

PART II

OPEN ARTICLES

Understanding and Applying Exodus 19:4–6: A Case Study in Exegesis and Theology

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Perhaps more than any other single text, Exodus 19:4–6 provides the Bible’s clearest and simplest snapshot of God’s revealed purpose for the old covenant. This essay seeks to interpret this passage within its immediate and broader biblical context, understanding and applying it as the Christian Scripture God intended (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 1 Pet 1:12). The study also supplies a case study in exegetical and theological inquiry following the twelve steps outlined in my book, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*.¹ Recognizably, the nine steps of exegesis and three steps of theology are all interrelated, and distinguishing them is somewhat artificial to the process of interpreting the Bible. Nevertheless, using a single passage to walk through the twelve steps should help students understand better the various aspects of exegesis and theology that are necessary for rightly handling God’s word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

A. Text

“What is the makeup of the passage?”

1. *The Genre of Exodus 19:4–6*²

In genre analysis we seek to (1) determine the literary form, subject matter, and function of the passage, (2) compare it to similar genres, and (3) consider the

1. Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017). I adapt the various exegetical and theological discussions of Exodus 19:4–6 from the following pages in the book: 32, 123–25, 148–50, 170–72, 226–32, 253–56, 265–67, 282–85, 314–17, 329–33, 370–74, 400–407, 422–27. Used with permission.

2. For more on genre, see Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III, eds., *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, eds., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th

implications for interpretation. When we consider the genre of Exodus 19:4–6, we immediately recognize two things. First, it is a speech of God recorded by his prophet, and therefore we can rightfully call it a *prophetic speech*. More specifically, it is a messenger speech from God through Moses to the people, and it includes instruction mixed with implied exhortation. Second, the address itself falls within a grand narrative that begins in Genesis and continues unbroken through the end of 2 Kings, only to be picked up again in Daniel and carried on to the end of 2 Chronicles (following the order of Jesus’s Bible as represented in Talmudic Baraita *Baba Bathra* 14b).³ The Old Testament (OT) story relayed in the narrative books overviews the history of salvation that ultimately climaxes in Christ and the New Testament (NT).

Thus, we can tag the genre of Exodus 19:4–6 as a prophetic messenger speech made up of instruction and implied exhortation. It is part of the historical narrative of Exodus, the Pentateuch, and the greater OT.

2. The Literary Units and Text Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4–6⁴

Next, we seek to determine the limits and basic structure of the passage, even establishing a hierarchy of the author’s flow of thought (for more on this, see below). Sometimes establishing the beginning and end of literary units can be a complicated endeavor. Helpfully, however, this is not the case in Exodus 19:4–6. The basic building block of all text analysis is a clause, which is made up of a subject and its predicate, along with all connectors and modifiers. The following figure separates the various Hebrew clauses and includes the ESV translation of the passage. The three colors signal different levels of perspective, as speeches are embedded within speeches. The narrator’s voice begins and ends the unit (highlighted in white, vv. 1–3b, 7); he cites YHWH’s speech to Moses (highlighted in light gray, vv. 3cd, 6b), which includes the words Moses is to relay to the people (highlighted in darker gray, vv. 4–6a).

ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 21–97.

3. See Jason S. DeRouchie, “Is the Order of the Canon Significant for Doing Biblical Theology?” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 157–70; Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Hermeneutical Significance of the Shape of the Christian Canon,” in *The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings: Studies in Evangelical Old Testament Hermeneutics in Honor of Duane A. Garrett*, ed. Andrew M. King, Joshua M. Philpot, and William R. Osborne (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021), 29–45.

4. For more on literary units and text hierarchy, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 87–104, 165–81; David Allan Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 21–35; Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph—A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003); Roy L. Heller, *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations: An Analysis of Clause Function in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Studies 55 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 98–127.

Fig. 1. Literary Units in Exodus 19:1–7 in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and ESV

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לָצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדֶּבֶר סִינַי: וַיִּסְעוּ מִרֶפְדִּים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדֶּבֶר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַהָר: וַיִּשְׁמַע עֲלֵיהֶם אֱלֹהִים</p> | <p>1 1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3 while Moses went up to God.</p> |
| <p>וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן־הָהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְהִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p> | <p>b The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying. c "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: d</p> |
| <p>אֲתֶם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲנִי אֶתְּכֶם עַל־כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֹא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי: וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּסְרַתֶּם אֶת־כִּבְיֹתֵי וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי סֹנְאָה סֹבְלֵת־עַמִּים כִּי־לִי קְדֹשׁ: וְאַתֶּם תְּהוּיִדְּלוּ סֹבְלַת־בְּתוּמִים וְנָטִי קְדֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p> | <p>4 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p> |
| <p>וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשָּׂם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה:</p> | <p>b These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." 7 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. c d</p> |

Exodus 19 opens with an asyndetic clause (i.e., a clause without any connector) that signals a major fresh beginning within the book. Since 3:12 Moses has anticipated the day when Israel would arrive at the mountain of God to worship him, and in chapter 19 they reach this destination. Following the initial asyndetic clause we get a chain of four *wayyiqtol* clauses in 19:2, and the initial paragraph concludes with non-*wayyiqtol* clause in 3a (i.e., ׀ + subject + *qatal*). Paragraph one includes only the voice of the narrator.

Paragraph two opens in 19:3b with a new subject: YHWH speaks from the mountain to Moses. The speech uses a *לֵאמֹר* frame, which marks the quotation as secondary.⁵ It could mean that we have only a synthesis of what God told Moses.

5. Secondary or “non-prototypical” speech frames may (1) summarize several similar speeches or one long speech, (2) present the statements of many people as one statement, (3) have one character in the story quote a prior statement by another character in the story, (4) come through an agent or prop rather than a full character or come from someone who is not actually present and participating in the current conversation, or (5) function as the official record of the principal points made by speakers. See DeRouchie, “Marked Primary and Secondary Citation Formulas,” in chapter 2 of *How to Understand*, 120–23; compare Cynthia L. Miller, “Discourse Functions in Quotative Frames in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter R. Bodine, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 155–82; Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 55 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

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script (S and L), it seems most likely that the translators of the multiple Hebrew manuscripts and the single Targum read “Egypt” as the place instead of as the people and therefore felt compelled to switch the preposition from לְ (“to”) to בְּ (“in”).

In problem “b” of 19:4 we read that the Greek Septuagint (G), the Syriac Peshitta (S), and the entire Targum tradition (T) including Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the Pentateuch (T^J) and the Palestinian Targum (T^P) read the compound preposition אַעַבְרָא (“as on”) rather than the single preposition אַעַבְרָא (“on”). This variant likely grew not out of an actual Hebrew text but more simply from a translator making explicit the implied simile in order to ensure readers recognized the metaphorical language and didn’t imagine something like Tolkien’s great eagles from *Lord of the Rings* rescuing the Israelites from the clutches of the Egyptians!

Problem “a” in 19:5 simply notes that the Septuagint (G) and Palestinian Targum (T^P) add אַעַבְרָא (“people”) into the text before אֲשֶׁר־אֶתְּנֶה (“treasured possession”). Because the Greek term consistently used to translate אֲשֶׁר־אֶתְּנֶה is the adjective περιούσιος (“special”) and not a noun, the inclusion of λαός was necessary to make sense of the clause. Hebrew and Greek are not equivalent languages, so two words were required to unpack what in Hebrew was represented by a single word. As with the previous text problems, there is no evidence here that a different Hebrew text including אַעַבְרָא stands behind what is found in the LXX. The Greek is just making a dynamic equivalent of the Hebrew.

4. *The Translation of Exodus 19:4–6*⁸

The final step in establishing the “Text” is to translate your passage and compare your work to other English translations. It’s important to note that very often a first draft of a translation will be very different than the final draft after all exegesis is complete. As we make fresh observations and new discoveries, they will challenge our initial decisions. Everything done at this stage is provisional. In figure 3, I compare several contemporary English translations with my initial translation of the reported speech in Exodus 19:4–6. After this, I offer some beginning observations and questions.

8. For more on translation, see Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau, eds., *Which Bible Translation Should I Use? A Comparison of 4 Major Recent Versions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012); Dave Brunn, *One Bible, Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 157–77.

| Fig. 3. Translations of Exodus 19:4–6a | DeRouchie's initial translation |
|---|---|
| <p>4 אַתֶּם רִאִים אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֵנָּה אֶחֱבֹא עַל־כַּנְפֵי יְשָׁרִים וְאֶבִּיא אֹתְכֶם אֵלַי׃</p> <p>5 וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־ בְּרִיתִי וְדִיתָם לִי כְּקֹלָה כְּקֹל־הַעַמִּים כִּי־לִי־ הָאָרֶץ׃</p> <p>6 וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיְדוּ־לִי מְמַלְכַת כְּהֹנֵם וְנָתַן־ לְךָ־יְהוָה</p> | <p>4 You have seen what I did to Egypt, and (how) I lifted you on wings of eagles, and (how) I brought you to myself. 5 And now, if you will indeed listen unto my voice and (then[?]) keep my covenant and (then[?]) be my (for me a[?]) treasured possession from (more than[?]) all the peoples, for (though[?]) all the earth is mine (for me[?]), 6 and (then[?]) you will be for me a (my[?]) royal priesthood and a holy nation.</p> |
| Young's Literal Translation (YLT) | NASB |
| <p>4 Ye--ye have seen that which I have done to the Egyptians, and I bear you on eagles' wings, and bring you in unto Myself.</p> <p>5 'And now, if ye really hearken to My voice, then ye have kept My covenant, and been to Me a peculiar treasure more than all the peoples, for all the earth [is] Mine; 6 and ye--ye are to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p> | <p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p> |
| ESV | NIV |
| <p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p> | <p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p> |

Key Observations on Exodus 19:4–6

- a. The explicit second masculine plural pronoun אַתֶּם (“you”) at the head of 19:4 is unnecessary syntactically but is likely present in order to mark the paragraph’s initiation, using a marked, non-default verb-pattern ([x] + *qatal*).⁹ It may also give added stress that it was the *Israelites* (“you!”) who saw God’s works.
- b. In 19:4, the first common singular *wayyiqtol* (*waw*-consecutive imperfect) verbs וָאֲשִׁיָּא (“and I lifted”) and וָאֶבִּיא (“and I brought”) appear to be building off the *qatal* (perfect) first common singular relative clause אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי (“what I did”). That is, Israel not only saw *what* God did but *how* he lifted them and *how* he brought them to himself.
- c. וְעַתָּה (“And now”) in 19:5 is an inference-marker,¹⁰ and the inference itself has both a marked protasis (-אם “if”) and unmarked apodosis (“then”).

9. For marked versus default clause patterns, see DeRouchie, “Discerning Sub-Units in Text-Blocks: Paragraph-Breaks,” in chapter 2 and “More on Marked and Unmarked Clauses” in chapter 5 of *How to Understand*, 109–16, 222–26. The marker [x] stands for any subject, object, or modifier in a clause; [x] cannot stand for either a finite verb or a conjunction.

10. See DeRouchie, “The Inference-Markers לָכֵן and וְעַתָּה,” in chapter 5 of *How to Understand*, 206–209.

Key Questions on Exodus 19:4–6

- a. As noted, אם (“if”) at the beginning of 19:5 signals a conditional protasis. Where does the apodosis begin? YLT begins it with the first *weqatal* (*waw*-consecutive perfect) וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם (“and you shall keep”), but most other English translations place it at the second *weqatal* (וְהָיִיתֶם “and you shall be”) (cf. KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB, NET Bible, ESV, NIV, CSB). It’s noteworthy that the majority view stretches way back to the 16th century, which could suggest a firmly fixed tradition rather than careful exegetical assessment.
- b. What is a תְּשׁוּבָה, rendered in the ESV of 19:5 as “treasured possession”?
- c. Does the fronted preposition מִן (“from”) in the phrase מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים in 19:5 express separation (i.e., “from all the peoples”) or comparison (i.e., “more than all the peoples”)?
- d. Does the כִּי clause in 19:5 function as a ground for what precedes (= “for/because,” so ESV) or as a concessive for what precedes or follows (= “though/although,” so NIV)?
- e. As at the front of 19:4, the וְאַתָּה (“and you”) in 19:6 is intrusive and unnecessary grammatically. Why is it part of the speech at this point?
- f. What is the significance of “a royal priesthood [*or* kingdom of priests] and a holy nation”?
- g. Do the various לְ prepositional phrases in 19:5–6 express divine possession (i.e., “mine”) or divine advantage (i.e., “to/for me”)? Most English translations treat the two occurrences in 19:5 as expressing possession and the single occurrence in 19:6 as expressing advantage.

As we proceed through our exegesis to theology, we will keep these observations and questions in mind. We have an initial translation and a good list of observations and questions from which to build. We are now ready to move from the “Text” stage into “Observation.”

B. Observation: “How is this passage communicated?”

5. Clause and Text Grammar in Exodus 19:4–6¹¹

The first step in “Observation” and the fifth step in the entire exegetical process is assessing the makeup and relationship of words, phrases, clauses, and larger text

11. For more on clause and text grammar, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An*

units. In Exodus 19:4–6 we have four areas to assess: (1) the demarcation of the protasis and apodosis; (2) the text hierarchy of the passage; (3) the specific function of the prepositions וְ and לְ in verses 5–6; and (4) the function of כִּי in verse 5.

Determining the Protasis and Apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6

In this section we want to consider where the apodosis (or “then” section) begins in Exodus 19:5–6. The protasis or “if” section of this two-part syntactic construction clearly starts with the אִם (“if”) in 19:5a (“If you will indeed listen unto my voice ...”). But where do we start the “then”? Our translation revealed three possibilities: vv. 5b, 5c, or 6a.

At times there is difficulty discerning the beginning of an apodosis because Hebrew usually doesn’t use an explicit conjunction like “then” or “therefore” to mark it. Instead, Hebrew relies on a mixture of content and grammatical signals. What we are looking for is a clear formal (i.e., grammatical) cue to identify the shift from protasis to apodosis—perhaps a new verb-pattern, a change in subject, or the use of an unnecessary explicit pronoun. So, let’s consider our three possibilities for the apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6. Figure 4 identifies where we left off our text-hierarchy, only having finalized the thought-flow through 19:4.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| אתם ראיתם | 4 | You have seen |
| אשר עשיתי למצרים | b | what I did to Egypt, |
| ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים | c | and how I lifted you on eagles’ wings, |
| ואבא אתכם אלי: | d | and how I brought you to myself. |
| ועתה | 5 | And now, |
| אם תשמעו בקולי | a | if you will indeed listen at my voice |
| ושמרתם את בריתי | b | and (ther[?]) keep my covenant |
| והייתם לי סגולה מקרב העמים | c | and (ther[?]) be my (for me a[?]) treasured possession from (more than[?]) all the peoples, |
| כי לי כל הארץ: | d | for (although[?]) all the earth is mine (for me[?]). |
| ואתם תהיו לי סגולה בתוכם וגי קדוש | 6 | and (ther[?]) you will be for me a (my[?]) royal priesthood and a holy nation. |

Option 1: Placing the Apodosis at 19:5b

The 1862 Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) placed the apodosis in 19:5b, directly following the אִם (“if”) protasis of 19:5a: “And now, if ye really hearken to My voice, then ye have kept My covenant, and been to me a peculiar treasure....” Positively, this

Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990); Ronald Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Lee M. Fields, *Hebrew for the Rest of Us: Using Hebrew Tools without Mastering Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 181–236.

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view includes a marked shift from the *yiqtol* תִּשְׁמְעוּ (“you will listen”) in the protasis of 19:5a to the *weqatal* וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם (“and you will keep”) in 19:5b. But the challenge is that, were 19:5b a continuation of the protasis, it would have looked exactly the same way. *Weqatal* usually follows *yiqtol* when a protasis extends over multiple clauses, so we ought to expect a greater marked shift than a simple change from *yiqtol* to *weqatal* in order to signal the start of the apodosis. With this, Davies adds that the language of keeping God’s covenant is “so closely parallel in meaning” to listening to his voice “that it must continue the protasis.”¹²

Option 2: Placing the Apodosis at 19:5c

Since the 1611 KJV, most English translations have placed the apodosis at 19:5c. For example, the NASB reads, “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine.” Indeed, according to Davies, from a semantic perspective, this is the only “real option.”¹³ However, note that 19:5c simply begins with the *weqatal* verb וְהָיִיתֶם (“and you will be”), which is the same conjugation represented in וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם (“and you will keep”) in 19:5b. There is no grammatical shift at all between 19:5b and 19:5c, and there are no other markers that would tell us that the apodosis should begin in 19:5c. This lack of signal calls into question the majority view. Indeed, this may be an instance where tradition rather than careful reading has guided most of the translations.

Option 3: Placing the Apodosis at 19:6a

What is noteworthy in 19:6a is the explicit presence of the unnecessary pronoun וְאַתֶּם (“and you [masculine plural]”) before the verb תִּהְיֶינָה (“you [masculine plural] will be”): “And *you* will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.” The inclusion of a lexicalized, unnecessary pronoun is exactly what we would expect to mark an apodosis where the main subject does not change. Davies claims that making Israel’s being or becoming God’s special treasure part of their responsibility makes little sense.¹⁴ However, I believe this is exactly what YHWH is calling for,¹⁵ as the parallel in Deuteronomy 26:17–19 makes clear.

Deuteronomy 26:17–19 stands as the climax to the Moab covenant, where God renews his relationship with the post-Sinai generation. Figure 5 shows my translation and basic outline of the passage. You’ll notice a number of allusions to Exodus 19:4–6.

12. John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 42.

13. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 42.

14. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 42.

15. In §7 below I will discuss the meaning of the phrase “treasured possession” and what exactly YHWH is calling for.

Fig. 5. DeRouchie's Translation and Outline of Deuteronomy 26:17–19¹⁶

Today you have caused YHWH to declare to be your God and (for you) to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his judgments, and to heed his voice. 18 And today YHWH has caused you to declare to be a people of treasured possession, just as he declared to you, and to keep all his commandments, 19 and (for him) to place you high over all nations for praise and for fame and for beauty and to make you a people holy to YHWH your God, just as he declared.

- 1. You have today caused YHWH to declare (v. 17):**
 - a. YHWH's commitment: to be God to you
 - b. YHWH's expectations:
 - i. To walk in his ways
 - ii. To keep his statutes, commands, and judgments
 - iii. To heed his voice
- 2. YHWH has today caused you to declare (vv. 18–19):**
 - a. Israel's commitment (v. 18):
 - i. To be a treasured possession for YHWH
 - ii. To keep all his commands
 - b. Israel's expectations (v. 19)
 - i. To set Israel high above the nations
 - ii. To be a holy people to YHWH

There are two parties in the covenant (YHWH and Israel), and here each party's readiness to enter into covenant moves the other to formalize both his covenantal commitments (obligations) and expectations (stipulations). The commitments of one party are equivalent to the expectations of the other. Focusing on the terms that are parallel with Exodus 19:5–6, in Deuteronomy 26 we see God *expecting* Israel to “keep” covenantal statutes, commands, and judgments and to “heed [ESV = obey] his voice” (26:17). We also see Israel *committing* to “be a treasured possession” and “to keep” the covenantal commands (26:18). YHWH calls Israel *to do* these things; they are not what Israel is hoping they will become. These divine expectations and human commitments suggest that all three main clauses in Exodus 19:5 serve as the protasis and that only in 19:6a do we arrive at the apodosis: “If Israel will surely heed his voice and keep his covenant and be a treasured possession—living as if

16. Deuteronomy 26:17–18 contain the only instances of the Hiphil of אמר (“to say”) in the Hebrew OT. The default meaning behind the Hiphil is causative, but most translators render the form as a simple declarative (see Walter T. Claassen, “The Declarative-Estimative Hiph’il,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 2 [1972]: 5–16). In contrast, my rendering retains the causative force, reading it within the covenantal ratification context. As such, Israel first *causes* YHWH to declare both obligation and stipulation, and then YHWH *causes* Israel to declare both obligation and stipulation. A more periphrastic rendering would be, “Today you have ratified YHWH’s declaration. . . . Today, YHWH has ratified your declaration. . . .” My proposal is adapted from Steven Ward Guest, *Deuteronomy 26:16–19 as the Central Focus of the Covenantal Framework of Deuteronomy* (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 72–129, esp. 77–88; however, I disagree with Guest’s treatment of “treasured possession” in verse 18 (pages. 118–19). My rendering is somewhat comparable to the NRSV: “Today you have obtained the LORD’s agreement.... Today the LORD has obtained your agreement” (Deut 26:17–18). It also similar to Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 185–86; and Daniel I. Block, “The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deut 26:16–19),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 648 (2005): 387–405.

they are valued by God, *then* they will fulfill their calling as a royal priesthood and holy nation” (author’s paraphrase). Notice how Deuteronomy 26:19 includes Israel’s becoming “a holy” people in their expectation. This too indicates that Exodus 19:6 is indeed the apodosis. We can thus display a basic outline of Exodus 19:5–6 like this:

1. **Protasis:** “If you will ...” (v. 5)
 - a. Heed God’s voice
 - b. Keep his covenant
 - c. Be his treasured possession
2. **Apodosis:** “Then you shall be ...” (v. 6)
 - a. Royal priesthood
 - b. Holy nation

The Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4–6

If we are on track with the placement of the protasis and apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6, we can expand our text-hierarchy of the passage. Laying out the hierarchy of clauses helps us visualize the relationship of all the parts. It helps us differentiate subordination, embedding, and the various text-blocks.

What you must remember as you visually represent your structural analysis through a text-hierarchy is that you mark subordination by indenting and that in given text-blocks you should always be able to follow the chain of וְ (“and”)-fronted clauses to their source, whether it is an asyndetic clause or a subordinate clause marked by a subordinate conjunction. Our exegetical decisions to date lead us to the breakdown shown in figure 6:

Fig. 6. Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4–6

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| אתם ראיתם | 4 | You have seen |
| אשר עשיתי למצרים | b | what I did to Egypt, |
| ואניא אהבכם על-כנפי נשרים | c | and how I lifted you on eagle’s wings, |
| ואנא אהבם אלי: | d | and how I brought you to myself. |
| ועתה | 5 | And now, |
| אם-שקוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי | | if you will indeed listen unto my voice |
| ושמרתם את-בריתִי | b | and keep my covenant |
| והייתם לי סגולה סגולת-תַּעֲשִׂים | c | and be my (for me a?) treasured possession from (more than?) all the peoples. |
| וְ כִּי-לִי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ: | d | [?] for (though?) all the earth is mine (for me?), |
| ואתם תהיו לי סגולת כהנים וְעַם קדוש | 6 | then you will be to me a (my?) royal priesthood and a holy nation. |

One feature of my text-hierarchy worth mentioning is that, with both וְעַתָּה (“and now”) in 19:5a and וְאַתֶּם (“and you [masculine plural]”) in 19:6a, the conjunction וְ (“and”) is not linked to anything before it. Scholars call this the “*waw* of apodosis,”

which usually stands as an optional marker of the main consequence clause following the subordinate protasis: “if-then, when-then, because-*therefore*.” When ׀ signals an apodosis, this coordinator does not join elements of equal syntactic value. The protasis is always subordinate to the apodosis, and I have identified this subordination through indenting both the unmarked protasis of 19:4 and the embedded ׀-protasis in 19:5.¹⁷

The Function of ׀ and ׀ in Exodus 19:5–6

We are now ready to clarify the function of the single ׀ preposition and three ׀ prepositions in Exodus 19:5–6. Was Israel to be a treasured possession to God in distinction “from” all the peoples of the earth (separative ׀) or “more than” all the peoples of the earth (comparative ׀)? Two arguments stand against the comparative reading and therefore support the view that the preposition expresses a relationship of separation between Israel and the rest of the peoples. First, elsewhere Scripture only designates Israel and the church as a “treasured possession” in relation to God (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal 3:17; Ps 135:4; Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 1:14). Indeed, as we will see in §7, the very meaning of תְּרֻמָּה (“treasured possession”) implies a unique and distinctive status. The translation “more than” requires that the peoples of the earth were still, in some lower sense, God’s special treasure, but this is *not* what the rest of the Bible teaches. Second, rendering ׀ as comparative sets us up to read the ׀ as a concessive statement (i.e., “though, although”). The result would be something like, “You shall be to me a treasured possession *more than* all the peoples, *though* all the earth is mine.” However, as the next unit highlights, a concessive translation of ׀ as “though, although” is highly unlikely, and without the contrary-to-fact statement, a translation of ׀ as “more than” makes little sense. We should translate ׀ as “from,” highlighting YHWH’s call for Israel to stand distinct *from* the nations.

The prepositional phrase ׀ occurs in 19:5cd and 19:6a, and each instance most likely expresses either divine possession (“mine”) or divine advantage (“to/for me”). Is Israel to be *YHWH’s* treasured possession or a treasured possession *to YHWH*? Is all the earth *God’s*, or is all the earth *for God*? Will Israel’s obedience result in their being *YHWH’s* royal priesthood and holy nation, or are God’s people to become a royal priesthood and a holy nation *for God’s sake*? The exegetical decisions here are not easy, but thankfully we can say that all these options are true teachings in

17. Richard C. Steiner has proposed that even in conditional sentences the “*waw* of apodosis” may actually still be a coordinator through an abbreviated form of logic. He proposes that the pattern “If A, then B” is equivalent to “If A, then A *and* B,” which both English and Hebrew can express as “If A, then *also* B” (cf. Lev 6:21 with Jer 31:37; 33:20–21; Zech 3:7; Steiner, “Does the Biblical Hebrew Conjunction -ו Have Many Meanings, One Meaning, or No Meaning at All?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 [2000]: 264). While Steiner’s proposal provides a likely explanation for the origin of the *waw* of apodosis, one struggles to see explicit patterns in biblical Hebrew for the use or non-use of the *waw* of apodosis. Its presence or absence seems optional in most two-part syntactic constructions.

Scripture. Nevertheless, the question is, “What exactly is the Lord calling for or declaring in *this passage*?”

As suggested in the major translations, the two instances of לִי in 19:5 are probably possessive, stressing that Israel was to exist as *God’s* special treasure and that the whole earth was the *Lord’s*.¹⁸ Only this interpretation counters the unnecessary redundancy of, “You shall be a treasured possession *to YHWH* because all the earth exists *for me*.” The use of לִי in 19:6a, however, may be different. Israel’s priesthood was always *for YHWH’s* sake (Exod 28:1; 1 Chr 23:13), designed to promote his holiness and display his beauty. Most translations render 19:6a as, “And you shall be *to me* a royal priesthood and a holy nation,” and this pattern seems sound.

The Function of כִּי in Exodus 19:5

The final major grammatical question in Exodus 19:5 relates to whether the particle כִּי marks 19:5d as supplying a logical ground for what precedes (i.e., “for, because”) or signals a concessive relationship with what precedes or follows (i.e., “though, although”).¹⁹ Compare the ESV and NIV translations.

Fig. 7. The Function of כִּי in Exodus 19:4–6

| MT | ESV | NIV |
|--|-----|---|
| וְעַתָּה אִם יִשְׁמַע הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּקוֹלִי | 5 | 5 |
| וְשָׁמַעְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי | b | Now if you obey me fully and keep |
| וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֻלְחָה סֻלְחַת הַעַמִּים | c | my covenant, then out of all nations |
| כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: | d | you will be my treasured possession |
| | | Although the whole earth is mine. 6 |
| וְאַתֶּם הֵייתֶם־לִי מְלָכֹת כֹּהֲנִים וְעַם קָדוֹשׁ | 6 | 6 |
| | | to me a kingdom of priests and a holy |
| | | you will be for me a kingdom of priests |
| | | and a holy nation. |

The NIV renders the clause in 19:5d (כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ) concessively with what follows: “*Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” While כִּי־גַם (“even though”) is the more natural way in Hebrew to express concession (e.g., Isa 1:15; Ps 23:4), scholars recognize that a כִּי clause can bear concessive force when it precedes the main clause (e.g., Jer 51:53; Ezek 11:16).²⁰ A strength of the NIV’s rendering is that it explains the explicit subject וְאַתֶּם (“and you”) in 19:6a by seeing it as emphasizing contrast with what precedes—as if God were saying, “Although I own all the world, *you alone* are my kingdom of priests.” Furthermore, the NIV translation of 19:5d–6a reads smoothly, treating

18. So, too, Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 3, *Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart: Kohlhamer, 2000), 23–25, 54–57, 77.

19. For a more thorough assessment of the syntax and meaning with different conclusions, especially due to his alternative placement of the apodosis, see Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 55–60.

20. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed., *Subsidia Biblica* 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 602 (§171.b).

the last sentence of the speech as an inner paragraph restatement of 19:5c. In this interpretation, being God's "treasured possession" (19:5c) is parallel to Israel's being a "royal priesthood and a holy nation" (19:6a) whereas "out of all nations" (19:5c) is parallel to "the whole earth is mine" (19:5d).

In spite of these strengths, the NIV reading fully depends on viewing the statement about the "treasured possession" in 19:5c as the start of the apodosis. And I already showed the unlikelihood of this reading, seeing as there are no grammatical signals that suggest any major change happens in 19:5c. The explicit subject וְאַתָּה ("and you") in 19:6a marks the start of the apodosis, and, therefore, we should read the כִּי as supplying support to what precedes. Scholars believe that the concessive force is unlikely whenever כִּי follows its main clause,²¹ so we are on most stable ground to treat the כִּי as causal (i.e., "because, for"), supplying a reason why Israel needed to live as a treasured possession.

The offspring of Abraham were to exist with a conscious sense that they were God's special treasure from all peoples *because* all the earth is the Lord's. How does God's ownership of all the earth supply a reason for Israel's being a treasured possession? It could mean two different realities, each of which may be true in this case. *First*, for YHWH to own all things and yet to place special affection on Israel should move them to a distinct awareness that they are valued. In paraphrase, "Because I own all things and yet treasure you uniquely, live as if you are treasured." Much later, the Lord would highlight through Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). And again, Moses elsewhere stressed, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut 10:14–16; cf. 4:8–10, 33–35; 28:1). Israel's unique position among all the peoples of the earth placed certain demands upon them. *Second*, because God had laid claim to all the earth and was calling Israel as an agent through whom he would make himself known, the people's living with a recognition of their special status before God would have served as a means for God's global sovereignty to be re-realized. From this perspective, we could paraphrase the whole: "Because I deserve allegiance from all the earth, I am giving you a sacred task, part of which is for you to exist as a treasured possession among all peoples. As you revel in my closeness and take pleasure in your sonship, you will in turn point the rest of the world back to the only sovereign, savior, and satisfier. And they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (cf. Deut 26:18–19; Jer 33:9; Zeph 3:19–20; Zech 9:16–17; Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:11–12). Either of these interpretations fit the grammar and calling in these verses.

21. Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 602n1; Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (1986): 198–9, 205–7.

We have concluded that כִּי in 19:5 is best read causally (“because, for”). When the conclusions from the last three sections are joined, the result is the following text-hierarchy and translation for Exodus 19:5–6:

Fig. 8. Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:5–6

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| וְעַתָּה | 5 | And now, |
| אם־שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶת־קוֹלִי | | if you will indeed listen unto my voice |
| וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי | b | and keep my covenant |
| וְהָיִיתָ לִּי סֵגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים | c | and be my treasured possession from all the peoples, |
| כִּי־לִּי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: | d | ‡ for all the earth is mine, |
| וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לִּי כֹהֵנִים וְעַם קֹדֶשׁ | 6 | then you will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation. |

6. Argument-Tracing in Exodus 19:4–6²²

Through observing further, the interpreter must now finish tracing the literary argument and create a message-driven outline that is tied to the passage’s main point. In creating an argument diagram, I will trace the various coordinate and subordinate relationships in Exodus 19:4–6 using the semantic categories and symbols from Biblearc.com (see fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Types of Propositional Relationships

| Coordinate | Subordinate | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Restatement | Distinct Statement |
| Series (S) | Action-Manner (Ac/Mn) | Ground (G) |
| Progression (P) | Comparison (Cf) | Inference (-) |
| Alternate (A) | Negative-Positive (-/+) | Bilateral (BL) |
| Both-And (B&) | Question-Answer (Q/A) | Action-Result (Ac/Res) |
| | Idea-Explanation (Id/Exp) | Action-Purpose (Ac/Pur) |
| | General-Specific (Gn/Sp) | Conditional (If/Th) |
| | Fact-Interpretation (Ft/In) | Temporal (T) |
| | Contrary Statement | Locative (L) |
| | Concessive (Csv) | Anticipation-Fulfillment (Ant/F) |
| | Situation-Response (Sit/R) | |

Analyze literary features and arrangement and create an argument diagram

Before completing our tracing of the argument in Exodus 19:4–6, it is helpful to recall our text-hierarchy in order to visualize the passage’s main sections.

22. For more on argument-tracing, see <http://www.Biblearc.com>; Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 87–104, 149–81; Ryken and Longman, *Complete Literary Guide*; DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 237–68.

Fig. 10. Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4-6

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| אתם ראיתם | 4 | You have seen |
| אשר עשיתי למצרים | b | what I did to Egypt, |
| ואניא אהבם על-כנפי נשרים | c | and how I lifted you on eagle's wings, |
| ואבא אהבם אלי: | d | and how I brought you to myself. |
| ועתה | 5 | And now, |
| אם-ישקעו תשמעו בקלי | | if you will indeed listen unto my voice |
| ושמרתם את-בריתי | b | and keep my covenant |
| והייתם לי סגולה מקל-העמים | c | and be my treasured possession from all the peoples, |
| כי-לי כל-הארץ: | d | ↑ for all the earth is mine, |
| ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וְעַם קדוש | 6 | then you will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation. |

Note that 19:4 recalls YHWH's great deliverance of Israel from Egypt. And then, with the inference-marker וְעַתָּה (“and now”) in 19:5a, 19:5–6 draw a conclusion from the great salvation related to Israel's sacred task. The inference section itself has two units: the conditional protasis in 19:5 (“if”) and the apodosis in 19:6 (“then”). Because God saved Israel, if they will heed his voice, keep his covenant, and be his treasured possession from all the earth, then they will serve for him as a royal priesthood and holy nation. We can now display these various relationships through an arc (fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Arc of Exodus 19:4–6

Our first step is to distinguish the understood *Ground* [G] in 19:4 from the *Inference* (:.) in 19:5–6. There is no כִּי (“because, for”) in 19:4, but we do find וְעַתָּה (“and now”) in 19:5, which identifies the inference.

Within 19:4a we have the initial statement that Moses's audience had seen something. This is the *Idea* (Id), which is then unpacked through the *Explanation*

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(Exp) given in the compound relative clauses in 19:4b–d. A *Progression* (P) is evident: They saw or experienced (1) what God did to Egypt, and (2) how he carried them, and then (3) brought them to himself. Now they were with God at his mountain, and he identifies the implications of this reality in 19:5–6.

The inference section has a conditional protasis in 19:5 and an apodosis in 19:6, which I identify with *If-Then* (If-Th). The “if” section contains a progression of three actions that appear to serve as the means by which Israel will reach God’s goal of them serving as a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Later we will consider more what this task actually means, but here I want to note the type of condition that is evident. I could say, “If I fly on the airplane, I will arrive in Chicago.” Here the arrival in Chicago is an ultimate goal not enjoyed until *after* the flight is complete. In contrast, I could also say, “If I fly on the airplane, I will get some extended time to read.” Here the apodosis is fulfilled while the condition is being met, not after. While I am flying, I am getting to read. This latter example clarifies the type of conditional relationship evident in Exodus 19:5–6. At the very time while Israel is pursuing God by heeding his voice, keeping his covenant, and existing as his treasured possession, the people will be serving as a royal priesthood and a holy nation on behalf of God for the sake of the world. The apodosis identifies the God-honoring calling, and the protasis the means for fulfilling the calling.²³

The final arc is between 19:5cd, with 19:5d providing the *Ground* (G) or reason for 19:5c. Israel must serve as God’s treasured possession amid the earth, *because* all the earth is God’s. As I already noted, the logic here appears to be that Israel bears a God-exalting calling and that their role of serving as God’s treasured people is part of YHWH’s means for reclaiming his rightful place as the recognized and praised Lord of the earth. Because all the world is indeed his, Israel must complete their purpose of reflecting and representing YHWH’s supremacy over the world.

Draft an exegetical outline

Unlike many outlines, an exegetical outline highlights the passage’s main message along with drawing attention to the relationship of all the parts. I begin by crafting a basic logical outline of the passage, then identify the main purpose and main idea, and then use these elements to draft the exegetical outline.

Draft a basic logical outline of the passage.

23. In Gentry’s words, “The conditional sentence is proclaiming the privileged status of Israel inherent in the covenant relationship.” Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 351–52.

Fig. 12. Basic Logical Outline of Exodus 19:4-6

- I. God Redeems Israel from Egypt (v. 4)
- II. Implication ("And now"): Israel bears a calling to make much of God (vv. 5-6)
 - A. The condition ("if") (v. 5)
 - 1. Heed God's voice
 - 2. Keep God's covenant
 - 3. Be God's treasured possession in the context of the world
 - B. The result ("then") (v. 6)
 - 1. Be a royal priesthood
 - 2. Be a holy nation

Clarify the main purpose of the passage.

Fig. 13. Main Purpose of Exodus 19:4-6

To motivate Israel to mediate and display God's greatness and worth in response to God's gracious redemption and by means of a lifestyle of radical God-centeredness.

State the main idea of the passage in a single sentence.

Fig. 14. Main Idea of Exodus 19:4-6

In response to God's gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living.

Reword the basic outline into an exegetically grounded, message-driven outline.

Fig. 15. Exegetical Outline of Exodus 19:4-6

- | | |
|---|--|
| You have seen what I did to Egypt and how I lifted you on eagle's wings, and how I brought you to myself. 5 And now, if you will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be my treasured possession from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine, 6 then you will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. The Basis of God's Calling for His People: God's Deliverance (v. 4) II. The Nature of God's Calling for His People: To Exalt God in the World (vv. 5-6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The means for fulfilling the calling to exalt God in the world: radical God-centered living (v. 5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heed God's voice 2. Keep God's covenant 3. Exist as God's treasured possession in the context of the world B. The essence of the calling to exalt God in the world (v. 6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Serving as a royal priesthood: mediate God's greatness and worth 2. Serving as a holy nation: display God's greatness and worth |
|---|--|

While I will comment more about this later, there is an analogy between the structure of grace in the old covenant and the structure of grace in the new. In the old covenant, God graciously redeemed Israel from Egypt and, only in light of this, called them to a life of radical obedience and witness in the world. Following God in obedience was not the means for getting saved from slavery but the proper response to being saved. This is the structure of grace we see in the new covenant as well. God graciously redeems us in Christ and only then calls us to radical Christ-centered living. We bring nothing to our initial salvation. Only after a disciple is reborn does he become an obedient follower of all Jesus commanded.

7. A Word and Concept Study from Exodus 19:5²⁴

The next step in the exegetical process and the last step in “Observation” is to clarify the meaning of key words, phrases, and concepts. After choosing a word to study, one must discover the range of meaning for the particular Hebrew word in the rest of the OT (external data) and then determine the meaning of the Hebrew word within the specific target text (internal data).

One of the words upon which the meaning of Exodus 19:5 hangs is *תְּצַנֵּף* (S 5459; G/K 6035), which the ESV renders “treasured possession.” In previous sections, we finalized our translation of 19:5 as follows: “If you will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be my treasured possession from all the peoples...” The term *תְּצַנֵּף* shows up eight times in the OT (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; 1 Chr 29:3; Ps 135:4; Eccl 2:8; Mal 3:17). Its first use in Scripture is in our text, which, as we will see, appears to have impacted the majority of other occurrences, thus showing the foundational role Exodus 19:4–6 played in shaping Israel’s self-understanding.

External data

I have classified the eight passages containing *תְּצַנֵּף* into two groups: (1) non-theological uses and (2) theological uses. This distinction is important, for God’s theological use of the term in our text is most probably applying in a spiritual or religious context how the greater society was using the term in everyday life—its more common or secular use.

Common, non-theological uses (2x)

Our first example comes from Ecclesiastes 2:8, where the Preacher, reflecting on his kingship in Jerusalem, declares, “I also gathered for myself silver and gold *and the treasure of kings* [וְיִסְגַּלְתָּ מִלְּכִיָּם] and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.” Similarly, in 1 Chronicles 29:3, King David asserts of the temple, “Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided

24. For more on word and concept studies, see John H. Walton, “Principles for Productive Word Study,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 1:161–70; Fields, “What Do You Mean?—Hebrew Word Studies,” in *Hebrew for the Rest of Us*, 221–33; DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 269–96. For key tools for word and concept studies, see <http://www.accordancebible.com>; <https://www.logos.com>; Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson, *The Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Study Edition*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, rev. one-volume ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2003); William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

for the holy house, I have a *treasure* [תְּגִלָּה] of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God.”

In both of these texts, the תְּגִלָּה appears to be costly, valued, private property of the king that is normally reserved for his sole use and special purposes. Not only this, both instances show that the property is movable—not palaces but treasures associated with silver and gold that could be gathered from others or given for the building of the temple on the king’s own prerogative. Ecclesiastes 2:8 may also add that the treasury is something personally gained.

In contrast to the narrow focus of תְּגִלָּה, we find in 1 Chronicles 27:25–31 a list of all the stewards who were over King David’s “property” (רְכוּשׁ), which is the broadest term for one’s possessions or goods. For David this meant his entire royal estate reaching over the entire kingdom, including all treasuries, workers of the fields for tilling the soil, vineyards, produce from the vineyards for the wine cellars, olive and sycamore trees in the Shephelah, stores of oil, herds that pastured in Sharon and in the valleys, camels, donkeys, and flocks. Because the text distinguishes “the king’s treasuries” (אֲצֻרֹת הַמְּלָכָה) from those “treasuries” in the country, the cities, the villages, and towers, it seems likely that the תְּגִלָּה was restricted to the private physical but non-living wealth he retained in his personal “treasury of the king.”

Synthesis: Based on these texts, the common, every-day use of תְּגִלָּה appears to have been “a king’s costly, valued, private, movable, non-living, personally gained property normally reserved for his sole use and special purposes.”

Theological uses (5x + Exodus 19:5)

We first assess the *Law*, which is the canonical section in which our passage falls, the bulk of which Moses authored. Outside Exodus 19:5, the initial few references are all from Deuteronomy. The first two are worded almost identically and both are tied to a reaffirmation of Israel’s identity as a holy people, which, with תְּגִלָּה, alludes to Exodus 19:5–6. Deuteronomy 7:6 gives the reason why Israel must utterly destroy all Canaanite worship implements: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his *treasured possession* [תְּגִלָּה], out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” Similarly, Deuteronomy 14:2 stresses why God’s people must not engage in pagan worship practices: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his *treasured possession* [תְּגִלָּה], out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” As in Exodus 19:5, YHWH’s intent for Israel to be his תְּגִלָּה is something not true of all other peoples on the planet. God is calling Israel to live out a distinct status. The text stresses that YHWH *chose* Israel to be a תְּגִלָּה, which highlights the value he places on his people.

We already encountered the next text in our earlier grammatical discussion of the protasis and apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6. Deuteronomy 26:18 reads, “And the

LORD has today confirmed your declaration to be a people of treasured possession [תְּרֻמָּה], just as he declared to you, and to keep all his commandments” (author’s translation). Here, once again, living as YHWH’s תְּרֻמָּה is God’s expectation for Israel.

We next assess the Prophets and Writings. While YHWH called Israel to holiness and to serve as his royal priesthood by pursuing him wholly, the history of Israel showed that their hearts were far from God, just as Moses said they would be.

The LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet ... but they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them.... Therefore the LORD was very angry. (2 Kgs 17:13–15, 18; cf. Deut 31:27, 29)

Nevertheless, YHWH’s fury was not his final expression. Indeed, out of his great compassion (Deut 4:30–31), the Lord would one day empower a remnant from Israel to be who they could not be on their own. *First*, we read in Malachi 3:17, “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my *treasured possession* [תְּרֻמָּה], and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.” No harm will come to those who are God’s. He will protect them, but he will punish the wicked. Malachi goes on to distinguish the righteous from the wicked as “one who serves God and one who does not serve him” (v. 18). To be God’s תְּרֻמָּה—his “treasured possession”—means that you will be his servant. When, therefore, YHWH charges Israel in Exodus 19:5 to “be my treasured possession” (וְהָיִיתֶם לִי תְּרֻמָּה), it seems likely that he is calling them to live in his service.

Second, Psalm 135:3–4 declares, “Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant! For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel *as his own possession* [לְתֻרְמָתוֹ].” The final book of the Psalter celebrates the God who restores and renews in anticipation of his full Davidic kingdom fulfillment.²⁵ Psalm 132 has just reaffirmed the Davidic covenant, and Psalms 133 and 134 celebrate the unity of the righteous and the hope for God’s blessing. Into this context Psalm 135 reaffirms YHWH’s claim on his own: “The LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel *as his own possession*.” The wording is more specific and personal than in earlier texts, using the third masculine singular suffix to emphasize that Israel is *his*.

25. For this reading, see Michael K. Searly, “The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 209–17.

Internal assessment: The meaning of הַגָּדֹה in Exodus 19:5

The non-theological uses of הַגָּדֹה in Ecclesiastes 2:8 and 1 Chronicles 29:3 pointed to the word meaning “a king’s costly, valued, private, movable, non-living, personally-gained property normally reserved for his sole use and special purposes.” הַגָּדֹה was indeed the king’s “treasured possession.”

The theological uses of הַגָּדֹה suggest that this is exactly how Israel was to think of themselves in their relationship with God. They were his costly, valued, private, personally gained property reserved for his special purpose. They stood distinct from the world as his special treasure (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2). Their responsibility was to live like it, which meant fleeing wickedness and serving YHWH (Mal 3:17). In the context of celebrating God’s greatness and the hope of complete Davidic kingdom restoration, the psalmist affirms YHWH’s claim on Israel, his treasure (Ps 135:4). The Lord also promises that one day he would bring about by his power what the people could not accomplish on their own (Mal 3:17). They would live as his servants and by this mediate and magnify his greatness to the world.

The LXX translates הַגָּדֹה in Exodus 19:5 as λαὸς περιούσιος, which is the same phrase Paul employs in Titus 2:14, where he highlights that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession [λαὸν περιούσιον] who are zealous for good works.” Thus, the church is now fulfilling the God-honoring calling of Israel by the power supplied through Christ. Jesus mediated and magnified the majesty of God perfectly in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, and now in him we are enabled to do the same.

Similarly, in a context of calling the church to holiness (1 Pet 1:14–16) and stressing that those who come to Christ “are being built up ... to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5), Peter alludes to Exodus 19:5, using περιποίησις, which means the same thing—a “treasured possession” of God: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *a people for his own possession* [λαὸς εἰς περιποίησις], that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” In Exodus 19 Israel’s call to be a “treasured possession” was only potential, but in the church of Christ it is already being realized. In Jesus we are enabled to live as God’s “treasured possession,” serving him in the strength he supplies (1 Pet 4:11), and by this we are functioning as a royal priesthood and a holy nation under our king, to the praise of his glorious grace.

C. Context

“Where does this passage fit?”

8. *The Historical Context of Exodus 19:4–6*²⁶

With step 8 we move from “Observation” to “Context.” As we turn our eye to the broader frame in which our passage rests, we first need to understand the historical situation from which the author composed the text and identify any historical details that the author mentions or assumes. Here we ask questions of Who? When? Where? Why? How? and especially What?

In historical narrative texts, it is often difficult to discern the difference between historical and literary context, seeing as the history is bound up in the narrative itself. Such is the case as we approach Exodus 19:4–6. In light of this challenge, I have decided to only deal with the most general historical data, and I will leave a more thorough analysis of the Exodus narrative for the Literary Context discussion. As we approach Historical Context, I have chosen to focus on two areas: (1) The event of the exodus, which 19:4 tells us grounds Israel’s God-honoring calling; and (2) the nature and significance of the “covenant” mentioned in 19:5.

The Exodus

After the Israelites dwelt in Egypt’s east Delta for an extended time (Exod 12:40–41),²⁷ God commissioned Moses to lead a deliverance before the eyes of both Israel and the

26. For more on historical context, see James A. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Eugen H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Walter C. Kaiser and Paul D. Wegner, *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016); Ian W. Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 299–322.

27. Exodus 12:40–41 tells us that Israel sojourned in Egypt 430 years, and then “at the end of the 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.” While many scholars believe this means 430 years from the time Jacob entered Egypt to the time of the exodus, I believe there is a strong case for viewing the 430 years as a reference from when Abram first entered Egypt (Gen 12:10–20). Jewish tradition, John Calvin, and some contemporary scholars like John Bimson and David Rohl propose the time from Jacob’s entry until the exodus was only 210 years, based on genealogical data and other specific statements from the biblical texts. In my own assessment, at least five observations support this view: (1) Kohath was born before the entry into Egypt (Gen 46:12, 26), and his son Amram (Exod 6:18) was the father of Moses and Aaron (6:20). Kohath lived 133 years (6:18), Amram lived 137 years (6:20), and Moses was 80 years old at the Exodus (7:7). This means that *at the very most* Israel was in Egypt for 350 years (133 + 137 + 80), and that assumes the unlikely possibility that each man had his son in the

world. This fulfilled his earlier promise to Abram in Genesis 15:13–14: “Then the LORD said to him, ‘Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions’” (NIV).

Scholars are not united on the dating of the exodus, partly because Scripture does not name the Pharaoh of the exodus. A straightforward reading of the biblical text, especially 1 Kings 6:1, would put the exodus in 1446 BC, probably during Egypt’s 18th Dynasty during the reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1450–1425 BC). While there is much corroborative evidence for the Israelite exodus in 1446 BC,²⁸ there is no explicit evidence in Egypt’s materials that they, as the greatest empire on earth, were drastically humbled by the God of a massive band of foreign slaves. But this should not even be expected, for we know of no kings in the ancient world who were quick to retain for posterity stories of their own humiliation. What we do know is that the biblical details associated with Egyptian culture line up perfectly and that nothing in Egyptian history counteracts the Bible’s claims.²⁹ Finally, as for Amenhotep II, we know that he began his kingship during Egypt’s zenith of global power and influence. He was a successful military warrior and made several campaigns into Canaan. But then, for whatever reason, he abruptly stopped his military activity. While not

year of his death. More likely is the fact that the nation’s time in Egypt was much shorter. (2) The 400 years promised in Genesis 15:13 most likely refers *not* to the length of Egyptian oppression but to the time until the oppression will cease—about 400 years from the Abrahamic covenant. Indeed, we know the oppression was not 430 years, for Israel lived in solace under Joseph for many years. (3) Paul’s statement that the Law came 430 years after “the promises were made to Abraham” (Gal 3:16–17) implies a shorter Egyptian sojourn, for his point of departure is the promises to *Abraham* and not the patriarchs in general or the entrance of Jacob and his sons into Egypt. (4) In Acts 13:17–20 Paul states that “all this” from the choosing of the patriarchs through the period of the judges took “about 450” years. If the time reference indeed refers to everything mentioned in verses 17–20, the actual period from Jacob’s entrance into Egypt to the exodus was *not* 430 years but much, much shorter. (5) While less specific, Acts 7:17–19 states that already after Joseph’s death but before Egypt actually enslaved the Israelites “the time of the [Gen 15:13] promise [fulfillment] drew near.” This would be strange to say if there was still many centuries of enslavement ahead, but if the enslavement happened only toward the end of the Egyptian sojourn, Stephen’s stress on the “nearness” of the fulfillment makes more sense. How then do we reconcile the 430 year period in Exodus 12:40–41? I propose that Moses’s “430 years” could be counting from the time when the father of their nation (Abraham) first sojourned in Egypt, which happens as early as Genesis 12:10–20 around Abram’s seventy-fifth year, soon after his initial entrance into Canaan. The promise of 400 years in Genesis 15:13 is not associated with a specific age of Abram but came somewhere between his seventy-fifth and eighty-sixth years (Gen 12:4; 16:16).

28. See Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History: From Earliest Times to 1000 B.C.*, Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); John Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 2nd ed. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 5 (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1981); David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015); Timothy P. Mahoney with Steven Law, *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015).

29. See especially Aling, *Egypt and Bible History*; James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 241–312.

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conclusive, the Dream Stele of Thutmose IV, son and successor of Amenhotep II, notes that Thutmose IV was not the firstborn son of Amenhotep II, which could be an allusion to the tenth plague on the firstborn of Egypt.

What is most significant with respect to this piece of historical context is that Exodus 19:4–6 assumes with much of the rest of Scripture that the exodus actually occurred in space and time. Israel’s God YHWH miraculously and with great power delivered them personally and visibly, making certain that all future deliverance was sure to come.

The Covenant

In his excellent co-authored work *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Peter Gentry has noted that Scripture applies the term כְּרִיתָה (“covenant”) to numerous oath-bound commitments: international treaties (Josh 9:6; 1 Kgs 15:19), clan alliances (Gen 14:13), personal agreements (Gen 31:44), national agreements (Jer 34:8–10), and loyalty agreements (1 Sam 20:14–17), including marriage.³⁰ In another exceptional study titled *Marriage as a Covenant*, Gordon Hugenberger helpfully defines “covenant” as “an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation under oath.”³¹ Or, as Thomas Schreiner notes, covenant the Bible’s term for “a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other,” often with God as the witness.³² These definitions fit well the nature of covenantal relationships that we see throughout both the Bible and the ancient world. At the heart of a covenant is a relationship—one established by choice and not by birth, though it is modeled on family relationships. Thus suzerains tagged themselves “fathers,” vassals “sons,” and fellow vassals “brothers.” This covenant relationship bore obligations for both parties, who established this relationship in the context of promise, or oath, usually with the gods as witnesses for curse or blessing.

In Exodus 19:5, YHWH calls Israel to “keep my covenant.” Since his dealing with Noah, YHWH has tagged his various relationships with humans “covenants” (Gen 6:8; 9:9–17; 15:18; 17:2–22; Exod 2:24; 6:4–5). This implies both his fatherly and sovereign authority and his intention to relate with the people of his creation. When we arrive at Exodus 19:5, the only two divine-human relationships tagged “covenants” are the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants. Now in Exodus 19–20, God is establishing what he later calls a “covenant” (Exod 24:8; 34:10, 27–28) specifically associated with Horeb, or Mount Sinai (Deut 5:2; 29:1[28:69]). The question becomes, what historical covenant is God pointing to in Exodus 19:5? “If you keep *my covenant*....”

30. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 162–63.

31. Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 11.

32. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 13.

In Exodus, the narrator opens the story of deliverance by saying, “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Exod 2:24). Then in Exodus 6:4–5, YHWH himself asserts, “I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.” YHWH had promised Abram in Genesis 12:2 that he would make him into a renowned nation, and then in 17:7–8 he promised, “And I will establish *my covenant* between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” These promises find their fulfillment in the Mosaic covenant established at Sinai.

William Dumbrell has argued that, because Exodus has only mentioned the Abrahamic covenant to this point, God is calling Israel in 19:5 to keep the Abrahamic covenant.³³ Other scholars struggle with this because Exodus 19–20 are the very context in which God makes the Sinai covenant.³⁴ Indeed, the call to “listen unto his voice” in 19:5 appears to anticipate the introduction to the Ten Words in 20:1, where we read, “And God spoke all these words, saying....”

I suggest that we do not have to choose between the two, for Genesis anticipates that God’s relationship with Israel established at Sinai is actually the fulfillment of stage-one of his promises to Abraham—those promises directly related to Israel’s nationhood and tenure in the land. While the Mosaic covenant includes some typological anticipations of blessing overcoming curse, it is the new covenant in Christ that ultimately fulfills stage-two of the Abrahamic covenant, for through it alone does blessing reach the nations through a male deliver (Gen 12:3; 22:17b–18) and Abraham become the father of a multitude of nations (17:4–6) (see esp. Acts 3:25–26; Rom 4:13–18; Gal 3:7–29). In Exodus 19:5 God is calling Israel to fulfill stage-one of the Abrahamic covenant, which will mean the need to abide by the Ten Words and the other regulations, all in order to enjoy sustained access to God’s presence and to mediate and display his holiness to the world.

9. The Literary Context of Exodus 19:4–6³⁵

The last of the nine exegetical steps is to comprehend the role that the passage plays in the whole biblical book within which it is found. Three areas in particular

33. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, 2nd ed. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 110–11.

34. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 50.

35. For more on literary context, see part 2 of T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* IVP

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are necessary to assess: (1) the text's literary placement or location, (2) the text's literary function or purpose, and (3) literary details that help identify the text's overall contribution.

Perhaps more than any other book in Scripture, Exodus is an extended narrative treatise on the nature of YHWH as God. The whole book is designed to highlight his rightful, necessary, and loving passion for his own glory above all things. It does this by focusing on two main areas: (1) his redemption of his people (chs. 1–18) and (2) his relationship with his people (chs. 19–40). Figure 16 contains my exegetical outline for Exodus. Note where 19:4–6 falls:

| Fig. 16. Exegetical Outline of Exodus | |
|---|---|
| I. YHWH's Self-Exalting, Gracious Redemption of His People (1:1–18:27) | |
| A. | Historical Background to Redemption (1:1–4:31) |
| 1. | Setting the stage for redemption (1:1–2:25) |
| 2. | Calling of God's messenger of redemption (3:1–4:31) |
| B. | The Call for and Experience of Redemption (5:1–15:21) |
| 1. | Moses' challenge to Pharaoh and Israel (5:1–6:27) |
| 2. | 10 Plagues: proclaiming the power and presence of YHWH (6:28–11:10) |
| 3. | The memorialization of redemption: the Passover (12:1–36) |
| 4. | The experience of redemption (12:37–14:31) |
| 5. | The celebration of redemption (15:1–21) |
| C. | The Ramifications of Redemption (15:22–18:27) |
| 1. | For Israel: the life of faith as trust for provision (15:22–17:16) |
| 2. | For Moses: the life of faith as trust for guidance (18:1–27) |
| II. YHWH's Self-Exalting, Gracious Relationship with His People (19:1–40:38) | |
| A. | The Covenant Embodying YHWH's Relationship with Israel (19:1–24:11) |
| 1. | The manifestation of and response to YHWH's presence and word (19:1–20:21) |
| 2. | The nature of the relationship expounded (20:22–23:33) |
| 3. | The ratification of the covenant (24:1–11) |
| B. | Sacred Space as the Emanating Center of YHWH's Relationship with Israel (24:12–40:38) |
| 1. | The manifestation of God's glory and the description of sacred space (24:12–31:18) |
| 2. | YHWH's response to Israel's failure to reckon with his presence (32:1–34:5) |
| 3. | YHWH's gracious manifestation of his presence among his people (35:1–40:38) |

Literary Placement and Function

Redemption and relationship through covenant and divine presence are the hallmarks of the way YHWH discloses himself in Exodus. Since each of these elements are present in Exodus 19:4–6, this passage has a foundational place in the book. Redemption and divine presence are manifest in 19:4, whereas the covenant and its purpose of mediating and magnifying God's presence is the focus of 19:5–6.

Chapters 19–40 address two things: (1) how the Mosaic covenant (19:1–24:11) set the boundaries and purpose of Israel's relationship with YHWH and (2) how

Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Jason S. DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013); Miles V. VanPelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 323–43.

the tabernacle (25:1–40:38) provided the context for this relationship. Within this framework, Exodus 19:4–6 introduces the section on covenant, describing its core. Exodus 19:4–6 is YHWH’s first speech in the main part of the book, which itself gives the text priority.

Chapters 19–40 stand as the heart of the book for at least three reasons: First, these chapters carry the most literary weight, standing twice as long as what comes before. Second, Exodus 19:4–6 is explicit that the redemption detailed in chapters 1–18 grounds and gives rise to the relationship and the calling that flows from it. Third, the narrative itself has been anticipating Israel’s arrival at Mount Sinai since 3:12, where God declared to Moses at the burning bush, “I will be with you, and this will be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve/worship God on this mountain.” Exodus 19:2 then tells us, “They ... came into the wilderness of Sinai.... There they encamped before *the* mountain.”

Literary Details

Background: Destruction and Deliverance

Using the translation I gave in §4, Exodus 19:4 reads, “You have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I lifted you on wings of eagles, and how I brought you to myself.” The task to which YHWH calls Israel in these verses is grounded in what he had just accomplished on their behalf. With their own eyes, they had witnessed the ten devastating plagues YHWH brought on Egypt, and they had experienced a remarkable salvation.

Pharaoh had asked, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?” (Exod 5:1). The plagues provided YHWH’s systematic response to this query. It is intriguing that the text never names the Pharaoh of the exodus. Oh, how historians wish that he was! But there is a theological point being made. Pharaoh was god on earth for the Egyptians, yet he remains nameless. In contrast, the God over both heaven and earth and from whom everything derives bears the name YHWH (3:14–15). He is jealous to be known (34:14), and the whole book of Exodus works to unpack the significance of his name.

The battle in Egypt took place first in the heavenlies—it was a battle of the gods, wherein YHWH as the only uncaused one defeated Egypt’s powers. Nearly every one of the ten plagues is known to have confronted an Egyptian deity.³⁶ Furthermore, we have texts like this: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on *all the gods* of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (12:12). “On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the

36. See John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 85.

Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them. On *their gods* also the LORD executed judgments” (Num 33:3–4). “And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people for yourself from Egypt, a nation and *its gods*?” (2 Sam 7:23).

YHWH declares in Exodus 19:4, “You have seen!” The destruction of Egypt and the people’s own deliverance happened before their very eyes. Faced with the amazing majesty and mercy of God, they had sung, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exod 15:11). The answer: No one! Thus, they declared, “The LORD will reign forever and ever!” (15:18). Others outside Israel also expressed similar awe. Thus Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, declared, “Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods” (18:10).

This amazing display of majesty and mercy sets the literary backdrop to our passage. Just before the seventh plague, YHWH told Pharaoh through Moses, “For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed *in all the earth*” (9:15–16). God is intent to exalt his power in the sight of all—with every people, every power knowing that he alone is God. He had raised up Pharaoh for this ultimate end. He destroyed Egypt and delivered Israel for the fame of his name, and this God-exalting motivation is what grounds the God-honoring calling detailed in Exodus 19:5–6.

Foreground: Covenant and Calling

Exodus 19:5–6 reads, “And now, if you will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be to me a treasured possession from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine, then you will be to me a royal priesthood and holy nation” (author’s translation). When YHWH asserted that Israel should indeed “listen unto his voice,” this implied his authority over his people. YHWH speaks as a sovereign, and therefore, his words are by nature authoritative and, when written, canonical.³⁷ The call to “listen unto his voice” in 19:5 appears to anticipate the introduction to the Ten Words in 20:1, which reads, “And God spoke all these words, saying....” The voice that the people are to obey is, at the very least, disclosed in the words that YHWH is about to proclaim.

God calls Israel specifically to keep his “covenant,” which I noted in my discussion of Historical Context refers to the Sinai covenant as the fulfillment of the

37. On this link, see Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 21–44.

first stage of the Abrahamic covenant. YHWH had promised Abraham that he would become a nation in the land, and the Mosaic covenant revealed initially in Exodus 19–24 is the working out of this promise.

Exodus 20 highlights the way in which the encounter with God's presence mentioned in Exodus 19:4 grounds and gives rise to the calling of 19:5–6. At the mountain YHWH had disclosed both his person and word in power through the giving of the Ten Words. The crashing and piercing sounds and the visible display of fire and smoke had caused the people to tremble and to back away from the mountain (Exod 20:18). YHWH is not safe, but he is good. At this Moses came to them and declared in Exodus 20:20: "Do not fear, for God has come in order to test you and in order that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin" (author's translation). The logic of this text is important. God came to test Israel and to generate holy fear in them in order that they might not rebel. Sin implies a lack of godward fear, and a lack of godward fear implies that we are not encountering God.

In Exodus 19:5–6, the means for fulfilling the calling to mediate his greatness as a royal priesthood and to magnify this greatness as a holy people was through their heeding his voice, keeping his covenant, and being a treasured possession. Israel needed to obey God's law to show the world the value of God, but they would not do so apart from his merciful disclosure of himself. This is Moses's point at the end of the book when, after the golden calf episode, he pleads for the Lord's presence to remain in their midst. "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" (33:16). In Exodus 19:5–6 what will make Israel a light in the world will be their radical surrender to God and his ways. In Exodus 33:16 what will make Israel a light to the world will be the presence of God. Exodus 20:20 clarifies that God's presence generates fear that in turn leads to obedience.

As I conclude this section, I offer a challenge. Examine your life. Where are your biggest struggles with sin? We only rebel against God when we don't fear him enough, and fear is generated with a personal encounter with his presence. Plead to God to make his presence known to you. I love the promise in Jeremiah 32:40 regarding the new covenant: "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." Pray that God will work within you the fear that leads to holiness, for the glory of his name.

D. Meaning **“What does the passage mean?”**

10. Biblical Theology in Exodus 19:4–6³⁸

As we move into biblical theology, we shift from the formal category of exegesis into the area of theology and now truly begin to synthesize the lasting message of the passage. We also move from “Context” to “Meaning.” At this step we consider how our passage connects to the Bible’s overall story line or message and points to Christ. Biblical theology is a way of analyzing and synthesizing what the Bible reveals about God and his relations with the world that makes organic salvation-historical and literary-canonical connections with the whole of Scripture on its own terms, especially with respect to how the Old and New Testaments progress, integrate, and climax in Christ.

We will now look more intently at God’s call that Israel be a “royal priesthood” in Exodus 19:6. This instruction builds upon revelation already disclosed in Genesis and sets a theological trajectory for what will come in the rest of Scripture.

The meaning of “a royal priesthood”

Before engaging in a scriptural journey, we must consider the proper meaning of the construct phrase מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים, which most translations render “kingdom of priests.” The noun מְמַלְכָה derives from the verb מָלַךְ (“to rule, reign”). Because nouns with preformative *mem* are usually (1) abstract nouns, (2) nouns of place, or (3) nouns of instrument, and because nouns of instrument usually bear an *a-e* vowel pattern whereas the others regularly follow either *a-a* or *i-a*, מְמַלְכָה (*a-a*) is likely either an abstract noun expressing the sphere/state/act of ruling (i.e., sovereignty) (e.g., 1 Sam 28:17; Isa 17:3; Jer 27:1) or a noun of place pointing to a realm of ruling (i.e., a kingdom—e.g., Gen 10:10; 1 Kgs 18:10; Isa 19:2).³⁹ In this light, the best possible meanings of the noun-relationship within the construct phrase מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים are (1) a subjective genitive meaning priests who exercise sovereignty (i.e., royal priests) or (2) a genitive of specification meaning a royal realm embodying priests (i.e., kingdom

38. For more on biblical theology, see part 1 of Alexander and Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 347–93; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020).

39. Joüon and Muraoka, *Joüon*, 236 (§88.L.d); compare with Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 357n37.

of priests).⁴⁰ The LXX interprets with the first option, rendering the parallel phrases with two nouns, each modified by adjectives: βασιλείον ιεράτευμα καὶ ἕθνος ἅγιον (“a royal priesthood and a holy nation”).

In the immediate context of Exod 19:6, YHWH is the sovereign who speaks, covenants, and possesses (Exod 19:5), which means that he is either calling the Israelites as his covenant partner to display his ultimate sovereignty through their priesthood (option 1: “royal priesthood”) or to operate as priests within his sovereign realm (option 2: “kingdom of priests”). The conjoined parallel phrase “holy nation” (גוי קדוש) simply includes a noun with modifying adjective, so it is difficult to know whether “nation” (גוי) stands parallel to מַמְלָכָה (“kingdom”) (thus supporting option 2) or כֹּהֲנִים (“priests”) (thus supporting option 1).

YHWH’s claim that “all the earth is mine” in 19:5d works well in relation to a focus on a particular “kingdom,” as does the possibility that the preposition in God’s assertion in 19:6a that the people will be “for me” (לי) is in fact a ל of possession. However, if, as I have argued, the 19:6 לִּי is one of advantage (i.e., “for my benefit”; see §5 above), and if the charge that Israel is to be a treasured possession among all the peoples” is indeed identifying a missional calling (see §5), then the assertion that Israel as a nation were to be “royal priests” would point to a calling to mediate and display YHWH’s greatness among the nations.

Davies rightly notes how the immediate literary context identifies how Israel’s own priests were those consecrated to God in order to draw near his presence (e.g., 19:22; 28:35). As such, Davies downplays any thought that the nation as a priesthood relates in any way to a functional/missional calling.⁴¹ However, along approaching the Lord, Israel’s priests were also to represent YHWH’s beauty and glory before the people (Exod 28:2), to clarify for the people his definition of what is holy and common, unclean and clean (Lev 10:10), and to instruct the people in God’s ways (10:11). Could these elements not also be a part of what it would mean for the whole nation of Israel to serve as a priesthood for God in the sight of the nations? This seems all the more likely in a book that has already declared that the Lord intends to work through Israel in a way that will proclaim his name “in all the earth” (Exod 9:14–15; cf. Isa 63:11–14; Ps 106:8), thus providing initial though incomplete fulfillment of God’s promise to the patriarchs that through Abraham the earth’s families/nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).⁴² With this, Moses will later

40. See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 227 (§25.4.2.3 and §25.4.3.3). Gentry similarly sees the options either as a domain of priests that God rules (that is, “kingdom of priests”) or the exercise of a royal office by those who are priests (that is, “royal priesthood”). Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 357.

41. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 98. He writes, “We ought not to be looking then for a functional definition of priesthood, but for ontological one” (97–98).

42. See William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, 2nd ed. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 119–21.

identify how only with YHWH's help will Israel actually be distinct from the nations (Exod 33:16), which shows that this was part of their responsibility.

Elsewhere, Moses highlights how Israel's keeping the law would impact the nations in a way that would bring glory to God (Deut 4:5–8), and this is at least one way to interpret what it means that they were to be a “treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine” (Exod 19:5). Furthermore, numerous texts that allude to Exodus 19:5–6 appear to interpret the responsibility to be a treasured possession in order to be priests as pointing to Israel's calling to mediate in some way YHWH's greatness to their neighbors—in a “come and see” rather than “go and tell” sense.⁴³ We already noted how Deuteronomy 26:18–19 identified that when Israel operated as the Lord's treasured possession, he would set them “in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations” and they would be “a people holy to the LORD.” Similarly, with an apparent allusion to Exodus 19:6 but without conjoining the phrases, 1 Peter 2:9 reads, “But you are a chosen race, *a royal priesthood* [βασιλειον ιεράτευμα], *a holy nation* [ἔθνος ἅγιον], a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” And with minor differences, Revelation 5:10 retains two nominal forms, followed by a verbal: “And you have made them *a kingdom and priests* [βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς] to our God, and *they shall reign* [βασιλεύσουσιν] on the earth” (cf. 20:6). While we will return to the NT texts at the end of this unit, what is apparent is that the biblical authors saw Exodus 19:6 relating both to state and function—a kingdom embodying priests and a royal priesthood called to proclaim God's excellencies and to reign on the earth. As we will now see, this aligns them with the Lord's original intention for humanity.

Adam as God's son, a royal priest

Exodus 19:5–6 builds upon the messianic and missiological plan set forth in Genesis, recalling the commission of Adam to image his heavenly father for the global display of God's glory. In Genesis 2:15 the Lord places the first man in the garden to “work” and “guard” the land (cf. 3:23–24), terms used together outside Genesis 2–3 only in relation to the function of the Levites as servants and guardians of sacred space (Num 3:4, 7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). Adam was a *priest* of YHWH.

But God also charged the first man and woman to “subdue” the earth and to “have dominion” over its creatures (Gen 1:28), royal language directly associated with Adam and Eve's role as imagers of God (1:26). Adam was also, then, a *king* under YHWH, commissioned to reflect, resemble, and represent his father-creator (cf. Ps 8:5–8[6–9]).

Genesis 5:1–3 identifies the close association of imageness/likeness and sonship when it writes: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male

43. For more on this distinction, see §11 below.

and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.” In a way comparable to how human sons image their fathers, Adam imaged his God, and as God’s son he was to operate as a royal priest, warding off evil and working to see God’s sanctuary and presence extended through the world.

Israel as a new Adam, God’s son, a royal priest

In contrast to God’s purposes for him, Adam sinned, failing to reflect, resemble, and represent his Father rightly. So, the sovereign of all things initiated his kingdom plan of salvation that would include a corporate royal priest-son who would in turn both give birth to and typologically anticipate an individual royal priest-son. The Lord anticipated the individual son first when he announced in Genesis 3:15 that a male seed of the woman would ultimately render a deathblow to the serpent and his God-hostile ways. Following the flood, we learn that he would be a descendant of Shem (Gen 9:26–27). Then, after having announced in Genesis 12:3 that Abraham would be the agent through whom the world would be blessed, 22:17b–18 detailed that the promised male deliverer would be in Abraham’s line and that he would ultimately control enemy gates and bring worldwide blessing (cf. 24:60; 26:3–4). We also learn in 49:8–10 that he would be a king in the line of Judah.

Into this context, YHWH announced in Exodus 4:22 that Israel is his “firstborn son,” and then in 19:6 he called this son to be “royal priesthood” in the midst of the whole world. 19:22, 24 tell us that, at the time Israel had arrived at the mountain, the congregation already had priests who served as mediators between God and the people. These priests would serve as the primary teachers of God’s word (Lev 10:10–11) and the primary ones to offer sacrifices, by which right order would be reestablished and God’s wrath against the people appeased (Lev 4:1–6:7; 16:1–19; 1 Chr 23:13). What is most amazing here is that Exodus 19:6 says not that Israel would have priests but that the entire nation was to be a royal priesthood, not only engaging YHWH’s presence but also mediating God’s word to the world through radical lives of surrender that would display the value and worth of the Lord. As Moses declares in Deuteronomy 4:6, “Keep and do [the statutes and the rules], for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” Just as Moses would consecrate the Israelite priests by placing the blood of a sacrifice on them (Lev 8:24), so also “Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exod 24:8). Thus, God set the nation apart as his royal priest-son, called to magnify his majesty in the world.

Israel's failure as God's priest and God's promise of future fulfillment

Like Adam, God's corporate son Israel rebelled, going his own way. Rather than praising and proclaiming God's name, the people profaned it. Moses had anticipated this in his prophetic prediction when he announced in Deuteronomy 32:5, "They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children, because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation" (cf. 31:16–17, 27, 29).

But in the midst of a sea of debauchery in the days of the Judges, God announced through Hannah, "The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed" (1 Sam 2:10). God still intended to raise up his king, whom he here called his "anointed." Then, later in the chapter a man of God announced, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build a sure house, and it shall go in and out before my anointed forever" (2:35, author's translation; cf. 2:30).⁴⁴ Now the anointed royal deliverer from Hannah's prediction is identified to also be a priest (cf. Zech 6:13). At this point we expect that this royal priest will also be God's son, and this is exactly what we are told when God asserts that the throne of David will never end: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:14, 16). In Hebrews 1:5, the author explicitly identifies God's royal son from this text to be Jesus.

In alignment with these promises, Psalm 110 reasserts that the royal, anointed, divine Son of Psalm 2 is also YHWH's priest. God declares to him, "Rule in the midst of your enemies" (Ps 110:2), and then he announces, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (110:4). This is the one whom Psalm 72 declares will "have dominion from sea to sea" (72:8; cf. Zech 9:9–10), whose name will "endure forever," and through whom the peoples of the nations will be blessed (Ps 72:17; cf. 2:8). Building off Isaiah's vision of the suffering royal servant, Zechariah 3:8–9 treats the high-priest Joshua as a type for the royal priest to come through whom God "will remove the iniquity of the land in a single day." Then, in fulfillment of the hopes of 1 Samuel 2:35, the prophet also envisioned that this same messianic figure would bear "royal honor," be a "priest," and "sit and rule" on God's throne, with "the counsel of peace" being between them (Zech 6:13). He would "build the [new] temple of the LORD" (6:13), and he would be aided by "those who are far off" (6:15). Thus, "many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people" (2:11).

Significantly, other prophets announced that the restored, new covenant people of God would effectively serve as YHWH's royal priest-sons, imaging YHWH's greatness to the world. For example, through Isaiah God declared,

44. For this reading, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 76. For an alternative possible reading, see Karl Deenick, "Priest and King or Priest-King in 1 Samuel 2:35," *Westminster Theological Journal* 73, no. 2 (2011): 325–39.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Isa 56:6–7).

And then again, “And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD ... to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD” (66:20–21; cf. 61:5–7). Then, later, Zephaniah predicted, “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering” (Zeph 3:9–10). In each of these passages, an international community engages in priestly service before the Lord.

Jesus the royal priest and all in him as royal priest-sons and daughters forever

The angel Gabriel announced to Mary regarding Jesus, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33). The wise men sought the “king of the Jews” (Matt 2:2) and found Jesus (2:11), who later affirmed this as his identity (27:11). Through his ministry he proclaimed the nearness and good news of God’s kingdom (4:17, 23; Mark 1:14–15), and the crowds recognized him to be the royal deliverer that the OT promised (Matt 21:5). He establishes and upholds the throne of David with justice and with righteousness (Isa 9:7). He lived in perfect accord with the Deuteronomic ideal for kingship (Deut 17:14–20) both in his teaching and actions (John 8:28; 15:10), and he brought justice to the broken and outcast (Matt 12:18–21; Luke 4:18–19).

Along with being the king, he is the high priest in the line of Melchizedek who mediates the new covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24; 1 Tim 2:5), leading us into the very presence of the Lord (Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 10:19–22). Christ “had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). He offered himself as a sacrifice in order to cleanse us from our sins and to secure us eternal salvation (Eph 5:2; Heb 9:11–12, 26; 10:12; 1 John 1:7). Now we can “with confidence draw near the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Jesus is “Israel,” YHWH’s servant-person (Isa 49:3), who God sets apart to save some from both Israel the people and other nations (49:6). Significantly, we who are in Christ have become royal priest-sons and daughters of the living God, empowered to offer up sacrifices of praise (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15–16; 1 Pet 2:5). As “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,” we now “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). The task of being a royal priesthood and a holy nation is no longer just a hope, for it is already being fulfilled in the church. The individual royal priest-son Christ has gone before us, doing what Adam and the nation of Israel were called to do. He represents us, and through him we are enabled to fulfill the calling of magnifying God’s greatness among the nations.

Revelation 5 provides an apt stopping point for this biblical-theological survey. There, before the one called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev 5:5), and “the Lamb” (5:8), this song is sung: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (5:9–10). Old covenant Israel’s calling is being fully realized through the new covenant church.

11. Systematic Theology in Exodus 19:4–6⁴⁵

The second step in theology is to discern how our passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible by assessing key doctrines especially in relation to the gospel. Systematic theology is the study of Bible doctrine designed to help us shape a proper worldview, and it traditionally divides into at least ten categories: (1) *theology proper* (God), (2) *bibliology* (Scripture), (3) *angelology* (angels and demons), (4) *anthropology* (humanity), (5) *hamartiology* (sin), (6) *Christology* (Christ), (7) *soteriology* (salvation), (8) *pneumatology* (the Holy Spirit), (9) *ecclesiology* (the church), (10) *eschatology* (the end times or last things).

We have already seen how a lot of later Scriptures build on Exodus 19:4–6 and how this passage supplies a helpful synthesis of the revealed purpose of the old covenant. Now I want to consider how this passage contributes to our understanding of soteriology and missiology, the latter of which is a subset of ecclesiology.

45. For more on systematic theology, see Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 394–411; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

Soteriology

None can miss that Exodus 19:4 addresses the most foundational redemptive act of the old covenant period. Advocates of the new perspective on Paul have ever been quick to note that YHWH saved Israel *before* he ever gave them the law at Sinai. Thus, the law was never about getting into relationship; it was about staying in. God ransomed before he required; he freed before he called them to follow. The indicative of redemption-accomplished precedes the imperative of redemption-enjoyed, and this is the same pattern in the new covenant. God converts and then calls us to follow. From the new covenant perspective, justification gives rise to sanctification. Faith is the root; obedience is the fruit. To put works first makes us legalists that trust in our own merits rather than in the merits of Christ. There is, therefore, a similar *structure of grace* in both the old and new covenants: gracious redemption precedes gracious law giving. Christ's saving work secures pardon and purchases power so that we can respond with his help in obedience.

While this is true, we must not miss what most advocates of the new perspective on Paul seem to miss. Namely, while the structure of grace between the old and new covenants may be the same, the nature *of grace* is entirely different. Old covenant grace was external; new covenant grace is internal. In the old covenant, YHWH delivers Israel from physical slavery in Egypt, but for the majority their bondage to sin remained. As Moses asserted forty years after the exodus: "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD" (Deut 9:6–7). The rest of Deuteronomy and redemptive history note how this rebellion would persist until the prophet greater than Moses would arise and establish a new covenant based on better promises and God-wrought inward transformation. There was *nothing* in the old covenant itself that secured eternal life for all its members.

Along with saving only externally, YHWH revealed his will at Sinai in a way that did not reach the hearts of the majority. They saw but didn't really see; they heard but didn't really hear. As Moses would later assert, "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (Deut 29:2–4[1–3]). Rather than having God's law written on their hearts, Jeremiah tells us that "the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart" (Jer 17:1).

In contrast, whereas most of those in the old covenant were rebels, all in the new covenant would be remnant. With circumcised hearts, those in the transformed

community would, in Moses's words, "turn and listen unto the voice of the LORD and do all his commandments that I am commanding you today" (Deut 30:8, author's translation). The prophet also asserted that in that day, "the word will be very near you; it will be in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it" (30:14, author's translation).⁴⁶ Paul says in Romans 10:8 that this is fulfilled in Christ. Through Jeremiah YHWH also predicted "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.... And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:33–34).

Even though external salvation preceded external law-giving in the old covenant, because Israel's sin remained undealt with, all their outward alignment with the law was unacceptable to God and equivalent to seeking salvation by works. Because the nation lost sight of their inability and need for repentance and a substitute, their outward pursuits of righteousness did not allow them to attain the life that the law promised. "What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone" (Rom 9:30–32).⁴⁷

In Exodus 19:4–6 we read that the revealed purpose of the old covenant was that the nation would, through a surrendered pursuit of God and his ways, stand as a royal priesthood and a holy nation amidst the world. But the revealed purposes of God for the old covenant was not his sovereign purposes. "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20). Paul says that the old covenant bore "a ministry of condemnation"; only the new covenant would bear "a ministry of righteousness" (2 Cor 3:9). In the old covenant, God commanded but did not enable. He changed Israel's outward status but did not alter their souls. He disclosed to them his law but did not give them the desire to keep it. And he did so in order to highlight the beauty and centrality of Christ. "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared

46. For more on reading Deuteronomy 30:11–14 as *future*, see Steven R. Coxhead, "Deuteronomy 30:11–14 as a Prophecy of the New Covenant in Christ," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 305–20; Colin James Smothers, "In Your Mouth and in Your Heart: A Study of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 in Paul's Letter to the Romans in Canonical Context" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

47. For more on this understanding, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (2014): 87–118; Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12: A Redemptive-Historical Reassessment," *Themelios* 45, no. 2 (2020): 240–59.

beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?” (Rom 9:22–24).

To Israel God gave the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and the Messiah (9:4–5). But if, after receiving so much, the nation was unable to live for God, how much more would the rest of humanity stand culpable before God and in need of a savior, having never received the law.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (3:19–22)

When we read that salvation grounded Israel’s calling, we must not automatically equate it with the salvation we enjoy today. The first exodus was an external deliverance that typified the second exodus, internalized salvation that Christ accomplished. The first exodus was but a picture, a predictive pointer, to the more ultimate deliverance that Jesus secures on behalf of his elect. Some who experienced the first exodus were truly hoping in this by faith, whereas the majority who left Egypt neither knew God’s pleasure (1 Cor 10:5) nor were allowed to enter his rest (Heb 3:18–19).

Missiology—a subset of Ecclesiology

Back in §6, I summarized the main idea of Exodus 19:4–6: “In response to God’s gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living.” Israel’s God-honoring calling is the central thrust of the passage. We must ask, however, how this task relates to the church’s great commission that Jesus gave after his resurrection (Matt 28:18–20). Did old covenant Israel bear a mission to cross-culturally evangelize the lost like Christians do in the new covenant?

There is very little potential support from the OT that within the old covenant period Israel bore a normative responsibility to be a “go and tell” people, seeking the conversion of the nations. Certainly Exodus 12 clarified how a resident alien or “sojourner” (גֵּר) could become like a native-born Israelite and thus be freed to partake in the nation’s various holy days (Exod 12:43–49). This “mixed multitude” (12:38), however, was still counted as the single nation of Israel. Similarly, within the framework of Israel’s history, people like Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, and Uriah the Hittite could, by their own choosing, become Israelites. Yet in doing so, Abraham was still considered the father of a single nation. The shift to his being “the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4–5) would only come when the single, male

deliverer would rise, overcoming enemy powers and reversing the Adamic curse: “And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:17b–18; cf. 3:15; 24:60). It was in Jesus’s day alone “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 25:47; cf. Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14, 16, 29).

Not even in the book of Jonah do we find evidence of a normative mandate for global missions in the old covenant period. Jonah’s prophetic role was first not to covert the Ninevites but to “call out against” them, declaring to them that they had sinned against YHWH and warning them of punishment (Jon 1:2). Many prophets wrote oracles against the nations (e.g., Isa 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Obadiah; Zeph 2:5–3:7), but we know of very few prophets beyond Jonah who actually engaged foreign powers directly (e.g., 2 Kgs 8:7–15; Jer 27:3; 51:61–64; cf. Zeph 2:5, 12). YHWH would later declare through Jeremiah, “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it” (Jer 18:7–8). Jonah says that the reason he fled to Tarshish was because “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (Jon 4:2). The prophet of YHWH did not like the character of YHWH. Certainly the book of Jonah reminds the reader that Israel’s long-range mission through its Messiah would be to see the curse against all the families of the earth overcome by divine blessing (Gen 22:18; cf. 12:3 with 10:39, where the ESV’s “clans” is the same word for “families”). However, the book focuses not on the need to evangelize our neighbors but on the proper disposition that God’s people were to maintain toward YHWH and his world. Jonah delighted in God’s mercy so long as he was its recipient, but he did not celebrate seeing this mercy extended to those outside Israel.

YHWH is both right and committed to bestow mercy on whomever he wills, and he calls his people to celebrate that he is this kind of God. He also promised that his anointed king would proclaim his glories to the nations. As Paul notes, citing Psalm 18:49, “Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order ... that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name’” (Rom 15:8–9). Nevertheless, within the old covenant itself, I am not aware of texts that called Israel to urge the nations to respond to the news of global salvation.

Instead, the Israelites were to live in their land as mediators of God’s tabernacling greatness. By encountering his presence at the temple/tabernacle (Exod 33:16), reverent fear would be generated that would lead to holiness (20:20). And by heeding his voice, keeping his covenant, and existing as his treasured possession, Israel would serve as a God-exalting witness in the midst of the world (19:5–6). Their righteous lives would attract the nations to YHWH’s uniqueness, as those

outside would see their righteous deeds and be directed to YHWH's wonders. Thus Deuteronomy 4:6–8 asserted,

Keep and do [the statutes and rules], for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

There was expectation within the old covenant that foreigners from faraway lands would hear of YHWH's fame, come to the temple and pray toward to the God of heaven, and receive their requests "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you" (1 Kgs 8:41–43). Evidence that this pattern actually happened is minimal, but we do see it when the Queen of Sheba journeys to Jerusalem and YHWH's temple because she "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD" (1 Kgs 10:1).

What is important to see is that YHWH's call for Israel to be a God-honoring witness was *not* a direct call to evangelize their neighbors. Indeed, the gospel of the kingdom was still only a *future* hope and not a present reality in the days of the OT (see Rom 1:1–3). Isaiah 40–66 highlights the salvation-historical shift from a hope for good news to the intrusion of good news through the messianic servant. YHWH gives comfort to his despondent Jerusalem (Isa 40:1–2) through the news of the herald who proclaims, "Behold your God!" (40:9). Only in this future day, now realized in Christ, does the messenger "publish peace" and "salvation," declaring the "good news" that "your God reigns" (52:7). And the one leading the global testimony is the royal deliverer himself, who declares, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God" (61:1–2; cf. 11:2–5; Luke 4:18–19).

Within the old covenant, YHWH called his servant-people Israel to live in a way that pointed to the Lord's greatness in the midst of the world. By God-dependent obedience they would serve as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (Exod 19:5–6), attracting other nations to "come and see" the display of YHWH's glory in and through his people. But the old covenant law could only clarify what Israel *ought* to do; it could not empower them to do it (Rom 8:3; Gal 3:21). As such, Israel failed miserably at representing YHWH's worth, and this sin ultimately resulted in their misrepresenting God's name among the nations (Ezek 16:20). But stage one of the Abrahamic covenant (i.e., the Mosaic covenant) was never portrayed as the end of God's kingdom-building purposes. Indeed, YHWH predicted that an obedient son

would rise who would “be a blessing” perfectly, and through this open the door for “all the families of the ground” to be blessed (Gen 12:2–3; cf. 22:17b–18).

The old covenant remnant longed for the day when God’s individual servant—the royal representative king—would succeed through his priestly obedience unto death (Isa 52:13–53:12; 55:3). Not only this, he would go beyond what Israel themselves were ever called to but to which they and the world hoped—through him the nations would enjoy God’s blessing (cf. Ps 72:17). The servant’s atoning work would open the door for the salvation of all who believe from both Jews and Gentiles, and he would establish a new covenant that would include light, law, and justice for the nations (Isa 42:1, 6; 49:6, 8; 51:4–5). The individual servant’s work would birth multiple servants who would carry out his redemptive purposes. Ultimately, fulfilling the promise of Isaiah 49:6, the individual royal servant “[Christ] would proclaim light” and salvation to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:23) *through* his commissioned servants (13:47), as the gospel message of the beautiful one (Isa 42:7) would become the gospel message of the beautiful ones (Rom 10:15).

In summary, the nation of Israel’s old covenant call to be a royal priesthood addressed only the immediate witness of their lives and not an intentional outward evangelistic proclamation of the gospel. The old covenant community was simply to urge others to “come and see” by the testimony of their surrendered lives, as they enjoyed the sustained presence of God at the temple.

Christ’s coming marks a salvation-historical shift from a “come and see” to a “come and see *and* go and tell” community.⁴⁸ As for the “come and see” element, the church is now empowered to stand as a royal priesthood and a holy nation, faithfully (though imperfectly) proclaiming “the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). With God’s help, we heed the call, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:11–12). Furthermore, enjoying Christ’s tabernacling presence (John 1:14; cf. 2:21) by his Spirit (Acts 1:8), the church as God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16) has now expanded to fill the whole earth (Acts 13:47; Col 1:23), and much of this is happening because we can now reach out and proclaim the good news that the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies believing sinners by Christ Jesus’s life, death and resurrection. This *gospel* is of first importance (1 Cor 15:3–5), and its proclamation marks the “go and tell” element that is new to the new covenant. The divine presence of the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22) is more accessible to the world than ever before, for it is not localized in a building but embodied in the lives of a new covenant community that has spread out to every corner of the globe (Isa 2:1–4; Jer 3:16–18). As the gospel

48. For more on this distinction, see especially Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 45 (2002): 35–57; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Kevin Paul Oberlin, “The Ministry of Israel to the Nations: A Biblical Theology of Missions in the Era of the Old Testament Canon” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2006).

advances, the church grows, with peoples from every tribe and language and people and nation being gathered into the one people of God, who together have become “a kingdom and priests to our God” and who together “shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9–10; cf. 22:5). Because Christ now enjoys all authority in heaven and on earth, we are commissioned to make new covenant disciples not only within our own families and neighborhoods but also across cultures among the nations. Others will not know unless they are told (Rom 10:13–15), so we live and we evangelize to see realized the obedience that grows from faith for the sake of Christ’s name among the nations (1:5).

E. Application **“Why does the passage matter?”**

12. Practical Theology in Exodus 19:4–6⁴⁹

The last step in interpreting the OT is to apply the text to ourselves, the church, and the world while stressing the centrality of Christ and the hope of the gospel. It is at this step that we most clearly identify that the seers, sovereigns, sages, and song writers of old “were serving not themselves but you” (1 Pet 1:12) and that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction” (Rom 15:4). It is here we recognize that the OT is indeed Christian Scripture.

In his book *Old Testament Exegesis*, Douglas Stuart offers some helpful guidelines for applying biblical texts.⁵⁰ I am going to summarize and somewhat adapt them here, using Exodus 19:4–6 to illustrate the process. I will cite my translation of the text to begin, but you may want to have your Bible open to help you track the discussion.

Establish the original revealed application.

Identify the audience of the application.

Fig. 17. DeRouchie’s Translation of Exodus 19:4–6

4 You [mp] have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I lifted you [mp] on eagles’ wings and brought you [mp] to myself. 5 And now, if you [mp] will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be to me a treasured possession from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine, 6 then you [mp] will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

[mp] = masculine plural

The second masculine plural “you” throughout Exodus 19:4–6 suggests that the target is every individual within the entire community. It was the nation as a whole

49. For more on practical theology, see Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Biblical Law*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Dennis E. Johnson, *Walking with Jesus through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 415–95; DeRouchie, Martin, Naselli, Chapters 3, 21, 25, 37 in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*.

50. Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 25–29.

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that was considered God’s “son” (Exod 4:22–23), and it was the nation as a whole that he redeemed. The plural requires individuals to act, but it also highlights that the task will only be accomplished in the context of corporate solidarity.

List the external life issues of application.

In Exodus 19:4–6, we see the personal experience of communal deliverance in 19:4, the daily pursuit of God in community in 19:5, a political context where Israel is distinct from surrounding nations in 19:5, and a sense of life’s purpose in 19:6. The church too has experienced a communal deliverance, but ours is from bondage to sin and salvation from God’s wrath. Unlike Israel, the church has no geo-political affiliation; the church is not a theocracy but is rather omni-ethnic, trans-national people united in Christ with a similar call to daily pursue God in community for the display of his glory.

Furthermore, Exodus 19:4–6 is calling for daily witness of YHWH’s greatness by every member of the community. This text covers the foundation, makeup, and ultimate goal of Israel’s relationship with God. Sadly, for most, Israel’s redemption was only external and their law keeping only skin deep, so the people never had the impact on the nations that God promised would come through whole-life surrender. Nevertheless, a lasting point of the texts is that the Lord’s gracious redemption requires living exclusively for him in every area, whether in our social engagements, our work, our personal and corporate worship, our family life, or our finances. The freedom we experience must lead to radical following, which will overflow in lives testifying to God’s majesty.

Clarify the nature of the application.

On the surface, Exodus 19:4–6 recalls God’s gracious past redemption and informs Israel of their future responsibility and calling. Implicitly, the text says more, for it calls the people to godward allegiance for the sake of mediating and displaying God’s glory to the nations. That Israel recognizes the necessity for response is clear from their elders’ reply to Moses: “All that the LORD has spoken we will *do*” (19:8). Nevertheless, the rest of the narrative also reveals that Israel’s commitment meant little, as their stubborn hearts resulted in lack of faith and rebellion (Deut 9:6–7; 29:4[3]).

Exodus 19:4–6 also most explicitly addresses action and state of being, calling Israel to “hear” and “keep” and “be” (v. 5). Nevertheless, because these charges are couched as the means for seeing their God-exalting, world-influencing calling accomplished, faith in God’s promises is the generator for the nation’s obedience. Only to the level at which the people *desire* the promise of being a royal priesthood and a holy nation and *believe* the promise-maker can act will they be motivated to heed his voice, keep his covenant, and intentionally seek to live as his treasured possession.

Determine the time focus of the application.

We can see that Exodus 19:4–6 called Israel to make an immediate response. And for every future generation in the old covenant, God’s revelation would remain the same. He had set Israel apart to express his worth in the world. Through this single nation the world would be blessed, and Israel’s lives of surrender would parade God’s upright character until the time when the promised deliverer would overcome the world’s curse with blessing.

Fix the limits of the application.

Exodus 19:4–6 is perhaps the most foundational synthesis of the revealed purpose of the old covenant that we have in Scripture. It looks back to the Abrahamic covenant promises and anticipates directly God’s revelation of his person and word at Sinai. It expresses God’s revealed will for Israel, but it does not address the implications of failure.

Synthesis

In summary, when it comes to establishing the original revealed application of Exodus 19:4–6, we can say that the text supplies a synthesis of the old covenant by addressing the nation of Israel’s redemption and life-calling in relation to the world. It explicitly informs but also implicitly directs, calling for action and motivating this call by the promise of global impact. The words target the entire community and address a surrender to YHWH that impacts every facet of life in every present and future generation.

Determine the theological significance of the passage.⁵¹

Clarify what the passage tells us about God and his ways.

Exodus 19:4–6 portrays YHWH as one who delivers in order to create people who can in turn display his excellencies. With respect to his character and actions, he is an able warrior God who redeemed Israel from the grip of an imperial power (v. 4). He is also a God who commands, establishes covenants, and treasures some more than others (v. 5). Finally, he is a God who motivates through promises and who desires his people to mediate and display his greatness to the world (v. 6). All of these are features from which solid application could be made, for his work in the new covenant is very analogous.

51. Douglas Stuart, whose general process of application I am following here, does not explicitly stress the need to recall what we have learned about the theological significance of the passage when making application. However, I believe that considering both what the passage tells us about God and his ways and how Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament impacts our passage are both vital for accurately establishing the lasting significance of an OT text.

As for his desires, he intends that his people hear his voice, heed his covenant, and be his treasured possession (v. 5). All these activities will supply the means for them serving as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (v. 6).

*Assess how Christ's fulfillment of the OT impacts our application of this passage.*⁵²

Christ's work fulfills Exodus 19:4–6 in at least three ways: First, the initial exodus typologically anticipated a greater, more universal second exodus that Jesus himself embodies. In Exodus 19:4, YHWH highlights his defeat of Egypt and his deliverance of Israel from the bonds of slavery. Moving ahead in redemptive history, Christ's death and resurrection initiates for all believers the antitypical exodus, the ultimate redemption to which Israel's liberation from Egypt's clutches only pointed. The OT prophets foresaw this second exodus (e.g., Isa 11:16–12:6; Jer 16:14–15; 23:7–8; Hos 11:10–11), which Jesus accomplished in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).⁵³

Second, Christ fulfilled the charge of this text as the perfect royal priest, bringing us to God and empowering us to serve him. Israel's fleshly, rebellious hearts were hostile to God, making it impossible for them to submit to God's law or to please him (Deut 29:4[3]; Rom 8:7–8; 11:7–8). They, therefore, never operated as the royal priesthood and the holy nation for which Exodus 19:4–6 called. But where God's corporate "son" failed, his individual Son Jesus, as Israel's royal and priestly representative, succeeded. Christ's perfect life embodied the ideals of righteousness the law requires (Rom 5:18–19; 8:4), and by this he was able to serve as the perfect royal priest (Heb 4:15), satisfying the Lord's wrath against sinners through his substitutionary death and proving through his resurrection that every believer incorporated into him can enjoy right standing with God. The Lord imputes our sins to Christ and Christ's righteousness to us, thus securing both our pardon (Rom 5:18–19; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9) and amazing promises (2 Cor 1:20), which together become power for our salvation—past (Eph 2:8), present (1 Cor 1:18), and future (Rom 5:9). Thus by Christ fulfilling the law, we as the new covenant community of

52. For a more developed discussion of how Christ fulfills the Mosaic law, see "The Christian and Old Testament Law," in chapter 12 of *How to Understand*, 427–59; Jason S. DeRouchie, "What Is a Biblical Theology of the Law?" in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 243–54. For a more developed discussion of how Christ fulfills OT promises, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Is Every Promise 'Yes'? Old Testament Promises and the Christian," *Themelios* 42 (2017): 16–45; Jason S. DeRouchie, "How Should a Christian Relate to Old Testament Promises?" in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 355–64.

53. See Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus," *NDBT*, 478–87; Stephen G. Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 3 (2008): 4–23; Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus Imagery," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, 205–14; Jason S. DeRouchie, "How Does Isaiah 12:2 Use Exodus 15:2?," in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 301–10.

faith are not only charged but also empowered to fulfill the law of Christ (Rom 2:26, 29; 13:8–10; 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2), which includes applying the OT laws in light of Christ’s fulfillment (Matt 5:17–19).

Third, Christ represented the nation of Israel, succeeding where they failed and by this magnifying God (see esp. Isa 49:1–6). Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father” (John 14:9). As the holy king-priest, Jesus perfectly represented Israel and reflected God’s holiness. As Hebrews 1:3 says, “[God’s Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” And now, for those of us in him, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). That is, in Christ God has, as Peter asserts, made us “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Summarize the lasting significance of the passage for today.

The simplest synthesis of what Exodus 19:4–6 calls for through Jesus is that the church is to live as a royal priesthood and holy people, proclaiming through our life-witness the worth and majesty of God (1 Pet 2:9). In §6, I summarized the main idea of Exodus 19:4–6 as this: “In response to God’s gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living.” Our unchanging Lord is consistent in what he requires, in what he intends, and in the way he uses promises to motivate obedience. Like the nation of Israel, the church is called to follow the instruction of our chief, new covenant mediator: “Make disciples of all nations, ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded” (Matt 28:20). Also, God uses promises to motivate holiness and to keep us from evil: “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet 1:4). Finally, God’s purpose ever remains that others “may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:11–12).

Conclusion

By attempting to understand and apply Exodus 19:4–6, I have sought in this case study to illustrate for the student of Scripture the journey from exegesis to theology. In this passage, in response to God’s gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living. And what YHWH called Israel to in the old covenant is now being realized through Christ’s new covenant church: “You are

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a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). My book *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* develops each of the twelve steps that together contribute to a biblically faithful, Christ-treasuring interpretation of Jesus’s Bible—the Old Testament. May the Lord increasingly enable Christians from all the nations to magnify his supremacy and worth through lives of surrender and devotion, all for the glory of Christ.

The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment: A Response to James S. Spiegel

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In a recent JBTS article, “It’s the Wrath of God?: Reflections on Inferring Divine Punishment,” James S. Spiegel considers whether we can be justified in believing that events in our lives and the lives of others are instances of divine punishment.¹ His stated aim is to answer the skeptical thesis – “the view that all assertions of divine wrath since biblical times are speculative at best and perhaps even irresponsible.”² In other words, he argues that an event’s being in the Bible is not a necessary condition for concluding that it is an instance of divine punishment. He proposes three sufficient conditions that justify ascriptions of divine wrath. The conditions are as follows:

- A. the occurrence of a miracle;
- B. extraordinary coincidence; or
- C. fulfilled bold prediction.³

He admits that applying these conditions will not produce the same level of confidence we have in identifying cases of divine punishment in Scripture, and he stresses that we must be cautious lest we slander God by ascribing to him intentions he does not have. I interpret Spiegel’s emphasis on caution here not as tentativeness with regards to the strength of his conditions but only as a reminder that we should not rush to conclusions when it comes to assertions about God.

Does Spiegel successfully argue against the skeptical thesis? To answer this question, I examine the case of Job, a case of non-punitive, divinely-ordained suffering. In the failure of Job’s friends to interpret Job’s suffering correctly, we learn that ascribing meaning to the suffering of others is fraught with difficulty. I argue that Spiegel’s conditions would not have helped Job’s friends and hence also fail to undermine the skeptical thesis. This is not to surrender to skepticism, for Scripture does teach that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin, which might be in conjunction with pain and suffering. Nevertheless, the Bible contains no

1. James S. Spiegel, “It’s the Wrath of God?: Reflections on Inferring Divine Punishment,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*, 4, no. 2 (2019): 301-16.

2. Spiegel, “It’s the Wrath of God,” 311.

3. Spiegel, “It’s the Wrath of God,” 312.

promises that God will always disclose his reasons, especially when it comes to the suffering of others.

The Case of Job

Consider the case of Job. Job experiences tremendous suffering, having lost nearly everything in his life. He is unable, at first, to understand why he suffers, but he trusts that God has a good reason. His so-called “friends” think they know the reason: God is punishing Job for his sins. Stephen Kepnes recounts:

The friends [of Job], according to Buber, follow “the assertion of an all-embracing empirical connection between sin and punishment”...In Bildad’s words: “Will God pervert the right? Will the Almighty pervert justice? If your sons sinned against Him, He dispatched them for their transgression” (8:3-5). Suffering is punishment; and since Job suffers, he must have sinned as well. Thus Eliphaz [another friend of Job] turns on Job: “You know that your wickedness is great. And that your iniquities have no limit” (22:5).⁴

Job’s friends say it is God’s wrath, but as the book of Job makes clear, they are mistaken. God is not punishing Job; rather, his sufferings are due to a wager that the devil makes with God, which God uses to show just how great a man Job is. God is proud of Job, not angry with him.

Job’s case shows just how difficult it is to ascribe meaning to the suffering of others. Kepnes says,

The friends’ justifications protect their wish to believe that the world follows the order of retributive justice. God is just and in control; and thus those who suffer deserve their plight and those who thrive and succeed deserve their success. That the response of the friends to suffering is weak is made crystal clear at the end of the text when God declares that they “have not spoken the truth about me” (42:7).⁵

Job’s friends fail to interpret Job’s suffering correctly because their mistaken theology describes God’s sole *modus operandi* as retributive punishment.

What happens when we apply Spiegel’s conditions to Job’s situation and the judgments of his friends? Consider the first condition – the occurrence of a miracle – which states that one might be justified in the ascription of divine wrath if the event is miraculous. In Job 1:16, the author describes a miraculous event: fire drops from heaven and consumes Job’s sheep and servants. This form of destruction is similar to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is, as Spiegel describes, “special” or miraculous, as opposed to an occurrence in accord with natural law. So,

4. Steven Kepnes, “Rereading Job as Textual Theodicy,” in *Suffering Religion*, ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 44.

5. Kepnes, “Rereading Job,” 44-45 (emphasis added).

this condition supports Job's friends in their mistaken conclusion that the cause of Job's misfortune is divine wrath.

Spiegel's other conditions also fail when applied to Job. It is quite an extraordinary coincidence that the events of the first chapter of Job happen simultaneously. First, his flocks are stolen and his servant killed by the Sabbeans.⁶ Second, fire burns up a flock of sheep and more of Job's servants.⁷ Third, his camels are stolen by the Chaldeans, and more of Job's servants are killed.⁸ Fourth, his children are killed when their house is knocked down by a strong wind.⁹ Nevertheless, as we learn in the narrative of the first chapter, God's intention is not to punish Job, so Spiegel's second condition is not sufficient either.

Spiegel's third condition is the occurrence of a bold prediction, such as in the New Testament case of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira,¹⁰ especially with Sapphira's death.¹¹ Although there are no predictions in Job's story, we can imagine Job's narrative including one without changing the outcome. For example, imagine if one of Job's friends had mysteriously predicted Job's suffering. Such a prediction would be compatible with the rest of the story playing out as it does, but Job's friends would still be wrong about God's intentions. So, it turns out that Spiegel's conditions are not sufficient for justifying belief in the occurrence of divine punishment.

Spiegel's conditions do, on the other hand, justify an inference to a supernatural explanation, for who could reasonably deny that a miraculous event, like fire from heaven that is also predicted and extraordinarily coincidental, has for its explanation a supernatural cause? However, correctly inferring a supernatural cause is not the same as identifying the intention, for there are many reasons God might have for allowing a particular event to occur. When someone experiences suffering, it is not always because of divine wrath.¹² Consider the following possible reasons:

1. to allow us to share in Christ's sufferings;¹³
2. to make us more complete in character, i.e. more Christ-like;¹⁴
3. to provide us opportunities in life;¹⁵

6. Job 1:15.

7. Job 1:16.

8. Job 1:17.

9. Job 1:18-19.

10. Acts 5:1-11.

11. Acts 5:9.

12. Spiegel defines punishment as a "severe divine response to human sin" (Spiegel, "It's the Wrath of God," 307). While he admits that divine punishment can be understood as redemptive and not just retributive, it seems that several of the reasons that follow have nothing to do with sin.

13. 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:12-13.

14. James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-7.

15. Genesis 50:20; 2 Corinthians 1:4.

4. to grow the community of believers;¹⁶

5. to show the works of God;¹⁷

6. and to test his followers or boast about them (as with Job).

The Bible describes many reasons God might use suffering for his glory and our good, and a set of conditions for identifying instances of divine wrath ought to be sensitive to the various possibilities.

The Empathy Condition

Perhaps Job's friends fail simply because they lack empathy – they do not know him well enough. Kepnes says,

The severity of [Job's] punishment is incommensurate with his crimes. *The friends miss this*; they are blind to the extent of Job's suffering. They are 'mischievous comforters' (16:2) who make it more and not less difficult for Job to endure his pain. . . Like passive bystanders to the suffering of the innocent, the friends are mainly concerned with providing quick rationalizations for Job's plight that will allow them to dismiss their own responsibility to help him.¹⁸

If they had been familiar with his character, they might have avoided their epistemic mistake and been more compassionate, as well. Let us call this the empathy condition: *before ascribing divine wrath to explain the suffering of others, one ought to have a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances*. Maybe Spiegel has such a condition in mind when he briefly refers to additional "stringent standards."¹⁹ As a necessary condition, an empathy requirement would remind us that epistemic caution is a virtue and that the act of judging others is prone to error.²⁰ Job calls out his friends' lack of empathy when he defends himself. He says, "Far be it from me to say that you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast to my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days."²¹ Job understands himself and his circumstances better than his friends do.

However, satisfying the empathy condition, even if possible, is not sufficient for inferring divine wrath, for it is not enough to know that others deserve punishment to know that God is punishing them. First, as any Christian knows that has followed

16. 2 Timothy 9-10.

17. John 9:2-3.

18. Kepnes, 44-45. Italics mine. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This would include Job, too, but aside from God rebuking Job for speaking presumptuously (Job 40), nowhere in the book of Job does the author speak of Job's sins. The point is that Job does not deserve this suffering.

19. Spiegel, 314.

20. Romans 14:4.

21. Job 27:5-6.

Jesus for a modest amount of time, God does not convict us of some sins until much later, even sins that we continue to commit. Perhaps God knows that we would be overwhelmed and crushed if the depth of our sin were revealed to us. For whatever reason, simply knowing that others continue to sin and are deserving of punishment does not justify one in believing that God is punishing them. Second, there are no guarantees that God punishes every sin in this life. Some sins may not be punished until the afterlife,²² which may explain why it appears evil and unrighteous people sometimes do not get what they deserve. Third, according to the penal substitutionary view of the atonement, Jesus atoned for sin on the cross; therefore, those who are found in Christ are not punished for their sins. At most, they experience discipline.²³

The Work of the Holy Spirit

According to the Gospel of John, one of the Holy Spirit's functions is the conviction of sin: "And when [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."²⁴ This is related to the doctrine of divine illumination, which says that the Holy Spirit works in believers as they read the pages of Scripture to understand and apply it;²⁵ this teaching is summarized in Article V of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics: "We affirm that the Holy Spirit enables believers to appropriate and apply Scripture to their lives."²⁶

The conviction of sin is not the conclusion of a deductive argument or the satisfying of a set of sufficient conditions; rather it is an awareness of one's spiritual condition communicated by God through the Holy Spirit. It is person-to-person communication. God is a person, and as such, he chooses to communicate when he so desires, as Job's narrative shows. The Spirit dwells within believers. In 2 Corinthians 2:10-16, Paul writes, "These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God... 'For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ."²⁷ According to one interpretation, "[This passage describes] the Spirit searching the depths of God (v. 10), not because he does not know the mind of God – for the Holy

22. Matthew 25:31-46.

23. Romans 3:21-26. While Christians are not punished for their sins, they are still disciplined (Hebrews 12:6), but it is doubtful whether discipline can be inferred, using a formula or necessary and sufficient conditions.

24. John 16:8.

25. 1 Corinthians 3:16; John 16:7, 8,13; John 14:26.

26. International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 25, no. 4 (December 1982): 397-401.

27. 2 Corinthians 2:11, 16.

Spirit is God – but in order to grant to us the understanding that the Lord wants us to have.”²⁸ The doctrines of divine illumination and the indwelling Spirit establish that God has provided a way to hear him, a way that makes knowing his intentions possible, at least in principle.²⁹

Spiegel appears to address this possibility under the category of “personal divine revelation,” although he speaks here of understanding events in both one’s own life and the lives of others.³⁰ He says,

Unlike the additional corroborating factors I posed above, personal religious experiences have an irreducibly subjective dimension which properly invites public scrutiny. Passing such scrutiny, it seems reasonable to suppose that such experiences might provide similarly corroborating grounds for inferring divine wrath in a given case. But, alas, establishing the veridicality of such extraordinary personal religious experiences is a very difficult thing to do. So grounding a claim of special divine wrath in this way only pushes a significant justificatory burden back one step.³¹

Spiegel is right to stress the “irreducibly subjective dimension” of religious experiences, and he is right in saying that these experiences are not necessarily unjustified just because they are subjective. In fact, a personal revelation of this sort is just what we should expect given the theology of the Holy Spirit. It is this direct communication from God himself that justifies the beliefs it produces in a basic way, not entirely different from the way that warrant is acquired by beliefs produced by the *sensus divinitatis* in Reformed Epistemology.³²

A distinction that Spiegel should stress then is between the justificatory demands of ascribing meaning to one’s own suffering, on the one hand, and the demands of ascribing meaning to the suffering of others, on the other hand. It is one thing to interpret events in one’s own life as instances of divine wrath; this fits well with a biblically-based understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit and requires no further “justificatory burden.” It is quite another thing to interpret such events in the lives of others for their sake. First, the examples of this kind in Scripture are limited to a special class of God’s people: prophets and apostles.³³ Second, such ascriptions are so prone to abuse given the human inclination to assert power over others that we ought to be very skeptical of any person who suggests he speaks for God about such

28. “Divine Illumination,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/divine-illumination/>.

29. Sometimes even individuals who are close to God endure suffering or the dark night of the soul without knowing why. Job is the best example of this.

30. Spiegel, “It’s the Wrath of God,” 313. I understand divine illumination to be a type of special revelation.

31. Spiegel, “It’s the Wrath of God,” 313.

32. For more on this, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

33. 2 Samuel 12, 1 Corinthians 11:30.

matters. This is not to rule out the possibility of the spiritual gift of prophecy.³⁴ It just means that we ought to be cautious in the use of such gifts lest we harm others and, as Spiegel warns, slander God.³⁵

While God does communicate via the Holy Spirit about his intentions, there is no guarantee that he will actually do so. For his own reasons and for our sake, he may keep his intentions hidden from us, and though the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts us of sin, it does not follow that he will make us aware of every sin in our lives, as mentioned above. In short, being close to God is not a sufficient condition for knowing the reason for our suffering. As Job's case shows, God does not always reveal his intentions even to the greatest of saints; moreover, there is no rational formula for doing this. Spiegel is right to critique the skeptical thesis, but his conditions for identifying divine wrath are not sufficient.

34. 1 Corinthians 12:10. I just want to emphasize here that I do not mean to dismiss the gift of prophecy altogether. I just want to stress that we ought to exercise extreme caution when it comes to the contemporary use of such gifts, comparing prophetic claims to the witness of Scripture.

35. One test for authentic prophecy is found in 1 John 4:1-3.

A Reply to Gregory Bock

JAMES S. SPIEGEL

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I want to thank Gregory Bock for his critical response to my *JBTS* article “‘It’s the Wrath of God’: Reflections on Inferring Divine Punishment.”¹ In my article I pose the question whether it is ever reasonable to infer that a particular contemporary state of affairs is a case of divine wrath. In addressing this question I review several cases of divine wrath reported by the biblical writers, including the worldwide flood (Gen. 6), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), the Egyptian plagues (Exod. 12), the Korah rebellion (Num. 16), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts. 5). In light of such cases, I discuss potential criteria for inferring the occurrence of divine wrath. The conditions I propose include: (1) the occurrence of a miracle in conjunction with the event in question, (2) extraordinary coincidences associated with the event, and (3) the association of the event with a fulfilled bold prediction.

Bock’s Helpful Critique

To test these criteria, Bock applies them to the case of Job—a man who suffered severely but, despite the claims of some of his friends, was actually righteous and thus not a victim of divine wrath. Yet, as Bock explains, my proposed criteria would seemingly invite a very different conclusion. After all, in this case: (1) Job’s suffering is a consequence of a miraculous event (i.e., the spontaneous fire falling from the sky, destroying Job’s sheep and servants), (2) there is an extraordinary coincidence of events in the form of simultaneous destruction of Job’s house, the stealing of his flocks, the burning of his sheep, and the killing of his servants and children, and (3) although these tragedies do not fulfill an actual bold prediction, as Bock puts it, “we can imagine Job’s narrative including one without changing the outcome.”² Such, he says, “would be compatible with the rest of the story playing out as it does, but Job’s friends would still be wrong about God’s intentions.” Therefore, Bock concludes that my proposed conditions “are not sufficient for justifying belief in the occurrence of divine punishment.”³

1. James S. Spiegel, “‘It’s the Wrath of God’: Reflections on Inferring Divine Punishment,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 4:2 (2019): 301-16.

2. Gregory Bock, “The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 5:1 (2021): 137.

3. Bock, “The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment,” 137.

Bock's application of my criteria to the Job narrative is interesting and instructive. It reveals that I should have been explicit about a key assumption in my proposal, specifically that *only persons demonstratively guilty of some significant sin are proper candidates for divine wrath*. Let us call this the *known sin* condition. The case of Job clearly fails this criterion, since God himself declares Job to be "blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8, NIV). Moreover, Job's friends, though not privy to this divine assessment of Job, had no independent evidential grounds on which to base their judgment that Job had sinned in some significant way so as to warrant such harsh treatment by God. Given these facts and the additional "known sin" condition, the application of the other criteria I propose becomes moot. Thus, my proposed conditions don't fail as much as they must be supplemented with the "known sin" requirement. This is something that I took for granted but I certainly should have made explicit, as Bock's critique makes evidently clear.

Bock's Misguided Critiques

While I am indebted to Bock for this corrective, I would like to push back on his other critiques. Bock proceeds to note that the failure of Job's friends in assessing him is rooted in a lack of empathy. He therefore proposes a condition of his own which he dubs the "empathy condition." He articulates this as follows: "before ascribing divine wrath to explain the suffering of others, one ought to have a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances."⁴ He adds that such a requirement "would remind us that epistemic caution is a virtue and that the act of judging others is prone to error."⁵ I strongly agree with both of these points and there is nothing in my argument which would suggest otherwise. In fact, I emphasize and elaborate in some detail on Bock's point about epistemic caution, noting that "it is probably prudent to maintain an especially stringent standard for making such assertions. After all, it is always possible to err in one's interpretations regarding each of the potential corroborating factors" that I discuss.⁶

Bock proceeds to focus on the personal dimension of making sense of suffering and emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting individual believers regarding sin in their lives. He says, "the conviction of sin is not the conclusion of a deductive argument or the satisfying of a set of sufficient conditions; rather it is an awareness of one's spiritual condition communicated by God through the Holy Spirit."⁷ I couldn't agree more. But the principal concern of my article and the criteria I propose is not personal divine guidance but the matter of inferring divine wrath

4. Bock, "The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment," 138.

5. Bock, "The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment," 138.

6. Spiegel, "It's the Wrath of God," 314.

7. Bock, "The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment," 139.

in the lives of *other people*. Since we are naturally interested in God's purposes in allowing or inflicting suffering in other's lives, not just our own, this is what motivates my interest in the question when, if at all, one may justifiably infer the occurrence of divine wrath in such cases. Furthermore, the public nature of much suffering is what demands the sorts of objective criteria (or "rational formulae") that I propose for making assessments in such cases.

Bock sums up his critique when he says that "a distinction that Spiegel should stress . . . is between the justificatory demands of ascribing meaning to one's own suffering, on the one hand, and the demands of ascribing meaning to the suffering of others, on the other hand."⁸ While this is no doubt an important distinction, for various reasons, I am not convinced that it is always useful, much less decisive, in the context of striving to understand *God's* purposes in allowing or inflicting suffering in one's life. While each individual has privileged access to many dimensions of their own life, it doesn't follow from this that their subjective judgments are incorrigible or even more reliable than that of some other persons. In fact, as psychological research has repeatedly demonstrated, it is often the case that the subjective point of view distorts one's judgments on events. Given the reality of personal bias and self-deception, whether due to the warping effect of emotions on one's use of reason or other factors, we might actually have more reason to be *skeptical* of a person's ascriptions of meaning to their own suffering.⁹ For this reason, perhaps the justificatory demands are *greater*, not lesser for the person who makes such meaning assessments regarding her own suffering. In any case, we need not assume, as Bock does, that justificatory standards should be less demanding when ascribing meaning to one's own suffering as opposed to the suffering of others.¹⁰

Conclusion

I do appreciate Gregory Bock's critical response to my treatment of the matter of inferring divine punishment. I have conceded a major point of his critique, namely

8. Bock, "The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment," 140.

9. See, for example, James R. Larson, Jr., "Evidence for a Self-Serving Bias in the Attribution of Causality," *Journal of Personality* 45 (1977): 430-441 and Emily Pronin, "Perception and Misperception of Bias in Human Judgment," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11 (2007): 37-43. And this is to say nothing of the problem of self-deception, the deleterious epistemic effects of which have been well-documented. For a definitive study on self-deception, see Alfred R. Mele, *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

10. Bock even goes so far as to assert the following: "it is one thing to interpret the events in one's own life as instances of divine wrath; this fits well with a biblically-based understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit and requires no further 'justificatory burden.' It is quite another thing to interpret such events in the lives of others for their sake" (Bock, "The Trouble with Inferring Divine Punishment," 140.). Why should we believe that one's assessment of whether God is acting wrathfully in one's own life incurs *no* rational justification? We most certainly have some degree of justificatory burden as we strive to interpret divine purpose in our own lives, as is evident for the reasons just noted regarding the psychological specters of self-serving bias and self-deception.

that my three criteria were not sufficient for inferring divine wrath. I have also showed that Bock's other critiques are problematic. Specifically, I pointed out that Bock seems to have overlooked the fact that I emphasized exercising epistemic caution when making inferences regarding divine wrath. And I also showed that Bock mistakenly grants certain epistemic privileges—specifically in the form of relaxed justificatory demands—to those making meaning assessments of their own suffering. I argued that because of the self-serving bias and the risk of self-deception, the justificatory demands in a context of self-concerned meaning assessments should be at least as rigorous as those pertaining to other people.

As for Bock's critical point that I concede, this concerns the fact that the three conditions I propose as potential criteria for inferring the occurrence of divine wrath should be supplemented with a "known sin" condition, which stipulates that *only persons demonstratively guilty of some significant sin are proper candidates for divine wrath*. Thus, my revised proposal would constitute a two-phase analysis, such that *only* in cases where the "known sin" condition is satisfied should one proceed to the next phase of application of conditions, which include: (1) the occurrence of a miracle in conjunction with the event in question, (2) extraordinary coincidences associated with the event, and (3) the association of the event with a fulfilled bold prediction.

While I am at it, let me make two further clarifications. First, the application of my proposed conditions ought to be construed *disjunctively* in the sense that in the second phase of analysis (that is, given the satisfaction of the "known sin" criterion) condition 1 *or* 2 *or* 3 might be sufficient to warrant the inference to divine punishment. That is, the demand that all three or even two of these further conditions be satisfied in phase two would be too strict—so strict, in fact, that it would rule out even many biblical reports of divine wrath as unwarranted. Secondly, I regard all inferences to divine punishment on the basis of these criteria to be inductive or abductive in nature, as opposed to deductive. This means that no such inferences are warranted to the point of rational certainty. Instead, they should be construed as probabilistic claims (if inductive) or inferences to the best explanation (if abductive). For this reason, inferences to divine wrath will always be epistemically fallible and subject to falsification given the acquisition of further data about a given case. Consequently, such claims should always be guarded, cautious, and, depending on the particular case, even tentative or provisional in nature.

Papal Bull: A Response to Contemporary Papal Scholarship

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Peter Lampe, in his work, *From Paul to Valentinus*, argues that until the second part of the second century, the church in Rome favored a fractured collegial Presbyterian ecclesiology.¹ The Catholic historian, Robert Eno, agrees with Lampe when he states the following:

But the evidence available seems to point predominantly if not decisively in the direction of a collective leadership. Dogmatic a priori theses should not force us into presuming or requiring something that the evidence leans against.... This evidence (Clement, Hermas, Ignatius) points us in the direction of assuming that in the first century and into the second, there was no bishop of Rome in the usual sense given to that title.²

And Eno is not the only Catholic historian who agrees with Lampe. Eamon Duffy, who served on the Pontifical Historical Commission, agrees that ‘all the indications are that there was no single bishop of Rome for almost a century after the deaths of the Apostles.’³ Using Bayesian reasoning, Jerry Walls, an analytic philosopher of religion, has recently argued that if there was a bishop in Rome in the first century, we should expect a mention of it in the Patristic writings. Walls puts the probability of Clement of Rome mentioning a bishop in Rome at .44, the probability of Shepherd of Hermas at .53, Ignatius at .33, and Justin Martyr at .27. Walls then goes on to calculate that the probability of there being at least one mention of a bishop in Rome in one of these writings, assuming there was in fact a bishop in Rome in the first century, would be about .87.⁴ And yet, since none of these documents mention a

1. Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the first two centuries* (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 397.

2. Robert B. Eno, *The Rise of the Papacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 26, 29. Cf. Jerry Walls, “If Christ be not Raised”; If Peter was not the First Pope: Parallel Cases of Indispensable Doctrinal Foundations, *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 4/2 (2019); 252.

3. Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners* (New Haven: Yale Press, 2014), 2.

4. Walls does the following to get the aforementioned calculation:

$$1 - P(\sim\text{CR} \ \& \ \sim\text{HR} \ \& \ \sim\text{IR} \ \& \ \sim\text{JR}) = 1 - [P(\sim\text{CR}) * P(\sim\text{HR}) * P(\sim\text{IR}) * P(\sim\text{JR})]$$

$$\text{Since } P(\text{CR}) = 0.44, \text{ and } P(\text{CR or } \sim\text{CR}) = P(\text{CR}) + P(\sim\text{CR}) = 1$$

we know that

$$P(\sim\text{CR}) = 1 - P(\text{CR}) = 1 - 0.44 = 0.56$$

bishop in Rome, we have strong evidence to suggest that there was no bishop in first century Rome. Lampe, Eno, Duffy, and Walls are not in the minority with their opinions; in fact, they espouse the paradigm view within papal historical studies. In this paper, however, I will argue that it is reasonable to hold a skeptical attitude toward the paradigm view that there was no bishop in Rome in the first century. I will do this by examining the evidence for the paradigm view in each of the aforementioned Patristic authors. I will conclude with a brief argument for there being a monarchical bishop in first century Rome.

Clement of Rome

Traditionally, Clement of Rome is dated to have been written in 95 AD. This in part can be explained by Eusebius linking Clement's reign as Peter's successor with the Roman Emperor, Domitian.⁵ If Clement did not come into power until Domitian was already reigning, then Clement's letter to the Corinthians would have to be dated toward the end of the first century. Most scholars then, go on to read Clement 1:1's discussion of 'calamities which have befallen us' as addressing the famous Domitian persecution. Again, if the letter refers to Domitian's persecution, then only a later dating of 1 Clement is acceptable.⁶

Recently, the traditional dating of 1 Clement has been challenged. For example, Thomas Herron has argued that we should date 1 Clement to 70 AD. One reason one should prefer the earlier dating relates to Clement's discussion of the temple. When Clement discusses the temple in 40-41, Clement speaks of the temple in the present tense.⁷ It is as if the temple is still around. Moreover, he gives great detail about the procedures that take place when it comes to temple sacrifices. Clement is not speaking of the temple as if temple life is far removed from Jewish worship.⁸

There have been some who have suggested that perhaps religious Jews continued to sacrifice at the temple even though the temple was in ruins; thus, the details that Clement gives us are to be expected with a later dating. But, as Herron points out, Kathleen Kenyon's archeology work makes this view implausible.⁹ Kenyon found

and we can conclude that

$$P(\text{CR or HR or IR or JR}) = 1 - [(0.56) * (0.47) * (0.67) * (0.73)] = 1 - 0.1287 = 0.87.$$

See Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years After the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 249.

5. Thomas J. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome: On the Dating of Clement's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008), 6.

6. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 21.

7. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 13-21.

8. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 13.

9. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 18-19.

remains of various worshippers around the temple. Surely, if observant Jews were still sacrificing in the ruins, they would have at least buried their neighbors.

Clement's discussion of the temple, however, is not the only reason for Herron's early dating of 1 Clement. At the end of 1 Clement, we read that three emissaries are being sent to the Corinthians, along with Clement's letter. The first two emissaries mentioned are Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Vito. It is likely that these were slaves who obtained their first names from the Emperor Claudius and his wife, Valeria.¹⁰ Given that according to Roman law, one must be at least thirty years of age to be released from slavery, and, assuming that Ephebus and Vito were freed before their masters died (Valeria died in 48 AD and Claudius died in 54 AD), Ephebus and Vito would be much too old to be emissaries and make the journey to Corinth at the end of the first century.¹¹ An earlier dating of 1 Clement however, could account for how Ephebus and Vito were able to make such a journey.

The third emissary mentioned is Fortunatus. This was a very common name for the time, so it is unexpected that there is no additional information about him, unless of course, they were already familiar with Fortunatus. There is a mention of a Fortunatus in 1 Cor 16:11. It seems plausible that Clement assumes that the Corinthians would simply recognize who he was referencing if the Fortunatus mentioned is the same Fortunatus that Paul references. But again, if this was the Fortunatus that Paul referenced, would he not be too old to be an emissary if 1 Clement was not written until 95 AD?¹² It seems like we would expect the names of the emissaries on the hypothesis that 1 Clement was written closer to 70 AD than the hypothesis that it was written in 95 AD.

If 1 Clement should be dated to around 70 AD, it is not a surprise that Clement does not appeal to his status as a bishop. For starters, he would not have been a bishop at the time. Moreover, it is not surprising that he would not mention the authority of some other bishop, given that Peter and Paul would have just died; the Petrine Office might not have had sufficient time to develop.

Shepherd of Hermas

But what about the Shepherd of Hermas? Should we expect a mention of a bishop in this Patristic writing? It is important to note that most scholars think that the Shepherd of Hermas has multiple authors.¹³ The first 24 chapters was likely written much earlier than the rest of the book. With respect to 1-24, it lacks reference to a bishop or successor to Peter. While it does reference Clement as an elder, (likely,

10. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 10.

11. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 10.

12. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 10.

13. Clayton N. Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).

Clement of Rome) it does seem to downplay his role significantly.¹⁴ He doesn't come across as a monarchical bishop.

It is typically understood that Shepherd of Hermas is difficult to date. While 1-24 has been dated to the 70s by some,¹⁵ others have dated it to the 90s.¹⁶ As Holmes suggests, the reference to Clement 'point[s] to the end of the first century.'¹⁷ Of course, the reference to Clement would only point to the end of the first century if we assume that Clement was only in leadership during this time. However, as Herron has argued, we have good reason to think that Clement was in leadership long before then. If one assumes that 1 Clement should be dated to around 70, the reference to Clement does not provide any evidence for a later dating of Shepherd of Hermas. If 1-24 should be dated to around 70, we again have little reason to expect a mention of Clement being a bishop or there being a successor to Peter.

Ignatius

Does Ignatius' letters act as evidence for the paradigm view? As Walls points out, Ignatius spends a lot of time talking in his letters about the importance of the bishop, and yet, his only letter that is missing a reference to a bishop is in Ignatius' letter to the Romans.¹⁸ If the Romans had a designated bishop, would we really expect Ignatius to be silent on the matter?

The content (or the lack thereof) of Ignatius' letter to the Romans has led some to believe that Ignatius did not believe there was a bishop in Rome. But this reasoning does not take seriously into account other statements made by Ignatius about the necessity of a bishop. For example, Ignatius does not seem to think that one can even be called a church unless one has a bishop:

In like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the Sanhedrim of God, and assembly of the apostles. Apart from these, there is no Church.¹⁹

14. *Shepherd of Hermas* 4[8]:3.

15. Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2006), 37-38.

16. See Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament*.

17. Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2006), 37-38

18. Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years After the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 245.

19. Ignatius, *Trallians*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0106.htm>>.

And yet, in his letter to the Romans, Ignatius seems to treat the Romans as if they have a church. In chapter four, he seems to indirectly include Rome as one of the churches that he is sending a letter to when he says that he is ‘writing to all the churches’ and only the Romans can hinder him. Moreover, in chapter three, Ignatius seems to indicate that the Romans are teaching other churches as they have ‘taught others’. It is hard to imagine that Ignatius both thinks a bishop is necessary to be a church, and yet, while the Romans lacked a bishop and therefore were not a church, they are still first in charity and are responsible for teaching various churches.

Because of this, if anything, Ignatius letters give us evidence that there was a bishop of Rome in the early part of the second century, not that there was not. Having stated this, I move on to discuss whether Justin Martyr’s lack of mentioning a bishop in Rome should cause us to endorse the paradigm view in historical studies.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr addresses the Roman Emperor to give a defense of the Christian faith. However, as it has been pointed out, Justin makes no mention of a bishop in Rome. This should not cause us to be skeptical that there was not a bishop in Rome however. For starters, it might have seemed wise to not let the Emperor know that there is another person reigning in Rome. This could have been a death sentence for the current bishop.

Moreover, it simply might not have been relevant to mention that there is a bishop in Rome. As a Catholic philosopher, I have written various defenses of the Christian faith, and yet, rarely do I mention the papacy. Perhaps, it simply seemed irrelevant to Justin at the time.

Finally, it is important to point out that Justin’s Apologies were written around sixty years into the second century AD. We know that just a couple of decades or so after the Apologies were written, there were references to there being bishops in Rome. The least controversial example can be found in Irenaeus. Irenaeus famously articulates a list of the successors to Peter.²⁰ Given this is the case, it seems that we can conclude one of four things:

1. Irenaeus was clueless about the shape of Roman ecclesiology two decades prior to his writing.
2. Irenaeus was lying.
3. Irenaeus was delusional.
4. Irenaeus was telling the truth.

20. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.

(2) seems implausible given Irenaeus' deeply rooted Christian character. (3) seems unlikely given the coherence of Irenaeus' writings. So, that leaves (1) and (4). In order to be committed to (1) it seems like one would have to come up with a plausible explanation as to why someone as brilliant as Irenaeus got his short-term history so wrong. Of course, you might think that he was lied to but the person postulating as much seems like they would have the burden of proof to demonstrate this as a likelihood. (4) then, seems like the best option.

Perhaps one objects to these options and argues for a fifth option, namely that Irenaeus was merely reading his present situation into very recent history. Since there is a bishop of Rome during Irenaeus' time, Irenaeus makes the unjustified assumption that previous important elders in Rome (e.g. Clement) were also bishops. This, however, seems to just affirm that Irenaeus did not really know what he was talking about. And thus, option (5) would really be a variation of (1). And this being the case, it seems reasonable to hold a skeptical attitude toward the paradigm view that there was no bishop in Rome in the first century.

The Beginning of Days: A Response to Jeremy Lyon’s “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One”

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Abstract: Jeremy D. Lyon, in his essay “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” claimed that Genesis 1:1–2 is meant to be read as part of day one and that this interpretation “reflects the grammar and syntax in the most straightforward manner” and is supported by “inner-textual commentary” (that is, other parts of the Bible). He helpfully focuses on the most crucial issue for young earth creationists: whether Genesis 1 allows for long periods of time between the creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), in Genesis 1:1, and the beginning of the days, in 1:3. Following the work of Weston Fields, Lyon offers a grammatically impressive defense of a crucial issue for defending Young Earth Creationism (YEC), that Genesis 1:1–2 is “circumstantial;” that is, that it describes the circumstances at the dawn of day one. However, his conclusion about the circumstantial clauses of Genesis 1:2 is overly narrow. Further, Lyon scarcely touches on the literary device demarcating the onset of each day (the “and God said” refrain) and doesn’t deal with the scene-setting grammar and vocabulary of the first two verses, or the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3, or the different terms (create, *bā-rā* [ברא] vs make, *‘ā-śāh*, [עָשָׂה]) between Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 20:11 and 31:17. These crucial omissions means that Lyon fails to prove his claims.

Introduction

Jeremy D. Lyon, in a 2019 essay in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, proffered an interpretation of Genesis 1 that begins day one at the first verse.¹ He called this “the traditional interpretation” and claimed it “reflects the grammar in

1. Jeremy D. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” *JETS* 62.2 (2019): 269–85. I prefer to call the first day “day one” rather than “the first day” because that is the literal translation of the term in Genesis 1:5 and to show that in Hebrew the first five days are described without the definite article (“the”) while the sixth and seventh have the definite article (e.g. “the sixth day”, “the seventh day”).

the most straightforward manner” and is supported by “inner-textual commentary.”² It is the standard interpretation for Young Earth Creationists (YECists), like Ken Ham and John MacArthur. The key question: Would an unindoctrinated reader, in the original audience Genesis was intended for, read Genesis 1 as beginning day one in verse 1? By “unindoctrinated,” I don’t mean presuppositionless as no such reader exists. I mean the average reader (or hearer) for which Genesis was intended. Does the author intend us to see the first two verses of Genesis as describing day one? Does Genesis, in that way, create an unbroken, dateable, chronological sequence back to creation? Lyon and other YECists insist that it does. Does their interpretation stand up to scrutiny?

The place to begin is at the beginning. Many readers assume that the key to the debate is the meaning of “day.” But this begs the question as to whether Genesis 1:1-2 is part of day one. Until that issue is settled, debating the meaning of “day” is premature. The first crucial question: when does day one begin? Thankfully, this is the question that Lyon grapples with. Like Luther wrote to Erasmus, Lyon is to be praised and commended highly for attacking the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and not wearying us with trifles.³ In this debate, the definition of “*yom*” (day) would be a trifle between young and old earth creationism until we settle whether the first two verses preface day one or are part of it.

Begin at the beginning. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). That’s the first sentence our imaginary unindoctrinated reader would see. Lyon claims that the traditional and “straightforward” reading of this verse is that it begins day one.⁴ Lyon’s interpretation achieves for Young Earth Creationism (YEC) an unbroken, chronological sequence all the way back to the original creation of Genesis 1:1 which is essential to it. Lyon concludes:

Gen 1:1 is an independent clause depicting God’s initial creative act (*creatio ex nihilo*) on day one. Genesis 1:2 is a description of the state or condition of the earth as it was initially created. Genesis 1:3 then moves the narration forward. Thus, the first five verses (1:1–5) constitute the creative acts of day one. The text does not allow for the possibility of preexistent matter or an undisclosed period of time prior to day one.⁵

2. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 285.

3. *The Annotated Luther*, Volume 2: Word and Faith, Kirsi I. Stjerna, editor, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) 256.

4. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 285.

5. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 285.

The Refrain

There is a major literary marker that we can assume our unindoctrinated reader would immediately notice: the refrain that introduces each day occurs in verse 3. Genesis 1:3 doesn't simply move "the narration forward."⁶ It opens with a refrain – a literary device – that marks it off: "and he said" (*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר).⁷ Each of the days is demarcated by a refrain with "And God said" (*way-yō-mer*) beginning each day and "it was evening and morning the *n*th day" concluding it (except for the seventh).⁸ Because we're looking for "the literary boundary" of day one, we cannot dismiss such an obvious boundary marker. Since every day is begun with that refrain, consistency suggests that the writer intends to show us that day one begins with "And God said" (*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר) in verse 3. There is no literary reason why verse one could not have begun with "God said" if the intention was to communicate that verses one and two are part of day one.⁹

In a detailed essay on this issue, it is notable that Lyon does not substantially deal with the introductory portion of the refrain. He fills three pages demonstrating the paragraph divisions of the Qumran texts compared to the Masoretic and an entire section on the commentary of ancient Jewish literature but confines his exegesis of the refrain that opens each day to two sentences in the footnotes. He notes that John Collins bases his conclusions on the fact that "the first *wayyiqtol* verb וַיֹּאמֶר ("then he said") occurs in 1:3" and that the "the following workdays of creation week (days 2–6) begins with the same *wayyiqtol* verb."¹⁰ He notes that the ending of every day is demarcated by "and there was evening and morning the *n*th day" but dismisses the idea that the phrase that consistently marks the beginning of every other day also marks the beginning of day one.¹¹ He states, "the fact that each of the subsequent workdays of creation week begin with the *wayyiqtol* verb וַיֹּאמֶר [*way-yō-mer*] ("then he said") does not necessarily mean that day one must also begin with the *wayyiqtol* verb וַיֹּאמֶר ("then he said") in 1:3." He reasons that this is the case because, "within the narrative, וַיֹּאמֶר [*way-yō-mer*] occurs in several places *other than* the beginning

6. Lyon, "Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One," 270.

7. "The days are marked off by a refrain" (John Collins, *Genesis 1-4, A Linguistic, Literary and Theological Commentary* (P & R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2006) 55.

8. "There is a clear pattern to the days: they each begin with the phrase "And God said" and end with the statement "and there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day." This means that, according to the text, day 1 begins in verse 3 and not in verse 1." (Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the Word* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011), 52).

9. For example, it could read, "In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light," when he created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void" etc. This is, essentially, the interpretation that Lyon wants us to believe was intended for Genesis.

10. Lyon, "Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One," 279.

11. Lyon on the concluding half of the refrain: "Each of the six days of creation week are clearly marked off by the formula, "Then it was evening, then it was morning, day one/second day/third day/fourth day/fifth day/the sixth day." (Lyon, 269.)

of a day (e.g. 1:11, 26, 29).¹² This is dubious reasoning. Just because the “and God said” (*way-yō-mer*) refrain is used at other places – each significant creative acts – than just the beginning of the days, doesn’t mean that the refrain still doesn’t mark the beginning of each creation day. Because *way-yō-mer* (וַיֹּאמֶר) is also used to mark the immensely important creative events of vegetation (1:11), humanity (1:26), and food for humanity (1:29), does not alter the fact that it is also the literary boundary marker for the beginning of each of the other days. Shouldn’t we conclude that it is also serving that purpose for the first day? That is, every other day in the creation week is begun with the literary marker “and God said” (*way-yō-mer*). In order to show that 1:1-2 is part of day one, Lyon must show why day one is an exception to this rule. He doesn’t.

Waws: Disjunctive and Consecutive

A major part of Lyon’s case is his exegesis of the Hebrew conjunction beginning verse 2, the *waw*: “The construction of the *waw* plus a noun (in this case, + וַיִּרְאֶה, [wə-hā-’ā-reš]) is known as a *waw* disjunctive, which does not convey sequence, but a condition. In other words, the opening clause of verse two is functioning as a parenthetical description or background information concerning the earth as initially created in verse one.”¹³ Hence, he concludes, on the basis of this *waw* disjunctive, that “Hebrew grammar does not allow for the insertion of vast periods of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.”¹⁴ Lyon here appears to be carrying on the work, from a generation earlier, of Weston Fields. Fields also strove to provide the academic foundation for YECists to show that Genesis 1:1-2 is part of day one. In his *Unformed and Unfilled*, he sought to close any possibilities for long intervals between the initial creation and the beginning of day one. That is, like Lyon, he tried to exclude the gap theory as a viable interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2.

The gap theory posits that there is a lengthy, undefined interval of time between the initial creation in Genesis 1:1 and the dawn of day one in 1:3. It was popularized by *Thomas Chalmers* (1780 – 1847), a professor at the University of Edinburgh and founder of the Free Church of Scotland. The Gap Theory was part of the original Scofield Reference Bible (1909). It was more recently propagated by Arthur C. Custance (1910–1985), a Canadian anthropologist, Biblical archaeologist and Hebrew scholar who wrote *Without Form and Void* in 1970. Custance’s gap theory claims there is an epoch between 1:1 and 1:2. Fields responded by describing the

12. Original emphasis, Lyon, 279, fn. 45. I have here reproduced the entirety of Lyon’s engagement with the opening refrain *way-yō-mer*.

13. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 278.

14. Ken Ham, *Six Days* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013), 105. This explanation is repeated by Answers in Genesis spokesman Troy Lacey in reply to the question about how much time transpires in Genesis 1:2.

conjunction beginning Genesis 1:2 as a *waw* attached to a noun (e.g. “and the earth”), usually interpreted as a “*waw* disjunctive,” which may indicate the back-ground or circumstances of the main verb.¹⁵ John Goldingay, referring to verse 2, notes that this is “a normal view that those are disjunctive *waws*.”¹⁶ It may indicate that the action is simultaneous or parenthetical material to the main verb. For example: “and the earth was” without form, etc., while God said the first fiat (“let there be light”) that begins day one. It is in contrast to the *waw* consecutive which is attached to a verb (e.g. “and God said”) and, as we’ll see, is usually translated simply as “and.” Fields sought to show that the *waw* disjunctive opening 1:2 prohibits any length of time between 1:1 and 1:2 and, by implication, attaches 1:1-2 to 1:3 and thus day one.

However, there are several problems with Lyon’s narrow interpretation of “*waw*” (ו) in Genesis 1:1-2. First, as Leslie Allen has noted, “*waw*” is so flexible in its meaning that it’s not possible to interpret it so technically and specifically.¹⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs notes that the *waw* “is used freely and widely in Hebrew but also with much delicacy, to express relations and shades of meaning which Western languages would usually indicate by distinct particles.”¹⁸ How we determine what shade of meaning the *waw* might carry is a matter of context and interpretation. It should be interpreted contextually rather than implying that a “*waw*” not connected to a verb is necessarily a “*waw* copulative used disjunctively” and necessarily exclude the possibility of gaps, as Fields and Lyon claim.¹⁹ In this case, common sense demands some kind of sequence as the earth must be “void and desolate” after having been created in 1:1, if, as Lyon rightly argues, 1:1 is describing creation *ex nihilo*. So, while it’s technically accurate to observe that the “*waw*” beginning 1:2 is a disjunctive, as Goldingay remarked, “I don’t really see how this proves anything about creationism!”²⁰

Waw (ו) is an extremely common Hebrew word, really a prefix to other words which may carry the meaning of “and,” “but,” “now,” “then,” etc, or even be untranslated, as it was by the NKJV of Genesis 1:2a, effectively treating it as a punctuation.²¹ Other than in the very first sentence of Genesis 1:1-3, *Waw* begins

15. In my educational experience the conjunction *waw* is usually pronounced “vuv” and the letter *waw* is pronounced like a “v.”

16. John Goldingay, e-mail interview, February 16, 2016. Goldingay (BA University of Oxford, PhD University of Nottingham) is senior professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary.

17. Leslie Allen notes that the *waw* disjunctive is “a slippery term.” (Leslie Allen, e-mail interview, Feb 19, 2016.)

18. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Hendrickson Publishing, Inc.: Peabody, MA, 1979), 252.

19. *Unformed and Unfilled*, (Master Books: Green Forest, AR, 1976), 82. Different scholars use the terms copulative, *explicativum* and disjunctive apparently synonymously.

20. John Goldingay, e-mail interview, February 16, 2016.

21. “Occasionally the English equivalent [of the *waw* consecutive] is “but,” “now,” “then,” “so,” “and so,” or “moreover,” and in a few instances merely a semicolon (typically with paired sentences).” (Samuel L. Bray and John F. Robbins, *Genesis 1-11, A New Old Translation for Readers*,

every sentence there. Further, while most scholars agree with Lyon that the *waw* beginning Genesis 1:2 is a disjunctive and so does not necessarily convey the meaning of a sequence of events, most would also say that the *waw* beginning 1:3 is a *waw* consecutive which likely does convey a sequence. But is it an immediate sequence, with no possibility of other events, no gaps, so immediate that the attached events must have occurred on the same day?

Answers in Genesis (AiG) official spokesman Troy Lacey insists that it is. According to AiG the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3, “really means something akin to “and then next”.”

So it is revealed that all of these events from 1:1 through 1:5 equal one day (verse 5) constrained by evening and morning. . . . Therefore at most the time between the Creative events of each day, cannot be longer than 12 hours, for in verse 3 God created light. Had God wanted to convey a time period (some type of gap) between each (or any) Day He could have surely done so by not having Moses connect everything with a *waw* consecutive.²²

To his credit, Lyon does not try to make this case of an immediate sequence of events based on the *waw* consecutive. AiG is right in the basic data they report -- the *waw* consecutive means generally “and then next”-- but wrong in the way they interpret that data. They imply that the *waw* consecutive allows for no intervening events, as though it means “and then immediately next.” This is a rendering of “*waw*” not borne out by Hebrew usage or lexicons.²³ For example, in Genesis 5, the genealogical entry of each name, beginning with Adam (in verse 3, and following in verses 6, 9, 12, etc.), begins with ׀ (translated as “when” in the ESV), a “*waw* consecutive.” Surely we are not expected to believe that Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, etc, did nothing other than father a son at the specified time; that there were no intervening events; indeed, we are told each of them “had other sons and daughters” in the intervening time. The truth is that the *waw* consecutive only signifies the next event that the author wishes to narrate.

Fields and now Lyon aren’t so careless, as AiG, as to make inaccurate, sweeping claims about the *waw* consecutive. Rather, they ignore it. Despite relying on the disjunctive of 1:2 for his argument, Lyon doesn’t deal with the *waw* consecutive opening verse 3, (the first word in the refrain “And God said” [*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר].) He doesn’t mention the *waw* consecutive at all. This is a crucial omission because the *waw* consecutive beginning the crucial “and God said” (1:3), can, indeed, allow for a gap. Fields strove to prove that the opening *waw* of 1:2 cannot be a consecutive; that consecutives, not disjunctives allow the possibility of a time interval.²⁴ Hence Fields

Scholars and Translators (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse: 2017), 48.

22. Troy Lacey, Answers in Genesis, e-mail interview, March 16, 2015.

23. Brown, Driver, Briggs’ entry on the “*waw*” contains no such sweeping, absolute statement (251-55).

24. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled*, 81-83.

and Lyon have implicitly admitted that the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3 may separate 1:1-2 from day one, just as the *waw* consecutive separates each day from the one before. That is, the opening *waw* of 1:3 communicates a subsequent act in the same way as the *waws* that begin every other day. Fields and Lyon strove to close any possible gap between 1:1 and 1:2 based on their interpretation of the *waw* disjunctive. But in so doing they appear to have proved the consecutive opening verse three, with the refrain, allows for a break in the sequence of events between 1:2 and 1:3.

The *sin a-qua-non* for YECism is demonstrating an unbroken, datable chronology back to the original creation. So tying 1:2 to 1:3 is crucial. YEC seeks to link the original creation (1:1) to the first fiat of day one (1:3) through the events of 1:2. But that attempt founders on exactly the grammatical point Fields and Lyon worked so hard to prove to close the gap between 1:1 and 1:2: a *waw* consecutive, not a disjunctive, begins 1:3. They argue – unpersuasively – that the *waw* disjunctive opening 1:2 forbids any gap between “In the beginning” (1:1) and “and God said” (1:3) but fail to note that the *waw* consecutive opening 1:3 allows that gap.

Grammar

This then brings the third major issue (after the refrain and the *waw*) regarding time in Genesis 1:1-2: the grammar. Lyon claims that the “straightforward” interpretation of the verbs, suggests that verses one and two are part of day one. C. John Collins disagrees. He noted, “The likely function of Gen. 1:2 is to describe the conditions of the earth just as the first day was beginning (v. 3) — so it says nothing about whether there was any time gap between the initial creation event (v. 1) and the first day. I argue this on the basis of discourse grammar.”²⁵ By “discourse grammar” Collins means that the perfect tense in the opening of a narrative describes an event that occurred prior to the main narrative. “The normal use of the perfect at the very beginning of a pericope is to denote an event that took place before the storyline gets under way.”²⁶ It’s a stage-setting grammatical device. Lyon calls them “*qatal* verbs” (apparently referring to the same thing), a past tense. The main storyline uses what Hebrew grammarians call “*wayyiqtol* verbs.”²⁷ (*Wayyiqtol* means “and + *yiqtol*.” For example, *way-yō-mer* is “and he would say.”)²⁸ To put it simplistically, it’s a story-

25. Collins, e-mail interview, August 7, 2015.

26. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 51.

27. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 51. “These verbs are used primarily to describe a sequence of consecutive actions (*Waw* Consecutive) in which the verb prefixed with the conjunction *Waw* is related to a previous verb (*Waw* Relative). These forms are often referred to by the English transliterations *wayyiqtol* and *weqatal*. The *wayyiqtol* form is one of the most common verbal forms in the Hebrew bible and denotes a simple action in the past, also called “Preterite.”” (Gary Practico and Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001], 194.)

28. http://vadimcherny.org/hebrew/grammatical_function_hebrew_yiqtol.htm

telling tense. In Genesis 1, there are no *wayyiqtol* (story telling) verbs in the first two verses. The first two verses use *qatal* verbs which Collins explains are for “stage setting.” The first use of a *wayyiqtol* verb, and thus the marker that the main narrative has begun, is at the onset of verse 3, “and he said” (*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר). The remainder of the Genesis 1 contains these type of verbs.²⁹ Hence, “created” (*bā-rā*, בָּרָא) in 1:1 “denotes an action prior to the main storyline – that is, prior to the beginning of the first day.”³⁰ Collins concludes, based on this “discourse grammar,” that day one begins in 1:3 at an “unspecified time” after the creation of the universe in 1:1.³¹

Lyon’s response is to claim that it is more “natural” to read the first two verses as part of day one and that it “would seem to be a bit out of place” to begin the narrative with a *wayyiqtol* verb.³² He explains that his reading is more natural “considering one of the primary (though not exclusive) functions of the *wayyiqtol* is to move the narration forward sequentially...”. That the *wayyiqtol* verbs beginning in verse 3 move the narration forward isn’t the question. The question is why doesn’t verse 1 begin with such a verb if, as he argues, day one begins in verse 1? Why is the stage set for “and God said,” if there is no stage prior to “and God said”? He further explains, “and given there would have been no creative acts prior to the beginning.” That is, he’s saying, verses 1-2 must be part of day one because there cannot be any acts before “the absolute beginning,” apparently assuming that day one is “the absolute beginning.” Lyon is begging the question of whether Gen 1:1-2 is part of day one. He says it is because that is the “natural reading.”³³

In reality, it is quite natural to preface a narrative by setting the stage; in this case, setting the stage for the six days by briefly describing the events prior to the beginning of days. There are four “stage-setting” statements, one in verse 1 (about the “absolute beginning”) and three in 1:2 focusing on condition of the earth:

And the earth was “void and desolate”,³⁴ (1:2a)

וְהָאָרֶץ, הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ

and darkness was over the face of the deep (1:2b)

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ, וְחָשָׁךְ, וְחֹשֶׁךְ

and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (1:2c)

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

Genesis 1:2b is closely connected to 1:2a because it borrows its verb (*hā-yā-tāh*, הִיְתָה, discussed below) from it. Genesis 1:2c may be interpreted as separable and so as an independent sentence. Or 1:2c may be interpreted as having a participle

29. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 42.

30. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 55.

31. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 57.

32. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 280.

33. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 280..

34. Bray and Hobbins, *Genesis 1-11, A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars and Translators*, 68.

(“hovering”, מְרַחֵף, *mā-ra-ḥe-pēl*) that assumes the verb of 1:2a (“was” or “became”) alongside it. Either way, the verb in 1:2c describes ongoing action, “was hovering” (מְרַחֵף, *mā-ra-ḥe-pēl*).³⁵ To hover is dynamic, an action over some time. This word evokes the image of a hen brooding over her chicks. It suggests nurturing, care, supervision.³⁶ The same word (מְרַחֵף, *mā-ra-ḥe-pēl*) is used in Deuteronomy 32:11, “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that *flutters* over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions”; and in Jeremiah 23:9 where the ESV (and other translations) renders it as “shakes.” It also suggests a process over a period of time. How long a period of time? The passage doesn’t say.

This brings us to two independent though interwoven issues: first, whether the phrases of Genesis 1:1-2 are sequential or circumstantial and, second, whether the verb in 1:2a (*hā-yā-tāh*, הָיָא) is properly translated as “was” or “became.” If they are sequential, they communicate a chain of events over time, a problem if the time is less than 24 hours. If they are circumstantial, they describe the environment of the action. (“A circumstantial clause describes the manner, circumstances or conditions under which the main clause occurs.”³⁷) They can theoretically be interpreted in four different ways: as sequential with *hā-yā-tāh* as “was”, or sequential with *hā-yā-tāh* as “became,” or circumstantial with *hā-yā-tāh* as “was,” or even circumstantial with *hā-yā-tāh* as “became,” describing the events prior to day one which brought about the circumstances on the dawn of that day. None of these possible interpretations establish Lyon’s YEC case. Some trouble it.

A sequential interpretation of 1:1-2 could render the *waws* as “then” and *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָא) in 1:2a as “became,” with the interpretation that it relates a series of events: the earth became void and desolate and then darkness became over the waters and then the Spirit of God nurtured the earth. This approach suggests that the earth was first created by the fiat of 1:1, then it became void. It implies a cosmic catastrophe befell the earth. (Some gap theorists have filled this gap with speculation that tends to discredit the gap theory, speculation that Lyon understandably pounces on.³⁸) Lyon claims that this is impossible, because of the *waw* disjunctive (discussed above) and the grammar. “The form of the verb הָיָא [*hā-yā-tāh*] which is not connected to the *waw* conjunction, cannot be construed as “became” in this context.”³⁹ Lyon asserts this conclusion on the basis of *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (1910) but doesn’t note that many other Hebrew grammarians don’t concur.⁴⁰ Barry Bandstra notes that *hā-yā-tāh* (1:2a) could, indeed, be rendered “as a material process and be translated

35. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 42.

36. John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning* (W Publishing Group: Nashville, TN, 2001), 77.

37. Ronald J. Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, (University of Toronto Press, 2014) 176.

38. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 279.

39. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 278.

40. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 454.

as *became*,” hence sequential contrary to Lyon. This suggests, “that the earth went through a transformation.”⁴¹ Lyon is eager to discredit this as an exegetical possibility because if the earth “became” void as a result of events after creation but prior to day one, the datable sequence of events on which YECism relies is undone.

In an e-mail interview, Leslie Allen, my former Old Testament professor, noted the possibility of interpreting the three statements of 1:2 as “circumstantial” and whether they are dependent or independent clauses.⁴² (Independent clauses are separate sentences, as in the current, major English translations of 1:1-2.) Lyon wants us, as is traditional, to read the first two verses as circumstantial and as independent clauses. He concludes that 1:2 is “a parenthetical description of the condition of the earth in its initial created state.”⁴³ Allen says this is a definite possibility, Genesis 1:2 “is generally interpreted as a nominal circumstantial clause with the verb [*hā-yā-tāh*] . . . just functioning as a copula (“was”) and with the usual order of subject-predicate in a circumstantial clause.”⁴⁴ Wilhelm Gesenius concurs. He believed that Genesis 1:2 is an example of *haya* (הָיָה), the root word, being used as a “connecting word,” what Allen calls a “copula.”⁴⁵ The condition reported by *haya* (הָיָה) is either “contemporaneous with the principal events or continuing as a result of them.”⁴⁶ The relevant question for us is, then, what are the “principal events:” the creation of Gen. 1:1 or the “and God said” of 1:3?

Paul Joüon with Takamitsu Muraoka likewise interpreted *haya* (הָיָה) as a copula (“was” connecting “the earth” with “void and desolate”), describing the circumstances that developed out of 1:1.⁴⁷ But in 1892 S. R. Driver insisted that Hebrew wasn’t so rigid in its rules, especially about what is or is not a circumstantial clauses; “emphasis or the love of variety” is a factor.⁴⁸ One must have a sense of the literary nature of the text. It’s literature, not mathematics. Further, even if 1:2 is circumstantial, the circumstantial, with *haya* (הָיָה) may represent “an act completed long before.”⁴⁹ Allen concludes, “There is no 100% proof rule as to whether Gen 1:2 is sequential or circumstantial.” In other words, Hebrew lacks an absolute rule on this

41. Bandstra, 43, 46. Bandstra notes that *bā-rā* “is a finite verb and not an infinitive; normally both components of a construct phrase must be nominal forms.” (Barry Bandstra, *Genesis 1-11, A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press, 2008), 43.)

42. Leslie C. Allen (BA and MA, Cambridge University; DD and PhD, University of London) is Senior Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. Richard Muller, when also teaching at Fuller, said that Professor Allen was one of a handful of people in all of North America who could read the unpointed Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls with fluency.

43. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 279.

44. Leslie Allen, e-mail interview, February 19, 2016.

45. Gesenius, 452, fn. 2, 454.

46. Gesenius, 455.

47. Paul Jouon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003) 542.

48. *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses*, 200.

49. Gesenius, 455.

grammatical issue. This opens the door to legitimately interpreting the verb in 1:2a, *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָאֵה), as “became,” in a temporal sequence.⁵⁰

Some scholars want to read the first two verses as circumstantial but as dependent clauses, hence like “When God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, it was without form,” etc. This is reading it as a dependent clause, following Abraham Ibn Ezra (d. 1167) and Solomon ben Isaac, d. 1105). F. F. Bruce wrote that he was “almost persuaded” that the best translation of Genesis 1:1-3 was, “In the beginning of God’s creating the heaven and the earth (now the earth was waste and emptiness, and darkness on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovering on the face of the water), God said ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Other mid-twentieth century scholars were more fully persuaded.⁵¹ While this would seem to bolster the conclusion Lyon arrives at, nevertheless Lyon helpfully commits several pages in his essay countering this dependent-clause interpretation.⁵²

Francis Andersen both interprets *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָאֵה) as “became” and concludes 1:2 is circumstantial but describing the circumstances arising out of 1:1, the aftermath of the original creation, not necessarily the circumstances of day one (as Collins suggested). Further, – and to complicate matters – it is a circumstantial that describes a sequence of events, effectively both circumstantial and sequential. Genesis 1:2 “is a circumstantial sentence comprised of three conjoined circumstantial clauses, the whole circumstantial to the opening time” (Gen. 1:1).⁵³ As circumstantial clauses with the perfect verb *haya* (הָיָה), Andersen compared the use in 1:2 with Genesis 7:6 (“when the flood came [7:10 ; (“[הָיָה] (“the flood came [הָיָה]” [ESV]); and Exodus 1:5b (“and Joseph was [הָיָה] already in Egypt” [ESV]). In these cases, *haya* (הָיָה) represents a circumstance that was the result of a series of prior events, over an extended time. So Andersen considers it more likely that the meaning is “the earth had become (or had come to be) ...” as a circumstance to the preceding verse, the creation of 1:1.⁵⁴ Hence Andersen concludes that while 1:2 is circumstantial, it describes circumstances that are the product of a sequence of events issuing from the original creation of 1:1, “prior to the first fiat” in 1:3.⁵⁵

This issue of sequential vs. circumstantial is directly relevant to whether Genesis 1:1 is interpreted as a title to the rest of the creation account or as the initial statement of it. Bruce Waltke defended the proposition that 1:1 is a title – hence a framing phrase summarizing the entire passage -- in a three part series of articles

50. Leslie Allen, e-mail interview, February 19, 2016.

51. F. F. Bruce, “‘And the Earth was Without Form and Void,’ An Enquiry into the Exact Meaning of Genesis 1, 2,” *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 78 (1946): 21-37, p. 22.) William S. LaSor joined the chorus for this rendering. (according to Fields, pp. 154-155.)

52. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 273-75.

53. Francis Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton: 1974), 86.

54. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 85, 79, 87.

55. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 85.

in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1975).⁵⁶ John MacArthur follows him, “Verse 1 is a general statement.”⁵⁷ MacArthur’s position seems to be that Genesis 1:1 is a summary in advance, like a title, and the events themselves are described beginning in 1:2, with day one. The most obvious problem with this interpretation is that there is then no statement of the creation of the earth. Where did the earth that is “void and desolate,” the “deep” and the “waters” come from? Even if 1:1 is a title, it is still not proven that day one dawns in 1:2 because of the three statements there, before the “and God said” demarcating each day.

John Sailhamer argues, in *Genesis Unbound*, that “beginning” (הַרְאֵת) in 1:1 is not a title to the following account but God’s original creating act. Lyon concurs, comparing 1:1-3 to 2:4-7 and mustering an impressive grammatical case to the conclusion that “the arguments in favor of the summary statement view of verse one are unpersuasive and appear to be forced onto the text.”⁵⁸ Further, he notes that the crucial issue is whether 1:2 describes conditions or events prior to day one. The “point of contention,” he says, is whether the earth was created “void” or whether it became that way after some process.⁵⁹ Again, Lyon helpfully frames the discussion around the critical issues.

Hence, there are two interwoven, over-lapping issues: whether 1:1-2 is sequential or circumstantial and whether *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָה) should be translated as “was” or “became.” “Became” suggests a sequential interpretation and would make the YEC position difficult as it would require the text to say the earth “became” “void” within day one before God said “let there be light.” But translating it as “was” and interpreting it as circumstantial doesn’t necessarily help YECism or bolster Lyon’s case. Andersen interprets it as circumstantial, like Lyon, but writes that 1:2 describes the state of the universe after creation, like Collins, setting the scene for the days. Hence, “The first event is reported in Gen. 1:3,” day one.⁶⁰

Vocabulary

Sailhamer essentially concludes the same with Allen and Collins, against Lyon, coming at it from another perspective, that of vocabulary, especially “*rē-šît*” (רֵאֵת, beginning). Sailhamer writes, *rē-šît* “always refers to an extended, yet indeterminate duration of time – not a specific moment. He notes Job 8:7, Genesis 10:10 and Jeremiah 28:1 using *rē-šît* in just this way. It is a ‘time before time,’ not referring “to a point

56. Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3”, Part 1, “Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony” (25-36); Part 2, “The Restitution Theory” (136-44); “The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory” (216-28); Part 4, “The Theology of Genesis 1”, (327-42), *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1975.

57. MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, 73.

58. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 278.

59. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 276.

60. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 86.

in time but to a *period* or *duration* of time which falls before a series of events. . . . [I]t says that God created the universe during an indeterminate period of time before the actual reckoning of a sequence of time began.”⁶¹ It is, then, in Collin’s terms, “stage setting.”

Similarly, Gesenius, noting the preposition “in” (בְּ) prefixed to “*rê-šît*” (רֵאשִׁית) that normally such nouns with prepositions (i.e. “specifications compounded with a presupposition”) stand after the verb, except, among other exceptions, “prepositional specifications of time,” citing Genesis 1:1.⁶² If, then, *bārê-šît* (בְּרֵאשִׁית, “in the beginning”) is the specification of time, then why would the same event, according to YECists, have another specification of time, namely “day one”? That is, according to Lyon, 1:1-5 is one event all occurring on day one. If so, why does it have two separate specifications of time?

Also, Sailhamer believes that *bārā’* (“created”) in Genesis 1:1 “refers to an indefinite period of time” which “could have spanned as much as several billion years or it could have been much less; the text simply does not tell us how long. It tells us only that God did it during the “beginning” of our universe’s history.”⁶³ YECist Ken Ham calls this a “modified gap theory” and concludes that “accepting billions of years” is “the real motive” of Sailhamer’s exegesis, noting, “Sailhamer proposes his idea in order to squeeze long ages into the text.” Ham doesn’t explain how he is able to discern Sailhamer’s “real motive.” Ham exclaims “No one in his right mind would believe this – it’s not even in the Bible!”⁶⁴ Neither Ham nor Lyon, who cites Sailhamer’s work and his conclusion, meaningfully engages Sailhamer’s claims on vocabulary.

Inner-Textual Commentary

Lyon turns to Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 as “inner-textual commentary” – that is, other passages of scripture elaborating on creation – “indicating that the initial creation of “the heavens and the earth” in Gen 1:1 is part of day one of creation week.”⁶⁵ However, Exodus 20:11 and 31:17, in the context of giving the theological basis for the fourth commandment, do not say God “created” (*bārā’*, אָרַב) the earth in six days. They say He “made” (*ā-šāh*, עָשָׂה) it. Admittedly, there is a great deal of overlap in the semantic range of the two words, just as with the English words they are rendered as. They can sometimes be synonyms as they are both sometimes translated

61. Emphasis original. John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 38, 44.

62. Gesenius, 457.

63. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 13.

64. *Six Days* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013], 114-115). Ham truncates Sailhamer’s quotation cited here, ending it immediately after the “several billion years.”

65. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 280.

by the Greek word ποιεω (*poieo*) in the Septuagint (LXX).⁶⁶ In the LXX *bā-rā'* (ברא) is rendered by *poieo* in 1:1 but by ἐγένετο (*egeneto*, aorist middle indicative of γίγνομαι, “were made”) in 2:4. In 2:4, the LXX translators had the opportunity to translate both words into the same Greek word if they believed that the two terms were interchangeable. They did not. So it's unclear whether the LXX translators regarded the two terms as always synonymous.

In order to show that Exodus 20:11 sums up all of Genesis 1, including 1:1-2, and not just the days starting in verse 3, Lyon must show that “make” (*ā-sāh*, עָשָׂה) is exactly, always synonymous with “create” (*bā-rā'*, בָּרָא).⁶⁷ He does not deal at all with this issue. Although Lyon frequently compares 1:1 with 2:4 (which summarizes the creation with both verbs “created” and “made,”) he doesn't comment on whether there is a difference in the semantic range between the two terms. This is another crucial omission.

While often synonymous, the key question for Lyon's use of “inter-textual commentary” to make Genesis 1:1-2 part of the days (Gen. 1:3-2:3) is whether create (*bā-rā'*, בָּרָא) has a meaning outside the range of “make” (*ā-sāh*, עָשָׂה). C. F. Kiel believes that it does. “In Kal [*bā-rā'* (אָרַב)] always means *to create* and is only applied to a divine creation, the production of that which had no existence before.”⁶⁸ That is, “create” (*bā-rā'*) refers to God's creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Brown, Driver, Briggs defines *bā-rā'* (בָּרָא) as “shape, create,” noting it is “always of divine activity.”⁶⁹ Besides Genesis 1:1, it is used of the creation of the heaven and earth (i.e. the universe) (Is. 45:18); of humanity (Gn. 1:27, 5:1f, 6:7, Dt. 4:32, Ps. 89:48, Is. 45:12; Mt. 2:10); of “the great sea creatures and every living creature” (Gn. 1:21); of a clean heart (Ps. 51:12); of the north and south (Ps. 89:13); of a cloud and fire over Zion (Is. 4:5); of the host (Is. 40:26); of the ends of the earth (Is. 40:28); of transformed nature (Is. 41:20); of the heavens (Is. 42:5); of Israel (Is. 43:1, 7, 15); of salvation and righteousness (Is. 45:8); of the smith and the ravager (Is. 54:16); of the “fruit of lips” (Is. 57:19); of a new heaven and earth and new Jerusalem (Is. 65:17f); of “new things” like the ground swallowing up the Korahites (Num. 16:30) or a woman encircling a man (Jer. 31:22); of wind (Amos 4:13); etc. That's *bā-rā'* (אָרַב).

Meanwhile, the verb in Exodus 20:11, *ā-sāh* (עָשָׂה), is defined with two primary meanings “do, make.”⁷⁰ Besides Gen. 2:4, both terms are used in Isaiah 45:7b, “making (*ā-sāh*, עָשָׂה) peace and creating (*bā-rā'*, בָּרָא) evil.” The question, though, is whether

66. ποιεω (*poieo*) means to make, do.

67. Fields, cites numerous instances of *ā-sāh* in which he seeks to show it is interchangeable with *bā-rā'* (60-74). I don't believe he successfully demonstrates any instance in which *ā-sāh* is clearly used for creation *ex nihilo*.

68. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1 (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1866), 47.

69. Brown, Driver, Briggs, 135.

70. Brown, Driver, Briggs, 793b.

“create” can have a meaning outside the range of “make.” It can. “Create” (*bā-rā*) is only used in the OT with God as its subject whereas “make” (*‘ā-śāh*) is not so specific.

If 1:1 is describing a creation *ex nihilo* then “create” (ברא) is the proper term. If 1:3-2:3 is describing God working on the earth already created in 1:1, then “make” (*‘ā-śāh*, הִשָּׂא) is the proper term. So 2:4 summarizes both the creation *ex nihilo* of 1:1 and the making of a habitable earth in the seven days in a synthetic parallelism.⁷¹ If Exodus 20:11 was meant to be interpreted to encompass the entire creation, from the beginning in 1:1, then *bā-rā* (ברא) would have been the proper term. But it uses *‘ā-śāh* (הִשָּׂא), the making of something out of pre-existing material. Therefore, Exodus 20:11 can be legitimately interpreted as to only summarize Genesis 1:3-2:3, the “main storyline,” not necessarily the four scene-setting statements of 1:1-2. Given the context of Exodus 20:11, the fourth commandment, the specific reference of “make” (*‘ā-śāh*) is to the seven days (1:3-2:3).⁷² To assume that those seven days includes the creating of Genesis 1:1-2 is to beg the question this essay is written to answer.⁷³

Conclusion

Beginning at the beginning, Lyon and other YECists have not shown a sound exegetical basis to claim that Genesis 1:1-2 is part of day one. The literary marker of the beginning of day one, as with each of the other days, is the refrain “And God said.” Day one is thus marked as beginning in verse 3. That the same phrase is also used of three other significant creation events besides the dawning of new days, doesn’t detract from its function as a literary signal, like a rooster crow, that a new day has begun. Hence, “absolute creation” occurred at an unspecified time before day one. Whether the earth “was” or “became” “void and desolate” is debatable but 1:2c tells us that for an undefined span of time the Spirit of God “hovered” over the water on earth. All of this occurred prior to the first “and God said,” the green

71. Alternatively, Bray and Hobbins (p. 90) interpret the second creation account (Gen. 2:4-25), in which God is called “Yahweh Elohim,” as beginning at 2:3b, thus breaking apart the *bā-rā* (ברא) of 2:4a from the *‘ā-śāh* (הִשָּׂא) of 2:4b, displayed by a the paragraph break. The NIV does the same. In this case, the two terms are in no parallel relationship. Bandstra (p. 116) and the ESV, however, more traditionally keep them together in some kind of parallelism.

72. Sailhamer concurs, noting that the use of *‘ā-śāh* (make) in Exodus 20:11 instead of *bā-rā* (create), indicates that this verse doesn’t refer to the original creation of the universe (*Genesis Unbound*, 107). The same could be said of Nehemiah 9:6.

73. Lyon also seeks to put weight on the fact that some Qumran texts and some medieval Masoretic texts demarcated Genesis 1 by means of spacing around the days, setting off each day with a blank line. However, Genesis 1:1-2 was grouped with Genesis 1:3-5, suggesting, Lyons writes, that the scribes saw Genesis 1:1-2 as part of day one. Two full pages of the essay are occupied with reproducing Qumran texts to illustrate this paragraphing (Lyon, 282-283). While interesting for lovers of antiquity, even Lyon admits that the lack of a break may only be “due to the small amount of text involved prior to the first major section break after 1:5” (Lyon, 284). The scribes may have read 1:1-2, like our unindoctrinated reader, as “stage setting.” Further, even if the lay-out is an expression of their interpretation, it only amounts to the opinion of copyists which is no more authoritative than the opinions of the author of the pseudepigraphal book of Jubilees.

light that starts each day. At this point, as far as dating the earth from the Bible, the meaning of the “days” is moot. Whether the days are literal 24 hour days, or long eras, or a literary framework is quite beside the point for dating the creation from scripture. Genesis simply doesn’t provide the unbroken, chronological chain back to creation *ex nihilo*. So, as John Lennox, observed, “the beginning” of Genesis 1:1 is not dated to day one as many assume. The initial creation happened before day one. How long before? Genesis does not tell us. So, quite apart from the input of science, without the pressure of the modern academic consensus, based purely on exegesis of the text of Genesis 1:1-3, we conclude that by separating the absolute beginning (1:1) from day one (1:3), the Bible leaves the age of the universe undisclosed.⁷⁴

Jeremy Lyon has contributed scholarly work seeking to tie the first two verses to day one in a way that closes the door on the possibility of any time before day one and thus bolstering the exegetical case of Young Earth Creationism (YEC). He’s helpfully focused on the most crucial matter in the debate: whether the first two verses are prior to day one. His work is substantially better than that of much of popular Young Earth Creationism, which often concentrates on strained interpretations of the conjunction *waw* and skips to a literalistic interpretation of “day” as though that was the crucial issue. In so doing, he’s made some helpful contributions, such as defending the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 as independent clauses rather than the dependent clause interpretation that was in vogue among some 20th century scholars. However, despite his subjective claims that his “traditional interpretation” is “natural” and “straightforward,” his failure to deal substantially with the “and God said” refrain demarcating the beginning of each day, the scene setting grammar and vocabulary of the first two verses, the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3, and the differing semantic ranges of “create” and “make” means that Lyon fails to prove his case. So our unindoctrinated reader would not find Lyon’s interpretation “natural” or “straightforward.” Such a reader likely would not assume that the first two verses are part of day one. The Bible doesn’t begin with day one. It begins with an absolute creation, *ex nihilo*, that sets the stage for the seven days. So, until YEC can show that the creation occurred on day one, YEC dogmatism is, also, *ex nihilo*.

74. Lennox, 53. John Sailhamer says this very thing, that after a creation over an “an indeterminate period” “the period of which follows “the beginning” is a single seven-day week....” (*Genesis Unbound*, 44.)

**The Growing Tree of the Global Church:
Review Article of Robert F. Rea and Steven D.
Cone, *A Global Church History: The Great Tradition
Through Cultures, Continents, and Centuries*
(London: T. & T Clark Bloomsbury, 2019),
pp. xxviii + 847.**

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When I attended a Protestant seminary in the 1980s, our assigned text for general church history was the venerable work by Williston Walker, D.D., L.H.D., Ph.D. (1860–1922), who had graduated from Amherst College in 1883, from the Hartford Theological Seminary in 1886, from Leipzig University (PhD) in 1888, and then taught and Hartford Seminary, before proceeding to Yale University, where he taught after 1901. By the time I first encountered it, Walker’s book had already been revised and updated by a team of three scholars from Union Theological Seminary in New York City, first in 1956 (2nd ed.), and then again in 1970 (3rd ed.).

A side-by-side comparison between the 1918 and third (1970) editions shows that the essential framework of the original 1918 book—published as soldiers battled in the trenches of World War I—had not appreciably altered, except within the final section of the six-hundred-page book. “English Unitarianism” was expanded to include both English and American developments, and there were new sub-sections on the “Great Awakening,” “The Revolutionary Epoch in the United States,” “The Eastern Churches in Modern Times,” and “The Ecumenical Movement.” The earlier sub-section on “Roman Catholicism” was now renamed as “Roman Catholicism in the Modern World,” and a new conclusion was added on “The Church in the World.”

In glancing through the 1970 version of the text, one is struck by what is not included in the story. The book omits discussion of Eastern Christian churches since the Great Schism of the eleventh century, except for a seven-page summary on *modern developments*. “Byzantium” is not in the index. “China” and “India” are mentioned only in detached references on four or five pages, and there only in connection with Euro-American missionary endeavors. Most remarkably, *one finds not a single section anywhere in the book devoted to African, Asian, Latin American, Australian, or Oceanian churches*. The words “Africa,” “Latin America,” and “Pentecostalism” do not appear in the index. The 1970 edition ends by depicting a church that is somehow newly engaged with “the world,” and reunifying by means

of the ecumenical movement. A detailed chart of church reunions across Europe and North America conveys a sense that ecumenism was largely succeeding in its aims.

It should go without saying that the half-century prior to 2020 has drastically altered the prevailing mindset regarding church history among even the most Eurocentric or Western-oriented scholars. First, there has been an *expansion* of the earlier Euro-American narrative that one finds in Walker's book; second, a new focus on the *agency* of, and the contributions by, non-Western, female, indigenous Christians; and, third, a modified concern for an interest in *ecumenism*, no longer focused on the World Council of Churches or on formal ecumenical dialogues, but rather with understanding the unity-in-diversity or diversity-in-unity that characterizes World Christianity today.

Recent scholarship exemplifies these three aspects of the newer church histories. As one example of the *expansion* of the church-historical narrative, one might point to Philip Jenkins's *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died* (HarperOne, 2009), which recounts the labors of Nestorian Christians in establishing churches across central Asia from the 6th to the 14th centuries, until the destruction of these churches by Chinese and Islamic Mongol rulers. A focus on indigenous *agency* is apparent in the online *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (<https://dacb.org/>), with its wonderfully detailed accounts of previously little-known African Christians and their contributions to the growth and development of African churches. Regarding the *ecumenical* theme of diversity-in-unity, one truly essential text is Todd Johnson's and Gina Zurlo's *World Christianity Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). No one has worked harder than the team of researchers and scholars associated with the *World Christian Encyclopedia* in crafting categories, typologies, and boundaries for understanding the contemporary global church. Over the last couple of decades, the rising interest in global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity partakes of all three aspects—an *expansion* of interest to African, Asian, Latin American, and Oceanian churches, a focus on the *agency* of female and male non-Westerners, including laypersons, in the development of the churches, and debates over how to interpret newly emerging religious groups within the *ecumenism* of a global church that is one and yet many.

Rea's and Cone's new text may be appraised in light of the three aspects just discussed. Speaking generally, *A Global Church History* succeeds on all three of these levels, in presenting an *expanded* narrative, in highlighting the *agency* of non-Westerners, laypersons, and women in the story, and in affirming an *ecumenism* that incorporates far-flung diversity as well as overarching unity in the Christian world. Below, I offer a few comments regarding the third theme of Christian unity and Christian diversity, especially in connecting with the authors' "tree" metaphor, involving a shared trunk of Christendom, with its attached and yet disparate branches. The "tree" serves as a powerful image, and yet it needs to be explained more fully, to

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account for the historical emergence of purported forms of Christianity (e.g., ancient gnosis, medieval sectarians, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, etc.) that the authors would most likely not regard as part of the “tree.”

The Daunting Enterprise of Writing a Church History Today

Rea’s and Cone’s new textbook does a phenomenal job at a formidable task, viz., narrating the entire history of global Christianity in only around five hundred pages of text. As a thought experiment, imagine being confronted with the current, gold-standard, academic treatment of the topic—the nine-volume *Cambridge History of Christianity* (2006-9), each volume of which contains around thirty or so essays by specialist scholars—and then being asked to summarize this content of almost seven thousand pages in the narrow confines of a textbook, written so as to be comprehensible to a beginning student of church history. How would one go about this?

The first issue to confront is the organization of material. There are at least four different options—chronological, geographical-cultural, traditional-denominational, or thematic. Since the *Cambridge History* was subdivided into more than two hundred and fifty essays, each contributor was able narrowly to delimit the scope of the essay in terms of all four parameters—i.e., the time period, the geography or cultural context, the Christian tradition or denomination in question, and the particular theme or issue under consideration. If one were interested in the impact of the French Revolution on Orthodox Christianity, for example, then one can turn to Paschalis Kitromilides’s essay (*Cambridge History*, Vol. 5, Ch. 10) to delve into this question. This sort of laser-focused essay can be very helpful to a specialist scholar, but is not so helpful to less advanced readers, and will be disorienting to beginning students. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to World Christianity* (2016)—edited by Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymond—employed a combination of all four organizational options mentioned above, making it a hybrid between a chronological narrative, and a set of specialized essays, like the *Cambridge History*.

From my own classroom experience in teaching church history, beginning students prefer textbooks that present a chronological narrative, rather than thematic treatment or some other approach to new and unfamiliar material. For first-time students in the history of Christianity, a *chronological approach* is almost certain to be the most *pedagogically effective* presentation of material. It is fitting then that *A Global Church History* has organized its material chronologically (xxvi), and departs from this only in cases in which contemporaneous developments are so disparate as to justify separate treatment. Thus one finds a helpful account of Christianity in Asia and Africa during the pre-modern era (pp. 104-38, including Persia, India, China, Ethiopia, etc.) bracketed off from the discussion of European Christianity. In this volume, the historical narrative runs through pp. 1-503, while pp. 507-764 contain a carefully curated collection of historical documents to which the main text is keyed.

Comments on Some Particulars in *A Global Church History*

A Global Church History embodies an unabashedly theological approach to Christian history, as is apparent in book's dedication "to the glory of God seen in the Church across cultures, continents, and centuries" (vii) and in the later reference to "a theological program of education" (xxv). The authors seek to uncover what is commendable and worthwhile in the varied strands of Christian experience, teaching, and practice, based on their conviction that "the Church is one community of believers, though diverse" (xxv), and that "believers from across cultures...and centuries can together see important teachings...that individuals can never see alone" (xxvi). The book breathes an ecumenical atmosphere, avoiding harsh language and sweeping judgments. Even in discussing the medieval Inquisition, for example, the language is matter-of-fact and non-condemnatory (p. 184). In this and other such passages, the authors do not presume to pass judgment—which I take to be one of the book's strengths, though I add a modest proviso to that below.

Because the book tilts toward theology, the authors often invoke intellectual history for explanatory background. Thus they pair a discussion of ancient gnosticism with Irenaeus's theology (pp. 13-17), the recovery of Aristotle with the emergence of medieval scholasticism (pp. 191-203), and Newtonian physics with the rise of Deism (pp. 327-31). Less frequently, Cone and Rea incorporate political history—as in the growing prestige of the papacy in connection with the decline of the Western emperors during the fifth century (p. 64), the complicated dynastic history of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English monarchs in relation to the English Reformation (pp. 268-85), and the political history of Latin American independence in relation to church history (pp. 400-4). Rea expounds nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity in reference to the high German intellectual tradition of Kant, Herder, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Baur, Strauss, Harnack, and Troeltsch—with Kuyper and Kierkegaard added for good measure (pp. 385-94). English-language thinkers surveyed include Coleridge, Newman, Irving, and Chalmers, and the narrative suddenly turns populist in reference to Salvation Army founders William and Catherine Booth (pp. 394-99).

Space here will not allow for in-depth discussion of the authors' interpretations of particular developments in church history. In this paragraph and the following two are a few points that might be worthy of note. Cone writes that Theodore of Mopsuestia was "unfairly accused of heresy" (p. 39), while at death of Cyril of Alexandria "many rejoiced" (p. 61). Perhaps there is here a tilt toward the School of Antioch rather than Alexandria? Cone says that Maximus Confessor "worked to overcome the misinterpretations of Origen" (p. 81), intimating that Origen was perhaps not theologically mistaken—as most earlier Christian scholars presumed—but misunderstood by his contemporaries and successors. The word "Byzantine" for Cone obscures the continuity between the earlier Western Roman Empire and the

later Eastern Roman Empire up to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 CE (pp. 74, 76-77). Barlaam of Calabria's opposition to the Hesychasts was based on his reading of Pseudo-Dionysius rather than his Aristotelianism (pp. 94-95). The doctrine of purgatory was "introduced" by Pope Gregory the Great, rather being a product of the high Middle Ages (pp. 148-49).

The *Filioque* clause is said to be anti-Arian in inspiration (p. 155), which might be true, but represents a Western opinion and not the Eastern view that the creeds simply cannot be rewritten. For a book concerned with theological orthodoxy, the approach to John Scotus Eriugena is remarkably gentle (pp. 158-59), given that Eriugena took a docetic view of the resurrection (Jesus merely appeared to have a human body), asserted universal salvation, and wrote a major work later condemned by Pope Honorius III as "swarming with worms of heretical perversity." On the vexatious issue of the Crusades, Cone seeks a middle way between the conflicting and perhaps irreconcilable Muslim and Christian narratives (p. 169). Regarding Scotus's doctrine of the "univocity of being," Cone judges that this theory caused a "conforming [of] our own understandings of God to our existence" (p. 214)—though medieval specialists debate this. Cone rightly notes that Meister Eckhart was "tried for heresy," while some "modern theologians have defended his work as orthodox" (p. 223).

Rea passes in the blink of an eye over the violent aspects of the Radical Reformation, such as the Peasants' War of 1525, and the Münster Rebellion of 1534 (p. 264), thus illustrating the general tendency in this volume to highlight positive aspects in each tradition and to downplay the negative. There is a Protestant tone in Rea's claim that "although the clergy in England [in the early 1500s] maintained the appearance of influence, they actually contributed little" (p. 268). Numerous Catholics of the past and present would not concur with Rea's assertion that "Martin Luther...has been described by Roman Catholics as the Roman Catholic Church's greatest Reformer" (p. 286). Even the ecumenically minded Catholic scholar Yves Congar, in *True and False Reform* (1950), did not go that far.

In recounting modern missionary history, Rea is to be commended for naming indigenous persons who labored alongside of—and sometimes apart from—Western missionaries. Xu Guangqi is cited as the Chinese Christian leader after Matteo Ricci's death (pp. 321-22; cf. 412-15, 426). It is heartening to see that Rea does not skip over Orthodox Church developments from the 1600s to the 1800s (pp. 341-45). Nor does his Catholic narrative leapfrog (as often happens) from the Council of Trent to Vatican I, but Rea includes substantial material on Catholic developments during this period (pp. 345-54). Likewise, there are later sections on twentieth-century Orthodoxy (pp. 435-40), and Catholicism (pp. 440-45), with Orthodoxy mentioned in the sequence of presentation prior to Catholicism once again.

Though both Cone and Rea teach in an institution affiliated with the Stone-Campbell tradition (and specifically the denomination called the Christian Church), I

could not discern a Stone-Campbell bias in this volume, including the brief paragraph mentioning both Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone (pp. 367-69).

The treatment of early Pentecostal history seems to be unduly centered on the USA (pp. 450-54), and does not reflect the more recent scholarship that challenges the long-prevailing notion that the USA was a privileged place of global diffusion. Allan Anderson's work on global Pentecostalism suggests not an American "Big Bang" in 1901 but something more like an interactive "string of firecrackers" from 1901 to 1910 (and perhaps earlier) at different places around the world, including Wales, India, Korea, Scandinavia, Britain, and Chile. More might have been said about the *massive global expansion* of Pentecostal-Charismatic forms of Christianity since the 1970s. Rea speaks of Pentecostalism's "shocking numbers of adherents" (pp. 470), which sounds pejorative.

Novelist Alice Walker is named and pictured in the text and treated as a Christian womanist theologian (pp. 463-64), although she has elsewhere called herself not a Christian but a "free spirit." "Womanist" for Walker seems not to be a self-designation as Christian. Rea's account of Japan's role in World War II seems unduly negative (pp. 477-79). The Pacific war witnessed horrors on both sides.

Critical Reflections on *A Global Church History*

By way of critique, *A Global Church History* might be said to have the defects of its merits. Its ecumenical and affirmative ethos—in seeking out what is best in each strand of the Christian tradition, and attempting to link this to what is best in all the other strands—succeeds in creating the sort of unitary narrative that will be helpful for students approaching the history of Christianity for the first time. Yet, by the same token, such a unitary narrative will tend to soften or eliminate some the sharp antitheses that are inescapable in interpreting church history.

For example we might ask: Was Constantine the best thing that happened to the ancient church? Orthodox Christians sometimes refer to him as *isoapostolos* or "equal to an apostle." Or was Constantine, as Anabaptists suggest, a disastrous lurch toward the later inquisitions, colonizations, and forced conversions? Opinions diverge. On church leadership, one wonders: Is a church under papal governance—or episcopal governance—comparable to one that is locally gathered and governed? Is there a both/and on this issue, or an either/or? The legacies of the Protestant Reformation continue to be contested, and one might compare Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Harvard University Press, 2012), with Diarmaid MacCulloch's *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy* (Oxford University Press, 2016), to see how differently two eminent historians approach the very same question.

A Global Church History begins its first chapter with the analogy of a "giant tree" (p. 3)—representing the normative or orthodox expressions of ancient

Christianity—from which Rea says that the later medieval and modern forms developed. In *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934, German; 1971, English trans., Fortress Press), Walter Bauer suggested that ancient “orthodoxy” was not always chronologically prior to “heresy,” and that, in many regions, versions of the faith later judged as “heretical” were the original and most ancient manifestations of Christianity. To illustrate Bauer’s idea visually, one might picture not a single tree, but multiple saplings, some of which perished (whether by natural death or by being cut down) to leave behind one “giant tree” of orthodox Christianity. Rea’s and Cone’s volume rests on an anti-Bauer premise, viz., that the earliest manifestations of Christianity can and should be interpreted through the lens of the “great tradition” embodied in the seven ecumenical councils from 325 to 787 CE—each of which councils is discussed in this volume.

“Gnosticism” of the second century, writes Cone, “competed with Christianity” (p. 13), suggesting that the former was not itself part of Christianity, and so that there existed some boundary between gnostic heresy and Christian orthodoxy even at an early stage. If a new edition of this book should appear, it might be helpful for the authors to expand their cursory four-page introduction (xxiv-xxvii) to say something about their underlying assumptions regarding the unity and diversity—and the cohesiveness or fragmentariness—of historical Christianity. If I were to adopt this textbook for instruction (as well I might), I would pair it with some shorter readings of an interpretive and opinionated character to raise critical questions—like those mentioned in the two paragraphs above. In classroom instruction, the neutral-to-positive stance that Rea and Cone adopt should be spiced up with some hard questioning and critical interrogation directed toward individual Christian traditions—and toward all of these traditions taken collectively.

The value of this volume for instructional purposes is enhanced by the concluding chapter summaries, discussion questions, and chapter bibliographies. Another engaging feature is the profusion of illustrations, maps, and charts—coming to more than 400 in total, or almost one image per page over the five narrative chapters. Information at a glance appears in numerous charts--of the Apostolic Fathers (p. 9), of the early Apologists (p. 12), of the phases of Roman persecution (p. 24), of Anabaptist leaders (p. 266), of the succession of English monarchs (p. 282), of the political context of the Council of Trent (p. 301), of nineteenth-century Christian expansion (p. 406), and of the assemblies of the World Council of Churches (p. 467).

The volume is almost entirely free of typographical errors. One date during the reign of King Henry VIII reads “1847” but should be “1547” (p. 274). An image of John Stuart Mill bears a caption that lacks the family name and reads simply “John Stuart” (p. 384). A map of Christianity in Asia has place names printed in Polish (p. 105). A Nestorian image of Jesus is so fragmentary that no figure is visible on the page (p. 121), and the Edict of Nantes is barely legible as shown (p. 307). In a few cases, the typeface used on maps, charts, or reproduced book pages is so

miniscule that even eyes that are much younger than my own might have difficulty in deciphering what is written (pp. 140, 236, 406). The captioned images of Clement of Alexandria and Origen (p. 36) are imaginative renderings by an artist rather than actual likenesses of these ancient figures, and so might be labeled as such for uninformed readers.

Something should be said regarding the illustrations in chapters three through five (Rea's section), in distinction from those in chapters one and two (Cone's section). Illustrations are more engaging for readers if they are *dynamic* in some fashion, i.e., if they show *something happening*—e.g., the image with the caption, "Harold Godwinson swears fealty to William the Conqueror" (p. 162). The images in the first two chapters are often dynamic in this sense, but throughout the last three chapters one finds an inordinate number of posed portraits or headshots of various historical personages. Over time this becomes numbing to the viewer. There is room for improvement in the images in the later chapters, if a second edition should appear.

Rea's and Cone's book will serve superbly as the backbone for a course on the global history of Christianity. Generally, I would regard *A Global Church History* as a seminary or graduate-level textbook, though it could be used for selected advanced undergraduate students. Despite my quibbles over this or that detail, as noted above, the fact is that no one could write a text that covers the entire history of global Christianity without encountering any number of interpretive ambiguities. It is to Cone's and Rea's credit that they have succeeded so notably in capturing both the large picture and the fine detail in the bi-millennial and globe-encompassing story that they tell. May their tribe of readers increase!