

Exodus: Survey and Comments

Dr. J. Alan Branch

After murdering an Egyptian, Moses ran into the wilderness where he lived for forty long years. We might think of the wilderness as God's seminary to prepare Moses for ministry. T. E. Lawrence, the famous Lawrence of Arabia, was the British officer who helped organize the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during WW1. He commented on his own feelings in the desert and said, "The abstraction of the desert landscape cleansed me, and rendered my mind vacant with its superfluous greatness; a greatness achieved not by the addition of thought to its emptiness, but by its subtraction. In the weakness of earth's life was mirrored the strength of heaven, so vast, so beautiful, so strong."¹ Perhaps God used the desert like this in Moses' life. Away from the distractions of Egypt, Moses' mind quit thinking about the things of this world and was able to focus on the LORD.

In these notes, I will survey several of the main issues of Exodus. I will address the Ten Commandments in a separate document.

I. Mount Sinai

God revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, also known by the name Horeb. It was here that God revealed His name *Yahweh*. The moving scene of Moses prostrate before the burning bush has inspired countless generations of believers who have longed to know God's will. Where is Mount Sinai? There has been a great deal of debate about the mountain's location.

A. The Mountain of God

Exodus 3:1 – 2: Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west

¹¹ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, New ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1940, 1955), 524.

side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

A. Moses was serving Jethro

When Moses was on the mountain of God, he was working as a shepherd for his father-in-law, **Jethro**: Jethro (יִתְרוֹ) was evidently the first name of Moses' father-in-law. Exodus 2:19 also calls the same man by the name "Reuel," which means "friend of God." Evidently, Reuel was Jethro's clan or last name. He is also called by the name Hobab in Judges 4:11. It was not uncommon then (nor is it uncommon now) for people to be known by more than one name (for example Jacob, Gideon, and Solomon).²

B. Sinai and Midian

The Bible says Moses was in the land of **Midian** when he was on the mountain of God. The biblical character Midian after whom the land was named was one of Abraham's sons via Keturah (Genesis 25:2). Thus, the Midianites would have been related to the Israelites.³ We must remember that by the time of the Exodus, several centuries had passed since the time of Abraham, and the Midianites had perhaps incorporated an amalgamation of other people groups into their identity. Some scholars suggest that by the time of the Exodus, the Midianites were a league of different tribes widespread throughout regions of the Transjordan.⁴

² Sometimes Muslims associate the Biblical Jethro with a prophet mentioned in the Qur'an named Shu'ayb (or Shoab).

³ In Genesis 37:25 – 28, the same ethnic group appears to be called both Ishmaelites and Midianites. But it is at least possible that in Genesis 37:25 Joseph's brothers see an Ishmaelite caravan, come up with the idea of selling their brother, and then sell him to a subsequent Midianite caravan travelling on the same route (Genesis 37:28). The details in the text are sufficiently vague to give caution against being adamant on any one interpretation.

⁴ While I don't agree with all of his analysis, see William J. Dumbrell, "Midian – A Land or a League?," *Vetus Testamentum* 25.2 (1975): 323 – 337.

Where is Midian? Answering this question is closely related to one's view of the ethnicity of the Midianites. It is difficult today to give precise boundaries, and given the rough nature of the terrain, boundaries for Midian may have been fluid even in the time of the Exodus. One frequently finds maps which confine the region of Midian to the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba, which influences why some people want to place the mountain of God in Saudi Arabia. But the region easily could have encompassed both the west side of the Gulf of Aqaba (the eastern side of the Sinai peninsula) as well as the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba.

C. Horeb

Horeb: The name "Horeb" (חֹרֵב) means *desolation*. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. Some suggest Horeb refers to the general area and Sinai refers to the specific mountain. I will alert you to another Documentary Hypothesis issue: Advocates of JEDP claim the name Sinai is only used by the J and P sources, while the mountain is called Horeb by E and D. Again, Dr. Branch does not affirm the Documentary Hypothesis and I think the simplest explanation is that the same mountain had different names. One might think of Mount Denali in Alaska which was officially called Mount McKinley for a time. Candidates for the location of Mount Sinai include:

D. Possible Locations for Mount Sinai

Lots and lots of suggestions have been made for the location of the "Mountain of God" or Mount Sinai. No one today can say with absolute certainty which mountain was the Mount Sinai of Exodus. Several common options for its location do emerge.

1. *Jebel Mūsá*

*Jebel Mūsá*⁵ is Arabic for “Moses’ Mountain.” Jebel Musa is 7,497 ft tall (2,285 meters) and situated very close to Mount Catherine. This is the most popular site for Mount Sinai and is the one tour guides call Mount Sinai today. The problem with either Jabal Musa (or its neighbor, Mount Catherine) is the surrounding territory is *extremely* rugged and it would be difficult to see huge masses of people camped in the surrounding territory. However, Wadi el-Deir connects Jebel Musa to the Plain of el-Raha. Raha means "rest" and according to tradition this is the area where the Israelites camped and the golden calf was forged (Exodus 32). Dr. Anderson prefers this site.

Opponents of *Jebel Mūsá* as being the Biblical Mount Sinai claim the mountain only became associated with Moses during the Fourth Century AD or later when Christian Hermits moved east from Egypt into the Sinai. At some point, a church was built around a plant identified as the burning bush. In the Sixth Century, the Emperor Justinian (ruled Byzantine Empire 527 – 565 AD) replaced the church with a fortress-monastery

2. *Jebel Katarin / Mount Catherine*

One suggested location for Mount Sinai is the mountain known by the name of Mount Catherine in the Sinai Peninsula. It is the tallest mountain in the Sinai at 8,668 ft (2,642 meters). St. Catherine’s Monastery is at its base. St. Catherine’s Monastery was built between 500 – 600 AD. In 1844, Count Konstantin von Tischendorf found Codex Sinaiticus at St. Catherine’s. Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest complete copy of the Bible known, dating from around 350 AD.

⁵ Sometimes spelled *Jebel Musa*.

3. Mount Serbal

Mount Serbal is in the southern Sinai and is 6,791 ft high (2,070 meters). It is the fifth highest mountain in the Sinai. Early Christian Anchorites – people who withdrew from public life in order to lead a private, prayer-focused life – had several dwellings around Mount Serbal. Some argue this indicates Serbal is the real Mount Sinai.

4. Mount Sin Bishar

Mount Sin Bishar is located in the West Central Sinai. Menashe Har-El of Tel-Aviv University suggested this site.

5. Hashem el-Tarif

Hashem el-Tarif is a mountain in the Northeast Sinai. James Cameron of the cinematic blockbuster *Titanic* fame (gag) produced the History Channel Special *The Exodus Decoded* (2006) and suggests this is Mount Sinai. I have a strong tendency to doubt anything James Cameron says on most any subject, especially the location of Mount Sinai.

6. Northwestern Saudi Arabia

Various sites in the Northwest of Saudi Arabia have also been suggested as the location of Mount Sinai. This is because ancient Midian was on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba. Also, some descriptions of Mount Sinai as having lots of fire have led some to suggest volcanic activity. Apparently (Dr. Branch is not a volcanologist!), there is no record of recent volcanic activity in the Sinai, but there has been volcanic activity in northwest Saudi Arabia. *Jebel al-Lawz* (8,500 ft) has been suggested as Mount Sinai. Among those who have claimed this is Bob Cornuke, who can be kindly referred to as an amateur archeologist. To be unkind, one could call him a kook! Nonetheless, dear old Broadman & Holman published Cornuke's book *In Search of the Mountain of God: The Discovery of*

the Real Mount Sinai. He also claimed to find the anchors from Paul's shipwreck off of Malta. Uhhhh, I am speechless.

Dr. Jim Anderson comments on this NW Saudi Arabia site and why we should reject this option, saying:

The more difficult part of accepting the Arabian Sinai is the distance required to cross the Sinai Peninsula, and to get to this point to cross the Sea before the pursuing Chariot and Horse Army of Pharaoh could reach them. The Egyptians would have to leave months later so as to give Israel that much time to cross the Sinai. Also, the time it would have taken Israel to get to the other side of the East Arm of the Red Sea and be at the Arabian Mt Sinai within the time given in the Bible is difficult to see allowable if Sinai is at that point."⁶

7. Har-Karkom

Another proposed location for Mount Sinai is *Har-Karkom*, a site in the Negev desert advocated by Italian archeologist Emmanuel Anati. This mountain is in the north central Sinai and is about 2,700 feet high and 2.5 miles long. Not many people agree with Anati.

So, what do you think, Dr. Branch?

My best guess is the site of Jebel Musa is the historical site of Mount Sinai, but I'm not going to fight about it! If not Jebel Musa, then Mount Sinai must be somewhere else in the Sinai Peninsula, and not NW Saudi Arabia. There is lots of evidence of volcanic eruptions in the distant past on the Saudi Arabian Peninsula, thus from time to time someone will claim that Mount Sinai was a volcano (smoke, lighting, etc.). Added to the proposed volcanic activity are those who narrowly define Midian as being only in NW Saudi Arabia; taken together, these factors are why some people suggest NW Saudi Arabia as the location for Mt. Sinai. But I really

⁶ Email correspondence July 21, 2012.

don't think Mt. Sinai was in NW Saudi Arabia. I suspect some of the arguments for putting Mount Sinai in Arabia are related to old disputes between Jews and Arabs, and the subsequent Jewish and Islamic debates. The following map gives my basic opinion about the route of the Exodus and the site of Mount Sinai.



II. God's Name: *Yahweh* – Exodus 3 – 4

In the English OT, you often will see the word *LORD*. When you see the word *LORD* in all capitals, this is the way of alerting the English reader that the Hebrew text has the name *Yahweh*. Exodus 3 is the definitive passage for understanding God's name. In Exodus 3, we are introduced to the main character of Exodus – *God Himself!* The Exodus is about God's compassion and plan. God is the main player in the story. Moses was the man God used to accomplish His will, but Moses is only His servant -- a great servant, but still only a servant.

A. God's Call of Moses and The Revelation of His Name

God declares his name in the context of calling Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

1. The Angel of the LORD

Exodus 3:2 says the "angel of the LORD" appeared to Moses in blazing fire from the center of the bush. So, who / what is the "angel of the LORD"? This figure appears several times in the OT (e.g., Genesis 16:7 – 13; 22:11; Numbers 22:22; Judges 13:3; Zechariah 1:11; 3:1). Usually, this angel shows up before something very auspicious is about to happen. Some suggestions for his identity include:

A pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God.

A very special angel sent with important messages.

A temporary manifestation of Yahweh.

The point is that this angel signifies God's presence. In this case, God was emphasizing his presence to Moses prior to leading the Israelites from Egypt. The phrase may have different meanings in different passages. But in this passage, it obvious that Moses is speaking directly with God.

Church father Athanasius contended Moses saw an angel at the burning bush, but heard God's voice. In other places, Athanasius clearly believes OT believers saw the pre-incarnate Christ, but he does not claim this occurred in Exodus 3. Commenting on Moses at the burning bush, he said, "The Angel that appeared was not the God of Abraham, and therefore God was speaking on that occasion in or by the angel. The Angel was seen, but God's voice was heard."⁷

⁷ Athanasius, *The Orations of Saint Athanasius Against the Arians*, The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden, & Welsh, 1889), 197, III.14.

2. The Burning Bush: Standing on Holy Ground

Exodus 3:3 – 5 (NASB): ³ So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵ Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Even the dirt at the burning bush is holy because God is there. Peter Gentry says the Mountain in Exodus 3 is called “holy” because of God’s presence there and not because of a holy character inherent or proper to place where Moses stands: It is not the mountain *itself* that is holy, but it is made holy by God’s presence. By taking off his sandals, Moses is acknowledging the ground belongs to God and is entering into an attitude of consecration. God takes the initiative to meet with Moses.⁸ R. C. Sproul also added that Moses took off his shoes in “recognition that he was of the earth – earthy. The feet of man, sometimes called “feet of clay,” symbolize our creatureliness. It is our feet that link us to the earth.”⁹

B. God’s Name: Yahweh

Moses’ encounter at the burning bush reveals that God’s name is Yahweh.

Exodus 3:6: He [God] said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

God emphasizes to Moses that He is none other than the God of the patriarchs. There is continuity between God’s covenant with Abraham and

⁸ Peter J. Gentry, “Sizemore Lectures II: No One Holy Like the Lord,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12.1 (Spring 2013): 22.

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1985), 38.

the impending deliverance of Israel from slavery. Exodus 3:10 says, "Therefore come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." Up to this point, Moses was probably glad to hear God say He was finally going to do something about the Israelite's predicament. Moses was apparently less than thrilled that God was going to do this great work via Moses! Moses goes on to make several excuses:

"Who am I?" Exodus 3:11

"Who are you?" Exodus 3:13

"What if they don't believe me?" Exodus 4:1

"I am not eloquent." Exodus 4:10

What excuses have you made about the call to preach the Gospel? I believe that every preacher must be called by God. You are not a hireling. There are two aspects to the call to preach: An internal and an external. Internally (subjective) are you certain God has called me to preach? Externally (objective), do other Christians affirm your professed call?

C. What does the name Yahweh imply/mean?

Exodus 3:13: Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The god of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"

Exodus 3:14 – 15: God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God furthermore said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD / יהוה, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations."

1. The Name Yahweh is Related to the Hebrew verb for “to be.”

God answers Moses’ question and says, “אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה,” famously translated in English as, “I AM WHO I AM”: the Hebrew is transliterated as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*. The verb translated “I AM” is אֶהְיֶה (*’ehyeh*), a Qal imperfect, first person form of the Hebrew verb הָיָה / *haya*, which means “to be.” The Hebrew verb forms an excellent paronomasia¹⁰ with the name “I AM.” When God used the verb to express his name, he used this form saying, “I AM” / *’Ehyeh* and in this way God reduces the words “I am that I am” to a name: *’Ehyeh*. This phrase communicates two great truths. First, God is self-existent and is not contingent on anyone or anything.¹¹ Second, the self-existent God will be present with Moses in the mission of freeing Israel from Egypt. God is not the “Great I Was” nor is He the “Great I Will Be”: He is the unchanging Great I Am.

To think of God as the Great I Am should drive us to profound reflection on the nature of time itself and how we experience time in contrast to God. Our lives are a succession of moments; we experience an increase in length of period. Not all of the time we experience is possessed at the same time; it has had a beginning and might have an end if we die prior to Christ’s return. For us, time has a past and a future as well as a present. *None of these things are true for God.* James P. Boyce forcefully displays the contrast and says of God, “God has no succession [of time], no

¹⁰ Paronomasia is the use of a word in different senses or the use of words similar in sound for rhetorical effect. In modern speech, paronomasia often refers to using words with similar sounds for humor, puns or ambiguity.

¹¹ Augustine actually suggests Plato may have seen the book of Exodus. After rejecting an idea popular in his own day that Plato had been acquainted with the Prophet Jeremiah, Augustine then suggests Plato perhaps had seen the Torah. After noting some parallels to Genesis 1:1 – 2 and Plato’s thought, Augustine then says, “But above all – and this especially brings me virtually to an admission that Plato was not without knowledge of those books [the Torah] – there is the fact that, when the angel brought the words of God to Moses, and the holy man asked the name of the one who charged him to go and deliver the Hebrew people out of Egypt, the answer was given: “I am he who is, and you are to say to the children of Israel: ‘He-who-is’ has sent me to you,” – signifying that, in comparison with him who really is because he is unchangeable, things which have been created subject to change have no being. This tenet Plato strenuously upheld and most earnestly urged upon others. Yet I do not know whether this statement can be found anywhere in the writings of those who preceded Plato, except where it is said: “I am he who is, and you are to say to them: ‘He-who-is has sent me to you.’” Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 3, David S. Wiesen, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 55, VIII.xi. Augustine’s desire to see Plato’s god in the best light has perhaps blinded his better judgement here.

increase of life, is possessed of the whole of His existence at once, and eternally possessed, has had no beginning and can have no end, and lives in the present only, having no past or future.”¹²

2. The Tetragrammaton

Exodus 3:15: God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD / יהוה, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”

The word “Yahweh” is actually just four letters in Hebrew יהוה (YHWH). It is often called the “Tetragrammaton,” a word that means “four letters.” No one really knows with complete certainty how the Tetragrammaton should be pronounced. It is the *nomen ineffabile*, the ineffable name. In an effort not to break the third commandment, pious readers would not pronounce the name יהוה, but would instead say the Hebrew word “Adonai” when they saw the tetragrammaton. Adonai means something like “my Great Lord.” An important point to remember here is that originally the Hebrew text had no vowels, only consonants. When vowels were added, the vowels from Adonai were placed under YHWH to remind the reader to say “Adonai” and not profane God’s holy name. In the Middle Ages when the Bible was translated into Latin, the consonants from the tetragrammaton were added with the vowels from Adonai to give the Latin hybrid *Iehovah*. In German, this word is *Jehovah*, and it is this form that has passed into English.

YHWH is a proper noun comprised of a third-person masculine singular prefix verb from the root *hwh/hyh*, “be, happen, become.” Depending on the stem of the verb, which is uncertain due to the lack of original vocalization, the name could be understood as “he is/becomes/will

¹² James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville, KY: C.T. Dearing, 1882), 72.

become.”¹³ The CSB simply transliterates *Yahweh*: “Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh . . . has sent me to you.”

There is a great deal of discussion about what *Yahweh* means. I do not believe the issue is quite as complicated as some make it to seem. Obviously, the meaning of the name “*Yahweh*” in Exodus 3:15 is connected to God’s statement in Exodus 3:14. “*Yahweh* seems to be an ancient form of the third person form of [the verb] ‘to be.’”¹⁴ When his people refer to him as *Yahweh*, which is the third person masculine singular form of the same verb, they say “he is.” While some scholars suggest *Yahweh* means “he causes to be” or “he will be,” but the connection with Exodus 3:14 leads me to believe (strongly) that the term means something like “He is,” again reinforcing God’s self-existence and eternity. This also fits with the NT use of the “I AM” statements by Jesus. J.I. Packer rightly said, “By this name, God announced himself as the “great I Am” – the one who is completely and consistently himself. He *is*: and it is because he is what he is that everything else is at is.”¹⁵

And we must keep in mind that God exists outside of time. Time is something God created. As an eternal being, He is not bound by time as we are. We live in a world of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. But God is the *Great I Am*: He exists in the eternal now. Often people ask, “What was God doing before He made the universe?” Such questions frankly do not understand that God is outside of time. Augustine said, “But if there was no such thing as time before heaven and earth existed, why do people ask what you [he’s addressing God] were doing “then”? There was no “then,” when there was no such thing as time.”¹⁶

¹³ D.W. Baker, “God, Names of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, Alexander and Baker, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 362.

¹⁴ Dorian G. Coover-Cox, “Study Notes on Exodus,” in *The Holman Christian Standard Study Bible*, Blum and Howard, eds. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 102.

¹⁵ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1973, reprint 2018), 202.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library, Carolyn J.B. Hammond, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 215, XI.xiii.

One further observation about God's nature needs be made based on Exodus 3:14. Yahweh is self-existent and unchangeable; he is the sovereign God who created the very universe by his own word. Thus, there is no being contrary to God's nature. This is very important when addressing the concept of the Yin and Yang, which posits two opposite forces in existence forever. But this is simply not true: Satan is not God's *opposite*. Satan is a creature made by God who rebelled and is bound for judgment. I like what Augustine says along these lines and he comments on Exodus 3:14:

For, since God is the summit of being, that is to say, he is supremely and is therefore unchangeable, he granted being to the objects he created out of nothing, but not the supreme kind of being such as belongs to him. . . . And that is why there is no natural entity contrary to the nature that *is* supremely and to whose agency are due all things that are, unless it be an entity that has no being.¹⁷

There is no being who is God's opposite. God exists and the opposite of existence is *non-existence*. A being which is God's opposite simply does not exist.

The fact of God's existence and the fact He has no opposite demonstrates the tragically flawed manner in which the pantheistic philosopher Georg Hegel misunderstood what God was saying to Moses. Hegel was quite confused at any number of points, but regarding Exodus 3, he claimed that when God said to Moses, "I am that I am," God was unable to talk about Himself with dividing His essence into a subject-object relationship ("I am" = subject; "that I am" = object). For Hegel, God is in an identity crisis.¹⁸ Such ramblings are total nonsense. God is declaring His own self existence by repeating "I am." God is not having an identity crisis, but Hegel is having a sloppy thinking crisis.

¹⁷ Augustine, *The City of God Against The Pagans*, The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 4, Philip Levine, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 11, XII.ii.

¹⁸ Summary of Hegel from Donald Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2020), 239.

All the conjecture about the name YHWH, its origin, and what it tells us about God's nature should not distract us from the way in which the OT uses YHWH as God's covenant name in connection to His unique relationship with Israel. The name YHWH occurs 6,823 times in the OT, and it emphasizes God's unique covenant with His chosen people, Israel. Murray J. Harris notes the personal nature of the name YHWH and says, "Being a proper noun and the covenant name of Israel's God, יהוה is invariably the name of a person who sustains relationships with other persons. This name is never used generically of deity but always personally and individually of "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:15)."¹⁹ Whereas *Elohim* and *El* can be used in certain contexts to designate human rulers or as a descriptive term of pagan, nonexistent gods, YHWH is only used of the God of Israel, and "functions exclusively as a proper noun, denoting an individual being (viz., Israel's covenant God), never as a common noun, denoting divinity in general or a nameless divinity."²⁰

Moses' encounter with God reminds of God's exalted and holy nature. God exists contingently and we exist necessarily. One of the great mistakes of a lot of pop theology is to diminish the distance between the Maker and humanity by exalting man and lowering the Divinity.²¹

3. LXX Translation of YHWH

As noted, YHWH occurs 6,823 times in the Old Testament. The LXX translates YHWH as θεός in the LXX 353 times. The most common LXX rendering of YHWH is (ὁ) κύριος, translated this way 6,156 times.²²

¹⁹ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹ Hannah More, *Christian Morals*, First American Edition from the fourth London edition (New York: Eastburn, Kirk, and co., 1813), 203. <https://archive.org/details/christianmorals00more/page/n3/mode/2up>.

²² Harris, *Jesus as God*, 25.

D. JEDP, Sinai, and *Yahweh*

I completely reject the Documentary Hypothesis. But so you will be informed, here is some information regarding how advocates of the theory address issues related to Sinai and the name *Yahweh*. I record these opinions to help Christians identify and refute such liberal notions when they are encountered.

1. Sinai and JEDP

Most advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis will claim that J and P call the mountain “Sinai,” while E and D call the mountain Horeb. To make things more fun (and confusing!), here is what else liberals will claim: In the J and E versions of the Exodus, the Israelites travel straight across the Sinai Peninsula to Kadesh Barnea. The P source adds a detour south to Mount Sinai where the law was given. Basically, they are saying that the later editors “shoe-horned” in a visit to Mount Sinai in the south in order to get the law. Again, the Documentary Hypothesis makes the giving of the Law pious fiction.

2. *Yahweh* and JEDP

Advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis will sometimes suggest that early Israelites borrowed the name *Yahweh* from another people group, perhaps the Kenites/Midianites. In response, there is no archeological evidence to suggest another people-group prior to Israel called God “*Yahweh*.”

Liberals will say Genesis 4:26 is in contradiction to Exodus 3:14 – 15. They will claim that two or three competing ideas about the origin of the divine name exist side by side in the Pentateuch. They will claim Exodus 4:26 is from the “J” source and that people called God “*Yahweh*” from primeval times. In contrast, they claim “the Elohist source (“E”) and the Priestly source (“P”) honor Moses as the first to receive the knowledge of

this name (Exodus 3:14 [E]; 6:2 – 3 [P]).”²³ But if the Documentary Hypothesis is hopelessly flawed, and I strongly contend that it is, all of these speculations really come to nothing.

3. Exodus 6:3 and JEDP

Genesis 4:26: A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Genesis 15:7 (CSB): He also said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.”

Exodus 6:2 -3: God spoke further to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD [Yahweh], I did not make Myself known to them.

At first glance, Genesis 4:26, 15:7, and Exodus 6:2 – 3 are hard to reconcile: If Genesis 4:26 says people called on Yahweh in primeval ages, and Genesis 15:7 says God told Abram He was Yahweh, how can Exodus 6:2- 3 claim that God *did not* make the name make the name Yahweh known until the time of Moses? Advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis argue that this is residual evidence of two sources being clumsily combined at a later date. Typically (remember, they don’t always agree), they will assign Genesis 4:26 to “J,” Exodus 3:14 to “E,” and Exodus 6:2 – 3 to “P.” Instead of appealing to hypothesized sources, a better answer is at hand. But, I will give various options.

Option 1 -- Liberal Answer: The use of Yahweh in both Exodus and Genesis cannot be reconciled. It is simply a contradiction and inconsistency. One should expect such inconsistencies if the Pentateuch is the result of various sources with competing theologies.

²³ Leo G. Perdue, “Names of God in the Old Testament,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 736. Perdue taught at Brite Divinity School in Texas.

Option 2: The word *Yahweh* was previously known to the patriarchs, but its meaning was not known until Exodus. In this way, Exodus 6:3 is not saying the name *Yahweh* was completely unknown to the Israelites, but rather now the Israelites would see the truth of God's name displayed before them. They would come to know by experience *Yahweh* as their covenant-keeping God.

Options 3: A later editor updated the language of Genesis 4:26 so contemporary readers could understand the text. There is *no* textual evidence for this position.

Option 4: The name *Yahweh* was previously known, but its significance was not understood until Exodus. (Very similar to 2)

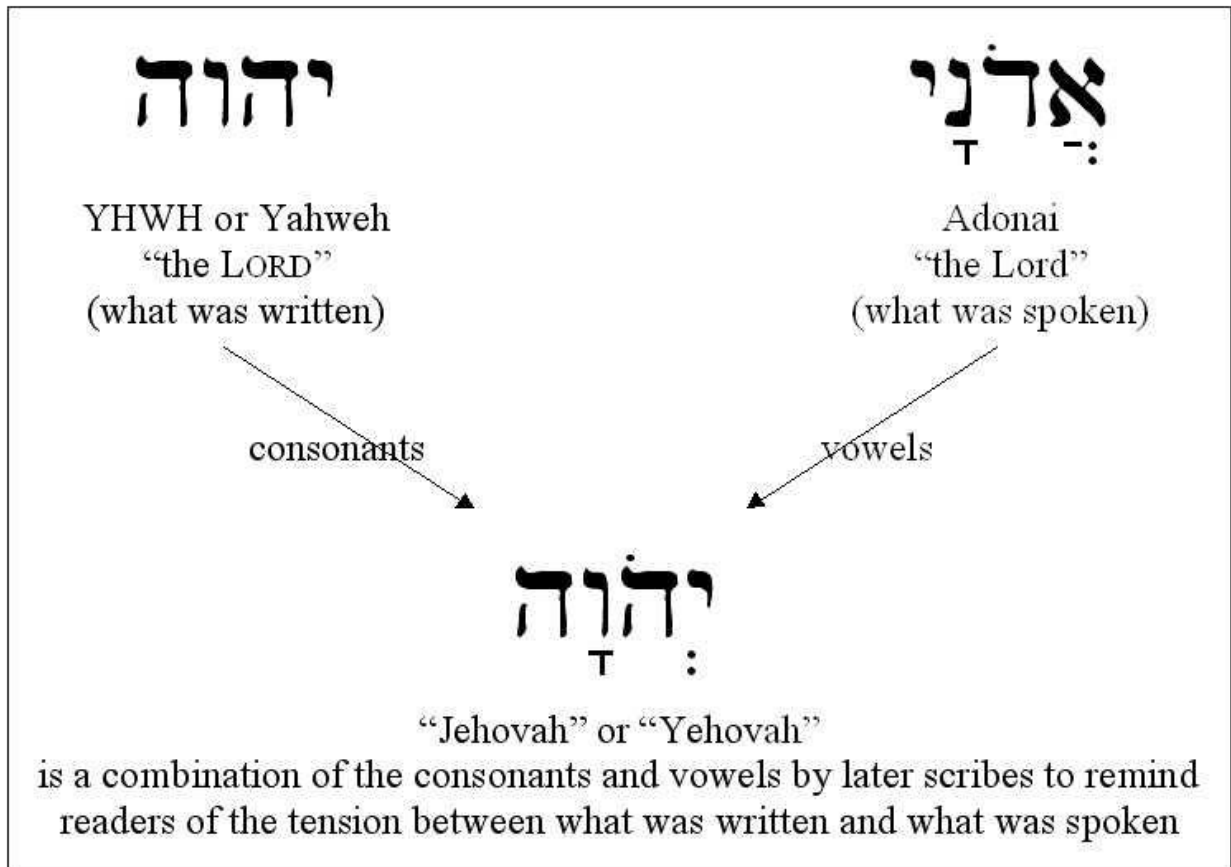
Option 5: It is possible to translate God's words in Exodus 6:3 as "Did I not reveal My name *Yahweh*?" This option is appealing, but has not garnered much support from translators.

Option 6: The use in Genesis 4:26, etc. is anachronistic. The author (whom I believe to be Moses) is using a term in Genesis 4:26 that will be explained later. It's like writing the life story of Muhammad Ali and referring to him as Muhammad Ali when discussing his childhood even though his birth name was Cassius Clay.

I like option 2 and here's why: the use of *El Shaddai* is an intentional context clue to point us back to Genesis. The name "God Almighty" is *El Shaddai* in Hebrew. This term is used in Genesis 17:1 when God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham. The translation of "Shaddai" as almighty is traceable to the LXX which translates it as *pantokrator* and the Vulgate which translates it as *Omnipotens*. "For God to recall to Moses the name *El Shaddai*, a deeply meaningful name from the experiences of the patriarchs, while also referring to Himself as *Yahweh*, is part of emphasizing the

continuity between God’s promises to the patriarchs and what He was doing for Israel through Moses.”²⁴

E. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Confusion Regarding the Divine Name



Jehovah’s Witnesses will insist *Jehovah* is God’s name and that if we call Him anything else, then we are addressing Him improperly. Baptists are not opposed the name *Jehovah*, in fact one of our great old hymns is “Guide me O thou Great Jehovah.” But, we must have some humility and admit that our English *Jehovah* was borrowed from the German which borrowed from the Latin, and the Latin was somewhat confused concerning the relationship between YHWH and Adonai. So, Dr. Branch loves the word Jehovah, but I also understand its history. The attributes of God given only to Jehovah in the OT are applied to Jesus Christ in the NT. So, JW attempts to deny the deity of Christ are at best cases of special

²⁴ HCS Study Bible, 107.

pleading and are at worst intentionally misleading. Also, I think the *Christian Standard Bible* does a good service to Bible readers by transliterating YHWH as Yahweh.

F. Jesus Christ and The Divine Name

Of the many claims Jesus made about Himself, the most astounding is that He applied the name *I Am* to himself. One example makes the point clear. In John 8, Jesus is engaging in a debate with some of his critics. Eventually, Jesus asserts in John 8:51, “Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone follows My word, he will never see death.” His opponents are thunderstruck by this claim, and sputter out a response in disbelief, “You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died, are You? The prophets died too. Whom do You make Yourself *out to be*?” (John 8:53) Then Jesus makes a statement which brings out rage in His opponents:

⁵⁶ Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see My day, and he saw *it* and rejoiced.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” ⁵⁹ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and left the temple *grounds*.

In the culture of Jesus’ day, stoning was considered the proper punishment for blasphemy. What was blasphemous about what Jesus said? As John Stott points out, Jesus didn’t say, “Before Abraham was, I was,” but He said, “Before Abraham was, I Am.” Jesus uses the same name God revealed at the burning bush to Moses and applies it to Himself. Jesus’ use the name *I Am* implies a claim not only to eternity but also to deity.²⁵ Jesus’ opponents in John 8 understood clearly that Jesus was claiming to be the God of the burning bush, and that’s the reason they wanted to stone Him.

²⁵ John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 22.

The LXX's translation of Exodus 3:14 serves as the background for the NT passages related to Christ as the Great I Am. The LXX translates "I AM THAT I AM" as "Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν." Early Christian author Justin Martyr went so far as to say, "Our Christ talked with him [Moses] in the shape of fire from a bush."²⁶

G. God's Call of Moses and Our Call to Ministry

Modern preachers do not have an encounter with God like Moses did when we are called to preach in the sense we don't hear God's voice directly from a burning bush. But the fact God called Moses should give some perspective for New Testament Preachers. God called Moses, and I don't think anyone should go preach unless he is called by God. Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "The man who is to thunder in the court of Pharaoh with an imperious "Thus saith the Lord" must first stand barefooted before the burning bush."²⁷

III. The Plagues of Exodus

The ten plagues in Exodus are a show down between Yahweh and Pharaoh. Wolf says, "Pharaoh thought he was dealing with the revolt of a hapless and enslaved people; instead he wound up in conflict with God Almighty and nearly brought about the destruction of his entire nation."²⁸

A. The Ten Plagues of Exodus

A brief summary of the ten plagues reveals fascinating insights about God's power and the manner of His dealings with humanity.

²⁶ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, The Fathers of the Church, Thomas B. Falls, trans. and ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 101, chapter 62.

²⁷ Clarence Stonelynn Roddy, ed., *We Prepare and Preach: The Practice of Sermon Construction and Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 30.

²⁸ Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1991), 157.

1. The Plague of Blood Exodus 7:14 - 25

Exodus 7:17: Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.”

The first plague was turning the water of the Nile River into blood, and the fact this is first is no coincidence. The Nile River and its cycle of annual flooding was critical to the Egyptians, so it is no surprise that the first plague strikes directly at their life source. Wolf advocates a flood of silt from further up the Nile. However, not just the Nile, but *all* the water became blood-red, even the water in the containers! Remember, Egypt is *hot* and you can't go very long without water. The word for “blood” can be used to describe something that is red while not actually being blood (see Genesis 49:11). Also, God's wrath on the Nile is directly connected to Aaron's rod striking the water.

2. The Plague of the Frogs 8:1 – 15

Exodus 8:1 – 4: Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.”””

The frog was the symbol of the Egyptian goddess Heqt, who was depicted as a woman with a frog's head. Since this goddess was related to fertility, there may be a bit of theological sarcasm when the frogs “invade the bedrooms” of the Egyptians. When Moses asked Pharaoh to set the time for the removal of the frogs, he was demonstrating God's sovereignty.

3. The Plague of Gnats Exodus 8:16 – 19

There is debate over whether these were gnats, fleas, mosquitoes, or ticks. The magicians of Pharaoh were able to imitate the first two plagues, but they could not imitate the third plague.

Exodus 8:18 – 19: The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

This is the background for Jesus’ statement in Luke 11:20, “But if I cast out demons by the **finger of God**, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

4. The Plague of Flies Exodus 8:20 – 32

5. The Plague of the Death of Livestock Exodus 9:1 – 7

Exodus 9:6 (HCS): The LORD did this the next day. All the Egyptian livestock died, but none among the Israelite livestock died.

During the seventh plague of hail (9:13 – 35), Moses warned the Egyptians to “give orders to bring your livestock all that you have in the field into shelters. Every person and animal that is in the field and not brought inside will die when the hail falls on them.” The mention of animals still living in Egypt indicates the reference to “all the livestock” in 9:6 is either hyperbole or a general statement.²⁹ It is also possible that the death of the livestock refers only to certain “livestock in the field” (9:3) and not to the entirety of every living animal.

²⁹ Dorian G. Coover-Cox, “Study Notes on Exodus,” in *The Holman Christian Standard Study Bible*, 113.

6. The Plague of Boils Exodus 9:8 – 12

Exodus 9:8 – 12: Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt.” So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. And the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

7. The Plague of Hail Exodus 9:13 – 35

8. The Plague of Locusts Exodus 10:1 – 20

Exodus 10:12 – 15 (NASB): 12 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt and eat every plant of the land, even all that the hail has left.” 13 So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. 14 The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; they were very [n]umerous. There had never been so many locusts, nor would there be so many again. 15 For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt.

Even unto today, locusts often swarm in extremely large numbers across Africa and the Middle East. In the recent years (2012 – 2013), Madagascar has been in the grips of a severe locust plague.

9. The Plague of Darkness Exodus 10:21 – 29

Exodus 10:21: Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.”

Darkness is symbol of God’s wrath. It is of some interest that the sky also went dark at Golgotha when Jesus died.

10. The Death Angel Exodus 11:1 – 12:42

B. Historical Accuracy of the Context of Brickmaking

Paintings on the ancient tomb of an Egyptian official named Rekhmire, the highest government official under pharaohs Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, give a striking confirmation of the context of the Israelite’s Egyptian slavery. Exodus 5:7 – 8 records the furious response to the Israelite’s request to worship Yahweh, “You are no longer to give the people straw to make bricks as previously; have them go and gather straw for themselves. But you shall impose on them the quota of bricks which they were making before; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, for that reason they cry out, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’” Kim Phillips of Tyndale House describes a lavish painting in Rekhmire’s tomb which shows “Nubian and Syro-Canaanite slaves fetching and mixing mud and water to make bricks, shaping the bricks in moulds, then casting them and leaving them to dry, before measuring off the results and carrying them to where they would be used. All this activity happens under the watchful gaze of rod-wielding overseers.”³⁰ Such paintings give

³⁰ Kim Phillips, “The Rekhmire Tomb Scenes,” December 7, 2021, <https://tyndalehouse.com/explore/articles/the-rekhmire-tomb-scenes/>.

extra-biblical insight into the context of the hardships of slavery and brickmaking in ancient Egypt.

C. The Purpose of the Plagues

God is not capricious and He does not work in an arbitrary manner. The plagues sent on Egypt were not capricious, but were part of God's purposes for both delivering His people and teaching us about Him. There are several lessons we can learn about God from the plagues.

Genesis 12:17: But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great **plagues** because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Exodus 11:1a: Now the LORD said to Moses, "One more **plague** I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt."

The word for "plague" in both Genesis 12:17 and Exodus 11:1 is *nega'*.

1. God's wrath

Exodus 7:4: [God speaking] When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments.

The plagues were God's wrath on Egypt for mistreating the Israelites. The idea of God's wrath is particularly offensive to our culture, but it is still true. God ultimately will judge all sin.

2. God Reigns Supreme

Exodus 9:16: [God speaking] But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you [Pharaoh] to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.

Regardless whether one advocates an early or late date for the Exodus, Egypt was one of the most powerful nations on earth and very proud of its heritage. As Wolf says, “But by means of the ten plagues, Pharaoh and his people learned the hard way that there was no one like the God of Israel, who was supreme in heaven and earth.”³¹ Egypt learned that Pharaoh was not sovereign; Yahweh is sovereign.

3. Yahweh’s Supremacy over all Idolatry

A strong body of evidence indicates the ten plagues were directed at specific Egyptian deities. For example:

Plague One – The Nile turned to blood: A direct attack on Hapi (also spelled “Hopi”), the god of the Nile. Hapi was depicted as a man with female breasts indicative of fertility; sometimes was viewed as two gods; he of the upper Nile with a cluster of lotus plants on his head, he of the lower Nile with a cluster of papyrus plants on his head.³²

The inundation of Nile was also associated with Osiris. The annual rising of the Nile was associated with Osiris’ “resurrection” (not the same as Jesus’ resurrection).

Plague Two – Frogs: The plague of Frogs was directed at the Egyptian goddess Heket, the goddess of childbirth, who was represented as a frog. Women often wore amulets or scarabs with images of the frog-goddess to protect themselves during childbirth.³³

³¹ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 158.

³² This description is from Jack Finegan, *Myth & Mystery: An Introduction to the Pagan Religions of the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 42.

³³ George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 67.

Plague Five – Livestock Destroyed: A direct attack on the bull gods Apis³⁴ and Mvevis and possibly the ram-god Khnum. The spirit of the god Apis was said to reside in one particular real bull at a time. This bull was kept and looked after by the Pharaoh. At the end of the year, the bull would be slaughtered and Pharaoh would eat it. Then, priests would search for a new Apis bull and the process was repeated. The fifth might also have had the sky-goddess Hathor in mind since she took the form of a cow.

Plague Nine – Darkness: A direct attack on Re,³⁵ the sun god. The myths about Re vary somewhat throughout Egyptian history. Most characteristically the sun-god travels across the sky in a boat. Pharaohs called themselves the “son of Re.” Re was depicted in many different forms in ancient Egypt.

Plague Ten – Death of the Firstborn: The tenth plague may have been directed against the god Osiris, the judge of the dead and the patron deity of the pharaohs.

Walter Kaiser offers a good summary statement about the relationship between the plagues and the Egyptian pantheon: “One weakness of interpreting the plagues *solely* as a biblical polemic against the Egyptian deities is that it leaves the third, fourth, and sixth plagues (mosquitoes, flies, and boils) unaccounted for. Nevertheless, there is enough of a connection that some Egyptians might have noticed that the very realms over which some of their most esteemed deities reigned had been so vacated that their worshipers were left without protection.”³⁶

³⁴ Apis is sometimes spelled *Hapis*.

³⁵ Re is sometimes spelled Ra.

³⁶ Walter Kaiser, *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 99.

D. The Pattern of the Plagues

1. Pattern Within Each Plague

First, the plagues begin with the request of Moses and Aaron that the Israelites be allowed to go free.

Second, there is a description of the plague itself and the response of Pharaoh and his officials.

Third, there is a response to the Plague. Sometimes Pharaoh asks Moses to pray to the Lord so that the plague will end (Exodus 8:8, 29; 9:28). Sometimes, Pharaoh agrees partially to some of Moses' demands. As noted above, in plagues one – five and seven, we are told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. In plagues six and eight – ten God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

2. The Arrangement of the Plagues

The plagues seem to be arranged in groups of three, followed by a climatic tenth plague. Wolf says, "Plagues one, four, and seven – the first plague in each set – are introduced by a warning from Moses to Pharaoh in the morning."³⁷

Exodus 7:15: Go to Pharaoh **in the morning** as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent.

"The last plague in each set – three, six, and nine – takes place without any announcement in advance."³⁸

Beginning with the fourth plague, the region of Goshen where the Israelites lived was not touched by the plagues. The Bible specifically says

³⁷ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 160.

³⁸ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 160.

that Goshen was exempt from the effects of plagues five, seven, nine and ten. Though not specifically stated, it is likely that Goshen was exempt in plagues six and eight as well.

In the tenth plague, the children of Israel were protected by the blood of the Passover lamb. The plagues seem to increase in intensity and severity, culminating with the death of the first born.

E. Disputed Claim: The Plagues as natural phenomenon

There is no specific Egyptian record of ten plagues striking Egypt or of the subsequent flight of the Israelites from Egypt. The first reference to Israelites in Egyptian records occurs in the so-called "Israel Stele" (inscribed monumental stone) or "victory stele of Merenptah", which dates from the fifth year of Merenptah's reign and describes a people called "Israel" who were by then already in Canaan. The stele says, "Their [Israel's] chiefs prostrate themselves and beg for peace, Canaan is devastated . . . Israel is laid waste, its seed exists no more." Merenptah ruled from about 1213 -- 1201 BC. For some scholars, this means that the events referred to in Exodus must have occurred before this date.

1. Liberal Theory Of the Plagues Stated

Greta Hort (1903 – 1967) was a Dutch professor who taught in Australia. In 1957, she wrote an article titled "The Plagues of Egypt" in the academic journal *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*.³⁹ Hort argues for an ecological domino effect. According to Hort's theory, each Plague recounted in the book of Exodus occurs in the correct "natural" sequence, all triggered by one underlying cause — a single and extraordinarily severe occurrence of the annual Nile flood in July. This torrent washed down a massive load of "red" mud along with the main reddening agent, the red algae, which discolored and contaminated the water in a red tide (A Harmful Algae Bloom or HAB, as biologists now

³⁹ Greta Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1957); 84-103.

prefer to call it). Supposedly, the red mud and algae together created the Plague of Blood. Hort names two species of algae as the culprits: *Haematococcus pluvialis* and *Euglena sanguinea*. A deadly chain reaction of successive plagues then followed, according to Hort.

In Hort's theory, the algae deoxygenated the water and killed the fish. Dead fish developed anthrax, sickening the frogs and driving them ashore. Dead frogs contaminated the soil, infecting and killing livestock animals with internal anthrax. Biting flies proliferated in the decaying plants left by the heavy flooding then carried the especially virulent skin anthrax from dead cattle to the live cattle and humans, causing the plague of "boils." The severe weather that had caused the unusual torrent then brought hail and locusts. The excessive load of mud from the high Nile flood dried into an unusually heavy covering of powdered silt. A violent dust storm lofted the silt into the air, creating an extraordinary darkness. The first fruits of crops were destroyed — rather than firstborn children — in the final Plague according to Hort, claiming error in translation of the Biblical account. Some of the Plagues may have missed the Israelites due to a natural sheltering effect of the Eastern Nile Delta valley they dwelled in, she claims. Hort suggests the Israelites left Egypt because they had food the Egyptians wanted and would have taken from them, so if they stayed they would "die either by violence or starvation."

Plagues According to Hort

Plague 1: Water turns to blood	Caused by an unusually heavy Nile flood containing red mud and red algae.
Plague 2: Frogs	Deoxygenated water kills fish and gives rise to Anthrax. Frogs leave the river and carry the disease.
Plague 3: Gnats	Mosquitoes bred in the flood water.
Plague 4: Flies	The biting fly <i>Stomoxys calcitrans</i> breeds in the decaying plants left by the retreating Nile flood.

Plague 5: Death of Livestock	Anthrax spread by frogs kills livestock.
Plague 6: Boils	The biting flies spread skin anthrax to humans.
Plague 7: Hail	A coincidental weather feature.
Plague 8: Locusts	Hail and storms promote a locust swarm.
Plague 9: Darkness	A desert sandstorm called a <i>khamisin</i> blots out the sun by throwing a blanket of fine, red dust leftover from the first plague.
Plague 10: Death of Firstborn	Biblical text is corrupted and there was no real death of the firstborn. Instead, what really happened was the destruction or loss of any remaining crops.

2. Problems with Hort's Theory

First and most obviously, “Red tides” occur in slower-moving or becalmed saltwater oceans and estuaries rather than rivers (e.g., not one of the 1,109 worldwide Harmful Algae Events in the UNESCO database occurred in a freshwater river). The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says, “Harmful algal blooms, or HABs, occur when colonies of algae—**simple ocean plants that live in the sea**—grow out of control while producing toxic or harmful effects on people, fish, shellfish, marine mammals and birds. The human illnesses caused by HABs, though rare, can be debilitating or even fatal.”⁴⁰ **The Nile is not a body of salt-water!**⁴¹

Second, Red Tides are mainly caused by microscopic marine algae called *Karenia brevis*. The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution lists

⁴⁰ “A Red Tide is a Common Term for a Harmful Algae Bloom,” *The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*. <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/redtide.html>. (Accessed July 19, 2012).

⁴¹ The CDC warns HABs can occur in marine, estuarine, and fresh waters,” but remember that not all HABs are Red Tides. See Harmful Algal Blooms, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/hab/default.htm>. (Accessed May 7, 2014).

twelve algae related to HABs. Neither of Hort's suggested algae are in their list.⁴²

Third, Anthrax is soil-based and isn't contracted in large bodies of water such as rivers. Under the microscope, the bacteria look like large rods. However, in the soil, where they live, anthrax organisms exist in a dormant form called spores. These spores are very hardy and difficult to destroy. The spores have been known to survive in the soil for as long as 48 years.

Fourth, anthrax infects mammals, not fish or reptilians (such as frogs).⁴³ Anthrax is caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. While anthrax commonly affects hooved animals such as sheep and goats, humans may get sick from anthrax, too. The most common type of anthrax infection is cutaneous anthrax, an infection of the skin. Anthrax can also be inhaled as well, and this type of infection is more deadly. Now rare, anthrax of the bowels (gastrointestinal anthrax) is the result of eating undercooked, contaminated meat. *Note: Any of you planning to be missionaries really should be aware of Anthrax. The shots really hurt, but Anthrax hurts more!*

Brad Sparks has written a popular article in *Bible and Spade* in which he asserts Hort's algae are rare and fragile ice water species that belong in sub-arctic cold climates, and can barely survive even in their own ideal environment let alone overwhelm a habitat.⁴⁴ If this is true, then the idea these algae could grow in the Nile River is ludicrous. However, my research shows that *Haematococcus pluvialis* and *Euglena sanguinea* are found in temperate climates. The *Haematococcus Pluvialis* alga is apparently responsible for red staining in the bottom of bird baths! However, Sparks argues this happens when the algae dry, not when they are alive in the

⁴² "Harmful Algae," *Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute*, accessed May, 2014, <http://www.whoi.edu/redtide/species/by-name>.

⁴³ All my information critiquing Hort is from Brad Sparks, "Did Anthrax Plague Kill the Egyptians?" Electronic resource available at <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2007/10/did-anthrax-plague-the-egyptians.aspx#1>. Accessed July 19, 2012.

⁴⁴ Brad Sparks, "Red Algae Theories of the Ten Plagues Contradicted By Science," *Bible and Spade* 16.3 (2003): 66 – 77.

water. Dr. Branch continues to do more research about this specific claim (sub-artic climate).

Obviously, the plagues involved natural phenomenon. But these phenomena are under the providential hand of God. For example, Anthrax may have been part of the plagues. Yet with the tenth plague, there is no way to explain the targeted death of the first born as a natural phenomenon. In 1971, Dutch geologist Rein W. van Bemmelen (1904 – 1983) proposed a volcano erupted starting all the problems, but his theory requires that one take the 9th plague (darkness) as really being the first plague. He then argued that the storm of hail (the seventh plague) came next, and was caused by the fine volcanic ash in the air. Thereafter, the frogs (the second plague) could have fled the waters, which were being transformed into acid baths because of the ash fallout. Finally, as the ash acidified and discolored the waters, the Nile turned red and carried dead fish.

F. The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

In Moses' confrontations with Pharaoh, we encounter a narrative which gives us some insight into the doctrines of God's sovereignty and human volition. Specifically, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart gives us perspective on God's working with men and the moral accountability of humans in their response to God.⁴⁵

1. The Future Tense: "God will harden"

Exodus 4:21: The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go."

⁴⁵ I first discovered this tension in Exodus between God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening his own heart in my own study many years ago. I later learned these passages in Exodus were and are the source of debate regarding soteriology.

Exodus 7:3: [God speaking] But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.

The issue of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is often taken up in discussions of soteriology, particularly when discussing God's sovereignty and man's free will. In Exodus 7:3-5, God is using word play: The word for "hardening" Pharaoh's heart is also used in Exodus 6:9 to refer to the Israelites' "hard" labor. Pharaoh had made their slavery "hard," and in return his heart would become "hard." Even here, God's hardening is connecting with human choices.

2. Pharaoh hardens his own heart

The next seven occurrences of "hardening" are in reference to Pharaoh hardening his *own* heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7).

Exodus 7:13 – 14: Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go."

Wolf comments, "Thus, it appears that Pharaoh had every opportunity to respond to the intense pleas to release Israel, and even his own magicians recognized in the third plague "the finger of God" (8:19)."⁴⁶

3. God hardens Pharaoh's heart

Exodus 9:12: And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

⁴⁶ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 158.

We should not attempt to downplay Exodus 9:12, but let it land with full force – God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Wolf continues, “But Pharaoh remained stubborn and unyielding, and finally God confirmed that hardened condition and ensured his continued obstinacy.”⁴⁷ Paul picks up on this in Romans 9:18:

Romans 9:18: [In reference to Pharaoh] So then He [God] has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

4. Conclusion on a Pharaoh and a “hard heart”

First, God is completely sovereign and is free to do what He chooses. His choices may *seem* arbitrary, but this is only because of our perspective as fallen, finite humans. God acts according to His purposes and plans, which are righteous and holy.

Second, humans can make choices that lead to a hard heart. Though the plagues begin with a warning that God will harden Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3), there is evidence that even this hardening is connected to Pharaoh’s previous actions of cruelty to the Israelites. In many ways, God’s hardening was confirming what was already in Pharaoh’s heart.

Third, in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, we see the mystery of both divine sovereignty and human volition held in tension. Paul asserts this in the book of Romans. Over-emphasizing one at the exclusion of the other leads to a truncated soteriology.

Fourth, the encounter between God and Pharaoh should serve as a warning to the unconverted. Repeated rejection of the Gospel call can lead to a hard heart. We as evangelists can always hope that as long as someone is alive that their heart can be turned to God and the Gospel. Yet, the Scripture is sufficiently clear that if one is under the conviction of the Holy

⁴⁷ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 158.

Spirit, then they should respond to Christ with haste for God does in fact harden hearts. Wow! That's an unpopular paragraph!

Finally, Pharaoh's reaction to Moses can teach us about people who seemingly make a break with sin, but actually they are not converted. During the plagues, Pharaoh was certainly terrified by God's power and had a certain fear of God's impending judgment. For example, in Exodus 9:27 – 28 he said, "I [Pharaoh] have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." Thus, Pharaoh demonstrated that he knew he was a sinner, he knew God was holy, and he knew God's judgment was pending, yet none of this brought him to conversion. Jonathan Edwards correctly comments on Pharaoh's response here and says, "So sinners are sometimes, by thunders and lightings, and great terrors of the law, brought to a seeming work of humiliation, and to appearance to part with their sins; but are no more thoroughly brought to a disposition to dismiss them [his sins], than Pharaoh was to let the people go."⁴⁸

Along the lines of this fifth point of application from Pharaoh's response, do not miss the fact that he wanted to let the people of Israel go *on his own terms and not on God's terms*. In Exodus 8:25, he said, "go and sacrifice to your God *within the land*." God had said they were to leave Egypt, but Pharaoh wanted them to go worship as long as they stayed in Egypt: He wanted things on his terms. Again, Jonathan Edwards makes application to people wrestling with becoming a Christian and says:

So many sinners are for contriving to serve God, and enjoy their lusts too. Moses objected against complying with Pharaoh's proposal, that serving God, and yet continuing in Egypt under their taskmasters, did not agree together, and were inconsistent one with another (there

⁴⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, John E. Smith, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 404.

is no serving God, and continuing slaves to such enemies of God at the same time).⁴⁹

Baptist Faith & Message 2000, Article V "God's Purpose of Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

"O Why Not Tonight," Elizabeth Reed (1794 – 1867), 1842

Oh, do not let the Word depart,
And close thine eyes against the light;
Poor sinner, harden not your heart,
Be saved, oh, tonight.

Refrain:

Oh, why not tonight?
Oh, why not tonight?
Wilt thou be saved?
Then why not tonight?

IV. The Passover

The Passover is the climatic event in the Exodus itself and a picture of our redemption in Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, 405.

A. The Death of the Firstborn

Exodus 11:4 – 8: Moses said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again. But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.’ All these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, ‘Go out, you and all the people who follow you,’ and after that I will go out.” And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

Wolf says, “According to Egyptian theology, Pharaoh himself was a god, but in this final plague the vulnerability of the king was clearly exposed.”⁵⁰ The firstborn in Egyptian and Israelite cultures was significant, but the firstborn of Pharaoh was most important. Pharaoh was considered a god, the son of Re, the sun god, for the specific purpose of ruling over Re’s chief concern, the land of Egypt. For the purpose of re-creation, the supreme god assumed the form of the living king and gave seed which was to become the next king and the next “son of Re.” Moreover, the Pharaoh was the incarnation of the god Horus, a falcon god whose province was the heavens. Horus represented the living king who succeeded the dead king Osiris. Every living king was Horus, every dead king Osiris. To strike any firstborn was to destroy the heir, who embodied the hopes and aspirations of the Egyptians, but to strike the firstborn son of Pharaoh was to destroy this cardinal doctrine of the divine kingship of Egypt. Such a blow would be enough for Pharaoh, for then he would drive the Israelites out.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 164.

⁵¹ *The NET Bible*. Accessed July 19, 2012.

B. The Passover Lamb

1. An Act of Faith

Exodus 12:1 -- 7: Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

The key provision of the Passover was the sacrifice of the lamb or goat and the application of the blood to the doorposts. Do not miss that this was done in faith: By placing the blood over the doorposts, the Israelites were showing they believed that by doing what God said, they would escape His wrath.

2. The name “Passover”

Exodus 12:11: Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste – it is the LORD’s Passover.

(פֶּסַח) In context, the meaning of the word is clear enough: God is *passing over* his people when he sees their act of faith (blood on the doorframe).

Exodus 12:23: For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will **pass over** the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite *you*. (פֶּסַח)

Exodus 12:23 explains why the feast is called *Pesach* by Jewish people: The word *Pesach* comes from Exodus 12:23

3. Passover and the New Testament

Jesus' passion occurred at Passover and Passover provides the theological background for understanding Jesus' death. The Passover lamb is a clear picture of Jesus Christ and the substitutionary atonement. Just like the firstborn of Israel, we are under a death sentence. But Jesus Christ died in our place. The NT calls him our Passover lamb:

1 Corinthians 5:7: Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 state that none of the bones of the Passover lamb were supposed to be broken. John 19:36 emphasizes that none of Jesus' bones were broken.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at Passover. As the Passover meal was the seal of the Old Covenant or Dispensation, which was sanctified by the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, Jesus Christ inaugurated His own memorial, which is the seal of the New Covenant or Dispensation. The Lord's Supper was forever sanctified by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God,

who takes away the sins of the world. The Lord's Supper was a Passover meal.

The method of applying the blood to the door is also informative to us concerning personal faith in Christ. The blood of the Passover lamb must not only be shed but it must be applied over the door. For the home to be safe, it was not sufficient for the lamb merely to be slain nor the blood collected; the blood had to be applied to the door. So too for us, it is not blood in the basin, but blood applied saves a soul. The blood Christ shed at Calvary provides for the availability of forgiveness, but it too must be applied to each person individually, then God says to us, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

C. The Feast of Unleavened Bread

1. Description of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus

Exodus 12:8: They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

Exodus 12:14 – 20: In these verses, the guidelines are given for the feast of unleavened bread.

It was to last seven days.

They were not to eat bread with leaven in it.

The first month from evening of the 14th to the evening of the 21st.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to begin the day after Passover and continued for seven more days. Wolf is correct when he states that by the NT era, these two separate feasts became one feast.

Exodus 12:15: Seven days you shall eat **unleavened bread**, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats

anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

The Hebrew term for “unleavened bread” is *maṣṣôt*.

Together with *Shavuot* ("Pentecost") and *Sukkot* ("Tabernacles"), Passover is one of the three pilgrimage festivals (*Shalosh Regalim*) during which the entire Jewish populace historically made a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

2. Feast of Unleavened Bread and Practices in First Century Judea

Mark 14:12: On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

The relation of Passover to the Feast of Unleavened Bread has a great deal to do with understanding the last few days of Jesus’ life and ministry and the day of the week on which Jesus was crucified. Don’t forget, Jewish days start at sundown, not at dawn. If one is following the OT precisely, the Feast of Unleavened Bread does not begin until the day after Passover night. But, Hurtado notes “there are indications that sometimes the day the Passover lambs were sacrificed was loosely called the first day of Unleavened Bread.”⁵² Mark makes clear the “Last Supper” occurred the evening after the day the lambs were slaughtered and was a Passover meal: “So the disciples went out, entered the city, and found it just as He had told them, and they prepared the **Passover**” (Mark 14:16).

Now, reconciling the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) with the Gospel of John at this point is notoriously challenging. Why? Because John 19:14 (HCS) says this about the day Jesus was crucified: “It was the preparation day for the Passover, and it was [the sixth hour].”

⁵² Larry Hurtado, *New International Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, *Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 237.

Thus, John describes Jesus as dying on the day the Passover lambs were killed. Furthermore, John 13:1 – 38 does not *explicitly* call the Last Supper a Passover meal, as is clear in Mark. These references from the Gospel of John are why some sincere and well-meaning people insist Jesus was actually crucified on Thursday, not Friday. I do not think that the “Jesus was crucified on Thursday” argument is sustainable. Dr. Branch suspects there was some flexibility in the use of the terms in First Century Judea, and “preparation day” in John 19:14 may refer to the day before the Sabbath of Passover week or our “Friday.” Thus, all four Gospels would agree that Jesus was crucified on Friday.⁵³

D. The Death of the Firstborn

Exodus 12:29 – 30: Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead.

Exodus 12:29 begins with the temporal indicator וַיְהִי (*vayyhi*), often translated “and it came to pass.” Here it could be left untranslated: “In the middle of the night Yahweh attacked.” The word order of the next and main clause furthers the emphasis by means of the *vav* disjunctive on the divine name preceding the verb. The combination of these initial and disjunctive elements helps to convey the suddenness of the attack, while its thoroughness is stressed by the repetition of “firstborn” in the rest of the verse, the merism (“from the firstborn of Pharaoh...to the firstborn of the captive”), and the mention of cattle.

⁵³ Hurtado suggests a different view and says, “The reasons for John’s version of the meal and the apparent difference in the timing of Jesus’ death are perhaps not fully recoverable, but they may be based on his theological emphases and his use of symbolism, making the death of Christ the new Passover sacrifice, replacing the traditional lamb (in keeping with his use of the title “Lamb of God” to describe Jesus, 1:29, 36).” *Mark*, 238.

The key to this entire passage is found in Exodus 12:13:

Exodus 12:13: The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

When God sees the blood of Jesus on our lives, judgment is passed and we have eternal life. An old hymn puts it this way:

“When I See the Blood” by John Foote (1892)

Christ our Redeemer died on the cross,
Died for the sinner, paid all his due;
All who receive Him need never fear,
Yes, He will pass, will pass over you.

Refrain:

When I see the blood, when I see the blood,
When I see the blood, I will pass, I will pass over you.

Judgment is coming, all will be there.
Who have rejected, who have refused?
Oh, sinner, hasten, let Jesus in,
Oh, He will pass, will pass over you.

V. Route of the Exodus

After the Death Angel’s sweep through the land of Egypt, his heart and will was broken and he let the Israelites leave. Yet the journey out of Egypt was not simple; many obstacles had to be overcome. This is a picture of the Christian life. When God saves us out of sin, it does not mean all problems are removed from our lives. God allows problems and difficulties to grow us in our relationship with Christ and to teach us to trust God by faith.

A. The People grumble at Moses and God when the first obstacle is faced.

Pharaoh demonstrates the fickle nature of humans; as soon as he lets Israel go, he regrets the decision, mobilizes his army, and uses the Egyptian military to pursue the Israelites in the desert. Similarly, when Christ saves a person from sin, Satan rarely lets them go from his grasp without warfare. We should be reminded that Jesus Christ faced 40 days of temptation in the wilderness immediately following his baptism. If Christ faced such temptation after baptism, we should expect something similar in the lives of his followers after their conversion.

As soon as Pharaoh's forces close in behind the Israelites, the people panic and begin to regret leaving Egypt. Their lack of faith leads them to grumble against both Moses and God:

Exodus 14:10 – 12 (NASB): ¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were coming after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone so that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!"

Fear always sees every situation in the worst possible light. They "cried out to the LORD," but they were fussing at Moses. Immediately, they assumed the worst and believed they were going to "die in the wilderness" (14:11). They also downplayed the horror of Egyptian slavery, and insisted Egyptian servitude was better than freedom (14:12). I suppose there was a certain comfort in the familiarity of Egyptian slavery; the work was brutal, but one knew what to expect each day. With the freedom of the Exodus,

they were now stepping into the life of faith and learning new ways of living with God as guide.

A common experience for new believers in Christ is the temptation to return to the familiarity of a life of sin as opposed to walking forward in the unfamiliar life of faith. For example, drug abuse may be a familiar coping mechanism in a person's life; destructive though it is, the person knows what to expect with drugs and the temporary high which numbs the pain of life can seem soothing. The new life of faith can seem frightening. What is God going to do? How will I cope with the stresses of life? Satan can make the memories of the slavery of sin seem so appealing. For the former drug addict, Satan only reminds the person of the soothing high of drugs, but doesn't bring to recollection the violence, physical sickness, broken friendships, and violence associated with drug use. And keep in mind, the Israelites were doubting God while *being led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night!*

B. The Route of the Exodus

Exodus 13:17 – 18: Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.

Exodus 13:20: Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness.

Exodus 14:1- 2: Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.

Exodus 15:22: Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

What was the route of the Exodus? First, we know for certain the Israelites did not travel along the coast as Exodus 13:17 – 18 make clear. If we advocate an early date – as I do – then how do we explain the presence of Philistines in the area now known as the Gaza strip between 1500 – 1400 BC when the extra-Biblical sources refer to their invasion taking place a couple of centuries later? We have, I think, two options: The first option is to suggest the Philistines were in Canaan earlier than reported by extra-Biblical sources. Perhaps there were smaller outposts on the shoreline followed later by a larger migration. There is a uniform layer of destruction around the ANE circa 1200 BC and I think this is the “Sea Peoples” or Philistines. The second option is to suggest a later editor updated the language for contemporary readers.

Second, we know the Israelites went by the “way of the wilderness.” So, we know for sure they were going through the Sinai Peninsula.

Third, we know the Israelites stopped at Succoth from Exodus 13:20. A Separate city east of the Jordan River is also called Succoth. The Succoth in Egypt has not been definitely identified, but it was not far from the Nile River delta. An archeological site known as Tell el-Maskhuta is often suggested for Succoth.

Fourth, the name Pi-hahiroth may mean “mouth of the canal.” The remains of an ancient canal have been found east of Wadi Tumilat. There is some evidence that as early as the 12th Dynasty under Pharaoh Senusret III (1878 BC–1839 BC) the Egyptians had attempted to build a canal from the Red Sea to the Nile. However, the Egyptians were perplexed with how to keep the salt water from the Red Sea from spoiling the Nile River.

Fifth, Migdol is a Hebrew word that means “Tower” or “Watchtower.” Apparently, the Egyptians had several watchtowers in the

area east of the Nile delta. So, again, this site is difficult to locate, but the reference to a “watchtower” makes complete sense.

Sixth, Baal-zephon means “lord of the north,” and incorporates the name of a Canaanite god important to seafarers. Some scholars claim Baal-zephon is probably to be identified with the modern Jebel Deraj or Kulalah, on the western shore of the Gulf of Suez. However, no one knows for certain where this was, but the name fits what we know of the area.

Seventh, the extent of the Red Sea may have been different in Moses’ day than in our own day. And this is a good place to transition to the next topic: Red Sea vs. Reed Sea!

C. “Red” or “Reed” Sea?

1. Red Sea versus “Reed” Sea

Perhaps you’ve heard of this debate: Did God lead the Israelites through the *Red Sea* or did they go through a *Sea of Reeds*? Intricately related to this is the route of the Exodus itself. Remember, liberals don’t even believe it happened! Just a note: Liberals seem unable to accept the Bible as a reliable ancient source. Every other source – Egyptian, Ugaritic, Assyrian – are automatically considered reliable. Why not judge these other sources in light of Scripture? Again, the Egyptians were egotistical – look at the pyramids! – So I’m not surprised if they didn’t leave any records of their worst defeat ever!

2. *Yam Suph*

Exodus 13:18: Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.

The Hebrew term יַם־סוּף (*Yam Suf*) cannot be a genitive (“wilderness of the Red Sea”) because it follows a noun that is not in construct; instead, it must be an adverbial accusative, unless it is simply joined by apposition to “the wilderness” – the way to the wilderness [and] to the Red Sea.

The translation of *Yam Suf*⁵⁴ as “Red Sea” comes from the sea’s Greek name in the LXX (*Erythra Thalassa*) as well as the Vulgate’s translation -- *Mare Rubrum*, which means “Red Sea.” The Red Sea on today’s maps is farther south, below the Sinai Peninsula. But the title Red Sea in ancient times may very well have covered both the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba (see Deut 1:1; 1 Kgs 9:26). The name “Sea of Reeds” in various English versions (usually in the form of a marginal note) and commentaries reflects the meaning of the Hebrew word יַיִס, a word for reedy water plants (Exod 2:3, 5; Isa 19:6; Jonah 2:6) that may have a connection with an Egyptian word (*tjuf*) used for papyrus and other marsh plants. On this basis some have taken the term *Yam Suf* as perhaps referring to Lake Menzaleh or Lake Ballah, which have abundant reeds, north of the extension of the Red Sea on the western side of Sinai. Whatever exact body of water is meant, it was not merely a marshy swamp that the people waded through, but a body of water large enough to make passage impossible without divine intervention, and deep enough to drown the Egyptian army. Lake Menzaleh has always been deep enough to preclude passage on foot. The Lake has been drained of much of its water by some stupid attempt of the Egyptians to farm the bottom soil. Anyway, I think it is too far north. While Lakes Ballah and Menzaleh are hypothetically possible, I like the *Red Sea*.

D. The Bitter Water at Marah

Exodus 15:22 – 25 (NASB): ²² Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they

⁵⁴ The Hebrew phrase gets transliterated variously as *Yam Suf*, *Yam Suph*, or *Yam Sup*.

were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” ²⁵ Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

Not only were the waters at Marah bitter, but the people quickly became bitter towards God. How soon we forget the victories God has given us! God provided a tree which Moses cut down and cast into the water making it potable. Johnny Hunt makes a good connection between the experience at Marah and our need for the cross of Christ to take away our bitterness today. Hunt commented on Exodus 15:22 – 25 and said, “Even as a tree was cut down and used to meet the need of bitterness in Marah, God used another tree at Calvary to meet our need. After tasting the bitterness of sin, we cast the tree of Calvary into our bitterness and God turns our bitterness into sweetness.”⁵⁵

E. Exodus 16: God Provides Manna and Meat

Exodus 16:1 – 3 (NASB): Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. ² The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

How quickly the Israelites forgot God’s goodness and favor! Do you notice that as soon as they face a difficulty, they begin to have fond memories of Egypt? They forget the miserable slavery and misrepresent

⁵⁵ Johnny M. Hunt, *Building Your Spiritual Resume*, 4th ed. (Woodstock, GA: 3H Publishers, 2002), 39.

their status in Egypt. So it is when Christians get saved and have lived for the Lord for a while, sometimes our own flesh or Satan can cause us to have fond thoughts of our pre-Christian life. “Oh, the friends I had! Oh, the good times we had! I miss it so much!” But this is the lie of our own flesh and of Satan. Just like the Israelites, we forget the slavery and bondage we had when we were lost. We remember the parties, but forget how the so-called “friends” we had were self-serving and lied to us, took advantage of us, and sometimes got drunk and fought with us. There is nothing in Egypt which makes it worth going back!

What is the “Wilderness of Sin”? It is a barren region somewhere west of the Sinai Peninsula and it should not be confused with the Wilderness of *Zin*, which is located on the northwest side of the Sinai.⁵⁶ Douglas Stuart suggests that at this point in the journey the Israelites were taking a turn south and staying close to the east coast of the Red Sea and probably following rather consistently the old road that ran southward along the eastern side of the Red Sea that the Egyptians had used in the past for mining commerce.⁵⁷

1. God Provides Quail

2. God Provides Manna

Exodus 3:13 – 15 (NASB): ¹³ So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.¹⁴ When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the sons of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.”

⁵⁶ “Sin, Wilderness Of,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Brand, Draper, England, eds. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 1507.

⁵⁷ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 2, *Exodus*, 369 – 370.

Concerning the exact characteristics and nature of manna, Stuart comments it may have been flaky “in the way a pie crust is called ‘flaky’ but not necessarily occurring in the form of separate, individual flakes.”⁵⁸ The word “manna” is derived from the Hebrew word *mān*, the interrogative “what.” Thus, the word “manna” is derived from the word for “what.” It means something like, “What is it?” If one stops and thinks about it, God’s perfect will was not for the Israelites to eat manna for forty years. If they had been obedient and entered Canaan when God said to do so, the experience of eating manna would have been rather brief.

Why is it that so many people are quitters? Because it’s easy to quit! But if Marah and wilderness of Sin teach us anything, they teach us this: Victory is just around the corner!

F. Appointing Leaders – Exodus 18

In Exodus 18, a leadership problem is presented along with a workable solution. Jethro comes to visit Moses, and Exodus 18:13 says, “It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening.” Jethro watched his son-in-law getting exhausted and made a suggestion: “Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.” (Exodus 18:17 – 18). Preachers, this is true for us as well. We can’t do it alone! The task is too heavy for us and we cannot do it alone. That’s why God has given us the body of Christ.

Moses delegated authority and assigned other people the jobs of handling minor decisions. Exodus 18:24 – 26 says, “So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all

⁵⁸ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, 378.

Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge.” These rulers of hundreds, fifties, and tens to a degree remind me of our modern office of the Justice of the Peace. A Justice of the Peace is a well-informed citizen assigned as a local magistrate empowered chiefly to administer summary justice in minor cases, to commit for trial, and to administer oaths and perform marriages. This is somewhat analogous to what Moses institutes here.

Remember, when you delegate a task, the person to whom you are delegating it may not do it *exactly* like you would. From my perspective and experience, when I delegate a task, the person to whom I’ve given authority often executes the task about 80% of the way I would do it. But the long term benefit for the strength of the organization of delegating tasks and getting more done is far greater than the lost 20%. In many if not most cases, the person to whom I delegate the task does it far better than I ever could have. Because we preachers are so strong about doctrine, we tend to become obsessed about everything being done in a particular way. While the tendency to be very strict about doctrine is a good attribute for a preacher, the preacher needs to be less strict about the execution of a task. Defending the doctrine of the Trinity requires us to be far more emphatic and firm than defending a particular way of communicating between the personnel and finance committees!

VI. Law Material in Exodus: Exodus 19 – 24

Exodus 19 – 24 contains God’s interaction with the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law. The Law begins with the Ten Commandments, and the other laws give more details about God’s expectations of His people.

Scholarly advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis often refer to Exodus 20:22 – 23:33 the “Covenant Code.” They claim the text originally

existed independently but was crafted into the “E” source’s narrative. According to the critical view of Scripture, the “Covenant Code” is supposed to be the “E” source’s equivalent to the “J” source’s “Ritual Dialogue” of Exodus 34:11 – 26. According to the theory, at some point a redactor forged “J” and “E” into one document. I strongly reject the Documentary Hypothesis. Please see my extended discussion of the reasons why. For our purposes here, I’m merely pointing out again the way the theory cuts the Bible into hundreds of competing ideas and theologies.

A. The Ten Commandments Exodus 20:1 – 20:21

I have an extended set of notes and an entire lecture devoted to the Ten Commandments. For our purposes here, note that the Ten Commandments are given by God himself, the God who has just brought them out of Egypt’s bondage. Exodus 20:2 grounds the Decalogue in history: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery” (HCS). The God who gives the Ten Commandments is the God who redeems. The Ten Commandments are not the result of an evolutionary process of religious development, but are given by God Himself at a particular point in time and in a particular historical setting.

Did everyone hear the Ten Commandments? Possibly so. Exodus 20:21 indicates Moses went approached the darkness “where God was” after the giving of the Ten Commandments.

B. Slavery – Exodus 21:1 - 11

The OT regulations on slavery often bother the modern Christian conscience. We ask ourselves, “Why didn’t God just tell them that slavery was wrong and they shouldn’t do it?” Furthermore, Exodus is part of the Torah, which begins with God making all humans in His own image (Genesis 1:26 – 28), the central premise in the Christian sanctity of life ethic. How can God say all people are made in His image – with the obvious

ethical implication that all humans have innate worth and value – and then give guidelines for slavery, a practice which devalues people?

The first point of clarification for these questions is to distinguish the OT practice of slavery from slavery in the antebellum South of the United States. For Christians in the United States, when the word *slavery* is mentioned, the first thing which comes to our mind is the massive slave trade in Sub-Saharan Africa and the horrid middle passage. Our minds immediately think of wretched and evil Simon Legree in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* whipping Uncle Tom to death. Walter Kaiser contrasts the nature of OT slavery from modern versions when he says, "Slavery in the Old Testament is not the horrible institution known by the same name in the modern western countries, for it often approximated employer and employee relationships, but there were aspects that were subject to abuse and the law spoke to these."⁵⁹ The institution of the Jubilee Year also prevented exploitation of the poor as slaves.

C. Exodus 21:22 – 25 and the Sanctity of Pre-born Human Life

Many believers may be surprised to learn that religiously-minded pro-abortion advocates use Exodus 21:22 – 25 to justify abortion. I will spend an extra amount of time explaining what the pro-abortion advocates claim and why they are wrong. Comparing the text of the NKJV and the RSV gives the reader some indication of the debate:

Exodus 21:22-25 (NKJV): 22 "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely (וְיָלְדָה יָלְדָהּ), yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. 23 But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, 24 eye for

⁵⁹ Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 98.

eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Exodus 21:22 – 25 (RSV): ²² “When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage (הַיָּלְדָה יִפְּצֵן), and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. ²³ If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

1. The Wrongheaded Pro-Abortion Argument Stated

Some pro-abortion advocates wrongly claim that Exodus 21:22 – 25 places a higher value on the life of the mother than the life of the unborn child. The Feinbergs call the pro-choice argument the “miscarriage” interpretation. The pro-abortion interpretation of Exodus 21:22 - 25 rests on two interpretive keys.

1. According to Pro-Choice advocates, verse 22 describes an incident when two men are fighting near a pregnant woman. Inadvertently the two men strike the pregnant woman causing a miscarriage: the child is lost, but the woman lives. Central to the Pro-Choice interpretation is that when verse 22 says that “she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury,” the reference is only to injury to the mother. Whether the child lives or dies is not important. A miscarriage that results from an accidental shove or push only merits a fine. The RSV favors this approach and translates verse 22 as “there is a miscarriage, but no harm follows.” Several other English translations mention the “miscarriage” translation in footnotes.

2. According to Pro-Choice advocates, verses 23-25 discuss a case where not only is there a miscarriage, but the mother is injured as well. If the mother dies, then the death penalty is imposed.

Based on these two interpretative steps, the Pro-abortion crowd reaches the following conclusion: Pro-Abortion advocates infer that aborting an unborn child must not carry the same moral approbation as taking the life of an adult since the miscarriage only merits a fine but death of the mother merits the death penalty.⁶⁰

2. A Pro-Life Response to the Pro-Choice Interpretation of Exodus 21:22 – 25

I believe the Pro-Abortion interpretation of Exodus 21:22 – 25 is wrong on four counts.

1. The key Hebrew terms point to a pro-life interpretation.

The Hebrew phrase in debate is וַיֵּצֵאוּ יְלָדֶיהָ . It can be somewhat woodenly paraphrased as “they come out children of her.” The central Hebrew noun in the debate about the correct understanding of Exodus 21:22 – 25 is *yeled* (יָלֵד) which is the word used in Exodus 21:22 – 25 to describe the child that issues from the womb. Walter Kaiser says *yeled* is the normal word for “child,” making it clear that a human being is in view here.⁶¹ The Feinbergs add, “This word [*yeled*] is never used elsewhere for a child who lacks recognizable human form or cannot exist outside the womb.”⁶² For example, in Genesis 30:26, Jacob asks Laban to give him the “wives and *children* (plural of *yeled*) that I have worked for.” Furthermore,

⁶⁰ In 1971 Evangelical author Norman Geisler advocated a similar interpretation of Exodus 21:22. Commenting on the passage, he said, “the unborn baby was not considered fully human and, therefore, causing its death was not considered murder.” Norman Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1971), 218. In the rest of his discussion, Geisler clearly takes a dim view of abortion, but he basically arrives at a position allowing for abortion of pre-viable children. In later works, Geisler took a decidedly hard turn away from this position.

⁶¹ This is the opinion of Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 170.

⁶² John S. Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed., 107.

Walter Kaiser also points out that that Hebrew does have a regular word for miscarriage (שבל), which means “to be bereaved [of children] or to be childless. In the *piel* participle, this verbal root [שבל] is used in Exodus 23:26 to refer to women who miscarry: “And none will miscarry in your land.”⁶³ This word *is not* the word used in Exodus 21:22 – 25. Since the Hebrew text uses a word normally used for live births and does not use the word normally used for miscarriages, it seems Exodus 21:22 is referring to case when a baby is born prematurely, but has no further injury.

We have seen the main noun in the debate about Exodus 21:22 normally refers to a living child, but what about the central verb in the debate? Again, a literal translation of verse 22 is something like “so that her children go (or come) out.” The Hebrew verb for “goes out” is *yatza* (יָצָא), which is the verb used ordinarily for live births. Compare two different translations:

NKJV “gives birth prematurely”

RSV “there is a miscarriage”

In short, verse 22 is referring to a live birth. Just as verse 22 has the mother *and* the child in mind, so do verses 23-25. Feinberg and Feinberg offer a good summary of this passage when they say: “When the baby is born prematurely, but unharmed, a fine is assessed. When there is harm to either mother or baby, the law of retaliation is required. And both stipulations apply in a case where what happens is totally *accidental*. In fact, this is the only place in the Mosaic Law and Scripture as a whole where the death penalty is required for *accidental* homicide.”⁶⁴ Archer concurs: “There is no second-class status attached to the fetus under this rule; he is avenged just as if he were a normally delivered child or an older person: life for life.”⁶⁵

Evangelical author Peter Enns takes a somewhat mediating position between that of pro-abortion advocates and pro-life proponents in reference to Exodus

⁶³ Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 170.

⁶⁴ Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 108.

⁶⁵ Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 248. John Calvin also affirmed that this passage was referring to the death of *both* the mother and the baby. See John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 3, *Calvin’s Harmony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 42.

21:22-25. Though I disagree with some of his conclusions, he is probably right when he says, “Although this law is clearly meant to maintain the dignity and worth of human life, it is ambiguous in its details.”⁶⁶ Granted that a certain amount of ambiguity may in fact exist, I suggest that the non-ambiguous truth found in this passage be affirmed: Human life deserves protection. When both the central noun and verb in question are considered together, pro-abortion arguments based on Exodus 21:22 – 25 are quite weak and flawed.

2. The text of Exodus 21:22 -25 points to some harm towards the baby involved in the first clause.

Exodus 21:22 says, “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.” The pro-choice interpretation attempts to say the “no harm follows” phrase refers only to the woman and has no reference to a child who is miscarried because of a scuffle. But if a woman has been hit so hard that she miscarries, she has already suffered harm! Thus, it is more logical to say that the phrase “no harm follows” refers to the child who is delivered prematurely (but still lived) because the mother was struck.

3. In either interpretation, the text still places some value on the baby in Verse 22.

Even if one grants the pro-abortion interpretation, the text still places some value on the pre-born child. Pro-Abortion advocates do not even do this! The unborn babies that are aborted are treated in a most ruthless manner. As Beckwith notes, at a minimum the text indicates the unborn are worth *something*, while modern pro-abortion advocates seem to say that the unborn only have value that their mother’s place on them.⁶⁷ I contend, along with others including John Frame, that the interpretative choices for Exodus 21:22 – 25 are not between a “pro-life” versus a “pro-abortion”

⁶⁶ Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 447. Stassen and Gushee reflect a similar opinion and say the passage is “murky” and should not be foundational for any particular view on abortion. See Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 218.

⁶⁷ Francis Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death*, 142.

interpretations, but between a “pro-life” versus an *even stronger pro-life* position.

4. Accidental Death and Abortion are Not Morally Equivalent

The Feinbergs rightly note that even if the pro-abortion “miscarriage” interpretation of Exodus 21:22 – 25 is correct, the passage describes the *accidental* death of a child while abortion is the *intentional death* of a child. The two circumstances – and accident as opposed to an intentional death – are not morally equivalent.⁶⁸

D. Various Laws Exodus 20:22 – 23: 33

1. Additional Laws about Idolatry 20:22 – 20:25
2. Laws about slaves 21:1 – 11
3. Laws about personal injury. 21:12 – 36
4. Laws about theft 22:1 – 4
5. Laws about crop protection 22:5 – 6
6. Laws about personal property 22:7 – 15
7. Laws about seduction of a woman 22:16 – 17
8. Capital Offenses 22:18 – 20
9. Laws Protecting Vulnerable Poor People 22:21 – 27

Don’t exploit foreigners.

Exodus 22:21 (HCS): You must not exploit a foreign resident or oppress him, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

⁶⁸ John S. Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 106.

Don't exploit widows or orphans.

Exodus 22:22 – 24 (HCS): ²² “You must not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you do mistreat them, they will no doubt cry to Me, and I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴ My anger will burn, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will be widows and your children fatherless.

Don't charge interest to the poor. (The check-cashing store owner's least favorite verse in the Bible!)

Exodus 22:25 (HCS): If you lend money to My people, to the poor person among you, you must not be like a moneylender to him; you must not charge him interest.

Apparently, there is no parallel whatsoever in ANE law to this particular command in Exodus 22:25. The Code of Hammurabi allowed for interest to be charged. The interest rates were capped at 20% on loans of money and 33 1/3% on loans of grain. The Code also allows for cessation of interest in the event of a crop failure.⁶⁹ In fact, frequent loans at interest are found as early as the third dynasty of Ur (2060 – 1950 BC).⁷⁰

Don't take basic necessities of life as collateral.

Exodus 22:26 – 27 (HCS): ²⁶ “If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as collateral, return it to him before sunset. ²⁷ For it is his only covering; it is the clothing for his body. What will he sleep in? And if he cries out to Me, I will listen because I am compassionate.

10. Respect for God. 22:28 – 31

11. Laws about honesty and justice 23:1 – 9

⁶⁹ R. P. Maloney, “Usury and Restrictions on Interest-Taking in the Ancient Near East,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (January 1974): 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

Exodus 22:9 (HCS): You must not oppress a foreign resident; you yourselves know how it feels to be a foreigner because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

12. Sabbaths and Festivals Exodus 23:10 – 19

13. Promises and Warnings 23:20 – 33

I will include an extended quote from Baptist pastor and theologian Andrew Fuller (1754 – 1815). Commenting on the blessings and curses in the Mosaic Law, he said:

Strictly speaking, men are not now under the covenant of works, but under the *curse* for having broken it. God is not in covenant with them [he means lost people], nor they with him. The law, as a covenant, was recorded, and a new and enlarged edition of it given to Israel at Mount Sinai; not, however for the purpose of “giving life” to those who had broken it; but rather as a preparative to a better covenant. Its *precepts* still stand as the immutable will of God towards his creatures; it *promises* as memorials of what might have been expected from his goodness, in case of obedience; and its *curse*s as a flaming sword that guards the tree of life. It is stationed in the oracles of God as a faithful watchman, to repel the vain hopes of the self-righteous, and convince them of the necessity of a Savior, Romans 7:10; Matthew 19:17. Hence it was given to Israel by the hand of Moses, as a mediator, Galatians 3:19 – 21.⁷¹

VII. The Tabernacle and the Priests: Exodus 25 – 31

God didn’t just drop a philosophy book or a theology book on Israel’s head, the tabernacle is evidence that God Himself wanted to lead

⁷¹ Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation or the Duty of Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ*, in *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, vol. II (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 375. Italics in original.

them! The significance of the tabernacle can be seen in the amount of space devoted to it. For comparison, God devoted only two chapters (Genesis 1 & 2) to the topic of creation while fifteen chapters in Exodus (25 – 40) are dedicated to the Tabernacle along with book of Leviticus 1 – 17 which is devoted to service in the Tabernacle. The design of the Tabernacle served as the pattern for the later Temple and teaches us about the importance of holiness in the believer’s life, along with the importance of substitutionary sacrifice.

The tabernacle was one of the ultimate goals of the Exodus from Egypt: God Himself would take up residence in the camp.⁷²

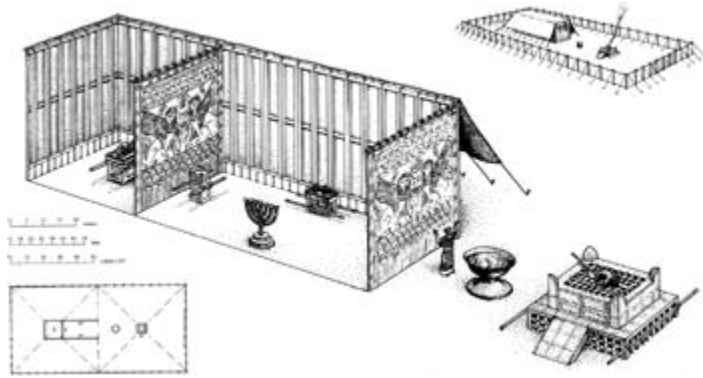
A. Command to Construct the Tabernacle

Exodus 25:8 – 9: [God speaking] Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may **dwel** among them. According to all that I am going to show you, *as* the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*.

The Tabernacle was designed to be a movable place of worship. All the various parts were designed to be rather easily disassembled and reassembled as the Israelites traveled from place to place. One author says, “For the Israelites to make a sanctuary for the LORD to dwell in continues the theme of His presence with His people and His goal in bringing them out of Egypt – to make Himself known as their God, and to give them a unique identity as His people.”⁷³ The word translated *dwel* (וַיִּשְׁכַּחֲנֵהוּ, *vijshakhanti*) in Exodus 25:8 is translated as “rested” when Exodus says the “glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai.” The term for “reside” is closely associated with the word “shekinah” used in postbiblical discussions of the Lord’s presence.

⁷² John Oswalt, “Holiness: The Goal of Human Life,” Paper Delivered Tuesday, November 15, 2022 at the 74th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Denver, CO. Personal notes.

⁷³ *HCS Study Bible*, 141.



B. Names for the Tabernacle

At least four different names are used for the Tabernacle in the Bible.

1. Tabernacle

Exodus 25:9 (NASB): According to all that I am going to show you, *as* the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*.

Mishkān – “Tabernacle” (Exodus 25:9). The most well-known of the four titles is *Tabernacle*. The term *mishkān* shifts our attention from the holiness and transcendence of God expressed by the term sanctuary. “Tabernacle” focuses our attention on the presence and immanence of the LORD suggested by the fact he would “dwell in their midst.”

2. *Miqdāš* – “Sanctuary”

Miqdāš – “Sanctuary” (Exodus 25:8). This is the most common term for the tabernacle complex as a whole. This term emphasizes God’s transcendence and holiness.

3. Tent of Meeting

'ōhel mō'ēd – “Tent of Meeting”. (Exodus 29:42, 43). It was here that God met Moses. The phrase then refers to the place where God meets men, not (as in some churches today?) where men meet each other!⁷⁴.

4. Tabernacle of the Testimony

“Tabernacle of the Testimony” (Exodus 38:21). The name refers to the fact the fact that the Tabernacle contained the ark, in which were the tables of the law, the testimony, or reminder of God’s testamental conditions.⁷⁵

Students may be confused because sometimes the term “tabernacle” is used in the Bible in reference to the tent that had the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. At other times, the term “tabernacle” is used in reference to the entire complex. Also, Exodus 33:7 – 10 refers to a tent other than the Tabernacle where Moses used to meet with God prior to the Tabernacle.

C. Layers of Covering on the Tabernacle

The Tabernacle itself had four layers covering it on the outside. Beginning from the inside out, they were linen embroidered with cherubim, goats’ hair, ram’s skin dyed red, and manatee / porpoise skins dyed blue.

Exodus 26:7 (NASB): Then you shall make curtains of goats’ *hair* for a tent over the tabernacle; you shall make eleven curtains in all.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 361.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁷⁶ Augustine engages in some odd numerology regarding the number “11.” He says, “Accordingly, since the law is symbolized by the number ten (and hence the designation of the famous Decalogue), surely then the number eleven, passing ten as it does, stands for trespassing against the law and consequently for sin. This is why eleven curtains of goats’ hair were ordered to be prepared for the tabernacle of the testimony, which served the people of God as a mobile temple on their wanderings.” Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 4, Philip Levine, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 533 – 535, XV.xx.

Exodus 26:14 (NASB): You shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red and a covering of porpoise skins above.

D. Contents of the Tabernacle

The Tabernacle. The Tabernacle basically had two rooms: The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place contained a seven-branch lampstand, a table for showbread, and an altar of incense. The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant. The tabernacle was surrounded by an enclosing "fence" composed of curtains. In the courtyard within the enclosure and outside the tabernacle were a laver and a sacrificial altar.

Also, the tabernacle was to face east. Matthew 24:27 says, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

There are eleven specific parts / contents of the tabernacle I want students to know:

1. The Holy of Holies or "The Most Holy Place"

Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies (Hebrew *debir*).

2 & 3. The Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat.

The Ark was a wooden chest covered with gold and was the only thing in the Most Holy Place. It was 3.75 feet (45 inches) long and 2.25 feet (27 inches) wide and high. Within the Ark was the Ten Commandments (Exodus 31:18), a jar of manna (Exodus 16:33 – 34), and Aaron's staff that budded (Numbers 17:10).

On top of the Ark was the Atonement Cover / Mercy Seat -- *kappōreth*. The word *kappōreth* is a substantive derived from the verb *kpr*, which means "to cover" and the corresponding greatly expanded technical

meaning of “to make atonement.” (See Exodus 32:30; Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31)⁷⁷ The Mercy seat had two cherubim that faced each other on top. Payne says, “The basic thought of the [mercy seat] . . . was that of grace (the blood of the testament) intervening between the holiness of God and the inalterable verdict of divine justice upon the conduct of man (the Decalogue underneath.”⁷⁸ The Mercy Seat was also the place where God promised to meet with His chosen people. Exodus 25:22 says, “I [Yahweh] will meet with you there above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony; I will speak with you from there about all that I command you regarding the Israelites.” With this concept of meeting God above the Mercy Seat in mind, Eugene Merrill argues the Mercy seat served “as a throne upon which the invisible God sat in regal splendor.”⁷⁹

When the OT was translated into Greek in the LXX, the word *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilastērion*) used 22 times to translate the “atonement cover” on top of the Ark of the Covenant, or the *mercy seat*.⁸⁰ In the NT, the cross is a kind of mercy seat where atonement occurs (Romans 3:25).

4. The Holy Place

The Holy Place (Hebrew *mishkan*) *was* the room just outside of the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place contained the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the golden lampstand.

5. The Altar of Incense

⁷⁷ Eugene Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament*, 353. In grammar, a substantive refers to a word or group of words functioning as a noun.

⁷⁸ Payne, *A Theology of the Older Testament*, 363.

⁷⁹ Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 353.

⁸⁰ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 159.

(Exodus 30:1 – 10) The altar of incense inside the tabernacle was much smaller than the altar of burnt offering outside. It was 18 inches square and 35 inches high. The incense burned on the altar of incense made a sweet-smelling aroma.

6. The Table for Showbread (Exodus 25:23 – 30)

Always in God's presence was the table with twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. It was 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. Merrill says, "The table was, in the truest sense, a place where the Lord and his people, represented by the priests, symbolically broke bread together."⁸¹ According to Leviticus 24:5 – 9, the priests were to eat the bread each Sabbath day.

7. The Golden Lampstand (Exodus 25:31 – 40)

The gold lampstand stood in the holy place, opposite the table of showbread. It held seven lamps, flat bowls in which a wick lay with one end in the oil of the bowl and the lighted end hanging out. The lampstand provided light in what otherwise was a very dark room. The shape of each branch is somewhat interesting and each contained a "bulb and a flower" (NASB) (Exodus 25:31, 33) while other translations say a "bud and petals" (CSB).⁸²

8. The Bronze Laver

(Exodus 30:17 – 21) The Bronze laver was where the priests would come for cleansing. They must be pure to enter the presence of God.

⁸¹ Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 355.

⁸² Jonathan Edwards argued strongly that the lampstand was a type of the New Testament church. "Tis beyond doubt that that golden candlestick, with its seven branches and seven lamps, was a type of the church of Christ. The Holy Ghost himself, has been pleased to put that matter out of doubt, by representing his church by such a golden candlestick, with seven lamps, in the fourth chapter of Zechariah, and representing the seven churches of Asia by seven golden candlesticks, in the first chapter of Revelation." Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, John E. Smith, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 400.

9. The Altar of Burnt Offering

The altar of burnt offering is described in Exodus 27:1 – 8. Animal sacrifices were offered on this altar, located in the court in front of the tabernacle. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the four horns of the altar.

10. The Veil Separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place

Exodus 26:31 – 33 (NASB): ³¹“You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. ³²You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks *also being of gold*, on four sockets of silver. ³³You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies.

Internally, the tabernacle tent was divided by veil. This veil separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. This veil separating the two chambers was a double curtain of the finest workmanship, which was never passed except by the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement.

11. The Curtain Surrounding the Tabernacle

The tabernacle was surrounding by a series of curtains which formed a kind of “tapestry fence” separating the tabernacle from the rest of the camp. There was only one gate in the tapestry fence, just as there is only one way to God.

E. The Tabernacle and the Later Temple

The floor plan of the tabernacle served as the basic design for the temple built by Solomon, but the overall size of Solomon's temple was twice that of the tabernacle.⁸³

F. Jesus and the Tabernacle / Theology of the Tabernacle

Before I discuss the manner in which the tabernacle prefigures Jesus Christ, some may object that this is merely allegorical interpretation and thus should be put aside. But seeing Jesus in the Tabernacle and Old Testament sacrificial system has a long history in the church. It is not only those OT prophetic passages which declare the coming of the Messiah which tell us of Christ's mediatorial and redemptive work, the Tabernacle also gives us a word of prophecy. Augustine reflects some of my thoughts when he says:

For not only all the prophecies which are stated in words, not only the precepts for living which go to form morality and religion and are found in those writings, but also the worship, the priestly offices, the tabernacle or temple, the altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, feast days and whatever else belongs to the service due to God that is properly called *latreia* in Greek, are prophecies.⁸⁴

At least seven points of application can be safely made regarding the tabernacle and how it informs Christian doctrine and practice.

1. Both the presence of God and the holiness of God are visible in the Tabernacle.

The location the tabernacle was in the center of the camp clearly showed the nation of Israel that God was with them. Yet, access to the tabernacle was controlled and it was separated from the surrounding

⁸³ Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 281.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library, William M. Green, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 491, VII.xxxii.

community by the tapestry fence. One could not just stroll up the tabernacle in any fashion. Entrance was only through the one gate in the surrounding fence. This controlled access emphasized that while God was present with His people, He is also holy and must be approached in reverence.

The veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle also teaches an important truth about God's holiness. Again, while God was living among Israel, the veil separated the Holy of Holies as a uniquely holy place. No one could enter this place except the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement, and he had to take the blood of a sacrifice with him. In this way, the very structure of the Tabernacle illustrates and teaches us how sin separates us from God.

2. How do we approach God?

In the OT, no one was allowed behind the veil in the tabernacle except for the high priest. He went only once a year, on the Day of Atonement and never without offering first a sacrifice for his own sins and then a second sacrifice for the sins of the people. Taking the blood of this second sacrifice, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies behind the veil and sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, the dwelling place of God among His people. This form had been ordained by God in order to teach that He is holy and cannot be approached at will. There is but one way to God, the way that recognizes His holiness and His justice. It is the way of sacrifice. Christ made one sacrifice for sins forever (Hebrews 10:12). Nothing now stands between the soul and God – no priesthood, no altar, no sacrifice.⁸⁵

3. "The Word Became Flesh and *Tabernacled* Among Us"

⁸⁵ Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Marks of Sonship," in *The Cross Through the Open Tomb* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1961), 128 – 129.

The idea of God's presence in the tabernacle is echoed in John 1:14: "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The phrase "made his dwelling" echoes the Exodus description of God's presence. It is possible to translate John 1:14 as *tabernacled* among us!

4. Propitiation

The New Testament word *propitiation* is connected to the cover of the ark – the Mercy Seat. In many ways, the cross became a mercy seat where God's wrath was poured on sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Also, within the Ark of the Covenant are the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are God's testimony that man is a sinner and needs redemption. On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sacrifice was placed on top of the mercy seat with the Ten Commandments, a testimony to man's sinfulness, underneath. The blood covers man's sin. This Old Testament sacrifice is a picture of Jesus' work of atonement: His blood covers our sin and we find forgiveness at the cross. The mercy seat clearly presents the idea of propitiation so clearly emphasized in the New Testament (1 John 2:2).

Approach, my soul, the mercy seat,
where Jesus answers pray'r;
there humbly fall before His feet,
for none can perish there.

John Newton, *Approach, My Soul, The Mercy Seat* (1779)

5. The Veil is Torn / Christ as Our High Priest

Matthew 27:50 – 51 says: "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split." When Jesus died on the cross, the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was torn in two. Notice especially it was torn in two from *top to bottom*, not from bottom to top as might be the case if men tore the veil apart. The veil was torn from *top to bottom*; *God Himself* tore the veil

into. The clear implication is that Jesus is now our high priest who lives to intercede for us. Through faith in Christ, we have direct access to God.

Mark 15:38: And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Luke 23:44 – 46: ⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” Having said this, He breathed His last.

The tearing in two of the veil of the temple shows us Jesus’ death provides the basis for a new access to God, a new “temple” – Jesus himself! The Jerusalem temple and what it represents have been superseded.⁸⁶

Hebrews 10:19 – 22 also picks up on the imagery of the veil in the temple and applies it to Christ himself, saying:

Hebrews 10:19 – 22 (NASB): ¹⁹Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Here in Hebrews, the veil is paralleled to Christ Himself. The tearing of the veil in the temple symbolizes that the death of Christ was necessary for us to have access to God and to receive salvation. W. A. Criswell makes my point:

⁸⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 268.

As long as the veil was there, as long as the veil was there, as long as Christ was in the flesh, as long as our Lord did not die, we were shut out from God. It is in the tearing of the veil, in the rending of the veil that we have access into the presence of God. Had the Lord remained in his flesh all of his years and had continued to go through all the cities of Israel doing good, to this present day we would still be in our sins. Not by his holy, beautiful, heavenly, celestial, righteous, and perfect life [alone] are we saved. It is by his stripes we are healed.⁸⁷

Both the veil and Jesus were beautiful. The veil was exquisitely made and strikingly beautiful, but as long as it was in place, our access to the Holy of Holies was restricted. Jesus' life was morally and virtuously beautiful, but until He died our access to God Himself and the Heavenly Holy of Holies was restricted. Just as the veil was torn in two by God, so Christ's body was pierced and bruised by God Himself. His body was broken, and we now have direct access into intimate fellowship with God.

6. Jesus: The Meeting Place With God

The tabernacle was where sinful people could meet with holy God. Jesus Christ is the only meeting place between a holy God and a lost sinner (John 14:6).⁸⁸

7. The Tabernacle and Modern Worship

How does the OT tabernacle inform our thinking about NT worship? What made the tabernacle special was not just the tabernacle itself, but God's presence. Although the meaning of the Tabernacle to the children of Israel and meaning it has for believers today are somewhat different, in the tabernacle the foundation was being laid for people to be able to

⁸⁷ W. A. Criswell, *What a Savior!* (Nashville: Broadman, 1978), 120.

⁸⁸ Henrietta Mears, *A Look At the Old Testament* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1966), 26.

understand what God would do someday through the Lord Jesus Christ. To make a modern application, it is God's presence that makes any worship building special.

Just a note: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims (seriously!) to have the original Ark of the Covenant at the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in the town of Axum, Ethiopia.

Just a note: If the Documentary Hypothesis is true, then the Jewish people didn't really have a tabernacle with them in the wilderness! Yet, Torah itself makes the tabernacle quite central. The fact the tabernacle is so very central to the Torah while the Documentary Hypothesis wants to eject it from history seems just another reason to reject the flawed theory hatched out of Germany in the 1800s.

G. Garments of the Priests – Exodus 29:1 – 43

There is not a one-to-one correspondence between the OT office of High Priest and the NT office of pastor, but the High Priest does at least inform us about some of God's expectations for spiritual leadership. With this in mind, the most striking thing to remember is the priest was "holy to the LORD." 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7 explains what it means for a NT pastor to be "holy to the LORD."

1. Ephod (28:6 – 14)

Exodus 28:6 (NASB): They shall also make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman.

The ephod was an apron-like garment worn over the priest's robe and under the breastplate. It had two shoulder pieces made of onyx stones. Each stone had the names of six of the tribes of Israel.

2. Breastpiece of Judgment (28:15 – 29)

Exodus 28:16: “You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it.

The breastpiece had 12 gemstones. Each stone had the name of one of the tribes of Israel.

3. Urim and Thummim

Exodus 28:30 (NASB): You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

No one is exactly sure what the Urim and Thummim looked like. They apparently were two objects that served as sacred lots. That is, they were used to determine God’s will or to receive a divine answer to a question. Perhaps the objects were drawn or shaken from a bag. One object gave one answer. The other lot gave another answer. Probably, whichever lot came out first was understood to be God’s answer.⁸⁹

LDS alert: Joseph Smith claimed to use the “Urim and Thummim” to translate the Book of Mormon from his imaginary “reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics.” Most LDS Church members have been taught that Joseph Smith used seer stones referred to as the Urim & Thummim to translate the Book of Mormon to various scribes. According to Joseph Smith’s version of events, the Urim & Thummim were preserved in a stone box, along with the gold plates for the Book of Mormon, for over 1,500 years for the purpose of enabling Joseph to translate the writings on the gold plates. Numerous illustrations in various LDS church magazines continue to depict this method every year. It’s really hard to know what Smith meant

⁸⁹ Al Bean, “Urim and Thummim,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 1643.

when he said “Urim & Thummim” because he was making his story up as he went along! Apparently, he was claiming they were special spectacles to help him translate the Reformed Egyptian (??). In earlier versions of his story, Smith claimed to put a “peep stone” into a hat and then put his face into the hat to translate the Book of Mormon. (I’m not making this up!)

Any attempt to make a coherent timeline of Smith’s claims about receiving revelation from God is fraught with difficulties. But as his story developed, Smith claimed the Urim and Thummim were only used for translating just the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon and were then taken from Joseph by the angel along with the golden plates. The angel later returned the plates but not the Urim and Thummim. After this, Joseph used a single “seer stone” that he had in his possession from before the Book of Mormon plates were retrieved. Prior to becoming a “prophet,” Joseph Smith had used seer stones to hunt for buried treasure.

The Book of Mormon is neither scripture nor an accurate history of American Indians, but a plagiarized novel that Joseph Smith wrote by copying and borrowing from several books existing in his own day. For example, some of the story line was borrowed from *The View of the Hebrews*, a religious novel written by Congregationalist Minister Rev. Ethan Smith in 1823 (about 7 years prior to the Book of Mormon). In this book, Ethan Smith argued Native Americans were descendants of the “ten lost tribes” of Israel. Joseph Smith’s reliance on *The View of the Hebrews* was admitted by late LDS General Authority and historian, B.H. Roberts (1857 – 1933), who wrote *Studies of the Book of Mormon*. Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon using 1611 English and included much, even several full chapters, from KJV. To summarize: The Urim and Thummim in the Bible had nothing to do with translating languages. Joseph Smith simply made these things up to give his own fanciful story a “Biblical” flavor. Smith fabricated stories about the Urim and Thummim and the comments he makes demonstrates his own unfamiliarity about the way the stones were used in the Old Testament. Joseph Smith had no idea what he was talking about!

4. The Robe (28:31 – 35)

Exodus 28:31 – 35 (NASB): ³¹ “You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. ³² There shall be an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, like the opening of a coat of mail, so that it will not be torn. ³³ You shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: ³⁴ a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe.⁹⁰ ³⁵ It shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and its tinkling shall be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the LORD, so that he will not die.

5. The Turban (28:36 – 38)

6. The Tunic (28:39 – 41)

7. Pants (28:42 – 43)

8. Anointing the Priest

Exodus 29:7 (NASB): Then you shall take the anointing **oil** and pour it on his head and anoint him.

The anointing oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit. We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit to minister in the name of the Lord.

Exodus 34:29 – 35 (NASB): ²⁹ It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony *were* in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. ³⁰ So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses,

⁹⁰ Jonathan Edwards said the golden bells on the priestly garment represented the good profession of genuine Christians: “The golden bells on this ephod, by their precious matter and pleasant sound, do well represent the good profession that the saints make; and the pomegranates, the fruit they bring forth. And as in the hem of the ephod, bells and pomegranates were constantly connected, as is once again observed, there was a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate (Ex. 28:34 and 39:26). So it is in the true saints; their good profession and their good fruit, do constantly accompany one another: the fruit they bring forth in life, evermore answers the pleasant sound of their profession.” Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, 401.

behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. ³² Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them *to do* everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

Moses' shining face was evidence that He had been with the LORD. Other people could tell when Moses had been with the LORD, and the same is true for us today: Other people can tell when we have been alone with God. Jonathan Edwards offers a tender thought here and says:

As Moses's face not only shone while he was in the mount, extraordinarily conversing with God; but it continued to shine after he came down from the mount. When men have been conversing with Christ in an extraordinary manner, there is a sensible effect of it remains upon them; there is something remarkable in their disposition and frame, which if we take knowledge of, and trace to its cause, we shall find it is because they have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).⁹¹

Indeed, may our lives and countenance give evidence that we have been with Jesus.

9. Jesus is our Great High Priest

⁹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, John E. Smith, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 344.

In the Old Testament, there was a succession of high priests because all of them were human, eventually died, and had to be replaced by a successor. Jesus was human, He died, but then He rose again and now He lives forever. As such, He is our permanent high priest who ever lives to plead our case before the Father. Athanasius said, "And . . . Aaron had successors, and the high priests had to follow one after another, as fast as death made a vacancy. But our Lord's High Priesthood never changes or alters. He never dies and leaves it to a successor. He abides a High priest for ever, and, therefore, He has become a faithful High Priest."⁹²

VIII. The Golden Calf Incident

The Golden Calf: The phrase itself has come to represent foolish idolatry at many different levels. The incident in Exodus 32 makes no sense just as idolatry itself makes no sense. After the crossing of the Red Sea, Manna from Heaven, and the thundering of Yahweh Himself from Mount Sinai, the people quickly resort to idolatry in a moment of panic. The fickle nature of the actions surrounding the golden calf are a picture of all of fallen humanity. Sinful humans, even with the most overwhelming evidence of God's existence and power right in front of them, quickly turn to empty-headed methods of finding comfort.

A. The Sin of the Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1 – 6: Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

⁹² Athanasius, *The Orations of Saint Athanasius Against the Arians*, The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden, & Welsh, 1889), 93, II.9.

He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

How quickly God's people forget his miraculous works and deliverance! Similarly, many people when they have been saved or have tasted of God's mercy and goodness quickly backslide into worldliness, longing for the things they have left behind. But we forget the slavery, the suffering, the torment of sin. The derisive comment about "this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land Egypt" is disrespectful to both Moses and God, especially because they disregard the Lord's work in their deliverance.

Very quickly, the Israelites fall into idolatry. The Hebrew phrase for "golden calf" is מִסְכָּה עֲגֹל. The Hebrew term refers to a "young bull" and doesn't necessarily mean "calf," though "calf" is the commonly accepted translation in English. Worship of a "golden calf" makes sense because the worship of calves or bulls was common in both Egyptian and Canaanite religions. Apparently, they borrowed the idea from the surrounding paganism. Are there any parallels here to churches who uncritically borrow ideas from the world in an effort to be more seeker friendly?

One example of Egyptian bull worship was the Apis [or Hapis] cult. The Egyptian belief was that a flash of lightning descends upon the cow from heaven, and this causes her to receive Apis. Thus, the bull that is born is Apis incarnate. The Apis bull was originally considered to be the incarnation of the god Ptah, the creator of the universe and master of destiny, but this was a lesser-known association. Later the Apis became widely known as the incarnation of Osiris, god of embalming and

cemeteries, when Ptah himself took on funerary characteristics and became associated with Osiris. So how did the priests know that “Apis” had incarnated into another bull? An Apis calf could be identified by certain distinct markings: the black calf had a white diamond on its forehead, an image of an eagle on its back, double the number of hairs on its tail, and a scarab mark under its tongue. Since the Apis was so sacred, it stands to reason that its mother (referred to as the “Isis cow”) was revered as well. Only one bull was considered to be the sacred Apis at a time; a replacement could be sought upon the death of the bull. The new Apis was transported to Memphis on a boat with a specially built golden cabin. Once the bull was proclaimed to be Apis incarnate, it was taken to the temple compound where it was purified, stabled in majestic quarters, fed the best foods, and given a herd of the finest cows.

Joshua 24:14: “[Joshua speaking] Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”

Joshua 24:14 indicates some of the Israelites had participated in idolatry prior to the Exodus. Was this the origin of the demand for a “bull” god? We only have conjecture.

B. Unrestrained Behavior and the Golden Calf

The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. Some scholars suggest that the Hebrew word for “play” implies sexual immorality, and the New Century Version reflects this, saying they “sinned sexually.” The fact is they were having a celebration and a party before an idol. This festive attitude towards an idol is sufficient to communicate the author’s disgust. The NLT refers to their activities as “pagan revelry.” The idea is that they have abandoned all moral restraint. The same language for “casting off restraint” is found in Proverbs 29:18.

C. God’s Judgment on Idolatry

Exodus 32:7: Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.”

The word translated “corrupted” in Exodus 32:7 carries the idea of total ruin. The same word is used in Exodus 8:24 to describe the “ruin” the plague of flies brought on Egypt.

Exodus 32:20: He [Moses] took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*.

By drinking the water with the ground up calf in it, the calf itself became nothing but human refuse and excrement.

Exodus 32:24: I [Aaron] said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

Aaron’s answer in Exodus 32:24 is perhaps the most pathetic attempt to abandon responsibility in the whole corpus of Scripture. Aaron tries to downplay his part in the idolatry by saying “out jumped this calf”!

Note: Proverbs 29:18 in the KJV says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” The Hebrew word for perish is The verb (*para'*) means “to let go or let loose; to let alone.” It occurs here in the Niphal with the meaning of “[the people] are let loose,” meaning, they cast off restraint. The same word is used in Exodus 32:25 which says, “Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies.” Furthermore the word “vision” in Proverbs 29:18 is referring to authoritative, declarative word from God. Many misguided preachers attempt to use Proverbs 29:18 in reference to modern leadership ideas about “vision casting.”

In Exodus 32:26 – 29, Moses directs the Levites to execute people involved in the worship of the golden calf. Approximately 3,000 men were killed in one day. Sin has consequences. Apparently those who were killed were the leaders in the rebellion. The text doesn't say this, but it is a logical inference.

The story of the Golden Calf reminds us: God judges sin. Exodus 34:7 says God “keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” Indeed, throughout the Scriptures, it God's glory and dishonor, His holiness and sin, His love and His justice, that are placed in fearful contrast.⁹³ As sinners, we will either have our sin judged in hell or we will settle our case by accepting God's judgement and wrath on sin demonstrated in Christ's atonement at the cross.

God's wrath on sin is rooted in His jealousy for His own holiness. Exodus 34:14 says, “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” What does God mean when he says his name is *Jealous*? J.I. Packer says, “He meant that he demands from those whom he has loved and redeemed utter and absolute loyalty, and he will vindicate his claim by stern action against them if they betray his love by unfaithfulness.”⁹⁴ As followers of Jesus, we will be tempted to abandon our Lord for other gods. But God is jealous for our own good and lovingly brings us to repentance and restores our faith in Jesus.

D. The Golden Calf and Critical Scholarship

I Kings 12:29 – 30 records that Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, made two statues of golden calves and set one up in Bethel and

⁹³ James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville, KY: C.T. Dearing, 1882), 115.

⁹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1973, reprint 2018), 171.

the other in Dan. Liberal scholarship says, “Ah hah! Jeroboam set his calves up first. Then, when later reformers were trying to rid the land of idolatry, these reformers needed religious justification. So, an editor went back and inserted the story about the golden calf in Exodus 32 in order to give historical justification for opposition to idolatry in the Northern Kingdom / Israel. Umberto Cassuto (1883 – 1951) was a Jewish scholar who rejected the Documentary Hypothesis. In his commentary on Exodus, he shows how the language of this chapter would not fit an Iron Age setting in Dan. Rather, he argues, this story was well enough known for Jeroboam to imitate the practice.

E. The Golden Calf and the Qur’an

The Qur’an gives a garbled recollection of the golden calf incident in Surah 20:85 – 96. The Qur’an says at Surah 20:85: “[Allah] said, "But indeed, We have tried your [Moses’] people after you [departed], and the Samiri has led them astray." Then Surah 20:87 – 88 says “Samiri” threw the gold into the fire and brought out the golden calf. The calf then makes a lowing sound, apparently by some trick of Samiri. Interestingly, Aaron does not receive any blame, but tried to stop worship of the golden calf in the Qur’an. This reflects the consistent habit of the Qur’an to repeat the stories from the Bible in a garbled manner.

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