EXODUS

AN EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY

VICTOR P. HAMILTON

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Baker Academic

Contents

Part 5: How to Build the Tabernacle (25:1–31:18)   *447*

Part 6: The Golden Calf and Covenant Renewal (32:1–34:35)   *527*

Part 7: Tabernacle Built, God's Glory Fills (35:1–40:38)   593

Preface

It has been my privilege since retiring from teaching Old Testament at Asbury College to devote full time to research and writing. This commentary is the first product of that time. I wish to express my appreciation to the administration of Asbury College for appointing me as "Scholar-in-Residence," and for allowing me to keep my office on campus. That has provided me a quiet place for much of my reflection and writing. Thanks also to the staff of the B. L. Fisher Library/Information Commons at Asbury Theological Seminary for their assistance. I have spent many an hour in that building, with full access to their invaluable resources, both books and periodicals.

Needless to say, without the encouragement and guidance of many individuals at Baker Academic, among them Jim Kinney, Brian Bolger, and a host of others, this book would never have seen the light of day. A big thank-you to all of them for their professional gifts in moving my manuscript to publication. A special thanks to Wells Turner, who has superbly supervised this project from start to finish in his capacity as a senior editor at Baker and has passed on to me a number of very helpful suggestions. This is the third book of mine that Baker has published, and it has been an honor to work with their staff. I wrote the book. They helped me write a better book.

I wish to reserve the highest accolade for my wife, Shirley, who has typed the entire manuscript for me. She has invested almost as much time in this project as I have. Additionally, she frequently interacted with me on the text, made many invaluable suggestions, and asked a lot of penetrating and helpful questions. For those kinds of contributions I am forever grateful to her.

Last of all, I thank our Lord for his sustaining grace and guidance. To him and him alone be all the glory. My prayer is that this commentary will not only find a place in the conversation within the biblical academy but will also be a reference book that a pastor can consult with profit when preparing to share this portion of God's Word with parishioners.

Abbreviations

Bibliographic and General

[ ]	encloses versification of the MT or the LXX when this differs from the English, as with Ps. 46:10 [11]
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ANEP	*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, trans. and annotated by W. F. Albright et al., 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
AT	author's translation
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907)
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, ed. I. J. Gelb et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956–)
cf.	*confer*, compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
COS	*The Context of Scripture*, ed. W. W. Hallo et al., 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002)
CTA	*Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939*, ed. A. Herdner, Mission de Ras Shamra 10 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1963)
EA	El-Amarna tablets: ed. J. A. Knudtzon, *Die el-Amarna-Tafeln* (1908–15; reprinted, Aalen: O. Zeller, 1964); continued in A. F. Rainey, *El-Amarna Tablets, 359–370*, 2nd rev. ed. (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1978)
EncJud	*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971–72)
esp.	especially
et al.	and others

fem.	feminine
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910)
GNB	Good News Bible
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962)
IDBSup	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. K. Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976)
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, rev. ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88)
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, ed. M. Dietrich et al., 2nd ed., Alter Orient und Altes Testament 24/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976)
lit.	literally
loc. cit.	*loco citato*, in the place cited
LXX	Septuagint, ancient Greek version of the Old Testament
masc.	masculine
Message	*The Message*, Eugene H. Peterson
MT	Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Scriptures
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures; The New Jewish Publication Society Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (1999)
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
pl.	plural
PRU	*Le palais royal d'Ugarit*, ed. C. F. A. Schaeffer et al. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1955–)
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
sg.	singular
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
TEV	Today's English Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version
trans.	translator, translated by
UT	*Ugaritic Textbook*, by C. H. Gordon. Analecta orientalia 38 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965)
v(v.)	verse(s)
Vulg.	(Latin) Vulgate
x	times a term/idea occurs, such as *nāṣal* in Exod. 18:10 [2x]

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Song	Song of Songs
Exod.	Exodus	Isa.	Isaiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jer.	Jeremiah
Num.	Numbers	Lam.	Lamentations
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Josh.	Joshua	Dan.	Daniel
Judg.	Judges	Hosea	Hosea
Ruth	Ruth	Joel	Joel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Nah.	Nahum
Esther	Esther	Hab.	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ps(s).	Psalms	Hag.	Haggai
Prov.	Proverbs	Zech.	Zechariah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mal.	Malachi

Old Testament Apocrypha

Jdt.	Judith	Sir.	Sirach
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees	Tob.	Tobit

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	James	James
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Eph.	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil.	Philippians	Rev.	Revelation
Col.	Colossians		

Other Ancient Sources

Alleg. Interp.	Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*
Ant.	Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

Bib. Ant.	Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*
Drunk.	Philo, *On Drunkenness*
Jub.	*Jubilees*
Names	Philo, *On the Change of Names*
Spec. Laws	Philo, *On the Special Laws*
Virt.	Philo, *On the Virtues*

Transliteration Patterns

Greek

α	*a*	ξ	*x*
β	*b*	ο	*o*
γ	*g/n*	π	*p*
δ	*d*	ρ	*r*
ε	*e*	σ/ς	*s*
ζ	*z*	τ	*t*
η	*ē*	υ	*y/u*
θ	*th*	φ	*ph*
ι	*i*	χ	*ch*
κ	*k*	ψ	*ps*
λ	*l*	ω	*ō*
μ	*m*	ʽ	*h*
ν	*n*		

Notes on the Transliteration of Greek

1. Accents, lenis (smooth breathing), and *iota* subscript are not shown in transliteration.
2. The transliteration of asper (rough breathing) precedes a vowel or diphthong (e.g., ἁ = *ha*; αἱ = *hai*) and follows ρ (i.e., ῥ = *rh*).
3. *Gamma* is transliterated *n* only when it precedes γ, κ, ξ, or χ.
4. *Upsilon* is transliterated *u* only when it is part of a diphthong (i.e., αυ, ευ, ου, υι).

Hebrew

א	ʾ	בָ	ā	*qāmeṣ*
ב	b	בַ	a	*pataḥ*
ג	g	הַ	a	furtive *pataḥ*
ד	d	בֶ	e	*sĕgôl*
ה	h	בֵ	ē	*ṣērê*
ו	w	בִ	i	short *ḥîreq*
ז	z	בִ	ī	long *ḥîreq* written defectively
ח	ḥ	בָ	o	*qāmeṣ ḥāṭûp*
ט	ṭ	בוֹ	ô	*ḥôlem* written fully
י	y	בֹ	ō	*ḥôlem* written defectively
ד/כ	k	בוּ	û	*šûreq*
ל	l	בֻ	u	short *qibbûṣ*
ס/מ	m	בֻ	ū	long *qibbûṣ* written defectively
ז/נ	n	בָה	â	final *qāmeṣ hēʾ* (בָה = āh)
ס	s	בֶי	ê	*sĕgôl yôd* (בֶי = êy)
ע	ʿ	בֵי	ê	*ṣērê yôd* (בֵי = êy)
ף/פ	p	בִי	î	*ḥîreq yôd* (בִי = îy)
צ/ץ	ṣ	בֲ	ă	*ḥāṭēp pataḥ*
ק	q	בֱ	ě	*ḥāṭēp sĕgôl*
ר	r	בֳ	ŏ	*ḥāṭēp qāmeṣ*
שׂ	ś	בְ	ĕ	vocal *šĕwāʾ*
שׁ	š			
ת	t			

Notes on the Transliteration of Hebrew

1. Accents are not shown in transliteration.
2. Silent *šĕwāʾ* is not indicated in transliteration.
3. The spirant forms ב ג ד כ פ ת are usually not specially indicated in transliteration.
4. *Dāgēš forte* is indicated by doubling the consonant. Euphonic *dāgēš* and *dāgēš lene* are not indicated in transliteration.
5. *Maqqēp* is represented by a hyphen.

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Introduction

The Narrative and Theology of Exodus

Before the book of Exodus begins to narrate an *exodus* ("a way out") of Hebrews from Egypt, it first describes an *eisodus* ("a way into") of a Hebrew family into Egypt. There cannot be, and need not be, an exodus unless there has been an eisodus. One need not ever have to get "out" of debt unless first of all one has gotten "into" debt. In a nutshell, the book of Exodus is about how the Lord God turns an *eisodus* into an *exodus* and why he does so, about how the Lord God changes a "going down" into a "coming up."

Why the Lord brings his people out of Egypt is as important, if not more important, than *how* he delivers Israel from Egypt. If the book of Exodus is about the exodus event, then the book should be concluded by the end of chap. 14, or by 15:21 if one wants to include Miriam's and Moses's lyrical response. But what is one to do with 15:22–40:38, all of which are postexodus events in the Exodus book?

The first answer, but not the most important answer, to *why* God delivers his people from Egypt is to rescue them from the excruciating oppression to which Pharaoh and Egypt are subjecting them. Why would the first two chapters of Exodus address this potential holocaust on foreign soil if it is only of minimal interest to the author (and to God)? Accordingly, I believe that liberation theology is correct in looking to this book of Scripture, at least to its first part, to fuel the passion of its message of "setting the captive free," especially when the captors are desensitized, megalomaniacal, bureaucratic governments that rule with an iron fist and keep the masses in line and impoverished.

I cannot imagine that the Lord of Scripture is moved to action when he hears Israel's moaning under its bondage at Egyptian hands but looks the other direction or plugs his ears lest he hear Philistines moaning under bondage

at Assyrian hands or Canaanites moaning under bondage at Hittite hands. Gratuitous suffering, whoever the perpetrator and victim are, is something to which the Lord is never indifferent. He feels about Philistine and Canaanite boy babies as he does about Hebrew boy babies.

There is, however, a second answer to why God delivers Israel from Egypt that, in my judgment, surpasses the above first answer. I argue that even if the Hebrews have been enjoying a blissful life in Egypt, that if Egypt for them has turned out to be a paradise, a French Riviera or a Hawaii, the Lord would still take them out of that land.

The reason for that is that Israel's misery is not the Lord's primary motivating factor. Rather, it is to fulfill the covenant he has made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of which Genesis speaks. That covenant includes Israel's settlement in the land of Canaan. See the emphasis on the "land" that God promises repeatedly throughout Genesis to the patriarchs (Gen. 12:1–2; 13:14–17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 22:17b; 24:7; 26:3–4; 28:13b; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24). The suffering Israelites never ask God to act on it, as later Moses does. Before Moses asks God to "remember" his pact with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 32:13), God already "remembered" his promise to those three (2:24). So Moses is a little late in asking God to do something God has already done. Hence, we can say that the most crucial reason for the exodus is to fulfill a covenantal promise.

Having said that, it is unlikely that the Hebrews were interpreting their exodus that way. For them what is happening is not a salvation "to" but a salvation "from." It is a deliverance from tyranny, a moment when light beats back the darkness, as it did at creation, a time when hope is birthed.

Many Christian writers have observed the "salvation" theme, at least through the first fifteen chapters of Exodus. After pointing that out, they then proceed to make the parallels between old-covenant salvation and new-covenant salvation. Some of these parallels are quite legitimate: (1) a tyrant rules the nest, be he Pharaoh or Satan; (2) Israel/the individual are in bondage to a power greater than themselves; (3) Israel/the individual are totally incapable of liberating themselves; (4) salvation is a deliverance, a liberation from bondage; (5) only God (in Christ) can provide such an exodus.

However, there are at least two major differences between "salvation" in Exod. 1–15 and "salvation" in the Second Testament. For one thing, as I understand it, salvation in the Second Testament is, for the most part, salvation from sins I/we have committed. By contrast, salvation in Exod. 1–15 is salvation from sins others have committed against me/us (Egypt against Israel).

The second difference is related to the first difference. In Second-Testament salvation, the experience alters the relationship between the individual/group saved and one's/its Savior. The alien becomes a citizen. An enemy becomes a friend. Those who are far away are now brought near. Reconciliation has taken place. See, for example, the radical way Paul speaks in Eph. 2:1–22 of conversion and the major changes it introduces into the divine-human relationship.

Salvation in Exod. 1–15 does not change the relationship between Yahweh and Israel; rather, it confirms and reestablishes a relationship that already exists. The Lord saves Israel not so that Israel may *become* God's people but because Israel already *is* God's people, and such a deliverance is essential for the realization of the plan and purpose that God has for his people down the road. As early as the burning-bush incident, with the moment of liberation yet a good way off, Moses hears his God already referring to Israel as "my people" (Exod. 3:7, 10).

This understanding of salvation may help explain why Exodus prefers to use much more extensively the verbs *ʿālâ* ("bring up") and *yāṣāʾ* ("bring out") for the exodus, what one might call "locomotive verbs," rather than the more-explicit "salvation-family verbs" (*yāšaʿ, pādâ, gāʾal, mālaṭ, ʿāzar, nāṣal*). These are present in Exodus, or in parallel portions of the Torah, but only sparingly. For example, the verb *yāšaʿ* ("save," and the verb from which the proper names "Joshua" and "Jesus" are formed) appears only once in Exodus (14:30) with God as the subject, and the noun *yĕšûʿâ* ("salvation") also only once (15:2). (Jethro's daughters use this verb in 2:17 to tell their father what Moses has done for them at the well.) Contrast that with the Hiphil of *yāṣāʾ* ("bring out"), of which there are well over twenty instances in Exodus. Vocabulary-wise, lots of *yāṣāʾ*, little of *yāšaʿ*. See further the perceptive insights of Barr (1973) on this topic.

Following the exodus and the first taste of freedom, Israel finds itself in a wilderness (much like Hagar does in Gen. 16 and 21) that is threatening enough to make life back in Egypt desirable, at least to some, as impossible as that sounds. God does not lead his people from carnage directly to Canaan. After the exit from suffocating land, the way to promised land is through unpromising land. As Birch et al. (2005: 123) says, "God's salvation does not guarantee life without hardships. The world outside of bondage is also a world with dangers and struggles. . . . In the context of such struggle, even bondage can begin to look attractive."

The God of chaps. 1–14 who "sees, hears, remembers, is concerned about, and comes down" is now in chaps. 15–18 (and beyond) the God who "tests." Wilderness time is testing time. The Israel who has "cried" in chaps. 1 and 2 is now the Israel who "complains." The God of chaps. 1–14 who graciously provides for Israel's liberation now graciously provides for Israel's hydration, their obstinacy notwithstanding. If God can prevent death brought on by cruelty and barbarism, can he also prevent death brought on by hunger and thirst? There is no indication that God ever entertains any second thoughts about leading recalcitrant Israel out of Egypt ("Maybe I should have left the ingrates there"). He did think of "destroying" them (32:10) but never of "leaving them in the lurch," although annihilation might be considered as bad as abandonment, maybe even worse. But as in Gen. 1:1–2:4a, anything God starts, he finishes. No Pharaoh, no anybody, will derail a plan that is in God's heart.

Israel, according to the structure of Exodus and Numbers, spends a good bit of time in the wilderness (Smith 1999):

Exodus	Numbers
1:1–15:21 in Egypt	1:1–10:10 at Sinai
15:22–18:26 in the wilderness	10:11–21:35 in the wilderness
19–40 at Sinai	22–36 in Transjordan

(Actually there is more wilderness time in Exodus and Numbers than the chart suggests, for Sinai too is part of the wilderness. Perhaps, then, a better way to outline Exodus would be: (1) in Egypt [1:1–12:30]; (2) beyond Egypt [12:31–18:27]; (3) at Sinai [19–40].)

Far and away the most critical revelations that appear in the wilderness era are those that take place at Mount Sinai. Far and away the most critical aberration that appears in the wilderness era is what takes place at Mount Sinai. Hence, this mountain is a place of great sanctity and gross sacrilege.

Under the category of "critical revelations," one includes these: (1) the Lord's offering of a covenant to his people (chap. 19); (2) the revelation of the Lord's law that articulates the guidelines by which his covenant people are to order their lives (chaps. 20–23); (3) the sealing of that covenant in a most moving ceremony (chap. 24); (4) the building of a place of worship where God will meet with his people (chaps. 25–31, 35–40). It is of no little interest that the disclosure of these monumental matters takes place in the wilderness. God speaks to his people about these most holy matters in a decidedly unholy place before they enter the holy land.

Furthermore, God's two most important revelations to his people take place when Israel is *not* on the move: Exod. 19:1–Num. 10:10 while camped at Sinai; and the legislation in Deuteronomy (12–29) while camped in the Plains of Moab, in the Transjordan.

Seven or eight times the text of Exodus cites Israel on the move from place X to place Y: 12:37a; 13:20; 14:1–2; 15:22a; 15:27; 16:1; 17:1; 19:1–2. Little significant revelation takes place during these journeys until the last one. God chooses to speak most clearly to his people when (a) they are camped rather than on the move, and (b) when they are alone in a wilderness, rather than in a land filled with all sorts of "people-ites." Most often, as far as I can determine, God speaks to Moses when they are alone. The posture of stillness and solitude creates an atmosphere that allows God to speak and his people to hear (see Ps. 46:10 [11]). That we are yet uncertain about Mount Sinai's location indicates that the reader should focus more on *what* God says than on *where* he says what he says, beyond recognizing the general "wilderness" area.

The Lord does not offer a covenant to his people until after (a) he has delivered Israel from Egypt and from Pharaoh, and (b) he has led and provided for them in the wilderness. A God who is a saving God and a sustaining God

now desires to become the covenant God of those he has saved and sustained. Clearly this covenant does not initiate a relationship between God and Israel, for we just observed that as early as Exod. 3 God labels Israel as his people. Thus the covenant raises an existing relationship between two parties (Yahweh and Israel) to a higher and more intimate level. It is the difference, to use a human analogy, between fiancé/fiancée and spouse/spouse.

The covenant at Sinai is not distinct from the covenant God has made with Abraham. Rather, it fulfills that covenant. There is not one covenant with the patriarchs and another covenant with their offspring some four centuries later. What God has started in Gen. 12 he is bringing to completion in Exod. 19–24. Abraham, the "friend" of God (Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; James 2:23), anticipates Israel as the Lord's "treasured possession." God's word to Abram, "Walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1b), anticipates his word to Israel about being "a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). God's promise to Abram that all nations "will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3; 18:18) anticipates God's word to Israel to be "a kingdom of priests," for as Moses has heard his "call to ministry" in Exod. 3–4, Israel now hears its "call to ministry" in Exod. 19. The emphasis on God's honoring Abraham's obedience (Gen. 22:15–18) echoes the call to faithful obedience on Israel's part throughout Exod. 20–24. God not only blesses; he also uses, beyond calculation, those who lovingly obey him.

Part of the covenant that God makes with his people at Sinai includes the commandments of the Decalogue (20:1–17) and the more detailed laws of the Book of the Covenant (20:22–23:19). Law never comes before covenant in the Bible, so it is inconceivable, for example, that chap. 20 could precede chap. 19. But covenant never exists apart from law, anymore than a marriage ceremony can delete the exchange of vows. If the purpose of covenant is to elevate (or initiate) a relationship between two parties, then the purpose of law is to help protect and nourish that relationship by providing guidelines or boundaries that, if faithfully honored, will go a long way in preserving and extending that relationship. And because this covenant relationship is one between nonequals, Yahweh the master and Israel the servant, it is Yahweh who determines the guidelines and sets the boundaries.

There is no clear-cut prioritizing or scaling of these *miṣbōt* (commandments) that permits the contemporary reader of Scripture, Jewish or Christian, to focus in on 20:1–17, but to brush aside as irrelevant 20:22–23:19. (For a thoughtful treatment of the "relevance" of all this Sinai legislation for modern believers, see Sprinkle 2006.) I find, on the one hand, no evidence that the Book of the Covenant stands in the shadow of the Decalogue, as if the latter is on the front burner and the former is on the back burner. The God who says, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3), also says (through Moses), "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk" (23:19b). The Lord is sovereign enough to be able to tell his people not only how to worship him, but also how to prepare the meals one eats in the privacy of one's home. On the other

hand, other passages in Scripture graphically spell out the consequence for worshiping other gods. I am not aware of any passage that tells what happens to the individual who, behind the closed doors of the home, boils a kid in its mother's milk. Plus, the significance of the Decalogue over the Covenant Code shows forth in that the Lord speaks the former directly to his people, and the only time he does so in Exodus, while he delivers the contents of the Covenant Code to Israel through Moses. (In my commentary section to follow, especially the last verse of chap. 19, I shall present the argument of some that the Lord also delivers the Decalogue through Moses.)

Any covenant-making moment calls for a ceremony, be it a bar/bat mitzvah, a christening, a baptism, or a wedding to solemnize the moment. Exodus 24 records the moment of covenant ratification in which, with a blood covenant, Yahweh bonds with Israel, and Israel bonds with Yahweh. In chaps. 19–23 Israel has heard. Now in chap. 24 Israel must respond to what it has heard. Its response is clear: "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." Who would not want to obey a God who has both saved and sustained one in perilous places and times? The more one trusts him, the easier it is to obey him.

Earlier I said that if Exodus were primarily about the exodus, then the book could have concluded by the end of chap. 14. If the primary purpose of God's delivering his people is that he might engage them in a covenant and solicit their obedience, then Exodus could conclude with chapter 24.

The last portion of Exodus, chaps. 25–31, 35–40, demonstrates that God's concern is to move his people beyond obedience, as crucial as that is, to worship, to having a place where God can dwell among them (*miškān*) and meet with them (*'ōhel mô'ēd*). Divine, legal pronouncements give way to divine presence. Exodus begins by briefly referring to Jacob's "going down" to Egypt (Gen. 46:3 uses *yārad*) and ends by referring to the Lord's "coming down" from the mountaintop to dwell among his people (although chap. 40 does not use *yārad* language). The God who has "come down" in Exod. 3:8 to rescue his people is the God who in Exod. 40 comes down to remain with his people. It is a "coming down" that shifts in emphasis from deliverance to dwelling, from saving to staying. Alter (2004) has picturesquely described the change from the pulsating narrative of Exodus up to this point to the ordered liturgy in chap. 25 and following. He says that chaps. 25–31, 35–40 provide a "beautiful ordering of sacred space, a zone of choreographed repetition set off against the unsettled peregrinations of the Wilderness generation. The satisfaction this material gives its audience is not story but pageantry" (2004: 305).

As early as 3:12 ("When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will *worship* God on this mountain") the worship theme surfaces. Pharaoh's refusal is a refusal to release Israel so that the people might worship Yahweh ("Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God" [3:18b]). In chap. 19 Moses instructs the people how best to prepare for a worshipful encounter with God, an experience akin

to his own at the burning bush. Surely it is no accident that the Book of the Covenant begins (20:24–26) and ends (23:14–19) with worship-related emphases. And in 24:1 Moses and others are to come up and worship, albeit at a distance, Moses excepted. But in chap. 40, nobody needs to "go up" to worship, for the divine glory came down and "settled upon" the shrine. G. I. Davies (1999: 149) has appropriately called Exodus "a theology of liberation for worship."

Exodus concludes with two powerful contrasts. In the penultimate chapter, one reads that the Israelites do "just as the Lord had commanded" (39:43). That positive comment contrasts with chap. 32, in which Israel does everything the Lord has forbidden. Similarly chap. 40 in several places says that "Moses did . . . just as the Lord commanded him." The actions of Moses in chap. 40 contrast vividly with his actions earlier in chaps. 3 and 4, where Moses is unwilling to do what the Lord is commanding him to do.

In the opening chapters of Exodus, it is Pharaoh who determines Israel's movements. In the last chapter of Exodus (vv. 36–38) and onward, it is the cloud and glory of God that determine Israel's movements. In the process Israel has shifted masters. Pharaoh controls their lives in the early chapters of Exodus. Yahweh controls their travels in chap. 40. Israel moves on only when the cloud lifts. Otherwise, they stay put. As Isbell (1982: 45) correctly observes, "The real issue throughout the narrative [of Exodus] is not slavery vs. freedom, but merely the identity and character of the master whom Israel must serve."

There are any number of ways to outline the contents of the book of Exodus. I cite a few that I find creative and compelling.

1. Westermann 1967: 55–56:

  I. God's Saving Act: Deliverance out of Distress (chaps. 1–14)
    A. The Distress (chaps. 1–11)
    B. The Deliverance (chaps. 12–14)
 II. Man's Response in Praise (15:1–21)
III. God's Action: Preservation (15:22–18:27)
    A. From Thirst (15:22–27; 17:1–7)
    B. From Hunger (chap. 16)
 IV. [Israel's] Response in Obedience (chaps. 19–31)
  V. Transgression and Renewal (chaps. 32–40)

2. Smith 1997: 190:

  I. Egypt
    A. Chapters 1–2: Moses's movement from Egypt to Midian
    B. Two calls and two confrontations
        i. 3:1–6:1: Moses's first call and confrontation with Pharaoh

  i′. 6:2–14:31: Moses's second call and Yahweh's confrontation with Moses

   The conflict between the powers of Egypt and Sinai

   15:1–21: Victory at the sea

 II. Sinai

  A′. 15:22–18:27: Israel's movement from Egypt to Midian

  B′. Two covenants and two sets of tablets

   i. Chaps. 19–31: Israel's first covenant with Yahweh; the first tablets

   i′. Chaps. 32–40: Israel's second covenant with Yahweh; the second tablets

3. Janzen (1997: 9–11), who sees Exodus as "a Story in two acts":

 A. Oppression, Redemption, Covenant (1–24)

  B. Planning a Place for Presence (25–31)

 A′. Sin, Redemption, Covenant (32–34)

  B′. Preparing a Place for Presence (35–40)

Among other connections between the "two acts," Janzen notes that in *A* Israel comes under dire threat from Egypt because of a "change" in Egypt's leadership, while in *A′* Israel comes under dire threat from Yahweh because of a "change" for the worse in Israel's behavior. In *A* the Lord intercedes with Moses to go to Egypt to bring Israel out, while in *A′* Moses intercedes with the Lord not to wipe out Israel. In *A* the Lord's saving his people from Egypt and Pharaoh is followed by the Lord's entering into a covenant with his people, while in *A′* the Lord's saving his people from his own wrath is followed by a renewal of the covenant.

4. Longman (2009: 34) offers the following concise outline, stating that it captures the book's three major themes of deliverance, law, and presence:

 I. God saves Israel from Egyptian bondage (1–18)

 II. God gives Israel his law (19–24)

 III. God commands Israel to build the tabernacle (25–40)

5. At the risk of overusing rhyming words, I offer my own outline:

 1. Oppression (1:1–2:25)

 2. Trepidation (3:1–4:31)

 3. Rejection (5:1–23)

 4. Reaffirmation (6:1–30)

 5. Confrontation (7:1–12:30)

 6. Liberation (12:31–14:31)

Oppression in Egypt

(1:1–6:1)

Little does Jacob realize when God speaks to him nocturnally, instructing him to go down to Egypt (Gen. 46:3–4), that the sojourn will last well beyond his lifetime, 430 years in fact (Exod. 12:40). While on that occasion he hears God's promises to "make you into a great nation," and "I will surely bring you back again," more than likely he is uninformed of what God has earlier said to his grandfather. That is, for 400 of those 430 years Jacob's descendants will be "enslaved and mistreated" (Gen. 15:13). For one reason or another, God does not bring that grim prospect up to Jacob. God's emphasis is on the termination of the servitude rather than on the duration of the servitude.

Hence, there is a considerable chronological gap between the end of Genesis, concluding with the death of 147-year-old Jacob, the last 17 years of which he lives in Egypt (Gen. 47:28), and the death of 110-year-old Joseph (Gen. 50:26).

For the first portion of those 400 years, any mistreatment and oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt must be mild and sporadic. Presumably Exodus begins toward the end, or least the second half, of those four centuries. As far as biblical record goes, they are years that the text passes over in virtual silence. There is no record of God's speaking even once during that interlude. The last time the text has recorded God as speaking to anybody is Gen. 46:2–4, and that is briefly in a nocturnal vision to Jacob. Before that, one has to go back to Gen. 35:1, 10. Fast-forwarding the tape, one finds that God is not heard from again until Exod. 3:4.

1

The Hebrews' fortunes go downhill rapidly when an anonymous Pharaoh "who did not know about Joseph" comes to the Egyptian throne (Exod. 1:8). One suspects that if he knew about Joseph and his salvific leadership that also spared Egypt through difficult times, such knowledge would override and cancel out any suspicions he entertains about these "foreigners" who live on his turf and who, in his imagination, pose a colossal threat to the well-being of his empire.

The first two chapters of Exodus provide a summarization of these brutal times for the Hebrews. The Lord's word to Abram in Gen. 15:13 is now coming to pass graphically and ominously. Still, no word from God, no word that would rend the heavens and stop this ruthless oppressor dead in his tracks. Thankfully the actions of some God-fearing women limit the death toll, but the torment continues.

That is, until God encounters a shepherd by a bush and calls him to be the instrument whom God will use to liberate his people from Egypt and lead them to a promised land. That shepherd is Moses. Chapters 3 and 4 of Exodus record his "call." It is a "call account" that has more than its share of bumps and sharp curves. But God sticks with a trying-to-get-out-of-it Moses as much as he sticks with a trying-to-get-out-of-it Jonah. In neither case does the Almighty adopt a take-it-or-leave-it disposition.

Chapter 5 records Moses's first attempt to persuade Pharaoh to release the Hebrews. Judged by the yardstick of "success in ministry," Moses's efforts are an unmitigated disaster. Both Pharaoh and his own flock of sheep reject Moses and his message. No wonder, then, that if in chap. 2 it is the Hebrews who are "crying out" (either just crying out, or crying out to God), at the end of chap. 5 it is Moses who is crying out to God. The one commissioned and sent by God to deliver the Hebrews from their lamenting can only articulate his own angry (and honest) lament.

2

Multiplying in Egypt

(1:1–7)

Translation

¹And these [are] the names of the sons of a man named Israel who came to Egypt, each with his own househeld: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, ⁴Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵Those souls issuing from Jacob's thigh numbered seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶Joseph, along with all his brothers and that entire generation, died. ⁷Still, the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and became extremely mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

Grammatical and Lexical Notes

1:1. The first word in Exodus is "and" (*wĕʾēlleh*, "*And these* [are] the names of . . ."), indicating that Exodus, rather than being a distinct book, is simply the continuation of the narrative that Genesis has begun. However, the LXX does not start with "and" and has its own name: "Exodus." These facts indicate that for the Greek translator(s) Exodus was considered a distinct book that could stand by itself (Wevers 2004: 21).

1:6. Although the subject of the verb "died" is plural ("Joseph, his brothers, that entire generation"), the verb is singular. There are several examples in Exodus of a compound subject with a singular verb, the reason for which is to highlight the principal person in the narrative (Exod. 4:29; 7:6, 10; 12:30; 15:1; 16:6; 29:21b).

1:7. "Was filled with them" illustrates an accusative of relation after a verb in the Niphal (cf. 1 Kings 7:14, "Huram was full of wisdom"; 2 Kings 3:20, "and the land was full of water"; Ezek. 10:4, "and the court was full of the radiance of the Lᴏʀᴅ's glory.").

1:7. One way Hebrew expresses the superlative (here indicated by "extremely") is by doubling the word: *mĕʾōd mĕʾōd*. Genesis examples include 7:19 ("rose greatly"); 17:2, 20 ("greatly increase"); 17:6 ("very fruitful"); 30:43 ("grew exceedingly prosperous").

Commentary

Exodus (in the Hebrew at least; see above note on 1:1) begins with the word "and" ("and these [are]"). This conjunction links the story of Exodus with Genesis, one taking up where the other leaves off. Leviticus ("and-called to Moses") and Numbers ("and-spoke the Lord") begin similarly. Genesis through Numbers is one story, a Tetrateuch.

1:1

3

Actually Exodus does not pick up exactly where Genesis leaves off. Exodus 1 goes back to the genealogy of Jacob's family in Gen. 46:8–27 rather than the end of Genesis. The repetition of the introductory "these are the names of . . ." from Gen. 46:8 indicates the writer's intention to link Gen. 46:8–27 with Exod. 1:1–5. In the latter passage he does so by resuming the subject of the former, thus arching over the intervening account, 46:28–50:26 (Talmon 1978: 14–15).

For a similar introductory phrase to name lists see Exod. 6:16 ("These are the names of the sons of Levi"); 2 Sam. 23:8 ("These are the names of David's mighty men"); 1 Kings 4:7–8 ("Solomon also had twelve district governors. . . . These are their names"). An Aramaic text from the fifth century BC begins as follows: "Now these are the names of the women who were found at the gates in Thebes and were taken prisoners" (Cowley 1923: 127, text #34).

1:2–4 Although these opening verses are taken from Gen. 46:8–27, the order in which the names are listed is different. Actually the best parallel to Exod. 1:2–4 is Gen. 35:23–26 (which also includes Joseph). Genesis 46:8–27 lists first the sons by Leah (vv. 8–15), then those by her maidservant, Zilpah (vv. 16–18), then the sons by Rachel (vv. 19–22), and finally the sons by Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah (vv. 23–25).

Exodus 1:2–4, however, arranges the sons chiasmically according to matriarchal origin:

  A the sons of Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun)
    B Rachel's second son (Benjamin)
    B′ the sons of Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah (Dan, Naphtali)
  A′ the sons of Leah's maidservant, Zilpah (Gad, Asher).

1:5 The Hebrew word for "thigh" (*yerek*) may sometimes refer to the genitalia, male or female. For example, what part of the anatomy is involved in those passages in Genesis (24:2, 9; 47:29) in which somebody puts his hand under the "thigh" of another as he makes a promise to that person? Literally, the thigh, or possibly the genitals? Similarly, the reference to the "thigh" of the suspected adulteress wasting away or sagging (Num. 5:21, 22, 27) is probably a euphemism for her procreative organs.

Verse 5 and Deut. 10:22 tell us that Jacob has seventy descendants. "Seventy" is a frequent number in Scripture and elsewhere (Burrows 1936). There are seventy nations (Gen. 10); seventy elders of Israel (Exod. 24:1; Ezek. 8:11); seventy other elders (Num. 11:16); seventy submissive kings (Judg. 1:7); seventy struck by the Lord (1 Sam. 6:19); Gideon's seventy sons (Judg. 8:30); seventy offspring riding seventy donkeys (Judg. 12:14); Ahab's seventy sons (2 Kings 10:1). Luke 10:1 says that Jesus sent out seventy or seventy-two of his disciples (there is good ancient manuscript evidence for both numbers).

4

In some instances it seems to be a precise number, and in others it symbolizes a large group of people.

In a Canaanite text from Ugarit that describes Baal as preparing a divine banquet (*KTU* 1.4 vi:46), this line appears: "Baal/Hadad invites the seventy sons of Athirat / he supplies the gods with rams (and) with wine." Parker (1997: 134, 171n135) adds this observation, "The number of gods perhaps survive in the later Jewish notion of the seventy angels, one for each of the seventy nations ([Babylonian Talmud,] *Shabbat* 88b; *Sukkah* 55b)."

The LXX, along with a Dead Sea Scroll text of Exodus (4QEx[a]), reads "seventy-five" instead of "seventy." Stephen too uses this number (Acts 7:14), as do Josephus (*Ant*. 2.7.4 §176) and the book of *Jubilees* (44.33). The difference is because Gen. 46:20 LXX adds five names to the families of Manasseh and Ephraim (details in R. Klein 1974: 14–15).

Unlike in Numbers, there is no indication that this first generation's death is in any way linked to a judgment from God. The first generation of Israel in Egypt fares much better than the first generation of Israel who flees Egypt. **1:6**

In Genesis the problem is too much infertility. Here so much fertility will arouse the paranoid fears of Pharaoh. Apparently there are few, if any, Sarahs or Rebekahs or Rachels in Goshen. **1:7**

There are numerous places, especially in Genesis, where the words "be fruitful/fertile" (*pārâ*) and "multiply" (*rābâ*) occur together. The two are used with animals (Gen. 1:22; 8:17), Adam (1:28), Noah (9:1, 7), Abraham (17:2, 6), Ishmael (17:20), Isaac (26:4, 24), and Jacob (28:3; 35:11; 48:4). Of these many parallels, the closest to Exod. 1:7 is Gen. 1:28, for they are the only two verses among the lot with a sequence of five nonidentical verbs ("be fruitful/ increase/fill/subdue/rule" and "were fertile/prolific/multiplied/became mighty/ filled with them"). "The climax of Genesis 1 is Exodus 1: the divine power to proliferate found its highest expression in the emergence of Israel" (Porten and Ruppaport 1971: 368).

The word I have rendered "prolific" is the verb *šāraṣ*, "to swarm, teem" (Gen. 1:20–21). The related noun, *šereṣ*, refers to the "swarming things" of Gen. 1:20 (aquatic creatures) and 7:21; 8:17 (land creatures). Leviticus 11:20 ("all winged swarming creatures") forbids their consumption. The use of this verb to describe Israel's phenomenal growth in Egypt, and its connections elsewhere with lower forms of life, suggests that their growth was "insect-like" (Gruber 1992: 101). More than normal conceived. Fewer than normal miscarried. More than normal survived to adulthood.

The parallel pair *pārâ*/*šāraṣ*, here side by side, occur again in distant parallelism in Ps. 105, parts of which (vv. 23–36) reflect on this section of Exodus: Ps. 105:24a and 30, "The Lord made his people very fruitful [*pārâ*]. . . . The land teemed [*šāraṣ*] with frogs." So the story goes from teeming Israelites in Egypt in Exod. 1 to teeming frogs in Egypt in Exod. 8.

An Anxious Pharaoh

(1:8–14)

Translation

⁸A new king who did not know Joseph came to power in Egypt. ⁹He said to his advisers, "Indeed the people of the sons of Israel outnumber us and are more powerful. ¹⁰Come now, let us deal wisely with him lest he multiply. Should war break out, he might join our enemies, fight against us, and go up from the land." ¹¹Then they put over him taskmasters to crush him with forced labor. He built store cities (Pithom and Rameses) for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they sought to crush him, the more he multiplied and became even more prolific, with the result that the Egyptians dreaded the sons of Israel. ¹³The Egyptians imposed backbreaking labor on the sons of Israel. ¹⁴They embittered their lives with excruciatingly hard work involving mortar and bricks and other kinds of demanding labor out in the field, all sorts of backbreaking labors that they imposed on them.

Grammatical and Lexical Notes

1:8. For two other places where *wayyāqom* ("arose, came to power") stands at the head of a sentence and follows the notice of someone's death, see Gen. 23:3 and Ruth 1:6.

1:9. "Advisers" (*ʿam*) hides the fact that the Hebrew word occurs twice in this verse: "Look," he said to his *people*; and "the *people* of the sons of Israel." For the first "people" the LXX uses *ethnei* ("people"), but for the Israelite people it uses *genos* ("race"). The latter term is used for Israel, "to indicate a foreign people, since the Israelites were foreigners in the land of Egypt" (Wevers 2004: 24).

1:9. Here Pharaoh introduces his words of concern with *hinnēh* ("indeed"). In 5:5 he introduces similar words of concern with *hēn*. Although at times interchangeable, *hinnēh* introduces something new in the discourse, while *hēn* reestablishes and reasserts previous knowledge (Garr 2004b: 342–44).

1:9. *rab . . . mimmennû* ("outnumber us") may be rendered either "too numerous for us" or "more numerous than we." See commentary below.

1:10. *hābâ* ("Come now"), an exclamation, is from the verb *yāhab*, "give." This word before a cohortative ("Come now, let us deal wisely") recalls the similar construction in Gen. 11:3, 4, 7 ("Come, let us make bricks"; "Come, let us build ourselves a city"; "Come, let us go down").

1:10. I retain the masculine singular (him/he) throughout vv. 10–12 until the plural surfaces in v. 14, rather than replace the Hebrew masculine pronouns and verbs with "it" or "she" or "they."

1:10. "break out" is from *qārāʾ* II, "befall, happen," and not from *qārāʾ* I, "call." The subject ("war") is a feminine singular noun, but the verb ("break out") is feminine plural. GKC §145e cites instances of feminine collective nouns with plural verbs. Dahood (1971: 348–49) upholds the Hebrew

6

consonantal text by parsing the verb as a Qal passive of the energetic mood ("when war is declared").

1:10. Ironically, Pharaoh speaks of the possibility of Israel "going up" (ʿālâ) from Egypt long before the Lord does (Exum 1994: 43–44).

1:11. The Hebrew for "forced labor" is *siblâ* (also in 2:11; 5:5, where NIV renders it "working"; and 6:6–7, where NIV renders it "yoke"). The Hebrew root *sbl* is the same as the Akkadian *zabalu*, which Held (1968: 92) notes was commonly used with transporting clay, bricks, and straw.

1:11. Although the correct translation for *miskĕnôt* is "store cities," the LXX translates with *ochyras* ("strong/fortified cities"). To the Greek translator, these Hebrew-built places were "cities built up for strong defence against possible attack rather than places for storing commodities" (Wevers 2004: 24–25).

1:12. "The more . . . the more" is *kaʾăšer . . . kēn*, on which see R. Williams 1976: §264; Waltke and O'Connor 1990: 641.

1:12. "Dreaded" is the meaning of the verb *qûṣ* when it is followed by the expression *mippĕnê* ("from the face of"), as here and in Num. 22:3 (Moab of Israel) and Isa. 7:16 (Ahaz of neighboring kings). However, followed instead by the preposition *bĕ*, *qûṣ* means "to loathe, be disgusted with" (Gen. 27:46: "I am disgusted with living because of these Hittite women," Rebekah says to Isaac).

1:13. "Imposed backbreaking labor" is literally "compelled them to labor [Hiphil] in harshness." The last word is *bĕpārek*. The expression resurfaces three times in Lev. 25 (vv. 43, 46, 53) telling how Israel is not to treat her slaves. The root is related to Aramaic *pĕrak* ("rub, pulverize") and Akkadian *paraku* ("hinder, oppose"). Hebrew *bĕpārek* has the same force as Akkadian *ina parikti*.

1:14. The Hebrew behind "embittered" is *mārar*, which some have rendered as "toughened." See commentary below.

1:14. *ʿābĕdû bāhem* near the end of the sentence shows that the (intransitive) Qal of ʿabad requires the *bêt* of means. If the (transitive) Hiphil is used, as in v. 13, the *bêt* is unnecessary. The use of *ʾēt* before a nominal expression (ʾēt kol-ʿăbōdātām) is perhaps surprising after a string of nouns with the prefixed preposition *bĕ*. The latter expression demonstrates the use of *ʾēt* before a noun in apposition to a noun with preposition, and introducing an explicative clause.

Commentary

The Bible could easily have identified who this "new king" was. It identifies the midwives by name (v. 15), but not this regal figure who more than likely was the most powerful person on the planet at that time. For all the pharaohs identified as such throughout Genesis and Exodus, one has to wait until Solomon's time until one is named—Shishak (1 Kings 11:40; 14:25–26; 2 Chron. 12:1–11).

When the verse says that this Pharaoh does not "know" Joseph, "know" could mean "has never heard of." Or it could mean "once knew, but has forgotten him" (as with Joseph and the cupbearer, who "did not remember Joseph; he forgot him" [Gen. 40:23]). More than likely "know" has a stronger, more belligerent thrust. The new Pharaoh refuses to acknowledge the worth of Joseph's contribution to Egypt's well-being. He repudiates the legitimacy of Joseph's time in office, refuses to acknowledge him and to extend any further courtesy to Joseph and his kin. A change of ruler may be a turning point in the

career of one who is powerfully positioned in the royal court. For a parallel, think of Daniel's predicament after the death of Nebuchadnezzar.

One cannot miss the parallels between the times of transition in leadership noted in Exod. 1:6, 8 and Judg. 2:8, 10: (1) Exod. 1:6: "Joseph, along with all his brothers died," and Judg. 2:8, "Joshua, the son of Nun . . . died"; (2) Exod. 1:6, "and that entire generation," and Judg. 2:10, "After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers"; (3) Exod. 1:8, "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph," and Judg. 2:10, "another generation arose [NIV, "grew up"] who did not know the Lord." Which ignorance imperils God's people more, a new Pharaoh who does not know Joseph, or a new generation of Israelites who do not really know their covenant Lord?

1:9 The Hebrew word for "advisers" is "people" (*'am*), but surely Pharaoh is not making a broad, nationwide announcement; rather, he is speaking to the advisers in his administration, those who counsel him and help expedite his decisions. Still, notice the almost back-to-back use of *'am*: "He said to his people, 'Indeed the people of . . .'" One people mushrooming, and another people alarmed.

Pharaoh is concerned either that these immigrant Israelites are increasing too rapidly (becoming "too numerous") or that they actually outnumber his own people. Elsewhere the expression carries comparative force ("far more numerous than" [Num. 14:12; Deut. 9:14]; "much larger than" [Deut. 7:1]; "greater and more populous than" [Deut. 4:38; 9:1]; "stronger than we" [1 Kings 20:23]; "stronger than I" [2 Sam. 22:18]). Pharaoh is speaking either truthfully or hyperbolically as part of his fearmongering tactics.

If this new king is Rameses II (1279–1213 BC), and that is not at all certain, then his fears seem even stranger. One historian reports that "he had an enormous harem, and as the years passed his children multiplied rapidly. He left over a hundred sons and at least half as many daughters, several of whom he himself married. He thus left a family so numerous that they became a Ramessid class of nobles" (Breasted 1967: 388). To this, Sternberg (1998: 123–24) adds, "Were all the Egyptian menfolk breeders of anything like their sovereign's caliber, the predicament of hosting a race 'too numerous and mighty' for us would hardly loom so large, not even to the xenophobes of antiquity."

1:10 The "Come now, let us . . ." recalls that phrase throughout the City/Tower of Babel story in Gen. 11. The further reference to "mortar and bricks" (Exod. 1:14) repeats some of the materials mentioned in Gen. 11:3. The builders do what they do "lest" they be scattered (Gen. 11:4), and Pharaoh is fearful "lest" Israel multiply. In both cases somebody comes up with a plan to do something that is not God's will, and so on both occasions God frustrates the plan. No city with a tower, and no genocide.

Pharaoh refers to "our enemies," indicating that Egypt has other nations who do not like Egypt and are prepared to go to war against that nation.

Israel might become a large fifth column, aiding the international bloc of such enemies.

The verb "crush," here and in v. 12 (*'ānâ* II in the Piel), carries the idea of forc- **1:11** ing someone into submission. That explains why in some passages it takes on the meaning of "rape," something a man does to a woman (Gen. 34:2; Deut. 22:24; Judg. 20:5; 2 Sam. 13:12, 14, 22, 32). The verb also describes what a woman might do with a man, Delilah binding Samson and "subduing" him (Judg. 16:5–6, 19). It is also used to describe what one woman may do to another woman (Gen. 16:6; NIV's "Sarai 'mistreated' Hagar" seems a bit weak in light of other uses of the verb). What Sarah, an (early) Israelite, did to an Egyptian, an Egyptian Pharaoh will do to Sarah's descendants. To that degree, Sarah foreshadows Pharaoh's role, just as Hagar's story prefigures Israel's story (Trible 1984: 69).

The Hebrew for "store cities" is *'ārê miskĕnôt*. It is difficult to miss the similarity in sound between *miskĕnôt* ("storage") and the word *miškān* ("tabernacle") throughout Exod. 25–40. Exodus begins with God's people building cities of *miskĕnôt* for Pharaoh; it concludes with God's people building a *miškān* for their God. The first building project is imposed and harsh. The second one is God-revealed and an honor with which to be involved.

Wherever the Bible mentions such cities, it is always in connection with royal activity: Gen. 41:35, 48 (in Egypt); Exod. 1:11 (in Egypt); 1 Kings 9:19; 2 Chron. 8:4, 6 (Solomonic); 2 Chron. 16:4 (in Naphtali, associated with Baasha, king of Israel); 2 Chron. 17:12 (Judean, built by Jehoshaphat); 2 Chron. 32:28 (associated with Hezekiah). Frick (1977: 136) suggests that "store city" "refers to the building of royal granaries or warehouses in already existing cities rather than to the building of an entire city. Such structures were used to store the taxes of grain, wine and oil collected by the government."

Of all these references to "store cities" in the OT, those belonging to Pharaoh in Exod. 1 and those belonging to Solomon invite comparison. What Pharaoh does with the aliens living in his backyard, David (1 Chron. 22:2) and Solomon (2 Chron. 2:17–18) do with the aliens living in their backyard. If Sarah's oppressing Hagar anticipates Pharaoh's oppressing the Israelites, David and Solomon's use of outsiders to do the hard and dirty work of construction recalls Pharaoh's decree.

The identities of Pithom and Rameses remain a mystery. Egyptologists usually connect Rameses with Pi(r)-Rameses ("House/Domain of Rameses"), a northeast delta metropolis built up and expanded by Rameses II (1279–1213 BC). His predecessor, Seti I (1294–1279 BC), had built a summer palace there. Pithom is thought to represent Egyptian Pi(r)-Atum, "House of (the god) Atum." It is either Tel er-Retabeh or Tel el-Maskhutah, both of which are south and west of Pi(r)-Rameses. (On these two sites, see especially the studies of Redford 1963; Uphill 1968; 1969; Hoffmeier 1997: 116–21; Kitchen 2003:

9

254–59; and A. Collins 2008, who regrettably dismisses the reference to these two cities as anachronistic additions.)

For some who have addressed the date of the exodus, the reference to "the city of Rameses" in Exod. 1:11 seems to seal the case for a date in the thirteenth century BC. Others who argue for an earlier date for the exodus (the mid-fifteenth century BC) suggest that Rameses in Exod. 1:11 is an editorial updating of an earlier name that has gone out of use. See the debate among Wood (2005; 2007) and Hoffmeier (2007).

1:12 Pharaoh's harsh measures directed at the Israelites have the opposite effect from what he was hoping. They continue to thrive and multiply, their severe conditions notwithstanding. Acts provides examples from the NT era where the believers, although harassed and persecuted, continue to multiply. Illustrations of this phenomenon can be found in almost any century.

1:13 The verse seems to repeat v. 11, with "backbreaking labor" (*bĕpārek*) replacing "forced labor" (*siblâ*). The former Hebrew expression occurs in Lev. 25:43, 46, and 53, all of which forbid the ruthless treatment of a fellow Israelite. What the Egyptians do to the Israelites (Exod. 1), Israelites ought not to do to one another (Lev. 25). Apparently they sometimes crossed that line. Ezekiel (34:4), addressing the shepherds/kings of Israel, charges them with this indictment, "You have not strengthened the weak. . . . You have ruled them harshly and brutally [*bĕpārek*]."

1:14 The attempt to exploit and degrade the Israelites has either "embittered" their lives, or only "toughened" their lives. How does one translate the verb *mārar*? The root is reflected in Naomi's words in Ruth 1:20, "'Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me *mārāʾ*, for the Lord has *mārar*-ed me.'" Does Eccles. 7:26 say, "I found more *bitter* than death the woman who is a snare," or does it say, "I found *stronger* than death"?

One reason for going with "be/make strong" is that the root *mrr* carries that meaning in Ugaritic, Arabic, and Aramaic (Gordon 1965: 438; Dahood 1958: 308–9), and so, maybe also in some OT passages. It is unlikely, however, that the writer of Exodus intended to suggest that the Egyptians were strengthening/toughening the Israelites, any more than Naomi was saying that the Lord had strengthened her (Pardee 1978: 258). Kutler (1984: 114) tries to retain "strong" over "bitter" but with a negative connotation: "And they 'exacerbated' their lives with hard work."

10

Two God-Fearing Midwives

(1:15–22)

Translation

[15]The king of Egypt said to the Hebrewess-born midwives, one of whom was named Shifrah and the second named Puah; [16]he said, "When you midwife the Hebrewesses, look upon the birthstool. If it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." [17]The midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had instructed them, but let the male children live. [18]Then the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing and let the children live?" [19]The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Because not like the Egyptian women are the Hebrewesses, because they are lively. Before the midwife comes to them, they have given birth." [20]God dealt well with the midwives. The people multiplied and became very strong. [21]Because the midwives feared God, he established households for them. [22]Pharaoh commanded all his advisers, "All the born sons you shall throw Nileward, but all the daughters you shall let live."

Grammatical and Lexical Notes

1:15. "To the Hebrewess-born midwives" renders the Hebrew literally: preposition (*la*), plus nominal participle in the construct (*mĕyallĕdōt*), plus the plural feminine adjective (*hāʿibrîyōt*). This makes it clear that the midwives are Hebrewesses. If we repoint the preposition *la* to *li*, then we have preposition (*li*), plus verbal participle (*mĕyallĕdōt*), plus plural noun (*hāʿibrîyōt*)—"to those who midwife the Hebrewesses." This is the reading in the LXX and Vulgate, and it suggests that the midwives were Egyptians.

1:16. "Birthstool" (*haʾobnāyim*) is literally "two stones" (the dual). Its only other occurrence is in Jer. 18:3, "I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the 'wheel.'" Did the midwives' stool look like the potter's wheel? Or does *ʾobnāyim* refer to something else? See commentary below.

1:17. The Piel of *ḥāyâ* (here and in vv. 18 and 22) does not carry the normal factitive use of the Piel ("make live") but means "let live."

1:18. For other "Why?" (*maddûaʿ*) questions in Exodus that spring from anger or reproach, see 5:14 ("Why didn't you meet your quota of bricks?") and 18:14 (Jethro to Moses, "Why do you alone sit as a judge?").

1:19. The midwives use no verbs until the end of the sentence. (I have supplied "are" for sense.) For other instances of clauses introduced by *kî* in which the predicate appears before the subject in a nominal clause, compare verses like "because detestable to the Egyptians [are] all shepherds" (Gen. 46:34), or "because fools [are] my people" (Jer. 4:22).

11

1:19. How best to render *ḥāyôt* ("lively, vigorous, instinct with life") remains unclear. A doubling of the middle consonant (*ḥayyôt*) gives the meaning, "They are like (wild) animals." Compare the phrase "multiplying like rabbits."

1:21. God either establishes "households" (*bāttîm* [or *bottîm*]) for these midwives or makes "houses" for them.

1:22. "All the sons . . . daughters" demonstrates the use of *kol* before a singular noun that is a noun of category or species, and hence the equivalent of the plural.

1:22. BDB 409b suggests that the Hebrew word for "born" in "all the born sons" (*yillôd*) is an adjective, and is an irregular punctuation for the Qal passive participle *yālûd*. Possibly the Pual of *yālad* uses two forms of the passive participle, *yullad* and *yillôd*, the latter to be explained through dissimilation. See Hendel 2000: 44n28, 45.

Commentary

1:15 As I indicated in my grammatical note on this verse, the Hebrew text clearly presents the midwives as Hebrew. Other ancient translations of Scripture (the Septuagint and Vulgate) and Josephus (*Ant.* 2.9.2 §§206–7) think of them as Egyptians. The difference between the two comes down to one vowel change in the opening preposition, *la* versus *li*. One might argue for their Hebrew origin because their names, Shifrah and Puah, are Semitic rather than Egyptian names. The latter name, Puah, is the same as Ugaritic *pgt*, "young woman," and the sister of Aqhat in the famous Canaanite story. Shifrah seems to be related to the verb *šāpar*, "be beautiful, fair." The same name appears in an Egyptian text that lists ninety-five household workers, forty-five of whom are Asiatics with Semitic names. One of these forty-five is identified simply as "the female Asiatic Shifrah" (*COS* 3:35). That v. 17 says they "feared God" might also tip the scales in favor of their being Hebrew, and if the text said, "They feared the LORD," it would have removed all doubt.

However, there are arguments to support their Egyptian origin. First, Hagar of Gen. 16 and 21 has a Semitic rather than Egyptian-sounding name although she is Egyptian. And might "they feared God" of v. 17 be rendered "they feared the gods [*hāʾĕlōhîm*]"? (Note that v. 21 uses a masculine, singular verb ["established"] with the subject *hāʾĕlōhîm*, suggesting "God" and not "gods" in v. 17 too.) Last of all, which group of women, Egyptian or Hebrew, would be more likely to implement Pharaoh's order about massive male infanticide?

Interestingly, the LXX transliterates "Shifrah" as *Sepphōra*, which is the same rendering it uses for "Zipporah," Moses's Midianite wife in the next chapter. Could it be that a non-Hebrew woman who rescues the newborn Moses from death at Pharaoh's hands later marries him and saves him from death at God's hands in 4:24–26?

Commentators continue to be vexed over how just two women could handle the obstetric needs of a people who earlier in the chapter are said to be multiplying and becoming very numerous. Are they actually two supervisors,

12

midwives-in-chief, over a much larger group of underlings? Does the low number reinforce the imaginative, folktale character of the whole narrative? Do these two restrict their work to a very small region of Goshen alongside their unnamed counterparts who preside at births elsewhere in Goshen? Or, and this is the position I would advance, does the implicit emphasis on these two overworked midwives parallel the emphasis elsewhere in the chapter on the overworked Hebrews in Egypt? For both groups it is unrelieved, around-the-clock labor. See Sternberg 1998: 235–37.

There continues to be a difference of opinion on how to reproduce in English **1:16** "look upon *hā'obnāyim*": "look upon the birthstool," or "look upon the two stones [i.e., testicles]." The former is the much more common, but the latter is not without its advocates (e.g., Meek 1963: 270; Fewell and Gunn 1993: 91; and Blenkinsopp 2003: 271). If we go with "birthstool," then the reference is likely to some object on which the parturient mother sat, with an opening to allow the newborn to pass from the mother and into the hands of the midwife.

Pharaoh's instructions about killing the boy babies (Hiphil of *mût*) with the midwives as the subject, and the girl babies living (Qal of *ḥāyâ*) with the girl baby as subject, recalls Gen. 12:12. Abraham says to Sarah in Egypt, "Then they [the Egyptians] will kill me [Qal of *hārag*], but let you live [Piel of *ḥāyâ*]." Female lives are safe; male lives are on the chopping block. Both pharaohs will keep the ladies and eliminate the men.

Commentators have long puzzled over the logic of Pharaoh's decree. For example, Greenberg (1969: 29) remarks, "The condemnation of male infants seems either self-defeating or inadequate. If Pharaoh wanted to exploit Israel's manpower, the decree was self-defeating; if he wanted simply to reduce the Israelite population, he should have condemned the females, or at least included the females." Maybe, however, Pharaoh's intention is to get rid of the boys so that eventually he can have all the girls for himself and his people. Do with the boys what David does with Uriah so that he can have all these Hebrew Bathshebas for himself and his cronies. The attractiveness of that possibility is surely heightened by the witness of the midwives in v. 19 that the Hebrew women reproduce rapidly. In bluffing Pharaoh, they may be confirming him, albeit unintentionally, in his diabolical scheme.

The midwives have "feared" God more than Pharaoh. Sometimes people act **1:17** the way they act and do what they do because God has appeared to them (as with Moses in chap. 3). Out of that divine encounter, a pattern for living and ministry is shaped. Not so here. God, as far as we know, has never appeared or spoken to these midwives. Their response is instinctive and immediate. They will not render unto Pharaoh what belongs to God.

The phrase "fear/revere God" has already appeared a number of times in Genesis: (1) Abraham rationalizes and justifies his lying about Sarah to Abimelech by saying, "There is no fear of God in this place" (Gen. 20:11);

(2) Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac proves beyond a shadow of doubt to the angel of the Lord that Abraham fears God (Gen. 22:12); (3) an incognito Joseph tests his brothers' sincerity by keeping Simeon as hostage until they bring Benjamin to Egypt. He says to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God" (Gen. 42:18). The phrase appears again in Exod. 18:21, part of Jethro's advice to Moses, "Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men," and in Exod. 20:20, Moses's words to his people right after the revelation of the Decalogue, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

M. Fox (2000: 70) notes that the "fear of God is valued because it motivates right behavior even when socially enforced sanctions do not exist, and therefore cannot be effective." For example, no legal authority would punish Abimelech and the Philistines if they kill the alien Abraham. Only the fear of God, which Abraham believes does not exist there, would restrain them. Abraham has no legal obligation to kill his son. Only his fear of God motivates him. But when Pharaoh speaks to two Hebrew midwives and orders them "to jump," their logical response should be, "How high?" Instead, they ignore the ultimatum. For them, "to fear God" means making a decision, when presented with alternatives, that will be most pleasing to God, come what may.

In v. 16 the text has Pharaoh using "live" in the Qal of the verb ("she shall live"). In v. 17 the narrator uses the Piel of that verb ("they let the male children live"). In v. 16 Pharaoh speaks (via the Qal stem) of natural survival, based on gender. Verse 17 speaks of a brave choice (via the Piel stem) by these midwives to save lives. In the following verse, v. 18, the narrator has Pharaoh use the Piel stem ("let live") when interrogating the midwives.

1:18 Pharaoh's question, "Why have you done this thing?" turns the midwives' behavior into a sin of commission, whereas v. 17 has described it as a sin of omission: "They did not do as the king of Egypt had instructed them." For another king who questions an underling as to why he has violated directions that the king has placed on him, see Solomon's words to Shimei in 1 Kings 2:42–45.

1:19 The midwives reject Pharaoh's accusation of a sin of commission on the grounds that they have played no role whatsoever in the birth of these babies. They have neither abetted nor aborted one single birth. The reason? The Hebrewesses are able to give birth even before the midwife arrives! True? Fabricated? Hyperbole? Are these captive women "lively/vigorous" (*ḥāyôt*), or do they reproduce like "(wild) animals" (*ḥayyôt*)? The consonantal text permits either reading. On the one hand, the Masoretic Text vocalizes it as *ḥāyôt*, a word that appears only here in the Bible. On the other hand, *ḥayyôt* is more common, as is its singular form *ḥayyâ*. The singular in Gen. 1 is both a generic term for animals (1:28, 30) and for wild beasts (1:24–25). If the word the midwives use is *ḥāyôt*, then they are complimenting Hebrew women over

14

Egyptian women. If the word they are using is *ḥayyôt*, then they are denigrating the Hebrew women as part of their ruse, using what today we would call an ethnic slur, a tactic comparable to the insult strategy used by Abigail to David about her husband, Nabal, in 1 Sam. 25:24–25 (Frymer-Kensky 2002: 319).

Their strategy of deception is comparable to what Rachel employs with her father, Laban, when he is searching for his gods: "I cannot stand up in your presence; I am having my period" (Gen. 31:35). A woman (or women) deceives a man by appealing to something unique to the experience of a woman. It is likely that Pharaoh knows as little about labor pains and delivery of a child as Laban does about menstruation (Fewell and Gunn 1993: 92).

Throughout Scripture, God honors faithfulness and right behavior. The mid-
wives do not act the way they do, however, in hopes that God will "bless" them for their salvific act. They do not say, "God, we spared the little Hebrew tykes; now you owe us one." Their response is spontaneous and not self-motivated, not doing something for God in anticipation that he will do something for them. For all they know, the midwives might be executed on the spot. And in the next chapter, Moses's mother receives nothing from the Lord for her brave act of defiance (except the survival of her baby boy).

Nevertheless, God "established households" for them. As Brichto (1973: 43) asks, "What reward could be more fitting than posterity for the women who preserved the posterity of Israel?" The same Hebrew expression, *ʿāśâ bayit/bāttîm*, occurs in 2 Sam. 7:11 in the covenantal promise God makes to David, "He will establish a house for you," and in Solomon's repetition of that promise (1 Kings 2:24). David wants to "build" (*bānâ*) a house for God (2 Sam. 7:5), but God will "establish" (*ʿāśâ*) a household for David. That is, David seems to be interested in projects, while God is interested in people. Paul (1992) has observed that Hebrew *ʿāśâ bayit* is the etymological equivalent of the Akkadian idiom *bitam epeshu*, "to found a family."

There is surely some irony in the fact that because the midwives befuddle this pharaoh, God gives each a house(hold). Most Egyptologists (Gardiner 1961: 52; Lambdin 1953: 153) believe that "Pharaoh" in Egyptian means something like "Great House." Those who pull the wool over the eyes of King Great House end up with their own houses.

I take "people" as "advisers" (here, and back in v. 9), rather than seeing this as
a nationwide pronouncement. Pharaoh's command to this group to "throw" (*šālak*) male babies into the Nile may conceal a Hebrew term for exposure and abandonment rather than literal throwing (Cogan 1968). Does Hagar throw (*šālak*) or "leave" Ishmael under a bush (Gen. 21:15)? In the allegory of unfaithful Jerusalem (Ezek. 16), is newly born Jerusalem "thrown" out into the open field, or "left, abandoned" in the open field (Ezek. 16:5)? In many cases, as White (1975: 287, 302) has observed, *šālak* may refer to the placing

15

of a dead body into a grave, or the placing of a living person into what surely will be his grave (Gen. 37:20, 22, 24; 2 Sam. 18:17; 2 Kings 13:21; Jer. 38:6).

When speaking to the midwives about newborn Hebrew girls, Pharaoh uses the verb "live" (*ḥāyâ*) in the Qal (v. 16). When speaking to his advisers about them, he shifts to the Piel of this verb (*tĕḥayyûn*), "you shall let live." To a female audience: "The little girls will live." To a male audience: "Let the little girls live." Possibly, as I indicated earlier (see my comments at v. 16), this may be his way of suggesting to his male senior staff that with the young males killed off, the young females will be all theirs when they are older. Recall that when Abram speaks about males letting Sarah live (the Piel of *ḥāyâ* in Gen. 12:12), he is suggesting that the males will let her live only for the purpose of later "taking" her. One wonders if Pharaoh's directive to Moses to depart Egypt with only the men, but leave the women (and children) behind, runs along the same lines (Exod. 10:10–11).

The Birth and Naming of Moses

(2:1–10)

Translation

¹Now a man from the tribe/house of Levi went and married the daughter of Levi. ²The woman conceived and birthed a son. Seeing how beautiful he was, she hid him three months. ³When she was no longer able to hide him, she got for him a papyrus basket, and caulked it with tar and pitch. She lowered the child into it and placed it in the marsh at the riverbank. ⁴His sister positioned herself at a distance to know what might be done to him.

⁵Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the river, her maidens walking on the bank of the river. She saw the basket in the middle of the marsh and sent her maid, and she took it. ⁶She opened and saw him—the child—and the infant was crying. She had compassion on him and said, "From the children of the Hebrews is this." ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call for you a wet nurse from among the Hebrewesses, that she might nurse for you the child?" ⁸Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." The girl went and called the mother of the child. ⁹And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your wages." The woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰The child reached boyhood, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became a son to her; she called his name Moses and said, "Because out of the water I drew him."

Grammatical and Lexical Notes

2:1. "House" (*bayit*) may sometimes mean "tribe," as in Num. 17:8 (v. 23 MT), "Aaron's staff, which represented the 'house/tribe' of Levi, had not only sprouted . . ."

2:2. "Conceived" (*hārâ*) and "birthed" (*yālad*) occur frequently together in birth scenes, e.g., Gen. 21:2 (Sarah); 30:5, 7 (Bilhah); 1 Sam. 1:20 (Hannah).

2:2. The basic difference between *kî-tôb* ("how beautiful") here and the frequent use of *kî-tôb* ("that it [was] good") throughout Gen. 1 (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 [*hinnēh-tôb*]) is that this Exodus passage includes the pronominal predicate: *kî-tôb hûʾ*. To that degree, Gen. 6:2 is a closer parallel to Exod. 2:2 than any of the Gen. 1 passages: "The sons of God saw that they were beautiful" (*kî tōbōt hēnnâ*).

2:3. The shift from the Piel of *ṣāpan* ("hide") in v. 2 to the Hiphil of that verb in v. 3 indicates simply variation as opposed to verbatim repetition as a part of Hebrew rhetoric. See Ratner 1992: 145–46.

2:3. The etymology of *tēbâ* ("basket, ark") is not evident. Cohen (1972) rejects the usual connection with Egyptian *db3t*, which is never used for any kind of sailing vessel or floatable receptacle.

2:3. Literally, "with 'the' tar and 'the' pitch," in which the article is the generic article rather than the definite article.

2:3. "In the marsh" seems a preferable reading of *bassûp* than "among the reeds." See Ward 1974.

2:4. *wattētaṣṣab* (Hitpael, 3rd fem. sg. of *yāṣab*) should read *wattityaṣṣēb*, for it appears that a *y* (*yôd*) has fallen out of the verbal form (BDB 426).

2:4. Only here is the Qal infinitive construct of *yādaʿ* written as *lĕdēʾâ*. The usual form is *lādaʿat*.

2:5. For *yad* ("hand") with the meaning "border, bank," see Num. 13:29 ("along the 'hand' of the Jordan") and Deut. 2:37 ("neither the land along the 'hand' of the Jabbok").

2:5. The Hebrew word for "maid(ens)" in the first part of the verse is the feminine form (*naʿărâ*) of the masculine word for "infant" in v. 6 (*naʿar*). However, the Hebrew word for "maid" in the second half of the verse is *ʾāmâ*. *Naʿărâ* seems to connote a higher status, female attendants who accompany their supervisor. *Āmâ* may refer to women who do more servile work for their superior. See Macdonald 1976.

2:5. The subject of "and she took it" at the end of the verse could be either "her maid" ("sent her maid to get it") or Pharaoh's daughter. If it is the latter, then it is an instance of taking by means of sending someone else, as in Gen. 20:2, "Then Abimelech . . . sent for Sarah and took her."

2:6. The *ʾet* before "the child" follows an already determined object ("saw him") in order to introduce an expression defining that object more precisely. Hence my use of dashes. See Elwode 1994: 173.

2:6. Of the *hinnēh* before "the infant was crying," BDB 244a (sub c) says that *hinnēh* is frequent "in historical style, esp. . . . after verbs of seeing or discovering, making the narrative graphic and vivid, and enabling the reader to enter into the surprise or satisfaction of the speaker or actor concerned."

2:7. For the phrase *ʾiššâ mêneqet* ("wet nurse"), see Yee (2009), who places the incident under the category of "resistance literature."

2:7–8. "Shall I go? . . . Yes," is "Shall I go? . . . Go." There is no word in Biblical Hebrew for "yes" as an affirmative reply to a yes-or-no question. The way it says "yes" is by repeating the verb in the answer without the interrogative particle ("Shall I go? Go"), in which "go" equals "yes." Compare David's words in 1 Sam. 23:2 and God's answer, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The Lord answers him, "Go." Or David's question to the Lord, "Will Saul come down?" to which the Lord responds, "He will come down" (1 Sam. 23:11). Or his question, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" to which the Lord responds, "They will surrender" (1 Sam. 23:12). See Greenstein 1989: 54–55.

2:8. The Hebrew for "girl" is *ʿalmâ*. Its normal rendering in the Septuagint is *neanis* (here; Ps. 68:25 [67:26]; Prov. 30:19; Song 1:3; 6:8). Of course, the most debated use of *ʿalmâ* is in the celebrated prophecy of Isa. 7:14, which the LXX renders with *parthenos* rather than *neanis*.

2:9. "I will pay your wages" is, literally, "I will give your wage." This is an illustration of how a pronominal suffix on a noun ("your wages") often indicates a dative idea ("I will give to you the wages"). Thus Lev. 26:4, "I will give your rains," means, "I will give you rains."

2:10. I shall comment below on the relationship between "Moses" (*mōšeh*) and "I drew him out" (*mĕšîtihû*).

Commentary

2:1 The verse does not name the parents of the child whose birth is mentioned in the following verse. They are identified only by tribal origin (tribe of Levi) and by function. Once married, they procreate. The baby too is unnamed (until the last verse of the unit), as are the baby's older sister and the Egyptian princess. Reinhartz (1998: 106) suggests that the "anonymity of the

women draws attention to their typified roles." One woman is a creative and nurturing mother; the second woman is a quick-thinking young girl and a protector of her baby brother; the third woman defies her father's ultimatum and demonstrates compassionate maternity as more than merely a biological process.

There may be some connection between the fact that Levi, the ancestor of the tribe of this baby's parents, is the third-born child in his family (Gen. 29:34), and this baby, as we will shortly discover, is the third-born child in his family.

The baby's parents are subsequently named, in Exod. 6:20, and later in Num. 26:59, as (father) Amram and (mother) Jochebed. In Exod. 2:2–3 Jochebed is the subject of no less than nine verbs (eleven verbs if we include v. 9), yet is unnamed. In 6:20 she is the subject of only one verb, yet is named. Furthermore, the chap. 6 reference informs us that Amram marries his aunt on his father's side. This is a marital relationship that Moses, speaking for God, later outlaws, either with a consanguineal aunt (Lev. 18:12–13) or with an affinal aunt (18:14).

That Amram marries his aunt raises the possibility that Moses's mother is a good bit older than his father. How much older, or how old? Taking the expression "daughter of Levi" in Exod. 2:1 and Num. 26:59 literally, rather than reading it as a metonym for a distant relative, Brichto (1998: 335–36) computes that Jochebed is forty years older than her husband and that she is 176 in the year she gives birth to Moses! To which Brichto adds: "And Sarah thought it past belief to bear a child at ninety by a husband aged one hundred!" So then, there are two miracles in this story: the miraculous preservation of the baby from the king's edict, and a mother who, pushing the second-century mark, conceives and gives birth.

Jochebed has the distinction of being the first person in Scripture with a name part of which includes a portion of one of God's names. For other *Jo-* names, think of Jo-el, Jo-nathan, Jo-ab and the like. *Jo* is an abbreviated form of "Yahweh." Her name means "Yo/Yah/Yahweh is glorious." By contrast, all theophoric names in Genesis are *-el* names (*el* an abbreviation for *ʾĕlōhîm*), such as Isra-el or Ishma-el. Exodus begins by telling us about Moses, whose mother is *yôkebed*, and it ends by telling us that *yôkebed*'s son cannot enter the tent because it is filled with the Lord's *kābôd*.

If we had no other data, then we might assume that this baby is the mother's **2:2** firstborn. However, the mention of an older sister (whose birth goes unnoticed), and later the mention of an older brother, Aaron (whose birth also goes unnoticed), shows that this is not the case. For a parallel, 2 Sam. 12:24–25 seems to suggest that Bathsheba births Solomon shortly after the death of their first newborn son. Yet 1 Chron. 3:5 tells us that Bathsheba has had three sons, Shammua, Shobab, and Nathan, before Solomon. Moses is the special child of Jochebed, and hence the siblings are ignored or briefly cited, just as Solomon

19

is the special child of Bathsheba. Miriam and Aaron will be to Moses what Andrew is to Peter, "Simon Peter's brother," as the NT frequently identifies him. As we all know, it can be difficult to be a minor prophet when God calls one of your siblings to be a major prophet.

There are other women in Scripture who are willing to put their own life at risk to save the life of a male who is at risk. One thinks of Michal, who saves David from her father (1 Sam. 19:11–17). A closer parallel is Rahab, who hides the two Hebrew spies from the local authorities (Josh. 2:4). These are the only two places in the Bible where a woman "hides" (*ṣāpan*) a man from another man or men.

2:3 The Hebrew word for "basket" is *tēbâ*. The only other place in the Bible where it appears is in Gen. 6–9 (about twenty-six times) to refer to the "ark" that Noah builds. For that reason, the KJV has Moses's mother building an "ark of bulrushes" for her baby. Obviously the two are quite different in size! Jochebed does not make a three-story floating zoo for her baby's bassinet. The appearance of this word in these two places, and only in these two places, ties together the lives of Noah and Moses. Two individuals, both major role players in God's plan of redemption, are saved from certain death by drowning by finding salvation inside a *tēbâ*.

"By faith Moses's *parents* hid him for three months after he was born" (Heb. 11:23). Yet the Hebrew of Exod. 2:3 suggests that Amram is possibly away from home at the time, drafted into the labor workforce of Pharaoh.

Jochebed's actions are an ironic reversal of Abraham's in Gen. 22. Abraham obeys God's order to kill Isaac, yet Isaac is spared. Jochebed disobeys Pharaoh's order to kill Moses, yet Moses is spared. In one incident, God honors obedience. In the other, he honors defiance.

2:4 This first encounter between Moses and his older sister is positive. Unfortunately their last recorded encounter is not (Num. 12). Exodus 2:4 is the only time the Hitpael of *yāṣab* ("positioned herself") appears with a feminine subject in Exodus, or in the entire Bible, for that matter. For masculine subjects with this verb in Exodus (with NIV renderings), see 8:20 [v. 16 MT]; 9:13 ("confront"); 14:13 ("stand firm"); 19:17 ("stood"); 34:5 ("the Lord stood with Moses there").

One wonders if the mother places the basket in the river at just any point, a river by the way that is infested with crocodiles, or whether she places the receptacle near the point in the river where she has frequently seen the princess come to bathe. With crocodiles, Moses has no chance. With a princess, there is at least a slight opening. Trust in Pharaoh's daughter and trust in God are not mutually exclusive. Thus Fewell and Gunn (1993: 93) are correct when they say, "Jochebed places the fate of their baby at the feet of Pharaoh's daughter, somehow trusting that this young woman could never carry through the brutal policy of her father." But so is Janzen (1997: 21) correct: "This is a

20

desperate commitment of the child into God's hands when all her resources are at an end."

The bathing may be either for hygienic purposes or a part of some religious **2:5** ritual. She is at the river either to clean her body or clean her soul, or maybe both. Because the princess is in the water and not her maidens, she is the one to see the basket. Would the maidens perhaps have handled things differently if they had spotted the basket first? Would they have dared to flout the king's decree as his own daughter does? Surely their lives are not as significant to His Royal Highness as is that of this daughter.

In some ways, as Fretheim (1991: 38–39) has pointed out, the princess's move- **2:6** ments in chap. 2 parallel God's in chap. 3. In 2:5 she "came down" to the Nile; in 3:8 God says, "I have come down." In 2:5 she "saw" a basket; in 3:7 God says, "I have seen the misery of my people." Twice, the text says, she "saw" something (2:5, 6). Twice, says the text, God "saw" something (3:7, 9). In 2:6 she hears a baby crying; in 3:7 God says of his people, "I have heard them crying."

The verb "took compassion on [ḥāmal]" appears only here in Exodus, but elsewhere is used of divine compassion (Mal. 3:17, "I will *spare* them, just as in compassion a man *spares* his son who serves him"). Numerous times in the prophets, God threatens not to *ḥāmal*, not to show compassion/pity (e.g., Ezek. 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10).

One could translate "she took pity on him," but I prefer "had compassion." One difference between "pity" and "compassion" is that pity means "to feel for," while compassion means "to feel with." In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the priest and the Levite have pity, but no compassion. They feel sorry for the victim, but it stops there. Not so with the Samaritan. And not so with this princess. She does not simply feel a brief tinge of sorrow, and then get on with her bathing. Not without reason could (at least parts of) Exod. 2:1–10 be called "the parable of the Good Egyptian(ess)."

We cannot know for sure whether Miriam speaks as a Hebrewess about a He- **2:7–9** brew to an Egyptian lady, or whether she pretends herself to be an Egyptian. For sure, Miriam never identifies herself as the baby's sister.

Numerous commentators have suggested that the story is told in such a way as to make the princess look stupid and naive. She is conned into surrendering the child, and ends up paying his biological mother to nurse him. However, she is not so foolish after all. Gunn and Fewell (1993: 93) properly ask, "Is she so simple to think that this young Hebrew girl's appearance is coincidental? Is she so slow to be unable to connect the woman who instantly materializes, her breasts filled with milk, with the child's mother?"

That she is willing to surrender the child, at least until weaning, says something profound about her respect for the honesty and integrity of these "Hebrews." After all, Jochebed can go "underground" with her baby, and the

princess may never see him or her again. If David can hide from Saul, why cannot Jochebed hide from the princess? There are plenty of places to conceal mother and child's whereabouts in Goshen. Maybe the princess insists that Jochebed and son stay near her house, where she can keep an eye on them, just as David brings Mephibosheth into his house, where he can keep an eye on this Saulide (2 Sam. 9).

2:10 Imagine the emotional trauma Jochebed must experience in handing her two- or three-year-old child, at the completion of the lad's weaning, over to the Egyptian princess, more than likely never to see him again. But there might be a better future, or even the possibility of a future, for her baby in the palace rather than in the brickyards, if he even lives that long. For other mothers who, for one reason or another, are willing to give up their young child to another, recall Hannah and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:28; 2:11, 19), and the prostitute who is willing to give her son to the other prostitute rather than have him killed (1 Kings 3:16–27, esp. v. 26). Mary, within eyesight of her Son on the cross, is another such mother.

For the first time the name "Moses" appears. His name is used 767 times in the OT, 647 of which are in the Torah (290x in Exodus, 86x in Leviticus, 233x in Numbers, and 38x in Deuteronomy), 80x in the Prophets, and 40x in the Writings (statistics from Nigosian 1993: 345–46).

A father often names the child (Gen. 4:26; 5:3, 29; 16:15; 35:18b; 41:50–51; Exod. 2:22), sometimes in response to God (Gen. 17:19; Isa. 8:3; Hosea 1:4, 6, 9). A child could also receive a name from the mother, either biological (Gen. 4:1, 25; 16:11 [in response to God]; 19:37–38; 29:31–30:24; 35:18a; 38:3–5; Judg. 13:24; 1 Sam. 1:20; 4:21; 2 Sam. 12:24; 1 Chron. 7:16; Isa. 7:14), or adoptive (Exod. 2:10), and from female neighbors (Ruth 4:17).

Esther 2:7 ("Mordecai had taken her [Esther] as his own daughter when her father and mother died") and Exod. 2:10 provide the only two instances of adoption in the OT. At least the Latin Vulgate reads it as such, translating the Hebrew as *adoptavit* in both verses, although the possibility of fosterage rather than adoption cannot be ruled out (Paul 1980: 182n28). Interestingly, though there is a legion of family laws in the legal sections of the Torah, there is not one anywhere about adoption.

The Hebrew "he became to" (*hāyâ lĕ*) appears elsewhere in Scripture. For starters, *hāyâ lĕ* means to gain a special status in relation to somebody. Thus when Deut. 7:6 says, "The Lord your God has chosen you . . . to be to him [*hāyâ lĕ*] his treasured people," the verse speaks of that unique relationship. The first commandment in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:3 = Deut. 5:7) says, "There shall not be to you [*hāyâ lĕ*; i.e., 'not have'] any other gods." "Have" here means "to be in relationship with."

This idiom is the idiom used for establishing family relationships (Exod. 2:10; Deut. 24:2; Judg. 14:20; 15:2; 2 Sam. 7:14; Esther 2:7, 15). Also, *hāyâ lĕ*

22

is the phrase for establishing a covenant relationship between God and Israel (Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12). Thus, when Moses becomes a son to the princess, he assumes a relationship to her that is unique, familial, and covenantal.

There continues to be much debate about the meaning of the name "Moses." Most scholars believe that she gives the weaned child an Egyptian name. The foundational study in support of that reading is Griffiths (1953). Numerous names of the pharaohs end with *-mose* (Ah-*mose*, Thut-*mose*, Ra*meses*), in which the first part of the name is the name of an Egyptian god, and the "mose" part reflects either the verb *msy*, "to be born," or the noun *ms*, "child, son." Thus, Thutmose means either "(the god) Thut is born" or "son of (the god) Thut." Here, it is suggested, we have the retention of the second part of the baby's Egyptian name with the deletion of the deity's name.

Kitchen (2003: 296–97) disagrees with this explanation. For one thing, many Egyptians (not pharaohs) were simply called "Mose" without any name of a deity. Second, one would expect Egyptian *s* to appear as *s* (*sāmek*) in Hebrew, not as *sh* (*šîn*) as with *Mōšeh* here. Kitchen himself suggests that the adopting daughter probably names him *Māšû*, "one drawn out," which somebody later changes to *Mōšeh*.

Many interpreters have observed that her name and her explanation for that name do not fit. If she calls him this "because I drew him out of the water," should she not call him *Māšûy*, passive participle, "One-who-was-drawn-out," rather than *Mōšeh*, active participle, "one-who-draws-out"? One writer, J. Ackerman (1974: 94–95), suggests that by mixing up her participles, the princess blunders into this name as an incompetent Hebraist!

It is not unheard of in the Bible for a non-Hebrew to give a Hebrew name to a Hebrew person. Pharaoh Neco renames Eliakim "Jehoiakim" (2 Kings 23:34), and Nebuchadnezzar changes Mattaniah to "Zedekiah" (2 Kings 24:17). This is not an exact parallel, however. It is one thing for a foreigner to change the Hebrew name of a king to another Hebrew name. It is another thing for a foreigner to give a Hebrew name to somebody who is nameless.

Possibly, as Marks (1995: 29–32) points out, the name "Moses" contains a double etymology, one public, one disguised, just as Moses at the beginning has a double identification. He is Egyptian and Hebrew. He is Hebrew in 2:11–15a but Egyptian in 2:15b–22. Thus, maybe it is the words of the narrator "he became a son to her" that provide the background for the name. Son/ *ben* = *mōšeh*/*mš*/son, for the Egyptian word for "son" is *mesu*, a name similar in sound to *Mōšeh*. As Sternberg (1998: 335) says, "His very name testifies to his sonship. He became to her what she called him."

To be sure, the verb *māšâ* never appears in Exodus as one of the "exodus" verbs such as "brought up, brought out, delivered," even though the name the princess gives to him seems to be given almost prophetically. Moses will "draw" his people "out of" Egypt. The verb appears in the Song of David when David speaks of his Lord: "he reached down from on high and took

23

hold of me, he 'drew me out' of deep waters" (2 Sam. 22:17 = Ps. 18:16 [17]). The closest use is Isa. 63:11, whose translation is far from certain: "He remembered the days of old, Moses and his people," or "He remembered the days of old, (the days) of him who drew his people out [*mōšeh ʿammô*]."

Many writers have noticed the parallel between the events surrounding the births of Moses and King Sargon the Great of Akkad (ca. 2350–2294 BC). The latter's birth account reads as follows (translation of Beyerlin 1978: 98–99):

> I am Sargon, the mighty king, the king of Akkad.
> My mother was an *enitum* [a priestess?]; I do not know my father.
> The brother of my father loved the hills.
> My city is Azupiranu, which lies on the banks of the Euphrates.
> The *enitum*, my mother, conceived me and bore me in secret.
> She laid me in a basket of rushes, sealed my cover with asphalt,
> And cast me on the river, which did not rise over me.
> The river bore me to Akki, the drawer of water.
> Akki, the drawer of water, lifted me out as he dipped his ewer.
> Akki, the drawer of water, (took me) as son and reared me.
> Akki, the drawer of water, made me his gardener.
> When I was a gardener, Ishtar gave me her love,
> And for [fifty-]four years I exercised the kingship.

On the one hand, it would be difficult to see any parallels between Moses and Sargon beyond the child set adrift by his mother in some kind of infant receptacle, and his subsequent discovery and rescue by another individual. On the other hand, there are numerous parallels within Scripture between Moses and other characters. For example, think of similar motifs with Joseph and Moses (see Carmichael 1996: 16–17):

1. Joseph is taken from a pit and escapes murder; Moses is taken from the water and escapes drowning.
2. A close relative plays a role in the deliverance of each: Joseph's brother Reuben, Moses's sister Miriam.
3. Non-Israelites play a role in the deliverance of each: the Midianites with Joseph, Pharaoh's daughter with Moses.
4. Joseph's brothers misunderstand Joseph (Gen. 37), and Moses's brothers misunderstand Moses (Exod. 2:11–15).
5. Both end up in a foreign, but neighboring, country—Joseph in Egypt, Moses in Midian—and live there for a good while.
6. Each marries a daughter of a priest in that foreign country, and fathers two sons: Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh; Moses—Gershom and Eliezer.
7. Joseph outperforms Egypt's wise men (Gen. 41), and Moses outperforms Egypt's wise men (Exod. 7:8–12).

24

An even closer parallel to Moses than Joseph, and one that is seldom connected with Moses, is Hagar in Gen. 16 and 21 (see Dozeman 1996: 28–33):

1. Both assume two roles that blatantly contrast with each other. Hagar is household slave and surrogate wife. Moses is Hebrew slave and Egyptian prince.
2. Hagar's shift from household slave to surrogate wife arouses Sarah's hostility. Moses's shift from Egyptian prince to Hebrew liberator arouses Pharaoh's hostility.
3. To escape Sarah's hostility, Hagar flees (*bāraḥ*) into the wilderness (Gen. 16:6). To escape Pharaoh's hostility, Moses flees (*bāraḥ*) into the wilderness (Exod. 2:15).
4. While in the wilderness, Hagar encounters "the angel of the Lord" (Gen. 16:7), as does Moses (Exod. 3:2).
5. Hagar is instructed to return to her mistress, from whom she has fled (Gen. 16:9). Moses is instructed to return to Pharaoh, from whom he has fled (Exod. 3:10).
6. While in the wilderness, Hagar receives a gracious promise from the angel (Gen. 16:11–12), as does Moses (Exod. 3:12).
7. Hagar gives God a new name ("You-are-the-God-who-sees-me" [Gen. 16:13]). To Moses, God reveals God's new name ("Yahweh/Lord" [Exod. 3:13–15]).
8. Hagar's second encounter with God is near a bush (Gen. 21:15); Moses's first encounter with God is near a bush (Exod. 3:2).
9. Hagar goes to the wilderness a second time when Sarah demands her expulsion (Gen. 21:10, *gāraš*). Moses (for the second time) and his people will find themselves in the wilderness, driven there by Pharaoh and *his* people (Exod. 10:11; 12:39, *gāraš*).
10. Both times, God either sanctions (Gen. 21:12–13) or orchestrates (Exod. 11:1) the expulsion, in effect transforming expulsion into liberation.
11. Food and beverage for the expelled are limited to what one can carry on one's shoulders (*šĕkem*, Gen. 21:14 and Exod. 12:34).
12. The absence of (drinkable) water threatens the life of Hagar's child (Gen. 21:15–16), as it does for Moses's people (Exod. 15:22–26).
13. Thirst produces a desperate cry (Gen. 21:16–17 [Hagar's? Ishmael's?]) that leads to a divine response of provision of water (21:19). Moses's cry to the Lord (Exod. 15:25a) leads to a divine response of provision of water (Exod. 15:25b).

All these parallels, hardly incidental, suggest that Hagar is the prototype for Moses, just as her son, Ishmael, provides the paradigm for Israel with their mutual wilderness experiences (Dozeman 1996: 33). In light of the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East, it would be interesting to reflect on

the implications of the biblical writers' using Hagar as a paradigm of Moses, and Ishmael as a paradigm of Israel.

Of course, the most transparent parallel just to Exod. 2:1–10 is Matthew's account of Jesus's birth (Matt. 1–2). What Pharaoh is to infant Moses, Herod is to infant Jesus. What Jochebed and Miriam are to Moses, Mary and Joseph are to Jesus. What Pharaoh's daughter is to Moses, the magi are to Jesus. In both birth instances, God sovereignly watches over and preserves the life of a little one who in adult years will emerge as the one chosen by God to save his people from their sins, either from the sins others have committed against them (Moses), or from the sins they themselves have committed (Jesus).

Hebrews 11:24 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (just as Joseph [Gen. 39:8, 10] and Vashti [Esther 1:12] similarly "refused" an invitation or opportunity). That must not have been an easy refusal. It is one thing to say "no" to the "treasures of Egypt." It is another thing to say "no" to somebody who has risked her life to save your life, who has invested years of her own life to nurture you, who takes you under her wing. Faith may involve saying "no" to good things as well as to things patently evil.

Moses's First Attempt at Mediation

(2:11–15)

Translation

[11]In those days, after Moses had reached manhood, he went out to his brothers and witnessed their hard labors. He witnessed an Egyptian assaulting a Hebrew, one of his brothers. [12]Looking this way and that, he witnessed nobody around. He fatally assaulted the Egyptian, and buried him in the sand. [13]The next day he went out, and behold, two Hebrew men were brawling. He said to the instigator, "Why are you assaulting your fellow?" [14]And he retorted, "Who appointed you prince and judge over us? Do you intend to kill me just as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses panicked and thought, "Surely the deed is known." [15]When Pharaoh learned of the deed, he sought to kill Moses. Moses fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, where he sat down by a well.

Grammatical and Lexical Notes

2:11. "In those days" (*bayyāmîm hāhēm*) can refer to either past time (cf. Gen. 6:4) or to future time (Deut. 17:9; 19:17; 26:3).

2:12. The Hebrew for "hid/buried" is *ṭāman*. It occurs thirty-one times in the OT. Thirteen of those times it is followed by the preposition *bĕ* ("bury in") as here. Jacob buries pagan memorabilia under an oak tree (Gen. 35:4). Achan buries the items he has stolen in the ground (Josh. 7:21). Jeremiah buries his belt in the crevice in the rocks (Jer. 13:4–7). See Balentine 1980: 142.

2:13. *bayyôm haššēnî*, "on the second day," should here be rendered "on the next day." See Josh. 10:32; Judg. 20:24–25; Neh. 8:13; Ezek. 43:22 (all of which the NIV translates—erroneously, I believe—as "the second day").

2:13. Many translations omit *wĕhinnēh* in their rendering. Its omission subtracts from Moses's shock at seeing what he saw. Andersen (1974: 95) says, "A *wĕhinnēh* clause is used to report a surprise development after verbs of motion." See, for example, Exod. 4:6, 7 and 16:10 for the same phenomenon.

2:13. "Instigator" is "the wicked one" (*lārāšāʿ*). Fontaine (1982: 114–15) suggests that a "wicked one" is "someone who is judged to be guilty of violence or illegal activities against the right civil authority." She cites the following passages where the word carries this nuance, as in Exod. 2:13: Deut. 25:2; Prov. 17:23; 18:5; 19:28; 20:26; 29:12.

2:13. On the use of the imperfect *takkeh* ("Why are you 'assaulting' your fellow?"), S. Driver (1998: 44–45) remarks that in why questions "instead of the outspoken, categorical perfect, the imperfect as more courteous, more adapted to a tone of entreaty or deprecation is often preferred."

2:14. There is some problem with how to render *lĕ ʾîš*, which admittedly disappears from my translation and also from the NIV. There are at least three possibilities: (1) the preposition *lĕ* prefixed to the noun is a vocative *lamedh*: "Who appointed you, O mortal, prince and judge over us?" (Dahood 1981: 413–14); (2) *ʾîš*, based on parallels from Tell el-Amarna, where "man of X" = "prince of X," may here mean "ruler": "Who appointed you a ruler, a prince and judge over us?" (Crown 1974: 111); (3) most simply, as Hess (1990: 5) has observed, when *ʾîš* is in construct to a following noun, it can be used to designate offices, professions, and nationalities. Thus in v. 11 *ʾîš miṣrî* and *ʾîš ʿibrî* mean, respectively, "an Egyptian" and "a Hebrew." In Lev. 21:9 *ʾîš kōhēn* designates a "priest," and in Joel 2:7 *ʾîš milḥāmâ* designates a "fighter."

2:14. Melamed (1961: 131) was the first to suggest that "prince and judge" may be a hendiadys: a figure of speech in which one idea is expressed by two nouns connected by "and." For the same two nouns together (*śar, šopēṭ*) elsewhere, see 2 Chron. 1:2; Prov. 8:16; Amos 2:3; Mic. 7:3; Zeph. 3:3.

2:14. The Hebrew verb *ʾāmar* ("to say"), when linked syntactically to infinitives, may express intent. So *halĕhorgēnî ʾattâ ʾōmēr*, "Do you intend to kill me?" Compare 1 Kings 5:5 [19]; 8:12; 2 Chron. 13:8; 28:10; Ezek. 20:8.

2:14. *ʾākēn* (surely) is an interjection, perhaps with the force in English "O, my!" Goldbaum (1964: 135) calls the word a "quasi-adverb," while Andersen (1974: 185) calls it "an utterance-initial asseverative." Compare Jacob's "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I am not aware of it" (Gen. 28:16), and Agag's words to Samuel, "Surely the bitterness of death is past" (1 Sam. 15:32).

2:15. "Settled" and "sat down" are exactly the same word in the Hebrew (*wayyēšeb*).

2:15. "By a well" is, literally, "by the well" (*habbĕ ʾēr*). The noun is definite either because a well-known well is meant, or else a well is always found near where people live. In 3:2 the Lord's angel appears to Moses from within "*the* bush, and *the* bush, although on fire, did not burn up." See Ehrensvärd 2001: 305.

Commentary

2:11 For "reached manhood," the Hebrew reads "became great" (*wayyigdal*, literally rendered in the LXX as *megas*). Fleishman (1992: 43–44) says that the root *g-d-l*, when used of a child's growing up, refers to "the stage of babyhood, when one is no longer a suckling, as well as the passage from childhood to the stage of early manhood." When a child has reached such a stage, he is able to choose his way of life and interests (Gen. 21:20; 25:27), take part in his father's business (2 Kings 4:18), marry (Gen. 38:11; Ruth 1:13), deprive other heirs from receiving a share of the father's estate (Judg. 11:2), and theoretically, give sound advice to others based on mature understanding and reason, but will not necessarily always do so (1 Kings 12:8, 10).

All this is to say that when God calls Moses into spiritual leadership (chaps. 3 and 4), Moses is not a child. Unlike Jeremiah, who tries to disqualify himself from ministry by protesting, "I cannot speak, for I am a youth" (Jer. 1:6), no octogenarian can get off saying, "I am only a *naʿar*." In the fourth and fifth centuries, the church father Jerome (*In Hieremiam* 6.5) suggests that Moses's resistance is met with severe rebuke by God because he is a grown man. By

contrast, God treats Jeremiah's resistance more leniently because he is just a lad at the time.

Like Jacob's daughter, Dinah, who "went out to see the daughters of the land" (Gen. 34:1), Moses "went out to see" the toils of his people. The Hebrew for "and witnessed" is *rāʾâ bě*. The verb followed by this preposition is used frequently for looking at some kind of trouble or disaster. See Gen. 21:16; 29:32; 44:34; 2 Sam. 16:12.

The verb *nākâ*, "assault, strike, batter," occurs either in finite or participial form three times here—vv. 11, 12, 13—and balances the three uses of *hārag* ("kill") in vv. 14–15. We are not told if the Egyptian in v. 11 or Moses in v. 12 uses any weapon in the physical attack. Normally the verb does occur with a listed weapon. Thus David strikes Goliath with a stone (1 Sam. 17:49–50), Abishai wants to strike Saul with a spear (1 Sam. 26:8), and Abner strikes Asahel with a spear (2 Sam. 2:23). David uses this verb when he speaks of having "struck" a lion and a bear, and hence Goliath would be no big deal (1 Sam. 17:36). He does not mention whether on those occasions he uses any weapon, or just his bare hands, as Samson, who tears asunder (*šāsaʿ*) the lion with his bare hands (Judg. 14:6).

In several instances *nākâ* means "to kill." That is its meaning in passages like Lev. 24:21 ("whoever 'kills' an animal must make restitution, but whoever *kills* a man must be put to death") or Lev. 24:17–18 ("If anyone 'kills' a human being . . . Anyone who 'kills' an animal . . ."). In 1 Sam. 17:9 Goliath challenges Saul to choose a man to fight him with these words: "If he is able to fight and 'kill' me, . . . but if I overcome him and 'kill' him. . . ." Clearly in Exod. 2:12 *nākâ* carries the meaning "kill" (hence my translation "fatally assaulted") for what Moses does to the Egyptian. The verb in v. 11 need not necessarily carry that nuance.

The verb *nākâ* occurs later in Exodus to describe what God will do, or has done, to Egypt and the Egyptians (3:20; 7:17, 25; 9:15; 12:12, 13, 29). Moses and Aaron also do their share of "striking" either water (7:20) or land (8:16, 17 [13, 14]). The hail God sends "struck" the land (9:25), and the flax and barley (9:31; NIV "destroyed"). Could it be that Moses's striking anticipates God's striking?

"Looking this way and that" does not necessarily mean that Moses wants to **2:12** avoid detection, to make sure nobody is looking. Maybe he is looking to see if anybody else will come along to avenge the beating, and when there is no one, he takes care of the matter himself. The language is close to Isa. 59:16 ("He [the Lord] saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene"), and 63:5 ("I looked, but there was no one to help. I was appalled that no one gave support").

Whether it is Moses's intention to kill the Egyptian, or simply give him a good beating in return (which tragically gets out of hand and goes too far)

29

remains a moot point. In one sense, Moses's actions in v. 12 are more violent than those of the Egyptian in v. 11. The Egyptian wounds and bruises; Moses kills. In so acting, Moses is repeating his ancestral heritage. Exodus 2:1 and 6:16–20 inform us that Moses's great-grandfather is Levi (Levi-Kohath-Amram-Moses). Levi, we recall, has a capacity for violence that astounds even his father, Jacob. Levi is one of two of Jacob's sons who avenge their sister's humiliation by wreaking violence on the perpetrators (Gen. 34:25–29). Both Levi and Moses come to the aid of a sister and a brother, respectively. Father Jacob rebukes Levi (Gen. 34:30), and a sibling Hebrew taunts Moses (Exod. 2:14).

2:13 "Brawling" (*nāṣâ*) connotes physical fighting rather than verbal sparring. See Exod. 21:22: "If men who are *fighting* hit a pregnant woman . . ."; Lev. 24:10: "And a *fight broke out* in the camp between him and an Israelite"; Deut. 25:11: "If two men are fighting . . ."; 2 Sam. 14:6: "I your servant had two sons. They *got into a fight* with each other"; Ps. 60, the superscription [v. 2 MT]: "A *Miktam* of David. For Teaching. When he *fought* Aram Naharaim."

The Bible abounds with strife scenes involving family or community members. It is as ancient as the Cain-Abel debacle (Gen. 4) and continues with the quarreling between Abram's and Lot's herdsmen (Gen. 13) and quarrels among neighbors over access to wells (Gen. 21:25–32; 26:18–21). A father-in-law is at the throat of his son-in-law over alleged thievery (Gen. 31:25–55), Israelite brothers on the west side of the Jordan are suspicious of and belligerent toward Israelite brothers on the east side of the Jordan (Josh. 22:10–34), and tribal groups (Ephraim) bellyache against their political/military leader (Judg. 8:1–13; 12:1–6).

2:14 Moses has been physically involved in stopping the Egyptian (v. 12). Here he is only verbally involved (v. 13). He takes no overt action other than to express his amazement and disappointment that two tired, overworked Hebrew brothers would fight with each other rather than join their resources to fight a common enemy. And yet he finds himself the target of insult from his own people.

In the previous chapter (1:11) the Egyptians "put [taskmasters] over" (*śîm ʿal*) the Hebrews. Now one Hebrew asks Moses derogatorily, "Who appointed/put you [*śîm ʿal*] over us?" The rebuke is not all that different from what the Sodomites direct at Lot when he seeks to protect his two male visitors: "'Get out of our way,' they replied. And they said, 'This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge!'" (Gen. 19:9). That Genesis incident is about somebody "knowing" something ("Bring them out to us, so that we may *know* them" [Gen. 19:5]). This Exodus incident is about somebody "knowing" something: "Surely the deed is 'known.'"

In Luke 12:13–15 a man approaches Jesus and asks him to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. In words recalling Exod. 2:14 Jesus responds with, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" This must be Jesus's way of defining his mission, and it does not include being

a local magistrate in a family dispute over property. There are individuals charged with that responsibility, but it is outside the orbit of Jesus's calling and ministry. Similarly, there are those individuals charged with waiting on the tables of the elderly, but it is outside the orbit of the apostles' calling and ministry (Acts 6:1–4).

There is only one possible way Pharaoh could have found out about the killing. **2:15** The only other person around in v. 12, apart from himself and the deceased Egyptian, is the Hebrew to whose rescue Moses has come. It is this fellow Hebrew who must have tattled on Moses, for whatever reason, to the local authorities.

Pharaoh's wrath is first of all unleashed at all boy babies (Exod. 1:22), and then it is directed at one special baby (2:15). Herod's wrath is the reverse of this. First it is directed at one special baby (Matt. 2:3–8), and then at all Bethlehem boy babies when his plan fails (2:16). The Greek of parts of Exod. 2:15 LXX and Matt. 2:13 are strikingly similar: *kai ezētei anelein Mōysēn* and *gar Herōdēs zētein to paidion tou apolesai auto*.

To flee to a remote, wilderness region (for such is Midian) when one's life is in homicidal danger is not a bad idea. Elijah does it after he has killed several hundred preachers, all of whom he feels were deluded (1 Kings 19:3–4). Like Moses, in this remote area Elijah encounters God by a bush/tree, then eventually makes his way back to Israel, as Moses does to Egypt. Jesus does so too, not because he has killed anybody, but because his miracles so confound the religious authorities that "from that day on they plotted to take his life" (John 11:53). What does Jesus then do? Verse 54 says, "Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert." But in chap. 12 of John, Jesus returns to the place from which he has fled, just as Moses and Elijah eventually do.

Barclay (1992: 31) notes that the Septuagint translates the Hebrew *bāraḥ* ("fled") by *anechōrēsen*, which it uses only two more times for the fifty-three occurrences of *bāraḥ*. The Septuagint uses the verbs *pheugō* (27x) and *apodidraskō* (23x) for the other fifty. Barclay asks, "Is this an attempt to remove the ignominy of a flight (*pheugein* would be the more obvious translation) by describing it in more polite terms as 'withdrawal'?" This reading seems to be in sync with Heb. 11:27, which says that Moses, "by faith . . . left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger," although, to be sure, Moses leaves Egypt twice, just as Hagar leaves Abraham's home twice (Gen. 16 and 21). Also, *pheugō* is the term that Stephen uses in Acts 7:29 when he is retelling this incident.

In Acts 7:23–29, Stephen has a unique take on Exod. 2:11–15. First, he omits some data from Exod. 2, such as any reference to Moses's "looking this way and that," any reference to Moses's burying the Egyptian in the sand, and any reference to Moses's fleeing Egypt to avoid Pharaoh's death threat. He adds some new data, such as the notice that Moses is forty years old at the

31

time. Stephen seems to suggest (v. 26 at least, but see v. 27) that both Hebrews are entangled with each other, while Exod. 2 suggests one is the attacker and the other is the victim. Most crucial is Stephen's addition of two phrases not found in the Exodus text. The first is Acts 7:25, "Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not." The second is Acts 7:27, "But the man who was mistreating the other *pushed Moses aside*." First, Moses's own people misunderstand him. Then his own people mistreat him. Can we see here a subtle attempt by Stephen to compare what Moses's kin have done to him with what Jesus's kin have done to him? Both have been misunderstood. Both have been abused, especially when they assume the role of mediator. Furthermore, Stephen's reference to Moses's assuming that his people will know that God has sent him as the Hebrews' rescuer is very interesting. It suggests that already, before the burning bush and God's first self-disclosure to Moses in Exodus, a divine dream has been taking shape in Moses's soul. Here is God's shaping the direction of a human life long before God even shows up!

32