The Coherence of Exodus[1]
Narrative Unity and Meaning

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Until the rise of modern criticism, studies of the Pentateuch focused on problems in the reading and understanding of the received text Although incoherence in the biblical text had been noted before, it was the serious development of the historically oriented critical methodologies in the eighteenth century and beyond that gave birth and support to a consistent skepticism about the historical, literary, and theological unity of this part of the Christian Scriptures. Enthralled by the inelegance of the pentateuchal text, criticism's identification of the four underlying, primary sources of the Pentateuch left no doubt about the incoherence of the received text. Nevertheless, the critical approaches also suggested the means for recovering a coherent message: Disentangle the primary sources from the secondary accretions, identify their historical and social location, and let these recovered primary sources speak. Furthermore, by analyzing the relationship of the secondary and later editorial additions to the identified earliest level of the text, scholars argued that it was not only possible to recover the compositional process of the text but also to understand the interplay of the different ideological positions represented by the sources and the various additions. Thus, by identifying the compositional history of the received text, locating the underlying primary sources within their sociopolitical and religious contexts, and understanding the interplay of the various layers, the historical critical methodologies sought to explain the contradictions they identified and to support scientifically the continuing meaningfulness of the received biblical text.

The individual books of the Pentateuch, however, disappeared from view, including from the textbooks that introduced theology students to the Pentateuch because they were redistributed among the underlying sources. Literary-critical excavation of the so-called primary documents of the Pentateuch also reshaped pentateuchal theology and the studies of personages of the Old Testament.[2]

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[1] This article completes the study of Exodus begun in Calvin Theological Journal 34 (1999): 11-35.

[2] See, for example, Robert H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941], 129-292) who, although he acknowledges that the Pentateuch "is a single work in five volumes and not a collection of five different books" (129), studies the Pentateuch in terms of

Although the critical students of the Pentateuch held to the incoherence of the received text, they held firmly to the coherence of the primary sources--to the point of distinguishing clearly among the linguistic gifts and peculiar theologies of their authors.[3] Historical-critical studies, it was thought, would yield a fuller comprehension of the text by integrating the results of these studies into an understanding of the received text. In some sense, then, a coherent understanding of this ancient literature was the ultimate goal. Nevertheless, the academy's failure to integrate the results of historical critical exegesis into a fuller understanding of the received text would leave Scripture fragmented and, to a large extent, silent in the church.[4]

"documents." Otto Eissfeldt (*The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R Ackroyd [New York: Harper and Row, 1965], 194-211) studies its "narrative strands." Similarly, see Ernst Sellin and George Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 103-92, and Artur Weiser, *The Old Testament and Its Deveiopment* (New York: Association Press, 1963), 70-142. Contemporary introductions continue in this vein. See Norman K Gottwald (*The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 135-48), who introduces his readers to "The Great Traditionists of Ancient Israel," and Anthony R Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Liberationist Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 52-71. This approach has also influenced the study of OT personalities; see Rudolf Kittel, *Great Men and Movements in Israel* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1968), 175-99 and his review of the "Great Narrators." F1eming, James (*Personalities of the Old Testament* [New York: Charles Scribner's, 1951], 196-209, 282-99, 425-42) treats 'The Yahwist," "The "Deuteronomists," and "The Priestly Writers." For a brief description of the characteristics of the primary sources, see Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 40-42. For an extended discussion, see Antony F. Campbell and Mark A O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

[3] See, for example, Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testamen Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975); the discussion in R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch:A Methodological Study* (Sheffield, 1987), 47-48; and F1eming James' enthusiastic description of the Yahwist (*Personalities of the Old Testament*, 196): "About me time when Elijah and Elisha were doing their work in the northern kingdom there lived in the kingdom of Judah a remarkable man, who, though his name is nowhere mentioned in the Bible, stands out today as one of the supreme thinkers of ancient Israel. This man is a discovery of modern scholarship. . . . He was in all probability a single personality. Many scholars, it is true, find two or more strands of narrative. . . . But the J narrative *taken as whole* is so vivid and colourful, so fresh and full of power, that we can hardly go far wrong in believing it to be the work of single great mind."

[4] See for example, James D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970). Whether such integration would have been possible is another matter, as James A. Wharton indicated (See below, footnote 5). The academy's separation of the Bible from the church continues in its contemporary claims that the interpretation of biblical documents has no validity beyond "the assent of various interest groups." Such interest groups may, of course, include the church, but typically the reference is to groups determined by ethnic, cultural, gender, or sexual-orientation interests. David J. A Clines, for example, writes: there are no 'right' interpretations, and no validity in interpretation beyond the assent of various interest groups, biblical interpreters have to give up the goal of determinate and universally acceptable interpretations, and devote themselves to producing interpretations they can sell-in whatever mode is called for by the communities they choose to serve. This is what I call 'customized' interpretation." In his "A World Established on Water (Psalm 24) ," in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. David J.A Clines and Cheryl J. Exum. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 87.

In 1974, Brevard S. Childs addressed this failure in his critical theological commentary on Exodus.[5] In it he argued that the critical methodologies should, and attempted to show how they could, contribute to an understanding of the canonical text. Thus, while he acknowledged the importance of historical critical exegesis, he required this exegesis to enlighten the received, canonical text. And, when he declared the commentary's purpose to be theological and "directed toward the community of faith which lives by its confession of Jesus Christ,"[6] he acknowledged and argued that the present shape of Exodus, although a composite narrative, was the text to be explained, not the reconstructed sources, traditions, or forms. Although Childs did not argue for the coherence of the received narrative, by subordinating critical exegesis to the received shape of the text, he acknowledged the significance and influence of the canonical text. Recent introductions have begun to refer again to the traditional division of the Pentateuch[7] and, in conjunction with the emergence of the new literary approach,[8] studies have defended the received shape of the individual books of the Pentateuch and of the Pentateuch itself.[9]

Since the eighteenth century, biblical studies have moved from understanding coherence and meaning as located in the *world behind the text*, in which historical, critical, and compositional issues were crucial, to the *world of the text* itself, where historical and compositional issues are less, and literary concerns more, important. Some exegetes, however, ignore both of these, sometimes

[5] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical; Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974). Indicative of the response to this publication is James A Wharton's critical, yet sympathetic, review, "Splendid Failure or F1awed Success?" *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 266-76.

[6] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, ix.

[7] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Forness, 1986). Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), but he does not employ the fivefold division.

[8] Distinguished from historical-critical literary readings, the newer approach focuses on the text as we now have it, not on the reconstruction of the history of the text in conjunction with the reconstruction of the history of the social context that produced the text. See, for example, Jean Louis Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us." *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), andJ. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

[9] For example: Dennis T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, Brown Judaic Studies, no. 71 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985). See also, Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 6, 8; Arie C. Leder, "An Iconography of Order: Kingship in Exodus. A Study of the Structure of Exodus" (Th.D. diss., Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto, 1992). Terence E. Fretheim (*The Pentateuch, Interpreting Biblical Texts* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996]) focuses on the rhetorical strategy that unifies the Pentateuch and its subunits. See also Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988).

completely, to argue that the *world in front of the text* is the locus of coherence and meaning. That is, where Childs relativized the historical issues and linked coherence and meaning to the canonical text, reader-response readings, even those working with the received text, locate them beyond the text: in the reader or the interest group to which the reader belongs.[10]

In this article, I will argue for the coherence of Exodus from the point of view of the text itself. I will begin with a brief discussion of the nature of plot and its conflictual aspect, demonstrate how Exodus is shaped by three major conflicts, and finally argue that these conflicts cohere within a larger conceptual framework-the kingship pattern.

Narrative and Plot

In its simplest form, narrative has a beginning, middle, and end. It moves from beginning to end by means of emplotted events, complications, and conflicts, to a resolution of the initially defined narrative problem. "Plot," reasons Fokkelman,

> determines the boundaries of the story as a meaningful whole. These boundaries. . . in their own way, draw the horizon of our correct under-standing of the story: within it, the reader is looking for the connections between everything and everything else. . . . The full-grown story begins by establishing a problem or deficit; next it can present an exposition before the action gets urgent; obstacles and conflicts may occur that attempt to frus-trate the denouement, and finally there is the winding up, which brings the solution of the problem or the cancellation of the deficit.[11]

I will briefly illustrate with a brief overview of the entire biblical narrative.

> Adam and Eve's sin in the garden of Eden defines the narrative problem, or deficit--refusal of divine instruction and the consequent exile from the divine presence--that initiates a series of events, complications, and conflicts between the Creator and humanity that come to a certain resolution with God's selec-tion of Abram. This selection of Abram begins another series of events, com-plications, and conflicts that concludes just before Israel's entry into the

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[10] Alice L. Laffey (*An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988]), ignoring both the traditional and source-critical segmentation, focuses on the women of the Pentateuch; and also David J. A Clines, "A World Established on Water (Psalm 24)," 87. Fretheim (*The Pentateuch*, 22-36) provides a brief review of the world behind, of, and in front of the text.

[11] Fokke1man, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 77. Claus Westennann (*The Promises to the Fathers. Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 36) writes that "a narrative gives literary form to a sequence of events leading from tension to its resolution." Wesley A. Kart (*Story, Text, and Scripture. Literary Interests In Biblical Narrative* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988], 1-2) argues that narrative as a primary form provides biblical material with its particular coherence within which "other forms take their places or produce their particular kinds of tension."

Promised Land (Genesis-Deuteronomy). Israel's entry into the land initiates yet another sequence of events, complications, and conflicts that concludes with the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah's exile from the presence of God (Joshua-Kings). Genesis through Kings, then, begins and ends with an exile; but the narrative problem defined in Genesis has not yet been resolved. Not even the narrative directed at the postexilic community, Ezra through Nehemiah, brings about a resolution; only a return to the land and a repetition of the old problems (Neh. 13). A Christian reading of the Old Testament narrative understands that Jesus Christ's coming solves the problem of exile from the presence of God, for he is "God with us" (Matt. l:16, 23; John 1:14), but Christ's ascension complicates the narrative again for he is no longer with us as he was during his earthly ministry. Even though the Holy Spirit indwells the body of Christ, the ecclesial community experiences much conflict John 16:33) as it awaits the anticipated resolution (1 Thess. 4: 13-18; Rev. 21).

The entire biblical narrative, then, develops the problem of humanity's refusal of divine instruction and the consequent exile from the presence of God and emplots a sequence of events, complications, and conflicts that bring God's people into his presence again, there to be instructed for life in that divine presence. Within this larger narrative, the Pentateuch develops a plot that depicts a particular community, Abraham's descendants, on the way to the presence of God, i.e., the Promised Land and the place the Lord chose for his name to dwell. Although Israel was graced by the presence of God and received divine instruction at Sinai, the Pentateuch ends without complete resolution, for Israel does not enter the land.[12] Each of the books of the Pentateuch contributes to this narrative uniquely, even Leviticus.[13] In the rest of this article, I will examine Exodus' contribution to the pentateuchal narrative, in particular, the development and coherence of its plot from the statement of the narrative problem at the beginning to its resolution at the end.

[12] On me shape and theme of me Pentateuch, see David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2d ed. JSOT Supplement Series, no. 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), and J. Severino Croatto, "Una promesa aun no cumplida: Algunos enfoques sobre la estructura del pentateuco," *Revista Biblica* (Buenos Aires) 44 (1982): 193-206. Much of Severino Croatto's article is summarized in his 'The Function of the Non-fulfilled Promises: Reading the Pentateuch from the Perspective of the Latin-American Oppressed People," in *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-51.

[13] Although apparently a collection of laws, Leviticus' laws are set within a narrative framework that begins with a reference to the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 1:1) from which the Lord instructs Moses what to say to Israel. Gordon J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5. James W. Watts, ("Public Readings and Pentateuchal Law," *Vetus Testamentum* 45, no. 4 [1995], 543) argues that "laws were intended to be heard in the context of other laws and narratives surrounding them . . . Unlike law, narrative invites, almost enforces, a strategy of sequential reading, of starting at the beginning and reading the text in order to the end. The placement of law within narrative conforms (at least in part) the reading of law to the conventions of narrative." For more on the reading of law within a rhetorical strategy see James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

Plot in Exodus

In my discussion of plot, I will account for the entire Exodus narrative from the point of view that conflict and its resolution is central to the understanding of plot, though not its only feature.[14] Thus, I will argue that Exodus is composed of three major conflicts, each of which sets the stage for a subsequent conflict. Together, and in their sequence, these conflicts take the reader to Exodus' resolution of the narrative problem defined in Exodus 1-2.

The Narrative Problem of Exodus

Pharaoh's enslavement of Israel, as expressed in the forced building of the store cities (Ex. 1:8-22; 5:1-23), constitutes the narrative problem, or deficit, of Exodus. As depicted in Exodus 1-2, the problem prompts the questions, "Whom will Israel serve?" or, "Who will be Israel's master? Pharaoh or God?"[15] The answer at first appears to be clear from Exodus 15:21; after crossing the Sea of Reeds, Israel is free from Pharaoh and his building project, but the people do not yet know what it means to be with God as their new master. These matters are addressed in the rest of the Exodus narrative.

The narrative problem defined in Exodus 1-2, however, should also be read as an integral part of the narrative problem of the Pentateuch, defined in the opening chapters of Genesis. Briefly stated, Genesis defines the problem as humanity's exile from the presence of God, an exile caused by Adam and Eve's refusal of divine instruction and the consequent human defilement of the presence of God in the Garden of Eden. The narrative depicts God himself initiating the resolution of this problem by instructing Abram to leave his land and to go "to the land which I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).

God's address of this problem includes the promise to increase Abram's descendants; a promise intended to fill the earth with those who acknowledge the Lord (cf. Gen.1:28), not those who fill it with violence (Gen. 6:11, 13). Those

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[14] In his brief discussion of plot in Exodus, for example, Kort argues for three major characteristics. First, a complexity defined by three patterns: "an almost formulaic pattern of repetition" between Moses and Pharaoh, the plagues, and the responses of Pharaoh; a pattern of conflict and competition; and a melodic pattern that moves the narrative forward. The second characteristic of plot is the juxtaposition of divine description with action. The final characteristic of plot in Exodus is "that it effects change." Although Kort mentions the wilderness and the mountain, his illustrations of these characteristics for the most part fail to take account of the narrative beyond the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture*, 27. Another study that limits the discussion of plot in Exodus to chapters 1-14 is David M. Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart': Plot, Character, and Theology in Exodus 1-14," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, eds. David J. A Clines, David M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), 72-97.

[15] On the role of Exodus 1-2 and the question that the Exodus narrative answers, see Charles Isbell, "Exodus 1-2 in the Context of Exodus 1-14: Story Lines and Key Words," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature,* 37-61.

who fill the earth with violence are the nations, the descendants of Adam[16] who desire to make a name for themselves in the earth (Gen. 11:4, 5). This desire for a name the Lord makes possible, but, at this time in the biblical narrative, and only among the descendants of Abram does the LORD say: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be blessing" (Gen. 12:2; cf. Gal. 3:8-9). When this blessing begins to take historical shape in Egypt (Ex. 1:7), Pharaoh objects to Israel's growth and forces the people into his building projects. Because the language depicting Israel's forced participation in Pharaoh's building program echoes Babel's attempt to resolve humanity's problem independently of God,[17] the text also evokes ancient Babel's solution to the human problem. It is from that human solution that God had separated Abraham, and provided him and his descendants with another building program, although that is not explicit in Genesis 12:1-3.

The narrative problem of Exodus, then, is rooted in the fundamental human problem as depicted in the opening chapters of Genesis. Within this larger narrative context Pharaoh's hostility to Israel's phenomenal growth may be read as opposition to God's promised resolution of the fundamental human problem by means of a uniquely created human community, whose unique role among the nations, especially its unyielding and undeflectable growth, summons up fear and opposition.[18] Stated simply, Pharaoh's actions embody the nations'[19] desire to gather against the Lord and his anointed (cf. Ps. 2:2). The narrator uses three major conflicts to arrive at his resolution of the narrative problem stated in Exodus 1-2.

The First Conflict: Pharaoh, the Lord, and Absolute Power

Exodus 3:1-15:21 narrates the contest between Pharaoh and the Lord, mediated by Moses, the Lord's messenger to Egypt and Israel. Of the three main characters, Israel is mostly passive at this time, their servitude renders them unwilling participants (Ex. 5:20, 21; 6:9). Two clusters of keywords define this struggle: the two nouns (עֶבֶד, עֲבֹדָה) and one verb (עָבַד) describing Israel's servitude and the verbs describing Pharaoh's hardness of heart.[20] God repeat-

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[16] "The men" (NIV) translates the phrase בְּנֵי הָאָדָם in which הָאָדָם surely recalls the Adam of the opening chapters of Genesis.

[17] The materials used in the construction of Pithom and Rameses, brick and mortar (Ex. 1:13) recall those used for the city and tower of Babel, brick and mortar (Gen. 11:3).

[18] See especially Ex. 1:12, 20. Compare this episode with Acts 12, which narrates the persecution of the church after the Passover, thereby recalling the Exodus experience, and shows how persecution could not stop the spread of the word of God (12:14; cf.13:49-50).

[19] Balak's fear of Israel's numbers and his solution (Num. 22:2-6) recalls Pharaoh's response lo Israel's increased numbers.

[20] For more on these keywords, and others in Exodus, see my article "Reading Exodus to Learn and Learning to Read Exodus," *Calvin Theological Journal* 34, no. 1 (1999): 11-35. For the discussion of the two above-mentioned clusters, see p. 27.

edly demands that Pharaoh let Israel go to serve him (4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3), but he refuses. Pharaoh does urge Israel to leave and serve the Lord, once before the final plague (10:24), and then after the death of the firstborn (12:31). He repents of these words, however, and pursues Israel into the sea and with his army is swallowed by the earth at the command of the Lord (15:7; cf. 7:12). It is only when Israel sees the Egyptians lying dead on the shore that it fears the Lord and puts its trust in him and in Moses (14:30, 31). Thus, the conflict between Pharaoh and the Lord is resolved.

The resolution of the first conflict begets Israel's praise (15:1-21). This song reminds the reader of the wider perspective of the biblical narrative: the nations who will tremble at the passing of God's people (15:14-16), and the establishing of the Lord's dwelling place (15:13, 17). The trembling of the nations indicates that Egypt is not the only nation for whom what God is doing with Israel has consequences; the reference to God's dwelling place indicates that building, especially royal construction (cf. 15:18), is within the scope of the narrative's address of the problem defined in Exodus 1-2. Identification of this dwelling place with a particular mountain anticipates both the building project, which will enable the Lord's presence in Israel's midst, and the place where its design will be revealed, thereby also furthering the resolution of the fundamental conflict between God and the nations stated at the beginning of Genesis. Although Pharaoh's death and Israel's separation and freedom from Egypt resolves the conflict between God and Pharaoh, this resolution is not yet the end of the story. Rather, it occasions the second conflict of Exodus.

The Second Conflict: Israel, God, and Complaints in the Desert

With the conflict between God and Pharaoh resolved, the narrative begins to develop the relationship between Israel and its new master, a relationship characterized by complaints against Moses. Israel's complaints about the lack of water at Marah and food in the Desert of Sin contrast with the plenty of Egypt (Ex. 16:3). In answer to Moses' mediation, God provides Israel with water and food with the result that, after Exodus 17:7, Israel no longer complains about its sustenance in the desert. These provisions, however, do not resolve the conflict between God and Israel because the real issue is not lack of sustenance but Israel's failure to submit to God's instructions.

Israel's complaints about water and food occur in the context of the Lord's expectation that Israel submit itself to his law. Thus, at Marah, the Lord tells Israel that he will not bring the diseases of Egypt upon them if they pay careful attention to his voice, his commandments, and decrees (Ex. 15:25-26). Later, after Israel disobeys his instructions concerning the manna, the Lord asks Moses: "How long will you [pl.] refuse to keep my commandments and instructions?" (Ex. 16:28). Thus, the narrative links Israel's sustenance in the desert to its submission to God's instructions. In the desert pericope (Ex. 15:22-18:27) the question to be answered is not: "Who is Israel's master?" or "Whom will Israel serve?" Rather, after Israel's liberation from Egypt, the question becomes:

"What is the nature of Israel's service to the Lord?" or, more existentially, "How will Israel survive outside of Egypt?" The answer is: Submit to the Lord's commands and decrees (Ex. 15:25-26; cf. Lev. 18:5; Deut. 8:3[21]).

   Although Israel's complaints in the desert are found only in Exodus 15:22-17:7, legal vocabulary clustered at the beginning and ending of the desert pericope create a frame (A-A')[22] within which the entire

	A		A'
to judge (שָׁפַט)			18:13, 16, 22:2, 26:2
judgment (מִשְׁפָּט)	15:25		
to command (צִוָּה)		16:16, 24, 32, 34	18:23
commandment (מִצְוָה)	15:26		
decree (חֹק)	15:25, 26		18:16, 20
law (תּוֹרָה)	15:25 (יָרָה)	16:4, 28	18:16, 20
to obey (שָׁמַע בְּקֹל לְקֹל) 15:26			18:19, 24

desert episode takes place and within which it should be read. Israel's survival-whether they need food and water, is oppressed by their enemies (17:8-16), or suffers internal problems (18)--depends on conformity to the instruction of the Lord.

   Submission to the Lord's instruction in the desert pericope, however, does not bring the conflict between the Lord and Israel to a resolution. It only suggests an answer to the question: "How will Israel outside of Egypt (and not yet in the land [cf. 3:8, 17]) survive?" The final resolution to the conflict in the desert is found in the Lord's covenant offer and Israel's submission narrated in Exodus 19-24. At Sinai, confronted with the good things the Lord has done for it (19:4), Israel promises submission to his words (19:8 [דְּבָרִים]), and in consequence of the Lord's terrible descent, his presence and declaration of the law, seals their submission with a self-maledictory oath (24:3, 7). This act of vassal submission brings the conflict between the Lord and his people to a legal resolution and answer the question posed by the first conflict--"Whom will Israel serve?"--because at Sinai Israel legally binds themselves to the Lord as the special people he freed from the terrible bondage to Pharaoh (cf. 20:1-2). After Israel seals the covenant, Moses ascends to the top of Sinai where, in God's presence, he receives instructions[23] for the construction of a building in

[21] For a crucial wordplay that points to the importance of law, see Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "What Comes Out of God's Mouth: Theological Wordplay in Deuteronomy 8," *Catholic Biblica*l *Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1985): 55-57.
   [22] Leder, "Reading Exodus to Learn," 28.
   [23] These instructions do not solve the narrative problem of refusal of instruction as defined in Gen.2-3 (see p. 255 above); that function belongs to Leviticus. The instructions in Exodus are limited to establishing a vassal relationship between the Lord and his people and to the construction of a building where the Lord will be enthroned amidst his people.

which the Lord would dwell in the midst of this special people.[24] It is while Moses receives these instructions that the third conflict arises.

The Third Conflict: Israel, God, and the Golden Calf

   Israel's complaints in the desert pale by comparison with its rebellious construction of the golden calf, the antitabernacle project[25] by which it defiles the presence of God, compromises the covenant, and exposes itself to destruction (32:10). Such divine destruction Pharaoh experienced because of his stubbornness, and Israel, stubborn like Pharaoh (33:3, 5; 34:9),[26] would similarly have been consumed by God's anger were it not for the mediator God himself appointed (32:11-14). Israel suffers the consequences of their rebellion (32:27-29, 35), but God relents of his anger, forgives their sin, and renews the covenant (34:27-28). God's forgiveness brings this conflict to resolution.

        This resolution, however, does not constitute the end of the narrative. Divine forgiveness only makes possible what God intended for his people: participation in the construction of the sanctuary (Ex. 35-39). God's grace makes possible the construction of the building central to the expression of God's kingship on earth: "Israel and the church have their existence because God picked up the pieces."[27] Because God forgave his erring and faithless people, the fire that dwells[28] in their midst did not consume them (40:34-38; cf. 3:3, 24:17), but it could have, and later did so (See Lev. 10:1-3 and Num. 11:1-3.).

   [24] The text reads, "have them make a sanctuary for me, and *I will dwell among them*" (emphasis added). The building itself has a secondary importance, it facilitates the Lord's dwelling among his people.
   [25] For a brief discussion of this construction as an antitabernacle project, see Fretheim, *Exodus*, 280-81. The verb עָשָׂה occurs 323 times in Exodus, 236 times in Ex. 25-40, a keyword in the instructions for the tabernacle and the description of Israel's compliance. Before Israel "makes" the tabernacle (Ex. 35:10), they "make" the golden calf (32:1, 4, 8).
   [26] One of the words that describe Israel's stubbornness (קָשָׁה) also occurs in the triad of verbs that describe Pharaoh's stubbornness (קָשָׁה, חָזַק, לְבֵד).
   [27]Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 580. For more on the role of Ex. 32-34 in its canonical context, see Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 175-76.
   [28] Read in isolation from Genesis, Exodus provides no hint that the theme of the Lord's dwelling with Israel is part of its narrative agenda. Seen from perspective of the narrative problem defined by Genesis (exile from the presence of God), and its initial resolution with the call to Abram (move toward the land, i.e., the place where the Lord would dwell), the appearance of this theme at Ex. 25:8 is not a problem. References to the land in Ex. 3:8, 17 can then be read as part of the larger trajectory that will bring Israel into the Lord's presence. That Israel finds itself in God's "tabernacling" presence before it gets to the land is also important: God's presence and the disclosure of Torah are preland realities that are crucial for life in the land. It is in the desert, at Sinai, that God brings about a partial solution to the human problem: He ends the exile of Adam's descendants (those elected through Abraham) and teaches them to live by his word. In this manner, Israel is led to acknowledge that, like Egypt, the promised land has no resources to effect such a resolution (Lev. 18:1-5), claims of the local religions to the contrary.

The third conflict, and its resolution, also answers a question. This time it is: "Who determines Israel's construction projects?" The outcome of the first conflict indicated that Pharaoh had no authority to make Israel build Pithom and Raamses; the conclusion of this conflict is that Israel itself cannot make such determinations either. God's design would be followed (Ex. 25:9).

Summary

    Closely linked together, these major conflicts move the Exodus narrative from one master and one construction project to another. The close relationship and special purpose attached to the relationship between the Lord and Israel occasioned the struggle between Pharaoh and the Lord, during which struggle Pharaoh forced Israel to construct his store cities (מִשְׁכְּנוֹה). Freedom from Pharaoh's construction project led to Israel's complaints about sustenance in the desert. The Lord's resolution pointed Israel to his instruction. After Israel's submission at Sinai, the Lord discloses his desire to dwell among his covenant people by means of a building he wants his vassals to construct according to his own design. Later, after God forgives Israel's rebellious antitabernacle construction project, Israel constructs the appurtenances of the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן), Moses assembles the tabernacle, and the Lord's glory cloud dwells in it.[29]

Narrative and Coherence

    The Exodus narrative moves Israel, and the reader, from social chaos, embodied in the forced building of Pharaoh's store cities, to social orderliness, embodied in the construction project of a building that would be central to Israel's existence as descendants of Abraham. The forced building of Pharaoh's store cities forms the deficit, with which the full-grown story begins, and the construction of the tabernacle solves the problem by cancelling the deficit.[30] The cancellation of the deficit, together with the overcoming of the obstacles depicted in the three conflicts, presents the reader with a unified, coherent narrative. The building programs, then, provide the key for a coherent reading of Exodus. They also provide a link to a conceptual pattern that reinforces the

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[29] The intimate links between the conflicts, and the move from one master and building project to another, argues against the suggestion that chapters 1-15:21 form the climax of the plot of Exodus and that, as such, these chapters generate meaning for the whole of the Pentateuch, as Severino Croatto suggests ('The Function of the Non-fulfilled Promises," 49-50. This thesis is worked out in detail in his "Exodo 1-15: Algunas claves literarias y teologicas para entender el pentateuco," *Estudios Biblicos* 52 [1994]: 167-94.). Chapters 1:1-15:21 generate meaning within the Pentateuch only as they contribute to the entire plot of Exodus. Moreover, his failure to include chapters 15:22 through 40:34 excludes Exodus' solution to the narrative problem stated in its opening chapters.

[30] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 77.

coherence of Exodus:[31] that of a king's doing battle against the threat of disor-
der in the realm. In the remaining part of this article, I will refer to this con-
ceptual pattern as the kingship pattern.

Narrative Coherence and the Kingship Pattern

The kingship pattern depicts a king who, when confronted with disorder in
his kingdom, seeks out the enemy, defeats him, and upon his return to the
imperial capital builds a structure emblematic of his victory. The pattern is
most clearly demonstrated in the extra biblical *Enuma elish* and Baal epics and
other accounts of royal victory and temple building.[32] The abundant evidence
of this pattern suggests it is a well-known literary configuration with central, cos-
mological significance. Biblical studies has recognized the importance of this
conceptual pattern and has applied it to the Genesis account of creation,
Exodus 15, Psalms 74 and 89, and Isaiah 40-55,[33] but its relevance for the entire

[31] Enrico Galbiati, *La Struttum Letteraria dell'Esodo: Contributo allo studio dei criteri stilistici dell'A.T. e della compasizione del Pentateuco*, Scrinium Theologicum, III (Rome: Edizione Paoli, 1965), 307-17, suggests the Hittite treaties and ancient temple building documents as literary genres useful for understanding the genre of Exodus, but he does not develop the thesis. James Plastaras, in his The *God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narratives* (Milwakee: Bruce Publishing, 1966), 49-57, suggests the lamentation liturgy as the pattern for Ex. 1-15 with following correspondences: lamentation (Ex. 1-2), salvation-oracle (Ex. 3:1-7:7), thanksgiving oracle (Ex. 15:1-21) with the latter two bracketing Ex. 7-14. C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 260, also applies the lament form to Ex. 1-15.

[32] The temple for Shamash built by Yahdun-Lin after defeating rebel vassals, in James B. Pritchard, ed. *ANETSup* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 120-21; the temple built by Innana, at Agade, after Enlil had defeated Uruk, in Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore:John Hopkins University Press, 1983), 51, 11.1-9; and the temple of Gatumdug after the defeat of Ur, in Jerrold S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1, *Pre-Sargonic Inscriptions* (New Haven: The American Oriental Society, 1986), 43, 45. See also Hayim Tadmor, "History and Ideology in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological; and Historical Analysis*", Orientis Antiqui Collectio, no. 17, ed. F. M. Fales (Rome: Instiuito Per L'Oriente, 1981), 13-33; and A. S. Kapelrud, "Temple Building: A Task for Gods and Kings," *Orientalia* 32 (1963): 62. The argument is not one of material literary dependence but of literary convention or similarity of sequence.

[33]"The cosmogonic myths of kingship and salvation through the work of the divine warrior have. . . profoundly molded the conceptual pattern of early Israel as reflected in her poetry." Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 117. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Conflict: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 11-42; Peter C. Craigie, "The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 3-31, esp. 19-24; Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 292-334; William R Millar, *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of the Apocalyptic* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 71-81; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "In Search of the Hidden Structure: YHWH as King in Isaiah 40-55," *Svensk Exegtisk Anbok* 51-52 (1986-1987): 153.

Exodus narrative has not yet been explored.[54] The elements of the pattern appear in the epics as follows.[55]

Enuma elish	Baal and Yamm
1. The occasion for the conflict:	1. The occasion for the conflict:
a. Tiamat's revenge for Apsu's death I:I09ff.	a. Yamm's messengers demand Baal's tribute CTA 2, i: 11, 22, 32-38
b. Marduk will fight for supreme authority III:65-66	b. Ashtarte urges Baal to seize the eternal kingship CTA 2, i: 40ff.
2. The kingship:	2. The battle:
a. Kingship is bestowed IV: 14	a. Baal battlesYamm CTA 2, i:11-17
	b. Baal defeats Yamm with a club CTA 2, i:18-31
3. The battle:	3. The kingship:
a. The battle IV:33-120	a. Baal's kingship is proclaimed CTA 2, i:34
i. Marduk defeats Tiamat with a war-bow IV:101	b. The victory banquet CTA 3 A
ii. Salvation of the gods IV: 123-46	c. Complaints: no house for Baal CTA 3 C, E i:46
b. The creation of man VI:1-44	d. Baal travels to Mt. Zaphon CTA 4, iv:19
4. The palace:	4. The palace:
a. Building of the temple Esharra VI:45- 77	a. A dwelling for Baal requested CTA 4, iv:50
i. bricks made for one year VI:60	b. Let a house be built CTA 4, iv:61
ii. erected at beginning of second year VI:61-62	i. the mountains will bring gold and silver CTA 4, iv:80
iii. Marduk sits down in majesty VI:65	ii. lapis lazuli CTA 4, iv:81
iv. a victory banquet VI:71-77	c. Anat brings news of permission to Mt. Zaphon CTA 4, iv:88
b. Marduk' s rule VI:78-81	d. House of Baal will be the size of Mt. Zaphon CTA 4, iv:119-20
c. Praise of kingship and proclamation of the fifty names VI:104ff.	

[34] M Frank M. Cross, 'The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 142, 165, suggests the following as the mythic pattern: the combat of the divine warrior and victory at the sea, the building of a sanctuary on the mount of possession, and God's manifestation of eternal kingship. He applies the return of the divine warrior to take up kingship to the revelation at Sinai. Craigie applies the pattern "conflict/order, kingship, conflict, temple, kingship" to Ex. 15 in his 'The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," 24, 25. A K. Grayson, "Assyria and Babylon," *0rientalia* 49 (1980): 154, in his discussion of display texts, lists form number three as having the following format subject, temporal clause, narration of conquest, and the description of building activities. See also Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 75-76.

[35] For Enuma elish see Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis. The Story of Creation*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). For the Baal and Yamm story, A Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cuneiformes alphabtitiques, decouvertes a Ras Shamm-Ugarit de 1929 a 1939* (Paris: Impr. nationale, 1963). Cited as CTA.

> e. Built by Kothar and Hasis CTA 4, vi:I7
>> i. to Lebanon for cedar CTA 4,
>>> vi: 19-21
>> ii. fire turns silver and gold into
>>> bricks on the seventh day CTA 4,
>>> vi:31-34
> f. A victory banquet CTA 4, vi:39-55
> g. Baal's rule CTA 4, vii:7, 9-12
> h. A window is built in Baal's palace CTA
>> 4, vii: 13-28
>>> i. Palace is the place from which Baal
>>> speaks CTA 4, vii:29-55

Although both epics employ the same major elements in similar patterns,[36] there are some differences: Marduk's kingship is proclaimed before the battle, and the description of Baal's palace construction is more extensive. Extant royal inscriptions recall the king's heroic deeds but do not regularly mention conflict as an antecedent for the building of a temple. Nevertheless, Tadmor has shown that when such inscriptions do change their format, they continue to function as ideological expressions of royal rule.[37] Later inscriptions extol the king's might through his building accomplishments alone; his heroic deeds are not mentioned.[38] Thus, although these literary-historiographical conventions were not strictly limited to a particular sequence they were continually used to communicate the image the king wanted to project.[39]

An examination of Exodus discloses a similar general pattern.

> 1. The occasion for conflict:
>> a. Pharaoh's oppression Ex. 1-2:25
>> b. The Lord's messengers demand
>>> Pharaoh's submission Ex. 3:1-7:7

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[36] See also Hanson, *The Dawn*, 302-3, who also suggests that this pattern is found in the Apsu-Ea conflict in tablet 1: Threat (37-58), Combat-Victory (59-70), Temple built (71-77). Millar, *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*, 71-81, discerns the Baal-Yamm, Baal-Anat-Mot, and Baal-Mot cycles. The Baal-Mot cycle includes a threat to consume humanity if Baal does not turn over one of his brothers to satisfy Mot's rage (CTA 6v, 20-25).

[37] Tadmor, "History and Ideology," 14, 29. When justifying an irregular assumption of the throne the document following the apology would conform to the typical narration of royal achievements. See his, "Autobiographical Apology in the Royal Assyrian literature," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 37. Carl Nylander writes of the "iconography of power" in his "Achaemenid Imperial Art, " in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires Studies in Assyriology*, no. 7, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Foriag. 1979), 356.

[38] Tadmor, "History and Ideology," 24.

[39] Ibid., 14. The pattern does not need to be copied slavishly, as Hanson, *The Dawn*, 303, argues in his discussion of judges 5. Later (pp. 308-11), he discusses the prophetic abandonment of the (royal) pattern and its reemergence in the exilic and postexilic eras.

2. The battle:
    a. The conflict   Ex. 7:8-11:10
    b. The exodus   Ex. 12:1-13:16
    c. Pharaoh'sdefeat   Ex. 13:17-14:31

3. The kingship:
    a. The Lord's victory and proclamation
       of kingship   Ex. 15:1-21
    b. The Lord takes Israel to Mt. Sinai   Ex. 15:22-19:2
    c. The Lord makes Israel his people   Ex. 19:3-24:11

4. The Lord's palace:
    a. The Lord will dwell among Israel   Ex. 24:12-25:9
    b. Building instructions   Ex. 25:10-31:18
    c. Israel's rebellion   Ex. 32:1-34:35
    d. Tabernacle and furniture crafted   Ex. 35-39:31
    e. Moses inspects the work and
       blesses the people   Ex. 39:42, 43
    f. Moses instructed to set up מִמְכָּן on
       first day of second year   Ex. 40:1, 2
    g. Moses sets up the tabernacle in seven acts   Ex. 40:17-33
    h. The Lord dwells in the מִשְׁכָּן   Ex. 40:34-38

There are significant differences between Exodus and the nonbiblical stories. The Lord builds his own palace; Baal needs El's consent.[40] The Lord's people craft the tabernacle and contribute the gold and silver themselves; in the Baal epic the gods' craftsman, *Kothar wa Hassis*, does all the work, and the materials were generally brought in from the mountains.[41] Finally, where in the ancient Near East temples were considered a resting place for the gods,[42] in Exodus the מִשְׁכָּן is only the temporary means for the Lord's dwelling in the midst of (Ex.

[40] Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 142.

[41] Gudea brought the materials from the Cedar mountain, having made paths and quarries where none had gone before. "Cylinder A, " xv-vxi 24. Eanatum brought white cedar from the mountains (Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Insripiptions*, 49). Bringing in such materials and the finest crafts from the periphery to the cosmic center represents the completeness of creation at its center: "at the center of the world there is everything, all is known, all is possessed-creation is complete." Mario Liverani, 'The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda*, Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology, no. 7, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 314. See also Pritchard, ANETSup, 275-76 on Tiglath-Pileser I and Assurnasirpal II's journeys to get cedar from the mountains.

[42] See CTA 6 iii, 18 and also Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord-the Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1-2:3," in *Melanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag. 1981), 502, note 2.

25:8; 1 Kings 8:27-30), and later for leading, his people. Nevertheless, the general coincidence of the pattern allows a reflection on its usefullness for understanding the coherence of Exodus.

The kingship pattern does not structure but underscores the coherence of the narrative and provides a key to its meaning. It underscores the coherence of Exodus first, not only because Exodus employs all the elements of the pattern in telling its story but also because the pattern accounts for the entire narrative, unlike the lamentation liturgy suggested by Plastaras and Westermann, which accounts only for Exodus 1:1-15:21.[43] Second, because the pattern reaches its climax in a building project, it reinforces the literary frame of the narrative: the building of Pharaoh's store cities in Exodus 1 and the construction of the Great King's earthly dwelling place in Exodus 35:4-40:33. In this connection, it is important to recognize that the Hebrew עֲבֹדָה is used to describe Israel's work on the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן 39:32, 42) and its work on the store cities (מִשְׁכְּנוֹת, 1:14 ["slavery," 2:23, 6:9]). The difference between the two projects is that Pharaoh forced Israel to build his cities, whereas the Lord's forgiveness led Israel voluntarily (Ex. 35:21; 36:6b) to participate in the construction of the tabernacle. In addition, and related to the former, the fourth element of the pattern, the building project, coincides with the narrative's cancellation of the deficit. The cancellation of this deficit is supported by the wordplay between מִשְׁכְּנוֹת (Ex. 1:14) and מִשְׁכָּן (39:32,33,40; 40:2, 5, 6,9, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 33, and esp. 34-38). Third, the elements of the pattern link the tabernacle section, both covenant and tabernacle instructions, naturally to the preceding events that took place in Egypt, the desert, and at Mt. Sinai and cast them into a coherent narrative. In a cultural context where the kingship pattern was prevalent, it would only be natural to read, after consolidating the victory at Sinai, that the victorious king engaged in a construction project to memorialize the event in some way. In these ways, the kingship pattern supports the coherence of the narrative discerned in its plot structure and development.

The completion of the kingship pattern in Exodus 40 also brings us back to the deficit with which the biblical narrative begins in Genesis: Adam and Eve expelled from God's presence in the Garden of Eden for refusal of divine instruction. In Exodus, when the glory cloud fills the newly constructed tabernacle, God dwells in the midst of the descendants of Adam and Eve through Abraham and Sarah. Adam's descendants are in God's presence not because they found their way back but because God has brought them to himself (Ex. 19:4). Moreover, they are not in his immediate presence; Israel's sinfulness requires a distance (Ex. 19:13; cf. Num. 1:53) that can only be overcome by a specially appointed priesthood (Ex. 29:1; Num. 18:1-7; cf. Heb. 9:19-25). The

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[43] See footnote 31.

elements of the text that point us in this direction are the phrases in Exodus 39 and 40 that recall the creation narrative:[44]

Thus the heavens and the earth were *completed*. By the seventh day God had *finished* the *work* he had been doing (Gn 2:1-2)	So all the work on the tabernacle was *completed*. (Ex 39:32) And so Moses *finished* the *work*. (Ex 40:33)
God *saw* all that he had made, and (behold, [הִנֵּה]) it was very good. (Gn 1:31)	Moses inspected the work and *saw* (behold, [הִנֵּה]) they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. (Ex 39:43)
And God blessed the seventh day. . . (Gn2:3)	And Moses blessed them. (Ex 39:43)
and made it holy. . . (Gn 2:3)	. . . consecrate (the tabernacle and the altar) (Ex 40:9,10)

This evocation of Genesis 1 and 2 suggests that a proper understanding of the coherence of Exodus is linked to the exposition of the fundamental conflict between God and humanity depicted in Genesis 1-3. With that fundamental conflict in mind, Exodus resolves, tentatively, the problem of humanity's exile from God's presence but does not provide the instruction that safeguards life in the divine presence. Leviticus provides that aspect of the solution to the problem.

The kingship pattern also lends conceptual coherence to Exodus by rendering explicit the meaning implicit in the royal metaphor that shapes Exodus throughout. The noun *king* is applied consistently to Pharaoh but never to the Lord; his royal status is acknowledged only in the clause "The LORD will reign " (יהוה יִמְלֹךְ, Ex. 15:18). The Lord's kingship does not, of course, depend on the title; his actions disclose who he is. Only a Great King could have done to Pharaoh and Egypt what he did. The kingship pattern supports this not only in the conflict with Egypt but also in the rest of the narrative, including Israel's survival in the desert where God's divisions travel to Mt. Sinai, a journey not unlike

[44] Moshe Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord," 503-4. These links between Genesis and Exodus are widely recognized. Erich Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholiscbes Bibelwerke, 1983), 170-75; Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, part 2, trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1983), 477-79.

the return[45] to the empire's center,[46] its capital, of the great armies of an ancient overlord such as Shalmaneser III or Assurnasirpal; the solemnization of suzerain-vassal covenant between the Lord and Israel; and the instructions and final construction of a royal dwelling place.

The Meaning of Exodus

As a "royal inscription" of a Great King's victory over disorder in his empire, Exodus not only recalls the fundamental conflict between God and humanity and proclaims the Lord's victory over it at the Sea but also witnesses to the construction of a concrete historical monument that proclaims his cosmic[47] rule from a historically particular building: the tabernacle in the midst of Israel. As a coherent royal inscription, Exodus must be heard as a whole--not from the perspective of one of its subplots, such as the victory at the Sea[48]--or even that of the Sinai covenant legislation but from the viewpoint of the cancellation of the narrative deficit: the "incarnation" of the triumphant King in the midst of his vassal people in the tabernacle. Neither victory at the Sea, Israel's submission to the covenant, nor the Lord's forgiveness of Israel's idolatry--individually or together--can express the full meaning of the Exodus narrative for they do not resolve the fundamental narrative problem of the Pentateuch that Exodus' plot structure develops: disobedient humanity's exile from God's presence. That resolution only occurs with the glory cloud's indwelling of the tabernacle. From this building Israel receives the holiness instructions that permit life in God's consuming fire presence (Lev. 1:1-2).

[45] Israel's depicted military journey through the desert has analogues in the royal annals of Shalmaneser III and Assurnasirpal where itineraries depict royal military marches with river crossings, problems of finding water, military exploits, hunting, and the receiving of tribute. See Graham I. Davies, "The Wilderness Itineraries: A Comparative Study," *The Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 58. In the same article, Davies argues that "the itineraries comparable to Numbers 33:1-49 from the Ancient Near East relate exclusively, so far as our evidence goes, to royal military campaigns. It may therefore be due to the conception of the wilderness period as a military expedition that an account of it in the form of an itinerary was composed," 80. For further studies on these itineraries as royal military marches see George W. Coats, 'The Wilderness Itinerary," *Catholic BiblicalQuarterly* 34 (1972): 147-48; Graham I. Davies, "The Wilderness Itineraries and the Composition of the Pentateuch," *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (1983): 1-13; Albrecht Goetze, "An Old Babylonian Itinerary," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 8 (1954): 51-72.

[46] On temples, mountains as cosmic center, see Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978), 113-20. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 111-76.

[47] On the theology of creation in Exodus, especially in the plagues' narrative, see Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1991),105-132, and his "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 385-96.

[48] So J. Severino Croatto, see above footnote 29.

It is this building, the place the Lord chose for his name to dwell, especially in its subsequent transformation as the temple on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, that is central to the Lord's administration of his rule over Israel (1 Kings 8:22-53). The nations will also stream to Jerusalem and from it the *torah*, the Lord's instruction, will flow to them (Isa. 2:2-4; cf. Isa. 19 with respect to Egypt and Assyria), for none of Adam's descendants can do without God's presence or his instruction. However, when Israel defiles God's presence, the glory cloud departs from the temple (Ezek. 8-10), God permits his servant Nebuchad-nezzar Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and removes Israel from his presence (2 Kings 24:3, 20; cf. 2 Kings 17:18, 20, 23). According to the New Testament, the body of Christ becomes the temple of God's presence John 1:14; 2:20-21; 1 Cor. 3:16) and Jerusalem loses its cen-trality: The Lord's disciples move from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) with the good news of the gospel, the torah of the LordJesus.[49] Thus, the building project begun in Exodus continues until a temple is no longer neces-sary and all the nations enjoy the presence of the Great King and walk by the light of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22-27), the joy of the whole earth (Ps. 48:2) .

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[49] For a fuller treatment of the temple and Torah as fulfilled by Christ's ministry, see David E. Holwerda, "Jesus and the Temple: A Question of Essence," and "Jesus and the Law: A Question of Fulfillment," in his *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 59-83, 113-45.