

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Contents

The Book of Exodus contains an account of Israel's great deliverance from bondage to Pharaoh (Exod 1:1—15:21), a brief narrative about life in the wilderness along Israel's journey from the sea to Sinai (Exod 15:22—18:27), and an account of a profound encounter with God at Sinai, a meeting wherein Israel received the law and formalized a covenantal relationship with its redeemer, Yahweh (Exod 19-40). In the overall text of Exodus the wilderness traditions constitute a relatively short link between the two huge complexes of material treating redemption and covenant. These great complexes are best viewed according to the gradual unfolding movements with which they are presented in the texts.

The exodus story begins with Israel's bondage (Exod 1-2). The biblical writers carefully delineate the struggle between two claims made on Israel — Pharaoh's claim and Yahweh's claim as articulated by Moses, Yahweh's spokesperson and mediator (Exod 3:1—7:7). The struggle intensifies through the course of the plagues (Exod 7:8—11:10) in such a way that the death-dealing at the beginning of the struggle finally

turns back upon Pharaoh through the deaths of the first-born of all Egyptian households. Yahweh then delivers Israel from death-ridden Egypt. The biblical account of this exodus is heavily laden with cultic regulations for a religious observance which would carry the power of this singular event to future generations (Exod 12-13). A final confrontation between Yahweh and the Egyptians takes place at the sea (Exod 14). There Yahweh dramatically rescues the freed slaves and the conflict is definitively resolved. Finally, Moses and Miriam lead in celebrating the community's proclamations about the religious dimension of the deliverance (Exod 15:1-21).

The second great complex of tradition, the Sinai material of Exod 19-40, can also be viewed in smaller sections. Chapters 19, 20, and 24 constitute the core narrative about the formalization of the covenant at Mount Sinai. The event includes theophany, the gift of the law, and rituals intended to symbolize the meaning of Yahweh's covenant with Israel. The only other narrative portion of the Sinai materials appears in chapters 32-34, the account of the sin around the golden calf and the renewal of the covenant. The remainder of the Sinai materials are legal traditions: the so-called Covenant Code (Exod 20:22—23:33) and the beginning of the great corpus of Priestly law (Exod 25-31 and 35-40) which extends through the entirety of the Book of Leviticus and into the Book of Numbers (Num 1:1—10:10).

Literary Forms

The preceding survey of the contents of the Book of Exodus indicates that the biblical text represents divergent literary forms which were at home in different arenas of life in ancient Israel. Narrative predominates in the first half of the book, although even there we encounter poetry (Exod 15:1-18, 21) and liturgical legislation (Exod 12-13). Laws predominate in the second half of the book, different kinds of law representing a broad expanse of lived observance in ancient Israel's religious life. Thus, the Book of Exodus is a

complex fabric of tradition in which the contributions of storytellers and poets have been woven together with those of cultic officials and lawyers.

History and the Book of Exodus

A proper understanding of the Book of Exodus requires that readers be aware of the distance which lay between the events referred to and the narration about those events. The Book of Exodus was not intended as an eyewitness account of events as they actually happened in history. Rather, the biblical text gathers up and speaks the faith of generations of believers who, separated from the events by several hundred years, offered their interpretation of what the experience of their ancestors revealed about God and about their relationship with God. The Book of Exodus, then, must be read as religious creed and not as historical chronicle.

This is not to say that the accounts which appear in the Book of Exodus have no relationship to actual events. Certainly the exodus story has its roots in ancient historical memory. When the witness of the biblical text is viewed alongside extra-biblical records from the ancient Near Eastern world it is possible to posit a broad outline of historical events underlying the biblical account. For example, according to Egyptian records Pharaohs Seti I (c. 1305-1290 B.C.) and Rameses II (c. 1290-1224 B.C.) moved Egypt's capital from Thebes to the Delta region and undertook significant building campaigns there using as slave labour the services of marginated peoples who were referred to as Habiru (or 'Apiru). Biblical scholarship has seen parallels between the Habiru and the Hebrews and between the above-mentioned building campaigns and the witness of Exod 1:11 which says that the Hebrews were forced to work on the construction of store-cities in the Delta region. Moreover, one of the store-cities is said to have borne the name of the Pharaoh Rameses. These correspondences have led to the commonly-held view that there really was an exodus event

in which some Hebrews were freed of their bondage to Pharaoh. Scholars date this event at approximately 1290 B.C.

The foregoing is a brief summary of the probable historical situation which formed the starting point of the exodus story. The biblical writers have supplied many details, of course, but readers must be aware that these belong to tradition and not necessarily to history. Moreover, one must be cautious about envisioning a single massive escape of slaves who subsequently spent exactly forty years in the desert before their children came into the land of Canaan. It is possible that the exodus was a gradual process, a series of escapes by oppressed peoples, and that a nucleus of these groups belonged to those who later took control (perhaps gradually) of the land of Canaan. Whatever the case, readers should keep in mind that the actual exodus event was too insignificant to be recorded in Egyptian or other ancient Near Eastern documents.

Theology and the Book of Exodus

If the biblical writers did not record exact eyewitness historical events as they occurred, we must ask what they did intend by their accounts. As stated above, the biblical texts are separated from the events they narrate by several hundred years. The writers sought to witness to the *mysterious dimension* of events in Israel's past. The texts rest on firm faith convictions that the people of Israel did not come to be as a result of their own initiative. Rather, the biblical writers record the conviction that the good fortunes of an insignificant powerless "mixed multitude" stemmed from the gracious involvement of a powerful and merciful Mystery who worked within Israel's history, bringing it out of bondage and shaping it into a people for the Divine Self. Thus, the biblical account of the exodus event is essentially a theological interpretation of the birth and formation of the people of Israel. Again and again Israel portrays itself as

powerless and unfaithful while Yahweh is the One "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod 34:6).

Understanding the above assists us in viewing the significance of many of the details encountered in the exodus narratives. Readers will find in these pages accounts which involve highly extraordinary circumstances, what modern readers might call "miracles." Examples include the marvelous events which plagued Egypt, the parting of the waters at the sea, and the wondrous ways in which God is said to have provided food and water in the wilderness. The biblical writers expressed their faith in terms of these signs and wonders. They wanted to focus readers' attention on the divine Mystery whom they believed to be freeing and nurturing Israel through these events. Therefore, they "heightened" their accounts of these events in order to emphasize that it was God who was directing history, not Israel. They wrote of the parting of the waters in order to say "God saved us from the Egyptians at the sea." It was not themselves and not some accident of history but God. Different writers tell the details of the sea event in different ways but the message is clear: "God saved us at the sea!" The "miraculous" ways in which that conviction is articulated must not distract the reader from the basic religious truth which the writers sought to convey. The stories are meant to point to the One who is present in history in powerful and mysterious ways. This is the One in whom Israel's faith rested and whose graciousness and mercy Israel sought to proclaim through the exodus and Sinai stories.

Literary Sources

The complexity of the Book of Exodus derives not only from the multiplicity of literary forms which it incorporates (see above) but also from the fact that it represents the work of different writers from various stages of Israelite history. The literary sources which together comprise the final text

of the Book of Exodus are the same as those found in the other Pentateuchal books: the Yahwist source (J), dating from the early period of the United Monarchy; the Elohist source (E), thought to have originated in the northern kingdom during the middle of the ninth century B.C.; the Deuteronomistic source (D), derived from a circle which was prominent during the latter part of the seventh century B.C. and which was active through the next hundred years; and the Priestly source (P), dating from the exilic or early post-exilic period. The respective sources must be viewed as collective witnesses to four different theological circles dating from different periods of Israel's history and not as the literary creations of four single individuals. Thus, to say that the Yahwist wrote an account of Israel's story which ranged from the creation of humanity to the inheritance of the land is to say that we have an account from the tenth century B.C. about Israel's early tradition as it was recorded and passed on by a particular theological circle. Another theological interpretation of much of the same material emerged later from circles in the north (i.e., the Elohist). A third theological interpretation came somewhat later and a fourth was recorded and interwoven with the earlier versions during the exilic or post-exilic period. Thus, the Book of Exodus is a tapestry consisting of heavy strains of Yahwistic and Priestly tradition. Somewhat less complete contributions were made by the Elohist and only a few fragmentary additions come from a Deuteronomistic hand.

For a further discussion of the literary sources behind the Book of Exodus, see other books within *Old Testament Message*, Vol. 1, pp. 31-33; Vol. 2, pp. 14-17; and Vol. 4, pp. 1-5.

Recognition of this process of biblical composition helps readers to understand repetitions and inconsistencies which appear in the texts from time to time. Perhaps more importantly it offers insight into ancient notions about religious tradition. The biblical writers took certain freedoms with their records of past events. God's saving presence among their ancestors somehow spoke to them of God's saving

presence among later generations as well. The past was not ancient history sealed in a sterile museum case for observation and veneration. Rather, early generations transmitted faith to their children and that faith was articulated anew in light of the lived experience of the dynamic presence of God among the later generations. The process continued through Israel's history. Thus, the Book of Exodus bears the fingerprints of different generations of faith as told by the literary sources represented in the book.

Significance

Because the Exodus and Sinai events are only a part of Israel's early creed, a total perspective on the Book of Exodus means that it should be read along with the entire Pentateuchal tradition. Having said that, however, we hasten to add that the exodus-Sinai story has had such profound religious impact on all of Judaeo-Christianity that it allows us to speak of its superlative uniqueness within the biblical tradition.

Commenting on the significance of the exodus story is akin to attempting to preach on Christian worship on Easter Sunday. What words does one use to convey the power of the foundational religious experience of a people? The exodus story is the prism which countless generations of believers have used to shed light upon who they are and to interpret their own experience with the Mystery. The passage from bondage to freedom is ancient yet ever new. It is the story of all God's people. In some foundational way the exodus story tells who God is. For Israel Yahweh is the One who "brought us up out of Egypt, that house of bondage." A major concern of the first fifteen chapters of the Book of Exodus is to voice Israel's conviction that its liberation from oppression was not the work of human pride or selfishness but the commitment of a divine Mystery zealous for justice and for relationship. It was in the context of the exodus event that Israel learned God's name.

While the first major complex of traditions in the Book of Exodus feature the liberation from bondage, the second complex, the Sinai story, features bonding, i.e., the formalization of a covenantal relationship, a relationship founded not in fear but in trust. Israel was free at last and responded to God's invitation to live freely by binding itself to the One who invites freedom through the observance of the law. The rest of the Hebrew tradition witnesses to a persistent struggle to be faithful to this relationship which Israel entered at the mountain of Sinai.

Between the exodus and the Sinai stories lay the brief interlude about Israel's journey through the wilderness. There we see a people who had left a bonded way of being-in-relation, a way based in servitude and security. At Sinai they would commit themselves to a new way of being-in-relation, a way based in risk and trust. The wilderness was the place in between. It was the place for learning about the alternative to which they were called and a place to be formed and nurtured in that alternative possibility of relationship.

Our Commentary on Exodus

We are unable to cover the entire texts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in a commentary of this size and must therefore be selective about the texts chosen for consideration. From the Book of Exodus we shall treat the story of Israel's bondage and deliverance (Exod 1:1—15:21), the wilderness traditions (Exod 15:22—18:27), and the narratives which are localized at Sinai (Exod 19-20, 24, 32-34) together with the concluding chapter of the Book of Exodus (Exod 40). We set aside the legal materials which constitute the so-called Covenant Code (Exod 20:22—23:33) and the Priestly law which appears in Exod 25-31 and 35-39. For more complete treatment readers are directed to those commentaries on the Book of Exodus which are listed under "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the end of this volume.

THE BEGINNINGS 1:1—2:25

The Book of Exodus begins with a presentation of the background of Israel's going out from Egypt. In some ways the two introductory chapters also foreshadow the great redemptive event which will be narrated. The biblical writers present a power-wielding Pharaoh whose fear is brought to expression in a three-stage program of oppression for the people of Israel (1:8-14, 15-21, 22). His program for the death of the Hebrew boys is ultimately established as national policy and the participation of all Egyptians is demanded. At every turn, however, Pharaoh's death-dealing initiatives are undermined by life-bearing processes: by the mysteriously increased strength of the people, by the decisions of the midwives, and by the deliverance of Moses through the cooperative efforts of his mother and Pharaoh's daughter. What the women do for Moses, God will subsequently do for all Israel. Likewise, in the narrative about Moses' exodus from Egypt the biblical writers foreshadow in a general way the subsequent exodus of all Israel.

This opening section of the Book of Exodus begins and ends with hints of new eras, new realities. Thus, the brief summary of the ancestral traditions of the Book of Genesis (1:1-7) is followed by an announcement that "there arose a

new king over Egypt. . .” (1:8). Likewise, the end of the unit (2:23-25) abounds with hints of a dramatic change of events: the death of the king, the people’s first protest of their bondage, and the first notice of the Divinity’s attentiveness.

In simple ways these introductory chapters set forth the tension which is resolved in the chapters which follow. Clearly, the matter at hand is a struggle of life and death proportions. Israel’s abundant life is stalked by a fearful, death-dealing tyrant. The points of tension are rooted in clearly perceptible beginnings. That is to say, the origins of both oppression and liberation are precisely identified. We learn that bondage and liberation are not the products of the inevitable course of events in human society. According to the writers of Exod 1-2 they have their basis in conscious decisions made by individuals. The personal is political. The oppressive policies have their beginnings in Pharaoh’s fear. Liberation has its beginnings in the decisions of the midwives, Moses’ mother and Pharaoh’s daughter not to participate in Pharaoh’s oppressive ways. Moses identifies with the oppressed and undertakes his own exodus. And, it is this very concrete and specific instance of political struggle which caught the divine concern: “God heard. . . and God remembered. . . and God saw. . . and God knew. . .” (2:24-25).

ISRAEL’S BONDAGE

1:1-14

¹ These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵All the offspring of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. ⁷But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them.

⁸Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹And he said to his people, “Behold, the

people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ra-amses. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor, ¹⁴and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor.

The opening verses of the Book of Exodus recapitulate the overall thrust of the Genesis traditions and at the same time provide the background for the events to follow. The list of names which initiates the story presents Israel as the family, the “sons of Israel,” which grew out of the ancestral narratives in the Book of Genesis (cf. similar listings in Gen 35:23-26 and 46:8-27). But, with the passage of time and generations, the *family* Israel grows into the *people* Israel (v. 9). The turning point in the eras is signalled by the notice of the death of Joseph (cf. the last line of the Book of Genesis, Gen 50:26) “and all his brothers, and all that generation” (v. 6), the record of an early source (possibly the Yahwist) in an introduction otherwise fashioned by the Priestly writer (vv. 1-5, 7). Having signalled the end of the era in v. 6, the combined tradition sets the context for the age to follow by noting the strength of the people Israel whose home was now Egypt (v. 7). Israel’s great strength is expressed in terminology which resembles the words of God’s blessing pronounced over the first human couple (Gen 1:28: “be fruitful and multiply”), over the new humanity begun in Noah (Gen 9:1: “be fruitful and multiply”), and in the people God initiated in Abraham (Gen 17:2, 6: I will “multiply you exceedingly” and “I will make you exceedingly fruitful”). Thus, when the Priestly writer says in verse 7 that “the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly;

they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong," the tradition asserts that Israel had grown up in accord with God's words of blessing to its forebears.

Exod 1:8-14 consists of an early (possibly Yahwist) narrative in vv. 8-12 supplemented by the Priestly addition of vv. 13-14. Verse 8 very clearly signals passage to a new era which sparks in the reader the anticipation of a change in direction. Immediately we learn that the multiplication of Israel in accord with God's blessing posed a threat to the power of Egypt's ruler. Thereafter the action ensues quickly. The king of Egypt expresses his fear (v. 9) and invites his people to join him in acting out of that fear (v. 10). Without a hint of hesitation, the Pharaoh's fear is given structural embodiment. One man's fear gives rise to social policy: "they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens" (v. 11). In verse 12 the early source marks the conclusion of the first stage of oppression in words which harken back to the Priestly writer's witness of v. 7. Oppressive efforts which arose out of fear were thwarted insofar as the exact opposite result took place. We are told that "the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied" (v. 12). This, in turn, precipitated greater fear which now forms the background for the Priestly writer's record of oppression (vv. 13-14). The counter-productivity of the oppressive measures ironically concludes the narrative about one stage of oppression even as it forms the context for actions which now assume life and death proportions.

PHARAOH AND THE MIDWIVES 1:15-22

¹⁵Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,
¹⁶"When you serve as a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live."¹⁷But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.¹⁸So the

king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?"¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them."²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong.²¹And because the midwives feared God he gave them families.²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

It appears probable that the story of the midwives (1:15-21) at one time circulated independently of the material which surrounds it in the present form of the text. This proposal helps to explain why reference to the oppressor changes from "Pharaoh" (1:11, 22; 2:1-10) to "king of Egypt" (1:15-21; cf. v. 19). It might also account for the slight difference between the king's instruction for the midwives to kill newborn boys belonging to the Hebrews (1:16) and the Pharaoh's command for all his people to cast Hebrew boys into the Nile (1:22). In addition, viewing the story of the midwives as an originally independent tradition offers a possible resolution to the puzzling situation in the present text according to which, on the one hand, the Hebrew people are apparently so numerous that they are a threat to the security of the Egyptian political power structure (1:8-14) and, on the other hand, the Hebrews are few enough to be served by only two midwives (1:15-21). In terminology and content, then, the story of the midwives appears to stand apart from the material in Exod 1:8-14 and 2:1-10. (Some regard it as belonging to the Elohist writer.) In its present context the story of Pharaoh's command to the midwives represents a stage of oppression which stands between hard labor (1:8-14) and a nationwide attempt to eradicate the Hebrew baby boys (1:22).

In several respects the story of the midwives features elements common to tales attributed to Israel's sages.

Divine intervention in human affairs recedes into the background as human beings pursue their own personal destinies while making decisions which direct the course of their communal history. Some of the characters in the story appear more as typical figures than as actual historical personages. The cleverness of the midwives' response to the oppressor outwits the oppressor's "shrewdness" (cf. v. 10). And finally, the midwives are characterized by their "fear of God," a prominent virtue in wisdom circles (cf. Prov 1:7; 10:27; 14:26).

More needs to be said about the midwives' "fear of God" since the story takes its direction from this and not, as we might expect, from the king's word. In Israel's wisdom tradition the expression "fear of God" bears strong ethical connotations (see Prov 2:1-22; 8:13; 14:2; 15:33; 16:6). Persons who feared God were those who acted according to a moral imperative or standard. This standard was learned through examination both of human experience (Prov 19:6-7; 20:4, 14, 19, 25; 23:1-3, 29-35; 24:30-34) and of the processes of nature (Prov 6:6-7; 26:20-22; 27:18; 28:3). There, by means of keen perception and wise reflection, one could observe common patterns which in turn were thought to reflect a fundamental order in the universe. The wise, i.e., ones who feared God, were those who not only discerned this order but who also brought their actions and lives into harmony with it. Those who feared God, therefore, were respectful of and faithful to a fundamental order of things which was wisely discerned through reflection on experience.

Shiphrah and Puah were, by profession, women who assisted people in life. Commitment to the pattern they perceived while assisting in birthing processes caused them to act according to a life-affirming order which meant disobeying the oppressor's death-dealing command. Thus we are told "the midwives feared God" (v. 17).

It is striking that the writer has recorded the names of the two midwives in a story where many other details are omitted. Whatever the reason for this, knowledge of the names invites the reader to a familiarity with Shiphrah and Puah

which contrasts with a sense of alienation from the nameless oppressor. The tyrant is cast as a type while Shiphrah and Puah are individuals whose names the reader knows. The ambiguous description, "the Hebrew midwives," or "midwives of the Hebrews" continues to hold scholars in debate about the nationality of the two.

This seemingly simple little story abounds in irony. In order to establish his own security, one of the most powerful persons in the world needs and orders the cooperation of two relatively powerless persons. The king directs professional life-bearers to serve death, not life. The directive, moreover, is selective: only male children need be killed. The presupposition seems to be that females pose no threat to the oppressor's power. Yet, in the end, it is women who render the oppressor's plan unsuccessful by their refusal to participate in it. The irony continues: a potential death story abounds in birth and life (1:20-21). The climax of the story appears in the play on words which appears in the midwives' response to the oppressor's confrontation regarding their disobedience. To his query about why they allowed the male children to live Shiphrah and Puah responded that Hebrew women are *hayot*, i.e., they embody abundant, indomitable life which renders death-dealing efforts powerless (1:19). The midwives express this, however, in a covert way which presumably is accepted by the king: the Hebrew women deliver before midwives arrive. In this affirmation of the Hebrews' life-giving power, the tradition notes that "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women," a remark in which Israelite readers must have taken great delight!

The story of the midwives is about human commitment, courage and ingenuity. It does not tell so much about what God does as about what seemingly powerless persons are capable of being and doing. A tyrant's plan to secure power by means of death is undermined by the life-bearing service of two women who act according to a more fundamental order which their experience as midwives had taught them.

This unit comes to an end with a brief statement of Pharaoh's command which constitutes the third stage of oppression: a nationwide effort to break the strength of the

Hebrews (v. 22). It is possible that in an early form of the tradition, this verse followed vv. 8-12. As the final text took shape, however, it appears as the final and most comprehensive of Pharaoh's three-stage measures of oppression.

IN THE COMPANY OF WOMEN 2:1-10

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. ³And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink. ⁴And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him. ⁵Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river; she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. ⁶When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" ⁸And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹And the Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew him out of the water."

Events described in this narrative presuppose knowledge of the oppressive situation described in chapter 1 of Exodus. The decision of Moses' mother to hide him is understandable only if the reader is aware that the lives of all newborn Hebrew boys were threatened. The fact that Moses is saved

by being placed in the reeds of the river (2:3) might have been intended as an ironic sequel to Pharaoh's command that all newborn Hebrew males be cast into the Nile (1:22). In any case, obstacles to Pharaoh's oppressive measures continue and intensify as readers view events surrounding the deliverance of one individual. In this incident a boy's biological mother and his adoptive mother are brought together by his sister and through their combined efforts the one through whom God will eventually rescue the Hebrews is himself rescued.

This infancy narrative arose long after Moses had come to be the towering figure of the entire exodus story. In retrospect the Israelites assigned remarkable beginnings to the man who mediated God's plan for them. In doing so, the biblical writer borrowed a general outline and some details from a legend about the beginnings of another great figure, Sargon, a prominent Mesopotamian monarch from the second half of the third millennium B.C. According to legend, Sargon was born in secret. His mother constructed a protective basket of bulrushes for the boy, sealed its lid with bitumen, and cast the basket into the Euphrates River. A man who came to draw water from the river found the child, took him, and raised him as a son. Sargon was later discovered by the goddess Ishtar whose patronage led him to the royal throne.

The similarities between Exod 2:1-10 and Sargon's story are clear. The births of both Sargon and Moses are shrouded in secrecy. Both children are placed in baskets (the descriptions of which are strikingly similar) and placed in rivers. Likewise, both are objects of good fortune in that they are rescued and well cared for. Ultimately, both rise to prominent public positions.

Whatever the original intent of the Sargon legend, it provided the biblical writer with a vehicle for introducing Moses as the one who from the very beginning was the object of special care.

It has been proposed in recent scholarship that some of the details of this story also reflect legal custom. In the ancient world when a mother did not wish to nurse her child

or if she was unable to, a nursing woman was contracted to nurture her infant. In these cases a legal contract was drawn up, its usual pattern including a declaration regarding the length of service, a statement of work conditions, specific instructions for nourishment as well as a statement of wages for service and fines for breach of contract. During the period designated in the contract, the nursing woman was responsible for raising the child and acting as its guardian. It is possible that this story of Moses' infancy, especially the details of Exod 2:9, are to be understood against the background of this practice in ancient Near Eastern life.

If the writer of this story relied upon the Sargon legend and/or upon ancient nursing contracts for a general outline and some details, it is also true that the borrowed features were freely adapted and interwoven with elements which are new. The biblical writer's most unique contribution to this story is seen in the three female characters. Unlike the mother in the Sargon legend, Moses' mother does not disappear after placing the child in the river. She recedes into the background only to emerge later and become Moses' nurse-guardian. The biblical writer delights readers with the double irony that not only is Moses nursed by his biological mother but the woman is even paid a salary (presumably out of Pharaoh's budget) for her service!

The introduction of Moses' sister into the story (vv. 4, 7-8) is another unique feature in the biblical story. Post-biblical tradition identified this girl with Miriam who appears alongside Moses and Aaron in other texts (e.g., Num 12:1-15; 26:59; 1 Chr 6:3; Micah 6:4) although there is no explicit suggestion here that this girl is the biblical Miriam. In this story the sister functions as a bridge between the traditions about saving Moses' life and providing for his nourishment, an intermediary between the biological mother and the adoptive mother. She stations herself to watch over Moses and she intervenes at the appropriate moment. The fact that she is there to counsel Pharaoh's daughter and that her suggestion is accepted gives her the appearance of the traditional sagelike court advisor in this interaction among women.

Finally, the writer of this story casts a compassionate, decisive, and courageous portrait of Pharaoh's daughter. The child of the oppressor sees the child of the oppressed and is moved to pity. She acts in contradiction to her father's oppressive policy and it appears that she did so consciously and deliberately for the writer mentions that she recognized the baby as belonging to the Hebrews (v. 6). Furthermore, the writer suggests that she deliberately intended that the child's earliest growth and nourishment take place within a Hebrew orientation when she agreed to the sister's suggestion that the nurse secured for the child be a Hebrew woman (v. 7). It is the princess who adopts the child, initiating the extreme irony that the one who would lead the oppressed from Pharaoh's control grew up under Pharaoh's own roof.

Given this portrait of a princess who aligned herself more with the Hebrews than with her father, the reader is not surprised when the writer casts Pharaoh's daughter as speaking the language of the Hebrews. The explanation of Moses' name which the writer placed on her lips derives from the Hebrew and not from the Egyptian tongue. The text says that Pharaoh's daughter called the child Moses because the name (*mosheh* in Hebrew) sounds like the Hebrew word *mashah* ("draw out"). The explanation given in v. 10 rests on a passive form of the root ("I drew him out") although the form of the name is more properly the active participle ("one who draws out"). In reality, the name Moses is probably of Egyptian origin, a short form of a name which typically combined a deity's name with a particle meaning "child of" or "born of" (e.g., Tut-moses, "child of the god Tut," or Ra-moses, "child of the god Ra"). If the meaning given in v. 10 is inaccurate by contemporary etymological standards, still it provides an opportunity for the writer to introduce another point of irony in this story. Attentive readers of the Hebrew text recognize the foreshadowing here. They know that the child whom Pharaoh's daughter "drew out" is more properly regarded as the "one who draws out." Indeed, Moses was well named!

In sum, the writer of Exod 2:1-10 seems to have drawn

upon some already existing material to communicate a unique and profound message. The one who grew up to become deliverer of the Hebrews himself first had to be delivered. God's direction of history in these events is inseparable and indistinguishable from the course of action taken by the three females in the story. As in the story of the midwives (1:15-21) so here a potential death-dealing situation is transformed into a story of life, nurture and growth by persons who made conscious and deliberate choices. The tradition's presupposition in creating this story is that remarkable people have remarkable beginnings and, in turn, the biblical writer accounts for the beginnings of Israel's most remarkable figure by recounting the remarkable deeds done by ordinary women whose decisions changed the course of history.

MOSES' EXODUS 2:11-22

¹¹One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. ¹²He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow?" ¹⁴He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." ¹⁵When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. ¹⁶Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷The shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. ¹⁸When they came to their father Reuel, he said, "How is

it that you have come so soon today?" ¹⁹They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰He said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." ²¹And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. ²²She bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

The ultimate goal of the writer in Exod 2:11-22 is to move Moses from Egypt to Midian which is the setting for his initial and profound encounter with God (Exod 3). The writer narrates this passage in three brief scenes. These incidents also demonstrate significant aspects of the character of the adult Moses.

In the events narrated in vv. 11-22 Moses is characterized by the same allegiance to the Hebrews and the same courage which characterized the community of women who were responsible for him in infancy. He intervened when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew (vv. 11-12). He intervened when he saw strife between two Hebrews (vv. 13-15a). Finally, he intervened on behalf of the Midianite women who were harassed by shepherds at the well (vv. 15b-22).

The biblical writer omits comment on the ethical dimension of the measures taken by Moses against the Egyptian who, in turn, was using physical violence against a Hebrew (vv. 11-12). Rather, the writer's interest in these two verses is concentrated on Moses' identity with the Hebrew people. In saying that "one day...he (Moses) went out to his people..." (v. 11) and again "When he went out the next day..." (v. 13), the writer portrays a continuing pattern, a stance adopted by Moses in his adult life, i.e., that although Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh's palace he allied himself with the oppressed Hebrews. In saying that Moses "went out" (both in v. 11 and in v. 13) the biblical writer uses the same Hebrew verb which later is used of the exodus itself. One interpreter thus observes that Moses' "going out" to his people was the first stage of his own exodus. Having

grown up, Moses "went out" from the oppressive posture of Pharaoh's household even as he "went out" to identification with the oppressed. In making this point the writer carefully and explicitly identifies the abused Hebrew as one with whom Moses belonged like a brother ("one of his people"; v. 11). Verses 11-12 then relate an incident which ultimately will lead to Moses' flight from Egypt. Moses' departure from loyalty to Egyptian ways prepares the reader for his departure from the land itself.

The second of the three incidents of Exod 2:11-22 shows that Moses' passion for justice was not limited to the oppression of the Hebrews by the Egyptians. In intervening in the struggle between the two Hebrews, Moses confronts the guilty party. The writer uses technical, legal terminology in referring to the man who did the wrong, a clear indication that the incident was no mere difference of opinion but a case in which injustice had been done. When Moses asked the unjust Hebrew to account for his action, the man was unable to explain himself. His only recourse was to seek to undermine Moses' authority by questioning his credentials: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" (v. 14a). Moses, acting on his own, is unable to establish a just situation. Only later, when he returns to Egypt from Midian as a mediator of divine power will his intervention on behalf of the powerless be successful. In the unjust Hebrew's second question to Moses: "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (v. 14b), the narrator witnesses that injustice reaches across ethnic and political differences to align itself with other injustice. That is to say, the speaker shows himself to have greater loyalty to the oppressive Egyptian of vv. 11-12 than to his fellow Hebrew.

In the third incident in this narrative (vv. 15b-22), the writer hastens to show that, just as injustice breeds alliances which transcend other boundaries, so does the passion for justice. Moses is forced to flee to Midian but he carried with him a willingness to intervene when he encounters the struggle of the Midianite priest's daughters with the shepherds. Contrary to the hostile response of the unjust Hebrew, Moses' action in Midian meets with a response of warm

hospitality (vv. 20-21). The writer uses this opportunity to repeat a conventional scene wherein the biblical hero's wife is first encountered at a well (cf. Gen 24:1-67 and 29:1-30).

With this final incident, the writer succeeds in portraying Moses in Midianite territory. The setting for his encounter with God is thus finalized. However, when Moses gives his son a name derived from the word for "stranger" or "sojourner" (v. 22), he attests to his primary alliance with the Hebrews and the reader is cautioned that Midian is not a permanent home for Moses. As Moses went out from Egypt, so he will return to lead the Hebrews through a similar passage. Thus, in this account of Moses' flight to Midian the writer foreshadows the exodus of the entire people held in bondage by Pharaoh.

THE CRY UNDER BONDAGE 2:23-25

²³In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. ²⁴And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

This text, usually attributed to the Priestly writer, directs the reader's attention from Midian back to Egypt by recalling the oppression of the Hebrews. More significantly, it marks a turning point in the action of the exodus story.

In the expression, "In the course of those many days" (v. 23), the author alludes to an indefinite period of time during which the Hebrews were oppressed. The notice of the king's death in an indirect way reminds the reader of the opening of the story where the beginnings of oppression are linked with the accession of a new king (1:8). But, if the notice of the king's death points to what has passed, it also initiates in

the reader a sense of hopeful anticipation that a new reign, a new era, will soon begin.

For the first time we are told that the oppressed cried out under their bondage. The cry of the oppressed proves to be the turning point in their situation. God began the redemptive action only when the oppressed voiced knowledge of the injustice being done to them. The naming and protest of injustice is the beginning of deliverance. Having voiced the cry, the humans who have been featured thus far in the exodus story are gone and the writer portrays an immediate and intense response on the part of the Divinity. The focus of the story now shifts to God's involvement in the struggle against bondage and oppression.

THE CALL OF THE FIRE 3:1—4:17

In this section of the Book of Exodus we meet one of the most engaging stories of the biblical tradition. It narrates the first of many encounters between God and Moses. The lengthy dialogue between the two has its setting at the "mountain of God," a holy place revered by generations of believers. There a mysterious fire sustained only by a wilderness shrub reached out and drew Moses to itself. From the fire issued word, a voice speaking in multifaceted ways. It told of its personal experience. It spoke of the commitment which rose out of that experience, i.e., its decision to offer a life and a way of relating which was an alternative to what Pharaoh offered. It bid Moses to enter into its own dynamic vision and commitment and, in the face of the mediator's hesitations, it coaxed Moses. Moreover, it told its name.

In this story readers of the text are invited to join Moses at Horeb and, like Moses, to draw near to the mysterious fire in order to catch a glimpse of God's imagination which bears an alternative to oppression. At the same time readers, with Moses, will hear a clear and persistent call to be claimed by that vision and let it offer direction for their own mission.

The text represents the combined accounts of the Yahwist

and Elohist writers. Generally speaking, the lines which refer to the Divinity as "Lord" (3:2-4a, 5, 7-8, 16-22; 4:1-15, 17) probably reflect the hand of the Yahwist while the title "God" signals the contribution of the Elohist (3:1, 4b, 6, 9-15; 4:16).

When one takes an overall look at this unit and views it in comparison with other narratives in Scripture wherein an individual is specially called to become a mediator of God's redemptive activity in Israel, it is possible to see a common pattern. These "call narratives" typically contain the following elements: (a) divine confrontation (Exod 3:1-4a; cf. Judg 6:11b-12a and Jer 1:4); (b) an introductory word by the Divinity (Exod 3:4b-9; cf. Judg 6:12b-13 and Jer 1:5ab); (c) the divine commissioning of the individual (Exod 3:10; cf. Judg 6:14 and Jer 1:5c, 9-10); (d) an objection voiced by the one called (Exod 3:11; cf. Judg 6:15 and Jer 1:6); (e) a reassurance by the Divinity (Exod 3:12a; cf. Judg 6:16 and Jer 1:7-8); and (f) a sign given by the Divinity (Exod 3:12; cf. Judg 6:17). Thus, the overall structure of Exod 3:1-12 represents a literary construction which is more or less typical for biblical accounts of the calls of God's mediators. After 3:12, the encounter between Moses and God is carried forward by a series of questions (3:13; 4:1, 10, 13) wherein Moses voices additional objections to his call. These, in turn, are followed by responses (usually including reassurance) by God (3:15; 4:2-9, 11-12, 14-16). Thus, in this particular instance elements (d) and (e) of the typical call narrative pattern are repeated several times.

Recognition that this story flows according to a typical pattern suggests that it is best understood as something other than a biographical account. Scholars agree that this story, like the other biblical call narratives, was probably designed to legitimate that Moses, like other leaders, acted in response to God's commission and not on his own initiative. Thus, this story asserts that Moses' mission is authorized by God. It presents his public credentials.

The story of Moses' call begins in the Divinity's profound self-revelation which is joined with the divine commission-

ing and Moses' repeated attempts to resist the call. Several elements in this are noteworthy. First of all, the initiative in the relationship belongs to the Divinity. The Divinity is present in a special way and the Divinity, not Moses, initiates the dialogue. Secondly, the purpose of the Divinity's presence and word is not focused on Moses but rather on the larger community. In other words, the dialogue initiated by God does not have as its purpose the closer relationship between God and Moses. Rather, it constitutes a commission which directs Moses to the needs of the community. Finally, the account witnesses to Moses' resisting of the divine call which in turn elicits from the Divinity a reassurance of divine presence and a sign of God's presence in power. In Exodus chapters 3 and 4 this part of the typical structure of the call narrative is repeated over and over again. The expansion of these particular elements makes a strong statement about the depth of Moses' struggle to answer God's call and the patient but persistent resolve of God to move forward in freeing activity through this specially chosen individual.

THE BURNING BUSH

3:1-12

3 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.² And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."⁴ When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I."⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹²He said, "But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain."

In the first verse of this story the writer establishes the setting. The Elohist characteristically uses the word "Horeb" to refer to Sinai. Moses' profound encounter with God and his special vocation take place at the mountain site where later the entire people will meet God. There were a variety of traditions with regard to the name of the Midianite priest who was Moses' father-in-law. The source represented here knew him as Jethro (cf. Exod 4:18; 18:1) although elsewhere he was known as Reuel (Exod 2:18) and Hobab (Num 10:29; Judg 4:11).

The story about the burning bush serves as the "divine confrontation" part of the typical structure of a call narrative. Viewed apart from the rest of this structure, however, the account looks very similar to other biblical stories which tell how a particular site came to be regarded as a holy place. In ancient Israel certain places were hallowed because it was believed that the Divinity at one time had been present there in a special way. Thus, tradition told that the shrine at

Shechem was first established after God appeared to Abraham there (Gen 12:6-8). Likewise, the foundation of the sanctuary at Bethel is traced to a special encounter with God which Jacob had there (Gen 28:10-22; see also Josh 5:13-15). Sinai-Horeb was a sacred place in Israel's tradition, then, not only because it was the site of the covenant but because, even prior to that, God was specially present there to Moses.

Moses appears to be going about an ordinary day's activity of shepherding when his attention was caught by the extraordinary, the bush which was burning but was not consumed. He was not searching for God; yet he was attuned enough to the mysterious within his surroundings to let it capture his attention when it presented itself. When Moses turned to investigate the fire, he did not yet know he was in the presence of God. He was aware, however, that he was in the presence of Mystery and he gave himself to it. The personhood of the Mystery was clear only when Moses was addressed and it was this word which allowed Moses to realize that the Mystery was Holy.

In verse 6 the Mystery is identified as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. With these words, the divine mystery is identified with past religious tradition as the Promise-Maker who had formed bonded relationships with the ancestors of the Hebrews. Verses 7 and 8 make clear that that relationship is now taking dramatic new directions. God has seen the oppression in Egypt and has heard the cries of injustice and has initiated a movement of deliverance which will ultimately lead to inheritance of the land promised long ago. The arena for divine presence and activity now at this moment in history is the Hebrews' struggle for liberation.

In Exod 3:9 we have the Elohist's version of what the Yahwist had recorded in vv. 7-8. In verse 10 the Divinity commissions Moses to mediate the divine involvement in this situation. In vv. 11-12 a pattern of Moses' objection and God's reassurance appears for the first of five times in Exod 3:1—4:17. According to the stereotyped structure of the call narrative, the one called responds with an objection. Here Moses' protest appears to be a sincere recognition of his lack

of credentials for such a mission. In God's response Moses is given his credentials: God is with him. The dynamic which will confront Pharaoh and free the slaves does not depend on Moses' ability or authority but is rooted securely in God's being there in the confrontation and in the struggle. The sign that this is true is that Moses' mission will be successful, i.e., Moses one day will return to worship at this very same site.

NAMING THE FIRE 3:13-15

¹³Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I Am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, 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 for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Carefully placed between two somewhat lengthy expositions of the divine plan with regard to the slaves (vv. 7-12 and vv. 16-22) stand these three verses which have long captured the interest of biblical interpreters. The lines raise many questions: are we to understand from Moses' statement in v. 13 that the Hebrews in Egypt did not know God's name? How are we to understand that, in the present text, vv. 14 and 15 both appear to be answers to the questions cited in v. 13? What is the meaning of the divine name according to this particular narration? Finally, why does the name-gift appear at this particular juncture in the larger exodus story?

Before pursuing these topics, a word about names and naming in ancient Israel is in order. In modern society, it

sometimes happens that persons are given names which do not bear any essential connection to the person's unique qualities or character. In these cases, if the person's name has a specific meaning it is because the bearer, by the uniqueness of his or her life, gives the name a meaning. The person, as it were, lives a meaning into the name which otherwise might be merely an identification tag.

This view of names stands in contrast to the notion that one's name is in some way descriptive of who one really is. In this perception to tell one's name to another is to offer more than an identification tag. In the ancient world to tell one's name was to give the other access to one's energy and potential. It was necessary to know the name of another in order to have a relationship with that person. This was true of divine-human relationships as well as of human relationships. Devotees had to know a deity's name in order to call upon the power and presence of that deity. Thus, when Jacob (Gen 32:22-32) and Manaoh (Judg 13:17-20) encountered the Divinity in special ways and asked its name, each request was denied. Presumably the Divinity sought not to make its potential accessible to these human beings.

It is noteworthy that in Exod 3:13-15 Moses puts the desire to know the divine name on the lips of the people in Egypt. What is the significance of the question when it is posed by the community to whom Moses would announce God's plan? Moses was regarded in some circles as a prophetic figure. One criterion for distinguishing true from false prophets had to do with the deity's name. If the prophet spoke in Yahweh's name, that one was regarded as a true prophet. Thus, if the questions of 3:13 were posed by the community when Moses announced God's plan of liberation, perhaps the community was essentially testing whether Moses was indeed functioning as a true spokesperson for God. If he presented himself as operating in Yahweh's name, the community knew his word was reliable.

Having said this, we must ask further regarding Moses' question: "What shall I tell them?" Does Moses not know Yahweh? Is this a new Divinity, previously unknown to Moses? Is this Moses' first knowledge of the God Yahweh?

Or is Moses here searching through the ambiguity of his own experience, treading deeper into its Mystery? Perhaps a clue to answering these questions can be found in the answer which is given to Moses in verse 15. There the name Yahweh ("Lord" in the RSV translation) is identified with the God of the Fathers, i.e., the God of Israel's ancestors. But that One known in the promise-fulfillment experience of the Hebrews' past now bears a new name. The Mystery's former function now gives way to something so dramatically new as to warrant a new name. The One traditionally present to the ancestors and their families in a promise-fulfillment experience is now the One who subverts and overthrows the oppressive society sponsored by Pharaoh and calls the Hebrews to a new life marked by trust and freedom. Thus, while Moses may have known this same deity before, he has not known God to do these kinds of things before. This leads him to ask that the Mystery identify itself.

Some scholars see verse 14 as a later insertion which was intended to convey the significance of the new name associated with the God of the exodus. Hence, the name Yahweh was thought to have been related to the Hebrew root *hayah* which bears the sense of "being." The answer given in v. 14, *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, is variously translated by scholars as present ("I am who I am"), future ("I will be who I will be") or causative ("I will cause to be what is"). Although biblical scholarship is not in perfect agreement on the exact translation of v. 14, it is one in warning against understanding the name as denoting an abstract, static notion of "being" since this is foreign to the Hebrew way of thinking. Rather, the root *hayah* denotes a dynamic sense of being present, being there. This had led some to render *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* as "I shall be there, as who I am, I shall be there." This translation not only seeks to be faithful to the etymology given in v. 14 but it is consistent with the broader context (see "I shall be with you" in v. 12). According to this understanding, the new name Yahweh is regarded as a pledge on God's part to be dynamically present to the people.

At the same time, the particular form given in v. 14 also insures the freedom of the Divinity. That is to say, it does

not give Israel control of the deity through total knowledge of the Mystery. When God said, "I shall be there, *as who I am*, I shall be there," God guarded the divine freedom. Presence was promised but God's particular way of being present was not handed over. Thus, believers could never control, never dictate, never be absolutely certain what form God's dynamic presence-in-power would take. God would be present in mystery and freedom. In preserving the Mystery ("as who I am"), God gave Israel a name the meaning of which they would have to continue to search out. The arena for this unfolding significance was to be their own history ("I shall be there"). To search out the meaning of God's name, Israel was called into the mystery of its own experience, its own name.

Israel knew it would never exhaust or know completely the name. Certainly it was not given into their control. Thus, while the pledge of divine presence contained in the name was a source of confidence for Israel, the mystery and freedom borne in it never allowed Israel to be perfectly comfortable.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE MISSION 3:16-22

¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; ¹⁷and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey."¹⁸And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, we pray you, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.'¹⁹I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go

unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it; after that he will let you go. ²¹And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²²but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of her who sojourns in her house, jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; thus you shall despoil the Egyptians."

This unit comes to us from the hand of the Yahwist. Before the combination of Yahwist and Elohist traditions, these verses followed verses 7-8. Thus, originally the announcement of the divine plan was followed by these specific instructions regarding how Moses was to enter into God's dynamic involvement in Israel's liberation.

According to the Yahwist, Moses first had to report to the elders of Israel what he himself had heard (compare vv. 16b-17 with Exod 3:7-8) and then go to the king of Egypt along with a delegation of elders. Moses' role in the Yahwist source is like that of a prophetic messenger, delivering the words which the Divinity placed in his mouth (vv. 16-17, 18). The message Moses is sent to announce is that *Yahweh* will bring Israel out of Egypt.

In casting Moses in the role of messenger, the Yahwist presents a slightly different view from that of the Elohist (3:9-12). According to the latter Moses is instructed by God to go directly and presumably alone to Pharaoh (v. 10). In the Elohist's work, it is *Moses* who brings Israel out of Egypt (vv. 10, 11, 12). As such, he is more of a mediator of God's saving presence than a messenger.

Verses 18-22 contain a foreshadowing of some of the details of how Yahweh's plan will unfold. Thus, the thought of Exod 3:18 reappears in Exod 5:3. Exod 3:19-20, by way of preview, offers a brief summary of the plagues. Exod 3:21-22 foretells details which reappear in the narration of events surrounding the exodus as recorded in Exod 11:2-3 and 12:35-36.

Just as the Elohist writer had presented the commission-

ing of Moses as followed immediately by an objection on his part (3:9-12, 13-15), so here too the Yahwist's account of Moses' mission (vv. 16-22) is followed by an objection.

OBJECTION AND RESPONSE

4:1-9

4 Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" ²The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." ³And he said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. ⁴But the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand, and take it by the tail" — so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand — ⁵"that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." ⁶Again, the Lord said to him, "Put your hand into your bosom." And he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. ⁷Then God said, "Put your hand back into your bosom." So he put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸"If they will not believe you," God said, "or heed the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. ⁹If they will not believe even these two signs or heed your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it upon the dry ground; and the water which you shall take from the Nile will become blood upon the dry ground."

The commission narrative from here through Exod 4:17 is carried along by a series of Moses' objections to his vocation (vv. 1, 10, 14). In this particular unit Moses' objection is cloaked as skepticism. He believed his mission to be impossible because he doubted that Israel would believe that he was sent by God. This objection is forestalled patiently and resolutely by the signs God provided Moses,

signs which underscore his authenticity as Yahweh's messenger.

In refusing to believe Yahweh's statement that he would be accepted by the Israelites, Moses embodies stark contrast to much of what has gone before. Yahweh had outlined the divine plan (vv. 16-22) as a sure thing. There was no doubt about its success. Moses, on the other hand, doubts the very first step of the plan. In Moses' view, God's sweeping plan for the Israelites would never get off the ground because his fellow Israelites would not trust that Moses' mission came from God. In response, the Divinity insures against such a stumbling block. Yahweh offers Moses three signs which were to be used to dissolve any such disbelief: the rod-serpent, the leprous hand healed, and, if these wonders failed to convince, Moses was instructed about a further sign he could perform, i.e., turning water from the Nile into blood.

Some of these signs bear similarity to events which indeed are recorded in the narratives which follow. Hence, the sign of water from the Nile turning to blood seems to anticipate the plague recorded in Exod 7:14-24. Likewise, the sign of the rod turning into a serpent is similar to the sign recorded in Exod 7:9-12 (note, however, that in Exod 7:9-12 the sign is done before Pharaoh, not Israel, and that it is performed by Aaron, not Moses).

Indeed, it appears that what is rehearsed here between Yahweh and Moses will later be acted out between Moses (as Yahweh's messenger) and Pharaoh. God's word of commission and command is enough neither for Moses nor for Pharaoh. Just as God's command to "let my people go" will need to be aided by signs and wonders before Pharaoh, so with Moses and with Israel signs are needed to validate the sureness of the call to liberation. Freedom is such a daring and dangerous venture. Those called to it need to be coaxed and reassured.

FURTHER OBJECTIONS, FURTHER RESPONSES 4:10-17

¹⁰But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue."
¹¹Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"
¹²Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."
¹³But he said, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person."
¹⁴Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart."
¹⁵And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do.
¹⁶He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.
¹⁷And you shall take in your hand this rod, with which you shall do the signs."

The final sections of this extended narrative about the commission of Moses are, like the foregoing sections, carried forward by additional objections raised by Moses. The objection voiced in Exod 4:10 recalls the one already cited in Exod 3:11. Both represent Moses as feeling unqualified for what God was asking of him. As earlier so here too, God assures Moses of the divine presence on the mission: "I will be your mouth and teach you what you should speak." The basis for Moses' mission thus is again shifted from his personal qualifications and credentials to the dynamic presence-in-power of the Divinity in this exodus mission.

In the last of Moses' five objections to his call (Exod 4:13) it might well be that we have reached the real core of the matter. It is possible that all along Moses has been attempting to articulate his reluctance about his vocation. In other

words, perhaps what lay behind those objections wherein Moses pointed to his inadequacies ("This mission won't work because . . .") was a basic unwillingness to get involved ("I don't want to do this"). It is possible that Moses for the first time here faces himself and expresses a truly honest response: ". . . send, I pray, some other person."

Exod 4:13-16 is viewed by nearly all scholars as a secondary addition to the original story. Its chief purpose is to introduce Aaron into the narrative. Aaron's role is that of Moses' mouthpiece and God promises to be with both of them. Aaron is described here as Moses' "brother." It is difficult to know what was intended by this. It is probable that the kinship terminology was utilized to designate Aaron as Moses' "associate" in the exodus process (cf. Exod 15:20 where Miriam is described as Aaron's "sister"). Whatever the case, the extended account of Moses' call (Exod 3:1—4:17) comes to a close with Moses' having evoked from God a promise of companionship.

The narrative of Moses' call, beginning with Exod 3:1, then, is a tapestry composed of alternating threads of God's recital of the divine plan for the redemption which is about to take place and Moses' reluctance to enter into this movement in the capacity of God's envoy. It is the story of divine initiative and invitation, on the one hand, and human difficulty in responding, on the other hand. It is the story of newness (represented in God's new name and Moses' new mission) but a newness which is continuous with God's gracious dealings with Israel's ancestors.

SETTING THE FOCUS

4:18—7:7

This section of the Book of Exodus can be regarded as consisting of three passages. The first (4:18-31) functions as a transition between Moses' call in Midian (3:1—4:17) and the initiation of his mission in Egypt (5:1). The second (5:1—6:1) is the reader's first indication that the movement from bondage to freedom, the "call of the fire," involves arduous struggle and pain. This sets the stage for the long and somewhat drawn out plague narratives which begin in 7:8. Finally, the third text (6:2—7:7) forms an inclusion with 3:1—4:17 insofar as it narrates another account of the gift of the name as well as the call and commission of Moses. Following as it does the ominous message about struggle (5:1—6:1), this second account of the call reasserts God's view of the matters at hand even as it recalls God's commitment to save and God's call for Moses to engage and mediate the divine decision to save. As such 6:2—7:7 not only points back to what has gone before but also offers a confident and challenging perspective from which believers might read the plague narratives which follow.

Taken together, these passages set in proper focus our approach to the exodus movement. They take us back from the open wilderness to the strictures of Pharaoh's world.

They reacquaint us with the pain described in Exodus chapters 1-2. At the same time, they call us to confidence in the face of struggle and faith in the Mystery whose name and resolve we know.

MOSES' RETURN TO EGYPT 4:18-31

¹⁸Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back, I pray, to my kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." ¹⁹And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." ²⁰So Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt; and in his hand Moses took the rod of God.

²¹And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go." ²²And you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, ²³and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.'

²⁴At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to kill him. ²⁵Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" ²⁶So he let him alone. Then it was that she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

²⁷The Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went, and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him, and all the signs which he had charged him to do. ²⁹Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. ³⁰And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses, and did the signs in the

sight of the people. ³¹And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Exod 4:18-31 consists of four short segments which begin with Moses in Midian and end with his reunion with Israel in Egypt.

The first incident to be narrated is Moses' taking leave of his father-in-law (vv. 18-20). A close reading shows some unevenness in the passage possibly reflecting a conflation of materials stemming from different oral or written traditions. In v. 18, Moses' speech to Jethro and Jethro's response ("Go in peace") suggest to the reader that Moses is about to be on his way, presumably alone (cf. Exod 18:2-6) and probably with the rod of God in his hand (v. 20b). Yahweh's command for Moses to go back to Egypt which appears in the following verse (v. 19) thus strikes the reader as somewhat superfluous and obstructive in the context of a movement which already appeared to be under way. Yahweh's words recall the tradition of the threat to Moses' life which appeared in Exod 2:15. Verse 20 portrays Moses as taking along his wife and sons which is consistent with the witness of Exod 4:24-26 although to this point the reader has been introduced to only one of Moses' sons (Exod 2:22).

The second incident recorded in this unit (vv. 21-23) constitutes a frequently used literary device whereby the writer foreshadows or previews events which lie ahead. The verses summarize in capsule form the events which are to come. Yahweh's claim on Israel as "first-born son" sets the scene for the dramatic struggle detailed in the following chapters wherein Yahweh and Pharaoh struggle for Israel's allegiance. More specifically, there is a hint of the final plague (Exod 11) in Yahweh's warning that the price Egypt will have to pay for refusal to permit Israel's liberation is the blood of its own "first-born."

The third part of this section (vv. 24-26) records a problematic and mysterious incident the meaning of which continues to intrigue biblical interpreters. The text is

problematic for several reasons. First of all, it is not known for certain who is intended by the pronoun "him" in v. 24 ("sought to kill him"). Generally, it has been taken to mean Moses although it is difficult to know why Yahweh would want to take the life of one so recently commissioned as an envoy. Secondly, v. 25 clearly describes the circumcision of Moses' son by the mother. In saying that she touched Moses' "feet" with the foreskin, the writer euphemistically suggests that she applied the foreskin to Moses' genitals. The significance of such a gesture and the meaning of Zipporah's statement ("Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!") are both very obscure. The elusiveness of the expression even seems to go back to biblical times for the last line of v. 26 is clearly intended to interpret the expression for readers unfamiliar with it. Finally, in addition to the textual problems, readers are understandably puzzled by the portrait of God suggested in these verses.

Scholars regard this text as reflecting very ancient times and primitive custom. Most simply admit that a full explanation of the meaning of the incident is no longer possible. It might be that at one level of development this story was told to demonstrate some connection between circumcision and marital customs. At another level the story might have served to point out the importance of circumcision. It might also have sought to explain how the custom of circumcising children arose. None of these possibilities, however, clearly explains the text as it now stands.

The concluding incident of chapter 4 (vv. 27-31) is Moses' meeting with Aaron and their preparation for mediating God's activity. Just as God told Moses that Aaron would be given as his spokesperson (4:13-16), so here we are told that "Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses" (4:30a). The notation that Aaron also performed signs (v. 30b) comes as something of a surprise since to this point only Moses has been given power to perform signs as an authentication that he was indeed sent by God (4:2-9, 17).

The final verse in chapter 4 clearly and succinctly describes the success which met Moses and Aaron's initial acts. The people believed the words and signs and, having heard

that God was aware of their awful situation, they worshipped.

LIBERATION: NOT THROUGH REQUEST, NOT THROUGH REASONING

5:1—6:1

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" ²But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go." ³Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." ⁴But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens." ⁵And Pharaoh said, "Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!" ⁶The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, ⁷"You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.' ⁹Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words."

¹⁰So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. ¹¹Go yourselves, get your straw wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" ¹²So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. ¹³The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, your daily task, as when there was

straw." ¹⁴And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today, as hitherto?"

¹⁵Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, "Why do you deal thus with your servants? ¹⁶No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people." ¹⁷But he said, "You are idle, you are idle; therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' ¹⁸Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the same number of bricks." ¹⁹The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight, when they said, "You shall by no means lessen your daily number of bricks." ²⁰They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came forth from Pharaoh; ²¹and they said to them, "The Lord look upon you and judge, because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

²²Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me? ²³For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all." ⁶ But the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

Having briefly narrated the transition which brought Moses back from the wilderness and into Egypt, the writer now presents the first of many meetings with Pharaoh and the struggle which ensues as a result of Pharaoh's refusal to let Israel go. Pharaoh declares that his refusal is based on his not "knowing Yahweh" (5:2). Thus the biblical writer introduces a motif which will recur in the plague narratives (see Exod 8:10, 22; 9:29).

In verse 3 Moses and Aaron use words quite similar to those of Exod 3:18 in requesting that the people be allowed to leave Egypt. The request only results in Pharaoh's determination to increase the oppression of the Hebrews. His design is to keep them busy, drain their energies, diffuse the likelihood of their reflecting on their situation and giving in to restless imagination about allegiance to anyone but himself (vv. 4-19). Moses and Aaron remain in the background as the officers of the people try to reason with Pharaoh regarding the intensified oppression. Being turned away by Pharaoh, the Hebrew officers rebuke Moses and Aaron for bringing this greater evil upon the people (vv. 20-21). The likelihood of the successful implementation of God's decision to free the slaves appears exceedingly dim at this juncture; not only Pharaoh but the slaves themselves reject the mission announced by Moses and Aaron.

In the narrative of 5:1-21 the biblical writer poignantly sets before us what appears to be an inevitable stage in the movement toward liberation and redemption. On the one hand, we see the intransigence of the oppressor. To deliberately hold others in bondage is not a careless, vacillating enterprise. Those in bondage are really *bound*, held firmly, and any suggestion or hint of loosening those bonds instinctively causes the oppressor to tighten the grip. Passage out of such bondage does not take place as the result of a simple request nor is it accomplished through human reasoning and negotiation. Bondage involves a firm commitment on the part of the oppressor and movement out of it must be undertaken through struggle, conflict.

On the other hand, this narrative demonstrates that the struggle demanded by the process of liberation initially brings discomfort, probably pain, to those who are bound, just as the pulling and twisting necessary to untie ropes around one's hands might lead one bound to protest: "Leave the bonds for the unloosening process is too painful." This is the response of the slaves following the initial confrontation with Pharaoh (5:20-21). It is this same pain which Moses brings to Yahweh (5:22-23). In God's response (6:1) we see that Pharaoh's determination is matched by the divine

resolve to free Israel from Pharaoh's oppressive grip.

Thus the writers delineate the unyielding and mutually exclusive claims being made upon Israel. The unit opens and closes with God's resolve. Pharaoh's resolve is described in the intervening verses. The stage is set for the bitter and prolonged struggle between Yahweh and Pharaoh which is recounted in the narratives about the plagues. This, however, is delayed by a second account of Moses' call and commission which has been inserted in Exod 6:2—7:7.

GOD'S NAME AND GOD'S CALL REPEATED 6:2—7:7

²And God said to Moses, "I am the Lord. ³I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. ⁴I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. ⁵Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, ⁷and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'" ⁹Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage.

¹⁰And the Lord said to Moses, ¹¹"Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land." ¹²But Moses said to the Lord, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh

listen to me, who am a man of uncircumcised lips?" ¹³But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a charge to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁴These are the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuben, the first-born of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. ¹⁶These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the years of the life of Levi being a hundred and thirty-seven years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their families. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being a hundred and thirty-three years. ¹⁹The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰Amram took to wife Jochebed his father's sister and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being one hundred and thirty-seven years. ²¹The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²²And the sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³Aaron took to wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon; and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵Eleazar, Aaron's son, took to wife one of the daughters of Putiel; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their families.

²⁶These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: "Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts." ²⁷It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.

²⁸On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹the Lord said to Moses, "I am the Lord; tell

Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you."³⁰ But Moses said to the Lord, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me?"⁷ And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.² You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Israel,⁴ Pharaoh will not listen to you; then I will lay my hand upon Israel and bring forth my hosts, my people the sons of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment.⁵ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."⁶ And Moses and Aaron did so; they did as the Lord commanded them.⁷ Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

This narrative reasserts, even in the face of struggle and pain, the divine call to exodus. It follows the renewed witness to oppression and the full recognition of the enhanced pain which is entailed in the struggle for liberation. It also extends courage and sustenance for the challenge which accompanied the gift of the divine name.

This is a second account of events already reported in Exod 3:1—4:17. As such it contains a slightly different version of the gift of the divine name as well as another account of the commissioning of Moses and a summarizing overview of the divine plan of events which are about to take place.

Signs of Priestly composition abound in these verses. One indication is found in the two divine monologues (6:2-8 and 7:1-5). In typical Priestly fashion these lengthy divine statements are followed by notices that things happened according to God's word (6:9a and 7:6). The "not listening" mentioned in Exod 6:9 is also a motif which recurs with reference to Pharaoh in the Priestly redaction of the plagues (see 7:22; 8:15, 19; 9:12). A second indication of Priestly

composition is the reference to God as "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) in 6:3. A third is the attention given to Aaron. Exod 6:14-25 is a family genealogy which must have originally belonged to the high priestly family since it focuses on the family of Levi and within that narrows even further to trace an increasingly exclusive line to Aaron, his son and grandson. Priestly focus upon Aaron is also evident in 6:30—7:2 where the objection which is part of the stereotyped structure of call narrative (see above on 3:1—4:17) has been used to add equal attention to the commission and role of Aaron alongside Moses in the exodus event. Finally, it is typical of the Priestly writer to record the ages of Israel's great heroes at the time of their appearance in God's great plan of saving history (7:7; cf. Gen 5:1-32; 7:6, 11; 9:29; 11:10-26; 16:16; 17:1; etc.)

In contrast to the account of Exod 3:1—4:17, the Priestly writer sets the call and commissioning of Moses in Egypt, not Midian. Whereas in the earlier account the signal of divine involvement had been the burning bush, here the divine authority is rooted solely in the Divinity's word. Particularly striking is the recurring formula of God's self-revelation: "I am the Lord" (6:2, 6, 7, 8, 29; 7:5). The words convey more than mere information. They somehow bear the power and authority and mystery of the divine presence itself.

Exod 6:3 is the Priestly writer's version of the tradition about the gift of the divine name, Yahweh, to Moses (cf. Exod 3:13-15). According to this writer, a new era in God's relationship with Israel is signalled by the fact that the God who had previously been addressed as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) now is called by a new name. The Priestly writer stresses the continuity between the Promise-Maker of ages past and Yahweh who now acts to bring the promise to fulfillment by freeing the oppressed. It is one God now being faithful to an ancient promise in a new and unprecedented way (cf. Gen 17:1).

The Priestly writer also stresses continuity with the past by including the genealogy of Exod 6:14-25. It legitimates the leadership of Moses and Aaron by relating them to their

roots. The list begins much like that of Gen 46:8-27, but soon focuses exclusively on the Aaronic line. The function of the genealogy in this context is to stress that the chosen and commissioned leaders of this exodus movement are truly Israelite, i.e., true descendants of one of the sons of Jacob. The text shows signs that the genealogy was artificially inserted into an already-existing narrative for Exod 6:28-30 basically restate the content of those verses which preceded the introduction of Aaron and Moses and their roots (cf. 6:10-12).

Finally, in Exod 7:1-7 the Priestly writer anticipates the full exodus movement, complete with details which will be borne out in the following chapters. If readers keep these verses in mind as they proceed through the narratives about the plagues and the exodus event, it will be clear to them that all happened in accord with God's word and that is the theological message which the Priestly writer intended to convey.

THE STRUGGLE

7:8—11:10

The early chapters in the Book of Exodus set the scene for subsequent events: the Hebrews cried out under the weight of their Egyptian bondage and God involved the Divine Self in loosening the bonds, a process which Moses was chosen to mediate. The stage is thus set for the next step, summoning Pharaoh to abide by God's decision. Exod 7:8—11:10 describes struggle: God's persistent imperative that Pharaoh let go of the Hebrews, Pharaoh's persistent refusal to do so, and the resulting disasters which plague the Egyptians.

On the one hand, much attention in biblical scholarship has been given to show that the plagues are best understood as natural phenomena associated with the annual flooding of the Nile River in Egypt. According to this view, the "supernatural" or miraculous element in the plagues lay not so much in the marvelous character of the events themselves as in God's direction and use of the courses of nature for the welfare of the chosen people. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that "natural" and "supernatural" are more clearly distinct categories for modern believers than for ancient peoples. That nature operated according to its own set of laws was an idea unknown in ancient times. Thus,

while a modern person might view the annual flooding of the Nile as a natural event, an ancient believer would have been less inclined to distinguish such an event from God's work in the world.

A survey of the plague narratives (Exod 7:8—11:10) indicates that the ten individual stories show remarkable likenesses to one another in structure, motif, and phraseology. These recurring features suggest that the narratives are not so much eyewitness records of spectacular events which took place in ancient Egypt as they are artificially constructed literary pieces intended to serve a message about the divine struggle for human liberation. While the length and redundancy of the plague narratives make for somewhat tedious reading, the writers may be suggesting something of the character of redemption itself, i.e., that the movement from bondage to freedom does not happen quickly or easily. It entails real conflict with real people whose self-interest is served by perpetuating the bondage of others. The texts make clear that Pharaoh heard and understood God's command. Every possible opportunity was given for him to align his policy with God's movement in the human arena; but evil has a profound grip. The unrelenting hardness of Pharaoh's heart is matched only by God's uncompromising commitment to human liberation. Hence, the length and violence of the struggle which is recounted in these stories.

The greater part of the plague narratives comes from the hand of the Yahwist. According to this narrative strand, the pollution of water with blood (7:14-18, 20b-21a, 23-24) was followed by plagues of frogs (7:25; 8:1-4, 8-15), flies (8:20-32), the death of cattle (9:1-7), hail (9:13-35), locusts (10:1-20), and darkness (10:21-29). The final blow was the death of the firstborn in Egyptian households (11:1-8).

The Yahwist's version of the plagues is carried forward by a series of dialogues between God and Moses and between Moses and Pharaoh. With a few exceptions, the accounts follow this pattern:

1) The Lord instructs Moses to approach Pharaoh and initiate dialogue with him saying, "Thus says the Lord."

- 2) The word of the Lord which Moses is to deliver to Pharaoh characteristically includes the Lord's demand, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." This command is followed by a threat of the plague which will take place should Pharaoh refuse.
- 3) The Lord sends the plague and its effects are described.
- 4) In the face of the effects of the plague, Pharaoh calls Moses to negotiate. Pharaoh appears to concede in promising to let the people go if Moses will intercede for the removal of the plague.
- 5) Moses intercedes and the plague is removed.
- 6) Pharaoh's heart is hardened when the disaster brought on by the plague is removed. The Yahwist concludes the story with the observation that Pharaoh did not let the people go. This line sets the scene for the sequence to begin again in the subsequent plague story.

In the Yahwist's version of the plagues, Moses' activity has similarities with the work of prophetic figures. He introduces his announcement of God's commands to Pharaoh with a messenger formula ("Thus says the Lord") which often appears on the lips of prophetic figures (1 Kgs 21:19; Jer 2:2, 5; 6:6, 9, 16, 21, 22; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). Moses' announcement of the plagues before they occur and his intercession with God for their abatement are additional prophetic characteristics (cf. 1 Kgs 13:1-6; 17:17-24; 20:13-21; Isa 7:18-25; 8:5-8; 42:14-17; Amos 7:1-3, 4-6; Jer 14:1-9, 19-22; 18:20).

In addition to a common structure and a common view of Moses' role, the Yahwist's version of the plagues is characterized by the appearance of two motifs. The first is the notice that one of the purposes of the plagues is "knowing Yahweh" (see 8:10, 22; 9:29; 11:7). This motif is initiated by the Yahwist's account of Pharaoh's response to Moses the very first time the two met. When Moses delivered Yahweh's command, Pharaoh said: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (5:2). A second motif which the Yahwist frequently records is that the Lord made a distinction between the Egyptians and Israelites in Egypt

(8:22; 9:4, 6; 9:26; 11:7). Although these two motifs recur several times, the Yahwist does not follow a rigid pattern in their use. That is to say, although they appear frequently in the overall account, they are not necessarily present in each individual plague story. The reader also notes that rigid linguistic formulas are not present in the appearance of these motifs.

Like the Yahwist's plague stories, the other major contribution to the overall narrative, that of the Priestly writer, also bears distinguishing characteristics. The two plague stories which are commonly viewed as coming whole and entire from the Priestly hand are the plagues of gnats (8:16-19) and boils (9:8-12). These two stories share this pattern:

- 1) God commands Moses to initiate actions through which the plague will be effected.
- 2) The instructions are followed and the plague ensues.
- 3) A reference to Egyptian magicians.
- 4) Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he did not listen. Thus, the stage is set for the next plague story.

It is noteworthy that the magicians appear only in the Priestly account of the plague. Likewise, although Aaron appears from time to time in the Yahwist's account of the plagues, he appears more consistently and prominently in the Priestly version. The Priestly writer presents the plagues as coming about through some action of Moses and/or Aaron whereas in the Yahwist's account the plagues come directly from the Divinity. The Priestly writer concludes his accounts of the gnats and boils by saying that all happened according to God's word which turns the reader's attention back to the Priestly introduction to the plague narratives in Exod 7:1-7.

Familiarity with these characteristics of P's plague stories enables the reader to detect the same writer's additions to stories originally told by the Yahwist. For example, in Exod 7:19-20a, 21b-22 one recognizes the Priestly hand in the major role played by Aaron in effecting the plague, the presence of the magicians, and the familiar extension of the notation about Pharaoh's hardened heart, i.e., that "he would not listen. . . as the Lord had said." A second clear

instance of the Priestly writer's addition to a Yahwist story appears in the account of the second plague (7:25—8:15). Although most of the story belongs to the Yahwist, the prominence of Aaron and the presence of the magicians in Exod 8:5-7 signals a Priestly addition as does the concluding line, that Pharaoh "hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the Lord had said" (8:15b).

The Priestly writer's hand can be found in the programmatic introduction to the plagues account which appears in 7:1-7 and in the concluding summary which appears in 11:9-10. In these texts the Priestly writer states his understanding of the purpose of the plagues: Pharaoh's not listening was known ahead of time by God (7:4) and was used so that God's wonders could be multiplied (11:9).

Some scholars detect characteristics of Elohist writing in a few of the plague stories. The Elohist's contribution to these chapters, however, is so minimal and fragmentary that we shall forego a treatment of it here. Additional presentations of the plague tradition can be found in Ps 78:44-51 and Ps 105:28-36.

Finally, before examining the individual plague stories it might be well to view the overall portraits of the chief actors of this struggle. The portrait of Pharaoh is drawn in broad outline, almost artificially, as a vague silhouette. He has no name, no specific place on the timeline of Egypt's history. His lack of personal characteristics makes it difficult for later generations of readers to feel sympathy or compassion or any sense of identity with Pharaoh. Thus readers are offered no basis for emulating him.

At the same time the narratives make clear that the God of the plagues is not a Divinity arbitrarily bent on destruction. Instead, God is the One who is zealous and uncompromising with regard to the welfare of the oppressed. The Divinity repeatedly calls for Pharaoh to join in mediating God's saving work in the world.

The lengthy narratives about the struggle between Yahweh and Pharaoh invite readers' consideration of the mystery of human resistance to the activity wherein God frees persons for the Divine Self. Furthermore, the theologians

who passed on these stories invite believers to view the struggle for human liberation as a locus for "knowing Yahweh" and for experiencing the power of God.

PRELUDE

7:8-13

⁸And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'" ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded: Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. ¹²For every man cast down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. ¹³Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the Lord had said.

Between the programmatic introduction to the overall plague narratives (7:1-7) and the account of the first plague (7:14-24) we find a brief prelude which sets in relief the two sides of the opposition which will be presented in the following chapters. The Priestly writer's hand is evident in the prominence given to Aaron, the presence of the magicians, and the concluding formula that Pharaoh did not listen "as the Lord had said." At issue in these verses is the question of credentials. However, the writer hints at what is to follow when he shows that nothing is proved by the working of a miracle. The stumbling block throughout the plague narratives is not any uncertainty on Pharaoh's part that Moses truly represents God's demands. Rather, the consistent stumbling block is Pharaoh's hardened heart.

WATER POLLUTION: THE FIRST PLAGUE

7:14-24

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; wait for him by the river's brink, and take in your hand the rod which was turned into a serpent. ¹⁶And you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold, you have not yet obeyed.'" ¹⁷Thus 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 rod that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood, ¹⁸and the fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile shall become foul, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink water from the Nile.'" ¹⁹And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

²⁰Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the rod and struck the water that was in the Nile, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood. ²¹And the fish in the Nile died; and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. ²²But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the Lord had said. ²³Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not lay even this to heart. ²⁴And all the Egyptians dug round about the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

It is possible that the starting point for this story, the pollution of Egypt's water supply by blood, was a redness in the water associated with the annual flooding of the Nile River. Whatever the case, the concern of the biblical writer was to tell of God's insistence upon freedom for the Hebrews and of Pharaoh's refusal to cooperate. Accordingly, in verse 17 we are told that the plague took place in order that Pharaoh might know Yahweh, although this purpose was not accomplished. Pharaoh's distance even from the needs of his own people is clearly set forth here when the narrator says that Pharaoh paid no attention to the negative effects of the plague while his people searched for water to drink (vv. 23-24).

The appearance of the messenger formula ("Thus says the Lord") along with the stereotyped command ("Let my people go") and the motif of "knowing Yahweh" suggest that the bulk of this account of the first plague comes from the Yahwist's hand. However, traces of the Priestly strand can be seen in verses 19-20a and in 21b-22 where a prominent part in effecting the plague is assigned to Aaron, the magician motif occurs, and an explicit connection is made between Pharaoh's hardness of heart and his not listening "as the Lord had said." In these short segments the Priestly writer heightened the wonder of the event by saying that not only the Nile but all of Egypt's waters were polluted by the plague.

While the picture of Egyptian magicians using secret arts against their own people might seem humorous, their success as narrated here underlines the fact that Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh was in every way a real struggle and as such was marked by ambiguity and tension.

FROGS: THE SECOND PLAGUE

7:25—8:15

²⁵Seven days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile.

8 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²But if you refuse to let them go,

behold, I will plague all your country with frogs; ³the Nile shall swarm with frogs which shall come up into your house, and into your bedchamber and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls; ⁴the frogs shall come up on you and your people and on all your servants.'" ⁵And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the rivers, over the canals, and over the pools, and cause frogs to come upon the land of Egypt!'" ⁶So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt.

⁸Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Entreat the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." ⁹Moses said to Pharaoh, "Be pleased to command me when I am to entreat, for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." ¹⁰And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "Be it as you say, that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. ¹¹The frogs shall depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile." ¹²So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried to the Lord concerning the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. ¹³And the Lord did according to the word of Moses; the frogs died out of the houses and courtyards and out of the fields. ¹⁴And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. ¹⁵But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the Lord had said.

Like the account of the first plague, this story is the result of mixed authorship. Most of 7:25—8:4 and 8:8-15 bears the marks of the Yahwist writer, for example in the use of the messenger formula, the command to "Let my people go,"

the "knowing Yahweh" motif, Moses' intercessory activity, and the first hint of a concession on Pharaoh's part. On the other hand, the role exercised by Aaron and the presence of the magicians in 8:5-7, as well as the final notice of Pharaoh's not listening "as the Lord had said" in 8:15b, suggest that the Priestly writer made additions to the basic narrative of the Yahwist.

It is reasonable to believe that the annual flooding of the Nile provided a situation ripe for the breeding of multitudes of frogs. Thus it is possible that, as with the first plague, the event narrated here had its starting point in regular processes of nature. Here, the writers say, Yahweh countered Pharaoh's obstinacy with the frog menace although the Egyptian magicians were able to do the same.

For the first time in the plague narratives, the divine struggle for human liberation appears to move closer to a resolution when Pharaoh agrees to let the slaves go in return for the removal of the plague. Moses responded at once to Pharaoh's concession. He separated the "knowledge of Yahweh" from the wonder of the plague (cf. 7:17) and linked it instead with God's graciousness in causing the disappearance of the frog menace at a time set by Pharaoh himself. However, God's concession in removing the plague did not result in Pharaoh's "knowing Yahweh" but in his renewed hardness of heart. Thus, the scene is set for the continuation of the struggle.

GNATS: THE THIRD PLAGUE 8:16-19

¹⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.'" ¹⁷And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and struck the dust of the earth, and there came gnats on man and beast; all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸The magicians tried by their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could

not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them: as the Lord had said.

This brief account belongs wholly to the Priestly writer and may originally have represented an alternate tradition of what is now the fourth plague. That is to say, the present text may simply be a variant of the Yahwist's story of the plague of flies (8:20-32). The narrative succinctly presents the command to be given to Aaron, his fulfillment of the command which thereby sparked the plague of gnats, the presence of the magicians, and Pharaoh's hardness of heart expressed in the Priestly writer's customary manner.

What is new here in the progression of Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh is the ineffectiveness of the Egyptian magicians' secret arts. Their powerlessness leads the magicians to the recognition of God, though their testimony regarding this does not touch Pharaoh's hardened heart and he did not listen "as the Lord had said."

FLIES: THE FOURTH PLAGUE 8:20-32

²⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and wait for Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²¹Else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. ²²But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there; that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. ²³Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. By tomorrow shall this sign be.'" ²⁴And the Lord did so; there came great

swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses, and in all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by reason of the flies.

²⁵Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." ²⁶But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so; for we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God offerings abominable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²⁷We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he will command us." ²⁸So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make entreaty for me." ²⁹Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you and I will pray to the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow; only let not Pharaoh deal falsely again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." ³⁰So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. ³¹And the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. ³²But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

This narrative begins much like that of the first plague story (cf. 7:15). Characteristics of the Yahwist's treatment of the plagues permeate the account. Like the preceding narratives, this story may have stemmed from regular processes of nature though the Yahwist was concerned to incorporate it into his story of God's continuing efforts at securing human freedom.

A motif which the Yahwist introduced here for the first time and which will come to its culmination in Yahweh's "passing over" the Hebrews' houses during the death of the firstborn is the distinction which God made between the chosen people and Egypt. This explains why Israel was untouched by the disasters plaguing the Egyptians. The

Yahwist offers this "setting apart" as yet one more way whereby Pharaoh might come to "know Yahweh."

Pharaoh's concession to Moses' demand (8:25-28) recalls 8:8 although here the motif is developed considerably. Moses is a shrewd negotiator who does not succumb to Pharaoh's invitations to compromise. Hopes for a resolution to Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh are raised by Pharaoh's decision to release the slaves to worship in the wilderness. These hopes are dampened, however, by Moses' ominous recollection of the untrustworthy nature of Pharaoh's concession on the earlier occasion (see 8:29b). What Moses suspected came to be and once again a plague story ended where it began, with Pharaoh's obstinate refusal to cooperate with God's designs.

CATTLE: THE FIFTH PLAGUE 9:1-7

9 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your cattle which are in the field, the horses, the asses, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴But the Lord will make a distinction between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the people of Israel."'" ⁵And the Lord set a time, saying, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land." ⁶And on the morrow the Lord did this thing; all the cattle of the Egyptians died, but of the cattle of the people of Israel not one died. ⁷And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the cattle of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

While several characteristic elements of the Yahwist's plague narratives are missing (e.g., the "knowing Yahweh"

motif, Pharaoh's concession, Moses' intercession), the "separation" motif is augmented in this brief account of the plague which struck the cattle of the Egyptians but did not touch the cattle of the Israelites. Tension mounts in Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh as this story moves beyond menacing plagues (water pollution, insects, frogs) to the death of "all the cattle" of the Egyptians.

BOILS: THE SIXTH PLAGUE

9:8-12

⁸And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of ashes from the kiln, and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹And it shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt." ¹⁰So they took ashes from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw them toward heaven, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. ¹¹And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. ¹²But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them; as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

This is the second of two plague narratives which come entirely from the hand of the Priestly writer (cf. 8:16-19). As in other Priestly accounts of the plagues, the magicians are present. Here, however, they are stripped of special powers. These masters of secret arts are themselves struck with boils just like the rest of the Egyptians. The notice that it was the Lord who hardened Pharaoh's heart coincides with the view which the Priestly writer set forth in his programmatic introduction to the plague narratives (7:1-7, especially v. 3). It reflects the writer's conviction that nothing takes place apart from Yahweh's control.

HAIL: THE SEVENTH PLAGUE

9:13-35

¹³Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ¹⁴For this time I will send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants and your people, that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. ¹⁵For by now I could have put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth; ¹⁶but for this purpose have I let you live, to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. ¹⁷You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. ¹⁸Behold, tomorrow about this time, I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹Now therefore send, get your cattle and all that you have in the field into safe shelter; for the hail shall come down upon every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home, and they shall die.'"²⁰Then he who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his slaves and his cattle flee into the houses; ²¹but he who did not regard the word of the Lord left his slaves and his cattle in the field.

²²And the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch forth your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man and beast and every plant of the field throughout the land of Egypt." ²³Then Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt; ²⁴there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵The hail struck down everything that was in the field throughout all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and the hail struck down

every plant of the field, and shattered every tree of the field. ²⁶Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, there was no hail.

²⁷Then Pharaoh sent, and called Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸Entreat the Lord; for there has been enough of this thunder and hail; I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." ²⁹Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. ³⁰But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God." ³¹(The flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³²But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) ³³So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and stretched out his hands to the Lord; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. ³⁴But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go; as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

There is much similarity between the structure, motifs, and terminology of this account and other plague narratives recorded by the Yahwist. This is true with regard to the command ("Let my people go") introduced by the messenger formula ("Thus says the Lord"), the threat, plague, Pharaoh's concession, and Moses' intercession. Several new elements, however, also appear here. Verses 14-16 (which some scholars regard as a gloss) offer an explanation for the continuation of these seemingly unsuccessful plagues. Here a unique interpretation is given to the "knowing Yahweh" motif. Whereas in previous stories this motif was connected with the sending of a plague (7:17), the removal of a plague (8:10), and the distinction God made between Israel and

Egypt (8:22), here God is known in the restraint which the divine power has exercised thus far with regard to the Egyptians. Thus graciousness, and not divine powerlessness, accounts for the prolongation of the plagues.

A second element which appears here for the first time may also be a gloss. In verses 19-21 we encounter distinctions between the Egyptians who "feared the word of the Lord" and those who did not. For the first time God's judgment is linked with personal decisions made by Egyptians other than Pharaoh.

A gloss of a different nature appears in verses 31-32. We have in these verses a rather studied explanation of exactly what was ruined by the hail and why. The lines offer readers a reasonable explanation of how it was that there were any plants left for the locusts of the next plague to destroy.

Finally, for the first time in the plague narratives Pharaoh's failure to cooperate with God's action is described as sin (vv. 27, 34).

LOCUSTS: THE EIGHTH PLAGUE 10:1-20

10 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, ²and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son's son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them; that you may know that I am the Lord."

³So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. ⁴For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, ⁵and they shall cover the face of the land; and they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours which grows in the field, ⁶and they shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your

servants and of all the Egyptians; as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

⁷And Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” ⁸So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh; and he said to them, “Go, serve the Lord your God; but who are to go?” ⁹And Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.” ¹⁰And he said to them, “The Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. ¹¹No! Go, the men among you, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desire.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

¹²Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.” ¹³So Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning the east wind had brought the locusts. ¹⁴And the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt, and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again. ¹⁵For they covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left; not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁶Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. ¹⁷Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me.” ¹⁸So he went out from Pharaoh, and entreated the Lord. ¹⁹And the Lord turned a very strong

west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. ²⁰But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

The narrative recounting the eighth plague presents familiar content fashioned according to the Yahwist’s established pattern. The pattern, however, is not merely repeated here. It is interwoven with unique features which attest to the artistry of the writers and which serve a plot which grows in complexity and tension as it nears its end.

Exod 10:1b-2 (which may be a late gloss added to the Yahwist’s story) offers yet another interpretation of the reason for the plagues. Here the “knowing Yahweh” motif is given a new direction. Yahweh claims to have “made sport of” the Egyptians not so much for the Egyptians to know the Divine Self but in order that Israel itself might know Yahweh and that this would be the subject of Israel’s proclamation about Yahweh from generation to generation.

Another new development occurs when, according to 10:7, Pharaoh’s servants plead with him to concede to Yahweh’s demands. The servants echo the “How long?” of Moses and Aaron (v. 3) and commend to Pharaoh a course of action (“Let the men go”) which approximates Yahweh’s demand even though it does not measure up to its fullness which includes women and children (“Let my people go”). This plea on the part of his servants leads Pharaoh to initiate negotiations with Moses once again even amidst repeated reminders of Pharaoh’s obstinacy (Exod 10:1, 3, 7b). However, just as in Exod 8:25-28, Pharaoh tried to negotiate the release on his own terms (Exod 10:8-11). In response Moses and Aaron insist that Yahweh does not make distinctions among the chosen people. All are called to service. Hopes for an immediate resolution to the struggle are lost when Yahweh’s two spokespersons are thrown out of Pharaoh’s presence.

Several elements in this story heighten the tension of the overall plague narratives and may subtly turn our attention to what is yet to happen. The east wind which brings the

locusts (10:13) will be echoed in the east wind which later will turn the sea into dry land allowing the Hebrews to cross (Exod 14:21). Attention to the event at the sea may also be occasioned by the notice that, following Pharaoh's apparent concession (10:16-17) and Moses' intercession (10:18), the locusts were driven into the Red Sea. Finally, the writer may have intended some irony when he makes Pharaoh refer to the plague of locusts as a "death" (10:17). In a short time that word will take on new meaning for the tyrant (see Exod 11). The end of this narrative resembles that of other plague stories recorded by the Yahwist. Exod 10:20 explicitly records that Pharaoh did not let the people go (cf. 8:32; 9:7).

DARKNESS: THE NINTH PLAGUE 10:21-29

²¹Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt."²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days; ²³they did not see one another, nor did any rise from his place for three days; but all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt. ²⁴Then Pharaoh called Moses, and said, "Go, serve the Lord; your children also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind."²⁵But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. ²⁶Our cattle also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there."²⁷But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. ²⁸Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me; take heed to yourself; never see my face again; for in the day you see my face you shall die."²⁹Moses said, "As you say! I will not see your face again."

While it may be that the starting point for this narrative was an annual occurrence in the spring when terrible hot winds carried enough dust and sand off the desert to darken the sky, it is clear that the biblical writer puts the event in the service of Israel's account of the struggle between Yahweh and Pharaoh. While the story bears a structure and motif like other Yahwist plague stories, it also carries a heightened sense of struggle pressing toward resolution. On the one hand, the plague leads Pharaoh to greater concessions than he has been willing to allow up to now. The reader wonders if this time Moses will agree to the conditions set by Pharaoh, i.e., that all the people may go but their possessions be left behind. Or, having watched Pharaoh come so far as to allow Israel to go, the reader hopes that ultimately the tyrant will concede regarding possessions also.

On the other hand, verses 28-29 suggest an ending albeit not an anticipated resolution. With the threat of death Pharaoh appears to bring all discussion on the matter to a halt. The note of finality which marks the end of this narrative necessitates some drastic new measure by Yahweh. It is clear that repetition of the established pattern would not be successful and indeed that such an attempt would endanger Moses' life.

DEATH OF EGYPT'S FIRSTBORN: THE TENTH PLAGUE 11:1-10

11 The Lord said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. ²Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and of gold."³And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

⁴And Moses said, "Thus says the Lord: About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt; ⁵and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits upon his throne, even to the first-born of the maid-servant who is behind the mill; and all the first-born of the cattle. ⁶And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever shall be again. ⁷But against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, not a dog shall growl; that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel. ⁸And all these your servants shall come down to me, and bow down to me, saying, 'Get you out, and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. ⁹Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."

¹⁰Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

The continuation of the plague tradition at the beginning of chapter eleven of Exodus comes as something of a surprise following, as it does, what appears to be a total breakdown of communication at the end of chapter ten. The resumption of the pattern which heretofore had yielded no resolution might lead the reader to expect no new result from this plague too. The content of verse 1, however, assures us that, although this plague might appear to be like the rest, in fact it will be different. The struggle between Yahweh and Pharaoh has indeed come to a point of resolution. Verses 2 and 3 confirm that the time for deliverance is at hand for conditions are now realized which Yahweh had described at the burning bush as belonging to the exodus event itself (see Exod 3:21-22).

Moses' announcement which appears in Exod 11:4-8a presumably is made to Pharaoh (see 11:8b). It is introduced with the same messenger formula which has marked the Yahwist's version of the foregoing plague stories. The hand

of the Yahwist writer is also signalled by the appearance, indeed, the linking of two motifs prominent in the Yahwist's strand of the plague stories, i.e., Yahweh's distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians and "knowing Yahweh" (v. 7).

A unique feature which sets this story apart from the other plague accounts is the absence of Moses' announcement of God's command to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." There no longer appears to be any opportunity for Pharaoh to decide. Moses simply announces that the death of the firstborn will take place and that it will ultimately result in the exodus. In addition, the fact that the story of Exod 11:1-10 comes to completion only in Exod 12:29-39 also leads us to connect the story of the tenth plague with the passover/exodus story which is to come. Thus, this story bears elements in common both with what precedes and with what follows it. As such it functions as the bridge between Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh and Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh as demonstrated in the exodus event. The story of the death of Egypt's firstborn, then, is a turning point in the overall narrative of Exod 1-15.

The Priestly writer has appended a conclusion to the plague narratives in Exod 11:9-10. Essentially the Priestly writer summarizes here what he had stated in his introduction to the plague stories (see Exod 7:1-7). According to this writer, Yahweh was in control of matters throughout the struggle. It was Yahweh's doing that Pharaoh had not listened. God used this as an opportunity to multiply divine wonders.

PASSAGE: REDEMPTION AND RITUAL

12:1—13:16

If readers come to the end of chapter 11 with a heightened sense of expectation that Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh is on the verge of a definitive resolution, the material which follows will come as something of a surprise. In Exodus 12:1—13:16 we are presented with the unlikely situation that, at this critical juncture, the Hebrew community paused to receive rather elaborate instruction regarding the ritual celebration of the event about to take place. In addition, we are told that the community conducted the rituals as commanded. Tucked in the middle of this concern for ritual is the Yahwist's modest account of the tenth plague which resulted in the exodus from Egypt (Exod 12:29-39).

Exodus 12:1—13:16 is a complex block of material in that it contains legislation for three originally separate festivals all of which at some stage of Israelite religion came to be connected with the exodus from Egypt. The three festivals are passover, unleavened bread, and the offering of the firstborn. Further complexity arises from the realization that the legislation given here derives, not from a single period, but from three separate sources of tradition representing a span of about five hundred years of religious prac-

tice. Thus the legislation for passover which appears in Exod 12:21-23 derives from an early source (possibly the Yahwist) and to that has been attached Deuteronomic legislation for the same feast (12:24-27a). Priestly legislation for passover both prefaces the earlier traditions (12:1-13) and follows them (12:43-49). Likewise, Deuteronomic directives for celebrating the feast of unleavened bread appear in Exod 13:3-10 although the Priestly writer had already addressed this topic in Exod 12:14-20. Finally, Exod 13:1-2 contains Priestly legislation for the offering of the firstborn while earlier legislation offered by the Deuteronomic tradition appears later in the chapter (13:11-16). Non-legislative units of material which appear in this section are the Yahwist's account of the tenth plague and the exodus from Egypt (12:29-39) and Priestly editorial summaries (12:28; 12:40-42; 12:50-51).

The Israelite feast of passover (*pesah*) probably had its beginnings in a rite observed by shepherds in the spring of the year as they prepared to migrate with their flocks to new grazing land. Scholars have suggested that the focal point of the observance was the smearing of blood of a sacrificial animal, a ritual designed to insure the safety and fertility of the flock during this time of passage. It has been further suggested that the shepherds, having prepared to leave, ate the sacrificial animal in haste. Some have connected this rite with the night of the first full moon of springtime.

Although this rite was probably practiced by the Hebrews' nomadic ancestors long before the time of the coming out of Egypt, it took on new meaning as later generations of Israelites continued the traditional ritual but reinterpreted it in light of Yahweh's deliverance from Egypt. Accordingly, Yahwistic worshippers viewed the ritual smearing of blood as a symbol of God's protection not of the flocks but of the people themselves as they undertook the passage from slavery to freedom.

Likewise, the feast of unleavened bread probably originated as an agricultural festival and only later was "historicized," i.e., given a meaning which was based not in nature religion but in an historical event. It is believed that at the

beginning of the barley harvest in the spring farmers refrained for a time from profaning the new grain by mixing leaven with it. At some stage, certainly after they were an agricultural people themselves, the Israelites reinterpreted this harvest feast in light of Yahweh's deliverance from Egypt. The feasts of unleavened bread and passover were easily joined to one another since both were spring festivals and both had come to be associated with the event of the exodus from Egypt.

Finally, it appears to have been widespread custom in the ancient world to offer the firstborn of the womb to the deities. The firstborn was thought to embody most completely the best features of the parent generation. Consecrating this firstborn (through ritual sacrifice, destruction, or redemption) testified to the belief that all life belongs to the Sacred. One witnesses to this by setting aside the first and best for the Divinity. Because of the story of the death of the firstborn at the time of the coming out of Egypt, the customary practice of offering firstborn was easily reinterpreted and linked with the exodus event. In this way it also came to be associated with the feasts of passover and unleavened bread.

In sum, through their common association with one historical event, i.e., the deliverance from Egypt, the three originally independent rituals of passover, unleavened bread, and the offering of the firstborn came to be linked with one another. The complex traditions of Exod 12:1—13:16 represent various stages of development in the combination of these festivals with one another and with the exodus event which they had come to symbolize. For a proper understanding of Exod 12:1—13:16, then, readers must recognize that in the text as it now stands late cultic practices have been anachronistically linked with the narrative about the exodus event itself.

The text of Exod 12:1—13:16 testifies to a bond between redemption and ritual. Familiarity with passover ritual (smearing of blood, offering of firstborn) shaped the writer's design of the story about the events of the night of

exodus (see Exod 12:29-39). At the same time, later generations of worshippers ritually repeated those events seeking thereby to make present again God's redeeming power in their own lives.

PASSOVER

12:1-13

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²"This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; ⁴and if the household is too small for a lamb, then a man and his neighbor next to his house shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats; ⁶and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. ⁷Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹In this manner you shall eat it: 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. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you,

upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

The Priestly writer's prescriptions for the celebration of passover are considerably more elaborate than the more ancient legislation which is now placed after it in Exod 12:21-27. According to the Priestly writer, the passover meal was to consist of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Specifications regarding the choice of the lamb and its preparation are minute and exact, as are directives for the time and manner in which the meal is to be eaten. Besides the ritual meal, the Priestly writer legislates for the smearing of blood on the doorposts (12:7). In Exod 12:13 the Priestly writer interprets this blood ritual as a means whereby Yahweh distinguished between Israelite and Egyptian houses during the tenth plague. However, in the more ancient account of the narrative about the tenth plague (Exod 11:4-8 and Exod 12:29-39) the Yahwist writer did not draw an explicit connection between Yahweh's "passing over" of Israelite houses and the blood smeared on doorposts.

At the conclusion of the legislation, the Priestly writer gives his interpretation of the festival which had been celebrated by countless generations of his nomadic ancestors and their neighbors. Because the Lord "passed over" the houses of Israel during the tenth plague, Israel keeps "pass-over" for the Lord.

UNLEAVENED BREAD 12:14-20

¹⁴"This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses, for if any one eats what is leavened, from the first day until the

seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly; no work shall be done on those days; but what every one must eat, that only may be prepared by you. ¹⁷And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt: therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as an ordinance for ever. ¹⁸In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, and so until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for if any one eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. ²⁰You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

These verses represent Priestly legislation for the feast of unleavened bread. Two series of prescriptions appearing in vv. 14-16 and in vv. 18-20 are linked by the writer's statement of the meaning of the feast which appears in the center of the passage, v. 17. The fact that passover is never mentioned supports the view that the feast of unleavened bread was originally independent of passover. The feast of unleavened bread is said to have lasted for seven days (12:15, 19), a feature which also distinguishes it from passover, a meal eaten hastily during one night (12:10-11). Passover and unleavened bread are brought together by the one historical event which each of them eventually came to commemorate. Thus, the center of this passage, the statement of meaning in 12:17, supplies the point of contact between the originally independent feasts of unleavened bread and passover. Likewise, the calendar notice of 12:18 makes the beginning of the observance of unleavened bread coincide with the date of passover (cf. 12:2, 6).

MORE ANCIENT PASSOVER LEGISLATION 12:21-28

²¹Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the passover lamb. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. ²³For the Lord will pass through to slay 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 enter your houses to slay you. ²⁴You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and for your sons for ever. ²⁵And when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. ²⁶And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' ²⁷you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshipped.

²⁸Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

The Priestly writer's legislation regarding the celebration of passover (12:1-13) was portrayed as spoken by the Divinity to Moses and Aaron (cf. 12:1). The passover legislation in the present text is portrayed as delivered by Moses and thus in the overall text may be regarded as Moses' interpretation of God's instruction (12:1-13) regarding the festival.

Verses 21-23 are commonly regarded as stemming from the Yahwist. It is noteworthy that the legislation here is concerned only with a blood ritual. There is no mention of a meal. The prescriptions of vv. 21-22 are followed by the interpretation given to the ritual by the Yahwist. As in the Priestly version (12:13), here the blood ritual is connected

with the distinction God made between Israelite and Egyptian houses at the time of the tenth plague (12:23).

The Deuteronomic writer presumably refers to the smearing of blood when he offers legislation for and theology of passover in 12:24-27. His concern is not so much with the rite itself as with its continuation in future generations and its meaning. Like the Yahwist before him (12:23), the Deuteronomist bases the meaning of the rite in God's own saving action. As Yahweh "passed over" us, so all future generations shall keep passover for Yahweh.

At the conclusion of all the ritual traditions of 12:1-27, we recognize the command-fulfillment schema of the Priestly writer when, in 12:28 we are told that all the prescriptions were carried out.

PASSAGE OUT OF EGYPT 12:29-39

²⁹At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. ³⁰And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead. ³¹And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. ³²Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also!"

³³And the Egyptians were urgent with the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said, "We are all dead men." ³⁴So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders. ³⁵The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing; ³⁶and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of

the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians.

³⁷And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very many cattle, both flocks and herds. ³⁹And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any provisions.

The manner in which this account of the exodus event is told bears likeness to the event itself: it is simple, decisive, and quick. In eleven verses the Yahwist swiftly brings the readers through the passage for which they had longed since the beginning of the Book of Exodus. What the tedious, recurring plagues were unable to accomplish is secured definitively in a single blow which, submerged as it is in the legislative texts, appears almost suddenly and mysteriously, a death in the night.

To be sure, the reader was prepared for this since the event is narrated in terms carefully consistent with what the Yahwist had foreshadowed in Exod 11:1-10. The expulsion appears to be the unanimous wish of Pharaoh and all the Egyptians (12:31-34; cf. 11:1, 8). As predicted, the Israelites leave heavily laden with a share in Egyptian property (12:35-36; cf. 11:2-3 and 3:21-22), a detail which probably arose from the customary practice whereby a freed slave was not to be left empty-handed at the end of the time of service and so was given a certain share in the owner's possessions at the time of departure (see Deut 15:13-14). Finally, the emphasis on the haste of the departure which appears in this narrative (12:33, 39) probably represents an attempt to account for the unleavened bread ritual which had come to be associated with this event.

The Yahwist attempts to describe the exodus community. There is little question that his enumeration, six hundred thousand men (not counting women and children), is a gross

exaggeration. As such it is not unlike the tradition of Num 1:17-46. Another detail included here, i.e., the tradition that the exodus group was a "mixed multitude" (12:38), is given more careful attention by contemporary scholars. It is not unlikely that the one common element which was shared by members of the exodus group was not blood kinship or faith but a marginalized social status. In the exodus event God intervened on behalf of those who had no rights in the political establishment in which they found themselves.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

12:40-42

⁴⁰The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴²It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

These verses contain a summarizing statement belonging to the Priestly writer. The time span noted here has been used by some scholars as partial evidence in calculating the Hebrews' descent into and exodus from Egypt. Accordingly, if the descent into Egypt coincided with the migration into that area of Hyksos peoples around 1720 B.C., then the exodus can be dated about 1290 B.C. This date would link the exodus event with the reign of Rameses II, a view which would appear to be supported by the notation that one of the store-cities on which the Hebrews labored bore the name of the Pharaoh Rameses (see Exod 1:11).

In addition to the glance backwards over the years passed in Egypt, the Priestly writer presents here a sweeping glance of future generations. This pivotal exodus-moment is to be marked in the future by Israelites who will imitate in their

own actions what the Lord did in this momentous event of passage. Ritually they shall continue the event by "keeping watch" for the Lord just as the Lord "kept watch" for them.

PASSOVER LEGISLATION CONTINUED 12:43-51

⁴³And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it; ⁴⁴but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵No sojourner or hired servant may eat of it. ⁴⁶In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not carry forth any of the flesh outside the house; and you shall not break a bone of it. ⁴⁷All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you."

⁵⁰Thus did all the people of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. ⁵¹And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

In Exod 12:1-13 the Priestly writer had legislated for the food for the passover meal, its preparation and its consumption. Here the same writer offers regulations regarding who may participate in the meal. Slaves who have been brought into the family (and thus into the congregation of Israel) may participate while uncircumcised strangers and foreigners are prohibited.

To the legislation of 12:43-49 the Priestly writer appends his familiar summarizing statement, noting that all the commands were fulfilled and the event was thus complete (12:50-51).

OFFERING THE FIRSTBORN 13:1-2

¹³ The Lord said to Moses, ²"Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine."

This chapter opens with the Priestly writer's legislation wherein God instructs that the firstborn of all life be set apart for the Divinity. Although it is placed between Priestly legislation for passover (12:43-49) and Deuteronomic legislation for the feast of unleavened bread (13:3-10), the consecration of the firstborn is not explicitly linked with either of the other rituals or with the exodus event.

UNLEAVENED BREAD 13:3-10

³And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place; no leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴This day you are to go forth, in the month of Abib. ⁵And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. ⁶Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. ⁷Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. ⁸And you shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' ⁹And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰You shall therefore keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.

These verses portray Moses as prescribing how the feast of unleavened bread is to be kept once Israel settles down in the land. The text's literary style and vocabulary mark it as Deuteronomic. By and large this tradition is in agreement with Priestly legislation for the same feast which already appeared in Exod 12:14-20. The two agree that this is to be a seven-day festival (13:6-7; cf. 12:15, 19). In addition, like the Priestly presentation in chapter 12, this Deuteronomic text never mentions passover although the date for the feast of unleavened bread coincides with the date for the passover observance (13:4; cf. 12:2) and the two feasts find their meaning in the same exodus event (13:8; cf. 12:17). In characteristically Deuteronomic fashion, the writer of these verses underlines the importance of carrying the past forward into the future. The feast is a remembering of a past redemptive event. But in the very act of ritual remembering one makes the redemptive power of the event present again and hands it on to the next generation. The practice of binding this instruction to one's very body (Exod 13:9; cf. Deut 6:8) was a very concrete way used by pious Israelites of later generations to try to stay closely connected to this pivotal redemptive passage.

OFFERING OF THE FIRSTBORN 13:11-16

¹¹"And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, ¹²you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstlings of your cattle that are males shall be the Lord's. ¹³Every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴And when in time to come your son asks you, "What does this mean?" you shall say to him, "By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

¹⁵For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.' ¹⁶It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes; for by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt."

The Deuteronomic writer continues with legislation regarding the consecration of the firstborn. This passage is cast in a fashion very similar to the same writer's legislation for the feast of unleavened bread in the preceding portion of the text. Thus, he sets forth these directives as applying to the time of Israel's settlement in the land (13:11; cf. 13:5). He articulates the meaning of the observance in the familiar schema of the dialogue with the next generation (13:14; cf. 13:8). He requires that believers sign themselves with reminders of the instruction (13:16a; cf. 13:9a). And, finally, he bases the significance of the practice in the exodus event (13:16b; cf. 13:9b).

The directives for the practice of offering the firstborn begin by saying that all firstborn must be set aside (13:12a). However, the writer immediately proceeds to cite exceptions: only males need be offered, unclean animals (e.g., asses) and humans can be ransomed (13:12b-13). In verse 15 the practice is based on what Yahweh had done for Israel, a passage which harmonizes well with the events of the exodus night as reported by the Yahwist in Exod 12:29-39. The rationale for the practice of setting aside the firstborn of animals and humans is strikingly similar to the rationale for the offering of the first fruits of the earth as recorded in Deut 26:5-11. Both texts indicate the Deuteronomic writer's awareness of the profound giftedness of life which ancient Israel experienced in its relationship with Yahweh. Whatever offering Israel gave to God was recognized as nothing more than a token set apart from the superabundance of gifts which Yahweh had already showered upon Israel.

EVENTS AT THE SEA 13:17—15:21

The narrative about the deaths of the firstborn and the consequent expulsion of the Hebrews from Egypt, together with the rituals commemorating the going out of Egypt, might legitimately lead readers to regard the exodus as complete. Yet Exod 13:17—15:21 contains one final encounter between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, between Pharaoh and Yahweh. It is clear that freedom from Egyptian domination is not secured until Yahweh delivered the Hebrews at the sea. At the conclusion of the passage the redeemed are portrayed as celebrating this event in song and dance.

Exod 13:17—15:21 is best viewed as a composite of different versions of one event which have been interwoven like threads of a fine tapestry. Scholars identify the main threads of the narrative tradition as belonging to the Yahwist and Priestly writers, although fragments from the Elohist are also present. The witness about Israel's celebration of the event (15:1-21) is probably the product of generations of worshippers who sang the songs and danced the dance recorded here.

The Yahwist's version of the event at the sea is found in Exod 13:21-22; 14:5b-6, 10a, 11-14, 19b, 21b, 24, 25b, 27b, 28b, 30-31. According to this early tradition, Israel went out

from Egypt with a profound sense of God's presence signalled by a cloud during the day and fire at night. Pharaoh and his entourage pursued Israel. When the two groups met at the sea, Israel responded full of fear, regretting ever having begun the flight to freedom. Moses countered their faithlessness with an invitation to "stand firm" in God's presence-in-power. The cloud protected them while a tidal-like wind caused the waters to recede during the night. The Lord then threw the Egyptian army into a panic so that they rushed into the sea bed. When the waters returned to their normal depths, the Egyptians were engulfed in destruction. Israel saw that what Moses said had indeed taken place and they had faith in Yahweh and in Moses.

Most of the remainder of the story (14:1-4, 8-9, 15-18, 21ac, 22-23, 26-27a, 28-29) belongs to the Priestly writer. In this strand the reader learns the tradition that the Egyptians were defeated at the sea through a series of acts executed by Moses at God's command. Moses and the Israelites encamped where God directed. Moses raised his staff over the waters as God directed, the waters split and the sea became a path of dry land bordered by a wall of water on each side. The Israelites passed through with the Egyptians close behind. Deliverance was secured when, in response to Moses' outstretched hand, the waters fell in upon the Egyptians.

A comparison of the two versions of the event reveals several points of contrast in the biblical tradition. The Yahwist characteristically presents the human perspective on the event (Pharaoh's plan, Israel's fear, etc.). God alone acts in bringing about deliverance. For the Yahwist, the people "have only to be still." The Priestly version, on the other hand, presents the divine perspective throughout, carefully showing how everything takes place in accordance with God's previously announced word. (Thus, the word announced in 14:1-4 comes to fulfillment in 14:8-9 while 14:15-18 unfolds into 14:21ac, 22-23 and 14:26 is completed in 14:27a, 28-29) In contrast to the earlier version, the Priestly writer presents the divine work of deliverance as mediated through the actions of Moses. Even Pharaoh acts

in accord with God's word although the tyrant is not aware of doing so. According to the Yahwist, God uses the forces of nature (the strong east wind) to accomplish deliverance while the Priestly writer presents the waters standing up like walls, contrary to the usual forces of nature. The Yahwist's story bears elements in common with stereotyped features of Israel's life in the wilderness (for example the "murmuring motif" in vv. 11-12) whereas the Priestly writer utilizes motifs like the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and "knowing Yahweh" to bring the story into closer association with the story of Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh throughout the plagues. Thus, while the Yahwist may have regarded this deliverance as the initial event of Israel's wilderness journey, the Priestly writer's contribution portrays the event at the sea as the final and definitive part of the overall exodus event.

A final preliminary word must be said about those elements in the text which highlight the military character of the event at the sea. According to Exod 13:18, the people who left Egypt were "equipped for battle." The Egyptian pursuit is portrayed as a full-scale military operation (see 14:6-7). Yahweh's action as described in Exod 14:14 is that of a warrior (cf. Exod 15:3). These and other textual clues suggest that ancient Israel regarded the event at the sea as the first and greatest of a series of battles through which the Divine Warrior secured the life and well-being of the redeemed people. Knowledge of some elements of Israel's "Holy War" tradition sheds light on particular details included by the writers of Exod 13:17-14:31.

The ancient Israelites held to the conviction that Yahweh was present in power with them. Yahweh's presence lent a sacral dimension to Israel's concrete historical experience. Israel experienced God's presence (or absence) most dramatically in those situations where its very life was at stake, e.g., on the battlefield. War, then, was a sacral event because Yahweh was dynamically present as Israel's chief warrior, the Divine Warrior. Just as Israel conducted special preparations and rituals in drawing near to Yahweh's presence at a shrine, so the conduct of war was governed by practices

which reflected Israel's belief in its sacral character. When battle appeared imminent, warriors conducted ritual purifications in addition to offering sacrifice or consulting oracles concerning the decision of whether or when to engage the enemy forces. They did not go into battle until they knew Yahweh was ready to march at the head of their armies. With the certainty of Yahweh's presence came certainty about the outcome of the battle. Victory was assured; therefore warriors were exhorted not to fear. Characteristically there was something very extraordinary about the battle (cf. the use of the forces of nature in Judg 5:20-21; Josh 10:10-11; 1 Sam 7:10 or the walls of Jericho in Josh 6). Sometimes this took the form of utter chaos or confusion wherein Israel's enemies actually did something to bring destruction upon themselves. Finally, Israel enforced the ban (*herem*), consecrating the booty of war for the real victor in battle, the Divine Warrior.

Two of these standard features in the presentation of Holy War figure prominently in Exod 13:17-14:31. Certainty about the outcome of any battle enjoined by Israel's Divine Warrior forms the background of Moses' exhortation in 14:13-14: "Fear not, stand firm... The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still." The story proceeds to narrate how these words are borne out (see especially Exod 14:25b). Whereas in some other examples of Holy War thought Yahweh puts to use the efforts of Israel's army, here tradition tells us Yahweh did it all. In this sense, the event at the sea is the act *par excellence* of Israel's Divine Warrior.

A second element in this story which is illuminated by viewing it in the context of Holy War thought is a detail cited in Exod 14:24. It is suggested here that through some mysterious action God glanced at the Egyptians rushing headlong into the sea and thus into their own demise. As was mentioned above, mysterious actions causing the enemy to contribute to its own destruction belong to the standard features of texts written within a Holy War framework.

We have discussed several elements of the separate

threads which have come together to form the tapestry of Exod 13:17—14:31. It remains for us now to stand back and view the text as a whole.

One commentator has suggested that the overall effect of Exod 13:17—14:31 is governed by a theological message about God's plan. Viewed as such, the final text of the narrative about the event at the sea can be regarded as consisting of three story units (13:17—14:8; 14:9-14, and 14:15-29) and an epilogue (14:30-31).

THE TWO PLANS

13:17—14:8

¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest the people repent when they see war, and return to Egypt."¹⁸But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.¹⁹And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for Joseph had solemnly sworn the people of Israel, saying, "God will visit you; then you must carry my bones with you from here."²⁰And they moved on from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.²¹And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night;²²the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, ²"Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp over against it, by the sea. ³For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.'⁴And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so.

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"⁶So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him,⁷and took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.⁸And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the people of Israel as they went forth defiantly.

The first phase in the overall story about the sea event casts the action in terms of God's plan and Pharaoh's plan. On the one hand, in 13:17-22 events are presented as carefully ordered and controlled by God: "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the Philistines . . . (v. 17) But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness . . . (v. 18) and the Lord went before them . . . (v. 21)." In the divine monologue of 14:1-4 the Lord discloses to Moses what the divine plan is and how it relates to Pharaoh's conduct. On the other hand, 14:5-8 the reader learns the mind of Pharaoh and what governs his action. Thus, by the time the reader reaches 14:8 two contrasting plans, God's and Pharaoh's, have been set in motion. It is also clear to the reader (vv. 4, 8), however, that Yahweh's plan encompasses that of the Pharaoh.

ISRAEL'S VIEW

14:9-14

⁹The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pihahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord;¹¹and they said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you

done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."¹³ And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still."

The second section of the story focuses upon how the Israelites perceive the two plans which are now unfolding into action. The cry of vv. 11-12 indicates that the Israelites are more keenly attuned to the power of Pharaoh's plan than to God's work. Moses responds (vv. 13-14) by sharing his conviction about the reliable power of God's plan. He intended to encourage Israel by his witness.

MEETING AT THE SEA 14:15-29

¹⁵The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea. ¹⁷And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

¹⁹Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness; and the night passed without one coming near the other all night.

²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and

the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²²And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians, ²⁵clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel; for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

²⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." ²⁷So Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its wonted flow when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled into it, and the Lord routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained. ²⁹But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

The third section of the story records the confrontation of the two plans at two levels (cf. the different literary sources). According to one view, God's plan is carried forward directly by the Divinity's action (movement of pillar of cloud, strong east wind, terror strikes the Egyptians) and according to the other view, God's plan is carried forward indirectly through Moses' action (the rod). In this third section, it is clear that Pharaoh's plan has been subsumed under God's. The Lord uses Pharaoh's plan to assist in the accomplishment of the divine plan.

EPILOGUE

14:30-31

³⁰Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. ³¹And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

The short epilogue to the story about the event at the sea offers a counterpart to the middle section of the story where the Israelites feared because they could perceive only Pharaoh's plan at work (see especially v. 10). Now, in vv. 30-31, the story has reached a fitting conclusion: the Israelites saw that God's plan had been worked for their welfare. As a result they feared Yahweh.

CELEBRATION

15:1-21

15 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,
 "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
 the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
²The Lord is my strength and my song,
 and he has become my salvation;
 this is my God, and I will praise him,
 my father's God, and I will exalt him.
³The Lord is a man of war;
 the Lord is his name.
⁴"Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea;
 and his picked officers are sunk in the Red Sea.
⁵The floods cover them;
 they went down into the depths like a stone.
⁶Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
 thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.
⁷In the greatness of thy majesty thou

overthrowest thy adversaries;
 thou sendest forth thy fury, it consumes
 them like stubble.

⁸At the blast of thy nostrils the waters piled up,
 the floods stood up in a heap;
 the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
 I will divide the spoil, my desire shall
 have its fill of them.

I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.'
¹⁰Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them;
 they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹"Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?
 Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
 terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

¹²Thou didst stretch out thy right hand,
 the earth swallowed them.

¹³"Thou hast led in thy steadfast love
 the people whom thou hast redeemed,
 thou hast guided them by thy strength
 to thy holy abode.

¹⁴The peoples have heard, they tremble;
 pangs have seized on the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
 the leaders of Moab, trembling seizes them;
 all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them;
 because of the greatness of thy arm,
 they are still as a stone,
 till thy people, O Lord, pass by,
 till the people pass by whom thou hast purchased.

¹⁷Thou wilt bring them in, and plant
 them on thy own mountain,
 the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thy abode,
 the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have
 established.

¹⁸The Lord will reign for ever and ever."

¹⁹For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and

his horsemen went into sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. ²⁰Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing. ²¹And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."

In these verses we are presented with two traditions about the celebration at the sea which expressed the faith of the redeemed community. The first, 15:1-18, puts on the lips of Moses and the people of Israel a hymn-like song which probably dates from monarchical times. Here the praise of God for the saving event at the sea (vv. 1b-12) has been joined with the praise of God for the gift of the land and for God's abiding presence in the sanctuary (vv. 13-18). The "coming out" (of Egypt) thus was linked with the "coming into" the land. In this profession of faith, as in others, Israel regarded the event at the sea as the first of victories wherein Yahweh secured its life and wellbeing.

The transition which appears in 15:19 sets the context for the second tradition about the celebration at the sea. In 15:20-21 leadership in the celebration is attributed to Miriam. Scholars generally regard this as a more ancient tradition than the celebration recorded in 15:1-18. It may well be that the song of 15:21 is the Bible's oldest witness regarding the event at the sea.

The likeness of Miriam's celebration, with its tambourines, dance and song, to other biblical records (Judg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6) indicates that the celebration led by Miriam had the character of a victory celebration. Unlike the celebrations attributed to Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11) and to the women greeting Saul and David (1 Sam 18) however, the victorious warrior honored by Miriam was Israel's Divine Warrior. The proper context, then, for viewing Miriam's celebration is not a secular festival but Israel's cult. Miriam's dance and song not only expressed joy at victory. They were also ritual actions and, like all ritual, were intended to

capture the event being celebrated, expressing its meaning and keeping it alive. The dramatic movements of dance, accompanied by the words of the song and the sound of the tambourine, somehow expressed the struggle and victory, the fear and exultation, the death and life which Yahweh's battle at the sea entailed.

In 15:20-21 an early writer (perhaps the Yahwist) attributed the cultic celebration of the foundational event in Israelite religion to a woman who is introduced here, for the first time. Miriam is the first to articulate the religious dimension of the event at the sea. In all seven of the biblical texts in which she appears (Exod 15:20-21; Num 12:1-15; 26:59; 1 Chr 6:3; Micah 6:4; Deut 24:8-9; Num 20:1), Miriam is portrayed as a leader in the wilderness community. It is likely that in very early circles of oral tradition she enjoyed much more prominence than what has been handed on to us in the written texts.

The description of Miriam as prophetess is probably anachronistic since authentic prophetic activity is never attributed to her in the biblical texts. The writer seems to have described her in terms of leadership roles exercised by women in later generations. Likewise, the description of Miriam as Aaron's sister probably stems from an editor who sought to bring all liturgical leaders into association with Aaron, the priest who had come to be the figurehead for all cultic personnel in a late period of Israelite religion.

With the text of Exod 15:20-21 the writers appropriately conclude the story of the arduous struggle for freedom. In its faith-filled response Israel recognizes that the journey was God's doing. The Exodus event, together with its climax in the event at the sea, came to be seen as somehow telling the experience of all generations of Israelites. To belong to the people of God was to belong to a group which experienced a marvelous passage from bondage to freedom. To tell Israel's story entailed telling this exodus story. Miriam thus initiated a dance which many generations of believers would join and make their own.

SEALING THE RELATIONSHIP: THE COVENANT AT SINAI 19:1—24:18

The tremendous importance which Israel's religious tradition assigned to the covenant-making at Sinai is indicated by the vast amount of material allotted to it in Scripture. According to the biblical record Israel's experience at Sinai begins in chapter 19 of the Book of Exodus and it is not until Numbers chapter 10 that we are told of the people's departure from this mountain of God. Thus, a significant part of the Pentateuch (over half of the Book of Exodus, the entire Book of Leviticus, and the first ten chapters of the Book of Numbers) is situated within the context of Sinai. Moreover, the Book of Deuteronomy brings the Pentateuch to a close with a rehearsal of Yahweh and Israel's life together where primary attention is given to their encounter at the mountain of God.

When Israel wrote about the Sinai experience, it spoke of an encounter with the Living God through a special theophany (Exod 19), a word-event wherein Israel was taught the responsibilities which flowed out of its relationship with Yahweh (Exod 20-23), and Israel's acceptance under oath of

the relationship with all of its ramifications. The covenant which bound Israel to Yahweh was concluded and expressed symbolically in rituals rich with suggestions of shared life (Exod 24). To this story the Priestly circle of tradition attached large quantities of material (Exod 25-31, 35-40; Leviticus; Num 1-10) which it viewed as belonging to the covenantal theology associated with Sinai. Finally, within the context of this solemn event Israel also witnessed to its own infidelity and God's response, a story which dips heavily into the mysteries of human sin and divine compassion (Exod 32-34).

Even a superficial glance at the overall content of the material placed within the context of the Sinai event in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers indicates that most of it is law. The word *torah*, rendered "law" in modern English translations, has its starting point in a Hebrew root which means to point out or direct and, by extension, to teach or instruct. Biblical law, then, is best viewed as instruction regarding what it is to live faithfully within the mystery of a faithful God. The law falls within and belongs to the bond which constituted Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel.

It is significant that the Sinai law was not passed on by lawyers but by storytellers. The biblical writers collected generations of Israel's civil and religious laws, attributed their origin to God, and placed them within the story of salvation history, i.e., within the witness to God's saving deeds. This context provides an enduring reminder that for Israel law was not viewed in and of itself. Rather, it was embraced as continuous with the prior experience of deliverance from Egyptian bondage and as the expression of Israel's commitment to be faithful to that exodus experience.

As Moses had been drawn by the fire in the bush at this mountain of God and approached to hear its voice (Exod 3), so now all of the Israelites take their stand in relation to the fire at Mount Sinai and listen to words which express God's claim on them, a people redeemed by and for the Divine Self. The voice which addressed Moses from the fire had

spoken freely and out of divine fidelity. Now, at this new juncture in the exodus story, the voice instructs Israel that its new life of freedom is not to be chaotic and directionless like the desert wind. Israel's freedom is to be like God's, faithful. Freedom and fidelity, mystery and revelation, are held together for Israel as they had been for Moses, in the gifts of theophany and word.

THEOPHANY 19:1-25

19 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2And when they set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. 3And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, 6and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

7So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. 8And all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. 9And the Lord said to Moses, "Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you for ever."

Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. 10And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash

their garments, 11and be ready by the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12And you shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, "Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death; 13no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14So Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. 15And he said to the people, "Be ready by the third day; do not go near a woman."

16On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder. 20And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and many of them perish. 22And also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out upon them." 23And Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou thyself didst charge us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain, and consecrate it.'" 24And the Lord said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them." 25So Moses went down to the people and told them.

The narrative about the covenanting at Sinai begins in a deliberate and solemn style which reminds one of a sacred religious festival. It is probable that the depiction of the Sinai meeting with God was influenced by the experience of worshippers who later sought to express the meaning of the primitive event by somehow rehearsing it amidst the smoke and sounding trumpets of Israel's cult. The ritual purification at the foot of the mountain probably reflects the practice of later generations of worshippers.

The literary character of this chapter, like the mountain itself, seems to shift as thoughts are expressed uneasily and uncertainly in jagged juxtaposition. Verses 3-8 hasten to tell the whole covenant story from start to finish whereas the rest of the narrative moves very slowly and cautiously as if on sacred ground. Verse 9 articulates the purpose of the meeting in terms of the validation of Moses' role as mediator, a topic which is not addressed again until Exod 20:18-21. Verses 21-25 portray a rather forgetful Divinity who demonstrates no knowledge of directions which had already been given (cf. v. 21 and vv. 12-13), a slip of memory which Moses has to point out. Amidst concern that the people and the space be properly consecrated for the encounter with God (vv. 10-15 and vv. 21-25) lies the account of the theophany itself (vv. 16-20). The text further communicates the restlessness and excitement of this moment in Israel's history by portraying Moses' repeated trips up and down the mountain in accord with the duties of a zealous mediator.

Tensions in the text also appear in connection with the nature of God's presence and the people's taking their stand in relation to that Mystery. Verse 3 presupposes that the Divinity's presence at the mountain was an abiding one while other lines (vv. 9, 11, 18) suggest that the Divinity came to meet Israel at the mountain but was not at home there. As for the people's response, some lines (vv. 12, 21-25) presuppose that Israel, in its fervor, would rush the mountain. This led to a concern that the sacredness of the divine presence not be violated and precautionary measures were issued. On the other hand, Exod 19:16 and its sequel in Exod 20:18-21 portray the people as trembling at the divine

presence. Because they feared God's nearness they begged Moses to act as mediator.

The unevenness in this narrative is best explained by positing that it has been handed down by several writers representing different viewpoints. Either literally or figuratively, different generations of believers in ancient Israel undertook their own pilgrimages to Sinai. Each came away with a unique perspective on the significance of the encounter there. Although biblical scholarship has not reached a consensus regarding the correspondence between the threads of tradition in Exod 19 and the major Pentateuchal literary sources, many agree that for the most part the chapter represents a conflation of Yahwist and Elohist traditions.

The compact unit of Exod 19:3-8 deserves special attention. Scholars generally view it as an editorial insertion contributed by a writer from the Deuteronomistic school. Its content includes a proclamation of God's saving presence in the exodus event, here tenderly likened to the movement of an eagle sweeping up and bearing Israel to the Divine Self (v. 4). This graciousness calls for Israel's obedient response which in itself expresses a willingness to bind the relationship between Yahweh and Israel more firmly and so extend it into the future (vv. 5-6). Israel engages God's bonding initiative by swearing on oath to give itself over to Yahweh (v. 8). The structure of this unit has much in common with other texts which speak of covenant (Josh 24; 1 Sam 12). It is likely that in the structure we see an outline of recurring covenant renewal ceremonies as they were celebrated in the ancient Israelite community.

Exod 19:3-8 presents a concise summary of the overall event at Sinai, the details of which are now taken up in the text. Having established with great care God's presence (Exod 19), the biblical writers describe the gift of the law (Exod 20-23) and the formalization of the relationship in the making of the covenant (Exod 24).

THE DECALOGUE

20:1-17

20 And God spoke all these words, saying,

²"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³"You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁵you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

⁸"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; ¹¹for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

¹²"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

¹³"You shall not kill.

¹⁴"You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵"You shall not steal.

¹⁶"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his

maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

The word-event at Sinai begins with a statement of the divine name together with a reference to God's pivotal redemptive act which had brought Israel to this moment. Exod 20:2 presents the *torah*-instruction at Sinai as rising out of and continuous with God's freeing activity. The decalogue issues not from some universal natural law or lawgiver but from the One who is "your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Thus, what could have been a burdensome yoke is presented as a tie that binds Israel to the personal Mystery who frees.

Some scholars have noted that the decalogue flows out of God's self-identification and they conclude from this that we are to understand the laws as continuous with that self-identification. That is to say, the laws of the decalogue are presented as flowing from the righteousness and justice of God's own person. The decalogue, the very core of the life and integrity of the covenant community, must then be regarded as profoundly theocentric. The text bears witness to the notion that the very life of the community is centered in the person of the living and liberating God.

Considerable attention in scholarly discussions has been given to the question of whether or not the text of Exod 20 was modelled after the pattern of political treaties in the ancient Near Eastern world. It has been pointed out that Hittite treaty forms begin with the self-identification of the king who is initiating the treaty and that this is followed by a so-called historical recital in which the great king describes the relationship which has already been formed between himself and his prospective treaty partner. The account of the relationship characteristically highlights the good will which the great king has already demonstrated toward the other. These two sections of the treaty documents preface the stipulations which then spell out the loyalty and fidelity which the great king asks in return. Some scholars have seen this pattern in Exod 20 where the decalogue follows Yah-

1e
28
s,
o
v
,
r
)

weh's self-identification and a reference to the redemptive event of the exodus. Others, however, point out that the self-identification and reference to past deeds in Exod 20 are too brief to have been modelled on ancient Near Eastern treaties. In addition, they note that other parts of the typical treaty form (such as witnesses to the treaty agreement, a pronouncement of curses and blessings which will follow the fidelity or infidelity of the treaty partners, and instructions regarding the care of the treaty document) are not found in Exod 20 as they are, for instance, in Josh 24.

The self-disclosure of Exod 20:2 is followed by what many contemporary believers refer to as the "ten commandments" or what the Bible itself calls the "ten words" (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13, 10:4). That such a list enjoyed privileged status even in biblical times is suggested by this special designation and by the fact that it is presented as having been spoken directly by God to the community (cf. the beginning of other law collections such as Exod 20:22, Exod 25:1, Exod 35:1, and Lev 17:1), and by the fact that virtually the same list appears in different levels of tradition (cf. Exod 20, Deut 5, Hos 4:1-3).

The laws which comprise the decalogue are "apodictic" laws. As such they are characterized by the categorical nature of their content, typically expressed in short, straightforward statements. Apodictic law is usually devoid of statement of motivation, elaboration or explanation, and it does not provide for exceptions or specific extenuating features. It characteristically deals with matters of extreme concern, evidenced by the fact that disobedience frequently involves the death penalty or its equivalent, a curse (cf. Exod 21:15; Lev 20:9, 10, 16). Apodictic law addresses matters on which the very life of the community was thought to rest. Sometimes stated in negative formulations, it charts boundary points and aims at protecting core values of the community by categorically ruling out specific acts which were thought to endanger common life. Although they chart the outer limits encircling the community's well-being, apodictic laws do not offer specific guides for what is permissible and desirable within community life. The inner

part of the circle is left open. Thus, specific demands and responsibilities are subjects for discussion and further development and understanding. In the words of one scholar, specific procedures for life within the circle of these general policies are "trusted to a healthy feeling for justice." It is probable that originally the "ten words" were similarly-structured prohibitions forming a catechesis of tribal ethos that could easily be remembered and taught because of their simple formulation and because they were readily numbered on the fingers of the hands.

Regardless of the witness of Exod 34:1 and Deut 5:22, contemporary readers would do well not to regard the "ten words" as having been carved in stone. That is to say, these commandments probably were not delivered once for all by God at the mountain at Sinai and forever remained the same. The slight differences between the decalogues of Exod 20 and Deut 5 suggest that the lists were shaped by the faith of generations of believers and in some cases bear the fingerprints of different traditions in the final text. As such the "ten words" reflect human testimony from communities of believers. By the "ten words" Israel rejected those matters which were ruled out by the integrity and wholeness of the covenant community. The "ten words" emerged from a long inspired tradition.

While it is clear that the biblical writers regarded the commandments as numbering a total of ten (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4), post-biblical religious traditions have numbered the individual commandments in different ways. The divergent enumerations depend upon whether the prohibition against other gods (Exod 20:3) is read in conjunction with the prohibition against graven images (Exod 20:4-6) and whether the prohibition against coveting (Exod 20:17) is regarded as a single command or as two. A third point of divergent interpretations rests on whether Exod 20:2 is to be regarded as a command or simply as an introduction to the list which follows.

Briefly stated, Jewish tradition is alone in understanding verse 2 as the first commandment. The prohibitions against other gods and against graven images (vv. 3-6) are then read

as one commandment as is the prohibition against coveting (v. 17). Anglican, Greek Catholic and Reformed traditions regard v. 2 as an introduction. The prohibition against other gods (v. 3) is read as the first commandment and separate from the prohibition of graven images (vv. 4-6). The prohibition against coveting (v. 17) is understood to be a single command. Finally, Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions also regard v. 2 as an introduction to the list of ten commandments. They combine it with the prohibitions against other gods and against graven images (vv. 2-6) which together are viewed as constituting the first commandment. Lutherans and Roman Catholics read v. 17 as two commands. According to this enumeration the ninth commandment prohibits the coveting of a neighbor's spouse and the tenth commandment the coveting of a neighbor's goods. This division is closer to the copy of the decalogue in Deut 5:21.

As we turn our attention to a brief examination of each of the "ten words," the reader will recognize that we have adopted the enumeration shared by Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

The exact intent of the first commandment (Exod 20:3) is not perfectly clear because of the expression which the RSV renders "before me" but which literally means "before my face." Some have suggested that the commandment prohibits the setting up of idols in Yahweh's presence, i.e., in a place of worship. Whatever the case, the core value which it appears to protect is the Oneness which must be at the heart of the covenant community. Israel is bonded with One; its center is One. This is safeguarded by excluding other gods, other primary allegiances. The first "word" thus appears to be a commandment about Israel's radical monotheism. It is not so much addressed to a general intellectual acknowledgement of the existence of only one God as it is a call to absolute, categorical, singular loyalty. The wholeness and integrity of Israel's life, its oneness, demanded that its center be One.

The second commandment (Exod 20:4-6) diverges from several of the others in that it contains material which goes

beyond a simple, categorical negative prohibition which may have been the original form of the commandments. Thus, verse 4 begins with a simple prohibition of graven images but then goes on to prohibit any representation of God whatsoever. Verse 5 makes the command even more inclusive by prohibiting as well the worship of other gods. This is followed in verse 6 by a statement of motivation.

This commandment protects God's freedom. A graven image is constructed from lifeless material according to a human blueprint. Once constructed the image remains static; it is moved only by human initiative and according to the needs and wishes of the humans in whose control it rests. Such an image could never represent the One whom Israel experienced as moving in its history in ways which were dynamic and mysterious and free.

As in the second commandment, so in the third commandment (Exod 20:7) it is probable that the motivation clause represents an addition to what was originally a simple, categorical prohibition. Precise definition of the original intent of this prohibition continues to elude modern scholarship. The Hebrew expression which the RSV renders "in vain" is rooted in a semantic range which suggests emptiness, something to which there is no substance or worth, something not grounded in any reality. Given the ancient Near Eastern reverence for the power and mystery which belonged to one's name and the Israelite tradition of the gift of God's name to Moses (cf. the commentary on Exod 3:13-15), it seems appropriate that Israel would seek to insure the sacredness of the name of the One in whom they found life and blessing. This ruled out vain or evil uses of God's name, reserving it instead for solemn and hallowed occasions such as oath-taking and blessing. The third commandment thus prohibits the abuse of sacred sounds by their use in angry or superficial speech.

The fourth commandment (Exod 20:8-11) bears marks of the faith of different generations of believers. Scholars have suggested that the command which now appears in positive formulation originally was a short, negative prohibition like other commands of the decalogue. If this was the case, the

original prohibition may have resembled that which now appears in Lev 23:3: "...the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work. . . ." As it now appears in the text of Exod 20:8-11, the command has grown to include a listing of who is to rest (v. 10); it is expressed in terms used by the Deuteronomic writers. Moreover, verse 11 offers a rationale for sabbath rest which appears to be based on the view of creation recorded by the Priestly writer in Gen 1:1—2:4a. The sabbath command, therefore, more than any of the other commands, reflects a long history of theological reflection upon the practice of resting on the seventh day.

Sacred days and taboo days are known to have been marked by special observance including rest from routine activity by other peoples of the ancient world. Thus in observing sabbath the Israelites may have been adapting non-Yahwistic customs which marked mysteries associated with special moments in the rhythms of the universe. As it is stated in Exod 20:8-11, however, Israelite practice is thoroughly theocentric. As God had rested, so must believers and all those who assist with the labors of believers (children, servants, cattle, strangers). The first and last lines of the commandment refer to the holiness of the day. The Lord hallowed the sabbath (v. 11) and believers are not merely to rest on that day but to "keep it holy" (v. 8).

The fifth commandment (Exod 20:12) shares with the one which precedes it a departure from the style of simple, categorical prohibition. The command is voiced in the positive and includes a statement which describes the reward and hence motivation for its observance. If, as some have suggested, this command was originally voiced in the negative, it probably consisted of something like this: "Do not curse (or abuse) you father or your mother" (cf. Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9). It, like the others, was addressed to a community of adults. As such, it was designed to protect the honor of aged parents against adult offspring who might be abusive toward parents whose most vital years and service had been spent.

The writer affixed a promise to the command: a full life is

the reward for esteem and respect shown to one's parents. Thus to uphold one's parents' welfare is to insure one's own. One enhances the life one has received by revering its bearers.

The sixth commandment (Exod 20:13) initiates a list of several short, categorical prohibitions. Although there is much ambiguity about the precise intent of this prohibition against killing, it appears certain that this commandment seeks to secure the value of human life. To that end, it prohibits murder, the intentional shedding of blood. Israel regarded God's lordship of life as a sacred reality. While it seems true that Israel did actually tolerate the taking of human life in some cases, these instances were carefully monitored and controlled by the community through institutions such as the constraints of blood vengeance, altars and cities of refuge, and so forth. In other words, laws were carefully designed to insure that human life was not taken arbitrarily.

Stated categorically without motivation or qualification, the seventh commandment (Exod 20:14) presumably aimed to safeguard the value of the marital bond. This prohibition of adultery does not address the topic of sexual relations in general. It is specifically concerned with marriage. Israel saw the exclusive claims of the marital relationship as somehow touching upon the core of the life of the entire covenant community.

On the basis of Exod 21:16 and Deut 24:7 some scholars have suggested that the prohibition against stealing which constitutes the eighth commandment (Exod 20:15) represents a secondary development of a commandment which was originally directed against the stealing of persons, i.e., kidnapping. Whatever its original content, as it now stands it does not limit the inclusiveness of what is not to be stolen. Neither things nor persons are to be taken in secret. Twentieth century Western notions of the right to private ownership are foreign to the original context of this commandment. However, Israel did see and attempt to safeguard a connectedness between a person or family and those things or people which made up the person or family's

sphere of life. Thus, to steal was to transgress against another's sphere of life and, by extension, to transgress against the person of that other. To do so was regarded by ancient Israel as jeopardizing the integrity of life within the covenant community.

The ninth commandment (Exod 20:16) has its background in ancient Near Eastern legal procedure. It prohibits the twisting of speech before a communal institution of justice in a way which would deny another member of the covenant community access to justice. The commandment does not address itself to lying in general (cf. Hos 4:2). To protect the wholeness of the fabric of community life, Israel had to be able to trust the language of legal testimony which one member bore with regard to another. The commandment attests to a conviction in ancient Israel regarding the bond and mutual service between truth and justice.

In the Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditional lists of the ten commandments, the prohibition against coveting (Exod 20:17) is regarded as two commandments. That is to say, the command against coveting a neighbor's wife has been regarded as separate from the command not to covet a neighbor's belongings. On the other hand, it is also possible to regard the imperative not to covet one's neighbor's "house" (v. 17a) as intended to be inclusive of everything connected with the wholeness of a neighbor's life. Thus, a neighbor's "house" is further defined and specified as wife, manservant, maidservant, ox, and ass (v. 17b). The list is summed up in the concluding phrase: "or anything that is your neighbor's." This commandment bears a close connection with the prohibition against stealing but it is unique among the ten in that it addresses itself to an underlying attitude. The value protected by this prohibition shares much in common with the values which lie at the heart of the preceding commandments. Ancient Israel recognized that the integrity of the covenant community demanded mutual respect for persons, their very life, extensions of that life in one's primary relationships, one's reputation and good name, and one's belongings.

ON MOSES' MEDIATORIAL ROLE 20:18-21

¹⁸Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, ¹⁹and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." ²⁰And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin."

²¹And the people stood afar off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

These few verses bear strong resemblance to material which appeared in Exod 19, so much so that some have suggested that they were originally placed after Exod 19:18. The unit begins with reference to theophany in much the same terms as used in the preceding chapter and it also recalls the people's fearful response described in Exod 19:16. As in Exod 19:9, there is explicit reflection on Moses' mediatorial role; Exod 20:19 differs slightly in that the initiative for Moses' service is said to have arisen with the people and not with God as the preceding chapter had said. In verse 20 Moses introduces Israel to the purpose for the Sinai encounter; ultimately, he says, it is "that you may not sin."

Regardless of the original placement of these lines, they serve theological and literary purposes in their present context. First of all, in the present text the law (Exod 20:1-17) is now enveloped by theophany. The event narrated thus far is bipolar: there is both Mystery and revelation. The divine Mystery is shrouded in clouds and smoke yet the divine word is given clear expression. The law flows out of and back into the otherness of God and in the process the covenant community learns what it is to be holy.

Secondly, when read in its present context, verses 18-21 provide an opportunity for the tradition to record that

additional laws were given at Mount Sinai (Exod 20:22—23:33). Unlike the decalogue which is presented as having been spoken directly by God to the community, the additional laws in Exod 20-23 are presented as having been given to Moses, presumably because of the people's fear of God's direct speech. Moses thus acts as the community had called him to do; he mediated the further words of God.

In accord with the original design of this commentary, we forego treatment of the so-called Covenant Code which appears in Exod 20:22—23:33 (see Vol. 4, *Deuteronomy*, by Richard Clifford, S.J., pages 186-191) and proceed directly to the narrative which continues in Exod 24.

THE COVENANT

24:1-18

24 And he said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. ²Moses alone shall come near to the Lord; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him."

³Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." ⁴And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. ⁶And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." ⁸And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

⁹Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

¹²The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tables of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." ¹³So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴And he said to the elders, "Tarry here for us, until we come to you again; and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a cause, let him go to them."

¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

The biblical writers bring the event on Mount Sinai to a close with their accounts of the covenant rituals described in Exod 24:1-11. The remainder of the chapter (vv. 12-18) sets a context for the material which has been added, i.e., the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 25-31). Verses 12-18 also help to account for Moses' lengthy absence from the community which in turn is the background and starting point for the building of the golden calf as narrated in Exod 32.

The narrative about the ritual formalization of the covenant relationship reflects at least two distinct traditions. Verses 1-2 contain instructions for an encounter which is narrated in verses 9-11. According to this tradition, the leaders (Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders)

are called apart from the community and, although verse 2 seems to separate Moses from the small group of leaders, it is these "chief men of the people of Israel" who symbolically mark the ratification of Yahweh's covenant bonding with Israel by sharing a meal in the divine presence. This tradition says that these leaders "saw the God of Israel" (v. 10; cf. v. 11), a remarkable assertion in light of the biblical notion that death would come to one who gazed upon God (see, for example, Exod 33:20). The biblical writer appears to acknowledge that this event was exceptional with the note that "he (God) did not lay a hand on the chief men of the people of Israel" (v. 11). The caution of the biblical writer can be seen, however, in the fact that the text avoids a description of the Divine Self and offers instead a description of the floor which supported the Divinity (v. 10).

Exod 24:3-8 contain an alternate tradition regarding the conclusion of the covenant at Sinai. In contrast to vv. 1-2 and 9-11, the setting for the ritual described in vv. 3-8 would appear to be the base of the mountain where the people were. Furthermore, in distinction from the special roles of the "chief men of the people of Israel" in the tradition of vv. 1-2 and 9-11, this account stresses the participation of the entire community while Moses exercised the role of mediator. Another obvious difference between the two traditions is that the ritual meal of vv. 1-2 and 9-11 has been replaced in vv. 3-8 by a ceremony marked by the prominence of word (God's law and the people's oath) and blood (sprinkled first on the altar and then on the people). The structure of the solemn ceremony described in vv. 3-8 almost certainly reflects covenant renewal ceremonies in later Israel's cultic rehearsal of the Sinai event.

The variant traditions regarding the sealing of the covenant at Mount Sinai appear to represent two attempts at capturing the meaning of the bond between Yahweh and Israel. Both ceremonies feature symbols which speak of shared life. In envisioning the meal at the ancient mountain, one tradition tapped the view that the sharing of food somehow symbolizes sharing in the very stuff of life. A

shared meal suggests a communion made sacred by virtue of food's inherent connection with life itself (cf. the covenant meal in Gen 31:44-54). Another circle of tradition sought to capture the same covenant relationship by utilizing instead the blood in which life itself was thought to be contained (see Deut 12:23). To share blood is to share life, to become one. In these rituals ancient Israel suggests that in the covenant bond finalized at Mount Sinai Yahweh and Israel came to form a single family, a communion of life.

The final redactor of Exod 24:1-11 tried to lessen the differences between the two traditions by enveloping the service of word and blood (vv. 3-8) with the witness about the sacred meal (vv. 1-2, 9-11). In the final text, then, the tradition featuring the word and blood has the appearance of growing out of the instructions contained in vv. 1-2 and of flowing into and culminating in the communion described in vv. 9-11.

Exod 24:12-18 once again feature Moses' unique role in the bonding between Yahweh and Israel which was solemnized at Mount Sinai. His mediatorial position is secure here, having been steadily built into the witness of the chapters since the arrival at Sinai. For the first time Joshua is presented as accompanying Moses while Aaron and Hur appear together in the capacity of settling issues which might arise in Moses' absence (cf. the linking of Aaron and Hur as Moses' assistants in the war against the Amalekites described in Exod 17:8-13). The ancient account of Moses' ascent to the mountain (vv. 12-15a) is elaborated upon in the Priestly writer's witness of vv. 15b-18. The older tradition contained in vv. 12-15a points forward to the continuation of the narrative in Exod 32 by including Joshua at Moses' side and by telling us that Moses disappeared into the mountain in order to receive the tablets on which the law was written (v. 12; cf. Exod 32:15-16). Even so, the addition by the later Priestly writer points backward to the beginnings of this Sinai encounter by recalling the mysterious elements of the theophany described in Exod 19 (cloud and fire). Taken together, Exod 24:12-18 reach back to the

mystery of God's presence and they point forward to the mystery of Israel's failure to live faithfully within its bonded relationship with Yahweh (Exod 32).

Moses' lengthy sojourn into the mountain provides the context wherein biblical tradition inserted instructions about the tabernacle (Exod 25-31). We set aside this material and proceed to an examination of the narrative text which resumes in Exod 32-34.