

YAHWEH, The God of the Exodus

Moses hid out in the wilderness burying himself in shepherding and family for forty years until the cry of Israel's bondage rose up to be heard by God. The author in Exodus 2:23-24 is piled up terms of hardship (sighed/bondage/cried out/cry for help/bondage/groaning) to show the rationale for why God will heed Israel's cry in the oppression at that particular moment. Likewise, the hints toward salvation loom large as God heard, and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This salvation spun its way into *sight* by repeating different players who *see* in the context, beginning twice with God seeing the condition of Israel (Ex. 2:25 *r'h*). The angel of the Lord¹ appeared (niph'al of *r'h*) in burning bush, as a foretaste of the theophanic fire (Ex. 3:2-3; 13:22). The burning bush is quite impressive since it is mentioned five times here. Moses had to turn aside to see (*r'h*) this sight and Yahweh saw (*r'h*) him turn aside to look (Ex. 3:3-4). Engaging in conversation God called out "Moses, Moses." To which Moses replied "Here I am." Out of the holy fire God spoke, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." God's very presence rendered the place holy or set apart. God

¹ Some argue for the angel of the Lord to be the preincarnate Christ, but in no text in which the angel of the Lord appears is it ever developed in that way. Rather, the angel of the Lord appears in contexts of monotheism like this one in which He is identified as Yahweh the monotheistic God of: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:24; 3:2, 14-15). Reading the N.T. trinitarian ideas into the earlier stages of the progressive revelation of the O.T. eisegetically abuses what the O.T. text is emphasizing; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is faithful to rescue His people by beginning the exodus.

identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to which Moses responded with further hiding of his face (*pānîm*). God responded that He has seen (*r^h* Ex. 3:7,9), heard the face (*pānîm*) of affliction and is aware of the sufferings of Israel under the oppression of Egypt. So, God has come down to deliver the Israelites from the power of the Egyptians, but He will do this through the agency of Moses as representative on the scene to lead Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

Moses' response to this call was that of inadequacy; "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh to lead Israel out." God's relational response was that He will be *with* Moses, which as a phrase is reminiscent of the religious commitments of Abraham and Joseph (Gen. 21:22; 39:2, 21; Ex. 3:12). A reassuring sign was provided for Moses in the promise that when he has led the people out of Egypt, they will worship God at this very mountain where the burning bush occurs. However, such a sign requires Moses to trust God to be faithful to His word, since the sign was in the rescue of the people.

Then Moses' response was to claim ignorance. That is, in going to the sons of Israel, how shall Moses refer to the God of their fathers? The name of this God as Yahweh is defined by relationships in Exodus 3:14 from the "to be" verb (*'ehyeh*) "I AM WHO I AM," and "I AM has sent me." This verbal name is either the Qal imperfect emphasizing God's presence as the unchanging one who can be counted on as present aid (as in the rescue of Israel from Egypt), or the Hiphil imperfect emphasizing that God will always be there to create and provide what is needed.² This memorial name then emphasizes God's presence in very practical ways to meet Moses and Israel's needs, especially in the exodus. This

² Grammatically, the verb could be either option. There is no development of the aseity or the Greek philosophical concept of eternal existence of God in this verse, rather a much more practical idea is being presented which reflects God's commitment to Moses, Israel, and the divine plan to carry out the exodus. Some also conjecture that this naming of God in Moses' call is the first instance in which the name Yahweh is used, but this is unlikely with Moses mother Jochebed having the name of Yahweh imbedded within her own name (Ex. 6:20). Some others conjecture that this statement in Exodus 3:14 is a refusal to answer Moses, but taken together with verses 15-22 answers Moses quite fully, explaining what Moses now must do.

God is further identified as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which shows His continuity with His Abrahamic covenant promise (Gen. 15:13-16) and His compassion at this time (Ex. 2:23-24). That is, while God is a responsive God to the crying needs of Israel in Egypt, the program of their slavery, including the length of time of their slavery, was completely worked out in advance for it to include Moses at this time in this call. So, God admitted that He was indeed concerned about Israel and the oppression that they had to suffer in Egypt (Ex.3:16). This concern motivated the exodus from Egypt for Israel to be gathered into the Promised Land of blessing. This message has different faces to it. To the Jewish elders the whole program was to be developed in a reassuring manner, while to the Pharaoh the partial truth of requesting a retreat to the wilderness for sacrifice and worship was to be the proposal (Exodus 3:16, 18 is parallel to the Genesis 47 request to worship Yahweh). Because of the resistance of which the king of Egypt raised, God struck Egypt with miracles so that Pharaoh would let Israel go. However, Israel's exodus would be so victorious that they would plunder the Egyptians of their goods.

Moses' response to God's promises was to lack faith, though it is put in the ploy of "what if they do not believe me." God's gracious answer in relationship is to begin showing these available miracles such as: Moses' staff turning to a snake, Moses' hand becoming leprous, and Nile river water becoming blood (Ex. 4:2-9). Moses' response to the staff becoming a snake was fear (Ex. 4:3). The Jewish people's response was faith in the promised rescue of God when they saw these miracles (Ex. 4:30-31). Pharaoh's response was rebellion and the demand for more bricks (Ex. 5).

Moses further showed his unbelief by making excuses for himself as inarticulate. This claim needs to be appreciated within a context of Moses having grown up in the court of Pharaoh and the examples throughout Exodus and Numbers where Moses does not seem to have any such heaviness of mouth or tongue. Moses later will whined that he has uncircumcised lips (Ex. 6:12, 30).

God graciously reminded Moses that as creator He is the one Who gives or removes speech, so actually this excuse further calls into question Moses faith in the creator God who is now relating to him with full knowledge of the articulate mouth that He has created for Moses.

At this point, Moses evidences insubordination with his claim, "Please, Lord send the message by another." In this relationship, Yahweh had had enough excuses so out of anger he stopped Moses there with the permission that Aaron could speak on his behalf, but that Moses would still tell Aaron what to say.

Finally Moses responds in obedience and returns to Israel to be the vessel of Yahweh's rescue. As he does so however, he continues to evidence some unbelief in not having circumcised his son as the Abrahamic covenant required (Gen. 17:12-14). It is only on the basis of Moses' wife's fast action that their son was kept alive when Yahweh met them on the way to kill the son. The Lord let the boy live in response to her quick circumcision of the lad.

The function of the plagues has to do with informing Pharaoh, who does not know (Ex. 5:12) so that he might know the unique pervasive power and ownership of Yahweh (Ex. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18). Many of the plagues attack different aspects of Egyptian religion, showing it to be impotent compared to the power of Yahweh. For example, the Nile river was thought in Egyptian cosmology to be the blood stream of Osiris as it flowed with water. However, as Yahweh caused the Nile to flow with blood, it is as though Osiris is hemorrhaging from mortal wounds through Yahweh's internal battle within the supposed pantheon of the gods (cf. chart, 'Yahweh's plagues in Egypt' on pages 113-14 in this book). Since Egypt is thought to be at the top of the political heap, so the Egyptian gods are thought to be the most powerful. However, each god is bested in its own domain by the sovereign God Yahweh. This is the consistent practice of Yahweh, showing Himself to be the only sovereign and the only One of ultimate power.

Likewise, when it comes to the conquest the same point is made by Yahweh over the pantheon of the gods of the land. The Canaanite gods were thought to be especially powerful in their own geographic area but the conquest shows them to be impotent as well. Additionally, Baal, the god of fire is known for riding the storm clouds from the Carmel mountain heights but he is unable to bring his own weapon of fire to the very slopes of Carmel as Yahweh did in 1 Kings 18, consuming the whole drenched sacrifice with heavenly fire. So Yahweh shows all other rivals to be impotent.

However, more than the Egyptian religion is polemicized, for the plagues destroy Egypt, rendering its people desirous of paying Israel to go. The plagues are a strong divine curse in the Abrahamic covenant, reciprocating curse as Pharaoh has tried to curse Israel. The plagues are Yahweh's tool to harden Pharaoh's heart and to pulverize Pharaoh into impotence (with the final blow drowning Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea), giving the fledgling Israel a toe-hold in the land. Likewise, the conquest also conquers enough of the land to obtain real control over the hill country. Israel was to be ever-vigilant to take the rest of the land, which finally under David was substantially obtained. Yahweh repeatedly shows Himself to be the only real God of power.

From the standpoint of Yahweh Who is there to provide deliverance for Israel, there is no equal to the sovereign monotheistic God. From this context of exodus and conquest, Yahweh presses His will upon His people Israel as a suzerain in a bestowal of the Mosaic covenant as it is formed in the pattern of an international treaty (Ex. 19-Lev. 27; Dtr.; Josh. 24). The major point of this suzerainty treaty is that Yahweh is declared to be king and Israel is mandated to remain loyal under allegiance to this reigning God.

However, Israel was not often faithful to covenant. In fact, at the very instance that Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the covenant and tabernacle design to reflect proper worship, the people under the leadership of Aaron had prostrated themselves before a golden calf in idolatrous worship to Yahweh (Ex.

32). Yahweh is so incensed with these rebellious people He told Moses to go down "because your people have become corrupt." In relationship with Israel He shows his anger by not wanting to be in relationship with them. He told Moses "I have seen these people and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." This is appropriate wrath on God's part since He has imposed a suzerainty treaty upon Israel with the ramification that if they disobey then covenant curse will come their way. This is a prime instance of Israel's disobedience. Moses sought the favor of Yahweh his God by saying, "O Yahweh why should Your anger burn against Your people, whom You brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people." Moses is reminding God that the whole issue of Who He is, is at stake in the narrative of how He now responds to His own chosen people. However, the issue goes deeper than this, in that Yahweh is a God of promises, which He has made repeatedly. "Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (the very one by which the people are named), to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land. I promised them and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Yahweh has had a deep commitment to accomplish this very exodus. When Yahweh made this oath to which Moses refers, Yahweh identified the very time frame (400 years) and the very generation (the fourth from Abraham) in which He will bring the people into this promised land (Gen. 15:13-16). The angry judgment, which God was inclined to do in suzerain relationship to His rebellious people, is not available to Him because Yahweh has bound Himself by an oath in the Abrahamic covenant. This type of oath normally sees that whoever traveled between the pieces of split animals is bound to keep what He promised or else the fate of the animals, that is death, will

be his fate but Yahweh was the only one who went between the pieces (Gen. 15:17-21).³ Yahweh's existence and character is on the line; will Yahweh be honest and keep His oath? It is a tension between Yahweh's faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant and the suzerainty treaty, which He is just putting into place. The Abrahamic covenant preserves the national entity to go into the Promised Land at this juncture. The Hebrew *nhm* does not make any comment on the changeability of mind like some English texts do but rather simply that Yahweh repents of the apparent course of action that He had revealed, namely judgment on Israel, as an expression of suzerainty treaty covenant curse. Yahweh repents and does not bring this disaster upon His people as He had threatened. Moses goes down to the people and has the Levites go throughout Israel killing the idolatrous people and then calls the people to repentance. Moses begs Yahweh to forgive their sin. However, Yahweh reminded Moses that "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book." This showed that the suzerainty treaty is still binding Israel to judgment but that Yahweh will find repeated ways of executing this covenant curse which will essentially preserve the nation so as to also realize the Abrahamic covenant blessings as well. Yahweh then again re-commanded Moses to lead Israel to the Promised Land and reassured him that the angel of Yahweh will still go with them. The people repented at this instance but God still executed His plague against them because of what they did at the golden calf. So the tension internal to God and the covenants which He made with His people was satisfied without diminishing either.

The continuing narrative through Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua shows that Israel eventually did get to the Promised Land and took possession of it. However, narratives (like real life) are often messier than ideal systems of theology. So repeated testings of Yahweh are met by Yahweh through an array of resources to meet the needs of Israel and to judge the rebellious

³ In Jeremiah 34:17-19 there is an example of this kind of oath being violated by Israel and they forfeit their lives in covenant curse when the captivity takes place.

people. God provides quail, manna, water from rocks, leprosy, a budding rod, consuming fire, gapping chasm, capital punishment, and victory in battle. Throughout all this narrative Yahweh shows Himself to be deeply committed to the relationship He established with Israel and consistent with His covenants which govern this relationship. That is the nature of narrative; one sees God as He relates, initiates and responds to those whom He is relating to in the narrative. Yahweh, the God of the exodus, brought the people Israel into the Promised Land, showing that He is dominant in accomplishing His plan. It is almost as if it is a unilateral move on God's part, but He shares the journey with Israel through joys and judgments. One of the greatest contributions that narrative theology contributes to theology as a whole is the deep commitment that Yahweh has to relationship with His people. This is also very different to the fickle gods of the ancient Near East who have neither this level of consistency to any people nor any covenant relationship. Yahweh shows Himself as engaged in depth of relationship and faithful to His purposes and commitments. Yahweh is king. He accomplishes His will, and He does so in relationship with His people.

Yahweh's Plagues in Egypt

The plagues show Yahweh that pharaoh might know the pervasive power and ownership of Yahweh (Ex. 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18).

Text	Plague	Egyptian God's Polemized	Effect	Pharaoh
7:14-25	Nile & Water to Blood	Khnum-guardian of Nile sources Hapi-spirit of Nile & bringer of fertility Osiris-god of underworld, Nile was his bloodstream	Stench & Can't Drink	Heart Was Hardened
8:1-15	Frogs Overrun	Heh/et- a frog goddess of fruitfulness and wife of: Khnum-symbol of resurrection and fertility	Repulsively Overrun & Death Stench	Remove Them and Go; He Hardened His Heart
8:16-19	Great Swarms	Kheper [a]-in form of beetle he symbolizes daily cycle of sun, Magicians are impotent to reproduce	Annoyance	Heart Was Hardened
8:20-32	Fly Swarms	Uatchit manifested self by Ichneumon fly depositing egg on living so larvae could feed	LXX: Blood Sucking Godfly, Egyptians Wasted, Israel Untouched	Remove Them and Go; He Hardened His Heart
9:1-7	Animal Plague	Ptah associated with Memphis, had an Apis bull as a sacred animal Hathor-goddess of Joy (with cow ears) Khnum-Ram god Amon- king of gods and patron of Pharaoh's with ram's head or ram with crown Geb-god of earth, pictured as or with a goose. Isis-queen of gods (with ram or cow's horns)	All Egyptian Livestock Die, Crippling Transportation, Agriculture and Worship; Israel Exempt	Heart Was Hardened

Yahweh's Plagues in Egypt

The plagues show Yahweh so that pharaoh might know the pervasive power and ownership of Yahweh (Ex. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18).

Text	Plague	Egyptian God's Polemized	Effect	Pharaoh
9:8-12	Boils On Man & Beast	Sekhmet-lion headed goddess had power to bring epidemics to an end Serapis-god of healing Imhotep-god of medicine Magicians were impotent to stand before Moses	Incredible Pain	Heart Was Hardened
9:13-35	Killing Hail & Fire	Nut-sky goddess	Men & Beast in Field Died; Israel Exempt	Repentance Until Plague Was Lifted, Then Heart Was Hardened
10:1-20	Locust	Feared locust god Serapia-protector from locusts	Ruined Egypt & Crops	Rebellion; Heart Was Hardened
10:21-29	Darkness (Khamsin Sandstorm from Wind?)	Re-sun god and king of gods Nut - sky goddess and protectress of the dead	All Commerce Stopped; Israel Exempt	Repentance Heart Was Hardened
11:1-11 and 12:29-36	Death of First Born	Osiris-king of gods Re-sun god, both foster life and retain the dead in their kingdom Possibly Taurt-goddes of maternity and protective household deity	Despoiling Egyptians of Silver & Gold; Grief & Loss of lives; Israel Exempt Through Passover	Heart Was Hardened But Broken Pharaoh Sends Israel Out of Egypt