to forget. Yahweh is God's name forever and it must not be forgotten. Our text states that imperative positively: *This is my name forever and it will be to my remembrance from generation to generation.* Enns is correct; this could not have been a new name, as it would not have helped Moses if they did not recognize the name. He gives five other reasons too. (2000:103-4). They who say that it is a newly revealed name find it particularly hard to explain earlier mention of the name *Yahweh*. Davila observes that the appearance of *Yahweh* in the MT of Gen.22:14 had long been recognized as a problem. Some scholars have deleted it and, offering various hypothetical scenarios, reconstructed *EI* or Elohim in its place (1991:581). We should not only understand the concept of remembrance as a function of memory, but that it implies honor, worship and celebration of the one who bears the name. This kind of faith and honor with reference to Yahweh is actively to be handed down *from generation to generation*. As God never changes, so his name will remain *forever* and it will never change.

As a prophet, Moses recognizes that his authority will be understood by his speaking in that Name. Deuteronomy, too, discusses the question of the true prophet and the false prophet. Dt. 13:2–6 deals with the case of a נָבִיא who summons to the worship of other gods. He is to be regarded as an enemy of Yahweh and put to death. In 18:20 the threat of death is also suspended over the

נָבִיא who speaks in Yahweh's name without any commission from Yahweh. (Kittel et al. 1976:807)

iii) 3:16 – 22. Moses Given a Message for the Elders.

God assures Moses of success with a second discourse which anticipates the future. The people will believe; the king will be hardened; the Egyptians will be plagued; the deliverance will occur, and finally the Egyptians will be despoiled. From God's perspective the way is clear. His whole plan unfolds before an open future. (Childs 1974:77). Moses, however, does not see the way clear.

Every society has its own ways of organizing themselves. Israel was mainly patriarchal, and was led by the elders of the community. The community was often divided along tribal and then extended family lines. The elders of the community would thus have been representatives of their various tribes and extended families. It cannot be said for certain that such was the representation of the people before the exodus while they were in Egypt, but it is very likely the case, as this was how they were organized immediately after in their wilderness setting. The elders were the leaders of the community. They were often selected on the basis of seniority and wisdom.

Moses is instructed by Yahweh to *go and assemble the elders of Israel*. We know that the elders were the chief or prominent men among the people. They were generally men of vigorous old age. They were the representation of the people; not only to Moses, but also to Pharaoh. They are at the same time the leaders of the Israelites. Osborn and Hatton (1999:103) confirm that the **elders** were the senior tribesmen of Israel, who were recognized for both their maturity and their ability to be "leaders," not necessarily for the number of years they had lived. If in a receptor language the two ideas of leadership and authority that these people had can be combined in one term, then that term will be a good translation for **elders**. They seem to be a prominent group with common interests, principles, values, norms

and duties. They were thus the men who would mediate between Moses and the people. Moses needed to establish the most appropriate and efficient way of communicating with the Israelites. The elders would be in the best position to mobilize the people. Yahweh sends Moses directly to the Israelite elders.

When Moses had assembled the elders, he had to give them a message from Yahweh. In the first place Moses had to say to them, *Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has appeared to me*. Moses had to authenticate his authority as God's messenger. The authentication is found in the fact that Yahweh has appeared to him. That also demonstrates to them that Moses has an intimate relationship with Yahweh, for he not only knows his name, but he has seen Yahweh. God would later further authenticate Moses as his messenger by an ability to do signs and wonders. As Moses must tell them that he has seen God, so he must also tell them that God had seen them in their suffering. Yahweh's appearance to Moses will also witness on behalf of the entire community, for this was what the elders too had to testify.

In the second place Moses had to say to them, *The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says, 'I have seen and have taken stock of what was done to you in Egypt'*. The children of Israel were the victims in Egypt, and God had taken special notice of their victimization. The two words, פָּקַד תִּי used together, has the effect of, "seeing, I have noticed", or, "counting, I have taken stock". By putting it in the way that he does, Yahweh is actually saying, I also know who the perpetrators are. The blame is laid at Egypt's door.

This is not the first time Moses is told to mention the patriarchs. The inclusion of their prime ancestor, Abraham, signifies the point in time when this relationship was established and the historical continuity of the relationship of Yahweh with his offspring. His sole function is to define Yahweh's ongoing commitment to his people in terms of the coordinates of time and space. He is a historical-geographical referent of the ongoing divine presence. (Nürnberger 1993:7). Reference to the patriarchal narratives is positioned in the exodus story in such a

way that the God of the exodus was identified as the God of the patriarchs. The exodus would thus also serve as the means to fulfill the land promises given to Abraham. In addition to that we are shown how the blessing /cursing aspect of the promise is here unfolding; those who bless Israel will be blessed, and those who curse Israel will be cursed. Pharaoh's resistance to Israel's demand to worship Yahweh in freedom costs him and the Egyptian population dearly. (Nürnberger 1993:11).

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will deal with the Egyptians according to their culpability. But first, Yahweh's resolve is to act on behalf of the victims, especially since they are his people. God's resolve is firm, direct and deliberate. *Therefore I have declared...*, demonstrates Yahweh's resolute commitment to his people. His declarations are as good as done. It cannot be frustrated, even though that might be what Pharaoh would try to do. Yahweh says to his people, *I will bring you out of your misery in Egypt*. Yahweh promises his personal intervention on Israel's behalf. God is going to carry them up out of the state of hardship and trouble, which they are experiencing in Egypt. Where will Yahweh take them? Yahweh's statement in verse 8 is here repeated. We are told exactly where and what kind of land they will be taken to. It is a specific land of abundance which Yahweh will give them as their inheritance. The people are both to be brought out and taken into (Motyer 2005:72).

Moses' first approach must be to the elders. Yahweh tells Moses that he will be successful in his mission to the elders. They will accept what he says to them, and when they do, he is to go with them to Pharaoh. *Then, when the elders have heard your message, go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt....* Normal protocol requires them to have some qualifications in order to enter Pharaoh's presence.

Secondly, what they have to say to Pharaoh provides them with the appropriate qualification. They were to say to him, '*Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, met with us*'. They were able to enter Pharaoh's presence because they were in Yahweh's presence. Having been in the presence of their God, gave to them the "right" to enter the presence of a lesser "deity", Pharaoh. If their God met with them, then

surely Pharaoh can meet with them also. Yes, later Pharaoh will say that he does not know Yahweh, but Yahweh is intent on making himself known to the Egyptians, and he will show them that, in fact, Pharaoh is not his equal.

Yahweh is known to the *Hebrews*, because he is their God. The term *Hebrew* means ‘one from beyond’, and is often used to distinguish them from other nations. They are an ethnic group of people connected to Abraham, a stranger from the Euphrates area. The elders and Moses met with the God of the Hebrews, and he told them what to say to Pharaoh.

What Moses and his delegation have to say to Pharaoh, is here not cast as a command, or as a demand. Rhetorically, they appeal to his sense of logic with the words, “*So now*” What follows is logical to the speaker. By this the hearer should be convinced. The interjection, “*Please*” is used as a submissive and modest request. It is a word of entreaty. Pharaoh is called upon to uphold the principle of religious freedom. *Let us go a journey of three days into the desert and offer a sacrifice to Yahweh, our God.* On the one hand, the Hebrews must acknowledge that Yahweh is their God. Pharaoh, on the other hand, is asked to allow the Hebrews to worship their own God. Their worship requires faithful service and sacrifice. Pharaoh should understand that the full extent of this principle means to allow the Hebrews to travel a journey of three days in order to worship their God, since in the light of his own belief Egypt is the domain of the Egyptian deities. When Pharaoh refuses to accede to their request, Yahweh will demonstrate that he is God in Egypt too.

Yahweh appeals to his omniscience when he says; *I know that the king of Egypt will not give in to you.* Yahweh knows that Pharaoh will not accede to their request. The king of Egypt will not relent. Pharaoh’s unwillingness becomes the very reason for Yahweh to harden his heart. Deist speaks of a *hardening motif* as a second plot line of the story (1989:45). The obstinacy of Pharaoh will also provide Yahweh with the opportunity to demonstrate his might. *He will not let you go, until by my mighty hand he does.* In the rhetoric of our text the term, *hand*, is often used (It occurs 13 times). It is an expression depicting power, where the extension of the hand is to

manipulate or control the environment or situation. In this case the hand of God will be against the king of Egypt. The mighty hand of Yahweh will overcome the hand of the Egyptians (v.8). Yahweh will also use the hand of Moses to do mighty signs and wonders. Pharaoh will finally give in and let them go.

Hoffmeier (1986:378-387) provides an excellent interpretation of the use of the hand-motif in the liberation from Egypt. The expressions “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm” are frequently found in Exodus and Deuteronomy with reference to the contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh. Metaphorically they mean power or strength in the imagery of a warrior. Yahweh is a divine warrior on Israel’s behalf. These expressions are also attested to in ancient Egyptology as applied to Pharaoh or a god. Ramesses III (1185-1154 B.C.), for instance, is called “Lord of a powerful arm who smites Asiatics”. Yahweh and the writer(s) of the exodus material (and the reminiscences in Deuteronomy) were familiar with Egyptian expressions and appropriated them, showing that Yahweh is a conquering divine warrior. Yahweh will demonstrate his legitimacy as the greatest God by his arm defeating that of Pharaoh (cf. Ex.18:10-11).

Yahweh promises Moses, *I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt*. There is a contest between the hand of Egypt and the hand of Yahweh. Yahweh’s hand will *strike with performing wonders* among the Egyptians. Yahweh will perform these wonders right *in their midst*. The Egyptians will witness the wonders that Yahweh will do. The word “wonders” (*נַפְלָאֹתִי*) could also be translated as “judging”; that which causes trouble or hardship (Swanson 1997: n.p.). Yahweh’s actions against the Egyptians are his judgments against them. When the hand of Pharaoh gives in to the mighty hand of Yahweh, Moses is promised, *Then, after this, he will send you away*. The power of Israel’s God will prevail over all the power of the enemy, and their hearts will be transformed to become accommodating and generous.

God’s action against the Egyptians will work out for the benefit of the Israelites. Yahweh *will put favor in the eyes of the Egyptians* so that they will show the Israelites great generosity. The Egyptians will have a favorable demeanor towards

the Israelites. *When you go, they will not let you leave empty-handed.* The Egyptians will beg the Israelites to take what they have to give. They will so desperately want the Israelites to leave that they will gladly give them whatever they ask for (cf. Ex.11:8). Anticipating this kind of a response from the Egyptians, Yahweh instructs every Israelite *woman to ask from her female neighbor and other women in her house for articles of silver ... gold and clothing* for their sons and daughters. Mackay (2001:83) comments that although the word ‘clothing’ is the general term, here it conveys the idea of valuable clothing, not just ordinary wear. It is this wealth that will later provide for the beauty and richness of the tabernacle to be constructed (Motyer 2005:73).

The contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh will end up with Yahweh as the victor, and Yahweh’s people will plunder the Egyptians. They will not forcefully take anything from the Egyptians. What they will take away with them, is what will be given to them. In this way they *will strip the Egyptians*. Contra Cassuto (1974:44), who sees an upholding of the Lord’s law (Dt. 15:13-14) for a master to send a slave out with provisions, we believe that the motif is that of plundering after victory in war. There is a case for reparations that are made by the Egyptians to their former slaves in this way (Fretheim 1991:67). The Israelites will receive the rewards for their slave-labor and for making them victims of their oppression. Reparations are nevertheless exacted by Yahweh from the Egyptians, by allowing the Israelites to plunder them.

The contents of the message Yahweh gives to Moses is not only aimed at the elders, but for Moses himself; to build up his faith in the one who gives him the plan of what will happen and what he will do. If Moses is able to appreciate the contents of the message he is to give the elders, he should now be willing to be Yahweh’s representative to Pharaoh. Unfortunately it does not turn out that way, and Moses still tries to get out of this particular task that Yahweh has given him to do.

d) Ex. 4:1 – 9 Yahweh Answers Moses and Gives Him Signs.

So far, Yahweh had done nothing, but he said a great deal more. The plan looks good, but it was just that; a plan. Moses is not convinced that he should go, but he nevertheless asks hypothetical questions if he were on the assignment. How will he convince the Israelites that Yahweh really did appear to him? Simply showing that he knows the name of the God of Israel is no proof that Yahweh appeared to him. Moses' initial resistance to Yahweh's commission was gradually overcome by the signs granted him. Moses did not ask for signs, but this is what Yahweh will give him. Yahweh will give him signs that surely will convince them. They are called 'signs' and not 'wonders', and the former normally points to something (Motyer 2005:77). The signs are not explained in our text, and we cannot say with certainty what they point towards, but we know that they are meant to authenticate Moses' claims.

i) 4:1 – 5 Yahweh Answers Moses' Third Objection with a Sign.

Moses' third objection is one that reflects upon his supposed ineffectiveness. He sees himself as unable to convince the Israelites. *What if they do not believe me or listen to me?* Moses' objection is really a matter of trust; not his trust, but their trust in him. It nevertheless betrays his lack of trust in Yahweh at this point. When he says that they will not *listen*, he actually means that having heard they will regard what he says as insignificant. They will not pay attention to what he has to say. Moses is concerned, not with whether Pharaoh will recognize his authority, but, whether Israel will.

What Moses regards as unbelievable, is the fact that Yahweh had appeared to him. Yes, he knows that Yahweh had appeared to him, but how does he prove it to the Israelites? What will he answer if they said to him, '*Yahweh did not appear to you.*'? He surmises that they would ask such a question because they do not believe, nor do they take his testimony as insignificant. His effectiveness among the Israelites depends upon his ability to answer this question.

In answer to Moses' question, Yahweh will now make use of an object lesson, and asks Moses, *What is in your hand?* As was customary for both travelers and shepherds, what Moses had in his hand was a *staff*. In the ancient Near East the staff was also a symbol of leadership. This particular staff would be called the staff of God (Ex.4:20; 17:9), and by that it is not to be conceived magically but as an instrument of God's will (Van Dam 2003:693). In response to Moses' desire for assurance and credibility, God would use this staff in special ways, and Moses would gain confidence through it. Moses needs to see, and he needs to show the people what God can do. God intends to use this staff as an instrument to his glory.

Moses is instructed by Yahweh to take his staff and *throw it to the ground*. It is quite a simple instruction, and Moses is able to easily do as Yahweh instructs. Moses *threw it to the ground*, not knowing what to expect; in fact he did not expect anything. It is interesting to know that the masculine is used in reference to the staff. Is it not perhaps the case that the staff is personified? Such personification could maybe be applied to the fact that it comes to life, because *it became a snake*. Moses did not expect it to turn into a snake. His reflex was one of immediate fleeing. *Moses fled from its presence*; a response not surprising at all. Moses' personal support became something that he fled from.

Moses must have been stunned at the sight he had just experienced. The first sight that stunned him, made him come closer, so that Yahweh warned him not to come any closer. This time he fled and Yahweh instructs him to come closer and to reach out to it. Yahweh said, *Put out your hand and take hold of its tail*. Moses is not only told to come closer to this dangerous (?) snake, but he is asked to do a dangerous thing too. To take hold of the snake's tail is to allow it the freedom to bite one's hand, but Moses obeys. He *put out his hand and took hold of it, and it became a staff in his hand*. The noun, **יָדְךָ** could also be translated 'in the palm of his hand'.

By now Moses should be convinced to go, as this was a sign to authenticate Moses as God's emissary. The phrase, *put out*, could also be translated 'send out'. The verb פָּרַא is translated as 'to become very powerful' in 2Chr.26:8. Hence, as Moses was to send out his hand to confront and arrest the snake, so Yahweh was sending Moses to confront and 'arrest' Pharaoh for him to become God's instrument. The 'arrest' of Pharaoh, is the 'arrest' of an Egyptian deity. Motyer succinctly states that our text indicates at least that the Lord is the God of transforming power. He can take the ordinary (the staff) and make it the deadly (the snake), but he can also make the deadly subordinated to the man of obedient faith. (2005:78). When Moses obeyed the word of God he mobilized the power and the resources of God, and for the same reason would be more than a match for the Pharaoh.

The whole purpose of this sign is *so that they will believe that Yahweh, the God of their ancestors appeared to Moses*. The unbelievable is made believable; and if they did not believe that Yahweh appeared to Moses, by virtue of this sign, they should. Yahweh did appear to Moses, and by that his mission mandate is to be authenticated before the people. They must receive him, believe him and pay attention to him. If this sign is not sufficient to convince the people, Yahweh is ready to demonstrate more.

ii) 4:6 – 9. Yahweh Gives Moses Two More Signs.

In the previous four verses the noun "hand" occurs four times; in the next two verses it occurs another five times. In our present text it occurs thirteen times in all, indicating that it forms an important theme here in this context. The next sign also involves Moses' hand. Immediately after the sign of the snake, Yahweh gives Moses another sign. As with the first sign, this one is meant to get Israel to accept Moses on the basis that God appeared to him.

After the sign of the snake, Yahweh speaks to Moses *again*. What Yahweh has to say is aimed at the same intention; that is to make the fact that Yahweh appeared to Moses believable to the Israelites. The language is that of entreaty; *Please put your hand into your bosom*. Moses is asked to tuck his hand into his garment in the vicinity of his chest. Moses does what is asked of him. Though we are not told that Moses was instructed to take out his hand, he understood that this is what he must do. The narrator knows that the reason why Yahweh asked Moses to put his hand in his cloak was to demonstrate something *when he brought it out from his cloak*. Bringing his hand out is really the point of the request to put it in. When Moses brought out his hand, *it was like snow*, leprous. The point is that Moses saw that he had a skin disease; though called leprosy it could have been something else. This sign may have anticipated the inflicting of the plague of boils (Enns 2000:103).

The sight of a skin disease could have distressed Moses. It was reckoned that this particular disease was incurable, and if Moses understood that, it would have distressed him even more. We are not told what his reaction was as in the case with the snake. But Yahweh made his point, both to Moses and to the reader. Later, anyone identified with such a skin infection, was to be quarantined. He was also to make a sacrifice for restoration (Lev.14). Immediately Moses is instructed to put his hand back into his cloak; *Return your hand into your cloak*. When Moses returns his hand and brings it out again, *it was as before; like the rest of his flesh*. Moses must have been relieved, as this sign touched his person. At the same time it gave him confidence because he would have to demonstrate this same sign to the Israelites in order for them to believe that Yahweh appeared to him. It would give him credibility with his people.

A third sign was given in case their unbelief persisted. By now Moses should have been satisfied that Yahweh had given him enough to convince the people, but Yahweh volunteers a third sign anyway. Moses did not ask for signs, but signs are given to answer his perceived difficulty. This time, however, Yahweh is repeating Moses' objection, *Then if it is that they do not believe you, nor pay attention*, plus the instruction to use the signs to get them to believe. If they do not believe *the first sign*, *they will believe the next sign*. Two signs were enough, but Yahweh adds the

third one. With this third sign, he can only expect success in his endeavor to convince them.

The signs must be utilized as proof of Moses' claim. Every sign serves as a witness to what Moses has to say. *If it happens*, indicates the unlikelihood of this, yet it is aimed at giving Moses the further confidence for the task he is commissioned to do. But in the unlikelihood *that they do not believe the second of these signs, nor heed your voice ...*, the third sign is given. This third sign is not demonstrated to Moses as were the other two. He is simply told what to do if he needs to employ another sign. In fact, Moses has to take a step of faith on the basis of Yahweh's previous actions. For the third sign Moses is to *take from the waters of the Nile and pour it on dry ground, and the waters ... shall become blood on the dry ground*. Moses has no reason to doubt that it will happen as Yahweh said it would. Again, this sign anticipates a plague. Even the life-force of Egypt, the Nile, is actually controlled by the God of the slaves.

Moses has the experience of Yahweh's presence; he has received a commission from Yahweh; he has a message to give both the Israelites and the Pharaoh; and he has received several signs. What more does he need?

e) Ex. 4:10 – 17. Yahweh Answers Moses and Gives Him a Helper.

Moses still does not believe that he is the right man for the job. This time he brings the problem he has back to himself. He thinks of himself as incompetent and does not make any room for the possibility that he could become competent, especially since he had received all these assurances, signs and privileges. Fretheim (1991:70) is indeed correct, that signs may dazzle, but they do not lead to belief.

i) 4:10 – 12 Yahweh Answers Moses' Fourth Objection.

Moses seems to be getting pretty desperate to get out of this predicament. He already now begs Yahweh, *Please my Lord, I am not a man of words.* He here

uses the word **אָלֹנִי**, as he focuses on Yahweh's authority and majesty. In the Pentateuch this word is often used where God is submissively addressed. Moses says that he is not eloquent. In fact he portrays himself as worse than inelegant; he restates it in two different ways; *I am heavy of mouth and slow of tongue*. Besides having a speech impediment, he cannot 'think on his feet' so that he can answer immediately when called upon to. He does not feel he has the diplomacy skills to approach Pharaoh. He sees his speech inability as something that comes a long way. Worse still is his accusation; ... *nor have I ever been before and after you spoke to your servant*. The accusation is that Yahweh's appearance to him has not changed anything in this respect for him.

Yahweh uses the creation principle in answering Moses' objection. Yahweh argues that he is the creator by a set of three rhetorical questions. The third question is really the answer to the first two, but the third answer, though not given, can only have an affirmative answer. Because Moses complains that he has a speech impediment, and that he is not eloquent, or sharp, Yahweh asks him the first question, '*Who gave man his mouth?*' Yahweh knows Moses' situation because he created him and therefore his ability, or inability, to speak. The way Moses was is exactly the way Yahweh created him. The second question has the same effect, but it connects the faculties of hearing and sight with that of speech.

The second question is, '*Who makes him to be mute, or deaf, or sighted or blind?*' Moses must be grateful that he can speak; he is not mute, though Yahweh could have made him thus. If Moses had no hearing from birth, he would have had no ability to speak, for speaking comes by the imitation of sounds heard. Even for the faculty of hearing he ought to be grateful. The point made to Moses is that Yahweh made him adequate, and what little he had should not be taken for granted. Nevertheless, God is in control not only of the elements, but he is able to direct mouth, ears and eyes. The creator God is the one who makes, orders, and dispatches all of creation. In Breuggemann's words, "The topic concerns creation and endowment of all humanity (**מְלֹא־לַיְלָה** to adam)" (1994:716)

The last of the three questions (*Is it not I, Yahweh?*), is really the answer to the first two questions. This last question is not given an answer, but there is only one possible answer; ‘Yes’. Yahweh is our creator and we owe him our full obedient response when he calls us to act according to his agenda. He is willing to use us the way he has made us, and if necessary, he will specially equip us for the task he gives us.

On the basis of this creation principle, what follows is a logical expectation. There is a sequential relation to what comes now. *So, go now and I myself will be with your mouth. I will instruct you what you must speak.* Yahweh’s instruction now is the same one given originally (3:10); ‘So now, go’ The promise is also the same as originally given (3:12); ‘Surely, I will be with you’, but because Moses was giving his mouth as an excuse, Yahweh promises to be with his mouth and to tell him what to say. The promise relates exactly to the areas of concern to Moses, namely his lack of eloquence (*I will be with your mouth*) and his inability to respond quickly (*I will instruct you what you must speak*). Yahweh himself is the answer to every objection of Moses.

ii) 4:13 – 17 Yahweh Answers Moses’ Final Objection with a Helper.

Moses made all the excuses he could think of, and they were all answered. So, what now? This time Moses flatly refuses to go. Moses said, ‘*Please Lord; please send whoever else you will send*’. In other words he is saying, “Lord, I beg you to send someone else”. The literal translation of this verse is, ‘... send by the hand which you send’. The first interjection, *please*, is an exclamation, while the second *please* has a modal connotation. The first calls attention to the second, while the second gives the idea of earnest entreaty. The seriousness of the entreaty is heightened by the use of the title *Lord* (אֱלֹהִים).

There is a strong case for translating the phrase ‘*by the hand*’ as ‘on his side’ (e.g. 1Sam.17:22), or ‘on his behalf’ (e.g. 2Sam.3:12), or ‘in his support’ (e.g. 2Kg.15:19). In that case a legitimate interpretation could be expressed by the

paraphrase, ‘send someone by my side as a help’. Moses preferred a man by his side rather than the divine presence alone. The rest of the story actually supports such a translation. That would also perhaps be a better reason for Yahweh to become angry with Moses. All of God’s persuasive powers have been brought to bear, and Moses still is not convinced (Fretheim 1991:73).

For whichever reason, Yahweh becomes *very angry with Moses*. The Hebrew is very graphic at this point, as it literally says that ‘the nose of Yahweh became hot’. Yahweh, nevertheless, ‘gives in’ to Moses, and asks the question, *Why not your brother Aaron, the Levite?* Yes, he would send Aaron with Moses. What is not quite clear is why Aaron is referred to in this way? Surely, if he is Moses’ brother than Moses needs not be told that he is a Levite. Many scholars believe that this is an interpolation by a Priestly (P) editor to accentuate Levitical involvement; but this need not be the case.

Yahweh appeals yet again to his omniscience when he comments on Aaron’s oratory skills (*I know that surely he can speak well* [literally, *speak he can speak*]), and that Aaron is coming (*Besides, he is coming out to meet you*), and on what is in Aaron’s heart (*and he will rejoice in his heart when he sees you*). Even though Yahweh ‘gave in’ to his wish, Moses needed to realize that he was being sent by the all-knowing God and He knows what the outcome of all this will be. Moses must place his confidence in Yahweh, rather than in Aaron. Aaron does not enter the scene in our present text.

It is now established that Aaron will be Moses’ help. Moses is told: *You shall speak to him and place words in his mouth*. Moses will tell Aaron what to say. Aaron will be Moses’ spokesperson to, both, the Israelites and to Pharaoh. Both of them, however, will be Yahweh’s spokespeople. Yahweh *will be with their mouth(s)*. That promise is reiterated in the very next sentence: *and I will instruct you (both) what to do*, but here it includes the idea of ordering their actions too. Both the authority of the teacher and the content of his teaching are here in view.

Aaron will be Moses' helper. Yahweh assigned him to a specific task. He is to be Moses' spokesperson, as *he will speak to the people* on Moses' behalf. The commissioning relationship that exists between Yahweh and Moses is the one that now exists between Moses and Aaron. Yahweh says about Aaron, '*... and it shall happen that he shall be as your mouth, and you shall be as his god*'. Aaron will speak exactly as Moses tells him, in the same way as Moses must speak exactly as Yahweh instructs. If the relationships between Aaron and Moses, and between Moses and Yahweh are such, then the recipients will receive the exact message that Yahweh intended for them to hear; whether the people or Pharaoh.

In addition to the mouthpiece, Yahweh provides a hand-piece too. *You must take this staff in your hand, so that you can do signs with it.* Moses is finally willing to go accepting Yahweh's promise that he will be powerful in word and in deed. He will know what to say with authority and to demonstrate that authority with signs and wonders. The staff would become known as "the staff of God" and Moses will act by God's authority. The staff will play an important role in demonstrating it because it will also be the sign of Yahweh's presence with him.

This is a story of human redemption; God heard, saw and knew the plight they were experiencing. God is the one who undertakes to redeem them. God wants to transform their status; from slaves to nationhood. The text does not speak of human commitment to divine ways, and we do not yet see them as a religious community. The only responsibility of humans in our text is that of believing, though by persuasion, and to allow God to lead them out of Egypt to a good and spacious land. They who trust in God are blessed with the benefits of freedom and possessions.

2.4 Theological Reflection.

The world of the text is not evil per se; only as far as Egypt's oppression of Israel causes them to cry in real anguish (3:7). It is called "misery" (3:17). There is also a pre-emptive evil of unbelief by the Israelites and by Pharaoh (3:19; 4:1, 9). The

unbelief of Moses that causes Yahweh to be angry with him is only temporary (4:14).

The world can be changed; at least for the Israelites. How? By redemption; and Yahweh intends to do so. Even though Yahweh creates an opportunity for Pharaoh to change in some minor way, the intention is not *conversionist* or *reformist*. God does not really want Pharaoh to change nor does he want the Egyptian structures to change. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart will facilitate the wondrous signs from God (3:10-11; 19-20). Neither is it *revolutionist* because God does not seek to overthrow the social order, but Pharaoh's obstinacy will finally bring his demise. Here, the Lord only shows the anticipated conquering of the Egyptians by the fact that the Israelites will take plunder (3:21-22).

Even though the initial request for a separation of the people by a three-day journey into the desert to worship (3:18), the intention is not *introversionist* either. Israel is not expected to withdraw from the world. In fact they will receive their own land (3:8, 17) and they must stand as witnesses of God's goodness to ensuing generations and to the nations.

There is definitely a *thaumaturgical* intention. God will by special intervention deliver his people. The deliverance will come by God's personal intervention (3:8 "I have come down...") and by His mighty hand (3:20). Moses becomes the extension of God's hand as he is given the ability to do mighty signs to prove that he is God's man (4:2-9).

God is interested for the Israelites to experience a *utopian* setting. They are promised a good and spacious land (3:8). It is a land of plenty; flowing with milk and honey (3:17). It must be for them an existence that will remind them to worship God for generations to come.

Slavery was not a shame, but the fact that they were guests in Egypt, was what made it wrong in this instance. The rights of the Israelites are taken away in slavery and their demeanor is expressed in their cry and anguish. They were being

oppressed to a point of misery. God makes himself judge over the Egyptians and declares them guilty after having weighed the situation (3:16 “*I have seen and have taken stock...*”). Their guilt will be weighed upon by the heavy hand of God (3:20) and the plundering by those who have been wronged and dishonored (3:22). Their slaves will put them to shame.

Ultimately, the honor of Yahweh is at stake. If he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then he must be a covenant-keeping God, and he must be able to stand up for his people. By that covenant was Israel’s honor acquired and guaranteed. The Israelites had a historical relationship with Yahweh.

Yahweh wants to have a *dyadic* relationship with Moses. God is the sender and Moses the messenger (3:10, 16). That task in itself seems too big for Moses who actually doubts himself (4:1, 10). It is precisely for the feeling of inadequacy that Moses would need a dyadic relationship with God. God promises relief in this respect when he says, “I will be with you” (3:12) and “I will be with your mouth and instruct you what to say” (4:12, 15).

Aaron is also drawn into this dyadic relationship in a dual way; mainly, that he will speak for Moses, and God will give him the words (4:15-16). Moses exists for God’s service and Aaron for Moses’. God wants this relationship to extend to the Israelites. They are his people because of the covenant with the patriarchs, and they are to receive the benefits of that position (3:6-10). This was an implicit contract binding them to Yahweh and Yahweh to them. Their identity as a people will be marked by this God who has seen their plight, and will fight for them (3:19-20). He will bring them to a good and spacious land, and give it to them as an inheritance (3:8).

Two personalities stand out as individualist, namely Yahweh and Pharaoh, and they are set in conflict with each other. Pharaoh is the king of Egypt, the oppressor. Yahweh will present himself as the king of the Israelites, the oppressed. The ultimate outcome of this challenge is indicated in the statement, “but I know that the king of Egypt will not give in to you. He will not let you go, until by my mighty

hand he does" (3:19). Yahweh will come forth victorious. This challenge will affect the people of both kings. The Egyptians will be plundered on the one hand, and the Israelites will be favored by both their God and their enemies (3:21) on the other.

There seems to be another challenge that is anticipated only. It is the challenge of believability and acceptance. The people had already rejected Moses as a mediator between themselves in conflict. How much more would they reject him as mediator between them and the God of their ancestors? They needed to be convinced that God appeared to Moses (4:1). This was a rare and special privilege and would place Moses on the level of honor with Abraham and Jacob. They will finally believe (4:17). How can Moses expect to convince his enemy (Pharaoh) if he cannot convince his own people? This particular conflict is resolved by the mention of God's name and by the triple miracle which Moses is instructed to demonstrate before them.

The most exciting prospect is that which indicates the possibility of an interaction between the human and the divine. The initiative, however, will always be with God. He must reveal himself and his ways, else we can have no hope of such an interaction. Here we see the revelation of God to Moses. God has opened himself for interaction with man. In his presence, Moses recognizes the awesome nearness, and covers his face, because it was too risky to look at God. The only thing that God insists upon is for Moses to take off his sandals because the place was holy. The place was only holy because of the presence of a holy God. God imparted holiness to the location. When God's presence departed, that space once again became common ground (Hartley 2003:421).

God revealed himself to a man whom he was going to commission as his messenger to his people. The visible element of the theophany functioned as something to get Moses' attention (Breuggemann 1994:712). Actually, God prepared Moses for this project, and yet this interaction made allowance for the free will of the man. He allows Moses to be resistant to his commission. God wanted Moses to aid in providing a solution to the people's oppression. Moses is expected to partner with God. Every objection raised by Moses' resistance is

handled with great seriousness, and God met them with divine promises. God promises Moses to be with him, or to be with his mouth. He omnisciently promises Moses success – the people will believe Moses; Pharaoh's heart will be hardened; the Egyptians will be plagued; the people will be delivered; and the Egyptians will be plundered by them. These assurances emanate from the fact of God's sovereignty and power. The hand of Pharaoh cannot match the strength of the hand of Yahweh.

God was concerned about the well-being of his own flock. He was willing to reveal his redemptive purpose for Israel. It was no sudden impulse of God (Mackay 2001:61). This redemptive purpose was in line with his covenant relationship with the forefathers. God has an ongoing commitment to his people. When he introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he linked that redemptive purpose to his historical relationship with them. He reiterated his covenant with his people. He is a covenant-keeping God. He is for his people, even into the future. The redemptive purpose for Israel will eventually overflow to the Gentiles too (Kaiser 1997:570). God is present for his people and for his people alone. That presence is an indication of their blessedness and success among the nations. God reveals himself for Israel's identity as his possession.

This redemptive purpose will continue as is later witnessed in the Nehemiah story. Nehemiah reminded them of *God's redemptive purpose for Israel* (*Neh. 5:8*). In the past, God redeemed Israel from Egypt; and more recently, He had redeemed them from captivity in Babylon. But this verse informs us that Nehemiah and others of the leading Jews had helped redeem some of their people, and now their fellow Jews were putting people into bondage just to make money. These selfish money lenders were tearing down everything that God and Nehemiah were trying to build up (Wiersbe 1996a:n.p.).

God's special revelation to Moses seems to be prompted by what he saw Israel going through. He "heard", he "remembered", he "saw", and he "knew" indicate profoundly Yahweh's involvement in the well-being of his people. God's people may forget His law, but God remembers His covenant (Wiersbe 1996b:n.p.). He

saw their hardships and revealed himself in response to their plight. God was intimately affected by their suffering. Here the distress of the People is emphasized; as the faithfulness of God to His covenant is impressed upon us (Bulinger 1898:325). Their groans he took as addressed to him, and he responded and “came down” for their benefit. Edersheim (1997:55) comments that though only “a cry,” so to speak, spiritually inarticulate, no intervening period of time divided their prayer from its answer. “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them”—literally, He “knew them,” that is, recognized them as the chosen seed of Abraham, and, recognizing, manifested His love towards them.

He was present in the midst of their suffering because he saw, heard and knew their suffering, and came down to deliver them. Their social situation had to be transformed from oppression to freedom (Breuggemann 1994:678). Redemption is the kind of interaction that brings transformation. The deliverance of God is finally not only from something, it is to something. They will move from redemption to creation; to a new way of life.

The Egyptian oppression was nevertheless necessary for God to reveal his power in his work of redemption. God will deal with the Egyptians according to their culpability. He will act on behalf of the victims. His redemption will be quick and decisive, leaving the Egyptians empty-handed. We see that human wickedness moves God to action. He will show himself as being full of holy zeal against wickedness, yet willing to show mercy to anyone who repents and submits to his sovereignty. Yahweh creates an opportunity for Pharaoh to change, and the people of Israel will experience God by what he does in their future.

When Moses was at Horeb, the Mountain of God, God appeared to him in a strange sight. Horeb was known as the mountain of revelation (Motyer 2005:48). The appearance was a self-disclosure of the divine. When Moses inspected it, the Angel of the Lord, who is the Lord himself, spoke to him from the burning bush. This was a supernatural flame of fire accompanying the revelation of God; also a

precursor to the theophany for the people's benefit (Enns 2000:96). The initiative changes from Moses to God. God allows Moses to be in his presence. He who inspects is now the one who is confronted. Moses became the discoverer of God, and of God's intention. The Presence means grace and sanctification. God's presence is an indication of his approval of those to whom he appears. The appearances of God are beneficent in its nature. God is visible but must not be seen (Noth 1959:38). He is both a self-revealing and a self-concealing God. Concealment relates to God's holiness.

The messenger of God was in dialogue with God; he must know God. Moses realizes this was a necessity for any possible prophetic office. Moses wants to know God's intention by asking his Name. God's name is his story; it summed up who he was. The question about God's Name comes up because of his presence (Thomson 1988:1751). When God gave his name he was willing to join the historical community and break the distance typical of an unknown entity (Fretheim 1991:65). The divine presence is linked with knowledge about God. Even though Moses learns the Name by using a hypothetical objection to his call; he knows that the Name authenticates the call. The revelation of a present God must serve as an assurance to Moses and to the people (Davis 1972:39).

When God revealed his name, it was in the context of dialogue. The revelation of the Name becomes an unveiling of God's sovereignty. The disclosure of Yahweh's personal Name, is to disclose his own person. It is a name containing the full richness and honor of the one naming himself. It is the eternal name of God. God is self-contained and incomprehensible. He speaks to Moses as king about a people he is responsible for when he says; *bring my people out of Egypt*. "I am" is the answer to these people's question, which Moses asked on their behalf. The theological implication of the Name for them was the focus of continuing worship. They were to remember him by that name for all their generations to come. Zimmerli (1982) notices that the expression, "I am Yahweh your God" is the long form, and is preferred in paraenetic statements.

The one sent will be endowed with the power of God. The prophet must be convinced of God's power present in him. More than that, he discovers the power of God, being allowed to appropriate this power in the execution of his commission. He was going to be God's vehicle of power to the coming deliverance. God gives his man power so that the people may believe. He endows him with three signs that will convince them of the messenger's authenticity. The Presence also authenticated the identity and the commands of Yahweh, as it authenticated the present programme of Yahweh. The messenger will be able to do signs and wonders, and the staff of God in his hand will give him the confidence, assurance and credibility he needed. The staff was a transforming power able to be turned into a living thing (Motyer 2005:78). Every sign that Moses will do only serves to give witness that Yahweh is omnipotent and irresistible. God's self-revelation shows his magnificence.

God reveals himself to Moses as the creator who redeems. The sovereign Lord reminds Moses that he created man's mouth, and he makes a man mute. Moses' inadequacy can be met by the creator God being with his mouth. God was able to make Moses new for the task of being God's prophet. Yahweh met every inadequacy of Moses with a pledge of his own sufficiency (Janzen 1979:234). Moses must rest in Yahweh's creative presence; the creator God is the one who makes, orders and dispatches all of creation to his ends.

God reveals himself to be a patient God. God's anger is even tempered with patience when Moses requests that another be sent. Throughout, as Moses raised his five (what might seem to us frivolous) objections, God responds with sensitivity and seriousness. The objections even border unbelief and contradiction to God's assurances. Yet, God persists in incorporating Moses as a partner in his redemptive intentionality towards Israel. Childs (1985:52) succinctly states that when God charged Moses, "Come, I send you to Pharaoh ... (3:10)", and he resisted the command, God was willing even to negotiate for his plan until the real ground for Moses' resistance emerged as unbelief. In sum, God appears throughout the Old Testament as a person with a will which he freely communicates. In spite of Moses' resistance, God assigned him a unique role

within Israel; a role which includes every other office: deliverer, lawgiver, prophet, priest, psalmist, sage and mediator of the Covenant.

Finally, Yahweh does not act according to deistic principles; getting things started and leaving it to continue on its own. He promises to be with Moses and Aaron all the way. He will not only be with their mouths, but he will teach them there and then what to do and to say. He will order their very actions and words.

Let us summarize the theological significance of this text according to Fretheim (1991:52-53):

The recognition of holiness (3:6) does not lead to passivity in the presence of God ... the divine holiness is of such character that it invites rather than repels human response ... God does not demand a self-effacing Moses but draws him out and works with him "warts and all" ... It is Moses' persistence that occasions a greater fullness in the divine revelation. Human questions find an openness in God and leads to fuller knowledge ... God treats the dialogue with Moses with integrity and honors his insights ... God is not the only one with something important to say. God will move with Moses, even adapting original divine plans (the role of Aaron; see at 4:10-17) ... God always aims for the best in every situation, but God must often work with options that are less than the best (witness Aaron's failure in chap.32).

The sense-perceptible representations of God's presence come in a variety of forms in which he reveals himself. This variety is an indication of his freedom. The appearances of God are for the most spontaneous and effective. God may appear in any place and at any time without any manipulation from outside himself. His holiness distinguishes him from his creation, but his sovereignty allows him not to be limited by the distinction. When God appears in theophanies he limits himself to specific and particular forms within the context of the creation he has made. God is nevertheless supernatural in every sense.

The Old Testament also interpreted this narrative in a particular way. Many scholars see this as a call narrative which is paradigmatic of a prophetic call. Joshua was promised that as Yahweh was with Moses, so too he would be with him. The call of Jeremiah, the prophet, in Jer.1:7-9 seems to follow the paradigm of Moses' call. Like with Moses, Jeremiah presents his inadequacies. Keil and

Delitzsch (2002: 27) comments that the divine call throws Jeremiah into terror. Knowing well his too great weakness for such an office, he exclaims: Ah, Lord Yahweh! I do not know how to speak. Moses, however, was not ready of speech, he lacked the gift of utterance; Jeremiah, on the other hand, only thinks himself not yet equal to the task by reason of his youth and want of experience. Jeremiah's youthful bashfulness and his shy unwillingness to speak before high and mighty personages stand as hindrances in the way of his accepting God's call. The Lord will be with him, so that he needs have no fear for any man. The promise of Presence again served as a motivation to act without fear in the obedience of God's commission. God himself solves the prophet's problem by touching his mouth implying that God would give him *utterance*, notwithstanding *his* inability to speak (Jamieson *et.al* 1997:n.p.). God empowers whom he sends. This, we see was the case with Gideon, Isaiah and Ezekiel too.

Our theological reflection cannot ignore the New Testament interpretation of aspects in our text. We must consider this in our reflection. We find a citation of Ex.3:6, 15 and 16 in Mt. 22:32 and its parallel passages in Mark 12:26 and Luke 20:37. The Sadducees came to Jesus with a question about the law of the kinsman-redeemer, hoping to trap Him in His doctrine of the resurrection, and He answered them out of the books of Moses and spoke of both angels and the resurrection (Freedman 1998:460). We may glean three emphases in our Lord's use of it. Firstly, it is used in a way where it chiefly undergirds the doctrine of the resurrection. Secondly, it brings to bear the power of God, because the Sadducees are accused of unbelief in this regard. Thirdly, the dead as we know them are not excluded from a relationship with God. Our Lord highlights the fact that the statement is in the present; "I am" the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Wiersbe succinctly puts it "Our Lord was not content to refute the Sadducees' foolish views about the future life. He also wanted to answer their claim that there was no resurrection; *and He did it by referring to Moses!* He knew that Moses was the only authority they would accept (1996c:n.p.)

In Acts 7:30-35 Stephen makes reference to the story in Ex.3:2-10, showing God's calling of Moses to lead the very people who rejected him earlier. In the same way,

this Jesus whom they have killed has been approved of God. He quotes numerous portions of the Septuagint text directly and summarizes others (Polhill 2001:197). This Moses whom they refused, saying, *who made you a ruler and a judge...* (Ex.2:14) —Here, again, “*the stone which the builders refused is made the head of the corner*” (Ps 118:22). This is quoted to remind his Moses-worshipping audience of the grand testimony of their faithful lawgiver, that *he himself was not the last and proper object of the Church’s faith, but only a humble precursor and small model of Him to whom their absolute submission was due* (Jamieson, et.al. 1997: n.p.). As Moses was appointed to be deliverer of the Israelites, so Jesus would be the deliverer of all who believe in him. It becomes obvious that Stephen had a freedom to paraphrase and to alter slightly the sequence of the historical events for the purpose of his message.

In Hebrews 11:16 we are reminded of the promise in Ex.3:8. The promise of God provided hope for the people who were subjected to tremendous suffering. The writer to the Hebrews confirmed that God was faithful and worthy of our faith. Like Philo, this writer believes that earth is not the home of the righteous; heaven is. But he envisions this idea in more traditionally Jewish terms than Philo, looking for a *future city* (Keener 1993:n.p.) His word will come true. In fact, the faith of those who please God, was so strong that the faithful were even willing to face persecution and still remain unwavering in their faith in the God of Israel. Christian believers do well to exercise their faith unwaveringly.

In Revelation we have a strong allusion, especially to Ex.3:14. The Name of God is stated in attributes; he is the eternal God; the first and the last; the alpha and omega; and the faithful one (1:4; 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). That he is eternal is admitted in that he is the one “who was, and is, and is to come”. He is therefore the trustworthy one. While the Revelation texts correlate more with Isa.41:4, it must be noted that the latter is based upon Exodus 3:14. God is there, and he is there to redeem his people. God’s activity for his people is past, present and future.

Philo. A first-century Jewish philosopher committed to both Judaism and Greek thought; he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and held a position of great influence and prestige in the Jewish community there.

Most important is that many of these verses actually refer to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God; the redeeming God. He is the eschatological messiah. He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He holds the keys of death, and in him is life eternal. Using Paul's words, he is the new creation because of the resurrection.

2 B. THE PRESENT GOD PROMISES DELIVERANCE.

Breuggemann (1994:723) aptly states that the two governing formulas “Let my people go” and “You shall know I am Yahweh” together join the social and theological issues. The imperative of freedom and the indicative of sovereignty cannot be separated in the rhetoric or in the faith of Israel. The indicative of sovereignty focuses on the power struggle between Yahweh and Pharaoh. The statement also bears on Moses and the Israelites. For Pharaoh, it will mean his demise, and for Moses and the people, their deliverance.

Moses must have been confused, because it seemed to him like Pharaoh was still in control. Pharaoh bluntly denied any knowledge of Yahweh and would not bow to his demands in any way. In fact, he now acted spitefully against the children of Israel and increased their workload, so that it would really become unbearable for them. In Cassuto’s words (1967:73), Moses is disillusioned and reproachful because he had learnt that his initial action had brought fresh calamity on the heads of his oppressed brethren. Moses foregoes the second audience with Pharaoh and comes into God’s presence protesting that God had not rescued his people, but had in fact caused them to be worse off. Even Moses’ faith became weak (Harlow 1969:16), and the fact that Moses and Aaron did not return to Pharaoh to present the complaint caused by their original request is a further indication of the severity of their failure (Durham 1987:69).

His protest came from the expectation that God would act faster and more decisively with the Egyptian king. He expected faster results. Pharaoh’s whole purpose was to break Israel’s hope of any freedom (Cole 1973:82). What added to the problem was that the foremen took their cry to Pharaoh, but unlike God, he neither hears nor answers. The obvious intent of the foremen’s visit to Pharaoh was to undo the harm that was brought upon Israel by the intercession of Moses and Aaron (Durham 1987:69). They gained no concession from Pharaoh. While, even according to the foremen Pharaoh’s treatment of the Israelites was unfair, he remained unmoved at the possibility of an uprising. Instead his response was harsh and unkind. This response actually set them against Moses and

consequently against God, and Moses himself was quickly caught up in the prevalent gloom (Clements 1972:35).

While the divine plan at first appears to be thwarted and the situation temporarily worsens, God is by it busy to do according to that plan. The Israelite foremen had no conception of the grandeur and far-reaching scope of God's plans – for that matter neither had Moses (Ellison 1982:33). Now, what Moses really needed was the kind of reassurance that only Yahweh could give him. Yahweh needed to remind Moses that the redemption to come was going to be more glorious and more meaningful in the light of its preceding difficulties. That is in fact also what he received from Yahweh. Yahweh assured him that he had not forgotten his covenant with Abraham, and that the covenant would be established with the Israelites after their miraculous rescue.

From the outset, the essential purpose of this narrative is to make plain the real and active presence of the incomparable Yahweh (Durham 1987:70). Moses and the people needed to trust in the present Lord. Their patient waiting and enduring will be rewarded by a grand redemption and a lasting relationship with the God of all creation himself. This was fairly easy for Moses to accept, but whether he could convince the people; this he doubted. Moses was really asked to present the people with the hope of redemption, and the prospect of them being showcased as the people of God. What a glorious hope, and what a wonderful prospect to have!

Exodus 5:22 – 6:12.

1. Translation:

5:22 And Moses returned⁵³ to Yahweh and he said, “Lord⁵⁴, why have you brought injury⁵⁵ upon this people? Is this why you sent⁵⁶ me?”

⁵³ TWOT indicates that this is the 12th most used verb in the Old Testament (over 1050 times in its various nuances). It is often understood as repentance.

- 23 From the time I came before Pharaoh to speak in your Name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered⁵⁷ your people with your delivering⁵⁸.
- 6:1 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. Because of a mighty hand he will send⁵⁹ them away, and by a mighty hand he will drive⁶⁰ them out of his land.”
- 2 And God spoke to Moses and he said to him, “I am Yahweh.”
- 3 “I presented⁶¹ myself to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as ‘God Almighty’, and by my name, Yahweh, I did not become known to them.”
- 4 “And also, I have established⁶² my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, where they have dwelt in.”
- 5 And also, I have heard⁶³ the groan⁶⁴ of the sons of Israel, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I remembered my covenant.”
- 6 “Therefore, say to the sons of Israel, ‘I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will rescue you from your bondage, and I will redeem you with outstretched arm and with great judgments⁶⁵.’”
- 7 “And I will take you as my people, and I will be your God⁶⁶; and you will know that I am Yahweh, your God, the one bringing you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
- 8 “And I will carry⁶⁷ you to the land which I have sworn by my uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and it I will give to you as a possession⁶⁸. I am Yahweh.”
- 9 And Moses spoke this to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to him because of a spirit⁶⁹ of discouragement and because of their cruel bondage.
- 10 And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying

⁵⁴ In our case, we prefer to translate **אֱלֹהִים** as Lord, and **יְהוָה** as Yahweh.

⁵⁵ Or “trouble” or “evil”; we did not choose “trouble” as our choice actually highlights the accusation against God. It seems to accuse God of maliciousness.

⁵⁶ This word is so translated 566 times in the AV. The understanding of this word is that of sending as an official. Moses sees himself as sent on an official mission as God’s representative.

⁵⁷ A physical snatching away can be understood by **לְנַשֵּׁת**

⁵⁸ Literally, “...to deliver not you have delivered ...”

⁵⁹ “send away” has a truer sense than “release” in that the former is more urgent.

⁶⁰ What we say in footnote 8 is really demonstrated here.

⁶¹ This is a more deliberate action than the rendering “appeared”

⁶² Alternatively, “set up”

⁶³ To listen intently. It is also translated as “obey” (81 times) and can speak of God’s response as a type of obedience to their call of groaning.

⁶⁴ The word **קֶרֶב** appears only 4 times, and in every occurrence it is translated as “groan”, which is, an intense struggle.

⁶⁵ More than just acts of judicial significance; it means to govern, rule and control with heavy-handedness.

⁶⁶ This is the core of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

⁶⁷ Alternatively, “bring”

⁶⁸ Or “inheritance”. There is the double force, to inherit and to dispossess. This is a major benefit of the covenant. To become a nation they had to gain possession of a land. In this land they would develop as a holy nation.

⁶⁹ This has reference to their demeanor.

11 “Go⁷⁰ and tell¹⁹ Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let the sons of Israel go⁷¹ from his land.

12 And Moses spoke in the presence⁷² of Yahweh saying, “Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me. So why will Pharaoh listen to me; and I am unskilled in speech⁷³. ”

2. Exegesis:

The relationship was such that Moses could enter the presence of Yahweh “at will”. In fact Moses even felt he had the right to out-rightly challenge Yahweh. In this interim narrative, between promise and deliverance, the demoralized foremen succeeded in demoralizing Moses. He accused Yahweh of evil. He expresses both confusion and disillusionment about Yahweh’s intention and ability to do what he has promised. If Moses found himself to be hopeless, what would be the state of the people who are suffering at the hand of Pharaoh, who had begun a policy of escalation, believing that more repression (Breuggemann 1994:729) would break the people’s faith in Yahweh and Moses?

Yahweh provides Moses with motivation to continue as his agent before the people and before Pharaoh. What motivated Moses is Yahweh’s promise of a deliverance that will leave Pharaoh powerless and themselves free. Moses and the people needed to trust in the Lord. Their patient waiting and enduring will be rewarded by a grand redemption and a lasting relationship with the God who was in covenant with them.

To accept this promise was fairly easy for Moses, but whether he could convince Pharaoh and motivate the people; this he seriously doubted. If the people would not believe, how could he expect Pharaoh to budge? Right now the Israelites felt like they were a people of reproach. Again, Moses had no doubt that he was not up to the task that Yahweh had given him.

⁷⁰ Both instances are in the Imperative mood.

⁷¹ Alternatively, “...send away the sons of Israel...”

⁷² פָנִי literally, “to the face”

⁷³ Literally, “uncircumcised of lips”

Now, we shall do an exegesis, looking first at the issue of genre; then, at the structural issues of this pericope; and finally, by providing a fairly comprehensive commentary on this text. We shall then derive theological principles from our text for later application in our dissertation.

2.1 Genre.

It may be said that the literary typing of this text is generally classified as *narrative*. It certainly sets out to recount the story of Moses' continued relationship with Yahweh in his role as deliverer. The story tells us that Moses had his first disappointment with Yahweh. He easily complains because he was really unwilling to be Israel's deliverer, but that he continues on the same basis that he received his call; on the basis of the promise that Yahweh, the God of his forefathers, will deliver them by spectacular means. This promise, however, does not completely satisfy him, because in his mind the Israelites will not believe him; nor will Pharaoh.

This traditional story is about Yahweh as the protagonist, and Moses, his agent, as the heroic characters about to save the Israelites from the cruel oppression of their Egyptian overlords and Pharaoh, the antagonist, is continued here. Any long heroic story is also called a *saga*, and so we classify this story as *saga*. This saga is told in prose format and includes *report* and *dialogue*.

2.2 Structural Considerations.

We have said before that we will accept the Exodus text purely as the final matured text accepted by the Israelite religious community. We shall therefore consider only the biblical text in its final form, not overlooking the scholarly consensus that this text is assigned to a Priestly source (Childs 1974:111). We will concede to Childs' comment that the present form is theological by nature. Our stance here is to consider the text synchronically as we accept the unity of the final text.

Most commentators set the limits of our present pericope as we have it (Ex. 5:22 – 6:12). Others include verse 13 of chapter 6 and thus bring Aaron into our present section. We are not convinced that Aaron forms part of this present story. Others include verse 13 because they see in this text a parallel to the call narrative, and in that case make a strong case for the documentary theory. Our present text cannot be further divided without affecting the story. This story is circumscribed by the section 4:27 – 7:5. The unity of this text is demonstrated by the specific dialogue between Moses and Yahweh.

2.2.1 Text Outline.

- a. 5:22 – 23 Yahweh Approached, Accused and Interrogated by Moses. A
- b. 6:1 – 8 Yahweh's Response to Moses B
 - i) 6:1 The Promise of a Spectacular Deliverance a
 - ii) 6:2 - 4 Yahweh Recounts His Covenant b
 - iii) 6:5a Yahweh Acknowledges Israel's State c
 - iv) 6:5b Yahweh Remembers His Covenant b'
 - v) 6:6 - 8 The Promise of Deliverance restated a'
- c. 6:9 Israel's Response to Moses B'
- d. 6:10 – 12 Yahweh Interrogated by a Skeptical Moses A'
 - i) 6:10-11 Yahweh's Instruction to Moses
 - ii) 6:12 Moses' Skepticism

It can be noticed that the outline given above has some introverted parallel structure. Though not perfect, but a chiastic structure is visible. The fact that such parallelism is obvious is also an indication of the unity of this present text, and that the pericope is more likely to be bounded by verse 12 rather than verse 13.

One can even find some parallel between the details of A and A': in both the people and Pharaoh are mentioned; the interrogation used is found in both sections; both use the interrogative 'why'; the presence of Yahweh is the location

of both sections; in both the sending of Moses is mentioned; in A Moses talks about his sending, and in A' he is told by Yahweh to 'go and tell'.

2.2.2 Linguistic, Grammatical and Rhetorical Characteristics.

2.2.2.1 Important Recurring Verbs (by stem)

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
דָבַר	speak	6	5:23 6:2 6:9 6:10 6:11 6:12	to <i>speak</i> in your Name God <i>spoke</i> to Moses Moses <i>spoke</i> this to Yahweh <i>spoke</i> to Moses Go and <i>tell</i> Pharaoh Moses <i>spoke</i> in the
שִׁמְעָן	hear	4	6:5 6:9 6:12 6:12	I have <i>heard</i> the groan they did not <i>listen</i> to Israel have not <i>listened</i> how will Pharaoh <i>listen</i> to
שָׁלֹחַ	send	3	5:22 6:1 6:11	why you <i>sent</i> me? he will <i>send</i> them away <i>let</i> the sons of Israel go
בָזָא	go	3	5:23 6:8 6:11	the time I <i>came</i> before I will <i>carry</i> you to Go and tell Pharaoh
נָצַל	deliver	3	5:23 5:23 6:6	you have not <i>delivered</i> with your <i>delivering</i> and I will <i>rescue</i> you
נָתַן	give	3	6:4 6:8 6:8	to <i>give</i> them the land to <i>give</i> to Abraham and I will <i>give</i> it to you
רָעַע	do evil	2	5:22 5:23	you have <i>brought injury</i> he has <i>done evil</i> to
רָאַה	see	2	6:1 6:3	you will <i>see</i> what I <i>presented</i> myself

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
יְדֻעַ	know	2	6:3 6:7	I did not become <i>known</i> and you have <i>known</i> that I
אֹצֵן	bring	2	6:6 6:7	I Yahweh will <i>bring</i> you the one <i>bringing</i> you out

2.2.2.2 Important Recurring Words (by stem).

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
מֶה	why?	3	5:22 5:22 6:12	<i>Why</i> have you brought Is this <i>why</i> you sent me <i>why</i> will Pharaoh listen
חִזְקָה	mighty	2	6:1 6:1	of my <i>mighty</i> hand he by my <i>mighty</i> hand he
בְּרִית	covenant	2	6:4 6:5	set up my <i>covenant</i> with I remembered my <i>covenant</i>
סִכְלָות	burden	2	6:6 6:7	under the <i>burdens</i> of from under the <i>burdens</i> of

2.2.2.3 Observable Thematic Progression.

5:22	why	send				
	why					
5:23		speak	come	deliver		
				deliver		
6:1		send				mighty
						mighty
6:2		speak				
6:3					know	
6:4		hear			give	covenant
6:5						covenant
6:6			bring	deliver		burden
6:7			bring			burden
6:8			carry		give	
6:9		speak	listen			
6:10		speak				
6:11	go	speak				
6:12	why	speak	listen			
			listen			

The higher frequencies of the words *speak* and *listen* prove that the present pericope is a dialogue. Also we may deduce that the *covenant* is the central motivation of the deliverance promised in this particular dialogue.

2.3 Commentary.

Moses is seemingly at the end of his rope. The dual defeat of the previous verses, where both Pharaoh and the Israelites want nothing to do with him (Enns 2000:171) weighed heavily upon Moses. The Israelites told Moses that he was to blame for their calamity. The foremen did not view the deprivation of their lost security as an aspect of the battle waged by God against Pharaoh on their behalf (Buttrick 1952:887). Moses did not answer them. He did not defend himself or Aaron. The only answer can come from Yahweh.

The Israelites called upon God's judgment believing that Moses and Aaron were to blame. Their very call upon God to judge while complaining showed that they had

no confidence in God and his power to save (Keil & Delitzsch 1968:466). Anyway, Moses is now about to appear before the Judge, not to be judged, but with the audacity to judge. What he was doing was calling into question God's character. Yahweh's answer is at the heart of this passage, which reflects the keys to this passage. According to Durham (1987:76) they are precisely (1) the fourfold occurrence of the auto-confessional phrase אָנֹכִי יְהוָה ; (2) the repeated references to the covenant relationship (6:4, 5, 6, 7, 8); and (3) the four references to the forthcoming mighty acts in Israel's behalf, including, above all, the exodus itself (6:6, 7, 11, 13)

a) Ex. 5:22-23. Yahweh Approached, Accused and Interrogated by Moses.

And Moses returned to Yahweh. Did he physically return to the Mountain of God? Did he simply return to the presence of God? Did he return to God in prayer? These are all valid questions to ask. That he returned to the mountain is highly unlikely and is not specifically stated in the text. One thing is certain, that Moses met the foremen in Egypt as they came from Pharaoh's presence. They seemed to have been in the proximity of the meeting of the Israelites with the Pharaoh.

That Moses "returned" to the Lord also shows a movement away from where he met the foremen. There seems to be a physical motion to the point of departure. Stuart (2006:168) differs with us as he feels that Moses' return to the LORD is not a reference to his going to a particular location, but that it refers to prayer. Since the previous talk that Moses had with God was not a prayer, we reckon that the return was to the presence of God at least. The ensuing dialogue supports the idea of Moses being in the presence of Yahweh. What is vital is simply the fact that the conversation takes place (Enns 2000:172).

Durham (1987:67) uses the translation ... *Moses turned on Yahweh* ..., indicating the nuance of him being set against Yahweh. We have no problem with this view because Moses does in fact want to blame Yahweh. This does not necessarily

contradict the matter of the location; being where God is. Moses confronts Yahweh because now the exodus seems more remote than ever. Moses, however, is still the mediator between God and his people (Noth 1962:56). We disagree with Calvin's view; that Moses was returning to the Lord in a bad sense for forsaking his office. He left his people in order to go back to God (n.d.: 123).

The conversation has begun. *Lord, why have you brought injury upon this people?* The word for Lord is אֱלֹהִי (adonay), which generally has reference to the divine's authority and majesty as ruler. Only very rarely does it have reference to human superiors. Here it is a way of addressing Yahweh with reverence. So, while Moses is interrogating Yahweh, it is not done disrespectfully.

This is the first interrogatory *why* that Moses brings up. Moses blames God for the calamity that the Israelites are experiencing. The foremen blamed Moses and now Moses blames Yahweh. We have selected *injury* instead of *evil* or *wickedness* because the latter two words have a moral implication. We agree with Kaiser (1990:339), who says that Moses did not directly accuse Yahweh with authoring evil, for the idiom only means that God allowed and permitted such trouble to happen. Moses is focused on the condition of the people rather than on the action of Yahweh. We do not think that Moses intends merely to accuse the Lord of maliciousness, even though such a meaning is possible. The narrative puts the question in this way to draw our attention to the fact that God allows dialogue of this nature. For now the question goes unanswered and Yahweh's intentions are misunderstood.

When the foremen accused Moses, they left the impression that Pharaoh was correct. When Moses accuses God, he also leaves the impression that Pharaoh is not to blame. Besides that, he is declaring his own innocence in response to the charge laid against him. The only one responsible must be Yahweh, for he acted in Yahweh's name.

The next question takes the focus away from the people and places it on Moses who is God's representative. *Is this why you have sent me?* This question can also be put as, *Why did you send me?* Moses understood himself as sent on an official mission as Yahweh's representative.

Moses was sent with the one message to Pharaoh; "let my people go". It states the one overriding agenda for emancipation (Breuggemann 1994:722). Emancipation does not seem to be anywhere in sight. In the next verse Moses actually states with exasperation that Yahweh has not delivered.

From the time I came before Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people.... Moses has been to Pharaoh and gave him the imperative from Yahweh. As one sent by Yahweh he spoke as Yahweh's representative. He spoke in Yahweh's name; that is, with Yahweh's authority. When Pharaoh denied any accountability to Yahweh, he actually began a process of increased oppression in defiance and in spite of Yahweh's sovereignty. Pharaoh brought injury with evil intention against the people of God, and this action was begun when Moses approached him in Yahweh's name. The people accused Moses of this injury and Moses accused Yahweh. Pharaoh was actually the guilty one.

Now Moses states with exasperation...*and you have not delivered your people with your delivering.* The statement is literally *to deliver not you have delivered.* The word used for "snatch" or "deliver" (**נָצַח**) means to drag out of danger at the last minute and to be in a more favorable circumstance. Rhetorically, the word appears thrice in the text, and its frequency establishes its significance, and the double use in this verse is a rhetorical device that indicates Moses' exasperation on the one hand, and Yahweh's failure on the other. But Pharaoh's *sending* (**פִּלְשֵׁת**) in 6:1 and 6:11 is actually Yahweh's deliverance.

There is no doubt that this text is about Yahweh's promised deliverance and the ensuing covenant establishment. By the first, Pharaoh will know who Yahweh is, and by the second action, the Israelites will know their God. The second is built

upon the first. There can be no covenant people without that people being redeemed. The bridge between the concepts of deliverance and covenant is created by the word *give* (גַּם); the giving of the land. The very acts of Yahweh *carrying* (נָשָׁא) and *bringing* (נָשָׁא) the people to the land (6:7 and 6:8) are expressions of his deliverance.

Here Moses accuses Yahweh of not doing what he promised to do; that is to rescue Israel. This is an intense accusation against Yahweh, who should have been the decisive player (Breuggemann 1994:728). The repetition of the verb here in verse 23 emphasizes Yahweh's failure. Moses still had to learn that if his people were to be the possession of the Lord rather than of Pharaoh, there must be a complete end to Pharaoh as a resource for them (Buttrick 1952:888). How will Yahweh tell Moses this very important truth? The Judge, who is the accused, must now respond.

b) Ex. 6:1-8 Yahweh's Response to Moses.

The seeming defeat is actually the beginning of Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh. This text witnesses to the power of Yahweh on behalf of the Israelites, even in the face of seeming defeat through the obstinacy of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's power to resist will soon give way for the mighty hand of Yahweh to prevail. Not only is Pharaoh's future at stake, but more importantly the future of the Israelites is at stake. Will they be established as the people of God?

So far Moses has been the only one to speak. He spoke rather abruptly and leaves us without a doubt that he is truly frustrated. What Moses thinks has not begun has indeed begun as he is soon to see; Yahweh's work on Pharaoh is already under way. It already began with Moses' first confrontation with Pharaoh (Durham 1987:70).

In this extended speech of God, we have the fullest self-disclosure of God that is offered in the exodus narrative (Breuggemann 1994:733). This account does not supplement the account of Ex.3-4 because it is much briefer and has an entirely different emphasis. Here we have no theophany and there is no reference to signs of any kind. We are therefore reluctant to call this a calling of Moses in the same sense as that in chapters 3 and 4. We however concede that a general framework of the call narrative may be identified.

i) Ex.6:1 The Promise of a Spectacular Deliverance.

And Yahweh said to Moses, completes the prospect of a dialogue. Yahweh is present and responding as he speaks to Moses. In chapter 5 it appeared as though Yahweh was absent because he was silent. The dialogue, however, is still private and Moses is Yahweh's only audience. In the future the people will request that Yahweh's communications remain private; he must speak to Moses and Moses must speak to them. It must be noticed that Yahweh does not answer Moses' questions.

Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. Yahweh's address is to Moses in the second person singular. Moses is privy to the plan of Yahweh. He is invited to behold the acts of Yahweh with respect to Pharaoh. As Durham (1987:70) puts it, Pharaoh's recalcitrance is but one ingredient in Yahweh's plan. Yahweh is going to use Pharaoh's obstinacy to bring about his salvation. Though Pharaoh has declared that he will not let the Israelites go he will actually do so. In fact he will drive them out as though this is his passionate desire, but it will be Yahweh acting heavily upon him. God was already working on Pharaoh.

Because of a mighty hand he will send them away.... Pharaoh will be compelled. He will be unable to resist the mighty hand of Yahweh. Pharaoh will act by a mighty hand; not his own but that of Israel's God. Even though there is no pronominal indication of whose hand is referred to, we, contra Breuggemann (1994:729)

believe that the conjunction יְהִי is causative and that Pharaoh is caused to send them away, and thus not his own hand. It is nevertheless finally Yahweh who mobilizes Pharaoh to become engaged albeit recalcitrantly in the mighty work of liberation. When he sends the Israelites away he will be performing according to Yahweh's behest.

And by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land. By interpreting the first phrase as referring to Yahweh's mighty hand, the second mention of it seems to be extraneous or redundant. There is debate as to whose hand it is. We believe that the repetition functions to emphasize the mighty act of Yahweh's redemption. The language is in any case an idiom connoting "by force" (Stuart 2006:169). It must be admitted though that the ensuing strong verb opens the possibility of a reference to Pharaoh. Pharaoh will drive them out with force. In the context of the contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh we get the sense of Yahweh's mighty hand overcoming the heavy hand of Pharaoh and of the Egyptians.

It is just as possible that the mighty hand of Pharaoh is actually the mighty hand of Yahweh when it acts according to Yahweh's will. In any case, it is Yahweh's mighty hand that will force Pharaoh to urgent and decisive action. Moses was told that Pharaoh would not obey at first until he is forcibly compelled to do so. *He will drive them out of his land.* Calvin (nd.: 124) puts it succinctly: He who today refuses to let you depart, will not only set you free, but will even expel you from his kingdom. There will be resoluteness about Pharaoh's action. Noth says: Yahweh will prove himself so powerful that Pharaoh will 'send Israel out', indeed he will even 'drive them out with a strong hand' (1962:56).

ii) Ex.6:2-4. Yahweh Recounts His Covenant.

God's reassurance to Moses continues with covenant language. What he is going to do, he does because of the covenant he has made with their forefathers. The seed aspect of the covenant has to a large extent been fulfilled. There still remains

the land and the blessings element of that covenant. Yahweh was now going to fulfill the land promise. Here we are given a fresh revelation of God's character and nature (Kaiser 1990:340). While there is no theophany, there is nevertheless inference to Yahweh's personal authority.

And God spoke to Moses does not indicate another time when God spoke to Moses. It simply means that Yahweh continued speaking to Moses. What God said to him was of utmost importance. He opens by the presentation of what Durham (1987:75) calls the auto-kerygmatic formula, *I am Yahweh* (אֶنְיָהוָה *ānî yahweh*).

The speech begins and ends with this phrase. The use of the Name on both ends guarantees all the contents of the speech (Cole 1973:83). The importance of this statement is its close connection with the covenant. Yahweh's deeds are held up as proof that he is and does what is claimed in his special name. The implications of this name are far-reaching.

Ellison (1982:35) begins to answer the questions that emanate from this and the ensuing statement. He says: "I am Yahweh" is not the revelation of a name, but a call to realize its implications, "I shall be that (what) I shall be". This auto-kerygmatic formula authenticates the message and the promise that is given to Moses. The divine name conveyed the idea of God's effective presence (Knight 1976:44). God is not here revealing the sound of the name, but he is really disclosing himself. He does not merely inform Moses of his name, but by announcing the name he also makes known his essential character (Childs 1974:114). He reveals himself to Moses as Yahweh who remembers his covenant, and who will bring it to pass. The phrase *I am Yahweh* appears several times as a refrain in our text (6:2, 6, 7and 8). Yahweh reveals that he is the only God who exists and exerts his power (Hyatt 1971:93) and Pharaoh will surely know it.

Henry (1999:206) argues that, assuming documentary redaction of the Pentateuch as projected by the critics, the very prominence of the name of YAHWEH in the pre-Mosaic narratives renders it highly improbable that any redactor could himself have understood Exodus 6:3 as a categorical denial that YAHWEH's name was known

before Moses' time. In the use of the names with almost equal frequency in Genesis (where YAHWEH occurs 146 times, ELOHIM 164 times) Allis finds evidence that the name YAHWEH was known in patriarchal times and while still lacking its later importance, had perhaps already gained prophetic significance (cf. Gen. 49:18; *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 28).

I presented myself to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as ‘God Almighty’.... The covenant connection is immediately clear by the mention of the patriarchs. We are reminded of Gen. 17:1ff. Yahweh revealed himself to the patriarchs. He *presented* himself in a particular way to them. It is a characteristic P reference to God and is restricted to the patriarchal narratives. *God Almighty* is an often disputed translation of אל שדי (*ēl šadday*). Cole (1973:84) notes: It appears to be an old Mesopotamian divine title, connected to the root “mountain”. He was thus also known as the ‘Mountain God’. Later Hebrew orthodoxy translated it as ‘the all-sufficient One’. It nevertheless has reference to the true God.

The strange thing is that it is now said that God was not known by the patriarchs as Yahweh; ... *and by my name, Yahweh, I did not become known to them.* It seems odd in the light of Gen. 15:7 and Gen. 28:13. So, it is not the revelation of a name not previously known. Cassuto (1967:77) argues that if God was introducing a new name, he would have said, ‘My name is Yahweh’, not ‘I am Yahweh’. The phrase ‘I am Yahweh’ appears very frequently in the Bible, and cannot every time be an introduction. It simply served as a re-iteration that that is his name. It is not a revelation every time, but a statement of him as fulfiller of his promises. We agree with Knight who says that the words ‘I am Yahweh’ are now the signature of the God of *revelation* (1976:45).

We cannot move on until we have mentioned Garr’s (1992:385-408) discussion on this issue. The verse records a contrast between the deity’s two names and the periods they represent. El Shaddai is contrasted with Yahweh. In the first instance the title is governed by the *beth*. The *beth essentiae* is able to influence the form, function and state of the word. The preposition marks a limited equivalence; the

subject is represented by the name. The 'I' (God) is *El Shaddai*, but *El Shaddai* highlights a partial aspect of God. The partial aspect is the fact that he is the promise-maker.

Yahweh, on the other hand, represented the whole. Both God and God's name is the object of knowledge. God's name is identified with himself. The noun and its subject are equi-referential. The entire verse, then, contrasts two divine names and what they represent: *El Shaddai* as a part of God, and *Yahweh* as the whole. *Yahweh* was therefore the manifestation of God in the period of Moses as the promise-keeper. Therefore God as *Yahweh* was not fully known to the patriarchs. Enns (2000:174) concurs: The traditional answer to the documentary approach is in my view correct: Exodus 6:3 does not say that God is now giving a *new* name, but that God's name is now going to be *fully* known; that is, the *significance* of the name is going to be understood at this most pivotal time in Israel's history. *Yahweh* is therefore the One who makes himself known in covenant keeping. *Yahweh* confirms an already established relationship by his mighty acts.

Now, we are told the context within which God made himself known to the patriarchs. It was in the covenant-making context that God was made known to them. Not only is there a link between *El Shaddai* and *Yahweh*, but there is a link between the patriarchal and Israelite relation with God. The covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God is one and the same. The covenant beneficiaries that span the big divide in time are the same too. The covenant is now brought to center-stage.

And also (וְאַתָּה wegham) appears twice, and starts the verses 4 and 5. This introduction therefore must be seen as related with what was previously said. The three statements that are connected by this introduction are "I have presented myself", "I have established my covenant" and "I have heard the groan of the sons of Israel". The relationship is one of continuity and of progression. In every case *Yahweh* is the subject and where וְאַתָּה appears the action is in the perfect tense. God not only revealed himself, but has also *established* his covenant with them.

The covenant is the result of God's providential and generous sovereignty (cf. Gen. 17:7-8) (Breuggemann 1994:734). According to Cassuto (1967:79), the expression *established* connotes the fulfillment. Mackay shares that sentiment: The idea of 'establishing the covenant' points not to the inaugurating of a new covenant relationship, but to confirming one that was already in existence (2001:120). The actions of Yahweh have reference to his covenant.

The establishment of the covenant God made with Abraham and his seed included the promise of land. The only land that Abraham's seed had title deed to was the cave of Machpelah, Sarah's burial site (Gen.23:17-19). Yahweh mentions the promise of land specifically: *I have established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, where they have dwelt in.* The proximity of this land that was promised has some historical connection to them; the patriarchs *sojourned* and *dwelt* there. Because of the ownership of the property bought from Ephron, the Hittite, the proximity of patriarchal sojourn and dwelling is confirmed by the statement, *land of Canaan*. God has made the decision to give them this land. They can only take possession of it after they are delivered from the Egyptians. The Abrahamic covenant is now made the basis of the exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the land of promise (Hyatt 1971:94).

iii) Ex. 6:5a. Yahweh Acknowledges Israel's State.

There is continuity with what has gone before. *I have heard the groan of the sons of Israel.* While Pharaoh refused to hear the groans of the Israelites, Yahweh their God did. This is not the first time that Yahweh says he *heard* their groans. He stated it earlier when he met Moses for the first time (Ex.3:7). Because he has a covenant, he responded when he heard their cry. This verb has the meaning of intense listening with the effect of obeying. In fact, 81 times it is translated as *obey* in the Old Testament.

The *sons of Israel* were the ones groaning, and the reason for their groaning was caused by the *Egyptians* who were *enslaving them*. The word used for *groaning*,

נְאָקֵח (*neaqāh*) connotes intense struggle of physical pain and suffering. The word is used only four times in the Old Testament, twice in Exodus (2:24; 6:5). God is fully attentive to their present pain and is driven to remember his existing covenant. The immediate pain conjures the historical relationship for future redemption.

iv) Ex. 6:5b. Yahweh Remembers His Covenant.

Yes, the Abrahamic covenant is now made the basis of the exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the land of promise. The fact is that there is a relationship that exists, and it exists because of the covenant that God made with Abraham. It is that relationship that drives Yahweh to do what he promises to do. The tradition wants to affirm the full continuity of Yahweh in the exodus narrative with the God who met with Abraham. It is God's memory of his promises to Abraham that operates in Exodus for liberation.

In the first place this is called *my covenant*. The unconditional nature of the covenant is bound up in this claim of Yahweh; what he promises he will do in spite of the unfaithfulness and faithlessness of his people. It is a gracious act of Yahweh. Secondly, God says that he *remembered* his covenant. This is the second time he is saying so in Exodus; first in 2:24 and now here. There it was spoken in the third person; now it is spoken in the first person. While that is so, it must not be thought that Yahweh forgot about his relationship or about the covenant he has with Abraham's descendants. God's covenant exists before him constantly. Calvin (n.d. 128) says that the meaning of God's remembering is demonstrated by what he does. Cassuto (1967:80) says it is a way of saying that God has resolved to put his promise into effect now. Now the time had come for God to actively intervene in the circumstances of his people (Linington 2002:697). This is an idiomatic way of saying "I will respond". It is an anthropomorphism used to describe God (Cole 1973:85). Every saving act of God will be seen as remembering the relationship.

v) Ex. 6:6-8. The Promise of Deliverance Restated.

Moses is instructed to go to the Israelites with a message. This is not the first time this message is given to Moses, but this time it is given to him and his people as an encouragement. God is putting his name on the line. His character and reputation is at stake. The covenant, upon which this promise of deliverance is made, is at stake. Everything is at stake!

The word '*Therefore*' is an apt introduction to what follows. It can function in two ways; to reflect motive and to reflect consequence. For motive we see the motivation in what Yahweh had just said. Because Yahweh has revealed himself in the past, he will act with great power for their deliverance. Because Yahweh has made a covenant with them in the past, he will act decisively for their salvation. Because Yahweh has heard their groaning he will bring great judgment upon their oppressors. His remembrance of the covenant is the force of his deeds on their behalf. Yahweh is out to prove himself. For consequence we need to consider what Yahweh is going to say. Moses now has the motivation to transmit Yahweh's message. What Moses must say, he must say *to the sons of Israel*.

Yahweh's speech has opened with the auto-kerygmatic formula, *I am Yahweh* in verse 2, and it will end with it in verse 8. This formula is used once in each of the three verses (6, 7 and 8) of our present consideration. There must be significance in the repetition of the phrase *I am Yahweh*. It authenticates and guarantees what Moses is to tell the people. It is for Moses a guarantee that Yahweh is with him. To both Moses and the people it guarantees the effective action of Yahweh. It evokes confidence in the covenanting nature of Yahweh who has what it takes to bring to pass what he says.

What Yahweh says to the people hits precisely on the area of their greatest needs. They need to be delivered from the Egyptians and they need to be given their own land where they can live in freedom. In effect Yahweh is saying to them that he has already done these things. We have translated what is in the perfect tense as future tense for the sake of flow in the narrative and because it is what Yahweh is

promising. *I will bring you out ... I will rescue you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you ... I will be to you ... I will carry you ... I will give to you.* These seven clauses are being linked together by *Wāw consecutive*. The promise is dominated by first-person verbs, with Yahweh as the subject (Breuggemann 1996:734). The verbs of hope and liberation arise from the self-disclosure reflected in the phrase *I am Yahweh*. He is the one taking the initiative. Three of these verbs are promises about the deliverance, two of them are promises about the land, and two are promises of a personal relationship between them and Yahweh. Lange (1971:18) reminds us that Yahweh pledges himself to a threefold promise of their deliverance from bondage, adoption as the people of God and settlement in the land. Their deliverance and settlement will mean nothing without their relationship through adoption.

Firstly, Yahweh's deliverance of his people will be complete, providing freedom, safety and vindication. Did Moses accuse Yahweh of having done nothing? Now Yahweh reveals himself through his name as the God who fulfils his promise and redeems Israel from Egypt (Childs 1974:115). He said:

1. *I will bring you out* (אָשָׁא yāšā) has the force of freeing. Yahweh will free them from forced labor. They will be freed from *the Egyptians* who are placing heavy burdens on them in the form of forced labor.
2. *I will rescue you* (לְנַשֵּׁא nāšāl) connotes the provision of safety. Not only were they subjected to burdens laid upon them, but they were in actual and mortal danger. Their *bondage* (עֲבֹדָה ābōdā) was a state of being owned and controlled by another under dangerous circumstances.
3. *I will redeem you* (גָּאֹל gā’əl) has in mind a kinsman who acts for the honor and well-being of a wounded or abused member of the family. Yahweh shows a solidarity with the slaves he is about to deliver. The *outstretched arm* which, before acted in the mode of oath-making, will now act in a mode of power enforcing *great judgements* (שֶׁפֶט šēpēt). The judgements are punishment according to Yahweh's strict justice for Egypt's unjust treatment of the Israelites even though they cried for justice. Yahweh will create conditions of justice. God would not merely rescue his

people from the Egyptians but would also overtly punish the Egyptians in the process (Stuart 2006:171).

Secondly, Yahweh's adoption of Israel as his own people is emphasized by the use of another strong first-person verb *I will take you* (**לֹא** **קָרַב** *lāqāch*). Israel will now publicly and irreversibly be marked as the people of God. They are no longer the "possession" of Pharaoh, but are the possession of Yahweh, not for his benefit but for their own. This is as much an act of grace as are Yahweh's acts of deliverance.

The act of grace is expressed in Yahweh's self-giving. He sets himself available to be their God. *I will be - to you-* (**וְהִיִּתִּי** *wəhāyīthī*) a God who is open to an intimate relationship. He is their God who will act on their behalf. He restates his deliverance undertaking when he refers to himself as being the one bringing them *out from under the burdens of the Egyptians*. Restatement usually functions to emphasize, and by this emphasis Yahweh shows Moses' earlier accusation as unfounded.

Finally, Yahweh's gift of land comes by his sworn undertaking. The promise of land already guaranteed is now reiterated. Breuggemann (1994:735) shows that there is counterpart to the deliverance of v.6 so that an intentional structure is obvious. In verse 6 there is a 'bringing out', while here in verse 8 there is a 'bringing in'. The two are hinged together by the covenant formula. It is just as obvious that between *I am Yahweh* of verse 6 and *I am Yahweh* of verse 8 is the recognition formula *and you will know that I am Yahweh* of verse 7. *Know* (**יֵדֶךְ** *yādā*) expresses intimacy. They will be better off than Pharaoh who did not recognize Yahweh. They will more than recognize him. Yahweh's acts predicate the knowing. This closing emphasizes the commitment to all that Yahweh has promised, and his ability as king of all the earth to ensure that it will be realized (Mackay 2001:122). Nevertheless, the knowledge of their God must be experienced in the land that he is giving them. The relationship and gift are possible only because of and are bounded by the claim *I am Yahweh*.

c) Ex. 6:9. Israel's Response to Moses.

Moses must have left Yahweh's presence to go and deliver the message to the Israelites. The narrative does not say so, but we are simply told that *Moses spoke this to the sons of Israel*. It is therefore obvious that Moses did what Yahweh told him in verse 6 to do, namely, "*Therefore say to the sons of Israel ...*". Moses had a powerful and authoritative redefinition of reality to share with the Israelites.

Instead of responding excitingly, as we would have expected them to do, we are told that *they did not listen* (*עָמַד šāmā*) to Moses. They lacked perception and did not receive or pay attention to the good news of deliverance, adoption and settlement. Their understanding failed them because of their state of mind and of body. After their disappointment at the failure of the initial attempt to liberate them, followed by the intensification of the bondage, they were disheartened and despondent, and they found no consolation in what Moses told them in the name of Yahweh (Cassuto 1967:82).

They did not respond in the way they did because they were stubborn or hard-hearted like Pharaoh, but *because of a spirit of discouragement*. It is more literally because of a *lack of spirit* that they failed to understand. Their spirit was broken. This was their state of mind. We do not agree with Cole who thinks that the response was one of impatience or anger (1973:86). In addition to a lack of spirit, we are also told that they did not respond *because of their cruel* (*עֲשֵׂה qāšēh*) *bondage*. This was their state of body.

Their response was not one of recalcitrance, but of exhaustion and despair. For this short moment the depth of despair defeated the hope of God (Breuggemann 1994:735). While Keil and Delitzsch comments that Moses also became despondent (1968:468), we believe that his report to Yahweh shows on his part an understanding of their difficulties.

d) Ex. 6:10-12. Yahweh Interrogated by a Skeptical Moses.

Neither does Yahweh weigh heavily upon them by insisting that they should heed what he is saying or, that they should notice his self-disclosure which is intended for their benefit. Instead Yahweh now gives Moses another mandate. We believe that Moses is again in the presence of God where he receives this second mandate. We are simply told that *Yahweh spoke to Moses*.

i) Ex. 6:10-11. Yahweh's Instruction to Moses.

It is within God's plan that Moses should 'go in', right into the unholy of unholies, to meet the evil at its source (Knight 1976:48). Yahweh now commands Moses to address Pharaoh himself. *Go and tell Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let the sons of Israel go from his land.* *Go* and *tell* are both in the imperative mood, yet Yahweh's mandate is again met with resistance. This time the resistance comes from Moses.

The nature of the message Moses must give to Pharaoh differs a great deal from the one he had to give the Israelites. The Israelites were given a message of hope. This one to Pharaoh treats him like a subordinate to Yahweh. Besides, this message to Pharaoh is a short instruction; *let the sons of Israel go*. Pharaoh was instructed to send the Israelites *from his land*. We can only imagine the struggle Pharaoh would have with this kind of instruction. It would disrupt his economic and public works programmes. Moses must have known what the implications to the Egyptians would be. In fact the message never gets delivered to Pharaoh because the messenger refuses to do so. He puts forward a good case for his refusal to go to Pharaoh.

ii) Ex. 6:12. Moses' Skepticism.

Moses' refusal to go to Pharaoh comes with some measure of boldness. *Moses spoke in the presence of Yahweh.* The word for *presence* (*לפנֵי* *liphnay*) literally means "to the face". The relationship between Yahweh and Moses was one where

Moses could frequent Yahweh's presence. In the presence of Yahweh he could express himself openly and honestly. Boldness never means contempt, for Moses has great respect for his God.

Pharaoh, Moses believes, will not heed his message. In comparison to the Israelites and the message meant for them, this new mandate seems unreasonable. If the Israelites rejected good news, then Pharaoh will certainly reject bad news. Stuart puts it well:

If the Israelites, who would be his natural allies and who stood to gain from the message he was speaking on God's behalf, would not listen, how could he ever expect to meet success by carrying on with the task of demanding freedom from Pharaoh, who was his natural enemy in this situation and who stood to lose hugely from an Israelite exodus? (2006:173).

Moses puts it across as a question, *why will Pharaoh listen to me?* We have to admit that his argument is potent. The thought of confronting Pharaoh and the repercussions it might have, stirs in Moses unwillingness.

Moses again brings up an old objection. In his humility, he bases his objection on his lack of eloquence by saying, *I am unskilled in speech*. It literally says 'uncircumcised (**עַרְלָה** ārēl) lips'. Moses is focusing on his own inadequacy, rather than appreciating that the outcome depends on what the Lord will bring to the situation, not what Moses can do (Mackay 2001:124). The question is, how can Yahweh use for his service what is uncircumcised? To this point it just did not seem to work. Moses' excuse will not let him off the hook. He is God's man for the job and will become the greatest leader Israel has known.

2.4 Theological Reflection.

This pericope is closely joined to the call of Moses. Moses is confused because it seemed that his obedience to Yahweh caused an outcome opposite to that which he expected. Their redemption seemed to be further than before he approached the king of Egypt. Pharaoh acted more harshly toward the Israelites. Pharaoh's

hand was heavier upon them, and the hand of Yahweh seemed impotent. The elders of Israel looked toward Pharaoh for relief, but unlike God, he neither hears nor answers. Pharaoh's response turns them against the man of Yahweh, and consequently against Yahweh himself. Moses was himself influenced to come with an accusation against God.

When Moses and Aaron entered the presence of Pharaoh, they used the prophetic oracle, which is rare in the Pentateuch: "Thus says the Lord" (This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says). But Pharaoh denied any knowledge of Yahweh. He did not know Yahweh; he did not fear Yahweh; and he would not let the people worship Yahweh. Pharaoh would get to know Yahweh, and he would acknowledge the mighty acts of the Lord.

The foremen of the Israelites did not understand that their deprivation was an aspect of the battle waged between Yahweh and Pharaoh. There must be a complete end to Pharaoh as a resource for them, even if they had to find their own straw for their brick-making. When Pharaoh used the fact that the Israelites outnumbered the Egyptians as the excuse for continued abuse, he expressed his denial of the fact that they were the blessed of Yahweh. Pharaoh made Yahweh's man to appear incredibly inept (Childs 1974:106). He got the Israelite leaders to discredit Moses. Moses was renounced by his own people, who now preferred the status quo rather than the prospect of freedom. For them it appeared as though Yahweh was defeated by an obstinate Pharaoh.

Moses appeared before God and accused him of maliciousness and of bringing evil upon his people. Durham (1987:67) translates that *Moses turned on Yahweh*. Moses appeared before the Judge, not to be judged, but with the audacity to judge. We see that he interrogates God. He was calling the character of God into question. Moses not only questioned the point of his mission, but accused God of failure to deliver and of bringing more calamity and trouble. Moses interrogated precisely only because he believed that Yahweh was indeed in control. So, why did Yahweh allow and permit such trouble to happen? The narrative puts Moses' question in this way in order to show that God allows dialogue of this nature.

The future of the Israelites as Yahweh's people was at stake. God gave a word for the future. Yahweh provided Moses with motivation to continue as his agent on behalf of the Israelites. Yahweh would demonstrate what real power was like. Yahweh confirmed his promise of deliverance and of leaving Pharaoh absolutely powerless and with no option but to release the Israelites. Pharaoh was going to feel Yahweh's judgment. Pharaoh will be caused to send them away; Pharaoh's sending is actually Yahweh's deliverance. Pharaoh will be unable to resist Yahweh. It is Yahweh who mobilizes Pharaoh to bring about Yahweh's deliverance. Pharaoh will be forced (Stuart 2006:169).

Moses and the people only needed to trust in the Lord. Yahweh is a God of war on Israel's behalf. Moses needed to know that he too was to act in the Name and authority of Yahweh. Their redemption would be spectacular. Moses was expected to encourage the people to hope in the Lord, who was their salvation; and in the prospect of them being showcased as the people of Yahweh.

We have the fullest self-disclosure of God offered in Exodus. Four times God uses the auto-confessional, "I am Yahweh" (6:2, 6, 7 and 8). This was an act of self-revelation, making known his essential character and his covenant faithfulness. God was committed to save the victims of Egyptian oppression. His self-revelation encompassed the whole redemptive power of God. God was going to save them with heavy-handed judgment upon the Egyptians, because he was committed to his covenant with the Israelites and to fulfill his promises to them. The auto-confessional conveyed the idea that God's effective presence was with them and for them.

The history of God's revelation is given. To Abraham he revealed himself as *E/ Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1ff.). The revelation to Moses is contrasted to the revelation given to the fathers. To the fathers God was the all-sufficient One. Yahweh was the Name of fulfillment. The name of God was now fully known. This was so because God *presented* himself. Moses was privy to the plans of God. Yahweh was going to use Pharaoh's obstinacy to bring about salvation. When the Israelites are

delivered, then Pharaoh will know who Yahweh is. When God establishes his covenant then the Israelites will know Yahweh, their God. The covenant people are a redeemed people. Their redemption comes from their covenant God. He will carry them and bring them to the land he has promised.

God revealed the purpose of his promise: he was going to redeem the Israelites because he heard their groans. He was going to make them his people because this was what he had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was going give them a land. The Name was the guarantee. The reality of God stands behind the promise. God's covenant exists before him constantly. God had resolved to put his promise into effect. His remembrance was his resolve to respond. God is putting his Name on the line. His character and reputation was at stake. The seven *I will* clauses have verbs of hope and liberation that arise out of the divine name. Yahweh is the one who takes the initiative.

Unfortunately, the people lacked perception and they would not listen to the good news of deliverance, adoption and settlement. They failed to understand this great news because their spirit was broken. The depth of their despair and despondence defeated their hope. The salvation that God was to provide had the force of freeing. It was to provide safety. It was to act for the honor and well-being of the wounded. God was in solidarity with the oppressed. He was to publicly make the slaves his own people. Yahweh was willing to be in open and intimate relationship with them.

The people's unbelief was contagious. Moses himself did not believe, and he used the unbelief of the people as the reason why Pharaoh would reject his message from Yahweh. Again, Moses was allowed to express his heart openly and honestly to Yahweh. Moses was not convinced that Yahweh was with him and with his mouth because he brings up the old objection; that he was a man of unskilled speech (uncircumcised lips).

Childs (1974:119) recognizes that this text is tremendously theocentric as is the case in the Book of Exodus. The focus of God is that of revealing himself. In this act of majestic self-revelation and self-identification, I am Yahweh, God is making

himself known. To know his Name is to know his purpose for all mankind from beginning to end. Pharaoh is reduced to a pawn; not a partner in the plan of God. He will be judged for his consistent obstinacy. All God's interventions in human history arose from the concern of his name.

As far as the New Testament's reference to our current text is concerned, there is not much to be found. The way it is used also demonstrates the New Testament's interpretation of it. Acts 13:17 finds some correlation with Exodus 6:1 and 6:6. Paul also alludes to our current text in his argument in Romans 9:14-18. How did Paul employ this text in the two occasions mentioned?

In his speech in Pisidian Antioch, Paul addresses both Jews and Gentiles as he was requested by the synagogue rulers to do. They were addressed as those who worshiped God. In Acts 13:17 Paul stated that God favored the fathers whom he chose. God's favor caused the people to prosper in Egypt. Though they were oppressed and ill-treated by the Egyptians, they still grew in number; so much so that Pharaoh uses this as an excuse to perpetuate his abuse of the Israelites.

God favored his chosen people to the point that he became their warrior, leading them out of that country with a mighty hand. The Egyptians army was on the other side of God's favor and they were destroyed because of their obstinacy; but God, not only overlooked Israel's obstinacy (v.18) because of his favor and election, but he overthrew seven nations to give the Promised Land as their inheritance. So, while in our text the Israelites could not recognize it, in fact God favored them.

The favor of God extended beyond the event of the exodus. Paul went on to show that God's favor was embodied in David, the king of Israel. He was a man after God's own heart (v.22). The promise to David was fulfilled in Jesus Christ who rose from the dead because he was the approved and beloved son of God (vv.30-32). God raised Jesus Christ from the dead for us; that is for our benefit (v.33). All this served God's purpose to show his favor also upon those who believe and are justified by God (vv.36-39).

In the Romans text, Paul speaks about the absolute freedom in carrying out his plans for Israel and the world. God's acts are his sovereign activities (vv.14-16). Pharaoh's role in the exodus is given. The almighty and sovereign act of God reduced Pharaoh to being a mere pawn serving God's purpose (v.17). Pharaoh was raised for the purpose of demonstrating God's mighty power, and so that Yahweh's fame may be declared in the whole world. God was not only interested in Pharaoh's personal acknowledgement, but in the acknowledgement of the whole world. God's purpose in election stands upon his sovereignty. He will harden whomever necessary in order to bring salvation to his people and to bring glory to himself.

2 C. THE PRESENT GOD DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE.

Up until now, Yahweh has taken the initiative and has been the only mover to perpetuate the relationship that was established many years earlier with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Passover was the culmination of a mighty deliverance through the plagues that God brought on the Egyptians. Curiously, only the Egyptians were subjected to the plagues, while the Israelites were spared, shielded and immune to all ten the plagues brought upon their oppressors. The mighty hand of Yahweh proved to be more powerful than the hand of Pharaoh. The Egyptians finally expelled them from their land, but they were not entirely rid of their oppressors.

While Pharaoh gave in he never gave up. His heart was still to be hardened some more and Yahweh was still going to do all that was necessary to free his people completely. What he was about to do was no ordinary feat. He would rescue his people with a mighty hand, demonstrating many wonders and signs, not so much against Pharaoh, as with the plagues, but for his people to show them that he is their deliverer. By these miracles both the Egyptians and the Israelites would know that Yahweh alone is God in all the earth.

This passage profoundly shows that the beginning of any relationship to be had with Yahweh, demanded faith in Yahweh on the part of those he was about to rescue. These slave-people, who had no military skills, would soon witness how Yahweh was about to fight on their behalf. Their victory was really Yahweh's victory. The might of their oppressor's military machine would finally be destroyed, and they would be free indeed. Pharaoh's chariots, horses and horsemen were no match for Yahweh whose only weapon was a staff in the hand of his servant. This was to be an event they would never forget. All that they needed to do was to trust in their God and in his servant, Moses.

The ironies of this story are numerous. The Egyptians, who perceived the Israelites to be confused and pursued them, became the confused when their wheels literally

came off during their pursuit of the Israelites. Yahweh was the cause of the apparent confusion of the Israelites, who chose rather to lead them through the desert than through the Philistine country. Yahweh also caused the confusion among the pursuing Egyptians who, in their confusion came to the realization that Yahweh was fighting for his people.

When the Israelites complained that Moses brought them there to be buried in the desert as though there were not enough graves for them in Egypt, Yahweh actually brought Pharaoh and his army there to be buried. The burial of Pharaoh and his men was Yahweh's final deliverance of his people from their oppressors. The people were freed as their overlords were incarcerated by their graves in the desert. Yahweh's victory over the Egyptians was comprehensive and decisive.

In all of Scripture this is probably the most quoted and referred-to event in the history of the Jewish nation. It is often referred to in both the Old and New Testaments. It is preached on in both Synagogues and Churches, and is important to both Jew and Christian in terms of its theological meaning and implications. The Jews were instructed to observe its remembrance, and to recognize that their very identity and relationship with Yahweh was characterized by this story of redemption.

Perhaps, the most important fact was that Yahweh was alive and was with his people. That, in itself, was an indication that Yahweh was also for his people. He was mighty on their behalf. He was able to work day and night to procure their salvation. The deliverance by the sea was where Yahweh not only gained the victory over Pharaoh, but he also gained the glory as he said he would.

Exodus 13:17 – 14:31.

1. Translation:

13:17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God led them, not by way of the Philistine country, which was nearer, because God said, “The people might repent when they face battle⁷⁴ and want to return to Egypt.”

18 And God led the people by the way of the desert, by the Red⁷⁵ Sea. And being organized by fifties⁷⁶, the sons of Israel went out from the land of Egypt.

19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because he (*Joseph*)⁷⁷ made the sons of Israel to solemnly⁷⁸ promise, saying: “If you do this, God will surely take notice of you and cause you to carry my bones from here with you.”

20 They set out⁷⁹ from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the desert.

21 And Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them in the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could proceed by day and by night.

22 The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, did not depart from the front⁸⁰ of the people.

14: 1 And Yahweh spoke to Moses saying:

2 “Tell the sons of Israel, ‘Return and encamp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of the sea and opposite⁸¹ Baal Zephon’.”

3 And Pharaoh will say: ‘The sons of Israel are being entangled in the land. They are shut in by the desert.’

4 And I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and he will pursue them. But I will be glorified by Pharaoh and his whole army⁸², and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, and that I have done this to them.”

⁷⁴ In the AV this word is translated “war” (158 times) and “battle” (151 times) (Strong’s:4421; HGK:4878)

⁷⁵ Literally, “sea of reeds” or “sea of weeds”. The word enters prominently into the problem of the route of the Exodus in the territory of the “sea of reeds”. There is no warrant for the idea that because Israel crossed the Sea of Reeds that the water was shallow and no miracle was involved. Any deep sea may have reeds on its edge and both the Bitter Lakes and Lake Timsah are large and deep bodies of water. (Strong’s:5488; TWOT:1479).

⁷⁶ It could also be translated “armed for battle” (NIV)

⁷⁷ Added

⁷⁸ Because the verb is re-stated, the force of the verb is amplified, and hence the adverb.

⁷⁹ It means literally, to ‘pull out the tent pegs’. This word is mainly found in the Pentateuch (especially in Numbers). It fits well with the historical setting of the Hebrews before the Promised land. (HGK:5825)

⁸⁰ Literally, *in the face of...*, or, *in the sight of...*

⁸¹ נִכְנָה Is more often translated “against” (HGK:5790; Strong’s:5226)

- 5 Then the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled. As did his servants, Pharaoh changed his heart towards the people. And they said: “What is this we have done; to cast⁸³ the Israelites out from serving us?”
- 6 And he harnessed his chariot and took his people along with him.
- 7 And he took six-hundred chariots of his choosing⁸⁴, and all the chariots of Egypt and the captains⁸⁵ over them.
- 8 And Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and he pursued after the sons of Israel. The sons of Israel were leaving with hand being high⁸⁶.
- 9 And the Egyptians pursued them and overtook them as they were camping at the sea-side. All the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen and his army, caught up with them at Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.
- 10 As Pharaoh drew near and the sons of Israel lifted up their eyes and beheld the Egyptians marching behind them, they became very afraid, and the sons of Israel cried out to Yahweh.
- 11 And they said to Moses, “Why? Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the desert? Why have you done this to us, and have brought us out from Egypt?”
- 12 “Is this not what we told you in Egypt when we said, ‘Leave us to serve the Egyptians, because it is better for us to serve⁸⁷ the Egyptians than for us to die in the desert?’”
- 13 And Moses spoke to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand and see the salvation⁸⁸ which Yahweh will perform for you today, because the Egyptians which you see today, you will never again see them.”
- 14 “You keep still, and Yahweh will engage in battle for you.”
- 15 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Why are you crying⁸⁹ out to me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.”
- 16 “And you; lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide it, and bring the sons of Israel through the sea on dry ground.”
- 17 “And see I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and bring them after you. And I will be honored by Pharaoh, and by all his army, his chariots⁹⁰ and his horsemen⁹¹. ”
- 18 “And the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, and I will be honored by Pharaoh, by his chariots and by his horsemen.”

⁸² Also, “men of valor” and “physical strength” (Strong’s:381; HGK:2657)

⁸³ Also, “to let go” (Strong’s:7971)

⁸⁴ We selected this word to accommodate the participle form of the verb, בָּחַר. The root idea is that of a special selection by examining; a carefully thought out choice. (Strong’s:977; TWOT:231)

⁸⁵ מִשְׁלָשׁ also means “thirty sayings” and “excellent things” (TWOT:2403)

⁸⁶ The idea is that of *boldness*.

⁸⁷ The Semitic root is to obey, and to worship. (BDB:712.2; Genesius:p598)

⁸⁸ There are 76 occurrences of this word. In the AV it is translated “salvation” (65 times), and “deliverance” (3 times), but it means “to rescue” (Strong’s:3444; HGK:3802)

⁸⁹ It is a crying out in desperation. (TWOT:1947a)

⁹⁰ This is actually in the singular form.

⁹¹ This is literally “horses”, meaning those who manage the horses from the chariots (Mowinckel, TWOT:1836.)

- 19 And the angel of God moved from going in front of the camp of Israel, and went to their rear. And the pillar of cloud moved from the front of them and stood behind them.
- 20 It stood between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. The pillar of cloud was dark on the one side, and it gave light at night on the other side, so that they could not draw near to one another all night.
- 21 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and Yahweh swept the sea with a strong east wind all night, as he rent⁹² open the waters⁹³ to make dry ground.
- 22 Then the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on dry ground. And the waters were a wall on the right and on the left of them.
- 23 And the Egyptians pursued and went after them with every horse of Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen through the midst of the sea.
- 24 And it was the night watch before the morning⁹⁴. And Yahweh looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud upon the camp of the Egyptians, and threw the camp of the Egyptians into confusion⁹⁵.
- 25 And he caused the wheels of their chariots to come off, and led them into difficulty⁹⁶. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the face of Israel because Yahweh is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”
- 26 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, and the waters will return over the Egyptians, over their chariots⁹⁷ and over their horsemen.”
- 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at day-break the sea returned to its perpetual movement, as it was before⁹⁸. And the Egyptians were fleeing into the closing waters⁹⁹. And Yahweh swept the Egyptians away in the midst of the sea.
- 28 The waters returned and covered every chariot and horseman, to the whole army of Pharaoh, who were going after them in the sea. Not even one of them was left.
- 29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea, and the waters were to them a wall on the right and on the left of them.
- 30 And Yahweh rescued the Israelites that day. And Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead upon the shore¹⁰⁰ of the sea.
- 31 And Israel saw the great hand which Yahweh used against Egypt, and the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and his servant, Moses.

⁹² The basic idea is a strenuous cleaving, hence a cutting into two. (Strong's:1234; HGK:1324)

⁹³ Found only in the plural form (580 occurrences). (TWOT:1188)

⁹⁴ That is the third watch. HGK:874; NASB:H821)

⁹⁵ The verb is used 13 times, and in ten of them, God is the subject (5 times Israel are the object). (Strong's:2000; TWOT:504).

⁹⁶ The basic meaning is “to be heavy”, and is rarely used literally. (BDB:459.2; TWOT:943g)

⁹⁷ Occurs here in the singular form.

⁹⁸ Literally, “in the morning”

⁹⁹ Literally, “to meet him”

¹⁰⁰ Literally, “the lip of the sea” (HGK:8557; BDB:973.2)

2. Exegesis.

This section delineates the Exodus of the Hebrews from their leaving Rameses to their passage through the Red Sea. The story moves from slavery through salvation to worship. The chapters in Exodus which are focused on an enslaved people approximate the number of chapters given to matters of worship, with the transition being the story of redemption. Their rescue from bondage will be decisive and comprehensive. Their redemption will be complete and they will be free to worship, not only for three days, but for all time.

Succoth was probably the rendezvous for the whole nation, so that it was from this point that they first proceeded in an orderly march (Keil and Delitzsch 2002:345). Their route would not be through the Philistine country, even though this was the shortest route. The Philistines were very war-like and would have attacked the Israelites, who were unprepared for such resistance, causing them to desire to return to Egypt. They soon desired to return to Egypt for different reasons. This just proved that their deliverance was not yet complete.

The large number (Ex.12:37) of people who left Egypt has long been found to be problematic, and historical criticism in general has rejected them as being “ahistorical” or impossible. The standard conservative viewpoint was for a literal interpretation. This obviously would have made the survival of such a group in the desert an extraordinary feat, notwithstanding the miraculous intervention of the Lord. Besides, it seems to be incongruent with Deut. 7:7, which suggests that Israel was indeed “the smallest [or fewest] of all the nations.”

We find the *semantic interpretation* very plausible. The Hebrew root אַלְפָן (aleph) can denote 1) a thousand, 2) leader, chief or captain and 3) clan, family, group, troop. Taking option 3 a total number of fighting men may come to 5550, which is approximately 10 men per troop. From other historical data such as the Amarna correspondence around the same period, fighting troops involved ten men. If the semantic interpretation is to be accepted, one would expect to have a total of

20000 to 25000 for the people of Israel. This is a figure that would be consistent with the issues raised concerning the size of the population during the time period under consideration. (Klingbeil 2003: 401-420).

The Hebrews could not depend on their numbers of fighting men or on their preparedness and armour, but on Yahweh. While the Hebrews were exhorted to notice how Yahweh would fight for them, it is the Egyptians who recognize and acknowledge that Yahweh was fighting for them (Ex. 14:25). Yahweh gave the Israelites victory that day.

2.1 Genre.

Again, the general literary style is *narrative*. It relates the story of the deliverance of the Hebrews that happened at the Red Sea. It is more particularly a *saga* as it portrays a contest between a protagonist and an antagonist. Pharaoh, the antagonist, tries through his agents of war to prevent the rescue of the Hebrews by Yahweh, the protagonist and his agent, Moses.

The section 13:17-22 is a simple *report* within the narrative. The report is written in prose, reflecting no rhythmic characteristics of any sort. The section 14:1-31, also written in prose, continues the saga of what became a *legend* in Israel's literary history. God's act of salvation had to be remembered and memorized by the Israelites. This deliverance would become the central aspect of their kerygmatic confession about God's goodness to them. The exodus-motif is found in the whole Old Testament. Together with the Passover, the deliverance message is applied to the New Testament work of Christ.

2.2 Structural Considerations.

Our present text is circumscribed by the story in the section 13:17 – 18:27. Some scholars go back to include the text from 12:37. It is therefore the beginning of a

story of the people out of Egypt. This is agreed by most scholars. Beyond 18:27 we find the Israelites settled at Mount Sinai, which is considered to be another section. Nevertheless, we recognize the unity of 13:17 – 18:27.

Many scholars bound this pericope as 13:17 – 15:21. While the songs of Moses and Miriam (15:1-21) may be naturally included, it will take the story beyond the section that more strictly represents the crossing of the Red Sea. This present section relates the actual deliverance story and can safely stand without the song. Another way, in which our current text stands on its own, is that what follows is regarded as the wilderness story. Furthermore, 15:1-21 is largely in poetic form and can on that basis be separated from our current prose text.

Our text, 13:17 – 14:31, cannot really be further broken into stand-alone texts. The section belongs together and makes sense only as it is considered as a unit. We shall therefore consider this text synchronically as we accept the unity of the final text. In fact, to cement the idea of unity in this text, we were able to recognize a somewhat balanced text in the parallelism (chiasm) demonstrated below.

2.2.1 Text Outline.

- a. 13:17 – 22. Israel's Route and Guidance. A
 - i) God leads the troops (13:17-18)
 - ii) Cutting ties with Egypt (13:19)
 - iii) Yahweh in the pillar (13:20-22)
- b. 14:1 – 4. Yahweh's Plan Revealed To Moses. B
 - i) Pharaoh is deceived (14:1-3)
 - ii) Pharaoh will acknowledge Yahweh (14:4)
- c. 14:5 – 9. Pharaoh's Final Response. C
 - i) Pharaoh's regret (14:5)
 - ii) Pharaoh's preparation (14:6–7)
 - iii) Pharaoh's pursuit (14:8-9)
- d. 14:10 – 14. Israel's Fear and Encouragement. D
 - i) Israel's fear (14:10)
 - ii) Moses' intention questioned (14:11-12)
 - iii) Israel must see Yahweh's salvation (14:13-14)
- e. 14:15 – 18. Yahweh's Final Resolve. E
 - i) Instructing Israel (14:15)
 - ii) Instructing Moses (14:16)
 - iii) Instructing Pharaoh and his army (14:17-18)
- f. 14:19 – 22. Israel's Protection and Salvation. D'
 - i) Yahweh positions himself (14:19-20)
 - ii) Israel goes through the sea (14:21-22)
- g. 14:23 – 25. Pharaoh's Final Pursuit. C'
 - i) The Egyptians pursue the Israelites (14:23-25a)
 - ii) The Egyptians acknowledge Yahweh (14:25b)
- h. 14:26 – 28. Yahweh's Deliverance Brought By Moses. B'
 - i) Moses stretches out his hand (14:26-27a)
 - ii) The waters return (14:27b-28)
- j. 14:29 – 31. Israel's Victory and Faith. A'
 - i) Israel's victory (14:29-30)
 - ii) Israel responds with faith (14:31)

2.2.2 Linguistic, Grammatical and Rhetorical Characteristics.

2.2.2.1 Important Recurring Verbs (by stem)

Stem	Meaning	Occurrences	Verse	Translated as
רָאַת	see	6	13:17 14:13 14:13 14:13 14:30 14:31	they see and see you see you see they saw they saw
שָׁבֵךְ	return	5	13:17 14:2 14:26 14:27 14:28	they return you return will return over the sea returned the waters returned
לִקְחָה	take	4	13:19 14:6 14:7 14:11	he took he took he took you brought
נָסֹעַ	set out	5	13:20 14:10 14:15 14:19 14:19	they set out they were marching you go forward he moved he moved
חֲנֹת	encamp	4	13:20 14:2 14:2 14:9	they encamped you encamp you shall camp they were camping
הַלְךָ	go	6	13:21 13:21 14:19 14:19 14:21 14:29	he went they proceed from going went from he swept they walked
דָּבַר	speak	5	14:1 14:2 14:12 14:12 14:15	he spoke you tell we told we said you tell

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
חַזֵּק	harden	3	14:4 14:8 14:17	I will <i>harden</i> he <i>hardened</i> I will <i>harden</i>
רָצַף	pursue	4	14:4 14:8 14:9 14:23	he will <i>pursue</i> he <i>pursued</i> they <i>pursued</i> they <i>pursued</i>
כָּבֵד	honor	3	14:4 14:17 14:18	I will <i>be glorified</i> I will <i>be honored</i> I will <i>be honored</i>
עָשָׂה	do	5	14:4 14:5 14:11 14:13 14:31	I have <i>done</i> we have <i>done</i> you have <i>done</i> he will <i>perform</i> he <i>used</i>
עַבְדָּה	serve	5	14:5 14:5 14:12 14:12 14:31	his <i>servants</i> <i>serving us</i> us <i>to serve</i> us <i>to serve</i> his <i>servant</i>
נָטַת	stretch out	4	14:16 14:21 14:26 14:27	you <i>stretch out</i> he <i>stretched out</i> you <i>stretch out</i> he <i>stretched out</i>
בָּאָה	come / go	6	14:16 14:17 14:20 14:22 14:23 14:28	you <i>bring</i> I will <i>bring</i> they <i>draw near</i> they <i>went</i> they <i>went</i> they were <i>going</i>
פָּנָה	turn to	9	13:21 13:22 14:2 14:2 14:9 14:19 14:19 14:25 14:27	he went <i>before</i> from the <i>front</i> <i>before</i> <i>in front</i> <i>before</i> going in <i>front</i> moved from the <i>front</i> from the <i>face</i> <i>before</i>

2.2.2.2 Important Recurring Nouns (by stem)

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
מִדְבָּר	desert	5	13:18	<i>desert</i>
			13:20	<i>desert</i>
			14:3	<i>desert</i>
			14:11	<i>desert</i>
			14:12	<i>desert</i>
עַמּוֹد	pillar	6	13:21	<i>pillar</i>
			13:21	<i>pillar</i>
			13:22	<i>pillar</i>
			13:22	<i>pillar</i>
			14:19	<i>pillar</i>
			14:24	<i>pillar</i>
לִילָה	night	6	13:21	by <i>night</i>
			13:21	by <i>night</i>
			13:22	by <i>night</i>
			14:20	at <i>night</i>
			14:20	all <i>night</i>
			14:21	all <i>night</i>
חֵיל	physical strength	4	14:4	his <i>whole army</i>
			14:9	his <i>army</i>
			14:17	his <i>army</i>
			14:28	the <i>whole army</i>
מַחֲנָה	camp / army	5	14:19	<i>camp of Israel</i>
			14:20	<i>camp of Egypt</i>
			14:20	<i>camp of Israel</i>
			14:24	<i>camp of the Egyptians</i>
			14:24	<i>camp of the Egyptians</i>
רְכָב	chariot	9	14:6	his <i>chariot</i>
			14:7	<i>chariots</i>
			14:7	<i>chariots</i>
			14:9	<i>chariots</i>
			14:17	his <i>chariots</i>
			14:18	his <i>chariots</i>
			14:23	his <i>chariots</i>
			14:26	their <i>chariots</i>
			14:28	every <i>chariot</i>



Stem	Meaning	Occurrences	Verse	Translated as
בָּרְשָׁן	horseman	6	14:9	his <i>horsemen</i>
			14:17	his <i>horsemen</i>
			14:18	his <i>horsemen</i>
			14:23	his <i>horsemen</i>
			14:26	their <i>horsemen</i>
			14:28	<i>horseman</i>
יַבְשָׁה	dry ground	3	14:16	on <i>dry ground</i>
			14:22	on <i>dry ground</i>
			14:29	on <i>dry ground</i>

2.2.2.3 Observable Thematic Progression.

13:17

18	went			
19	carry			
20	set out			
21	went			pillar
	proceed			pillar
22				pillar (2x)

14:1

2					
3		harden			
4		pursue		army	be glorified
5					
6			chariot		
7			chariots (2x)		
8		hardened			
		pursued			
9		pursued	chariots	army	
			horsemen		
10	marching			afraid	
11				die	
12				die	
13				afraid	
14					
15	go forward				
16				stretch out	dry ground
17		harden	chariots		be honored
			horsemen		
18			chariots		be honored
			horsemen		
19	moved			camp	pillar
	going				
20				camp (2x)	
21	swept				stretch out
22					dry ground
23		pursued	chariots		
			horsemen		
24				camp (2x)	pillar
25					
26			chariots		stretch out
			chariots		
			horsemen		
27					stretch out
28			chariot	army	
29	walked				
30				dead	dry ground
31				fearred	

It may be observed that our text has much activity. There is movement all the time. The sons of Israel are on the move. Soon the Egyptians and their king, Pharaoh, will be on the move. Certainly, Yahweh too is on the move. Yahweh's movement is always for the benefit of the Hebrews and for the demise of the Egyptians.

The frequency of many words together sets a typical battle scene. Their movements are expressed by words like *set out*, *marching* and *go forward*. The Egyptians are in pursuit until they are hampered by Yahweh's presence. While the Israelites are only once depicted as being ready for war, we see the Egyptians alone able to present their war machine, which includes chariots and horses and which the Israelites do not have. The Egyptian king alone has a fighting-spirit as he is the one whose heart is hardened.

The Israelites on the other hand are filled with fear. They are afraid to die in the desert. It does not seem that they wanted freedom badly enough. Their philosophy was that "it was better to serve than to die". It turned out that they lacked faith. They did not believe in God and his servant Moses. They operated by sight rather than by faith. That is why they were exhorted by Moses to be still and see what Yahweh would do on their behalf.

The first movement of Yahweh is to move in Israel's defense. He moves to their rear and between them and their attackers. Yahweh's war-machine was different from that of the Egyptians. He only had the pillar, Moses and his staff, and the wind. Only these were necessary to open a path in the sea. All that Moses was expected to do was to stretch out his staff over the waters. Israel went through on dry ground. The Egyptians tried to go through but their wheels got stuck and came off. It is possible that the ground was not dry for them.

Yahweh wiped out the whole Egyptian army and gave Israel the victory. Before the Egyptians died they made an important admission, namely, that Yahweh was fighting for the Israelites. This is how they would come to honor Yahweh.

2.3 Commentary.

Salvation is always predicated by the compassion of God. He heard their cry and he “came down” to save them. The Lord surely came down to save the people of Israel, but he also came down to lead them and to protect them. They needed his salvation, his leading, his protection and his provision. In our text God proves himself as the one who finalizes Israel’s salvation by his leading and protection.

Motyer (2005:156-157) expresses our belief that Yahweh’s saving, leading and protection is part of a coherent story of selected facts in Israel’s history. The accusation that selective writing of history is tendentious is erroneous for all history, ancient or modern, has to be selective. It does not follow that there must have been a tampering with historical truth in order to make it fit into a preconceived literary idiom. It is history written with a perspective on the acts of God.

God is with his people in all his glory. It is that glory that in fact overcomes all that which threatens his pilgrim people. Even though their path is a place of conflict, their God can measure up to any threat that seeks to undo their salvation. Pharaoh and his forces, which are guilty of wanting to undo their freedom and bring them back into slavery, will find themselves fighting against the sovereign Lord of every force within the created order, and who will not hesitate to use them for the benefit of his people’s continued freedom. God’s dominion over the sea and the wind remained as evidence of his sovereignty, so that his will for his people’s freedom could not be frustrated.

Again, we agree with Motyer (2005:160) who sees that the underlying contest was for the ownership of the people of Israel. Who had the right to claim ownership of Israel? They themselves were not sure to whom they belonged. For a moment it seemed that their allegiance was with Pharaoh. They wondered if it would not have been better if they stayed in Egypt than to find their demise in the desert. The sea ahead will decisively settle that question. Their deliverance and redemption must

be entirely God's work, for they have no power to stand against the ensuing and claiming superpower.

a. 13:17-22 Israel's Route and Guidance.

We have already seen how this story depicts the scene of war. Israel has left Egypt "by their armies" (12:51). The people were "organized by fifties" (13:18). They are said to have gone out "with a high hand" (14:8), and the Egyptians on the other hand were preparing both to pursue and to overpower. God will fight for Israel and Pharaoh will contend with the mighty hand of God. Marching as they were for battle, Israel was not to lift up a single finger against their enemies; Yahweh was to fight for them. These verses set the stage for the drama in chapter 14.

i) God leads the troops (13:17-18).

Pharaoh let the people go because the hand of Yahweh was too heavy upon him. He could offer no resistance. God touched his firstborn son in the same way that he touched Yahweh's firstborn son. The hand of Pharaoh could not match the mighty hand of Yahweh, so he had to let go. In the light of this statement, it is strange that the Israelites should be thought to have *fled* (14:5). We shall deal with this when we comment on the verse in chapter 14, but the unfolding of the story leaves us with no other conclusion, but that the king of Egypt let them go.

The important point is that *God led* the released Israelites. God is omniscient and knows what every possible route holds for the pilgrims. The decision is given us by divine soliloquy (Breuggemann 1994:788) in the words, *God said*. The reason for their entry into the Promised Land from the east is given us in a subtle way ahead of the time, but that is not the immediate reason. The route they took begs the question, why not the *nearer* and quick route, the *Via Maris*? The road through the *Philistine country* was nearer. It was a well trodden trade and military route (Noth 1962:107). On that route they would *face battle* too soon and it would discourage

them from going further and encourage them *to return to Egypt*. Spence-Jones (2004:305) comments that the direct road from Tanis to Palestine—a road much frequented under the nineteenth dynasty—lay along the coast of the Mediterranean, and conducted to Philistia. If we look at the map, and observe the position of Tanis (now San) on the old Tanitic branch of the Nile, now nearly dried up, we shall see that the route which would naturally suggest itself to any one wishing to proceed to the Holy Land from Tanis would be one running almost due east, from Tanis to Pelusium, and from Pelusium, south of Lake Serbonis, to Rhinocolura; and thence, following the course of the coast to Gaza, Ashkalon, and Ashdod, the chief towns of the Philistine country.

It is true that a marsh region intervenes between Tanis and Pelusium which might seem to bar the route; but the Egyptian remains show that, in the times of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties, this obstacle was surmounted by means of an embankment which was carried across it, and that a direct road thus connected the two cities. Archeologists have found the coastal highway that led from Egypt into Canaan through Philistine territory was heavily fortified. God led His people by a different route because they were not ready to face war (Richards 1996:60). God led them in a way that prevented such a possibility and *led the people by the way of the desert, by the Red Sea*. Also, they first had to be trained to function as a nation. Fretheim's comment expresses our own view; that the divine concern for Israel is important in that it shows that God must take into account prevailing sociopolitical forces as well as people's emotional makeup in charting a way into the future (1991:150).

We recognize that the sea-fairing people that became known as the Philistines had not settled in that land *en masse* until round about the beginning of the twelfth century. This may be seen as an anachronism. This particular discussion does have bearing on the date of the exodus, or the writing, or the connotation *Philistine country*. Cole (1973:116) resolves this problem by translating it as "by the Philistia road". Also see Gen.26:1; it is possible that small numbers of Philistines may have been settled there before in trading settlements and during their invasions of Egypt, and only after their expulsion from Egypt did they settle *en masse* in Palestine.

Scripture does not hesitate to locate the Philistines at Garar as early as the time of Abraham (Gen. 21:32f). Of greater significance is the fact that the people were divinely led (Mackay 2001:240).

Critical scholarship makes too much of the literal “sea of reeds” (*יָם סֻף* *yam suph*) in stead of *Red Sea*, and by that narrows the possibilities of the crossing place through the sea. We cannot know for sure where the place of crossing might have been. There is much that remains highly tentative. Precise locations elude us and will probably remain undiscovered (Enns 2003:272). There are many proposals, but these are speculations. A decision here will also influence any proposed route through the wilderness. Even here we cannot be certain.

In any case the Sea at the Gulf of Aqabah, used for Solomon’s fleet, is referred to as the “Red Sea” (*יָם סֻף* *yam suph*) in 1Kg. 9:26. Considering their itinerary this cannot be where Israel crossed. The Gulf of Suez is also referred to as *yam suph* in Num.33:8-11. The point we are making is that *yam suph* need not necessarily mean “sea of reeds” and it refers to more than one body of water. Before we move on, there is one other suggestion to consider.

Batto (1984) posits that *suph* should mean “end” rather than “reeds”. He bases this on the reading *soph*, and translates it as “sea at the end of the world”. His view is supported by the widely accepted theological motif of (re-) creation in the book of Exodus. It introduces associations with creation and the waters of chaos in Genesis 1. The crossing of the sea is represented as a crossing of the waters of chaos, the sea at the end of the world. This view is by no means universally accepted, but at least it brings to the fore the theological significance of the sea.

We are told that Israel *went out from the land of Egypt* being *organized by fifties*. Contra the NIV translation, the Hebrew actually says, “The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt organized by fifties”. Fifties were one of the smallest fighting units, and putting it this way still maintains the *war* motif of the text. It also obviates

the need to understand the Israelites as a capable fighting force (*cf.* Stuart 2006:324). The Lord acted as their leader and king.

ii) Cutting ties with Egypt (13:19).

Moses kept Israel's oath to Joseph. *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him.* Joseph's bones were not immediately taken to Canaan like his father, Jacob's were. It remained in Egypt until the exodus. Joseph became the one through whom God preserved alive the remnant of Israel. Bringing his bones out of Egypt brings closure to the Egyptian stage of Israel's existence. Mackay says that it served as a reminder to the Israelites that Egypt was not their homeland (2001:243). Taking the bones of Joseph was a clear demonstration that ties with Egypt were being severed completely. They were honoring their word to Joseph because he made the sons of Israel *solemnly promise* that they would take his bones with them when they left Egypt. Joseph's "prophecy" was now being fulfilled, and the blessing of God's favor was indicated by taking the bones from Egypt *with them*. Gispen puts it this way: "... Joseph's faith was not put to shame" (1982:139). In fact the root of the word translated 'took' (לְקַחַ *lā-qăh*) occurs four times in our text, and is indicative of the fact that the people themselves were taken out of Egypt.

The report serves the double function of fulfilling the expectation raised by Gen.50:25 and of asserting yet again that God has made possible the exodus of Israel (Durham 1987:186). We see that Exodus is vitally connected to Genesis. Israel's departure from Egypt is part of a larger plan that God has been orchestrating for hundreds of years and which is now coming to a climax (Enns 2000:270). The inclusion of Joseph's bones on the journey binds the exodus community to the promises in Genesis. Ultimately, Joseph's bones will be buried at Shechem in the track of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem (Jos.24:32).

iii) Yahweh in the pillar (13:20-22).

The people *set out* from Egypt under Yahweh's guidance. The word for *set out* (**נָסַע** *nā-să*) literally means to "pull out the tent pegs". It sets well with the historical setting of the Hebrews before the Promised Land. *Succoth* seems to have been their first rendezvous before setting out to *Etham*. Their initial route was along *the edge of the desert*. The location of neither Succoth nor Etham is certain. We are not particularly concerned with the geographical details. So far their movement was still predictable and it looked pretty normal.

The leadership of Yahweh was their experience day and night. *Yahweh went before* the people *to lead them in the way*. The theological idea of Yahweh's leadership is pivotal in the whole story. The method of God's leading was by means of a *pillar* (or column). The noun, *pillar* (**עַמּוֹד** *ăm-mûd*) occurs six times in our present text. The pillar was a sign of Yahweh's full presence that was stable and visible (Breuggemann 1994:789). The pillar took on characteristics that responded to the needs of the people. By day it was a *pillar of cloud* and at night it was a *pillar of fire*. We cannot say whether the cloud changed or whether with the darkness of night made the fire (shrouded by smoke) visible (cf. Stuart 2006:327). In 14:20 it was able to give light to the Israelites and darkness to the Egyptians. It is reminiscent of some of the plagues where Israel remained unharmed while the Egyptians were not benefited.

Our text mentions only the fact that the pillar gave light at night and the reason for that is to show that they were given the ability to *proceed by day and by night*. The awesome significance of this statement is that God did not remove the cloud when the people murmured and complained and disobeyed (Reid 2007:2). It must not be forgotten, however, that the pillar very much served the purposes of both leading and protecting (cf. 14:19-20). In the day it shielded them from the scorching sun of the desert, and at night it provided both heat and light.

The pillar was the people's guarantee that Yahweh was present with them all the way and all the time. Here was a supernatural, huge, and visible reminder that Yahweh was at the head of his people as they marched or encamped, whether by day or by night (Stuart 2006:328). The guiding presence was the manifestation of the glory of God, where the "cloud" expressed its "veiling" to humanity. Ps.105:39 speaks of this pillar as having the power to "screen" (Law 1967:37).

That the pillar is often interpreted as "cultic appurtenances" (Mann 1971:18) or "cultic devices" (Breuggemann 1994:789) or is given any "liturgical" significance, is born from the historical critical thinking of Graf-Wellhausen. Furthest to the left it tries to posit some natural phenomenon, like the volcanic and meteorological imagery, to explain the pillar. Others like Cross and Freedman (1953:20) see it as metaphors borrowed from Canaanite mythology. This is often more because of a philosophical stance rather than a historical one.

The point must in any case remain the guiding presence of Yahweh. *The pillar did not depart from the front of the people.* The word we translate as *the front* is literally "in the face of ..." or "in the sight of" The presence was visible and, in the words of Fretheim (1991:151) it served as a "tangible assurance" to the people. When the pillar moved the people moved, and when the pillar stopped the people encamped. There was a relationship between the people and their present Lord. We may take it that the presence of Yahweh did not depart from the people in their journey; at least until they arrived at Mount Sinai.

b. Ex.14:1 – 4 Yahweh's Plan Revealed To Moses.

As a king or a general would strategize for war, so Yahweh strategizes to meet Pharaoh and his forces. First, Pharaoh must be enticed to engage in this battle, and then he must have the unswerving resolve to do just that. The envisaged battle must have the desired outcome, namely that Yahweh be glorified and that his fame be established. Yahweh must be known as the one who rescued his people. The final decisive intention is not Israelite freedom, but Yahweh's glory, which is

decisive (Breuggemann 1994:792). When *Yahweh spoke to Moses*, he shared this strategy with him. We are not told what Moses' response was, but as the story moves on we know that he must have been in agreement with the plan.

- i) Pharaoh is Deceived (14:1 – 3).

Wherever these places were located, it looks like Yahweh wanted Israel to encamp (הָנָא *hā-nā*, also jussive in meaning) in a “boxed-in” position, where Israel was to be surrounded by Pi-Hahiroth, Migdol, Baal Zephon and the sea. If we were to take the meaning of נַכְחָה (*nak̄h*) as “against” in stead of “opposite”, our speculation is that Pharaoh and his pursuing army were expected to make their approach from Baal Zephon. Their movement as instructed by Yahweh will nevertheless create the impression with Pharaoh that the Israelites are confused and lost. Yahweh guided the people away from the shortest and most logical route and into an eccentric series of turns designed to depict confusion (Durham 1987:187).

The story uses the narrator's omniscience. He knows what *Pharaoh will say*. This is a quaint way of saying what Pharaoh will think. What the Israelites do will bring Pharaoh to a particular and desired conclusion; that they have no way out because *they are shut in by the desert*. This very conclusion will be his motivation to try and re-capture the Israelites. The lure of having his slaves back was great indeed.

Pharaoh will *pursue* (רָדַּךְ rā·dă̄p) the Israelites. Fleeing slaves must be pursued. He considered himself as not having given up ownership, and his pursuit must become a matter of his will. Yahweh facilitates Pharaoh's resolve by hardening his heart. In all three occurrences (14:4, 8, 17) in our text when the Egyptians' hearts are hardened, it is done by Yahweh. To *harden the heart of Pharaoh* was to render him morally hardened, obtuse and obdurate. He will pursue because of his hardness of heart, and he does not know that he acts according to Yahweh's behest. They will only find this out when they see how God rescues his people.

Yahweh's purpose is not the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. That is only the means to an end, which is to be *glorified by Pharaoh and his whole army*. To be glorified means to be given weight. The volitional desire of Yahweh is expressed in the cohortative form (יִאֱפֹךְ) of the verb. God's desire will not be frustrated, and the Egyptians will respond accordingly. When, once Pharaoh would not acknowledge Yahweh, he and his people will then *know* who he is. Perhaps a better way to say it is that they will *find out* who Yahweh is, and that it was he who has *done this to them*. Pharaoh and his people will acknowledge Yahweh. What was done to them is narrated later in verses 24-27.

c. Ex. 14:5 – 9. Pharaoh's Final Response.

This is Pharaoh's final response because after this there will be a complete severance between Egypt and Israel. Whether Pharaoh died in the Red Sea or not is debatable. Unless (according to our preference) we take literally in every way, that not even one of them was left (14:28), we can never know for sure. This will nevertheless be Pharaoh's last act involving the Israelites. With the battle-motif of the text, this is Pharaoh's final assault on the people and their leader, Moses. What was Pharaoh's final response, and to what exactly did he respond?

i) Pharaoh's Regret (14:5)

Pharaoh regretted the fact that his slaves, the Israelites left the land of Egypt. His regret emanates from two areas, namely that *the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled*, and that the Egyptians lost the services of the Israelites. In 13:17 we are told that Pharaoh let the people go. Later in this verse the Egyptians are said to have *cast the Israelites out*. These seem to contradict the notion that the people have fled. How do we reconcile these seemingly contradicting ideas?

As is often done, one explanation is given by asserting two different sources; the one believing that the people fled and another believing that the people were given permission to leave. The opinion is that there are at least two apparent presentations of the exodus, i.e. the “Exodus Flight” and the “Exodus Expulsion”. If they were given permission to leave, then there is no need to flee. Why would they flee? We believe that such an explanation is unnecessary and that too much is made of this so-called incongruity.

Another view posited is that which says that the Israelites were given permission to go and worship Yahweh as they have requested; a three-day journey into the desert (Ex.3:18). They have overstepped the terms of their permission and were now forced to flee, either because they went further away than the three-day journey, or because they stayed longer than was allowed. Though this is a fairly good and plausible explanation, we are of the opinion that such an explanation too is unnecessary.

The simpler explanation is that the narrator used the idea of fleeing to heighten the battle-motif of the story. The idea anticipates the fact that Pharaoh will choose to pursue the Israelites. It creates the urgency in the minds of the Egyptians that they will see the need to pursue speedily. The chariots therefore serve two functions; that which enables the Egyptians to catch up with the Israelites, and that which provides them with the military strength to overcome the Israelites. Already the readers know that the Israelites stand no chance against the pursuing army. For Vervenne (1994:97) the use of the flight-motif depends on the description of this

pursuit, even though it functions perfectly within the broader context of the narratives which deal with the conflict between Pharaoh and Israel (Ex.7-11).

Besides, Pharaoh and the Egyptians regretted that they let the people go. They blamed themselves asking, *what have we done; to cast the Israelites out from serving us?* They regretted losing the services of their slaves. It certainly will have had an impact on the economy of the country. This regret became the motivation for their pursuit of the Israelites as *Pharaoh changed his heart towards the people.* It must have been part of the hardening process brought on by Yahweh. Pharaoh seeks to block the departure of the Israelites with the display of his military might.

ii) Pharaoh's Preparation (14:6-7).

Any attempted pursuit would require some preparation. The only possible reason to pursue the Israelites would be to bring them back so that they could continue to serve the Egyptians. The campaign would require an adequate war machine. Pharaoh took the lead, *harnessed his chariot and took his people along with him.* Chariots were formidable military weapons in those days. The process of taking his people included a selection. He *took six-hundred chariots of his choosing.* The participle of the root **נָסַב** has the idea of a special selection by examination. These six hundred chariots were carefully chosen by Pharaoh. Besides the six hundred chosen chariots, *all the other chariots of Egypt with its captains* were taken along.

It is important to note that the word for chariot occurs nine times in our present text. It is believed that the Horites and the Hyksos introduced the chariot into warfare (Negev 1996:n.p.). The exact date of the arrival of the Horites in Palestine and Egypt is still in dispute. It is thought by some experts to have coincided with the conquest of Egypt by the Hyksos in the 18th century BC, but others date it a century later. Both in Egypt and in Palestine the Horites and the Hyksos made up the ruling nobility, the *maryannu*, who introduced the horse and chariot into warfare. Elwell and Beitzel (1988:1011) concur: The Hyksos introduced the war

chariot into Egypt, a military device later used to drive the Hyksos aliens out of Egypt. Horse and chariot warfare became the norm in the following centuries. John Davis (1971:160), however, makes an interesting comment: The Eighteenth Dynasty was noted for its standardization of the chariot as army equipment. Fortunately for Bible students two royal chariots of the Eighteenth Dynasty have survived to the present day and we are therefore not in the dark as to their construction and size. The Egyptians planned a massive military assault on the “fleeing” slaves. Stuart (2006:333) reminds us that the Israelites must have seemed easy prey for Pharaoh’s chariot-based army.

iii) Pharaoh’s Pursuit (14:8-9).

While we cannot discount the fact that the Egyptians pursued the Israelites because they were perceived as having fled and because of the loss of their services, ultimately it must be because *Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt*. God made him change his heart towards the people (v.5). God hardened the heart of the Egyptian king, precisely, so that he would pursue the Israelites (v.4a). God was drawing Pharaoh out to “battle”. Pharaoh did not know that it was Yahweh, whom he did not know, who was manipulating him to come out to battle. The hardening by Yahweh did not violate Pharaoh’s own intention in any case. He was drawn into this battle by his desire to recapture his departed slaves. Pharaoh did not know that his battle would be against Yahweh rather than against Israel.

Pharaoh and his whole army *pursued after the sons of Israel*. His intention might have been only to recapture the Israelites and to make them his slaves again. Even though Pharaoh liked to believe that the Israelites were fleeing, the narrator reminds us that, unlike slaves who are fleeing, *the sons of Israel were leaving with hand being high*. That means that they were leaving Pharaoh’s domain with boldness. Their organized marching formation (13:18) was perhaps a demonstration of their boldness. The Israelites did not yet know about the pursuing

Egyptians, and their travels up until this point would have been filled with enthusiasm.

Finally the pursuing Egyptians *overtook them as they were camping at the sea-side*. The Israelites were camping where they were in front of the sea. The whole Egyptian war machine caught up with the Israelites. The narrator is careful to mention *all of the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen and his army*. It seems that they came through Pi Hahiroth and were heading towards Baal Zephon. There, the confrontation would place the Israelites in a vulnerable position.

d. Ex.14:10 – 14. Israel's Fear and Encouragement.

The Israelites were fairly at ease with the way things were developing. It may not even have crossed their minds that the Egyptians would want to re-capture them and take them back into slavery. When they finally saw the Egyptians in pursuit of them, they were overcome with fear. The narrator employs an imagery of battle preparation when he tells us that the Israelites *beheld the Egyptians marching behind them*. The Israelites *became very afraid*. The people were in great distress (**יָרְאָה** yā·rē).

They *cried out to Yahweh*. Previously Yahweh heard their cry without them necessarily having cried out to him. Here they cried out to Yahweh and they expected an answer from Moses. Their enquiry was about the reason why they were brought *to die in the desert*. Was it *because there were no graves in Egypt?* That could not have been the case because Joseph, whose bones they took, was buried there. They suspected some malicious intention on the part of Moses and Yahweh, but could not understand why.

The narrator now gives us a window into the past, and the people's real unwillingness to be rescued from slavery in Egypt. They wanted Moses to admit

that they were unwilling by asking, *is this not what we told you in Egypt when we said ‘Leave us’* They wanted to continue serving the Egyptians as this was a better option than for them *to die in the desert*. It is understandable that they would rather be slaves than be dead. Their pessimism was ill-founded entirely. They were wrong on two counts; they thought the Egyptians were coming to kill them, and they did not believe that God would rescue them (Stuart 2006:335). It is, however, ironic that the Israelites were willing rather to serve the Egyptians. The word for ‘serve’ (**עֲבָד** ‘ā·bād) can also be translated ‘obey’ and ‘worship’. This irony is heightened when one considers that they came to the desert with the original intention to worship Yahweh.

Because this question is leveled at Moses, he responds from a position of faith in Yahweh. Moses gives them three reassuring imperatives (Breuggemann 1994:793). He tells them not to be afraid. Assurance is given to override fear. Faith was able to see what Yahweh could do. They are exhorted to *stand and see the salvation which Yahweh will perform* that very day. Yahweh was going to rescue (**יְשֻׁעָה** yēšū·ā(h)) them, and they are excluded as an agent in the liberation. They would be delivered from this attacking army. These Egyptians who were alive in their sight will not be seen alive again. That they will *never again see them* does not mean that they will not have a visual purview of the Egyptians, for later they do see them dead on the sea shore.

The Israelites are instructed to *keep still* (**חֲרֵשׁ** hā·rēš). While they were to be silent, they were actually instructed to take no action. The only action to be taken in this situation was to be taken by Yahweh. *Yahweh will engage in battle* for them. The battle was between Yahweh and Pharaoh. The people must choose to serve Yahweh rather than Pharaoh because he will come out victorious from this battle.

e. Ex. 14:15 - 18 Yahweh's Final Resolve.

Yahweh was about to do a miracle for his name's sake. He was going to make himself known by doing two things, namely to make a way for the people through the sea, and to harden Pharaoh's heart for the last time before he wipes him out, but not before he acknowledges Yahweh. Yahweh was going to use a man; Moses, an inanimate object; the staff of God, and nature; the east wind, to redeem his people from the oppressive Egyptian regime. The miracle was an indication of God's presence with his people. Moses is made privy to these plans of Yahweh. Moses was going to play a pivotal role in the redemption of Israel, especially in terms of the outcome it hopes to produce, namely that the Egyptians acknowledge Yahweh, and that the Israelites place their faith and allegiance in Yahweh and in Moses, Yahweh's servant.

i) Instructing Israel (14:15).

Strangely, Yahweh asked Moses "*Why are you crying out to me?*" We cannot point out from the text that Moses cried out to Yahweh. He had every reason to do so though. The people complained to Moses when they saw the approaching Egyptians. That Moses would have complained about this is incongruent with his motivational instruction to the people. He was convinced that Yahweh was going to fight on their behalf (v.14). It cannot refer to the cry of the people because this verb (**צַעֲקָה**) is in the masculine singular, and it speaks of a cry out of desperation. Crying, nevertheless, constituted a lack of faith. The odd-ness of this question will have to remain unresolved, but Moses is instructed to *tell the sons of Israel to go forward* or to set out (**נָאַסֵּה**, *nā·să*). The verb expresses Yahweh's desire for the people to set out. Yahweh issued an imperative that called for daring action on the part of the Israelites. They were to go forward. "Forward" was going to be through the sea.

ii) Instructing Moses (14:16).

Moses was to instruct the Israelites what to do, and he was now also given instructions for what he must do. He was to wield the staff of the Lord. Yahweh was going to employ Moses and his staff to divide the sea. It is extraneous to ask whether Moses or Yahweh divided the sea, or whether Yahweh used Moses or the wind to do so. It was Yahweh who performed this miracle. Moses, the staff and the east wind were all Yahweh's instruments. Moses, however, is confirmed to be the man of God. He was instructed to *lift up his staff and stretch out* (**תִּשְׁלַח**) his *hand over the sea to divide it*. The root of this verb occurs four times (14:16, 22, 26 and 27).

The sea was divided so that Moses could *bring the sons of Israel through it on dry ground*. The fact that the people went through on dry ground is an important one. It occurs three times in our present text (14:16, 22 and 29), emphasizing the amazing success of the deliverance for Israel contrasted with the success that brought demise to the Egyptians, whose wheels got stuck when they pursued the Israelites.

iii) Instructing Pharaoh and His Army (14:17-18).

What is often said about Pharaoh is now true about the whole Egyptian army. As Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh, so he *hardened the hearts of the Egyptians* so that they may follow after the Israelites into the sea. Yahweh knows that he will be honored in the middle of the sea *by Pharaoh, and by all his army, his chariots and his horsemen*. "Chariotry" is preferred because the noun here is in the singular form (also Cole 1973:119). Yahweh instructs Pharaoh and his army indirectly by hardening their hearts to follow their resolve.

How are the Egyptians to honor Yahweh? Verse 18 gives the answer. The *Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, and I will be honored by Pharaoh, by his chariots and his horsemen*. They will come to this knowledge by experiencing the

awesome power of Yahweh. Acknowledging Yahweh will be Pharaoh's way of conceding that Yahweh is victorious and greater than he is. He must know that nobody can frustrate the resolve of Yahweh. Pharaoh will concede and Yahweh will be confirmed as the supremely sovereign one.

f. Ex. 14: 19 – 22. Israel's Protection and Salvation.

The presence of Yahweh was made evident, and the descriptions of that presence conjured the imagery of Yahweh moving into position to ready himself for battle. He demonstrated a battle strategy in the way he positioned himself. The strategy benefited the Israelites and it put the Egyptians at a disadvantage. Yahweh was the main mover in what played itself out at that point. Everyone else just followed the circumstantial prompts that were created by Yahweh. Breuggemann (1994:794) aptly remarks that these verses are an extravagant way of characterizing the vigilant protection God gives Israel, which Moses promised in verses 13-14. Yahweh was proving his Presence still, rescuing his people and decimating a powerful and well-organized Egyptian force with no exertion of effort by Israel (Durham 1987:195).

i) Yahweh Positions Himself (14:19-20).

The angel of God can also be spoken of as a messenger of God. As was the case in chapter three at the burning bush, the angel (**מֶלֶךְ** *māl'āk*) of God is in fact God himself. Although ‘angel’ means simply a ‘messenger’ or ‘courier’, it is clear that the angel of the Lord is not merely human (Mackay 2001:255). It was a way in which God chose to reveal himself. While we cannot describe what this angel looked like, it suffices to say that the term connotes the manifest presence of God. The angel of the Lord was frequently equated with God. God, who was leading the Israelites, *moved from the front of the camp of Israel, and moved to the rear*. The

idea of an Israelite camp (**מַחְנֶה** *mă·ḥĕnē(h)*) and an Egyptian camp evokes the imagery of a military setting.

The physical manifestation (theophany) of Yahweh was in the *pillar of cloud* which *moved from the front of them and stood behind them*. In this case it is quite likely that the angel of God has reference to the pillar of cloud; they are equated (c.f. Clements 1972:87). Be that as it may, Yahweh went and *stood between* the Israelite camp and the Egyptian camp. The pillar of cloud, which was between the two camps, *was dark on the one side*; evidently on the side of the Egyptians. The pillar *gave light at night* on the side of the Israelites. With the pillar between the two camps, *they could not draw near to one another all night*. In fact, the Israelites were able to move on, while the Egyptians were restricted in their movement, at least, the movement that would satisfy the yearnings of their hardened hearts. ‘Cloud’ suggests impenetrability to the Egyptians. It was a divinely imposed barrier (Mackay 2001:244, 255). In this way Yahweh protected the Israelites; now he was going to save them. The barrier also only seems to be a temporary one, because they must be allowed to pursue the Israelites into the sea and so meet their final demise.

ii) Israel Goes Through the Sea (14:21-22).

The man, the staff and the wind all work in tandem under Yahweh’s direction to bring to pass the great rescue. *Moses stretched out his hand over the sea* as Yahweh had instructed him to do. We accept that the staff must have been in his hand. Yahweh *swept the sea with a strong east wind all night*. The east wind was the instrument which Yahweh used to *rent* (**בָּקַע** *bā·qă*) the waters apart. Stuart (2006:342) interestingly reminds us that the east wind was often seen as a destructive or punishing phenomenon, because it was blisteringly dry and hot. Here we have the idea of a forceful dividing of the sea. “Waters” always appear in the plural form. The waters are rent apart to create a path through the sea. Yahweh was the one renting the waters apart.

The narrator emphasized the fact that the miracle performed had as its secondary purpose *to make dry ground* (**יָבַשׁ** *yāb·bā·šā(h)*). Some scholars see here that Yahweh is replicating the coming of dry land in creation. Of course, the primary purpose was to provide for the Israelites a way of escape through the sea. The primary and the secondary purposes of opening the sea are now fulfilled. Breuggemann (1994:794) says: "In this moment of liberation, God does a deed as powerful, original, and life-giving as the very newness of creation". The sons of Israel were able to go *through the midst* (**תְּמִימָה** *tā·wěk*) *of the sea on dry ground*. The fact that the path goes through the midst of the sea is explained in a more graphic way; *the waters were a wall on the right and on the left of them*. The Israelites are themselves in the midst so that these walls are on their sides. They went through the sea as an act of faith in Yahweh.

It is uncertain where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. Two proposals are presented as plausible possibilities, namely the northern part of the Gulf of Suez, and the Gulf of Aqaba. The problem with the latter proposal is that its accompanying proposal for Mount Sinai is improbable because it would be too far from Egypt for the Israelites to reach in the short time reflected in the narrative. A Gulf of Suez crossing in the region of the Bitter Lakes is more realistic. Elwell and Beitzel (1988:2143) states, Sinai is said to be three days' journey from Egypt and 11 days from Kadesh (Ex 5:3; Dt 1:2). The best recent suggestion is that Mt Sinai is Jebel Sin Bishar, a striking isolated peak in the Suder plain. Its Arabic name may mean "heralding of the law" or "the laws of man." It lies at the right relative distances from both the Egyptian border and Kadesh-barnea. There is sufficient water in the vicinity to sustain a large group of people such as the Israelite tribes. Be that as it may, both crossings proposals are so located (running north to south) that an east wind would traverse the width of the gulfs, which would be the shortest route through the sea. In any case, it cannot only be the wind to have caused the sea to open, for even if it blew like a nozzle it would not explain the fact that the water stood like two walls on the sides of the passing Israelites. Jamieson, *et.al.* (1997:n.p.) comment:

Suppose a mere ebb tide caused by the wind, raising the water to a great height on *one side*, still as there was not only “dry land,” but, according to the tenor of the sacred narrative, a wall on the right hand and on the left (Ex 14:22), it would be impossible on the hypothesis of such a natural cause to rear the wall on the *other*. The idea of divine interposition, therefore, is imperative; and, assuming the passage to have been made at Mount Attakah, or at the mouth of Wady Tawarik, an *east* wind would cut the sea in that line.

g. Ex. 14: 23 – 25. Pharaoh’s Final Pursuit.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians are now ready for their final pursuit. They will never again after this pursue the sons of Israel. Their going through the sea is however not an act of faith in Yahweh. We must remember that the pillar was between the Israelite and the Egyptian camps and that this was Yahweh’s means of keeping them apart (*cf. v.20*). The Egyptians would be taking a huge risk to pursue the Israelites into the sea, but their stubbornness would not allow them to do anything else (Stuart 2006:340).

i) The Egyptians Pursue the Israelites (14:23 – 25a).

One can only assume that the pillar of cloud moved behind along with the Israelites as they went through the sea. Only with this as a possibility, were the Egyptians able to pursue the Israelites. They *went after them with every horse* they had. Every chariot and horseman *went through the midst of the sea*. At this point it seems that the Egyptians had the same experience as the Israelites with respect to the gaping sea. In fact they may have decided to go through because the Israelites had and that like the Israelites, they should have no problems.

They obviously made a mistake to think that they could go through because the Israelites did so. What the Egyptians did not know was that Yahweh, who opened the sea for the Israelites, did so solely for Israel’s benefit. It was in fact their hardened hearts that made them pursue under these odd conditions; without any

restraint or without any fear. The narrator tells us the time of the Egyptian pursuit. It happened during the third watch. He refers to it as *the night watch before the morning* (נַּרְבָּה bō·qēr). That means that it was shortly before daybreak when they entered the gaping sea. This, the darkest hour before dawn, was traditionally the time for attack, when men's spirits are at their lowest (Cole 1977:122).

The towering God acted. *Yahweh looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud upon the camp of the Egyptians.* Not that the Egyptians were encamped, but that they are referred to as the camp (מַחֲנֵה mă·ḥĕnĕ(h)) a designation for the whole military group of fighters. The theophanic pillar was an indication of Yahweh's localized presence, from whence he acted. The looking down of Yahweh introduces the actions that follow. He *threw the camp of the Egyptians into confusion.* They were caused to panic. The verb to throw into confusion (מִמְּלֹא hā·măm) occurs thirteen times in the Old Testament and in ten Yahweh is the subject as in this instance. The Egyptians are the object. The irony is that those who thought that the Israelites were confused and being entangled in the land (14:3), were now themselves confused and entangled in the sea.

Yahweh caused the wheels of their chariots to come off, and led them into difficulty. It appears that the wheels of the chariots operated with great difficulty. They got stuck. The dry ground of the Israelites was not dry for the Egyptians and they moved with difficulty (קָבֶד k^obē·dūt). The basic meaning is 'to be heavy'. It is possible that because of this difficulty of movement the wheels came off (סֻר sūr). This is also the possible source of our idiom when things go haywire. That day things did not go well for the Egyptian army.

ii) The Egyptians Acknowledge Yahweh (14:25b).

Soon enough the Egyptians realized that they were in trouble. They certainly had a mobility problem. Their circumstances pointed to the real reason for their

difficulties. They recognized that *Yahweh was fighting* for the Israelites *against the Egyptians*. That was what Yahweh wanted to achieve; that Pharaoh and the Egyptians would acknowledge him (*cf. v.17*). This they refused to do up until this stage. Now they finally do. Thus the Egyptians are made to confess what the Israelites themselves have doubted. Ironically, the Egyptian praise becomes a theme for Israel's praise (Fretheim 1991:155).

They recognized that they were no match for Yahweh, and the only way out is to *flee from the face of Israel*. They who thought that the Israelites were fleeing (14:5) wanted now to flee from those they pursued. Also they who were chasing behind the Israelites wanted now to flee from their face (פָנֶה pā·ně(h)). Whether they recognized Yahweh's actions or their need to flee from Israel, by it they acknowledged Yahweh both as supreme and as Israel's God.

h. Ex.14:26 – 28 Yahweh's Deliverance Brought By Moses.

Yahweh had done enough to convince the Egyptians that he is sovereign Lord, but the job was not yet completed. There could be no possibility for the Egyptians to regroup as he had already promised that the Israelites would never again see these Egyptians (v.13).

i) Moses Stretches Out His Hand (14:26-27a).

Yahweh again showed that Moses was his approved servant, and he invites him to participate in sealing the victory over the Egyptians. Moses is instructed again to *stretch his hand over the sea*. This time the waters will not be opened apart, but it *will return over the Egyptians*. The completeness of the Egyptian demise is given by the reiteration that the waters will return *over their chariots and over their horsemen*.

Moses did according to the instruction given by Yahweh. Again the narrator mentions the time when the waters returned to its previous state. It was *at day break* when the sea *returned to its perpetual movement*. The sea returned to the state it was *before* (בָּקָר bō·qēr); literally, in the (previous) morning. The rescue of the Israelites happened at night and was concluded at day break. At daybreak the Israelites could see the entire process clearly.

ii) The Waters Return (14:27b-28).

The Egyptians were fleeing from the Israelites because Yahweh was fighting for them. They were fleeing because their pursuit of the Israelites became too difficult. As they were fleeing, they found themselves *fleeing into* (נִרְאָה qā·rā) *the closing waters*. Literally, they were fleeing to meet with the waters. If they were fleeing away from the Israelites and into the closing water, then the waters were closing from the entry side. Ironically, the Israelites were hemmed in before the waters opened, but now the Egyptians found themselves hemmed in with the waters closing.

Yahweh swept the Egyptians away in the midst of the sea. The word for *swept* (נִעַר nā·'ār) could be expressed in this way: Yahweh shook off the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Yahweh did so by covering *every chariot and horseman* with the returning waters. The *whole army of Pharaoh*, who went after the Israelites into the sea, was drowned. *Not even one of them was left.* Not a single Egyptian survived. The victory of Yahweh was complete.

j. Ex.14:29 – 31 Israel's Victory and Faith.

The battle motif of this story now comes to a close. This was a decisive battle. It settled the question on who was Lord; Yahweh or Pharaoh? It also settled the

question on whom Israel belongs to; Yahweh or Israel? Whoever wins the battle determines who is Lord and owner. Their motivations already create in the mind of the reader an affinity with the protagonist. Pharaoh sought to recapture while Yahweh sought to free. Yahweh leads and Pharaoh chases. Pharaoh attacks and Yahweh defends.

i) Israel's Victory (14:29-30).

There is a definite contrast created in this narrative. The Egyptians could not manage to go through the sea, but the Israelites *walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea*. The Egyptians found great difficulty going through, while the emphasis of dry ground reflects Israel's relative ease. This contrast is introduced here by the use of the conjunction, *but*. That the waters were *a wall on the right and on the left of them*, demonstrates the contrast in that the waters stood "upright" when the Israelites went through the sea, but it "collapsed" upon the Egyptians when they tried.

In the same way as the waters stood, the Israelites stood in the battle; and in the same way as the waters collapsed, the Egyptians collapsed in the battle. Since it was Yahweh who fought, he is the one who *rescued the Israelites that day*. Their victory was confirmed when they *saw the Egyptians lying dead upon the shore* (**שָׁפֵךְ** *sā·pā(h)*) of the sea. This Hebrew word literally means "lips" or "speech". The sea bore testimony and pronounced the Egyptians dead, and by that declaring an Israelite victory. Cole (1973:122) eloquently states that this is a very graphic touch, as an eye-witness account.

ii) Israel Responds with Faith (14:31).

Israel was never expected to have blind faith. Their faith was to be based upon what Yahweh has done. Yahweh demonstrated his great power to them. The

Israelites saw the great hand which Yahweh used against the Egyptians. The contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh was over. The mighty hand of Yahweh prevailed over the heavy hand of Pharaoh. Faith among the Israelites was the result of this great feat of Yahweh.

The faith of the Israelites found expression in two ways. Firstly, they *feared Yahweh*. Their fear (**יְהָרֵא**, *yā·rē*) was not one of anxiety or frightfulness; it was one of reverence and respect. Their fear emanated from their sense of awe. Secondly, *they believed in Yahweh*. They had confidence in Yahweh. He proved himself to be true. They had a similar level of confidence in Moses. *They believed in Yahweh and his servant, Moses*. Here was an affirmation of both Yahweh and Moses, and it paves the way for Moses to mediate between them and Yahweh. Their believing was established after their deliverance. “Believing” and “establish” come from the same Hebrew root (**מַנָּא**, *mān*).

2.4 Theological Reflection.

Yahweh is a miracle-working God; for his people’s sake and for his own glory. God’s miraculous rescue of Israel at the Red Sea was the event by which they were made the people of God. It was a conflict for paternal power over them. Pharaoh did not give up possession and would try to reclaim and take back his slaves to Egypt. Yahweh claimed them as his firstborn son. The lure of having his slaves back was great indeed. When Pharaoh wanted to keep Yahweh’s firstborn son, Yahweh took the lives of Egypt’s firstborn sons until Pharaoh let go.

Israel was now God’s possession. Every connection with Egypt had to be severed. They had also to take the bones of Joseph as they had promised to do through their forefathers. Joseph’s “prophecy” was to be fulfilled, and would be an indication of the Lord’s blessing upon them, for the Lord had orchestrated this for hundreds of years (Enns 2000:270). Egypt was not their homeland (Mackay 2001:243).

The omniscient God is the one who will lead his people with his pillar. The pillar was a sign of Yahweh's full presence that was stable and visible (Breuggemann 1994:789). The pillar took on characteristics that responded to the needs of the people. He knew and anticipated every response of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He knew the Israelites, anticipating what their response would be should they face resistance by the warring Canaanites. They would then face battle too soon. He knew what every possible route held for them. The Lord knew which way was the best one to take to the Promised Land. The concern of Yahweh for Israel had to take into account the prevailing sociopolitical and emotional contexts. Everything the Lord did was based upon his omniscience, and for the benefit of his reputation and his people.

The miraculous rescue was needed for the people themselves to know where they belonged. Right up to the point of rescue, the people vacillated, calling out to Yahweh, yet considered themselves better off serving Pharaoh, then coming out to serve Yahweh. The miraculous rescue turned fleeing slaves into a people who testified about God's miraculous deliverance; a people who believed in Yahweh and Moses. This miraculous intervention would convince them that Yahweh was mightier than Pharaoh, and that he is a better king to have and to serve. Yahweh, their king, alone rescued them from oppression.

Though Yahweh is sovereign he intimated his strategy to Moses. God was willing to be in partnership. Moses was to stretch out his hand with God's rod in it to divide the sea. Though the outcome was for Yahweh's glory and acknowledgement, Moses too was believed in by the people. Moses, who was before accused of malicious intent, was now accepted as leader and mediator of the people.

Yahweh provided an escape when there was no hope. Their hopelessness already saw them as candidates for death and burial in the desert. God wrought the impossible and created new life within a new existence as the people of God. The God who was able to dry up the sea and make a road in its depths for the redeemed to cross over, is able also to give his people eternal life (Is. 51:10f). He

is able to defeat the powers of resistance to bring forth new life (Childs 1974:238). In this moment of liberation, God does a deed as powerful, original, and life-giving as the very newness of creation (Breuggemann 1994:794). Providing hope is the grace of God displayed. Though the response of the people in relation to God was initially not that of faith, it culminates in faith (Stuart 2006:335). Faith overcomes fear. They were encouraged not to be afraid but to be still, seeing how Yahweh will engage in battle on their behalf (14:13-14).

Yahweh was able to use anything or anyone as his instruments for deliverance. His deliverance came by supernatural and natural means. He could use miraculous and ordinary means. He could use the swaying of Moses' rod to split the sea; and he could call the east wind to lay bare the sea bed for his people to cross over with ease. The miraculous included the waters to stand as walls on both sides of the path through the sea; and the ordinary caused the Egyptians to drown in that same water. The supernatural created dry ground for the Israelites; and the natural was the mud that was to be expected there, causing the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to stick and come off. We see the mighty hand of God at work in the wonderful and in the ordinary (Childs 1974:238). Pharaoh's chariots, horses and horsemen were no match for Yahweh whose only weapons were a staff in the hand of his servant and the wind. The sovereign Lord of every force within the created order will not hesitate to use them for the benefit of his people. Yahweh's deliverance was decisive, comprehensive and complete.

The redemption of God required the people to follow. His redemption is never forced upon those he rescues. It may have been forced upon the oppressors as it was upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They did according to the behest of Yahweh. Oppression provokes God's intervention. Forces that seek to forcefully incarcerate an innocent people invite God's intervention. Whether from free will or by compulsion, Yahweh's sovereign will is never frustrated by humans. God's intervention aims at getting the redeemed to respond in faith and worship. Israel believed in Yahweh and in his servant, Moses. Redemption must create a people of faith and of praise. Their path must be from slavery through salvation to worship.

The people experienced the fact that the Presence is there for their guidance and for their protection. The pillar was a “tangible assurance” of Yahweh’s presence with the people (Fretheim 1991:151). The pillar went ahead of the people leading them. But when the forces resisting freedom threatened, the pillar of Presence moved to the rear. Isaiah 58:8 says that the “glory of the Lord will be your rear guard”. The people had a foretaste of the joys of life in the presence of their God, Yahweh. So, the Presence was for the people of Yahweh, and against their oppressors.

The people of God also had to realize the difference between them and their adversaries. As it had been during the time of the outpouring of the plagues, so it is with their redemption. The judgment of Yahweh was upon the Egyptians, while his favor was upon his people. God dealt differently with the land of Goshen, where his people lived; they had no swarms of flies; their livestock did not die; they had no hailstorm; when the Egyptians were in darkness, the Israelites lived in light; and their firstborn were not killed by God’s angel. God will again deal differently with them at the Red Sea; the pillar of Yahweh would provide light for the Israelites and darkness for the Egyptian camp. The Israelites were a people of Yahweh’s grace and favor. The pillar was a divinely imposed barrier making this distinction (Mackay 2001:244).

God is able to make all things, even perceived bad things, work for the good of his people and his cause. The perceived evil that Moses did by bringing them out of Egypt against their better knowledge turned out for their salvation. When they saw graves, God created for them a highway through the sea. They needed only to be still and see God’s intervention. The Egyptians, who ironically thought that the Israelites were confused and hemmed in, actually had themselves become confused and hemmed in by the sea. Yahweh was able to work day and night to procure his people’s salvation.

Yahweh is able to assert his authority over the nations. The Egyptians were expected to come to the knowledge of who Yahweh is. They were to honor Yahweh in their acknowledgement that he is the supremely sovereign one.

Yahweh is willing to take the responsibility of his harsh action against them to bring them to that knowledge. *The Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, and that I have done this to them* (14:4). Yahweh said that by this he would be *honored* and *known* by the Egyptian king, his army, his chariots and his horsemen (14:17-18). God was willing to cause Egypt to become hard in order to make the rescue a great work to be admired by the whole world. The greater the obstacles are, the greater the victory will be.

Yahweh was not like Pharaoh. Yahweh was the protagonist and Pharaoh the antagonist. Pharaoh sought to recapture while Yahweh sought to free. Pharaoh pursued the people while Yahweh led them. Pharaoh attacked them during the traditional time (just before daybreak), while Yahweh moved to defend them day and night. Yahweh is for his people.

There are many allusions to the exodus in the rest of the Bible; each of them reflecting theologically on what they took for granted as a momentous event in the history of the Israelites. We may simply list some such allusions in the Old Testament as follows: in the Psalms, Ps.74:12-13; Ps.77:12-20; Ps.78:11-14; Ps.78:42-53; Ps.99:4-7; Ps.103:5-8; Ps.105:23-39; Ps.135:5-9 and Ps.136:10-16. In the Prophets, Is.51:10-11; Is.52:10-12; Is.63:11-14; Jer.2:6; Jer.23:7-8; Dan.9:15-16; Hos.11:1-5; Am.4:10; and Mic.6:4. We shall look at these allusions in order to derive an Old Testament theological interpretation of the exodus from Egypt.

In the four excerpts from Psalms 74-78 we find the psalmist struggling within himself as he witnesses the evil and injustice in the world. In the seventy-fourth Psalm, Van Gemeren (1991:486) reminds us that God's people in exile are weeping over the destruction of the temple which symbolized the presence and protection of God. What the heathen had done 'in the midst' of the sanctuary was as nothing to what God at the exodus had done in the midst of the earth (Kidner 1975:268). The community nevertheless affirms the creative and redemptive powers of God their king by remembering what he had done to the Egyptians showing his supremacy and sovereignty (Ps.74:13-14).

God's works in their variety in creation, redemption, judgment and salvation was seen in his holy power over the Egyptians, for all the nations to witness his mighty arm. His greatest salvific deeds prove his incomparability (Kraus 1993:114). Yahweh is the divine warrior. The waters and the forces of nature received special powers (Ps.77:16-17) to affect the liberation of God's people. These powers were the executors of the salvation and of the wrath of God. The invisible God was present in Israel's liberation and in the judgment of their oppressors (Ps.77:19).

The people's failure to appreciate the blessings of God was largely due to their forgetfulness and therefore disregard for God's redemptive intentions with them. Westermann (1989:105) reminds us that the 'historical credo' was to be a living reality for Israel. It was supposed to function as a means to magnify God in the gloomy present. Delitzsch (1902:404) correctly says that therein lays a hope, which makes the retrospective glance into the better past a source of consolation for God's people. But they were no longer moved by the history of redemption (Ps.78:11) as it no longer motivated them to live as Yahweh's covenant people. They were called to sanctify his name with everlasting remembrance. "Remembrance" is nothing other than to live in honor of the God and in gratitude to him who personally delivered them from oppression and bondage. Yahweh brought adversity to the Egyptians on the one hand and blessings to his people on the other (Ps.78:42-53).

In Ps.99 the sovereign and glorious rule of God is seen by his enthronement, which makes his presence accessible to his subjects; here, particularly through his mediators (v.6). Tate (1990:n.p) notes that the kingship of Yahweh correlates with the Mosaic declaration that the Divine Warrior of Israel, Yahweh, would "reign forever and ever" (Ex.15:18). Everything, whether it is God's revelation or his acts of creation and redemption, reveals his greatness, awesomeness and holiness (Van Gemeren 1991:636). Every revelation of his otherness is the glory of his majestic power and justice in his acts of judgment and deliverance. He spoke to his mediators in history through the cloud; among others, clearly a reference to Moses

in the exodus narrative. God has shown himself to be the God of grace, which has transformed the history of Israel into a *Heilsgeschichte* (Weiser 1959:642).

The psalmist's concern for righteousness and justice is almost tangible in this psalm. His reference to its establishment by the Lord in the narrative of the deliverance demonstrates that concern. God is concerned with the establishment of righteousness in this world. Weiser (1959:661) succinctly states that God has shown his righteousness to be a succession of glorious acts which run through the history of Israel. As the Lord has delivered from evil and oppression, so also, it has become incumbent upon us to deliver from evil and oppression. The Lord's forgiveness, redemption and sustenance must be emulated by his people.

God's fidelity as Creator-Ruler and as Redeemer of his people is celebrated in Psalm 105. Its historical reflection leads to a reflection on his mighty acts in redemption. The psalmist describes the exodus in the colors that provide hope for the exiles (Mays 1994:339). God added to their number and made them "too numerous" (Dahood 1970:59) for the Egyptians. The Lord delivered his people with supplies of silver and gold, and so initiated their prosperity too. To the Egyptians he gave hail as their rain – v.32 (Dahood 1970:61). The oppressed were blessed, while the oppressor's "blessing" actually became their punishment.

In Psalm 135:5-9 Yahweh is great as Creator and as Judge. He is greater than all other gods and none of them can be compared to him. The greatness of the Lord is seen in his rule over all creation, to the exclusion of other gods (Ex.15:12f). His greatness extends to his sovereignty (Perowne 1989:424). He harnesses the heavens and nature for benefit or for judgment, as he pleases. Historically, he has done so for Israel's benefit on the one hand and for Egypt's judgment on the other. Wilcock (2001:248) beautifully sums up this psalm saying, "It looks back to God the Creator (vv.5-7), forward to God the Judge (vv.13-14), and at the heart of its faith to God the Redeemer (vv.8-12)."

Many commentators see Psalm 136 as a companion to Psalm 135 in its celebration of the Creator and Redeemer. The exiles were there in principle

(Wilcock 2001:251). The dividing of the Red Sea asunder as an act of loving kindness will be recounted forever. God, on their account suspended the natural course of the waters that they may pass through it on dry ground (Kimhi 1973:75). They were to sing this Redemption Hymn in their annual celebration of the Passover Feast as a perpetual reminder of the redeeming and judging acts of God. Van Gemeren (1991:825) very aptly states that whenever Israel suffered, the history of redemption continued.

Our three references in the prophet are all found in Deutero-Isaiah. In Isaiah 51 God had given wonderful promises to his people through the prophet, who now urges God to fulfill them. God promised that they will see new revelations of his mighty power in verse 5. The prophet daringly summons God's arm to put on strength (Knight 1984:154). The *arm of Yahweh* is further identified with the drying up of the sea and the provision of a way for crossing the Reed Sea (Watts 1987:211). Whybray (1990:158) comments that Yahweh's arm speaks of his capacity as warrior. God's mighty power had already been witnessed in the destruction of Egypt's power (vv.10-11). The power that brought deliverance through great miraculous displays will again be the confidence of God's people for his new saving action, when they will again enter their land with joy; this time from Babylonia. Oswalt (2003:215) is right in saying that none of the powers of evil in the world can stop Israel's redeemer.

The verses just prior to the fourth Servant Song (52:13 - 53:12) speak again of the act of salvation as powerful as the deliverance from Egypt, and with the arm spoken of in chapter 51. Unlike the flight from Egypt, the flight from Babylonia will not be as pressured (Grogan 1986:297). Just as at the exodus, God would protect the procession from both the front and the rear. In this use of the exodus theme (v.12) there is a promise of an exodus more wonderful than that from Egypt (Herbert 1975:106). Hanson (1995:146) puts it beautifully: God will act as God acted in creation and the exodus. God's power is sufficient to defeat the pernicious forces of chaos.

In a text of lament, Isaiah 63:11-14, the prophet calls to mind the past deeds of God for his people and complains that God is slow to provide deliverance. Again, as in Isaiah 51 and 52, mention is made of the arm of Yahweh. The focus of attention is still the events of the exodus and of divine power. God was their shepherd leading the people as a flock. Their unhindered passage through the sea, compared with the freedom of horses in an open country, was a great miraculous act of God. This remembered past was a time characterized by God's presence in the midst of the people, saving them from the dangers that engulfed them. The present in contrast is a time of God's absence (Hanson 1995:237). The cynics are asking if the arm of God was now too short to save. Was his ear too dull to hear their cry? Webb (1996:242) reminds us that the Exodus deliverance established a father-child relationship between God and the Israelites. Will he now see their distress and lift them up in their weakness? Yes, he will. In all their suffering he also suffered (v.9). They were his people and he was grieved by their misery (Walker 2005:272). As he has saved in the past, so he will save again.

God's goodness should inspire gratitude in the people of God. Instead, they were only expressing ingratitude by their apostate behavior, forgetfulness and lack of faith. In order to show the nation how far the people had departed from the Lord, Jeremiah (2:1-8) reminds them of the time of their deliverance from Egypt (Thompson 1980:168). Israel's devotion and faithfulness to her God has dwindled and she acts like an adulteress; as though she does not belong to him. Even the priests, who should enjoy the first-fruits of the harvests, did not enquire after the Lord. Feinberg (1986:388) correctly asserts that to be thoughtless is to be thankless. They did not appreciate the multiplicity of benefits they enjoyed at God's hand, nor were they mindful of his presence in their midst. God proved himself to be faithful in their past deliverance when as a young bride she followed him in the wilderness (Ryken 2001:38; Huey 1993:62). God had passion for his bride; he protected her all the way.

Jeremiah gives oracles of deliverance (Craigie 1991:333). The promise of a future salvation and settlement in their land is one that is patterned according to Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Jer.23:7-8). The people's confession of their paradigmatic

liberation will also provide them with bold hope of God's future acts of deliverance from Assyria and Babylon, the countries of the north. Their repatriation will rival the fame of the exodus from Egypt and will also be provided with good and God-honoring shepherds to lead the people (Guest 1988:244). Dearman (2002:264) puts it that something new and wonderful will emerge from David's line in this second exodus. Martens (2005:415) sums it up: "Beyond the Exile, God would take the initiative, as he did at the Exodus, to reverse a bad situation ... the themes of re-gathering, resettlement, repopulation, prosperity, new leadership and security ... so striking will be the undoing of the Exile that the Exodus will pale by comparison (23:7-8)."

As a diligent student of Scripture, Daniel 9:1-19 calls to mind Jeremiah's word and the Exodus event. Porteous (1979:136) admits that this text gives very clear expression to the faith by which Israel appropriated the mercy of God. The Exile and the Exodus are juxtaposed to demonstrate both God's justice and God's goodness. As the people of God, we accept responsibility for our actions and neglects. We are not fatalistic. We recognize that God, in response to our acts, was being just (Goldingay 1989:265). Daniel appeals to God's pity on the exiled nation and her ruined city of Jerusalem. He based his appeal wholly on God's own honor and glory (Archer 1985:110). God's reputation came a long way; since the deliverance from Egypt and Daniel's plea is for God to uphold his great reputation before the nations by being merciful to them. Le Roux (1995:110) gives fine expression to the people's dependency upon God: "In hierdie ellende, diep bewus van hulle skuld en met die resultate van God se regverdige straf duidelik voor oë, kan hulle opnuut soek na God se barmhartigheid "(vv.15-20).

Hosea introduces a moving contrast between God's steadfast love and Israel's persistent apostasy (Wood 1985:212). The prophet here in 11:1-5 begins to talk about Israel's restoration. Israel's earlier history recalls the relationship between them and God. He was their caring father, and they his chosen son, called out of Egypt. It was the event of the exodus that first made Israel conscious of his sonship (McKeating 1971:137). Boice (1983:88) reminds us that Israel was a son, not by birth, but by an adoption based on election. Israel in its childhood was

already set apart for the world's ultimate blessing (Kidner 1981:101). Instead, they despised their calling and followed the Baals. The rhetorical question in verse 5 implies an answer in the affirmative; they will return to bondage because of their apostasy and obduracy. Theirs was then redemption unto adoption and election for the purpose of showing God's kindness.

Amos narrates the immanence of God in Israel's history (McComiskey 1985a:305). God's interventions cannot be missed or overlooked. Sometimes God responded in judgments to alert Israel of her sins, yet they did not return to him. Contrary to Hayes (1988:147), who sees no reference to Exodus 7, we believe the reference to the plagues sent upon Egypt (v.10) is raised as an indictment against Israel's hard-heartedness; similar to that of Pharaoh back then. As Pharaoh was contrary to God and life, so now they demonstrated their contrariness in their refusal to return to God. Here Amos is setting out plainly his doctrine of discipline; that it is intended to be remedial in nature (McKeating 1971:36). It is meant to turn men back to God. This intention is expressed when they are exhorted to prepare themselves to meet their God (v.12).

Finally, in Micah 6 the Lord makes his appeal to Israel. He desires them to live in love, humility and justice towards their God. He has proven himself to be good and righteous towards them; he redeemed them from Egypt, the land of slavery, and gave them credible leaders such as Moses. In this act God demonstrated his saving love for his people. McComiskey (1985b:435) speaks of the prophet's "Theology of History". They, however, can offer nothing, especially if what they offered resembled that which was offered to idols. Waltke (1988:194) asks, "How could Israel think that costly sacrifices would buy her deliverance from the Assyrians when God had so freely delivered her from the Egyptians?" God wants them to walk with him. That was the kind of relationship that existed during their wilderness sojourn when he led them. God's love was not bought.

The New Testament has numerous references and allusions to our current text. Hebrews 11:22 alludes to Exodus 13:19 where Moses took Joseph's bones with them. Joseph made the Israelites promise that they would take his bones back to

the Promised Land. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the faith of Joseph in a coming exodus from Egypt. This faith may have rested on the word that God gave Abram in Genesis 15:13. Guthrie (1990:238) comments that Joseph cherished the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and signified his confidence (Gen.50:24ff). The dominant idea of the text is that of a triumphant deliverance at the hand of God. Hagner (1990:197) says that Joseph had faith in the faithfulness of God, and hence his confidence in the coming exodus so that he gave instructions concerning his bones. Nevertheless, faith characterizes the demeanor of God's people.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1 Paul alludes to Exodus 13:21-22. He uses it as an admonition for the believers to remain holy in their actions. He refers to the fact that all the people, every one of them, were privileged to be led by the cloud through the sea to receive the new existence of freedom and God's provision, but not all of them entered the Promised Land because of their unholy actions. Ungodliness among God's people is displeasing to God and unbecoming for the redeemed. The means of grace must not be contaminated by an ungodly life. Clark (1975:151) comments that Paul warns against laxity, for laxity ruined most of the people with Moses. Dunn has this to say about this Corinthian verse:

The implications of all ill health or even death could be a consequence of "unworthy" eating and drinking (11:27-30) was particularly sobering and increased the solemnity of the sacramental occasion. On the other hand, it has been equally argued that the sin primarily condemned in 11:29 was failure to recognize the character not so much of the bread as the body of Christ, as the church as the body of Christ; proper discernment of the body in this sense is what would have prevented people acting independently of one another and without concern for other members of the body. (1997:76).

In Romans 9:18 Paul alludes to Exodus 14:4, 17. He demonstrates that in his election and in bringing to fulfillment his purpose, God is absolutely sovereign. Though the intention of God is the salvation of the whole world, his provision of that salvation will come in a particular way, and by the instruments he has chosen. He does this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy (Rom.9:23). Every one, nevertheless, gets what they deserve. Pharaoh had himself also hardened his heart in his reaction to what God has done. Morris says that God's hardening follows on what Pharaoh himself did. His hardening always

presupposes sin and is always part of the punishment of sin (1988:361). God was not unrighteous in his dealings with Pharaoh because he gave him many opportunities to repent and believe (Wiersbe 1977:105).

In Acts 7:36 Stephen makes reference to Exodus 14:21. He reminded his people that though the Israelites rejected Moses, he became the one whom God chose and through whom God saved the Israelites with many miraculous signs. The point of Stephen's speech was to show that Jesus, though rejected by the Jews, is chosen by God to be the savior of his people (Kebble 2000:98). Stephen thinks of the salvation provided by Jesus as a "second exodus" available to all who believe. He, Jesus, is indeed approved by God as Moses was approved of God.

In Hebrews 11:29 the writer alludes to Exodus 14:21-31. The writer contrasts the Israelites with the Egyptians. Hagner (1990:201) comments that they had the same kind of faith as Moses, following, also, the example of their leader. The Israelites had faith, while the Egyptians did not. Faith in Yahweh identifies the redeemed people, and those who are lost have no faith in God. Israel walked through on dry ground, but Egypt drowned though they tried to walk through. They were unable to do so without faith in Yahweh. Redemption, therefore, can only come by faith in God. Guthrie reminds us that the writer to the Hebrews here turns from individual faith to national faith (1990:241). Corporate faith and unbelief is in view here.

Matthew 2:15 indirectly alludes to the exodus narrative. It alludes directly to Hosea 11:1 where the prophet says: *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.* The prophet Hosea, however, refers to the exodus event. Israel was in its infancy as a nation. The redemption made them into an independent nation on the way to their land. Barclay (1975:37) admits that Hosea had nothing to do with Jesus, and nothing to do with his flight to Egypt, and that Matthew was typically using Old Testament passages with a verbal fit as a prophecy about Jesus. It was his method of appeal to his readers. Yet, as with Israel, Jesus Christ is presented as the one whom God calls from Egypt to provide light and salvation for the whole world.

Childs (1974:233) comments that in Revelation 15:2f John alludes to our current text in Exodus. He sees plagues of God's wrath as having been poured out. Next, he sees a sea mixed with fire. Standing beside the sea were those who had been victorious over the beast and that which represents him. They sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. Uppermost in mind is the heavenly analogue to the Red Sea in connection with the new exodus ... the exodus atmosphere is also discernible in the "plagues" modeled after the plagues of Egypt (Beale 1999:789). The plagues bring to mind those that culminated in the Passover in Egypt. The sea mixed with fire brings to mind the Red Sea with the pillar of fire. The beast and all that represents him reminds us about Pharaoh. Those standing victorious beside the sea remind us about the Israelites. The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb bring together the parallel event of deliverance (from Pharaoh and from the Beast). This apocalyptic text points to the Christian eschatological hope in Jesus Christ.

2D. PREPARATION FOR GOD'S COVENANTING PRESENCE.

Israel saw the mighty hand of God in action. They must have been awe-inspired and confident that the God who redeemed them was certainly able to lead them to the land he had promised them. Their redemption was brought about with many miracles, by a God who showed them that he was for them. The Egyptians now knew that Yahweh was God, and Israel knew it too.

We now begin the account of God's revelation at Mount Sinai. There are scholars who do not accept Sinai as a natural part of the whole nation's history. Le Roux (1983:105-113) identifies one such scholar as Gerhard Von Rad, who, because of the consistent lack of Sinai's mention in the credo (Dt.6:20-24; 26:5-9 and Jos.24:2-13), comes to the conclusion that the exodus and Sinai were two distinct events in which two separate groups of previously unconnected people participated. These different tribes, who came from different places and entering the Promised Land at different times, only became a united group in Palestine. The exodus and Sinai were therefore separate events, and the Sinai tradition originated with one of these tribes. Von Rad makes two unsubstantiated claims: firstly, taking the credo as a priority statement around which the Hexateuch was constructed, and secondly, the possibility of reading the credo itself too narrowly; especially, since the credo is couched in a context that encourages obedience to the Law, which Deuteronomy always connects with Sinai.

Three main elements become apparent at Sinai, namely, a theophany, the making of a covenant, and the revelation of laws and instructions for worship. Clements (1972:110) comments that Mount Sinai, and the knowledge of the covenant made there between God and Israel, have clearly served as central points of anchorage for all the main traditions governing Israel's life and worship. The Sinai covenant may be compared to a national constitution which may have undergone expansion and amendment in the course of history, but which has remained true to its original intention.

It is not always taken for granted that law and narrative was written together. Fretheim (1991:201-207), for instance, says that law and narrative were passed down separately for years, and have later been integrated into the story. He admits that the integration in Exodus is unique among ancient Near Eastern literature. This can be challenged, because God is the subject of both the law and the narrative. The giver of the law interacted personally with those who received it. There was a prior connection between the giver and the receivers; God redeemed them, and therefore they were expected to respond in obedient gratitude. The narrative actually places the law into proper perspective and explains its rationale with respect to the character of the God who stands behind it. The law is not an imposition from God that is unrelated to Israel's particular history or to common experience regarding what is in the best interests of true life. The law cannot be grasped without the narrative, and the narrative is incomplete without the law. The law is not an abstract ethical imposition, which would have been watered down to mere legalistic terms. The narrative shows that the true context of the law is really the very fabric of life in its living. We agree with Fretheim when he says that the integration of law and narrative becomes a form of witness to God and to what God has done. Narrative shaped the people's identity and provided a pattern for the life of faith (1991:207).

On the issue of the layers and compilations, we cannot talk of the so-called disruptive form of Exodus in our text. Diachronic scholars are themselves very tentative in this regard. This is so because after almost a century of close critical work, many of the problems have resisted a satisfactory solution (Childs 1974:344). Literary critics allocate our current text roughly as follows: 19:1-9 as J; 19:10-19 as P; 19:20-25 as J; and 20:1-21 as E. There is no general agreement here (cf. Childs 1972:345). The divine names are not a reliable guide to sources in the chapter. Traditio-historical critics also cannot agree on the recitation, reading, promise and covenant-making patterns. A purely cultic background to our text is untenable.

Together with Durham's (1987:259) admission (and even though he speaks of such layers and compilations), we take it that the final form of Exodus is in fact the

one sequence we know without speculation, and which reflects a coherent theological intention. The key to the Sinai narrative sequence lies in the theological purpose, not in its narrative-source or traditio-historical roots, which are open to much speculation. At the center of that theological purpose is the gift of Yahweh's Presence to Israel at Sinai. Without the narrative of that Presence, the motivation for keeping the law can hardly be found.

The Israelites became the treasured possession of Yahweh. They had to relate to him in a specific way. He called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The relationship between God and Israel came by God's initiative. Up until this point, Israel could only refer to their history to demonstrate this relationship. Unless there was some way in which this relationship could be perpetuated on their part, the relationship would have been meaningless. Even then, however they may have attempted to perpetuate this relationship; it would have depended on whether such an attempt was valid and acceptable. Mendenhall's discovery of the Hittite covenant/treaty form has shown itself to be inadequate as a pattern for what we have here. Nevertheless chapter 19 remains as a witness that God did enter a covenant with a historical people at a particular time and place.

Their input had to be acceptable to the one they desired to have a relationship with. If God prescribed the way this relationship was to be perpetuated, then it may be assumed that there was agreement from his side. This agreement was indeed confirmed by the presence of God. Exodus is indeed the book of the presence of the Lord among his people. The Sinai pericope stands at the very center of the book of Exodus and as the pivotal point for Mosaic faith. From Sinai onwards, God dealt with Israel, nationally, according to the terms of the Sinaitic covenant (Pink 1981:153).

The meeting with God is the entry into "the holiness" for the purpose of worship. This act of worship implements the long-standing, oft-repeated demand of the liberation narrative: "Let my people go that they may worship me". There is a great deal of movement up and down the mountain. We may discover seven ascents of Moses into the Lord's presence on Mount Sinai. Command is rooted in theophany,

but obedience to the command must be an expression of worship as a response to the theophany. Israel's destiny under command is rooted in the self-disclosure of God who spoke the commands.

Our present text establishes the terms that God sets in place for this relationship. These are what would regulate the relationship that God wanted to have with his people. Yahweh would be their God and they would be his people. There is a covenant relationship between them. The Israelites were to obey all the commands of the Lord, their God. The God who has delivered is the God who commands. Their obedience would demonstrate their allegiance to the commands of Yahweh, and to the appointment of Moses as the authorized mediator.

Exodus 19:1 – 25.

1. Translation:

- 19.1 In the third month¹⁰¹, on the day, when the sons of Israel came out from the land of Egypt, they came to the Desert of Sinai.
- 2 They journeyed from Raphidim and came to the Desert of Sinai and they pitched in the desert, and Israel encamped there in front¹⁰² of the mountain.
- 3 And Moses went up to God. And Yahweh called him up on the mountain and said, “Thus you must say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel,
- 4 ‘You have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, and *how*¹⁰³ I have carried you on eagles' wings, and have brought you in to myself.
- 5 And now, if you *obey*¹⁰⁴ my voice and keep my covenant, then you are to me a peculiar treasure among all the peoples. The whole earth is mine,
- 6 but you are to me a kingdom¹⁰⁵ of priests¹⁰⁶ and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the sons of Israel.”

¹⁰¹ Properly means “new moon” determined by observation and proclamation by blowing trumpets; a lunar month.(HKG:2544; BDB:294.1; Genesis:263)

¹⁰² Can be translated “before” or literally, “in the face of”, which could also mean “in the presence of”.

¹⁰³ Added

¹⁰⁴ With the infinitive and imperfect of the verb, it literally says, “... if to obey you obeyed ...”

¹⁰⁵ Out of the 117 occurrences of this word, it is translated 110 times as “kingdom” in the AV.(Strong's:4467)

¹⁰⁶ In almost all instances, this word is so translated from the Hebrew (744 out of 750 occurrences). (Strong's:3548)

- 7 So Moses came and called the Elders of the people; and he put before¹⁰⁷ them all these words which Yahweh commanded him to give.
- 8 And all the people answered together and said, “All which Yahweh has spoken, we will do.” And Moses brought back to Yahweh the words of the people.
- 9 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Behold, I am coming to you in the¹⁰⁸ thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak to you, and so always believe you when you tell them the words of Yahweh.
- 10 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate¹⁰⁹ them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their garments”.
- 11 So they were preparing for the third day, because on the third day Yahweh would come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.
- 12 “You are to put limits for the people on every side, and say, ‘Beware all, do not¹¹⁰ go up on the mountain or touch its border; whoever touches the mountain will surely be put to death.
- 13 Not a hand shall touch him¹¹¹, because he shall surely be stoned to death, or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live. After a long blast of the ram’s horn can they come to the mountain”.
- 14 And Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated them. And the people washed their garments.
- 15 And he said to the people, “Be prepared for the third day, and do not come near¹¹² a woman”.
- 16 On the morning of the third day there were sounds of thunder and lightning flashes, a thick cloud was heavy over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet sound. All the people in the camp trembled.
- 17 And Moses brought the people out from the camp to meet God, and they stationed¹¹³ themselves at the foot of the mountain.
- 18 And Mount Sinai was covered with smoke. While the presence of Yahweh descended on it in fire – it smoked up like the smoking of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently.
- 19 And there was the increasing sound of a trumpet which became very loud. Moses spoke and God answered him with a voice¹¹⁴.
- 20 And Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.
- 21 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people to keep them from breaking¹¹⁵ through to Yahweh, to gaze at him¹¹⁶ and many of them perish¹¹⁷.

¹⁰⁷ Literally, “to the face of them”

¹⁰⁸ Some translations use the indefinite article here. (e.g. NIV)

¹⁰⁹ In the majority of instances, the word “sanctify” is used. It nevertheless has the idea of dedication. (Strong’s:6942; BDB:871.1; HGK:7726)

¹¹⁰ Implied

¹¹¹ It cannot be said for sure whether this refers to the slain person or to the mountain, as the mountain is also referred to in the masculine in the previous verse.

¹¹² It means not to have sexual relations.

¹¹³ The Hithpael form of the verb can also imply the idea of presenting themselves in the presence of God. (Strong’s:3370; HGK:3656)

¹¹⁴ The voice could have sounded like thunder, as the word used can also be translated “thunder”; cf. Ex.9:23. (Strong’s:6963; BDB:876.2)

¹¹⁵ The connotation here is that of forcefully breaking through. (HGK:2238; Genesius:p232)

- 22 And the priests, who draw near to Yahweh, must consecrate themselves lest Yahweh breaks out against¹¹⁸ them”.
- 23 And Moses said to Yahweh, “The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai because you have charged us and said that we must set boundaries around the mountain, for you have sanctified it”.
- 24 And Yahweh said to him, “Go down and bring with you Aaron and the priests. But the people must not break through to come to Yahweh, lest he breaks out against them”.
- 25 So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

2. Exegesis.

It had been three months since the Israelites left the land of Egypt. They left Rephidim and travelled through the Desert of Sinai until they came to the mountain. It was named Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy prefers to call it Mount Horeb. It was otherwise also known as the “mountain of God”. It was called the mountain of God because it was there where Moses met with Yahweh, and where he received his call and commissioning to go to his people. This very mountain was to be the sign to Moses that it was really Yahweh who sent him to rescue the people from Egypt (Ex.3:12).

Moses' first three ascents were introductory to the establishment of the covenant. The first ascent calls Israel to obedience. They were to respond in obedience to the laws that were to be given, and which were to establish the covenant between them and God. The second ascent calls the people to holiness, which was to characterize their future existence within the covenant relationship. In the third ascent Moses is faced with the seriousness of this holiness, and that it was to be an expression of the people's identity and testimony in the world.

At this mountain Yahweh was confirmed to be a saving God. He alone was God, sovereign over all the gods of the nations. He has defeated the gods of the Egyptians, and would prove himself to be over all the gods and that he alone was

¹¹⁶ Added

¹¹⁷ The perfect tense gives it a sense of finality.

¹¹⁸ This is a way of saying that Yahweh will destroy them.

God in the world. He was for the sons of Israel. He was their God and they were his people. This relationship was to be confirmed here at this mountain with a covenant which Yahweh made with the children of Israel. They were to fear the Lord.

At this mountain the children of Israel were to be confirmed as the people of God. The Lord came down on the mountain in the sight of the people. He descended on it in fire. They heard God speak. They heard the ever-louder trumpet sound with every appearance of Yahweh. They were to be a consecrated people. They entered into a covenant relationship with Yahweh. They pledged themselves there to serve Yahweh faithfully, and to be different to all the nations around them. They pledged themselves to the intentioned position that Yahweh had for them, namely as a kingdom of priests unto Yahweh.

At this mountain they were to receive the Law of God. That “God spoke all these words” was a unique feature of the Decalogue and of the Book of the Covenant. Their relationship to Yahweh was regulated by this Law, and by it they were to be identified uniquely as Yahweh’s possession. This apodictic law was unique to Israel and provided true Israelite law. The Decalogue was rooted in the institutional life of Israel. The commandments were tied inextricably to God’s revelation at Sinai and were used in the sealing of the Covenant between Yahweh and his people.

At this mountain the people experienced the presence of God most demonstrably. They saw the demonstrations of God’s presence; the mountain shook at the voice of God. Both the people and animals could not even touch the foot of the mountain, else they would die. The mountain was covered with a cloud and fire when God presented himself. The presence of Yahweh is that which distinguished the Israelites. That Yahweh was present with them was indicative of his favor upon them.

At his mountain Moses was to be confirmed as God’s man. He spoke to God as a man spoke to his friend; face to face. Moses frequently met with God on this mountain. Moses alone could go into the presence of God to speak with him.

Moses was mediator between Yahweh and the people. Moses told the Israelites the words of Yahweh. In fact the Israelites preferred Moses to speak to them rather than Yahweh himself. The people were to be at a distance from Yahweh, but Moses entered the thick darkness of his presence.

2.1 Genre.

This whole pericope may be classified as *narrative*; and in particular *saga*. It is the story about the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The whole narrative is written mainly in prose form. Quoting Cassuto (1967) is appropriate here: "... as befits a passage treating of so exalted a subject, the diction rises above the level of prose, and even assumes, at times, poetic aspects in its form, qualities and poetic rhythm." This narrative includes anecdote, reporting, instruction and apodictic law.

Ex. 19:1-2 is narrative in *anecdotal* form. It sets the scene for what is to follow. It recounts the details about the arrival at Mount Sinai. Ex. 19:3-8 is a *report* that relates the conversation between Yahweh and Moses. He was commanded to relate to the people what Yahweh said. Ex. 19:9-15 is a narrative that relates Yahweh's *instructions* to Moses and the people. Ex. 19:16-25 is a *report* of Moses' execution of God's instructions and the happenings at Mount Sinai before Moses receives the Ten Words of Yahweh. We agree with Cassuto that the whole chapter can be explained simply as a single sequence and that there is no reason to regard it as a collection of fragments derived from various sources (1967:235).

Moses is confirmed as the mediator approved of God. In fact, it is here where Moses becomes the model of Israelite and Jewish identity (Bosman 2007:326-333). Quoting Albright and Bright, Bosman remarks that Moses as a historical figure in biblical tradition is strongly supported by historical analogy, and is now being confirmed by a rapidly increasing mass of evidence uncovered by archeologists and philologists. The events of the exodus and Sinai require a personality behind them. To deny that role of Moses would force us to posit another person of the same name (2007:327). A more recent statement came from

Hoffmeier, who says: “I have shown that the biblical description of the entry into Egypt, the enslavement and the exodus are all plausible. I have also shown that several geographical sites on the exodus route are attested in Egyptian records of the New Kingdom” (2007:41). Bosman states what Hoffmeier concludes; that although Moses is not mentioned by name, the “minimalist” presupposition that all *realia* reflected in Exodus presuppose the 7th to the 6th Century BCE should not be accepted for granted (2007:327). There is no reason why the historicity of Moses as a person should be doubted as is done by some critical scholars.

2.2 Structural Considerations.

There is no doubt about the difficulty of analyzing the literary and tradition-historical aspects of our text. This is so because there is little agreement among literary critical scholars; the allocation to documentary sources is particularly difficult with the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. According to Childs (1974:344ff.) the level of comprehensive agreement eluded scholars like Wellhausen, Bäntsch, Kuenen, Gressmann, McNeile, Driver and Rudolph. The various linguistic and conceptual criteria in analyzing the sources are rather precarious, and the literary critics were basically mistaken in denying the lack of unity to chapter 19. The divine names are not a reliable guide to sources in this text.

Scholars speak about the detachability and the expansion/contraction of the “ground-text”. There have been so many expansions, contractions and redactions it is said that it has become an impossibility to establish the various layers of the text. Both the literary- and form-critical schools provide no answers for us. Frankly, neither do the traditional critical scholars provide any definite identification of the so-called layering of the different traditions. Whatever is presented amounts to nothing more than speculation.

Our concern is not to try and “unravel” all of this. Instead, we have already said that our concern is the synchronic rather than the diachronic consideration of the text. Durham (1987:259) is correct when he admits that the final form of the Book of

Exodus and its sequence is the only one we can know without speculation, because its compilation was based on a coherent theological intention. The key to the Sinai narrative sequence lies in its theological purpose, not in its narrative-source or tradition-historical roots. The form of the entire Sinai narrative sequence is determined by the single factor of the gift of Yahweh's Presence to Israel.

The connection between the theophany and the giving of the law was highly problematic. Another question concerns the connection of the text to the patterns of covenant-making. While we may identify a Hittite form in the covenant-making in our text, the Hittite parallels to the covenant form did not answer the question of connection between theophany and law. Also, there was also no parallel to the covenant mediator of chapter 19 in that particular treaty pattern.

The theophany, however, was purposed also to legitimate Moses, the covenant mediator, in the eyes of the Israelites (Ex. 19:9). Moses' function was to lead the people out to meet God in order to conclude the covenant (Ex19:12). These were the two forms of Mosaic office which were to be reflected throughout the Sinai pericope. The people's request, that Moses should be their mediator rather than that God should speak to them directly, came *after* (Ex.20:18ff.) the receiving of the Decalogue.

God first appeared in a theophany (chp.19), pronounced the Decalogue to all the people (Ex.20:1-17), established Moses as mediator because of the people's fear (Ex. 20:18-21), and finally delivered the remaining laws of the Book of the Covenant to Moses for the people (Ex. 20:22-24:18). The appearance in the theophany was necessary for the formal aspects of covenant-making, at least until Moses was established as the covenant mediator. Both parties had to be represented in the covenant-making process.

2.2.1. Text outline.

- a. 19:1-2 Israel's Arrival at Sinai
- b. 19:3-8a The Covenant Announced
 - i) Conditions of the Covenant (3-6)
 - ii) Israel's Acceptance (7-8a)
- c. 19:8b-9 Announcing the Coming Theophany
- d. 19:10-13 Instructions for Consecration
 - i) Consecration for the Coming Theophany (10-11)
 - ii) Limiting the People (12-13a)
 - iii) Signal for Approach (13b)
- e. 19:14-15 Consecration of the People
- f. 19:16-19 Anticipating the Theophany
 - i) Signs of the Coming Theophany (16)
 - ii) Going to Meet God (17)
 - iii) Trembling Mountain and Blasting Trumpet (18-19)
- g. 19:20-25 The Present God
 - i) God Calls Moses Up (20)
 - ii) Instructions for the People (21-24)
 - iii) Moses' Descent (25)

2.2.2 Linguistic, Grammatical and Rhetorical Characteristics.

2.2.2.1 Important Recurring Verbs (by stem)

Stem	Meaning	Occurrences	Verse	Translated as
שִׁמְרָה	keep	2	19:5 19:12	<i>and keep</i> <i>do not</i>
שִׁמְעָה	hear	3	19:5 19:9	(<i>to obey</i>) <i>you obey</i> <i>hear</i>
קְרָא	call	4	19:3 19:7 19:17 19:20	<i>called</i> <i>called</i> <i>meet</i> <i>called</i>
נָשָׂא	lift up	1	19:4	<i>carried</i>
נָגַד	tell	3	19:2 19:3 19:9	<i>in front of</i> <i>tell</i> <i>tell</i>
עָנוֹת	answer	2	19:8 19:19	<i>answered</i> <i>answered</i>
קָדֵשׁ	consecrate	4	19:10 19:14 19:22 19:23	<i>consecrate</i> <i>consecrated</i> <i>consecrate</i> <i>sanctified</i>
יָרַד	descend	7	19:11 19:14 19:18 19:20 19:21 19:24 19:25	<i>come down</i> <i>went down</i> <i>descended</i> <i>came down</i> <i>go down</i> <i>go down</i> <i>went down</i>
נִגְעַשׁ	touch	3	19:12 19:12 19:13	<i>touch</i> <i>touches</i> <i>touch</i>

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
מוֹת	die / kill	2	19:12 (2x)	<i>surely be put to death</i>
עַשֵּׂן	smoke	3	19:18	<i>covered with smoke</i>
			19:18	<i>smoked up</i>
			19:18	<i>smoking</i>
נִגְשָׁה	come near	2	19:15 19:22	<i>come near</i> <i>draw near</i>
כּוֹן	form / establish	2	19:11 19:15	<i>preparing</i> <i>prepared</i>
גָּבְלָה	set up a boundary	2	19:12 19:23	<i>to put limits</i> <i>set boundaries</i>
כְּבָס	launder / wash	2	19:10 19:14	<i>wash</i> <i>washed</i>
חָרָד	tremble / be afraid	2	19:16 19:18	<i>trembled</i> <i>trembled</i>
עוֹד	bind / charge	2	19:21 19:23	<i>to keep</i> <i>charged</i>
הָרָס	destroy	2	19:21 19:24	<i>perish</i> <i>breaks out against</i>
פְּרַץ	break down	2	19:22 19:24	<i>breaks</i> <i>break through</i>
כְּבָד	be heavy	1	19:16	<i>was heavy</i>

2.2.2.2 Important Recurring Nouns (by stem)

<i>Stem</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Verse</i>	<i>Translated as</i>
שְׁלִישִׁים	third	3	19:1 19:11 19:16	<i>third month</i> <i>third day</i> <i>third day</i>
יְהוָה	Yahweh	26	Various	<i>Yahweh</i>
סִינֵּי	Sinai	6	Various	<i>Sinai</i>
הַר	mountain	17	Various	<i>mountain / Mount</i>
קֹול	sound / voice	5	19:5 19:16 19:16 19:19 19:19	<i>voice</i> <i>sounds</i> <i>sound</i> <i>sound</i> <i>voice</i>
פֶּהָן	priest	3	19:6 19:22 19:24	<i>priests (kingly)</i> <i>priests</i> <i>priests</i>
מֹשֶׁה	Moses	17	Various	<i>Moses</i>
שׂוֹפֵר	trumpet	2	19:16 19:19	<i>trumpet</i> <i>trumpet</i>

2.2.2.3. Observable Thematic Progression.

19:1 third month

3	called		
5	voice	obey	
		obey	
		keep	
6		priests	
7	called		
9		hear	
10		consecrate	
		wash	
11	come down		
	third day		
12		(don't) touch	
		touches	
		put limits	
13		(don't) touch	
14	went down	consecrated	
		washed	
15			don't come near
16	third day	sounds	trembled
		sound	
		trumpet	
17		meet	
18	descended		smoke
			smoked up
			smoking
19		sound	
		voice	
		trumpet	
20	came down	called	
21	go down		
22		consecrate	priests
23		sanctified	
24	go down		priests
25	went down		

With the frequency of occurrence it becomes apparent that Yahweh and Moses are the central characters in this narrative. That they are located at the central place, Mount Sinai, is emphasized. There is now no doubt that it was Yahweh who redeemed his people, for it was confirmed when they got to this mountain. It was here that they will worship Yahweh (Ex.3:12).

It is also very apparent that there was much shaking and noise. The people trembled. The mountain trembled. Thundering, lightning, loud sounds and prolonged trumpet blasts filled the atmosphere. The calling and the voice of God are prevalent throughout our text, and have caused all these portents. They were an indication of Yahweh's personal Presence with the Israelites. God descended to the top of the mountain; which is also understood as its "source" or "head" (an appropriate understanding for the place where God comes to). When Moses descended, he came with the word of Yahweh to the people of Yahweh. The leaders were given the privilege to ascend and experience God's presence on behalf of the people.

The smoke veiled the Presence of Yahweh for the benefit of the people. The mountain was cordoned off as it became holy because of the Presence. There were limits to men's drawing near to God. The people were to be consecrated and "washed" before they could enter the proximity of Yahweh's holiness, and they were to be careful in what they touched.

The principles of the Law were that which Yahweh's people were to obey and uphold. With these they were to relate well with both God and man. Keeping the Law gave the nation an opportunity to live out creation principles within the spheres of religion and society. While in the religious cultic aspect there was place for communal expression, the Decalogue needed first to be expressed by the individual within the community.

2.3 Commentary.

The Sinai narrative in Ex. 19-20 not only is a very specific datum within Old Testament writings, but also appears to be remarkably isolated with respect to considerable parts of the literature. So says Booij (1984:1) as he traces the importance of the mountain theophany in the Sinai narrative within the Old Testament and Israel's faith history. Indeed, theophany marks the identity of this

people in a most remarkable way. In general one can say that in Ex.19-20 the heart of the matter is not “serving” God, “feasting”, and “offering”, but rather God’s “descending” (19:11, 18) and imperative “speaking”, and the covenant between him and the people (Booij 1984:9). In this narrative we find the most sublime section in the book, supremely signifying a decisively important event in the history of Israel and of humanity as a whole.

Nürmberger (1999:20-61) also sees the Sinai narrative as the datum within Old Testament Scripture. He, however, does so to the exclusion of the emancipatory role of the exodus motif. The covenant-law tradition that identifies the Israelites as the people of God, is for him most fundamental. With the exclusion we cannot agree, but with Moses as the real mediator in that context, we do agree. If Moses was a fictitious figure, why did the composers of this tradition not make him lead Israel into the Promised Land? That he died just before Israel entered the country seems to point to an ancient historical memory.

The personal presence of Yahweh was perhaps the most vital. It was demonstrated by the theophany, giving authority to the communications that happened at the mountain. It also was meant to authenticate Moses as the man of God. God knew that his people would be inconsistent and gave them personal and public affirmation of his mediator, Moses (Murphy 1979:209). Moses’ mediation is further authenticated by the fact that he alone was able to come into the presence and commune with God. Nevertheless, the personal presence of God is evident throughout the process of covenant-making.

Not only does the Sinai pericope represent a coherent account of the theophany, but it shows the primacy of direct discourse over summary in biblical narrative. In this case, the speech of Yahweh and the people’s reply focus the reader’s attention upon the covenant. The narrative contains two different perspectives of the theophany (Chirichigno 1987:479). The first is the perspective of Yahweh which emphasizes the preparation, execution and holiness of God and the second is the perspective of the people which elaborates the resuming narrative in 20:18-21, where they accept Moses as their mediator.

The exodus liberation established the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites. In fact, earlier already, God gave his name to the people (3:14), and by giving his name he gave himself. The relationship had a connection that even pre-dated the giving of the name, as Yahweh's beneficial action was a response to the relationship that he had with the patriarchs. The giving of the name, however, was the preparation for recognizing the one who was to make a covenant with them in the future. Without the disclosure of the divine name, and thus without the proper recognition of the deity concerned, there could be no relationship established with this deity (Dumbrell 1984:82). His self-disclosure and self-identification, "I am Yahweh", would become central and necessary in the process of covenant-making.

The place was as important as the name; not that the covenant could not be established elsewhere, but that it had already been specified as the place where they would come to meet with God. The mountain known as "Sinai" and "Horeb" was also known as the "Mountain of God". This is the mountain towards which Yahweh and Moses were leading the people. The very mountain of Moses' commissioning was the place where they would meet God. Quoting Weisman, Booij (1984:11) remarks that the mountain of God is extra-territorial; it lies outside Egypt, first of all, and outside Midian, behind the wilderness; there outside human territory is a holy place.

Three months after having left Egypt the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. They were going to remain there for almost a year, and in this period the Covenant is proposed, they received the Law and they prepared the dwelling place of God, the sanctuary, for their journey to the Promised Land (Davis 1971:193). At the mountain they were actually united as a people, being constituted as a nation.

The self-disclosure of Yahweh, his liberating act, and this holy place created the scene for the covenant about to be ratified between himself and Israel. He was to be their God, and they were to be his special people. They were to be a people, who through their experience of his presence, were to be his representatives in the world and to the nations. Let us now look at the text in more detail.

a. Ex. 19:1-2 Israel's Arrival at Sinai.

These two verses provide a narrative setting of the time and place. Mount Sinai is very much in the focus at this stage of Israel's story. *In the third month* (*הָרְבֵי שֶׁנֶּת* *chodesh*) more properly means “the third new moon”. It was the commencement of a new period of time in the life of nature. *On the day* specifies the exact time, emphasizing the beginning of the new moon. It was the first day of the month. Durham (1987:257) believes that the insertion of these words indicates Moses' eagerness to have Israel experience at Sinai the revelation of the Presence he had experienced there. According to Cassuto (1967:224) the mention of the third new moon is not unintentional as they were in their seventh week since the exodus, and that that formed a still higher significance as a Sabbath. For him the labour in Egypt reflected the six days of labour before the Sabbath. Whether this was the author's intention or not, does not matter; what matters is that *the sons of Israel came out of Egypt and came to the desert of Sinai*. The goal of the journey from Egypt has been reached.

The sequence of the geographic itinerary ties in with 17:1 and the description of their movement in Ex.18. *Israel encamped in front of Mount Sinai*. The words *in front* can also be translated as “in the presence”. We cannot know the exact location of Mount Sinai. To propose the mountains on the east of the Gulf of Aqaba because there are volcanic peaks is to read into the text volcanic activity where there is mention only of theophanic portents. Cole (1973:143) is correct when he says that it is most unlikely that such a nomadic group could ever have been persuaded to remain so near a volcano in eruption. Be that as it may, any proposal of location is speculative. Mount Sinai is the mountain of God, where he chose to reveal himself to his people. The mountain is the place where earth touches heaven, where the human realm makes contact with the abode of God. The place thus is laden with holy presence. The mountain is made the context of what follows.

b. Ex. 19:3-8a The Covenant Announced.

Here we have a thematic announcement of covenant. The expected covenant obedience is rooted in the exodus, a theophany of the coming God, the ritual preparation for the coming that is expected, and the preliminary oath of allegiance to the coming God. This theophany will provide the context for the utterance of the Ten Commandments, a speech from the very mouth of God to the sons of Israel. The wording of 19:3 suggests that Moses began to ascend the mountain before he had heard the Lord calling him (Rylaarsdam 1952:204). Moses' first ascent centers on the call to Israel to be obedient. The concern of the chapter to single out Moses is of fundamental importance.

i) Conditions of the Covenant (3-6).

Moses went up to God before Yahweh called him up on the mountain. It reflects Moses' eagerness to bring Israel to where he had experienced the presence of God. Though we have not translated it thus, the verb *called* (קֹרֵא Qowre) does not only mean 'summoned', but 'spoke in a loud voice', as in the expression 'lifted up his voice and cried aloud'. Durham (1987:261) says that Yahweh is as eager for Moses and Israel to arrive at Sinai as they are to get there. In either case Moses' ascent precedes the call. It is to be believed that the call came as he was on his way up.

God called Moses in order to give him a message for the people. Notice the synonymous parallelism in the way the people are referred to. They are both *the house of Jacob* and *the sons of Israel*. According to Cassuto, this way of expression is commonly found in the poetic tradition of 'commissioning' (1967:226). The purpose of God's bringing Israel to the mountain is announced to Moses.

According to Le Roux (1983b:62-63), this double form is a late usage and is entirely absent from the older stories. Gen.46:27, Ps.114:1-2 and here are the only occurrences outside the prophetic literature. The problem is that Le Roux equates “house of Jacob” with “house of Judah” (of Ps 114 and the prophetic material of the divided kingdom) and on that basis ascribes the late date. The Exodus text does not have any reference to Judah and the assertion is therefore unnecessary. However, there can be no confusion about whom this message is for. Throughout this entire theophany and covenant-making ceremony on the mountain Moses plays an indispensable role as mediator between God and the people. He combines in one person the work of priest, prophet and national leader.

There is a set form which proceeds from the proclamation of God’s mighty deeds. Before Yahweh gives the conditions for the covenant, he calls Israel to remembrance about what he had done for their redemption. He has in fact dealt differently with the Egyptians than with his people. Their deliverance was Yahweh’s decisive victory against the Egyptians. The invitation to a covenant is predicated on the great divine acts of the past which Israel has herself experienced. Yahweh addresses the Israelites with three reminders, thereby identifying the parties to the covenant, namely “I” and “you”. Firstly, he tells them, *you have seen what I have done to the Egyptians*. The Israelites themselves are called as witnesses. They have seen for themselves how Yahweh acted against the Egyptians with devastating power.

Secondly, they have seen how he has *carried them on eagle’s wings*. Although the word נֶשֶׁר (*ně·šēr*) applies to birds of prey in general, we have no doubt that here it refers to the eagle. Breuggemann comments that the goal of the exodus is presented as a flight from Pharaoh to Yahweh, from one master to a new one. The exodus required both power to override the grip of Egypt and nurturing to sustain when there was no other sustenance (1994:834). It encapsulates the exodus itself. This metaphor is also found in Deut.32:11-12 and is an image of the tender and protective care of Yahweh for the Israelites. It is a gracious image of God. God is one whose wings are always available for refuge, shelter and loving concern.

Thirdly, he reminds them that he brought them in to himself. Stuart (2006:422) notes that Yahweh not only brought them to his presence at Sinai, but he also brought them to enter into a covenant relationship with himself. This rescued people can be a community of ongoing covenant. Mackay (2001:326) succinctly states that as they have been travelling, they had repeatedly been made to realize their utter dependence on the Lord. Now at Sinai, they are removed from the corrupting environment of Egypt; they are living from day to day on the bounty of his provision; and they can focus on developing an intimate and obedient relationship with their benefactor.

Now the condition of any future relationship between Yahweh and Israel is stated. Fretheim notes that the matter is presented in personalistic terms: I did; I carried you; brought you to myself... (1991:210). While there is ample motivation, this relationship is conditional; it contains an *if/then* clause. *If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you are to me....* The word for *obey* (שָׁמַע šā·mā) is in the imperfect tense and has the effect of *is* or *will be obeying*. It speaks of Israel's required commitment to God himself. They must be heeding his voice. Obeying the voice of God entails more than obeying the laws given at Sinai. Much the same point can be made regarding the phrase "*and keep my covenant*". This is an open-ended commitment to Yahweh.

Then you are to me a peculiar treasure among all the peoples. Israel is God's own people, set apart from the rest of the nations. Israel is commissioned to be God's people on behalf of the earth which is God's. The way to be this kind of people is to keep covenant; to keep the covenant is to be this kind of people. They are a choice and valued treasure (^{s^e}סְגֻלָּה s^egūl-lā(h)) belonging privately to the king from heaven, the creator of all. The Hebrew construction of the sentence highlights the personal sense of value to Yahweh (Janzen 1997:134). They hold a special position among the nations as the only nation with a covenant relationship with Yahweh. All the peoples are God's, and therefore he is the God of all the peoples. The Egyptians

already acknowledged that fact, and Israel must be instrumental in getting all the nations of the world to acknowledge it too.

The idea of being a peculiar treasure was reserved for Israel. How did the foreign resident or alien fit in? Here we refer to the non-Israelites who have joined themselves to the Israelites. Knauth (2003:26-33) tells us that they seemed not to have been full-member Israelites, with a lower status and dependant on a patron for protection. They were to be treated the same as an Israelite; on the basis of hospitality, with justice and equity, since the Israelites were themselves at one stage foreigners (in Egypt). Those “living within the gates” had to comply with many of the same rules as the Israelites, e.g. dietary (Ex.12:19), blasphemers were subject to death penalty, Sabbath rest (Ex.20:10), and religious festivals. Foreign wives were fully integrated. They were also excluded from certain obligations and privileges. So, while they were accepted in the community, we cannot conclude that those who were not foreign wives were part of the *peculiar treasure* referred to in our text.

Israel as a people is also dedicated to God’s service among the nations as priests function within a society. Israel was to become a kingdom like other nations, but, beyond this, it was also to enjoy a very close relationship to God, akin to that which a priest enjoyed within the community of worshipers which he served. In this way Israel was to be the priestly nation of the world, serving the nations by its service of God (Clements 1972:115). *And you are to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* The “you” is emphatic, meaning “you alone”. To be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation represents the responsibility inherent in the original promise to Abraham; that he will be a blessing and that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him, and ultimately fulfilled in Christ. In addition to the fact that the Israelites are a *prized possession*, they are also a *kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. These three images are closely related. The first speaks of a unique and exclusive possession and the other two expand and underscore that image. It must be said that Le Roux’s (1983b:73) assertion that **גוי** (goy) is an anachronism

admits to the rejection of the predictive element that is connected to the condition *if you obey*.

Kingdom of priests is unique in the Old Testament and has the interpretations of *kingdom of priests*, *kings who are priests* or *priest-like kings* (Durham 1987:262-3). If Israel is to be a servant nation rather than a ruling nation, then the two latter interpretations can be excluded. This is supported by the idea that these images (kingdom and priests) are true of Israel in relation to Yahweh.

While Israel themselves had no priesthood in place, we may be certain they were familiar with the concept from the surrounding ancient near eastern nations. They must have encountered heathen examples of priesthood. Besides, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and a Midianite priest had contact with them to have exposed them to the concepts and functions of priesthood. In relation to Yahweh, they are his possession; they are his priests (in worship – “that they may worship me”); and they are a nation holy, separate from other nations and dedicated to him. In this way they are different from every other nation. That the whole earth is Yahweh's, speaks clearly to the biblical claim of monotheism and Israel's privilege to have been chosen as his special people.

It is perhaps appropriate to quote Mackay's (2001:329) profound remark:

One feature of the Exodus narrative that favors interpreting ‘kingdom of priests’ as referring to the priestly role of Israel as a whole is the ritual carried out in the covenant confirmation ceremony of 24:5-8 where the people were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificed animals. It would be at this point that the role proposed for them in this verse would have been formally undertaken. Now the other passage where blood was ritually applied to persons under the Mosaic law was in the consecration of the priests (29:19-20). This suggests that the people as a whole were set apart in relation to this worldwide mission in the same way as Aaron and his sons were set apart to function as priests within the covenant community.

Finally, the life of Israel shall be commensurate with the holiness of the covenant God. Verses 5-6 show us that worship must inform and undergird obedience. The presence of God demonstrates God's initiative in both law and narrative, and which motivates a response of worship. The condition God places on Israel is the

condition of authentic hearing that leads to obedience to his voice (Hahn 2005:2). Hahn states further that obedience by Israel will be necessary for this covenant to achieve God's purpose of mutual relationship. This life of corporate obedience by the nation is the holiness to which they were called (2005:3).

ii) Israel's Acceptance (7-8a).

Moses had now to deliver this message to the people. *Moses came and called the Elders of the people.* It is obvious that Moses had to descend the mountain. The people were given the message through the Elders. Moses put before them *all the words which Yahweh commanded him to give.* Moses was a faithful messenger of Yahweh and *put before them all these words which Yahweh commanded him to give.* 'Put before' implies that they were to give careful consideration to these words.

We are not told that the Elders responded, but that the people did so. *All the people answered together.* With the words 'all' and 'together' we have no doubt that there was a corporate response. The people pledged themselves to obedience. They agreed to the conditions of the impending covenant, and answered similarly to the response later found in 24:3, 7: *all which Yahweh has spoken we will do.* The covenant invitation here in chapter 19 shows the same response as the covenant sealing in chapter 24. By that they pledged faithfulness to Yahweh, which went beyond obeying only the commands of Sinai. They have accepted Yahweh's invitation to be his people among the nations, carrying the knowledge of God throughout all the earth. The covenant responsibility encompassed Israel's whole life, defining her relationship to God and to her neighbors, and the quality of her existence (Childs 1974:367). They were a new kind of kingdom and a new kind of nation, one marked by priestly, holy marks.

c. Ex. 19:8b-9 Announcing the Coming Theophany.

Moses now plays the role of mediator and brings *back to Yahweh the words of the people*. Moses is a faithful mediator bringing only the words of the people as they responded saying: ‘all which Yahweh has spoken, we will do’. The people will obey the voice of Yahweh. They have promised to keep Yahweh’s covenant. Furthermore, they have accepted the role Yahweh has chosen for them; the role of being his peculiar treasure, and of being a kingdom of priests, and of being a holy nation among the nations of the world. The covenant is entered into voluntarily by Israel. We may assume that Moses ascended the mountain in order to report their response or reply to Yahweh. The word for *brought back* (**וַיִּשְׁבֹּה** wayyāšebh) is used in the sense of replied, for the proposal was in the nature of a question that required an answer (Cassuto 1967:228). This would have been Moses’ second ascent since their arrival at Mount Sinai.

Yahweh then spoke to Moses, making his first announcement of the coming theophany, which will also serve as an authentication of Moses as Yahweh’s spokesman to the people, as Yahweh enters into a covenant with them. Yahweh announced: *Behold, I am coming to you in the thick cloud*. The word *behold* (**הִנֵּה** hin-nē(h)) calls for Moses’ attention to what is being said. This is Yahweh’s stunning promise to come to them. While the ‘you’ is in the singular, we prefer to think that the promise was not to Moses alone, but to the people also, because they were instructed to make the necessary preparations for the coming. The preparations were obligations to each individual in the community. However, for Moses the Presence would be more intimate than for the people. Nevertheless, this promise of Presence is unconditional and immediate. Yahweh’s coming will be *in the thick cloud*. Whether our use of the definite article goes too far in alluding to a specific cloud or not, the essential truth is that Yahweh’s presence will be shrouded. It has to be because his presence can be destructive and dangerous. His holy presence cannot, and should not, be trivialized at any time.

This verse testifies that the mediatorship of Moses did not arise as an accidental afterthought, but was intended from the start (Childs 1974:368). Moses was appointed only because of Israel's fear. Durham's (1987:264) belief that this verse is a later addition because of the introduction of a 'new' theme of Moses' mediatory role is needless reasoning as he has already functioned in that way in this very context (v.8). Moses is the only link between God, whom no one can gaze upon, and the people, who have committed themselves to heed the commands of God. Motyer (2005:209) succinctly puts it:

In verse 9 *to you* is second person singular masculine, i.e. it refers to Moses, with the purpose of validating him as the mediator of the covenant (another 'anticipatory providence'), the Lord having known in advance how the people would react to the sound of his voice (20:18-19).

The coming in the thick cloud had a purpose in mind; *so that the people may hear when I speak to you, and so always believe you when you tell them the words of Yahweh*. The two-fold purpose was to authenticate Moses as God's spokesperson. The first intention within that purpose was for the people to *hear* God speak to Moses, and the second intention gives the real purpose, namely that the people *will always believe* Moses *when he tells them the words of Yahweh*. The first intention is the support for the second intention and also the real purpose of God's communicating presence. The people had to first believe in the reality of God's communication to Moses before they could believe the claims that God spoke to him. God will speak in such a public way to Moses in order to convince the people – now and forever – that Moses is a mediator of the word of God (Fretheim 1991:215). Lordship and revelation go together because lordship has no meaning without revelation. The Lord of Israel revealed himself to them.

d. Ex. 19:10-13 Instructions for Consecration.

The Lord not only said what he would do; he also instructed Moses and the people what to do and what not to do and the consequences to them if they disobeyed. Yahweh now instructs Moses to prepare the people for the theophany to come. The sons of Israel are now to put into practice the holiness that should depict their

character as a holy nation. The holy practice is a means of dedicating the people to God. Both Moses and the people have a responsibility in the task of sanctifying themselves and preparing themselves in the next two days to meet the Lord.

i) Consecration for the Coming Theophany (10-11).

Moses is to *go to the people and consecrate them* for that day and the next. The piel form of the verb, *consecrate* (קָדַשׁ qā·dăš), is a second person masculine singular with a third person masculine plural ending. Moses was expected to bring the people to a state of sacredness. The profound connection between the people and God who has laid claim upon them begins to emerge in the process of preparation. It also has the idea of dedication. Only what is holy can be dedicated to the Lord.

While we do not have more detail, it must be accepted that part of the process of consecration was to have the people *wash their garments*. Whether this meant that they should wash all their clothing (not expected to be more than two sets anyway) or just the set they would wear on the third day; we are not told. There is nevertheless an ambiguity, as one also wonders why God requires them to wash their clothes. Clothes-washing seems to have been an act that preceded a great and solemn happening (e.g. Gen.35:2 and Jos.3:5). Enns (2000:390), however, is correct; when he says we can only speculate. Perhaps washing clothes is analogous to Moses removing his shoes in God's presence in 3:5; they are to be in God's presence. Maybe it foreshadowed the priestly washing in the laver before they entered the Tabernacle. There is of course a connection between their calling to be a holy nation and the demand to purify them. They were nevertheless about to do what no other nation has ever done – to meet their heavenly king and hear his voice. Also, we can only speculate on the ease or difficulty of doing as they are commanded to do. The preparations are to qualify the people for the presence of God.

This was how *they were preparing for the third day, because on the third day Yahweh would come down upon Mount Sinai*. The fact that 'Yahweh' is in the third person is striking. Noth (1962:158) sees it as a possible explanatory gloss. We believe that the whole verse 11 is the author's comment. God was assumed normally to reside in the distant heavens, and the special sanctity of the mountain was established by his coming to it, or descending upon it, at particular times (Clements 1972:116). This did not preclude the possibility that God could make this mountain his 'abode'. Indeed, Mount Sinai was also known as the 'mountain of God'. What is important to notice is that God promises to come down *in the sight of all the people*. Each one will personally experience the Presence. They, who are commanded to prepare for the coming, will have the privilege of seeing their coming God. Even in his coming near, God's presence will remain veiled in mystery. Yahweh's visible manifestation in the sight of all the people will be in a thick cloud at the top of the mountain.

ii) Limiting the People (12-13a).

Yahweh's speech continues. Moses is *to put limits for the people on every side* of the mountain where the people are. The people were sealed off from the sacred precinct. The mountain is to become holy because the holy God will be present. As with Moses when he was instructed to remove his shoes since the ground was holy because of the Presence, so too the people were to know that the mountain was holy to them because of the Presence. It was believed that holiness, like uncleanness, was infectious through physical contact. With the advent of Yahweh, Mount Sinai would become holy by virtue of his special Presence there, and that holiness would constitute a danger to all persons and animals (Durham 1987:265).

All the people are told to *beware* and *not go up on the mountain or to touch its border*. The people must not presume upon the presence of God. No amount of inquisitiveness must entice them to ascend the mountain to want to be near to God on the same level of intimacy as Moses. God will later invite them up. Neither were they allowed to touch the mountain or the border that was set up. Physical contact

will cause the dangerous holiness to ‘infect’ them and destroy them. The least contact was forbidden.

The people were not to touch the mountain or its border. *Whoever touches the mountain will surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch (him) it, because he shall surely be stoned to death, or shot through.* The threefold reference to touching is for emphasis (Cassuto 1967:230). We also note a movement from the general to the particular (the corporate “all”, the individual “whoever”, and the part of the individual -“hand”). We agree (but not without question) with Clements (1972:117) who says that individuals who touch the mountain would have to be put to death not so much as punishment, but in order to prevent the holiness which they had contracted from being dispersed into the profaned world. Why would Yahweh allow them up after the long blast of the ram’s horn if that was the reason? We answer by saying that holiness is conferred rather than claimed; it is a gift and not a right. The means of death to the offender is by stoning or by shooting; we assume by bow and arrow. No offender, *whether beast or man shall live.*

iii) Signal for Approach (13b).

An exception to death allowed for special invitation from God to his people to “go up to the mountain”, meaning at and around the base but not further up (Stuart 2006:427). *Only after a long blast of the ram’s horn can they come to the mountain.* The blowing of a ram’s horn normally marked the opening of a sacred festival, heralding the presence of God with his people.

e. Ex. 19:14-15 The Consecration of the People.

This is the second descent of Moses from the mountain, and from the presence of Yahweh. This time Moses comes *down from the mountain* to put into action what Yahweh had instructed them to do. We are not quite sure what procedure Moses applied, but he *consecrated* the people. One must also imagine that *the people*

must have *washed their own garments*. This was not the sum of the people's preparation for the coming Presence.

Moses added another requirement, which we can only assume comes to him from Yahweh. Moses gave the people the imperative to *be prepared for the third day*, and *not to come near a woman*. It, (**נָגֵשׁ** *nā·găš*), simply meant that as part of the preparation, the people were to refrain from sexual relationships until the third day when Yahweh's presence came. The people must take care to be cultic-ly pure by the third day. The sexual act would have rendered them cultic-ly unclean (Lev. 15:16-18) for priestly function. The author uses priestly language which is concerned with the external act. Israel is, therefore, to be prepared by a special act of separation (Childs 1974:369). Breuggemann says that contact with a woman will either profane, weaken, or render them impure (1994:836). Clements says about the same thing: this was to preclude any weakening of the vitality which holiness required, and did not imply that such relationships were regarded as opposed to God (1972:11).

f. Ex. 19:16-19 Anticipating the Theophany.

i) Signs of the Coming Theophany (16).

The third day has arrived. The story is fast-forwarded to *the morning of the third day*. The third day was going to be a day full of new and unexpected things. The coming theophany is preceded by certain unusual phenomena that caused the people to fear. *There were sounds of thunder and lightning flashes*. The word (**קֹל** *qôl*) which is translated "sounds of thunder" can be translated either "sound" or "thunder". It could also be translated "voice", which is often, but not here, a poetic expression for the 'voice of the Lord'. A classic storm-theophany is used here to describe the manifestation of God in the form of a storm. Lightning flashes are part of this storm manifestation of God. As part of the storm-motif, there is *a thick cloud*

over the mountain. The word ‘thick’ (**קָבֵד** *kā-bēd*) renders both ‘heavy’ and ‘glorious’. The cataclysmic upheaval is caused by the entry of God’s own holiness. Yahweh is an alien presence, a foreboding, threatening, and de-stabilizing otherness.

It begs the question whether the voice of God was both audible and understood by the people. According to Deuteronomy 5:4-5, the people heard the word of God without any need for mediation. It would seem that they heard the delivery of the Decalogue in clear and understandable language, and only thereafter in Exodus 20:18-21, did the people request mediation. This fits in with Deuteronomy 5:5, which seems to contradict the previous verse. So, as in verse 4, the people heard God speak, and in the next, they requested Moses to mediate because of the fearful experience of God speaking directly to them. Moses is now legitimated as God’s special instrument.

In addition, there is a *very loud trumpet sound*. Whether this is the sound made by the ram’s horn mentioned earlier, is unclear. Together with the sounds of thunder and lightning, this trumpet sound causes *all the people who were in the camp* to tremble. The people were filled with fear. Their trembling resembles the violent trembling of the mountain spoken of in verse 18.

ii) Going to Meet God (17).

The writer again returns to describe the effect of God’s presence on Sinai. The trembling people and the trembling mountain are brought together, when in verse 17 *Moses brought the people out from the camp to meet God*. The people *stationed themselves at the foot of the mountain*. The hithpael form of the verb, *stationed* (**יָשַׁב** *yā-shāb*), can also imply the idea of presenting themselves in the presence of God. Here at the foot of the mountain they would meet God.

iii) Trembling Mountain and Blasting Trumpet (18-19).

The author now describes Mount Sinai as *covered with smoke*. We cannot say whether the ‘thick cloud’ and this ‘smoke’ that covers the mountain are synonymous. One thing is clear though; the smoke that descends with the Lord and the fire, and the smoke that covers the mountain are not the same.

While the presence of Yahweh descended on it in fire – it smoked up like the smoking of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. The presence of God descended on the mountain. Fire is a symbol of God’s presence in that it represents purity, and is threatening and dangerous, with an elusive attraction (Mackay 2001:334). Like with the burning bush, the Lord was in the fire. It must be noted that the fire descended, and therefore any talk of volcanic eruption cannot be supported as volcanoes spew out ‘fire’ upwardly. The smoke on the other hand that came from it, went up like the smoke of a furnace. The concept of a furnace was not unknown, as there were copper mines in the Midianite territory, which would create the need for smelting furnaces (Cole 1973:148). The whole mountain shook violently. Mackay is correct in saying that the author was trying to describe the indescribable: the presence of God (2001:333). The smoke and the trembling mountain are the effect of God’s presence on Sinai. These effects serve to heighten the awe and terror.

The increasing sound of the trumpet became louder and louder until it was *very loud*. That too, heightened the sense of awe, terror and surprise. The theophany was to center the reverence and attention of the people on Yahweh. The trumpet reaches its greatest intensity, and Moses is seen talking with God, and God is heard answering in a voice. *Moses spoke to God and God answered him with a voice* that might have sounded like thunder. We know that the whole purpose was for the people to hear God speak with Moses. Moses had indeed been legitimated as God’s special instrument, just as he had promised (v.9). Right at the apparent climax of the theophany, the scene is interrupted and Moses is called up the mountain for further instruction.

g. Ex. 19:20-25 The Present God.

Childs (1974:369) describes this section as a dismal climax which disturbs the ongoing movement of the chapter. In this section we have Moses' third ascent on Mount Sinai. The coming God was now present at the top of the mountain. The settlement of Yahweh among his people was now place-specific (here upon the mountain) and was the pre-cursor to Yahweh's dwelling presence in the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle will only be constructed once the Covenant between Yahweh and his people is ratified.

i) God Calls Moses Up (20).

The coming of Yahweh is now established. Our text simply states that *Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain*. Previously we are told that Yahweh was descending; now he has descended and settled. So, verse 20 does not depict a second descent of God as some scholars may want to imply. The specific location of Yahweh's presence is given. As was to be expected, Yahweh is now present at Mount Sinai, the Mountain of God, also known as Horeb. The exact place of his presence is given as *the top of the mountain*. It would mean at the highest point. At the climax of the theophany, Yahweh is settled at the "climax" of the mountain. The theophany came to rest on the top of the mountain. Stuart (2006:431) calls it 'the point of contact'. Cassuto (1967:232) sees that the summit was the scene of the theophany in contrast to the foot of the mountain (v.17).

Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. Moses is called to where Yahweh is present. The same specific location as Yahweh is given, namely the top of the mountain. This is Moses' third ascent on the mountain. Whether the previous occasions were so, we cannot say, but this time Moses must go to the top of the mountain. Moses was going to be in the 'immediate' presence

of God. Moses was to find God, who is the Source at the “source” (**שָׁמֶן rō'ēš**) of the mountain.

ii) Instructions for the People (21-24).

Durham (1987:274) states that as exciting as is his Advent onto the mountain, more amazing still is his address to all the people waiting; but first, he speaks to Moses in their hearing. Yahweh told Moses to *go down and warn the people to keep them from breaking through to Yahweh and gazing at him*. This warning may appear superfluous after the statement in verses 12-13. Even Moses thinks so in the next verse. The people were not allowed to look at God. No one could see God and live. It must be noticed that *breaking* through has the connotation of forcefully breaking through in order to look at God. They will *perish* (**הַרְסָה hā·răs**) if they attempted to do so. They will be destroyed.

The same fate will befall *the priests who draw near to Yahweh* and who have not consecrated themselves. It is odd that this is said when the (Aaronic) priesthood in Israel has not yet been instituted. The only way that this may be explained is to understand this as a principle that will apply into the future as well. At least, the priests will be allowed to come into God’s presence, only upon consecration of them. If they are not consecrated, Yahweh will *break out against them* (**פֹּרֶר pā·răs**). This word is used twice, here and in v.24 again. Yahweh will destroy them.

Moses also thinks this warning is superfluous by saying: *The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai because you have charged us and said we must set boundaries around the mountain, for you have sanctified it.* The mountain was holy because Yahweh had sanctified it, and his presence demonstrated its sanctity. Secondly, the people were not able to ascend the mountain because Moses had set boundaries just as the Lord had instructed. Moses’ seeming impatience is unfounded because the warning was given for the sake of the people, who were

theologically naive about the dimensions of divine holiness and the consequences of trespassing.

Verse 24 poses a particular difficulty in its mention of *Aaron and the priests*. The sons of Aaron had not yet been assigned to the priestly office. Childs (1974:375) notes that the rabbis suggested a translation of ‘first-born sons’, but he believes the most obvious explanation is that here we have an historical anachronism. Enns (2000:394) proposes two possible solutions to this problem. Either priests of some sort existed before the official establishment of the priesthood, or portions of this chapter are chronologically displaced. We believe that since in 24:5 it is the young men who offer the sacrifices, there is a real possibility of an informal priesthood in place. Motyer (2005:210) sees no need to concede to an anachronism because the idea of “priest” was widespread in the ancient world, and 19:6 indicates that it needed no explanation in Israel.

Moses is instructed to *go down* and bring Aaron and the leaders. The fact that Moses and the people would find themselves at the foot of the mountain, created the opportunity for Yahweh to speak the Ten Words for all to hear him. Moses did not need to be at the summit, but would hear these words in the same way as the people. God already spoke to Moses in the hearing of the people for their benefit of believing him to be God’s mouthpiece to them. Nevertheless, Moses would eventually take Aaron them up the mountain (Stuart 2006:433). Again, the people are warned not to *break through to come through to Yahweh, lest Yahweh breaks out against them*.

iii) Moses’ Descent (25).

Moses went down to the people and spoke to them. Moses’ actual words are only to be speculation on our part, but the time has come for their whole attention to be focused on the Decalogue. The theophanic thunder gave way to the real and direct voice of God. Moses, Aaron, the priests and the people were all ready to hear God speak out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness (Dt.5:22). This single

sequence given us in chapter 19 was to prepare us for the giving of the Decalogue. There is no reason to believe that it was a collection of various fragments from various sources (Cassuto 1967:235). The purpose of chapter 19 is to recount the preparations for the giving of the Ten Words to the Covenant partners of Yahweh. The theophany that has been described in chapter 19 was not the ultimate revelation that God gave of himself to the Israelites. It clearly revealed his power, majesty and holiness, but God had not come just to overawe the people with his splendor, but to communicate to them his will so that they would know what sort of conduct was expected from them (Mackay 2001:340).

2.4 Theological Reflection.

The important point to acknowledge here is that narrative and law go together, and the law really only makes sense in the context of narrative. Narrative guards against a legalistic interpretation of the law. In fact the narrative of Presence and the giving of the law both authenticate the law and predicates it with grace, as Presence is nothing but an expression of grace to sinful humans. The heart of our text is God's "descending" (Ex.19:11, 18).

At this mountain Yahweh was confirmed to be a saving God. He alone was God sovereign over the gods of the nations. It was given as the sign that he called Moses, and was now fulfilled when the people he saved arrived there. He was going to meet with them there. Yahweh came down on the mountain in the sight of the people. Theophany marked the identity of this people. Theophany gave authority to the communications that happened at the mountain.

The giver of the law interacted personally with those who received it. God redeemed them, and therefore they were expected to respond in obedient gratitude to him. The law is not an imposition from God that is unrelated to Israel's history. The law cannot be grasped without the narrative, and the narrative is incomplete

without the law. The narrative shows the true context of the law. Narrative shaped the people's identity and provided a pattern for the life of faith.

At the center of the theological purpose is the gift of Yahweh's presence to Israel at Sinai. Without the narrative of the Presence, the motivation for keeping the law can hardly be found. The presence of God confirmed his participation in the relationship forward. Their meeting with God is the entry into holiness. Presence is also the true basis for worship and obedience. Each one was to personally experience the coming Presence as God promised to come down in the sight of all the people.

Every ascent of Moses up the mountain was an ascent to the Presence. The preparation of the nation defines the holiness demanded of the Presence. The law defines the holiness demanded of the covenant people. The preparation is a reflection of holy attitude, while the law is a reflection of holy actions. Both attitude and actions must be right in this divine-human relationship. The people of God demonstrated their position with respect to God. They were to be a consecrated people. Only what is holy can be dedicated to the Lord. They pledged themselves to the intentioned position that Yahweh had for them, namely as a kingdom of priests unto Yahweh.

The people have a special and unique relationship with God. They have been chosen by God. God took the initiative. He carried them and cared for them when he brought them out of Egypt. They belong to him on the basis of election and on the basis of redemption. The purpose of their election is two-fold: to act as a nation of priests unto God on behalf of the nations, and to be a holy nation as an example to the nations. Their redemption and the covenant are brought into view here, and are meant to act as their motivation to live commensurate with their holy God who revealed himself to them. They are to share the redemption of God to the world and to bear witness to his final judgment of sin (Childs 1974:383).

The people could not presume upon the Presence because they saw the power of the Presence entering the time and space of the creation order. The Presence had

phenomenal effects on mountain and man. Man was better off at a distance. He needed special preparation to be in the proximity of the Presence. The necessary preparations for the coming were prescribed by the coming Lord himself. Yet, the promise of Presence was unconditional and immediate. The preparation was intended for their own benefit. Unprepared, they could not dare venture into the Presence. It was too dangerous. Besides the special preparations, Israel also needed a mediator, which both Israel and God recognized in Moses. Moses played an indispensable role as mediator, playing the role of priest, prophet and national leader.

Yahweh's personal presence with Israel was accompanied by convulsions of the mountain. The convulsions were accompanied by noises and a storm. Smoke veiled the presence of Yahweh. The convulsing mountain had to be cordoned off so that no one could touch it. The veil and the cordon were there for the protection of the people. They needed the protection from the holy and destructive Presence. If the holy Presence made the mountain convulse, then the proximity of the Presence must have been dangerous. Holiness must be met with holiness. That is why the people had to be consecrated. The holy Presence should not be trivialized at any time.

The scene of the covenant was only right through the self-disclosure of Yahweh, his liberating act and this holy place. Self-disclosure is central and necessary in the process of covenant-making. The very liberated people, who were also now consecrated in Yahweh's presence, were ready to be participants in the process of covenant-making. Their status as the people of God would be confirmed. The place was laden with holy Presence. The mountain was the place where heaven touched earth. The Presence certainly demonstrates the initiative of Yahweh. His presence cannot be coerced. Lordship and revelation go together because lordship has no meaning without revelation.

The conditions for covenant-making included the call to remember the redemptive work of God. The deliverance was Yahweh's decisive victory over the oppressive regime of the Egyptians. Israel was called as eye-witnesses to the fact of the

redemption. They have experienced both the redemptive power and the nurturing power of God. He snatched and carried them like an eagle. God is both awesome in power and in grace. His Presence can evoke both fear and confidence. His Presence is both, a destructive force and a sustaining power. It was a power that brought them to him, and a power that kept them at a distance. They were to love him and obey him. There can be no covenant apart from redemption. God comes in an act of grace to join to himself a people, but on his terms; outside of which we can expect judgment.

Obeying the voice of God entails more than obeying the laws. Keeping covenant was a matter of showing loyalty out of gratitude. They were a treasured possession of Yahweh. They are a choice and valued treasure. They are a treasure belonging privately to the king of heaven. While all the peoples of the earth belong to God, only the redeemed people are peculiarly related to God. This position is aimed at making them instrumental in getting all the nations of the world to acknowledge Yahweh as Pharaoh did. In any, case holiness is conferred rather than claimed.

Having the privilege of the Presence, the Israelites were to be the priestly nation of the world, serving the nations by its service of God. This was their inherent responsibility as heirs of Abraham. They were not kings who happened to be priests. They were subjects to the king of heaven and, as such, priests within this kingdom. They are a nation of priests. They are Yahweh's priests. They are holy unto the Lord. This is clearly a claim for biblical monotheism.

Here is demonstrated to us a corporate response to the Presence. Moses in the call narrative demonstrated an individual response. Now, we are able to see the sum of individuals make a harmonized and collective response. The holiness and Presence requires an appropriate response by the people of God. They pledge faithfulness to Yahweh as a nation chosen and redeemed by Yahweh. Their response shows their acceptance of the invitation to become Yahweh's people among the nations.

God makes allowances for a relationship with a mediator. Moses, who was at first rejected by the people, and who in fact himself rejected the role, was now accepted as the mediator between the people and God. He fulfilled the role of priest in that he represented the people before God; and he fulfilled the role of prophet in that he spoke on behalf of God to the people. He was afforded the privilege of entering and moving from the Presence for the people and for God respectively. Moses was authenticated by direct and witnessed communication between Yahweh and Moses.

There were symbols of God's presence to be found at this incident. Fire was an often accompanying symbol of the Presence. The Lord was in the fire. The fire descended in the same way as it is understood that the Lord descended. The dark cloud was also an often accompanying symbol of the Presence. The specific Presence was understood to be at the highest point of the mountain; often a symbol of God's presence. Theophanic thunder gave way to the real voice of God. Whatever symbol of Presence is employed, it is really only the means the author employs to try and describe the indescribable – the presence of God.

From a canonical approach, we may glean interpretations on our current text from both Testaments. In the Old Testament we shall briefly look at Dt.5:4-22; Dt.7:6; Ps.68:7-9; Is.43:21 and 61:6; and Hag.2:6. In the New Testament we shall consider Acts 7:38; Heb.12:18-20; 1Pt.2:5, 9; and Rev.1:6, 4:5, and 11:19. The allusions to Exodus 19 are theologically applied in different ways and give us an idea of its religious and socio-ethical applications in the context of canon.

In Deuteronomy (5:4-22) Moses gives further expositions on his previous experiences and the details of the Law. He recounts their experience just before and during the giving of the Decalogue. Their experience was meant to encourage them to *hear, learn and do* the commands of God (Brown 1993:76). The Israelites had the privilege of both a “face to face” and a mediated communion with God. God was both transcendent and immanent. The majesty of Israel’s God is emphasized; and so his openness to speak to his people. There was a sense of

awe and widespread fear. There was an unforgettable sense of God's greatness and transcendence.

Deuteronomy 7:6 calls to mind the holiness and election of Israel, and the statement of Exodus 19:5-6. The election and holiness of Israel was an assured fact, and was indeed a divine achievement. Their holy character does not indicate inherent merit, but rather divine choice (Craigie 1976:179). They were already holy, and their actions were to reflect what they were. Holiness was an act of God, for God has chosen them from among all the nations. Election is thus the reason that makes holiness also a specific obligation to demonstrate their belonging to God as his treasured possession.

In Psalm 68:7-9 we are reminded of God's leading in power. His appearance demonstrated that power. His coming was awesome, making the earth to quake and the heavens to shed abundant rain for provision. Sabourin (1970:160) comments on this text, that Old Testament theology is dominated by the reality of God's interventions in world history, past, present and future. Van Gemeren (1991:446) comments on these verses that the Lord is the God of Sinai by revelation and the God of Israel by covenant (We would rather say, by election).

In Isaiah 43:21 reference is made to Exodus 19:5-6. The Israelites are a people chosen and formed by God. They were formed and chosen for the purpose of bringing praise to God. If, even the wild animals honor God for providing water for his people in the desert, then, so should the people honor him by proclaiming his praise.

In Isaiah 61:6, the prophet reminds the people that they are priests. The nations will call them priests, and in the same way that the Levitical priests were to live by the supplies of the other tribes, so Israel, as ministers of God, will feed off the wealth of the nations. As the Levitical priests were released for their distinctive work because others labored and provided for them, so is Israel's place among the nations to be. This implies that her priestly ministry is to be for the nations' benefit (Grogan 1986:334).

Haggai 2:6 has the distinction that it is the only verse from Haggai that is quoted in the New Testament (Alden 1985:586). It is quoted in Hebrews 12:26 in a rather paraphrased way. There the author makes interpretive comments, stating its connection to Exodus 19. The prophet in this passage applies the Exodus shaking to another coming – that of the Lord's glory to the second temple. The Lord's presence was not restricted to any one place.

In the New Testament too there are numerous allusions to our current text. Stephen in Acts 7:37-38 calls to mind the promise to Moses and the Israelites that God will raise up a prophet like Moses as that which is fulfilled in Christ. The words of God spoken in the hearing of the Israelites are referred to as living words that were passed on to the people. These living words could mean enduring words (Newman & Nida 1972:993).

Hebrews 12:18-20 has reference to Exodus 19:12-22. The writer aims to draw a contrast between the old covenant and the new. The New Testament writer shows considerable freedom in its paraphrasing, showing the possibility that the Sinai tradition has developed beyond the Old Testament; using the haggadic style of exegesis (Childs 1974:376). The old covenant was transitory, and the new is eternal. He pictures the Sinai event in highly eschatological language. The writer exhorts to steadfastness in faith, especially in a better covenant with a better mediator, Jesus Christ. The terror of the law is set opposite the freedom of grace. The spiritual in Christ is ultimately unshakable.

In 1 Peter 2:5, 9 we have a positive application of the Exodus text. Peter joins the temple and priesthood motifs. On the one hand, it is common in Old Testament language to speak of the house of Israel and the Lord's house as a dwelling place for God (Hillyer 1992:67). On the other hand, Israel's identity as priests is necessitated by the fact of God's presence. The entire nation of Israel is addressed. The spiritual understanding is a New Testament contribution. What was intended for Israel, Peter sees as fulfilled in the Church for the purpose of

declaring the praises of God. In fact Peter understands the Church to be the true fulfillment of this intention for Israel.

Finally, in Revelation there are a number of references to Exodus 19. In 1:6 (and 5:10) we have been made a kingdom and priests to serve the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who made us such to fulfill an everlasting purpose. Here, however, the people of God are conferred with the authority to rule as kings. They will rule on the earth together with Christ (20:6). This understanding is new in the New Testament. This will be a future eschatological reality for the people belonging to Christ.

In Revelation 4:5 and 11:19 the immediate Presence is accompanied by the theophanic portents that accompanied the coming down of Yahweh in Exodus 19:16-19. The throne and the cover of the Ark of the Covenant are depictions of the Presence. Emanating from the throne and from the Ark in the temple are flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. 11:19 adds an earthquake and a hailstorm to the lightning, rumbles and thunder. Aune (1997:294) observes that John uses the present indicative placing in the foreground the phenomena that occur continually. Not only are the phenomena continuous, but so also is the Presence with the people of God. There will, however, be a culmination, when the people will enjoy the Presence without the fear that was experienced at Sinai.