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11-15-2004

## Portraits of Moses

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# Portraits of Moses

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A Seminar Paper presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology.

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The debut of the Dreamworks' film *The Prince of Egypt* has given the story of Moses and the Exodus a popular face again. Once again people, religiously persuaded and otherwise, are exposed to a retelling of the life of Moses. This raises the question in the popular mind, what is to be believed about Moses? This is especially relevant since the film at its very beginning issues the warning that this is an artistic rendition. The film itself refers the audience to the book of Exodus for the actual account of Moses' life. If a moviegoer should happen to have the diligence to look up Exodus and read the account he will find a very different kind of person than the one which confronted him at the cinema. The portrait of Moses in the film differs from the one in the text.

What about different portraits of Moses? What can be said about how Moses is portrayed in the book of Exodus? How does that compare with modern retellings of the life of this great man of God? We will explore some of these issues here. We will begin with modern critical approaches to the text of Exodus. These approaches yield a certain picture or pictures of the man called Moses. Then the text of Exodus as it stands in the canon will be examined. It will yield its own portrayal of Moses. It will be argued here that the portrait of Moses is so broad that he can only be characterized as the "servant of Yahweh." Once the examination of the evidence in the text is completed, different "biographies" of Moses will be considered. Conclusions regarding an "historical" Moses will be examined. Finally, the film *The Prince of Egypt* will be examined in light of the results of this study.

The office that Moses holds in the book of Exodus shows development throughout the book. At the beginning of Exodus, all that is known is that Moses is a

Levite. By the end of the book he has become prophet, judge, covenant mediator, covenant renewer and the institutor of the cult. Moses, however, did not become all of these things all at once. Throughout the book new responsibilities are given to Moses or are assumed by Moses. This study will examine such development, considering primarily the book of Exodus and how Moses' role unfolds there.

### Source Criticism

It is important to consider source criticism's explanations for the differing roles of Moses. Source criticism continues to influence popular perception today. As a result of this and other influences it has had on scholarship, it is important to see how source theory has affected the images of Moses, especially as he appears in the so called J, E and P sources. The sources will be considered beginning from the evidence which is used to support their existence as it relates to the portrayal of Moses.

When dealing with Moses' office it is important to consider first the call narrative (3-4). Under the old source system, J<sup>1</sup> includes Sinai, the Angel of Yahweh and uses "priest of Midian" to refer to Moses' father-in-law.<sup>2</sup> A careful observation of the occurrences of the divine name determined this. These concepts and vocabulary are then associated with J. They become watchwords along with the divine name for identifying sources. The E (3:1, 4b, 6, 9-15; 4:17) source contains the name Jethro for Moses' father-in-law, and Horeb is the mountain of God.

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<sup>1</sup> The J source in the call includes 3:2-4a, 5, 7, 8, 16-22, and 4:1-6. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1974), 52. All designations of the sources come from summaries found in Childs unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



In regard to the Mosaic office both J and E agree that Moses is called as a prophet (3:10) and sent to Pharaoh with the explicit purpose to bring the Israelites out of Egypt (3:10). Yahweh promises to teach him what to say so that the words that Moses brings are actually God's words (4:12). Yahweh gives to Moses His Name and identifies it with the God of his fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:14, 15). Aaron is introduced in 4:14-16 (J) as a Levite (as was Moses in chapter 1). He is to be a spokesman for Moses. Moses speaks to Aaron and Aaron repeats the message, just as God speaks to Moses who then speaks the message (4:17).

Many critics have posited a JE redactor who combined the two sources.<sup>3</sup> The result would be the final account of Moses' call as it is in Exodus. However, this account is still separated out from the call narrative according to P (6:2-7:7). This call narrative (or call renewal as I would posit) contains no physical theophany as occurred with the bush in the JE account. It does not seem to assume that the earlier account even happened. Instead *אני יהוה* occurs, which some believe to be a liturgical phrase.<sup>4</sup> The P narrative contains a lengthy genealogy demonstrating the origins of Moses and Aaron. In JE their parents are listed as Levites and little other information is provided. Here, in P, we have their entire lineage straight from Jacob (6:14-27). This lineage serves to give the origins of Moses, thus, according to source criticism, serving the same purpose as the basket on the Nile account in JE.<sup>5</sup> Some things are repeated from the JE account. The suffering of the Israelites in Egypt is mentioned again by God (6:5).

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 114.

Aaron's relationship to Moses is repeated in answer to the same complaint from Moses that he cannot speak (7:1). It is considered unlikely by the critics that Moses would repeat the same excuse twice (6:12).<sup>6</sup> Here the office of prophet is defined in no uncertain terms. A prophet repeats the words of the one who sent him. Exodus 6:3, if it is seen only in the P source, gives the appearance that Yahweh has changed His Name. This, it is claimed, is parallel to JE's account of Yahweh revealing His Name to Moses at 3:15.

The different emphases of the P and the JE accounts are subtle. P contains a genealogy establishing Moses' lineage. JE merely states his tribal affiliation. In both Moses is set up as the giver of God's words. What God says Moses says and then also Aaron (4:16; 7:1-2). It is claimed that P is more theocentric than JE despite its genealogies, which draw attention away from God's action. The account does not center on the figure of Moses. Instead of the call, God's Name and His wonders take center stage.<sup>7</sup> The similarities between the two accounts are variously explained either by a literary dependence of P on JE<sup>8</sup> or an oral development of the two stories independently.<sup>9</sup>

The plague narratives are also divided.<sup>10</sup> J reveals this pattern: 1) Yahweh commands Moses to command Pharaoh to release the people. This is accompanied by

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J.S. Bowden (Bloomsbury Street, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), 61ff.

<sup>9</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 112.

<sup>10</sup> J: 7:14-15a, 16-17a, 17b, 18, 21a, 24-25, 26-29; 8:4-11a, 16-28; 9:1-7, 13, 17-18, 23b, 24a, 24b, 25b, 26-30, 33-34; 10:1a, 3-11, 13b, 14b, 15a, 15b-19, 24-26, 28-29, 11:4-8.

E: 7:15b, 17b, 20b, 23; 9:22-23a, 24a, 25a, 35a; 10:12-13a, 15a, 15b, 20, 21-23, 27; 11:1-3.

some kind of threat. 2) The threat is carried out (plague). 3) Pharaoh makes a concession. Moses intercedes on Pharaoh's behalf. Pharaoh's heart is hard. E reveals a different pattern: 1) Moses is commanded to stretch out his staff. 2) The command is carried out. 3) The pattern ends with the hardening formula. It should be noted that the E cycle occurs in its entirety nowhere in the plague narrative. It has been assembled from all the various bits found throughout the narrative. In fact Noth, denies E's presence in the plague narratives at all.<sup>11</sup> At best the critics could with most surety decipher only the JE redaction. P reveals yet a third plague cycle: 1) God commands Moses to instruct Aaron to stretch out the rod. 2) The command is executed. Here P also includes the stories about the contest with the Egyptian magicians. 3) Pharaoh fails to react and his heart is hardened. According to JE the first-born is included as part of the plague cycle (11:1), whereas in P the firstborn incident is part of the Passover account (and thus the plagues end at 11:1 for P).

Here some distinguishing features in the Mosaic office begin to present themselves. JE shows us a Moses who is not presented in relationship with Aaron. Despite the fact that JE has an account of Yahweh giving Aaron to Moses to speak for him (4:14-16), when Aaron was found to be unnecessary he was dropped. A confident Moses emerges who not only speaks God's message to Pharaoh, but also is able to bargain with Pharaoh (8:21-25; 10:8-11). Also in JE something new develops, which was not mandated explicitly in Moses' call. Moses is depicted praying to God on Pharaoh's

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P: 7:1-7, 8-13, 19-20a, 21b-22; 8:1-3, 11b, 12-15; 9:8-12, 35b; 11:9-10.

Additions: 9:14-16, 19-21, 31-32; 10:1b-2, Ibid., 137.

<sup>11</sup> Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 69-83.



behalf. This is the first picture that we get of Moses as an intercessor asking God to repeal punishment.

P accents the call of Aaron. Everything is mediated in some fashion through Aaron. It gives us a picture that is in keeping with the picture that is portrayed in the call narratives. Moses tells Aaron what to do or say, and then Aaron executes it. It is almost as if Moses cannot function without Aaron present. Also, P allows for supernatural events to occur outside of Moses and Aaron's purview. The Egyptian magicians are depicted as working wonders also. This heightens the view that God is struggling against the religious authorities in Egypt and ultimately against their gods.<sup>12</sup>

Moses' office is highlighted again in the narrative after the Israelites have successfully crossed the Sea of Reeds. J includes an account of the people grumbling against Moses. A need occurs in the wilderness (15:22-23). The people grumble (15:24). Moses intercedes on their behalf (15:25, cf. 17:4). God meets the need of the people (15:25).<sup>13</sup> Once again Moses is speaking with God on behalf of someone. First it was Pharaoh. Now it is God's own people.

The manna and the quail incident is recounted in both J and P. It underlines Moses' continuing role as prophet. God's instructions are transmitted to the people through Moses. Any complaints directed against Moses are actually complaints against God (16:8). So Moses' office is closely identified with divine authority. Since Moses is

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<sup>12</sup> Hummel views the different natural disasters as personifications of attacks on Egypt's gods over which Yahweh obviously has control since He can end the plague while Egypt's gods are unable to intervene. The tenth plague strikes at the Pharaoh himself who is thought to be the top of the Egyptian pantheon. He is bested by Yahweh. Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 72.

speaking God's own instructions, any attack on the message is an attack on God. The account can still be split into J and P. J has only manna, Sabbath instructions and God's anger at the people's refusal to listen.<sup>14</sup> P has both quail and manna. P includes omers and other measurements. Aaron and maggots are involved in the story along with an anachronistic mention of the Ark of the Testimony.<sup>15</sup>

According to source criticism the whole of chapter eighteen is the E source<sup>16</sup> except for the title "Jethro," which is an addition.<sup>17</sup> Here a whole new picture of Moses is presented. Moses is seen acting as judge for the disputes that occurred among the people (18:13). There has been no calling for Moses to fill this position thus far in the accounts. The people have left Egypt and are now beginning to function as a separate nation. They need a leader. Moses is the called prophet who led them out, so this role naturally falls to him. E presents this story without supernatural revelation. The judiciary system is rearranged according to Jethro's advice (18:18-24). Moses now becomes a sort of supreme court over all of the other elders who are now appointed to handle the smaller cases. Moses will decide the difficult cases.

Then comes the largest split between the sources: the making of the covenant. The E account contains a dark cloud and the ram's horn at the theophany at Horeb. The people hear the horn and ask Moses to mediate (20:18-21). Thus 20:18-21 is moved from its current location to a position previous to the Decalogue. Moses is now in the

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<sup>13</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 260-261.

<sup>14</sup> 16:4-5, 13b-15, 21b, 27-31, 35aβ.

<sup>15</sup> 16:1-3, 6-13a, 16-26, 32-35 a,b.

<sup>16</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 321.

<sup>17</sup> This is unusual because Jethro has already been identified as a distinguishing feature of E. Ibid. 52.



position of covenant mediator at the people's request. God then gives the Decalogue to the people through Moses. This is the ethical Decalogue of E. Noth disagrees at this point, claiming that the Decalogue of Exodus 20 is J or older, but has simply been inserted into an E framework.<sup>18</sup> Moses then becomes the covenant mediator of 24:3-8 when he conducts the ceremony, which seals the covenant. The ceremony is stereotyped including a reading (24:3a), response (24:3b, 7) and the sprinkling of blood (24:5, 6, 8). In this, von Rad, Muilenberg and Baltzer find the covenant renewal ceremony where every year in Israel a person standing as the covenant mediator would recite the words of the covenant. The people would give the liturgical response (24:7), and a sacrifice would occur. The fact that the words of the covenant (which in E is only the Decalogue and not the Book of the Covenant) are apodictic indicates a cultic use.<sup>19</sup> It is curious that this is even included in E because of the use of the divine name (24:3, 4, 5, 7, 8) six times.<sup>20</sup> Here the people play a more active role, being almost on par with God Himself as partners in the Covenant. The Covenant is sealed with a sacrifice. Moses as mediator makes the sacrifice with the assistance of young men, which indicates the age of the account.<sup>21</sup> If it were written later, the cult and priests would have had to be involved with the making of sacrifice. Such concerns are of P and are therefore considered late. With these disagreements, the most that can be concluded

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<sup>18</sup> Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 456.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1972), 264.

<sup>21</sup> Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 198

from this line of reasoning is that E provides the general outline for 19-24 with major portions of material other than E inserted into it.

J presents quite a different version of the same events. It begins in chapter nineteen also, except the mountain is presented with fire and smoke as from a kiln (19:18) rather than beclouded (19:16, E). Moses is selected by God to be the Covenant mediator (19:9). In fact, God's expressed purpose for the theophany is to legitimize Moses' authority as mediator. Moses converses with God and the people witness it. Then the account skips from 19:20 to 34:5.<sup>22</sup> The Commandments are given to Moses only (17:9, 34:5). The people are not involved. The commandments consist largely of instructions having to do with Israel's worship as opposed to E's "ethical" Decalogue. The covenant is made only with Moses who is standing vicariously for Israel (34:32).<sup>23</sup> There is no Covenant ceremony. God reveals His Name in the theophany (34:6). Any mention of Covenant renewal is redactional. The "Ten Words" (34: 28) have been added by a deuteronomistic editor. The division between sources is used to explain why there are two legitimizations of Moses' office at 19:9 by God and again at 20:18-21 by the people. It also explains why Moses is portrayed as going up and down the mountain so often.

One last distinction that is made between J and P by the critics which affects the office of Moses is the one between the Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle. The Tent of Meeting occurs in J.<sup>24</sup> The Tabernacle occurs in P. In J Joshua is the sole attendant in the

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<sup>22</sup> Noth has the account moving from 24:12-15 to chapter 34. *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>24</sup> Noth has 33:7-11 being taken up from an older tradition into J. *Ibid.*, 255.

Tent of Meeting (33:11). God visits only occasionally when the cloud descends on the Tent (33:9). Moses meets with God at the entrance to the tent. Moses mediates in this way between God and the people (33:11ff). This mediating of the word of God on the part of Moses is a continuing office as indicated by the frequentive verbs of 34:34ff.<sup>25</sup>

In P's Tabernacle things operate a little differently. Moses seeks God over the כפרת (25:22). God's dwelling is emphasized. Moses cannot always enter into the tabernacle (40:35). The tabernacle creates a change in Moses' office (25:22, 34:22) especially because Moses' office tends to be replaced by the permanent tabernacle and the priesthood (40:15). There is now an ark and a Holy of Holies. This is how P supports the formation of the Tabernacle without eradicating Moses' role altogether.

### **Summary and Theology of Source Criticism**

So we essentially have two presentations of Moses, each with its own emphases. First we have the JE account with its earthy negotiator Moses. Secondly, we have the P's Moses, descended from a genealogy and dependent upon Aaron.

**JE:**

In JE Moses is presented primarily as the one who is sent to Pharaoh to deliver God's messages and gain the redemption of the people out of Egypt. Moses is free to negotiate on Yahweh's behalf and makes appeals for Pharaoh before Yahweh. Moses later represents the people before Yahweh when they grumble. Moses is the chief arbitrator and judge, which authority is later disseminated to others. Moses is human and portrayed in a lively narrative style.

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<sup>25</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 617.



In regard to the sealing of the covenant, the sources J and E are still separated by source criticism despite their supposed redaction. According to E, the people pick Moses to be their mediator. The people actually meet with God and have some interaction with Him. They hear the commandments without Moses' intervention. The people enter into the covenant with Yahweh on fairly even footing, as if two parties of similar stature voluntarily entered into the covenant together. Moses' office is retained as covenant mediator over against the people, but he does not have the exalted position that he does in J. The people have some voice without its being exclusively mediated by Moses. They have a say in who is to be the mediator between themselves and God. They voice their agreement to the covenant in terms that seem to indicate that they have some choice in the matter.

J on the other hand presents a Moses who virtually does it all for the people. God, not the people, picks Moses to be covenant mediator. Moses stands before God in place of the people. Moses has a heavy responsibility in appealing to Yahweh on their behalf. The Covenant is sealed with Moses on the people's behalf.

Moses seems to be J's special concern, as P is concerned with Aaron. At every opportunity J, seems to put Moses in the forefront. The call of Moses involves his investigation of the bush as opposed to P's account of the call which limits most of the narrative's attention to God. J records Moses' conversations with God. Moses negotiates with Pharaoh. Moses announces the coming plagues with no help from Aaron. Moses becomes the intercessor with God. He very nearly becomes the propitiator of Yahweh's wrath. He is the one who conducts the investigation of the

crime of the golden calf, and seemingly without any word from Yahweh, commands a judgment against them brought about by the Levites. At every turn, J insures that Moses is presented as the sole hero and leader of Israel.

**P:**

In P, on the other hand, concern is shown for Aaron. Aaron is not neglected in any of the stories. Aaron is Moses' mouthpiece and he functions in that capacity in the narrative. Aaron is to hold a special office as the chief priest. Aaron is not someone who stumbled during the whole golden calf incident. God commands Moses and the command is executed through Aaron or in association with the cult.

P is concerned primarily with the importance of priests and the cult. P stops just short of making Aaron the leader of Israel. At every turn Aaron is there at Moses' right hand. Aaron is mediator along with Moses. He is actually granted the title נביא (7:1). The plagues are brought about through the word of Yahweh received by Moses and proclaimed by Aaron. Aaron strikes the rod or lifts it at Moses' bidding.

P insists that the cult is directly from the mouth of Moses himself. The cult is received on Mount Sinai, the same place that the covenant originated. P presents the cult as the Presence of Yahweh among His people right from the very start. This grants legitimacy to the cult and to the theology surrounding the cult.

## Exodus Unified

"[T]he formation of 32-34 can be attributed to the hand of the JE redactor whose work was so far reaching as to approach that of an author rather than a redactor."<sup>26</sup>

This is what could be called the true confession of a critic. Indeed, the biblical text shows an amazing amount of vocabulary and literary unity which can be and is attributed to a single author. The assessment of the biblical evidence does not favor the divisions of the critics or the observations of form or canonical criticism, even though they make progress in the right direction. Thus if the book of Exodus is read as a complete narrative unto itself, a much richer picture of Moses emerges, one that is not fraught with all of the contradictions that the critics claim, especially if viewed from a theological perspective. Yet when the text of Exodus is taken seriously the portraits of Moses still do not appear all at once. Moses' "office" shows some evolution as the narrative progresses. The goal of this section of the paper is to consider the Exodus narrative as it actually stands in the texts, especially that of Exodus. This time the claims and context of the narrative will be taken seriously. His role shall be examined by the duties that he is depicted performing in the texts. What follows is an examination of Moses' duties in light of the rest of the Old Testament, including comparisons of Moses to other people who hold labels like "prophet", "priest" or "king," with a concluding examination of the label that Moses receives in Exodus: עֹבֵד.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 610.



## 1. Go and Say... (Prophet)

Many who give Moses a label give him the label "prophet." It is almost assumed to be obvious that he is one. This position has merit, but it is not without its problems. First we will consider the evidence in favor of the "prophet" label for Moses.

Moses is called by God to rescue the people. God sends (אשלחך) him to Pharaoh (3:10-11). Yahweh promises His presence with Moses (3:12, 15). Moses is instructed by God to say things to the Israelites (3:14 תאמר). When Moses eventually presses God on this point (4:10), Yahweh asks a series of rhetorical questions designed to remind Moses that He is the One Who gives man his mouth and makes him dumb, etc. (4:11). Yahweh commands Moses to "סג" (לך). He promises to be with Moses' mouth (4:11) and He will teach Moses what to speak (תדבר).

Exodus 6:2-7:7 uses similar language to describe what Moses does. Rather than being a different account of the call narrative in P, which view does not take into consideration biblical contextual concerns, it is actually a confirmation of the original call to Moses. אני יהוה is used in the confirmation of Moses' call. יהוה cannot simply appear in a story which has never mentioned it before, which would be true of the P narrative. Thus יהוה as a name has to have been introduced earlier in the same story, namely at 3:14 and 15. This also is shown when יהוה is used in the mouths of the patriarchs (Genesis 15:2, 8; 24:12; 32:10; 49:18). Yahweh also uses His Name in addressing the patriarchs (Genesis 15:7; 28:13). Thus when God says נודעת (Exodus 6:3) He is speaking about revealing the character of His name to the patriarchs, not the

actual vocable.<sup>27</sup> According to Muilenberg, ידע at 6:3 is being used in a covenantal sense.<sup>28</sup> Thus the patriarchs and others previous to Moses may have been familiar with the vocable יהוה without being aware of its full significance, which is now revealed to Moses.<sup>29</sup> He is the God who redeems. In this passage Moses is not presented in Exodus as an epic hero, but rather as a person with human fears who needs such reassurances as in 3:12f. At 6:2 Moses has just confronted Pharaoh for the first time. It seems that the divine message has failed. Pharaoh had heard the message of God, but instead of letting the people go, he increased their labor by forcing them to glean straw themselves for the bricks (5:1-14). Even the Israelites turned on Moses and complained about him (5:21). Moses reacts not as the epic hero, but as the mortal that God has called. He complains to God (5:22, 23). God proceeds to assure Moses by saying over again what He had said previously. He is commanded to give a message to the Israelites (6:6 אמר). Yahweh repeats His command, sending Moses to Pharaoh with His message (בא דבר).

In fact throughout the book of Exodus in Yahweh's dealings with Pharaoh and in His dealings with His own people, this pattern emerges. Yahweh sends Moses or gives the command "Go." Yahweh gives Moses some kind of message that he is commanded to speak to Yahweh's intended destination. Usually some kind of command occurs

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<sup>27</sup> Buber points out that at 3:13 Moses uses the interrogative מה, which asks about the nature of a name, rather than using מי, which would ask for the vocable of a name. Martin Buber, *Moses the Revelation and the Covenant*, (New York: Harper, 1958), 49.

<sup>28</sup> James Muilenberg, "The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator," *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas on His Retirement from the Regius Professorship of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge*, edit. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabus Lindraus (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 177.

<sup>29</sup> Ezekiel 20:5 confirms that God can reveal His Name in stages (Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 113).



using the roots **אמר** or **דבר**. This is the pattern between Yahweh and Moses: "Go and you will say...."

This also is the pattern between Yahweh and His prophets throughout the Old Testament. The earliest example of this seems to be Gad (2 Samuel 24:11ff). Yahweh commissioned Gad with a message to David with the command to go (**הלך**) and speak (**ודברת**). Yahweh repeated the pattern with Gad later (2 Chronicles 24:12). Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29ff.) found Jeroboam in the field and announces a message from Yahweh using the messenger formula, **אמר יהוה כה**, indicating that he had been sent to say these words by Yahweh. Amaziah set up idols and bowed down to them (2 Chronicles 25:14). In response Yahweh sent (**וישלח**) a prophet who said (**ויאמר**), "Why...." Oded was commissioned by Yahweh to rebuke Ahaz for his sins (2 Chronicles 28:9). Oded went out (**ויצא**) and delivered his message (**ויאמר**). At the call of Jeremiah (1:1-5) Yahweh told Jeremiah that he will go to whomever He sends Jeremiah (**אשלחך**). He will speak (**חדבר**) whatever Yahweh commands him to speak.<sup>30</sup> Ezekiel also was sent (**אני שולח**) to say (**ואמרת**) Yahweh's message to a rebellious house (2:1-6). Haggai (**שלחו יהוה**, 1:12) and Elijah (**שלח**, Malachi 3:23) are also both sent.

Yahweh's treatment of Moses is the same in character as His treatment of all the prophets. Moses is sent repeatedly to Pharaoh with a message from God throughout the plagues. Yahweh sends Moses with messages and instructions for the people in a variety of situations, not the least of which is the establishment of the covenant itself. Since Moses and the other prophets of the Old Testament resemble each other in these

aspects, it is reasonable to say that Moses sets the precedent for other נביאים and is one himself.

Surprisingly, Aaron is the only one called a נביא in the book of Exodus (this fact shall be returned to later). However, it occurs in a context that could point to Moses being a נביא. The title נביא is applied to Aaron in an analogy. The analogy compares Moses to Yahweh and Aaron to a נביא. Moses is to be as God with reference to Pharaoh, and Aaron is the prophet of Moses. Therefore Moses is to Yahweh as Aaron is to Moses. Yahweh uses this analogy to explain the relationship that Moses will have with Aaron. This assumes that the relationship that Moses has with Yahweh is one of נביא.

Aaron's call might lead one to suppose that Aaron will be repeating all of the messages that Moses receives from Yahweh and thus impinge upon Moses' call as prophet. If that is the case, it must be assumed from the call because the plague narratives do not record an Aaron who speaks on behalf of Moses. In fact Aaron's role is limited. In the first three plagues Aaron is asked only to stretch out his staff. Moses is the one who talks to Pharaoh (8:5f). At the plague of boils Aaron is addressed by Yahweh along with Moses (9:8), but Moses is the one who actually initiates the plague. At the plagues of flies and hail, Aaron is not mentioned at all until Pharaoh summons him along with Moses (8:21; 9:27). Moses is left to speak with Pharaoh himself (8:22, 25; 9:29). In addition, with the hail and the locusts it is Moses who stretches out the staff, not Aaron (9:22-23; 10:12-13). At the plague of locusts Aaron goes to address Pharaoh along with Moses (10:3), but Moses does the talking (10:9). At the plagues of flies and

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<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that Jeremiah's excuse at his call (Jeremiah 1:6) resembles Moses'.

darkness Aaron is not mentioned at all. The plague on the firstborn has Moses as the sole mediator of the message (11:4) even though Aaron is involved in the Passover instructions (12:1, 28). While Aaron is not missing from the narratives and it could be assumed that he passed along the messages from Moses, the text itself maintains a high regard for Moses as the one who brings the messages of Yahweh and executes the plagues.

When Moses executes his office of prophet, he goes to Pharaoh and delivers the messages of God. The plague narrative as a whole shows to us the fullness of Moses' dealings with Pharaoh. Moses sometimes delivers God's words verbatim. At other times he negotiates with Pharaoh on God's behalf without direct instructions from God as to how to go about such negotiations. Moses acts more independently than merely repeating a message from God. The emphasis is never removed from Moses as the called prophet from God. Moses uses the messenger formula with God as subject mainly in the plague narratives.

Thus far we have seen good evidence to call Moses a prophet. However, in spite of the observation that Moses is a prophet because he bears a strong similarity to other prophets, it is interesting to note that the book of Exodus never refers to Moses as a prophet (נביא). There are other places in the Pentateuch where Moses is called a נביא indirectly. At Deuteronomy 18:18 and 34:10 the text refers to prophets "like" Moses. Numbers 11:24ff, while not calling Moses a prophet, seems to assume that he is. Joshua defends Moses' status as a prophet over against the prophesying elders. Finally, Numbers 12:1-8 declares that Moses is more than a prophet to the point where the



things that are true of prophets (visions and dreams) are *not* true of Moses. Except for Hosea 12:14, the rest of the Old Testament is silent as to whether or not Moses is a prophet and there, Moses' name, is not mentioned. This fact should introduce a note of caution to labeling Moses a prophet without qualification. He does the work of a prophet, but is never called a prophet.

## 2. Miracle Worker

Moses has been accused by some of being a magician<sup>31</sup> because he announces the plague and within a short period of time the plague occurs. This quick execution of a message actually can be seen elsewhere in connection with an office like נביא. Elijah calls down fire from heaven in his contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:21-38). Elisha heals Naaman from his leprosy (1 Kings 5:1ff). The purpose of the healing is "so that he will know that there is a prophet in Israel" (5:8).<sup>32</sup> The sun moves backward on the steps of the stairway of Ahaz at the word of Isaiah to confirm that Hezekiah will recover from his illness (2 Kings 20:1-11; Isaiah 38:1-8). The miraculous rescue of Jerusalem from Assyria at the word of Isaiah could also be considered a miraculous sign (2 Kings 19:1ff.; Isaiah 37:1ff.; 2 Chronicles 32:20ff.). These miracles all occurred within short periods of time after the prophet announced them. Thus the Old Testament finds miracles in connection with the work of prophets. Even the Pentateuch itself predicts that prophets will come and perform miraculous signs (Deuteronomy 13:1ff.). One wonders how a magician would manipulate nature on such a grand scale anyway. Moses is therefore not a magician, but rather is in line with the rest of the prophets of

the Old Testament who will follow him, thus again demonstrating a certain appropriateness to labeling him a "prophet."

However, a note of caution must again be sounded. Prophets like Jeremiah or the twelve minor prophets do not record quick fulfillments of their messages. While Yahweh did have to manipulate history on a grand scale to fulfill Jeremiah's messages (50:2-4, e.g.), it did take some years before the message came to pass. This is not how miracles are usually defined and certainly the plagues did not take years to see their fulfillment (Exodus 9:5, e.g.). Thus "while a miracle may suggest the presence of a prophet, it does not necessarily do so."<sup>33</sup> Therefore Moses' ability to perform miracles, while making him to resemble some prophets, does not guarantee him the "prophet" label in itself. Thus a new label must be found for Moses beyond "prophet" that will encompass everything that he does. Witherington rightly observes, "Early figures such as Moses and Aaron, in fact, played a variety of roles that were not always typical of prophets in the classical period. They were thus difficult to categorize, and this was more the case with Moses than with Aaron...."<sup>34</sup> The rest of Moses' action will be considered with this in mind.

### 3. Intercessor

Moses' intercession develops during the plagues. When the messages that Moses delivers come to pass in a plague, Pharaoh wants Yahweh to remove the plague.

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<sup>31</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 137, 146.

<sup>32</sup> This is to say nothing of Elisha's many other miracles (2 Kings 2:19-25; 4:8-44).

<sup>33</sup> Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Pharaoh at this point seems compliant and wants to appeal to Yahweh for an end to the plague. Now who would go to deliver this message of Pharaoh back to Yahweh? Would Pharaoh dare to take it to Yahweh himself? It is first of all natural that Moses directs messages back to God. If the messenger of a foreign king comes to court with a message and the recipient king has a return message, it would seem natural that the king would send his reply via the emissary rather than through some other means. In this case, Moses is delivering the message of the Israelite deity (אמר יהוה 4:22; 5:1; 7:17, 26; 8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 11:4 (32:27)). It then follows naturally that Moses should be the one to return a message from Pharaoh to Yahweh. So Moses prays on behalf of Pharaoh.

Moses seems to have taken on a new responsibility at this point. He was sent to deliver messages. Now he is speaking to Yahweh for Pharaoh. This can be compared to the behavior of other prophets. The man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13:1ff.) prophesies against the altar at Bethel. The sign that the prophet gives comes to pass, Jeroboam repents and he asks the man of God to intercede on his behalf. The man of God did so and Jeroboam's hand is restored (13:6). Zedekiah appeals to the prophet Jeremiah to pray for him and his officials even though they do evil in the eyes of Yahweh (Jeremiah 37:1-3). Johanan, Jezaniah and all of the army officials ask Jeremiah to pray on their behalf after the exile (Jeremiah 42:2-3). Jeremiah agrees and does so (42:4). Jeremiah in a sermon against lying prophets who say that the articles from the Lord's house will be brought back from Babylon (27:16), exhorts the prophets saying that, if they really have the word of the Lord, then they should plead with the Lord that the furnishings of the



temple not be removed (27:18). Amos, in the visions that Yahweh causes him to see, intercedes on the people's behalf. Amos' first vision is of swarms of locusts devouring the crops of the land (Amos 7:1-2). Amos' reaction is to cry out to Yahweh, "Forgive! How will Jacob survive for he is small?" (7:2). Yahweh responds to Amos' plea by repenting and promising, "It will not happen" (7:3). In Amos' second vision he sees a great fire devouring the deep and the land (7:4). Amos responds "Lord Yahweh, cease! How will Jacob stand for he is small?" (7:5). Again Amos is successful in averting doom because Yahweh repents again: "This will not happen" (7:6). This is the most extended case where judgment was put off by the pleading of a prophet. Amos seems to deny later that he is a נביא (7:14), but he does accept the title חזה "seer," which is synonymous with נביא. Also, Amos is sent by Yahweh with the command הִנְבֵּא אֶל-עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל. Therefore he is a prophet and is shown here to be one who pleads with God in order to avert judgment.<sup>35</sup> This illustrates that it was common for prophets in the Old Testament to intercede on behalf of someone else. These examples all show that Moses is a prototype for the other prophets of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:18). Moses sets the precedent of intercession and other prophets follow. However, there is one example of a precedent being set in the Pentateuch in this regard for Moses: Abraham. In Genesis 20, Abraham moves to live for a while in Gerar (20:1). Abraham tells Abimelech, the king of Gerar, that Sarah is his sister (20:2) and so Abimelech takes her. God is angry

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<sup>35</sup> Andersen/Freedmen extensively compare Moses' intercession with Amos'. They especially point out that only in the intercession of Moses is the imperative of נָחַם used. Then also note unusual nature of asking Yahweh to repent of His actions. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 24A (Doubleday: New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland, 1989), 647-650.

with Abimelech for taking Sarah and threatens him (20:3). Abimelech pleads his innocence (20:4-5). God accepts his pleas and exhorts him to return Sarah to Abraham "for he is a prophet (נביא) so that he will pray on your behalf and you will live," (20:7). This is the first occurrence of נביא in the entire Old Testament. At the first occurrence of the word, its definition seems to be merely one who prays on behalf of another. There is as yet no sending to speak something for Yahweh.

While such evidence combined with what has been observed above concerning Yahweh sending Moses to speak on His behalf would make it seem that Moses is definitively a prophet, when it comes to intercession prophets do not have the corner on the market.<sup>36</sup> Kings also intercede with Yahweh on behalf of other people. The most extended example is Solomon when he dedicates the temple. Several times during that prayer Solomon intercedes on behalf of Israel, asking God to listen to their prayers and to forgive them (1 Kings 8:30, 36, 39, 45, 49, 50). He also asks God to bestow justice upon the righteous and the guilty (8:32). Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, sends his army against Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17) and threatens it (18:19-25, 28-35). King Hezekiah tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth, consults with Isaiah the prophet and asks him to intercede (19:4), but after one final threat from Sennacherib (19:9-13) Hezekiah himself prays. Hezekiah prays on behalf of the people (19:19) and even appeals to Yahweh's

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<sup>36</sup> In fact, Witherington emphasizes Moses' intercession in such a way as to indicate that he is not a prophet, "...Aaron and Miriam are presented as prophetic figures, while Moses, in the main, is presented as God's agent or intermediary, who communicates with Aaron, and as the people's intermediary, praying to God to end or begin one or another divine act" (*Jesus the Seer*, 28). Witherington furthermore asserts, "...there is a marked difference between a mediator or an intermediary and a prophet. There are times and places at which a prophet is simply a mouthpiece for the deity and in fact does not intercede with the deity on anyone's behalf. The communication flows in one direction and is not prompted by any attempts at consultation by a human party" (10).



reputation as a reason that He should take action (19:15-9; cf. Exodus 32:12). Hezekiah's intercession is successful. Yahweh takes action (19:35-37). He destroys Sennacherib's army and has him assassinated by his sons. Intercession on the part of the king would seem to make sense. He reigns over the people and therefore represents them. This then demonstrates that Moses has something in common also with kings, as intercession is not the exclusive domain of the prophets.

Even priests can be said to intercede, although they do it in a cultic setting. The sacrificial system is designed to procure forgiveness for the worshipper. Thus the priest makes intercession on behalf of the worshippers by making intercession through the sacrifice to get their sins forgiven (Leviticus 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16; 6:7; 9:15, 18) even as Solomon prayed for the forgiveness of the people. On the Day of Atonement the priest makes atonement not simply for an individual worshipper, but also for the entire nation (Leviticus 16). Numbers 16:46-50 records the dramatic intercession of Aaron. When the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron, blaming them for the deaths of Dathan, Abiram and the 250 Israelites who supported them, Yahweh sends a plague among the people. Moses directs Aaron to get a censure and to burn incense in the midst of the assembly. As a result the plague stopped, with Aaron the priest standing between the living and the dead (16:48). In light of this, Moses' pleading for an end to the plagues and his pleading for mercy and forgiveness upon the people (Exodus 32:11-14) shows that his role is not unrelated to that of a priest either.

#### 4. Judge

The next time that the responsibilities of Moses are presented in detail in the narrative is in regard to his capacity as judge for the people (שפט 18:13). Later in Israel's history, the judges will perform this task for Israel using the same verb שפט. Othniel is the classic example (Judges 3:9-10) who judges Israel. Tola (10:2), Jair (10:3), Jephthah (12:7), Ibzan (12:8), Elon (12:11), Abdon (12:13) and the mighty Samson (15:20) all serve as judges for Israel. Many of the judges resemble Moses, not only in that they judge, but also that they rescue. Ehud saves Israel from the Moabites by assassinating Eglon (3:12-30). While Deborah did not command the Israelite army herself, Barak refused to go into battle without her encouragement (4:6-10). In the end it is Jael who rescues Israel by killing Jabin's general Sisera (4:18ff) according to Deborah's prediction (4:9). In addition to leading the rescue of Israel Deborah also decided Israelite disputes (4:5).<sup>37</sup> Gideon is commanded to save Israel from the hand of Midianites (6:14).<sup>38</sup> Gideon then under Yahweh's blessing miraculously defeats an army more powerful than Gideon's own (Judges 6-7). Thus Moses bears immediate resemblance to a judge who hears Israel's cases and rescues it from foreign powers.

After the time of the judges comes the time of the monarchy. Samuel judges (1 Samuel 7:6) followed by his sons (8:1). His sons do not administer justice fairly and the people ask for a king to replace them (8:5). Yahweh reassures Samuel that they have not rejected Samuel but rather Yahweh Himself as King over Israel. The first king, Saul, then replaces the last judge, Samuel. Thus the kings take over the function of judging

the people. 1 Kings 15:1ff describes Absalom's conspiracy against David. One of the things that Absalom did was to intercept those people coming to the king for a decision regarding a court case (15:2). Absalom promises them justice if he were judge in the land (15:4 שפט). Absalom's goal is be king himself (15:10; cf. 16:22). Thus we see that kings rendered judgments in court cases. Solomon's great show of wisdom comes when he judges between the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:28 שפט). The hall in which the throne of Solomon sits is called the hall of judgment, משפט, where Solomon judges (שפט 7:7). In this Moses shows resemblance also to the later kings of Israel.

What is unique about the judgment of Moses is some of the other terms also used to describe what the people are doing when they come to Moses for judgment. The people who wait on Moses for decisions are described as coming to Moses "to seek God," לדרש האלהים (18:15). דרש is used with Yahweh, God, or some pronominal suffix referring to Yahweh/God 62 times. The vast majority of times it simply is a way of describing devotion to God (26 times: Isaiah 8:19; 55:6; 58:2; Zephaniah 1:6; Psalm 9:11; 14:2; 22:27; 24:6; 53:3; 69:32; 105: 4; 119:2; Job 5:8; Lamentations 3:25; 1 Chronicles 15:13; 16:11; 22:19; 28:8, 9; 2 Chronicles 14:6; 15:2, 13; 17:2; 19:3; 30:19; 34:3; cf. Ezra 4:2; Amos 5:14). The second most common usage is the seeking of God through some kind of prophet (13 times). It is described as general policy in Israel (1 Samuel 9:9) and then followed in practice. Ahab consults four hundred prophets (1 Kings 22:5; 2 Chronicles 18:4) and then Micaiah (22:13, 8). Hazael consults Elisha (2 Kings 8:8). Uzziah is instructed by Zechariah (2 Chronicles 26:5). Josiah sends officials to consult with

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<sup>37</sup> Deborah is also a prophetess! (Judges 5:4)



Huldah (2 Kings 22:13, 18; 2 Chronicles 34:21, 26). Zedekiah consults Jeremiah through his officials (Jeremiah 21:2; 37:7). The distinguishing feature of this kind of usage is that there is a human being, who is consulted on behalf of Yahweh and responds with a message from Yahweh. The uses which indicate simple devotion to Yahweh do not involve this third party.

Yahweh can also be sought at the sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:5; 1 Chronicles 13:3; 21:30; 2 Chronicles 1:5). Even though a third person speaking on behalf of God is not mentioned in these passages, the sanctuary is the location where the priests gave instruction and where the Urim and Thumim could be consulted. This fits with the category of people seeking Yahweh in the sense that they seek an oracle, whether from a prophet or some other third party. The other uses of *דרש* with God as object include observing His commandments (Psalm 119:10; Ezra 6:21; 2 Chronicles 14:3; 15:2; 31:21), turning to Him in repentance (Deuteronomy 4:29; Psalm 78:34). It is also used when someone inquires of false gods (2 Kings 1:2, 3, 6, 16; 2 Chronicles 25:15, 20).

The coming of the people to Moses so that he could render judgment is described using this phrase. At 18:13 Moses is described as sitting "to judge" (*לשפוט*). He is deciding court cases. He judges between a man and his neighbor (18:16). Moses describes this action to his father-in-law, saying that the people come "to seek God" (*לדרש אלהים*). The action of the people bringing their disputes to Moses is described in Exodus using the same language that the Old Testament uses to describe the actions of people seeking an oracle from a deity through a prophet. This is further borne out by

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<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that at 6:26 Gideon even offers sacrifices!

the fact that Moses is teaching them "the statutes of God and His Torah" (האלהים ואת־תורתיו) (את־חקי). Moses is passing along messages from God. This is the work of a prophet as was observed above; or if one wants to emphasize the time when the root דרש implied the involvement of the sanctuary and the formal instruction of the people, then what Moses is doing could be compared to the work of a priest.

He functions as a go-between. He speaks for the people when they bring a case before him seeking God. He speaks for God by making known the statutes and the Torah of God. Even his father-in-law describes Moses as being "in front of God" מול האלהים (18:19) with respect to the people. This is how he previously functioned with Pharaoh. He brought messages from God to Pharaoh and also brought messages from Pharaoh to Yahweh. This is also how Moses will function in the future.

It is also useful to note that the text does not observe any tension between Moses' role as a prophet/judge sent from God with His messages and his ability to receive advice from a priest outside of Israel. Many reformation commentators have struggled to explain how Moses the great prophet was able to receive advice from a pagan (namely Jethro). Childs points out that this is not an issue for the text but only for later theologians.<sup>39</sup> Josephus, Origen and Augustine also show no difficulty with this kind of advice and found explanations for Moses' reception of it.<sup>40</sup> The struggle with Jethro's advice also rests on the assumption that he was indeed a pagan, which is hardly clear from the text (cf. 18:23).

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<sup>39</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 335.

<sup>40</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* III 66ff. Origen, *Hom.* IX, 6; *Strom.* VI, 66.5. Augustine, *Hept.* II, 62; *Doct. of Christ* proem. 7MPL 34.18.

## 5. Covenant Mediator

Moses, then, is the natural choice for a covenant mediator. At the sealing of many covenants in the Old Testament an altar is built (Genesis 8:20; 12:7; 26:25; 31:54; 35:7). Sacrifices are sometimes made (Genesis 8:20; 15:8-9; cf. 35:14). The root  $\text{קָח}$  "take" is used of the sacrifices (8:20; 15:8-10). Sometimes instead of an altar, a pillar or some other kind of monument is erected (28:18; 31:45, 51; 35:14). When the covenant is made between human parties, the two groups or individuals eat together (26:30; 31:54; cf. 28:20; 2 Samuel 3:20). Some of the action takes place in the morning (Genesis 26:31; 28:18). On occasion there is some kind of indication in the ritual that the covenant is between two parties: something is halved, or there are two objects involved representing the two parties (15:10; 31:51). When the covenant is between Yahweh and some human party, Yahweh makes an appearance (12:7; 15:17; 26:24; 28:12-13; 32:2-3; 35:9; cf. 9:13). While in these early covenants there is no explicit consent from the parties such as we find in Exodus 24, there are some hints that human obedience in the people with whom He makes a covenant is important to Yahweh (Genesis 12:5-6,8; 26:24). What is most characteristic of each of these covenants is that the "stipulations" or terms of the covenant are spoken aloud. When the covenant is between Yahweh and a human being, it is Yahweh who does the talking (8:21; 9:1, 17; 12:1; 26:24; 35:1, 10-11; 15:1-5, 13, 18). Even when the covenant is between two human parties, the stipulations are spoken aloud (Genesis 35:50-53; 2 Samuel 3:17, 19, 21). Covenants do not appear without some kind of spoken word outlining how the covenant is going to work and what is required of each party.



All of these elements of covenants appear also at Exodus 24 when the covenant is sealed between Yahweh and the people, except Yahweh does not personally speak the terms of the covenant. That is left to Moses. The people give their assent to the covenant in two places, both before the ceremony (24:3) and during (24:7). After recording all of the words of Yahweh, Moses arises in the morning (וישכם בבקר 24:4). He builds an altar and sets up twelve pillars (ושחים עשרה מצבה 24:4). Young men from the Israelites offer the sacrifices (ויעלו עלת ויזבחו זבחים שלמים 24:5). Moses takes (ויקח 24:6) the blood. Here the taking is in reference to the blood of the sacrifice, not the sacrifice itself, as in other covenants. The blood is halved (חצי). One half is placed in bowls. The other half is dripped against the altar.<sup>41</sup> Moses reads the words of the Book of the Covenant. The people give their assent. Moses takes (ויקח) the blood in the bowls and sprinkles it on the people. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders of Israel go up and see (ויראו) the God of Israel (24:10). A description is given only of the brick under His feet. Later they gaze (ויחזו) at God, an even stronger verb.<sup>42</sup> There they eat and drink with Him (ויאכלו וישתו 24:11).

All the elements of covenant making are present at Sinai. Everything that Yahweh has done to establish covenants with the patriarchs is done here. Some things are done in an expanded way. For example, there are twelve pillars now (24:4) instead

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<sup>41</sup> The remaining half will later be sprinkled on the people (24:8 also using ויקח). They receive the sprinkling only after they give their assent to Yahweh's covenant. It is possible that the blood is given only after assent. Yahweh gave His implicitly by proposing the covenant so Moses drips blood against the altar at the beginning of the ceremony; but only after the people give their consent does Moses sprinkle blood on them.

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that at 24:17 the text describes what the Israelites did using the verb ראה which is less forward and more reverent than "gaze" חזה.

of just one (Genesis 31:45; cf. 28:18-22). Yahweh made his appearance and the elders of Israel gaze upon Him. Also different was the mode by which Yahweh made the stipulations of His covenant known. Usually He appeared to the patriarchs and spoke with them. The texts do not describe the specifics of the revelation. When Yahweh spoke with them it was to tell them what the features of the covenant would be. Usually the covenants with the patriarchs required most of the activity to be done by Yahweh Himself. At Exodus 24 Yahweh made no such appearance to speak the features of His covenant. Rather the features of the covenant were actually recorded in a book (24:3). Moses records all of the words (כל־דברי יהוה) and the judgments (כל־המשפטים) from Yahweh. Later after the sacrifice is made Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read all the previously recorded words of Yahweh to the people. This is how Yahweh made the features of the covenant known to the recipients. Formerly, He appeared personally and spoke directly with the recipients, but in the case of Exodus 24 at Sinai, Yahweh did not speak the words of the covenant personally. Instead, Moses delivered Yahweh's words on His behalf. Moses can be understood as prophet here also, faithfully proclaiming the words of the Lord (24:3, 7).

Moses also intercedes. He comes down from the mountain to speak to the people (19:7, 21, 25). Moses goes back up the mountain to return the people's answer to God (19:8). Thus Moses is seen going up and down the mountain often. Buber points out that such repetitions serve to underline a theme. This means that Moses' position is being underlined in some way by his repeated journeyings up and down the



mountain.<sup>43</sup> He is the ultimate go-between. Then after the Decalogue is given, we have a formal confirmation on the part of the people that Moses should be the spokesman for God (prophet) and the one to approach God on their behalf (intercessor; 20:18-21).

Moses is the natural choice for the sealing of the covenant ceremony. We have seen how he functions as prophet by reading the words of the covenant (24:3), but also he hears their response (intercessor), "Everything that Yahweh has said we will do!" (24:3).

"Thus again the complementary facets of Moses' role as mediator are highlighted:

Moses is both God's representative to the people — man of God as lawgiver — and the people's representative to God — heroic man as intercessor."<sup>44</sup>

When Moses performs his duties in the role of covenant mediator, it is important not to misunderstand the term. Moses is not some kind of third party who brings the two other parties (Yahweh and Israel) together in a covenant as mediation might commonly be understood today. He performs no activity that would make such a covenant possible, nor is he the originator of the idea.<sup>45</sup> Moses' primary function, in addition to sprinkling the blood, is to announce the will of Yahweh and return the people's response back to Him. Thus he reads the words of Yahweh as they are written

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<sup>43</sup> Buber, *Moses the Revelation and the Covenant*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 4, eds. Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, John David Pleins, Astrid B. Beck (New York-London-Toronto-Sydney-Auckland: Doubleday, 1992), 915.

<sup>45</sup> This is in opposition to Gerhard von Rad who states that Moses suffered on behalf of the people in a sacrificial way, making expiation for the people. He offers Deuteronomy 3:23-26 as evidence. However, such a view fails to account Moses' own responsibility for his fate (Numbers 20:12), nor is such an interpretation given at Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34 (Gerhard von Rad, *Moses*, (New York: Association Press, 1960) 15-17). Von Rad offers this because of his assumption that the sacrificial aspects of the Aaronic priesthood did not date from the Sinai event and therefore the covenant needed a mediator to expiate the sins of the people. Such a role then fell to Moses. Cf. Paul Schrieber, "The Origin of the Aaronic Priesthood in the Context of the Sinaitic Covenant," Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, 1983, 49.

in the scroll (24:7). God chose him for this task just before He announced the covenant (19:9). A new situation has arisen in the life of Israel as a people. Yahweh has fulfilled His promise made to Moses as a sign (3:12). Yahweh has brought forth the people out of Egypt. They were now to worship Him at the mountain. The worshipping community is to be in covenant with Him. In order to establish the covenant, Yahweh makes use of Moses as the one who announces the terms of the covenant (24: 3, 7). He is not to be thought of as some kind of propitiator. That role is reserved only for the sacrifice.<sup>46</sup> In fact, it would be more accurate to refer to Moses using some term other than covenant "mediator"--perhaps "covenant announcer."<sup>47</sup>

The trouble is that here Moses is not announcing the words of Yahweh in typical prophetic style. He reads them from a book. While Jeremiah writes the words of Yahweh on a book and has them delivered to the temple (Jeremiah 36), the elders and priests of Israel are also charged with the reading of the Law (Deuteronomy 31:9-13; cf. Joshua 8:34-35). The priests are also commanded to teach all of the decrees given by Moses (Leviticus 10:11). It is difficult to understand how such teaching could occur without the use of the Book of the Law. Thus when Moses reads the Book of the Covenant to the people, it cannot be said that this necessarily has to be prophetic. It is also priestly. This idea is further highlighted by his sprinkling of the blood (Exodus

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<sup>46</sup> In reference to Moses' statement regarding the blood of the Covenant (24:8), Hilber states, "In this statement Moses summarizes the fact that *the Covenant relationship is mediated through sacrifice* and is defined in terms of the 'Book' just read," [emphasis added]. John W. Hilber, "Theology of Worship in Exodus 24," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (June 1996): 183.

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that the concept of "mediator" is not explored much in the Old Testament. The vocabulary is absent. In the New Testament when the concept appears it is the One who is sacrificed who is the mediator (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 12:24 and 9:14ff where Exodus 24 is under discussion).



24:6, 8 זרק). This function will be performed later by the priests (also with the root זרק, Leviticus 1:5, 11 [15]; 3:2, 8, 13; 7:2, 14; cf. 4:6, 17, 25, 30, 34; 5:9). Moses will also sprinkle blood in a similar fashion at the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29:12, 16, 21; Leviticus 8:15, 19). At the ordination Moses will pour blood at the base of the altar (Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 8:15), an action which resembles what he does with the blood when it is sprinkled on the altar at the sealing of the covenant (Exodus 24:6). Such pouring of blood at the base of the altar is also the tasks of the priests (Leviticus 1:15; 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5:9; 9:9). While Moses does not make the actual sacrifices himself, but leaves that to the young men (24:5), it is undeniable that his use of the blood is priestly.<sup>48</sup>

## 6. Covenant Renewer

When the covenant is broken at the golden calf incident, Moses is the one who pleads on behalf of the people. He receives the renewal of the covenant and all of the further cultic regulations on behalf of the people. Again he is doing what he has done all along, even judging. The covenant is broken. Certainly this is a difficult case (18:22). Moses declares the covenant broken (32:19) and delivers the judgments of God (32:19-20, 27-29; cf. 18:16). He even questions Aaron (32:21-24).

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<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that Cody sees Moses here acting as the chieftain of his people. He represents them before God. He cites the *mukariibun* of Dadramaut who did similar things with their gods but were not priests. "Whether Moses is here being priestly or not depends entirely on what we mean by priestly." Aelred Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 43.



He also delivers appeals on behalf of the people (32:11ff, 30ff; 33:12ff; 34:8ff).<sup>49</sup> He demonstrates that he identifies himself with the people by saying "we," "us" and "our" to God when referring to the people (33:15-16).<sup>50</sup> At one point his appeals even sound like he is appealing to his own merit (34:9). His most compelling arguments, however, are his appeals to God's reputation with the Egyptians (32: 12) and ultimately to the promises to the patriarchs (32:13). It should be noted, that even in his appeals, Moses is still dependent upon the prompting of God. In 32:10 God mentions wanting to make Moses into a great nation, which gives Moses the hint for the idea of arguing from the promises to the patriarchs (cf. Genesis 12:2). So God actually tells Moses which argument is going to be the most effective.<sup>51</sup> Moses appeals for the presence of God with His people and not merely that of an angel (33:15). He asks to see the glory of God (33:18). He even offers his life on behalf of the people (32:32). In fact, the verb for what Yahweh performs in response to the interceding of Amos (יָחַד, Amos 7:3, 6) is the same verb for the action that Moses demands from Yahweh (Exodus 32:12). He is interceding.

## 7. Institutor of the Cult

Moses received instructions for the cult. In this Moses resembles kings and prophets who also gave instructions regarding Israel's worship. At 2 Chronicles 29 Hezekiah repaired and purified the temple of Yahweh. Once everything unclean had

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<sup>49</sup> Childs compliments the redactor on his art because he included the theme of intercession throughout the entire final form of the text, which brings unity to the story as it is redacted. *Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>50</sup> Muilenberg, "The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator," *Words and Meanings*, 174.

been removed from the temple Hezekiah offered sacrifices and reestablished the Levites in charge of music in the temple. The Levites were arranged with cymbals, harps and lyres as David, Gad, his seer (חזה), and Nathan the prophet (הנביא 29:25) had commanded. The verse ends with the remark that the arrangements for worship were by the hand of Yahweh who commanded by the hand of his prophets (נביאיו). So apparently prophets did give instructions for worship. Haggai is a prophet (Haggai 1:1) who commanded that the temple be rebuilt (1:8; 2:5). He was sent with messages that even the high priest is to obey (1:1, 12; 2:2). He even consulted the priests for assistance with his indictments against the people (2:11-13). Yahweh sent instructions regarding the building of the temple through the prophet Haggai. The prophet Ezekiel also received a vision of the pattern of the heavenly Temple (Ezekiel 40-43). This also is congruent with Moses' receiving the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him on the mountain. Ezekiel even received instructions regarding the priests (44:15ff), their garments, etc. This is reminiscent of when Moses' received instructions for Aaron and his sons' garments. Jeremiah also had a ministry attached to the temple and instructions regarding correct worship. God sent Jeremiah to the temple to preach to the people entering for worship (Jeremiah 7:1ff). He warned them that their behavior needs to change in order to avert disaster. They could not simply rest secure because they have the temple (7:4-5). He ordered them to abandon their cultic devotion to other gods (7:9,18,21). He then pointed out that Yahweh has commanded both the cult and walking in His ways (7:22-32). The cult should be observed correctly, but not at the expense of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 503.

other obligations. Isaiah had a vision of Yahweh in the temple (Isaiah 6). Yahweh sent him from the temple to preach. Thus the cultic center is the origin of Isaiah's prophetic ministry.

The other prophets bear similarity even in cultic involvement to Moses. It is a cult according to God's pattern shown to him on the mountain (25:9). Here Moses is delivering more instructions from God--this time, regarding His institutions for worship. Through that cult Israel will have permanent access to God in appropriate worship. Here Moses is setting up a permanent way for the people to have intercession between themselves and God. Moses assembles the Tabernacle (40:1-33), the means by which the people will approach God. He is the one who is sent to ordain Aaron (29:1-35). Only after his ordination does Aaron take over the role as intercessor in so far as it has to do with the cult. The story of the veil (34:29ff) indicates that Moses continues as prophet, carrying the messages of God.

While prophets did give instructions regarding cultic matters, not all prophets did. In addition, as we have seen already with Hezekiah, kings also gave instructions regarding worship. David arranged the Levites for worship (1 Chronicles 23:2ff). He gave instructions to Solomon for the building of the temple (1 Chronicles 22:2ff; 28:2ff). Such instructions came through David by the Spirit (28:11ff). 1 Chronicles 29:6-9 recorded the gifts given for the temple. At Exodus 25:1-7 and 35:4-36:7 Moses requested the gifts and manages them. At 1 Chronicles David requested the gifts of the people and managed them. The only difference is that David also gave of his own wealth toward



the temple. Solomon was in charge of constructing the temple (2 Chronicles 2-6; 1 Kings 5-6) just as Moses delivered the instructions and was in charge of the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 37-40). Moses thus seems to be combining several offices together. Here at least we have seen that he seems to resemble both prophets and kings. However it must still be observed that the cult is mainly the realm of the priest. So is Moses a priest, as we have seen hints of at the sealing of the covenant?

### **8. Is Moses a Priest?**

There are several arguments from the book of Exodus that are put forth by various scholars who argue that Moses is a priest. Almost none argue that he is a priest to the exclusion of prophet. Some of their arguments involve the book of Exodus, which is under consideration here. Any discussion of the offices of Moses must involve considerations for those occasions where he appears to be fulfilling a priestly function.

Kennett, while dealing mainly with his theory of the origins of the Aaronite priesthood, does make an observation about Moses. Operating under source criticism's assumptions, he points out that Exodus 33:7-11 is an older tradition (E). He also claims that other parts of E confirm this by showing such "age" (17: 10-12; 24:14). In this older tradition Aaron does not appear in the tent. Only Moses does. Therefore Moses is a priest in the earliest traditions and not Aaron. Kennett's primary piece of evidence is the Tent of Meeting which Moses pitches outside of the camp in chapter 33.

One wonders what Exodus 33:7-11 has at all to do with priestly matters. Moses pitches a tent without any kind of instructions from Yahweh. He calls it the Tent of Meeting. He commands anyone who wants to seek Yahweh (כל־מבקש יהוה; 33:7) to come to the Tent of Meeting. Moses himself enters the Tent of Meeting with a great show of respect from the Israelites to consult with Yahweh. Yahweh speaks to him "face to face as a man speaks to his neighbor" (33:11). The purpose of the Tent of Meeting is to set aside a place where Moses can go in order to receive further revelation from Yahweh. Moses is not pictured in this passage doing anything which may be construed as being priestly except perhaps the entering of the tent. He does not offer sacrifice, burn incense or consult the Urim and Thummim. In fact, when he comes out from the Tent of Meeting it is to deliver more prophecy to the people (34:33-35).<sup>52</sup> The only thing that the text demonstrates is that "[T]here was a connection between the prophecy of Moses and the ... tent."<sup>53</sup>

A more elaborate theory involving more texts beyond Exodus, but yet not divorced from the Exodus narrative, is the one involving Moses as an eponym for Mushites. Wellhausen observed that Mushites were priests at Dan. He argues that Judges 18:30 traces the decent of the priesthood at Dan from Gershom, the son of Moses.<sup>54</sup> Thus the Mushites are actually descended from Moses and not from a clan of

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<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that this text does not explicitly mention the Tent of Meeting. However, to what else would Moses' "entering" and "going out" refer?

<sup>53</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 238.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that the MT and some LXX texts have "Manasseh" instead of "Moses." The critical position allows such conclusions because a person was a priest in ancient Israel if he served at a sanctuary. Levitical connections were unnecessary as the Levites were a secular tribe of wanderers in



Levi (1 Chronicles 6:47).<sup>55</sup> Cross connects this theory to the Exodus text by reading the Pentateuchal material in light of the proposal that the name Moses is actually an eponym for Mushites. Assuming that Aaron is also an eponym for the Aaronites he cites Exodus 32:1-6, 15-24, 35 as actually an account of a clash between the Mushites and the Aaronites expressed in Aaron's construction of the golden calf and the ensuing confrontation between Moses and Aaron. The story as it stands has been adjusted to relieve Aaron of some of the blame for the golden calf. It is assumed here that Moses would have surely punished Aaron for building the golden calf, but the story contains no such punishment. This is because the story comes down to us, according to Cross, through Judean hands, who after the exile were pro-Aaron. In this line of thinking the pro-Aaron Judeans edited out Moses' punishment of Aaron. Thus the original story must have also contained some kind of injunction against Aaron by Moses. According to Cross this story is also Elohist. Elohist material is northern material. Thus the original story before Judean editing must have come from the north. There were two sanctuaries in the north, Dan and Bethel, who could have preserved this story. The priests that served at Bethel were descended from Aaron (Judges 20:26-28) and thus were Aaronites themselves. Since this original story is an attack on Aaron it must have come from the Mushites at Shiloh via Dan in the north.<sup>56</sup> Thus in the Exodus text Cross

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Israel who only later came to be thought of as priestly at their own insistence in order to survive without land in an agrarian society. Therefore being a descendant of Aaron was also unnecessary. Moses can be made a priest just as easily as anyone else and Moses has more prominence in the traditions. Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, 55-57.

<sup>55</sup> Cross also points out that the name Gershom is given as a son of Levi as well as Moses. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 198.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.



sees the connection between the Mushites and Moses because they would have told the story to cast Moses as the hero of the golden calf and accuser of Aaron. Since the Mushites are priests and Moses represents them, in the text of Exodus we have one priest confronting another.<sup>57</sup> Or perhaps more appropriately, we have one set of priests confronting another set.

The odd thing about all of this is that it rests on the assumption that Moses represents the Mushites in the text. If the Mushites had access to the traditions enough to change them to such a great extent as to include a polemic against the Aaronites at Bethel, why did they not also alter Moses' portrait so that he resembled a priest a little better? Moses is seen at Exodus 32 as a prophet, intercessor and judge. He descends from Mount Sinai carrying the tablets of the commandments which he has just received from Yahweh (Exodus 32:15-16). This is prophetic in that he is delivering the messages of Yahweh. He then proceeds to deliver the judgments of Yahweh. He questions witnesses and renders judgments with the messenger formula: כה-אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל: (32:27). He executes judgment via the Levites and returns to the mountain to make more intercession on behalf of the people (32:27-34, cf. 32:11-14). Such intercession as we have already observed is a prophetic characteristic. While it is true that priests also intercede, they do it within a cultic context (see Leviticus). In Exodus 32 Moses is having a conversation with Yahweh similar to the intercessions of Amos and also Abraham (Genesis 18:16-33). If the Mushites were adjusting the text, why not have some kind of sacrifice or cultic ritual at least alluded to during such intercession? It

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 199.

could be argued that the Mushites were glorifying Moses the priest by presenting him as having direct conversation with the Almighty, even asking Him to repent! This would make their great ancestor even more impressive. Such a telling of the story would expand their hero Moses from merely priestly into prophetic and judicial action also because he makes intercession without the need for a cult and receives divine revelation directly from Yahweh. But if the portrait of Moses the priest is being expanded to include prophetic and judicial aspects, is it not just as likely that Moses was being portrayed as a prophet or judge and not a priest? This could be argued from what we have seen without the necessity of making Moses into a priest. However, this would require taking the context of the narrative more seriously and abandoning Moses as a possible eponym for the Mushite priests at Dan.

Other arguments for the priesthood of Moses involve his association with the Midianites. His father-in-law is a Midianite priest. According to this line of reasoning Zipporah is, more than likely, a priestess herself (4:24-26). The influence that the Midianites had on Moses is seen in Exodus 18 when Jethro advises Moses regarding the judicial system in Israel.<sup>58</sup> Gressmann even argues that Jethro instructs his pupil, Moses, in the methods of sacrifice (18:12).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cross includes a discussion of the descendants of Hobab who is a relative of Moses (Numbers 10:29). His group settles in the Negev and later migrates to Naphtali (Judges 1:16; 4:11). Jael was part of this group. Sisera, a supposed descendant of Moses, flees to the tent of Jael. Thus Cross observes that the two groups were allies further sealing the affinity between Moses and the Midianites (Judges 4:17). *Ibid.*, 200-201.

<sup>59</sup> Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, 45.



None of this kind of priestly involvement shows up at Exodus 18. If Jethro is advising Moses in regards to priestly matters, then we must conclude that the judiciary arrangements in Israel are the responsibility of the priests. This is not the case in any of the texts.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the divisions referred to in Exodus 18 resemble the divisions of authority amongst the people (Deuteronomy 1:15, 1 Maccabees 3:55). This was never a charge of the priests. Thus the text is not demonstrating any dependence of Moses upon Jethro for matters of a priestly nature. In addition, the text which depicts Jethro's sacrifice does not mention Moses at all, only Aaron and the elders. If Moses is to be taught how to sacrifice, he will find it difficult to learn not being present for the lesson! Cody posits that what is being depicted here is a covenant meal like we saw between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:44-54). Thus what is actually happening here is that a covenant is being formed between Israel's leadership and Jethro.<sup>61</sup>

Such elaborate critical theories are unnecessary to demonstrate a priesthood for Moses. Moses' own actions in clear passages from Exodus will suffice to demonstrate that he did at times function as a priest. Besides the examples already examined, it should be considered that Moses receives the instructions for the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29). He is told to immolate the victim, place its blood upon the horns of the altar, pour its blood at the base of the altar, and place its blood on the big toe, thumb and earlobes of Aaron and his sons (29:10-14, 20-23). These instructions strongly resemble the duties that the priests will carry out after their ordination. Moses

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<sup>60</sup> Except perhaps Deuteronomy 19:17 where the Levites hear court cases.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 45.



behaves as the priest; Aaron and his sons fill the role of the individual worshippers (29:10, 15). This would seem to be the best piece of evidence in favor of a priesthood for Moses. He is here filling the role that Aaron and his sons will soon take over. Since Moses fills the role of the priest only temporarily Gray concludes that he must be a priest who has a "priesthood of a week."<sup>62</sup> However, Cody points out that if we remove Moses from the texts, we have no one to ordain Aaron. It takes a priest to ordain another priest, and there is no priesthood as yet. Cody frames it in terms of source criticism. He says that P needs to get the priesthood started. So the motive for choosing Moses to ordain Aaron in no way demeans Aaron; rather "[t]he motive for doing so would be simply the desire to express ... the theological idea that Moses is at the origin of Israel's religious institutions in general."<sup>63</sup> Thus when Moses ordains Aaron, he performs duties that are priestly at God's command because Yahweh has called no one else as yet to perform this kind of duty. Furthermore, it is a different kind of priesthood than the biblical presentation.<sup>64</sup>

The one text that has gone unconsidered by most is Exodus 40:29. After Moses has placed the altar in its position, he offers offerings (ויעל עליו אחד-עלה), which would seem to make him a priest. There is the command of Yahweh (יהוה אחד-משה כאשר צוה) who

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<sup>62</sup> George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 196.

<sup>63</sup> Cody's eventual conclusion is that "Moses does not appear in any way that clearly makes him a priest." Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Schrieber points out that Moses did not receive the same portion of the peace offering that a regularly ordained priest would have received: "both the right thigh, the breast and various cakes" (Leviticus 7:11-13) while "Moses received only the breast." Thus Moses does not serve in exactly the same capacity as priests, even though what he does in ordaining Aaron and his sons is necessarily priestly. Paul Schrieber, "The Origin of the Aaronic Priesthood in the Context of the Sinaitic Covenant," 165.

has instructed Moses to do what he is doing. Aaron and his sons have still not been ordained so they are unavailable to make the sacrifices yet at the newly assembled tabernacle. Apparently sacrifice at the assembling of a tabernacle is the thing to do. Moses performs the sacrifices. Not only is such sacrificing priestly, but it also resembles the actions of King Solomon who offered sacrifices at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:62-63; 2 Chronicles 7:1). So Moses performs the duty as the leader of Israel who brought them up from Egypt, interceded on their behalf, decided their court cases, and mediated the covenant. He is the only called individual available for these tasks. After the priesthood is instituted, Aaron and his sons handle the cultic functions and Moses continues his other duties.

## **Conclusion**

### **Moses the Servant**

Now that the various duties of Moses have been observed, it can be seen that no strict label can be applied to Moses in terms of the functions he performs. Moses' duties have such a variety that many different kinds of people in the Old Testament after Moses perform the same functions that Moses did. In the effort to give a specific label to Moses it should also be considered what label the Old Testament gives to Moses and not just an examination of his duties.

Deuteronomy concludes by describing Moses' death: "Moses, the servant of Yahweh died..." (34:5). The book of Joshua continues the story of Israel beginning with the death of Moses, "the servant of Yahweh" (1:1). Yahweh calls Moses "My servant"



(1:2, 7). Joshua follows Yahweh's example in referring to Moses as His servant (1:13, 15; 18:7; 22:2, 4, 5). The land is apportioned according to the command of Moses, the servant of Yahweh (12:6; 13:8; 18:7). The Israelites follow Moses' command to renew the covenant at Mount Ebal. At this renewal Moses is called the servant of Yahweh (8:31, 33). They follow the command of the servant of Yahweh regarding the conquest of the land (11:12-15). Even the Gibeonites who have heard of Moses' fame call him the servant of Yahweh (9:24). Solomon speaks of Moses at the dedication of the Temple in his prayers, saying that Yahweh spoke through Moses to set the Israelites apart from all other nations (1 Kings 8:53). Yahweh's good words, which came by Moses, His servant (1 Kings 8:56), have not failed. Moses, the servant of Yahweh is said to have commanded the covenant (2 Kings 8:12) and given the Law (2 Kings 21:8; Nehemiah 1:7, 8; 9:14; 10:30). Moses, the servant of Yahweh, is credited with the erection of the tabernacle (2 Chronicles 1:3), implementing the tax for its maintenance (2 Chronicles 24:6,9), and commanding proper worship for the priests (1 Chronicles 6:34). Psalm 105 recalls the history of Israel beginning from Abraham and concluding with Yahweh providing water for the Israelites in the wilderness. When Moses is mentioned as one sent by Yahweh to Egypt, he is called His (Yahweh's) servant (105:26). When Aaron and Miriam rebel against Moses (Numbers 12), Yahweh defends Moses. He explains that other prophets receive their revelations in visions and dreams, but not Moses, His servant, to whom He reveals Himself face to face (12:6-8). The Old Testament refers to Moses as the "servant of Yahweh" or some equivalent phrase 36 times. The title is also found in Exodus (עֶבֶר, 14:31). This is the only direct label that Exodus uses to address



Moses. Otherwise Moses is simply addressed by Yahweh or others without a specific title or by name. This title is also used to describe other people in the Old Testament (most notably David) who perform some of the same functions that Moses did. The title "servant of Yahweh" is apt for the Old Testament's portrayal of Moses because it provides a description for Moses which allows for the variety of functions that he performs.

Moses is a multifaceted jewel. While Moses appears as a prophet par excellence and many of his duties can be seen in that light, which is why he is so frequently labeled a prophet, there are also duties that he performs that are not typically prophetic in the Old Testament sense. For example, Moses is seen judging the people. While his judicial responsibilities are described using words that describe the prophetic office (שֹׁפֵט, etc.), judging court cases is not something typical of prophets in the Old Testament. Judges and kings will later decide Israel's cases (cf. Judges 4:4-5; 2 Samuel 15:2). While Moses' primary duty at the sealing of the covenant is to announce the words of Yahweh to the people, he does sprinkle blood, which is typically priestly (cf. Leviticus 1:5). Although other prophets make sacrifices besides Moses (1 Kings 18:33), sacrifices remain at the heart of what it is to be a priest (Leviticus 1-7, 9). Other prophets also give instructions regarding the cult, but only Moses receives the initial instructions from Yahweh regarding the detail of the cultic regulations, the construction of the tabernacle, and the duties of Aaron and his sons. While receiving such instructions and passing them on to the people is prophetic, the content of this prophecy is priestly in character. Thus there are other facets to Moses' service of Yahweh. Schrieber rightly

points out, "...Moses possessed a unique office, consisting in elements which later were the special purview of several distinct offices or institutions. United in Moses were the functions of 'prophet,' 'priest,' and 'king.'"<sup>65</sup> Yet Exodus does not consider these facets as contradicting each other. It is a modern theologian's concern that duties and offices be apportioned with the correct duties assigned to the correct offices and no others.

Exodus shows that Moses does what Yahweh tells him to do without any concern about going outside of his realm.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps this is why Exodus does not assign any labels to Moses except twice, "servant." This could also explain why the Old Testament in general prefers a generic word like "servant" rather than a term that would connote a more specific and limited list of duties than the ones that Moses performs.

### Critiques

Now that we have considered the theory under source and form criticism and the Exodus text as we have it, we are in a position to consider and respond to select biographies of Moses, including the film "Prince of Egypt."

#### Auerbach

Elias Auerbach offers his version of an historical Moses. Auerbach's approach is to take the earliest sources (mainly J) and to strip away all of the legendary additions in order to find the actual Moses. In the end, Auerbach leaves us with a very meager

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>66</sup> "The ebed YHWH is thus an honorific title of the mediator of revelation rather than an official title and is referring to the special status of his relationship to God." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol.



Moses, as follows. Moses had some form of contact with Egyptian society from childhood. Auerbach cites Moses' Egyptian name as evidence. Moses leaves Egypt and lives in Midian where he takes a wife. He begins to tend his father's-in-law flocks at Kadesh. While at Kadesh Moses invents the name Yahweh by adding an emphatic ה to the ancient deity's name, יהו. Moses then decides that his life's work should be rescuing his people from Egypt. Moses returns to Egypt. Moses never has an audience with Pharaoh because slaves are not allowed at court. While in Egypt some kind of calamity strikes the country. The Israelites take advantage of the confusion and flee. At this point Auerbach becomes uncertain as to what exactly happened. It seems inconceivable to him that Pharaoh did not pursue the Israelites. However, Pharaoh did not capture them. Auerbach is uncertain how they made good their escape, but they must have managed it somehow. Once free of Egypt, Moses leads them back to Kadesh. While at Kadesh, Moses develops a revolutionary new religion. Moses is seen as an innovator of religion. Moses invents monotheism, complete with apodictic law codes and one day in seven for rest. Moses invites his father-in-law out to Kadesh to teach Moses how to offer sacrifices since Jethro was a priest and Moses wanted to add sacrifices to his new religion.

Auerbach's historical analysis rests on the documentary hypothesis, which will be addressed below. Without addressing those issues, let it suffice to say that Auerbach takes us far away from the biblical narrative. The servant Moses who reveals Yahweh to

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X, eds. G. Johannes Botterweek, Helmer Gtingren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge U.K., 1999), 394.



His people is completely missing. Instead we have a sociological innovator. His motives for inventing a religion based off of an ancient name is not explained. Also no explanation is given of how the people came to believe such a concoction of religions. Auerbach is deeply unsatisfying not only because of the meager Moses that he leaves us with, but also because in order to achieve his historical Moses he has had to distance himself so far from the text.

## **JEDP**

The different portraits of Moses in J, E and P have been observed and summarized above. Using the evidence from Exodus narrative itself which points toward Moses the servant, a response is here offered to the presentations of Moses in the sources. In order to offer such a response to source criticism's division of the text of Exodus, using the offices of Moses as our guiding point, the call narrative will be considered first. J and E are primarily divided into sources using details in the text. No major thematic differences are used to distinguish the two. J is concerned with Yahweh, the priest of Midian, and Sinai. E is concerned with Elohim, Jethro and Horeb. However, in regard to the call itself, J and E seem to be in agreement. Moses is God's chosen messenger for bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Thus Yahweh aims to reveal His will to Pharaoh. Aaron is incidental to that call. Yahweh is concerned that His people be rescued from Egyptian domination.

Yahweh's rescue of His people is one of the chief concerns of the Exodus narrative. God chose Moses as His instrument for delivering the messages which

brought about the release of His people. This is the primary concern of the call narrative whether it occurs in J, E, or P. In light of this same major concern of all of the sources, matters of the choice of divine name, "Jethro" vs. "Moses' father-in-law," and the name of the mountain of God (which could easily have had two) all become incidental and a matter of stylistic selection. This is borne out by the fact that many critics combine the J and E sources into a single redaction.<sup>67</sup> However, as with all unified texts, if a final redactor can be posited, why not an author?

Source criticism lifts Exodus 6:2-7:7 as P's call narrative separate from JE. In order to do this, however, contextual concerns have to be ignored, namely that this incident occurred after Moses' first encounter with Pharaoh and that the words of Yahweh actually serve to encourage Moses rather than to call him. P repeats much of the material found in J and E, which is natural. If the servant of Yahweh doubts his calling, Yahweh seeks to reaffirm the call and thus uses similar language to the call found in Exodus 3 and 4. One wonders if this really is P speaking, why Aaron's role is not expanded here? Surely the redactor could have worked it in. This concern regarding Moses' call as Yahweh's servant chosen to deliver the people is where agreement is to be found between JE and P. Differences such as P's genealogy (6:14-27), which JE lacks, are not as significant to the narrative. And even at the genealogy there is agreement on the detail that Moses and Aaron are both Levites. The critics observe that P tends to be more theocentric than either J or E.<sup>68</sup> Aside from the fact that they never explained how

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<sup>67</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 114.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.



P is more theocentric than the other sources in the call narrative, it is easily explained by contextual concerns. In P Yahweh is reassuring His prophet. He dwells upon His own might and objectives in order to reassure Moses that the fate of Israel is not in Moses' hands, but rather in His hands.

Once again, in the plague narratives, all of the sources agree that God is behind the occurrences of the plagues. God commands Moses to deliver the message to Pharaoh regarding the plague. Pharaoh is unresponsive to the plague. This is the core of each of the cycles in the separate sources. Once again the stress is on both what Yahweh is doing to rescue His people through plagues and on Moses His servant. The variations (Aaron's role, whether there is a staff involved or not, the Egyptian magicians, Moses' negotiations with Pharaoh, etc), which they use to divide the sources, then, are a matter of style.

The manna and quail incident in Exodus 16 is divided into J and P. Both sources agree that Moses' function is to deliver the instructions of Yahweh regarding how the people are going to be provided for. Both include Yahweh's displeasure and punishment when the people disobey the instructions. Yahweh considers rebellion against Moses the same as rebellion against Him. The sources even agree that there will be punishment for the people's actions (J: 16:27-28; P: 16:20). Thus the details that divide the "sources" become incidental: quail and manna (P) vs. only manna (J). The real concern and unity of that narrative is found in how the relationship between Yahweh and His newly redeemed people will function.



At the making of the covenant the split between the sources is most severe. The critics ignore the contextual concerns of 32-34. They move 20:18-21 after the Decalogue to a new position prior to its current place in order to sustain the source critical theory. No real reason is given for this change except that it serves to heighten the differences between the sources, which are, of course, assumed before the reordering occurs.

Even here, though, unity is still found in the presentation of Moses and his office. Moses is the covenant mediator in both J and E's presentation of the making of the covenant. Whether chosen by the people (20:18-21) or by Yahweh (19:9) Moses is the covenant mediator. Moses in both contexts (20-24 and 32-34) is the revealer of the divine word and thus the covenant. In one context he reads the words of Yahweh from a scroll (ספר) and in the other he brings them on tablets (לוח). Nevertheless he is still the revealer. Yahweh's goal is the same in both: to have a covenant between Himself and His newly redeemed people. The differences between "sources" are minor and can be explained mainly by taking the contextual concerns of the narrative seriously. For example the scroll of Exodus 24 could be explained by saying that the initial covenant required full disclosure of the details of the covenant therefore they were all written down in a scroll, but the renewal required only tablets since only the major items of the covenant needed review. The people selecting Moses at Exodus 20 is in response to the fear they have of His appearance at Sinai. The fact that Yahweh picks Moses at 32-35 indicates that because of the golden calf the people have lost their ability to speak with God. Thus God appoints Moses as a representative for them and speaks through him.

So we see that theologically, in regard to the understanding of the office of Moses, the "sources" are all agreed. This serves to indicate the unity of the text under a single author. The writer of Exodus was concerned mainly with Yahweh's choosing of a people for Himself. This is seen in the redemption out of Egypt, the Sinai covenant and the tabernacle. Yahweh chose to bring about His wonders through the instrumentality of Moses. Moses delivered the messages of God to the people and frequently delivered the words of the people back to Yahweh. The only thing that gave Moses and his office any kind of significance at all in the narrative is the fact that Yahweh chose him for this purpose. And so Moses at Yahweh's direction and power delivered the messages that redeemed the people from Egypt, established the covenant at Sinai and gave instructions for the construction of the tabernacle.

#### **The Film "Prince of Egypt":**

The opening scene shows the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt. It begins, promisingly enough, with the song "Deliver Us," which is a prayer to Adonai asking for their rescue and guidance to the Promised Land. This then cuts to the scene of Moses' mother leaving him in a basket on the Nile. Pharaoh's wife (not his daughter) finds Moses. He thus becomes the adoptive son of Pharaoh. What ensues next is the early life of Moses, which Exodus does not record for us. Moses and Rameses are raised as brothers, quite close ones at that. They are seen engaging in all manner of adolescent foolery, which serves to demonstrate to the audience that Moses and Rameses are good



friends. Once Moses discovers his heritage, which of course has been kept secret from him, he kills an Egyptian and then flees. Rameses tries to convince him to stay. He even offers to pardon Moses with his Pharaonic authority. Moses pushes the offer away and charges into the desert. Whether this was done for philosophical or for merely artistic reasons, the effect is to take the focus off of Moses' office and therefore off of God, and place it onto Moses himself. This problem plagues the rest of the film. The story of Moses becoming acquainted with Jethro and marrying Zipporah, which in Exodus is told in one sentence (2:21), is elaborated into an entire musical number. The musical number does have the advantage of giving the audience the impression that time has passed.

Moses is finally called by God. The speeches of God from the bush in Exodus are highly edited. God responds in the briefest of ways and even some of Moses' objections are removed in the film. This probably stems from the difference between the written form and the filmed form. It is difficult to film long speeches from God. They read better than they film. When Moses returns to tell Zipporah what has happened, she responds with understandable skepticism. Moses reassures her by giving her his personal motivations regarding the condition of his people in Egypt rather than by resorting to the call of God. Such objections on the part of Zipporah are, of course, not mentioned by Exodus. Zipporah accompanies Moses into the court of Pharaoh but not Aaron. Aaron is off busy being a slave. Upon seeing Moses, Rameses is overjoyed at his return. Rameses announces that Moses is indeed "our brother Moses." They hug each

other, much to the court's surprise. Furthermore, when Moses makes his mission known to his one-time brother, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is explained neatly by Rameses' disappointment regarding their reunion. Miriam is pictured as defending Moses both to Aaron and to the Israelites. Miriam, not God, encourages Moses when he doubts his abilities to carry out God's mission.

All of this is an effort on the film's part to show more of Moses' personal life than what Exodus presents. The effect is to reduce the importance of the office and to increase the importance of the man. Once the office of Moses is reduced, however, the importance of God in the story is also reduced. God is brought in seemingly only to get some special effects in the movie which will interest the contemporary audience. The words of God are not as important. The Ten Commandments are reduced to the briefest of scenes. The covenant is thus missing entirely. The plagues are condensed into the sequence of a single song. Thus all of the announcements on the part of Moses of messages that the Lord has sent to Pharaoh via himself are reduced to a refrain sung by Moses. Moses leads the people out of Egypt. God is brought in for the special effects at the sea. At the sea Aaron and Moses are reconciled as Aaron is the first one to trust enough to step into the divided sea. After the people have been rescued at the sea, Moses' family is seen hugging one another. At this point Moses smiles at Miriam in seeming thanks for all of the encouragement that she has given to him.

In distinction, the Exodus narrative has God as the main character. He is the mover of the plot. The details of Moses' life are related only briefly. God's speeches are



elaborate and designed to give the full significance of what God is about to accomplish in Egypt. Moses' motivation to go to Egypt rests entirely on his calling. Zipporah accompanies Moses to Egypt and then disappears almost entirely from the text. Aaron accompanies Moses into the court of Pharaoh to be a prophet for Moses. This again highlights Moses' office. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is given no psychological explanation. Rather it is a theological expression indicating Pharaoh's rebellion against the God of Israel. Later God hardens the heart of Pharaoh. Thus the plot of the story as it progresses is governed entirely by God Himself. When Moses doubts his abilities, it is God Himself who consoles him and reassures him, not Miriam. The plagues extend over a large portion of the narrative. Moses is pictured as being sent with God's messages, which come true. It is God who breaks Pharaoh and brings the people out. God leads and feeds them in the wilderness. Moses parts the sea at God's direction. The commandments and the covenant are the heart and core of the book, not an afterthought at the end of the tale.<sup>69</sup>

Exodus gives us only the briefest of glimpses into the personal life of Moses. Chapter 18 shows Moses greeting his father-in-law and bringing him and his family into the tent. Moses has a tent, which makes sense, but has been left unmentioned up until this point. Zipporah has been sent away from Egypt, but it is not mentioned earlier

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<sup>69</sup> While I have been somewhat harsh on *Prince of Egypt*, I felt it to be superior to Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (Paramount, 1956) production. In *Prince of Egypt* God directs Moses to the Nile for the blood plague and He also is heard directing Moses at the sea. *The Ten Commandments* gives God only two opportunities to speak, at Moses' call and then the commandments themselves. Other than that, Moses seems to be on his own. Also in *The Ten Commandments*, Moses invents the Sabbath while he still considers himself Egyptian! Thus it is not the Lord's institution.

in the narrative because of the intense focus on the conflict between God and Pharaoh. Jethro does give Moses some advice, which he takes. Other than this, and the story of Moses murdering the Egyptian and fleeing from Pharaoh (2:11-15), we get very little on what Moses is like as a person. While there is plenty of material in Exodus from which inferences can be drawn regarding Moses' personal character (his Levite ancestry 2:1, his response to failure in 5:22ff and to the people's rebellion, chapter 16), what we find in Exodus primarily is the mighty servant of Yahweh. He is the instrument of God doing battle with the tyrant Pharaoh for the freedom of God's people. Thus the real story, as far as Exodus is concerned is to tell us about God and His story, and not to indulge in the modern curiosities about Moses' personal life.



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